

HI-FI CHOICE

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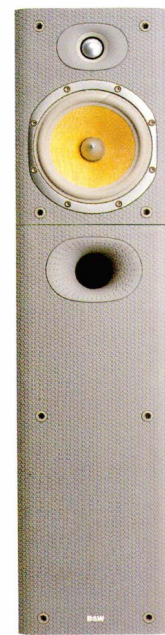


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SPEAKER CABLES

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CONTRIBUTORS



Dan George *HFC's* own Mr Fixit answers your hi-fi conundrums in our Help section and road tests some of the very latest kit.



Jason Kennedy *HFC's* former editor turns his attention to one of surround sounds least understood problems – delay.



Paul Messenger takes eight mid-priced stereo speakers for a rigorous turn around his listening room.



Paul Miller puts those same speakers through the rigours of his testing lab to sort the woofers from the tweeters.



Alvin Gold applies his gilded ear to Martin Logan's sonically and visually expressive home cinema system.



David Vivian gets to swap tweaking tips with that master of the serendipitous system set-up, Jimmy Hughes.

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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.

intro



Long ago, when the sickly stench of Bros contaminated the airwaves and I was barely legal, I made the decision to plunge into the world of hi-fi separates. I had a Pioneer midi system at the time, and decided to swap the speakers for a pair of

B&Ws. The transformation was extraordinary. The sound changed from flatulent and scratchy to bold and substantial, a musical warmth that made me grin from ear to ear.

Of course, once I'd started I couldn't stop; other separates followed and my midi was no more. I enrolled as a student, moved away from home and became the scourge of my immediate neighbours (instead of my parents). "Music should raise the roof, not paper the walls" was my motto. And believe me, my "seshes" were legendary.

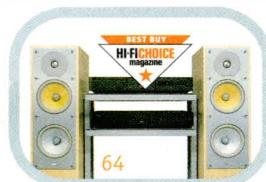
My memory of those halcyon days was jogged by this month's *Bench Test* starting on page 38, a comprehensive run down of the latest loudspeakers in the £300 to £600 ballpark. Chances are, most of you have already embarked down the heady road to separates heaven, but if you're looking for an upgrade from entry-level you may well find a pair of these fits the bill. Frankly, it's astonishing what that kind of money can buy these days – a powerful yet finely detailed sound and a handsome cabinet to boot. And you can't say fairer than that.

Here at *Hi-Fi Choice*, we can't abide music fascism. If it's Nineteenth Century Latvian folk music that floats your boat, well, that's fair enough. (As long as you don't impose it on me.) A good hi-fi system should be the same – it should utterly involve you in your music, whatever you choose to play.

Our CD systems *Group Test* starting on page 60 is a case in point – three high quality set-ups from British brands who specialise in conveying the heart and soul of music, each chosen by a respected hi-fi dealer and rated by us for your delectation. If you're a music fan looking for a complete system to further ignite your passion, one of these could provide the answers you seek. Because, as we all know, music matters.

Tim Bownen, Editor

this month's star products



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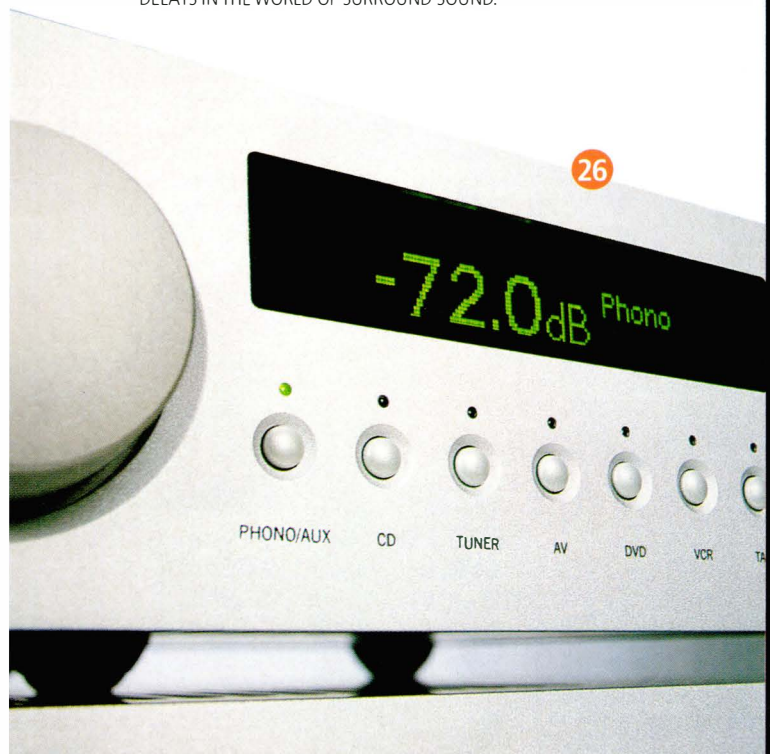
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FIRST IMPRESSIONS

DAN GEORGE AND ALAN SIRCOM HEAR SWEET, SWEET MUSIC WITH THE MOST SOULFUL NEW KIT.



HEYBROOK HB3 LOUDSPEAKERS

★★★★★ £349.95

After a brief period in the wilderness without a factory Heybrook is back, Kevlar drivers and all. The new HB3 is a two-way floorstanding design that will set you back around £350 and both drivers, including the 25mm soft-dome tweeter are of Indian origin and contribute to an internationally sourced loudspeaker.

Build is of a good standard with the baffle made up from a whopping 34mm laminated MDF sandwich, claimed to add

to the cabinet's strength. More questionable is the leather-look vinyl on the baffle and the unconvincing vinyl wrap around the chunky cabinets. Front-mounted twin reflex ports aid low frequency response and Heybrook recommends positioning at least 25cm from a rear wall, advice that auditioning fully supports. The cabinet is quite large and becomes very heavy if sand-filled, which is recommended to tighten and control the bass. Twin binding posts complete the list of features, allowing you to bi-wire should you choose.

Where the HB3 excels is in terms of sheer weight; the sizeable box throws out a very big sound, plenty of impact and good solid bass. The odd moment of boom fails to distract from an engaging performance, delivering a laid-back sound from the soft dome tweeter and Kevlar cone combo.

Impressive dynamics aided by a claimed sensitivity of 90dB make for an entertaining performance with all sorts of music from Debussy to Radiohead, and the HB3 was outstanding with the hard, uncompromising nu metal of Slipknot. This is definitely a speaker for rockers and dance fans but the good news extends all round to make the HB3 a winner across diverse musical genres. It may not have the visual refinements of the competition but performance is right up there with the Mission M74s and B&W DM602.5 S3s of this world. Don't hesitate to audition a pair, especially if you're a closet rock fan. **DG**

"THE CABINET IS QUITE LARGE AND BECOMES VERY HEAVY IF SAND-FILLED, WHICH IS RECOMMENDED TO TIGHTEN AND CONTROL THE BASS."



DATASTREAM

DIMENSIONS: 24x90x29cm (WxHxD), 165mm Kevlar mid/bass driver, 25mm soft dome tweeter, claimed 90 dB sensitivity/6 ohm impedance, weight 14kg each.
HEYBROOK AUDIO
01367 253295



ARCAM DIVA CD62 CD PLAYER

★★★★★ £349.90

"IF YOU'RE PAST FAST AND FURIOUS, THIS WILL SUIT TO A TEE."

Arcam's decision to release the new £350 CD62, the entry-level CD player in the DiVA range, marks a clear assertion that CD music still has pride of place in Cambridgeshire. The CD62 features a 24-bit Delta-Sigma DAC and looks, feels and sounds like a cut-down version of the £430 CD72.

The big difference between the two: the CD72 can be upgraded to Ring-DAC CD92 standards, but the CD62 has no such upgrade potential. This means the CD62 has a smaller, cheaper power supply, a more basic chassis, a

simpler (and therefore easier to use) remote control and a simplified AC-coupled analogue output stage instead of the more sophisticated servo-assisted DC-coupled kit used in the CD72. If you have discs with CD-Text code, you get track and title information on the green LED front panel.

The CD62 capitalises on Arcam's legendary smoothness across the midband. It's a very pretty sound; clean and controlled, but laid-back. It does keep improving with age, however; it started out unable to cope with anything that wasn't Mozart, but after a week of running in could almost make it to House Of Pain. The CD62's treble extends nicely up into the top registers without sounding harsh or brash, and the big-but-soft bass is rhythmic with Cassius' infectious French dance music, but could do with some welly at times. Stereo imagery CD62-style is wide and deep and images remain solidly fixed in the soundstage, although sounds are recessed. Even a big, forward recording seems to prefer firing from behind the speakers.

Those who find second-rung-on-the-hi-fi-ladder CD players a bit bright will love the CD62. It makes a very attractive sound, but loses some of the musical impact in the process. If you're past fast and furious, however, this will suit to a tee. **AS**



DATASTREAM

CD PLAYER, CD-R/RW replay, CD-Text compatible, 24-bit Delta Sigma DAC, optical and coaxial digital outputs, remote control minijack input. Arcam ☎ 01223 203200

KJ West One London McIntosh Centre

For more than fifty years McIntosh has enjoyed a reputation in the hi-fi world as the American Power house! Not surprising, with some McIntosh amplifiers delivering four figures, these are big systems in every sense of the word.

Yet, with such power comes remarkable subtlety and technological finesse, the gentle giants of both two and multi-channel systems.



As enthusiasts ourselves, we've long been fans of the company's leading edge valve amplifiers. In fact the latest big valve amps have attracted a knowledgeable following at KJ and we're pleased that more state-of-the-art releases are on their way to us.

What has been pleasantly surprising, is how successfully McIntosh has embraced current multi-channel technology. Their home cinema systems are not only as versatile as anything currently available, they are so easy to use.

There's a very compelling 'retro' feel to all McIntosh hardware which has a tangible authenticity. Materials and controls feel just right and massive construction suggests an investment rather than a purchase. In support of that, it's worth knowing in the United States McIntosh enjoys the highest level of customer loyalty in the industry.

McIntosh is highly specified, demonstrably effective equipment that stands head and shoulders above mainstream audio and home-cinema systems. An impressively comprehensive range of products is available to meet the widely different requirements of both serious music and film lovers.

As the London McIntosh center, we hold the largest stock of McIntosh equipment in Europe. So, whether your preference is for stereo or multi-channel, prepare yourself for a most spectacular, high powered demonstration, exclusively at KJ West One.



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TOSHIBA SD-510E DVD-AUDIO/VIDEO PLAYER

★★★★★ £400.00

"TOSHIBA IS BEST KNOWN FOR ITS VISION PRODUCTS, NOT FOR MAKING NEXT-GENERATION MUSIC REPLAY."

Toshiba's new £400 SD-510E is a 'stealth' DVD-Audio/Video player. It represents the entry point for DVD-Audio, but the Audio side of things is so low-key that it could easily be passed over as a DVD-Audio player. Only the small Audio/Video logo gives the game away on the box, while a little LED glows blue whenever a DVD-Audio is played. And, let's face it, aside from the company's top SD-900E, Toshiba is best known for its vision products, not for making next-generation music replay.

It may not be a high-end player, but it is well specified. The DVD-Audio decoder features 24-

bit/192kHz DACs that benefit both DVD-Audio and Video. Its audio side includes a built-in decoder for Dolby Digital and DTS, support for HDCD discs, as well as MP3 replay on CD-R/RW discs and a built-in 'SRS Spatializer' virtual surround decoder for stereo-only soundtracks. For video, it has a 10-bit/54MHz DAC, and Toshiba claims a picture resolution of 540 lines. It can also process NTSC progressive scan pictures and includes a set of ColorStream component video outputs alongside the composite, S-Video and single Scart sockets.

DVD-Audio is shown off pretty well with the Toshiba SD-510E; it has a great sense of space and acoustic, but the tonal balance is a bit too soft and warm compared to more expensive DVD-Audio players. The same applies to CD and DVD-Video replay; highly detailed and informative, if perhaps a little bit soft and cuddly sounding. Compared to a dedicated CD player, the SD-510E sounds flat and unexpressive on CD, but that makes it a bit of a CD playing star by similarly-priced DVD standards.

This is more of a home cinema product than an outright hi-fi component, but it could prove to be the secret star of multichannel music and movies on a shoestring. Check it out, now. **AS**

DATASTREAM

DVD-AUDIO/VIDEO player, MP3/CD-R/RW replay, HDCD decoder, 5.1 output for Dolby Digital, DTS and DVD-Audio, SRS Spatializer pseudo surround sound

TOSHIBA ☎ 0800 281126



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2010 Integrated Amplifier

2010 Integrated Amplifier

"You immediately notice the shed-load of power on offer ... go and listen!"

★★★★★ HiFi Choice, UK.

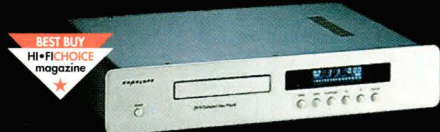
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"Music is dynamic and beautifully presented"
★★★★★ HiFi Choice, UK.

"This new Exposure sound is highly addictive"
Hi-Fi World, UK.



2010 Compact Disc Player



2010 Power Amplifier



2010 AM/FM Tuner

exposure
high fidelity engineering

www.exposurehifi.com



PURE DRX-601EX PORTABLE DAB DIGITAL RADIO

★★★★★ £499.99

It was late October 2001 when VideoLogic Systems announced details of a new upmarket range of products under the PURE brand name. The PURE DRX-601EX is the first portable DAB tuner with built-in amplification and speakers, described by VideoLogic as a "kitchen radio". Quite who's kitchen it's designed for at £500 is anybody's guess – a well-heeled celebrity chef perhaps? And if you're after a DAB tuner that you can stick with a separate amp and speakers there's some stiff competition, not least from VideoLogic's own £300 DRX-601E separates tuner. But early adopters may be tempted by the appeal of owning the first portable unit, despite the high price tag.

Build is of a good standard, with the exception of the rather flimsy tuning dial used to browse and select stations. The buttons to the right adjust the display and give various information modes including signal strength and bit-rate data. A useful remote provides some additional functionality, like Dynamic Range Control (DRC) for the quieter passages in

music or for use in noisy environments. Power up for the first time and the unit tunes itself, taking a couple of minutes for a comprehensive scan of the airwaves.

For speakers, the DRX-601EX uses two integral Audax 10cm dual concentric drivers. The internal amp delivers ten watts of power and if you jack the volume it goes surprisingly loud. Our central London-based unit suffered from a certain amount of 'burbling'; the result of a weak signal that suggests an alternative aerial may be more suitable. But with a strong signal it's quite impressive, delivering a crisp and punchy sound. Speech is particularly good, with excellent intelligibility.

A good complement of inputs and outputs facilitates integration into a separate hi-fi system, but portability is this unit's main draw and VideoLogic should be congratulated for delivering a real first. Even if it doesn't come cheap. **DG**



DATASTREAM

MAINS POWERED portable DAB tuner, dimensions 30x28x12cm (WxHxD), digital co-axial and optical outputs, twin 100mm dual concentric drivers, 24-bit/96kHz DAC, line-level input and output, LCD display 16x2 characters, remote control.

VIDEOLOGIC SYSTEMS
☎ 01923 260 511

**"THE DRX-601EX DELIVERS
A CRISP AND PUNCHY SOUND.
SPEECH IS PARTICULARLY GOOD,
WITH EXCELLENT INTELLIGIBILITY."**

ProAc HOME THEATRE



If you're going to surround yourself with great sound, it had better look good.

Dim the lights, sit back and immerse yourself in the sumptuous sound of the ProAc Home Theatre speaker system. Whether using it for DVD or straight music replay, this is as good as it gets.

You want your system to look good too. And with ProAc the restrained good taste of the cabinet designs, all finished in real wood veneers, will never go out of fashion. Produced with a good choice of finishes these beautiful cabinets will grace any listening environment.

For more than twenty-five years ProAc have set the pace in high-end music replay and now that same sonic excellence and build quality is available for home theatre. Expensive yes, but since this is the speaker system you'll want eventually, why not invest in it now?

Highpoint House, Riding Road,
Buckingham Road Industrial Estate,
Brackley, Northamptonshire NN13 7BE
Telephone 01280 700147
Fax 01280 700148
Website www.proac-loudspeakers.com

 **ProAc**
perfectly natural





MYRYAD Z110 CD PLAYER **EXCLUSIVE**

★★★★ £449.95

It's good to see that despite neglect from the biggest Far Eastern brands, affordable CD players are still emerging from UK marques. The Z110 is Myryad's new entry-level CD player (outside of the complete Cameo system) and emerges as part of the new Z-Series, described by Myryad as "budget esoterica" – an entry-level range of hi-fi and AV components in svelte boxes that wouldn't look out of place in the most costly of racks. Build quality is first rate, the metal casework sitting perfectly flush against a sleek aluminium fascia that looks like it could happily grace a product at three times the price. That said, the black plastic buttons are a bit of a let-down with an odd, rattly feel – good job there's an excellent remote control supplied.

Round the back lies the main power switch and a further standby button allows you to keep the circuits powered up until you're ready to play. Elsewhere on the back panel is the 'MyLink' communications output for linking to other Myryad kit and a single coaxial digital output. Components inside the box include seven individually regulated power supplies and 24-bit/96kHz delta-sigma DACs.

Looking smarter and sleeker than a lot of the competition, the Z110 is a step ahead as soon as you slap eyes on it. But for the ears it's a less exciting experience. It sounds pretty detailed but tonally it's excessively dry, which tends to strangle musicality and foot-tapping rhythm. It's

"LOOKING SMARTER AND SLEEKER THAN A LOT OF THE COMPETITION, THE Z110 IS A STEP AHEAD AS SOON AS YOU SLAP EYES ON IT, BUT FOR THE EARS IT'S A LESS EXCITING EXPERIENCE."

a polite and inoffensive sounding box for sure, relaxed and well-behaved with a solid soundstage and equally solid bass, but even a change of amp and loudspeaker failed to bring much excitement. Competition is tough for dedicated CD players at this price level, and though it sports class-leading style this new Myryad fails to ignite. Polite to a fault, but it doesn't light our fire. **DG**



DATASTREAM

DIMENSIONS 43x7.8x28 (WxHxD), 24-bit/96kHz delta-sigma DACs, coaxial digital output, remote control, weight 5.3kg, available in natural silver fascia with silver-grey casing or satin black fascia with black casing

MYRYAD SYSTEMS
☎ 0239 226 5508



NAD T741 AV RECEIVER EXCLUSIVE

★★★★★ £399.95

When NAD comes up with a new entry-level AV receiver, hi-fi and home cinema enthusiasts on a budget get excited. And NAD's new £400 T741 gives them just cause for pant-wetting exertions.

In the NAD tradition, this is a no-frills 5.1 channel receiver with Dolby Pro-Logic, Dolby Digital and DTS decoding on board. It has both composite and S-Video switching for AV buffs, although the front AV input lacks an S-Video option. NAD has upgraded the remote control - the new slim-line model has escaped a beating with the ugly stick unlike many previous NAD controls and the buttons glow in the dark.

There are two shortcomings. The red and black plastic caps placed across the speaker terminals to make the amp pass Euro regulations are tenacious and refuse to move - hang around like a bad smell in a camper van.

More importantly, the omission of Dolby Pro-Logic II (or even DTS Neo) is understandable at the low price, but that may scratch the T741 from the wish lists of those who check specifications

"THE NEW SLIM-LINE REMOTE HAS ESCAPED A BEATING WITH THE UGLY STICK, UNLIKE MANY PREVIOUS NAD CONTROLS."

before auditioning. This is a shame, because they'll miss out on a sonic star.

The T741 sounds far bigger and more powerful than its 5x50 watt rating suggests. It is also free from the shrill brightness so common in cheaper AV amplifiers. Instead, it produces a rich and dynamic sound with very good image placement as sounds move from speaker to speaker. It is also a good 'un in two-channel mode, delivering that classic NAD sophisticated warmth and refinement and never once sounding like a five channel amplifier press-ganged into stereo.

Disregarding the lack of Pro-Logic II and those immovable 4mm socket covers, this is an excellent budget all-rounder for those who don't want to sacrifice stereo sound just for the sake of DVD. Well worth checking out. **AS**

DATASTREAM

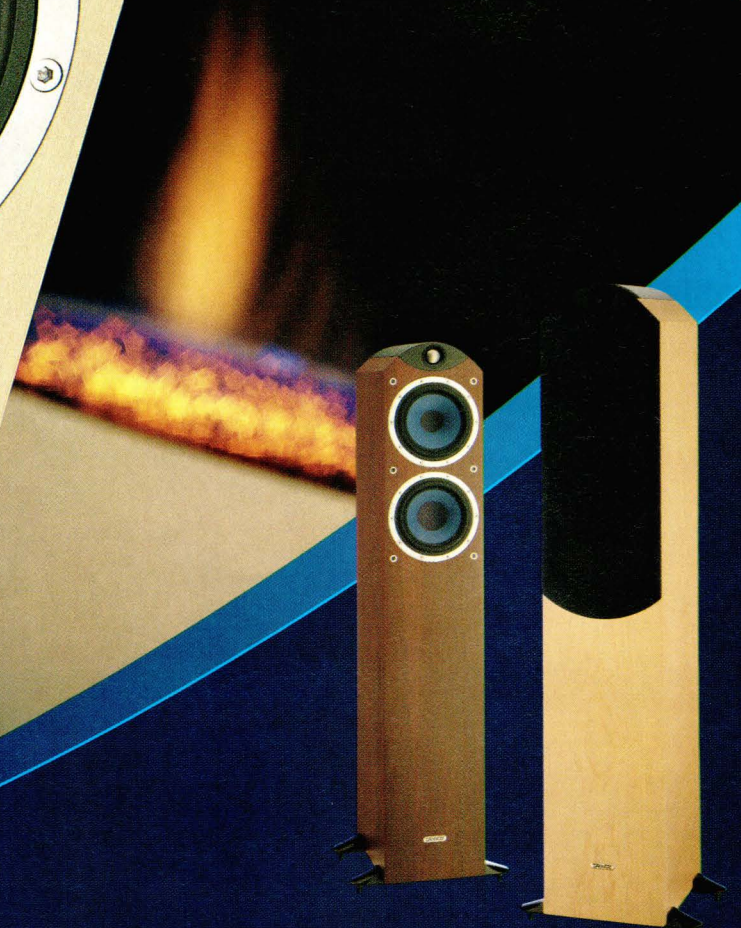
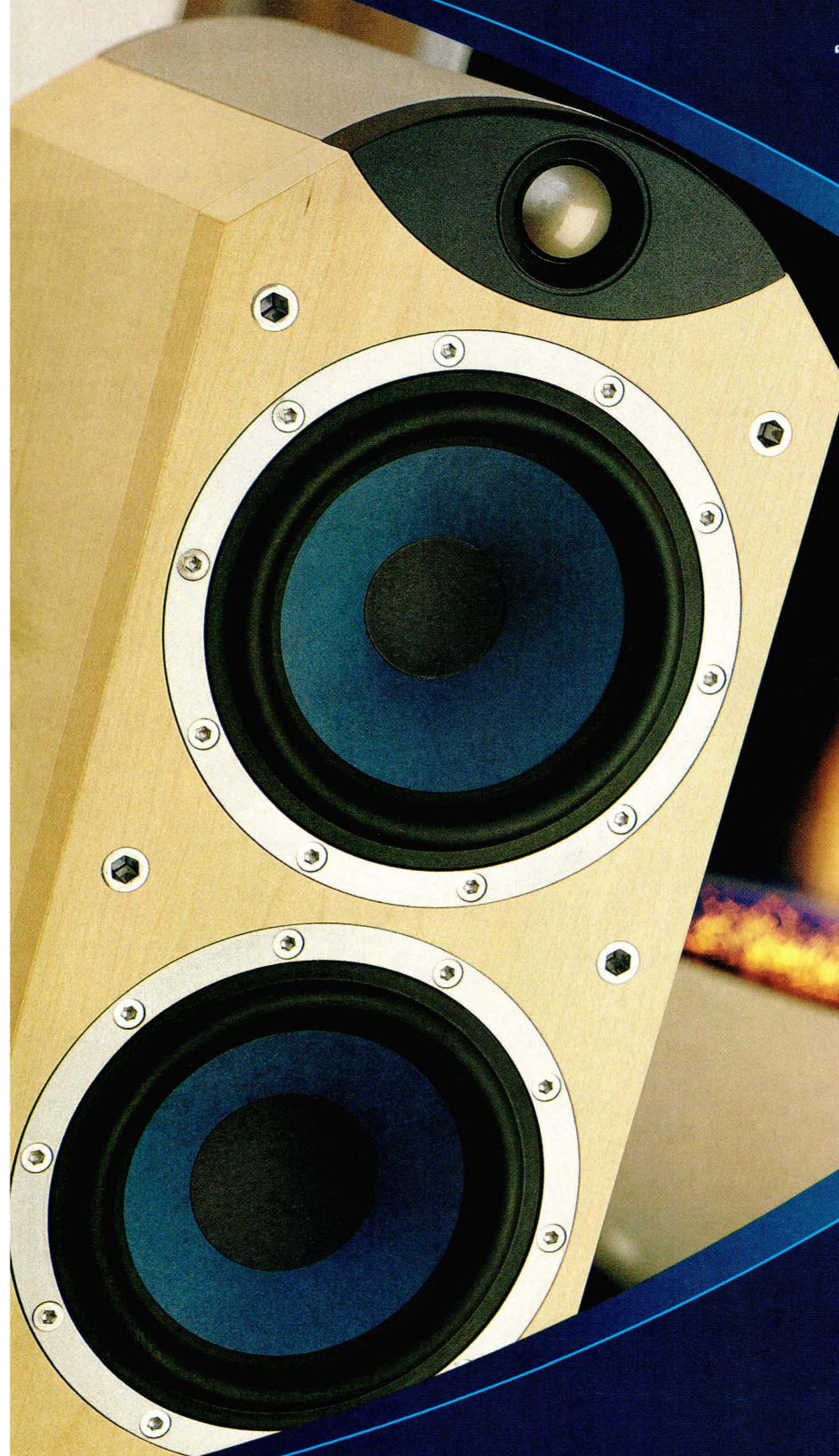
AV RECEIVER, 5x50 watts, Dolby Pro-Logic, Dolby Digital, DTS, front AV inputs, S-Video/composite video switching, AM/FM tuner, five inputs and one tape loop.
LENBROOK ☎ 01908 319360

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NEWS BRISTOL SHOW

SOUND & VISION SHOW, BRISTOL 2002

The annual Sound & Vision Show in Bristol has become an essential date in the hi-fi calendar. Most of the major movers and shakers make a point of being there, ensuring its position as one of the UK's most established events and a reliable indicator of what the year holds for practitioners of the audio (and indeed visual) arts.

This year was no exception. From 22-24 February a deluge of technologies old and new descended on the Marriott Hotel, a healthy range of manufacturers clamouring to ply their wares to a breathlessly eager public. There was plenty here to suit the AV enthusiast and two-channel aficionado alike, from new turntable designs to the latest in digital processing.

Popping in and out of the hotel bedrooms, each one home to a different manufacturer, visitors were treated to an Aladdin's cave of kit including the gear you'll see on the next four pages. It's true to say there wasn't an abundance of ground-breaking news – new DVD-Audio and SACD kit was relatively thin on the ground – and not all the audio demonstrations were of the highest quality. But for hi-fi fans, people who value absorbing sound and vision, a deluge of new product looks set to delight the senses during the course of the coming year.

One of the biggest revelations came from digital specialist Meridian. Its 800 Version 3 DVD system, complete with proprietary MHR high resolution digital audio transfer (see *News* last month) made some astounding sounds with multichannel DVD-Audio. It seems we can expect a standardised digital link for high quality multichannel audio and video in the next couple of years...

In the meantime, feast your eyes on our pick of the best new kit at this year's show.



AVID VOLVERE SEQUEL TURNTABLE

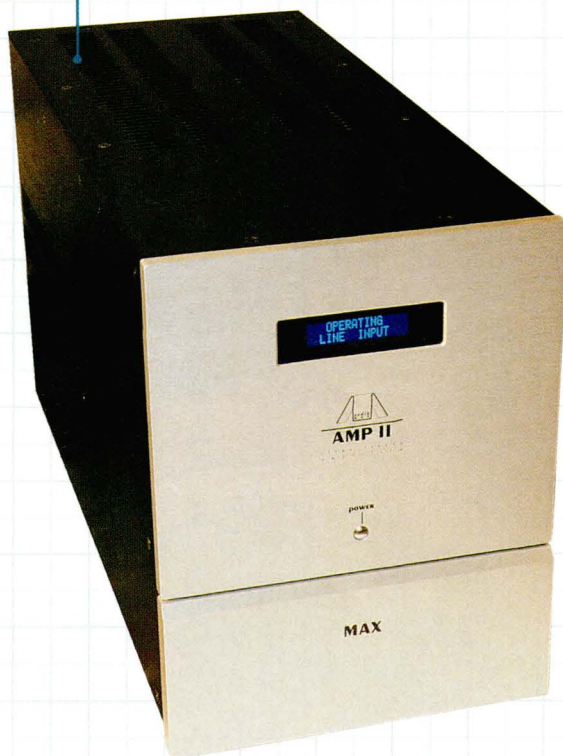
Avid's new Volvere Sequel turntable is a gorgeous belt-driven design with a sprung sub-chassis, and clamping, bearing and suspension similar to the flagship Acutus. A high torque motor coupled to a purpose-built electronic power supply drives a substantial 5kg platter. £3,500, to you. Avid ☎ 01832 710370

AUDIONET AMP II MAX MONO POWER AMPLIFIER

Fresh to UK shores courtesy of British manufacturer Wilson benesch, Audionet is a German brand featuring some serious electronics. Pictured is the AMP II MAX mono block, which weighs in at 68kg and delivers a whopping 400 watts into 8 ohms (700 watts into 4 ohms). Price is £7,500 for a pair. Wilson benesch ☎ 0114 285 2656

KEY FEATURES

- THX Ultra certified
- 8x Burr-Brown 24-bit/192 audio DACs
- Twin 14bit/108MHz video DACs
- PureProgressive Scan video engine
- Audiophile build
- Extensive audio and video connections



DENON DVD-A1 DVD-AUDIO/VIDEO PLAYER

Denon's new flagship DVD player promises to be something special. It's a new 'Reference Class' machine said to deliver top-rank performance from all types of music and video DVDs, as well as CDs. Denon has developed a proprietary digital output for this player, able to carry high resolution digital audio at full DVD-Audio spec – six channels at 24-bit/96kHz or two channels at 24-bit/192kHz. This can be transferred direct to an upgraded version of the AVC-A1SE amp and forthcoming flagship AVC-A1SR. The DVD-A1 costs £2,500 and should be in the shops now. Denon UK ☎ 01234 741 200



KEY FEATURES

CD PLAYER:

- Burr-Brown 24-bit DACs
- Toroidal transformer
- High stability crystal clock

PREAMP:

- Six line inputs (phono optional)
- Toroidal transformer

EXPOSURE XXII CD PLAYER AND XXIII PREAMP

Classics is the name of Exposure's new upmarket range of stereo electronics. Building on the aesthetic qualities of the brand's recent lower priced components, the new line-up consists of a power amp and off-board phono stage, along with the CD player (£1,400) and preamp (£1,300) pictured here. Exposure ☎ 01273 423877

KEY FEATURES

- 'Paramid' glass composite mid/bass cone
- Soft dome tweeter
- Moulded plastic baffle
- Bi-wirable
- Substantial cabinet construction



MISSION M51 LOUDSPEAKER

Part of the new m5 Series from Mission, the m51 is a £300 per pair standmount speaker featuring a beautifully curved plastic baffle with a metallic finish that mirrors Mission's high-end Pilastro design. The range also includes two floorstanders, the m52 and m53, priced at £450 and £550 respectively. Mission ☎ 01480 423700

KEY FEATURES

- 64-bit/96kHz Custom Pulse Array DAC
- Valve output stage
- 'Ever-Warm' standby for DAC and valve stage
- Optical/coaxial 'clock lock' digital outputs
- Can be used as standalone DAC via digital inputs

PROAC TABLETTE REFERENCE EIGHT LOUDSPEAKER

The latest version of ProAc's long-standing Tablette speaker incorporates two new drive units and is claimed to offer a remarkably flat frequency response. A 125mm mid/bass driver and 25mm soft dome tweeter are housed in a birch ply cabinet, finished in a choice of real wood veneers. It retails for £699 per pair, with a premium yew finish available for an extra £70. ProAc ☎ 01280 700147

KEY FEATURES

- Dimensions (WHD) 150x260x220mm
- 25mm soft dome tweeter
- 125mm mid/bass driver
- 86 dB sensitivity
- 8 ohm impedance

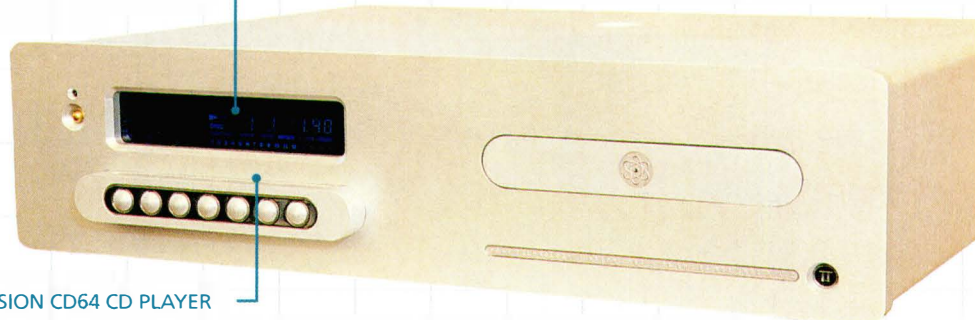


KEY FEATURES

- 64-bit/96kHz Custom Pulse Array DAC
- Valve output stage
- 'Ever-Warm' standby for DAC and valve stage
- Optical/coaxial 'clock lock' digital outputs
- Can be used as standalone DAC via digital inputs

TUBE TECHNOLOGY FUSION CD64 CD PLAYER

Valve expert Tube Technology has a new range of electronics called Fusion Platinum. Pictured is the CD player, a £1,950 design called the Fusion CD64. Along with a valve output stage, it also contains a 64-bit/96kHz custom-built DAC and an HDCD-compatible digital filter claimed to offer an exceptionally long 'tap length' – the result is said to be more accurately resolved transients. Also in the range is a £1,450 hybrid integrated amp, the Fusion HB50, combining a valve-based input stage with a MOSFET output stage, and the £900 Fusion FMT tuner. Tube Technology ☎ 01932 242420



NEWS BRISTOL SHOW



KEY FEATURES

- Fully balanced digital and analogue outputs
- 24-bit upsampling
- HDCD compatible
- Analog Devices DACs
- Can be used as an off-board digital processor

MARK LEVINSON NO.390S CD PLAYER

New from Mark Levinson is the No.390S CD player, or "CD Processor" – an updated and redesigned version of the No.39 CD. Typically well built, it sports 24-bit upsampling and newly devised D-to-A conversion, output buffering and volume control technologies. The No.390S is HDCD compatible and boasts fully balanced outputs at £6,495.

PATH Premier ☎ 01844 219000

SONY STR-VA55ES MULTICHANNEL AV RECEIVER

Sony's new upmarket 5.1 channel AV receiver has been designed to get the best from high resolution multi-channel SACD music discs as well as movies on DVD. It's the first Sony product to carry Dolby Digital EX certification and is said to be easily upgradeable to 7.1 channel status. Expect to pay £1,000 for one. Sony ☎ 08705 111999



KEY FEATURES

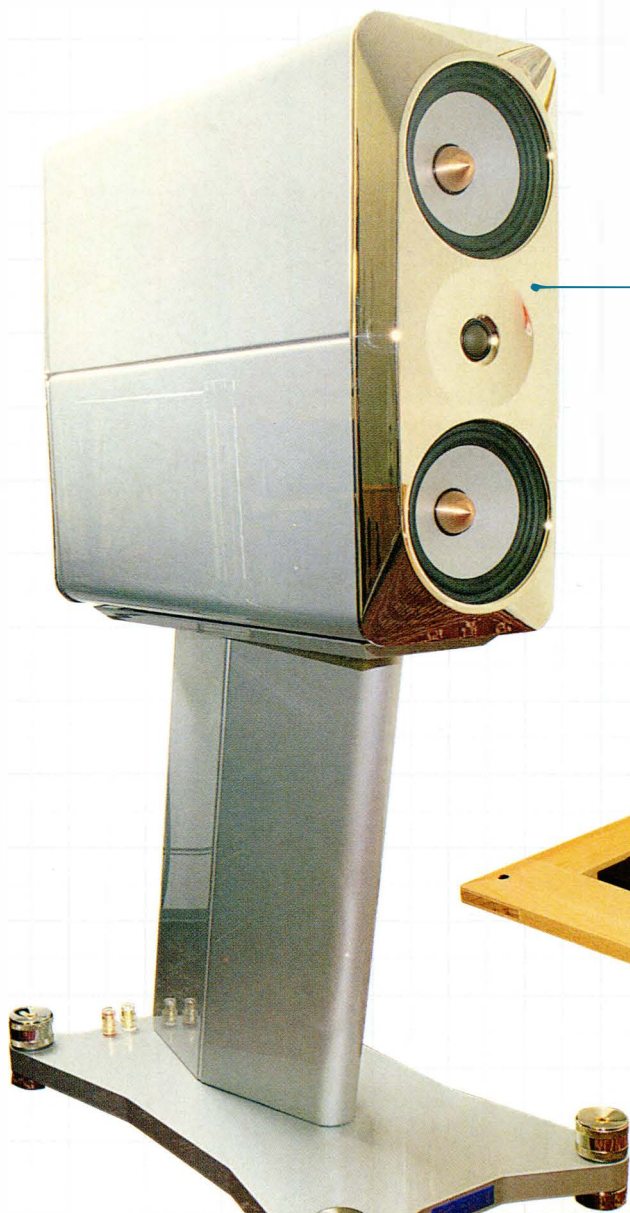
- Dolby Digital EX, Pro-Logic II
- DTS ES, ES Discrete and NEO 6
- Newly developed 32-bit DSPs
- 7.1 channel compatibility

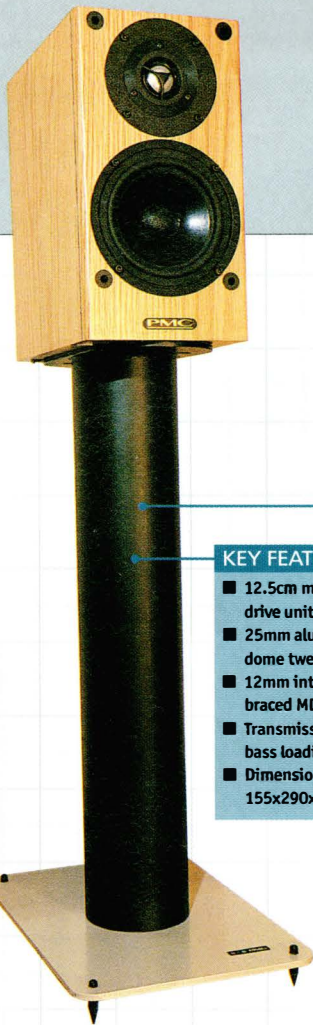
EMOTIVE EXCELLENCE LOUDSPEAKER

Emotive Excellence has a new line-up looking to make a splash in the world of high-end audio. The range so far includes a stunning-looking standmount speaker (pictured) and subwoofer, along with a mono power amp and digital crossover unit. The speakers feature "unique" resonance control technology said to channel and absorb unwanted soundwaves from the rear of the drive units. Expect prices to match the kit's high-end aspirations. Emotive Excellence ☎ 01453 843682

REGA P9 TURNTABLE

This update of Rega's Planar 9 flagship turntable comes with an extensively re-designed version of the RB900 tonearm – the ultra-low mass RB1000, a one-piece silicone and aluminium casting with a polished tube. A new lightweight plinth offers further improvements and is available in maple, cherry or black. Price is £2,248 including arm and it's reviewed next month. Rega ☎ 01702 333071



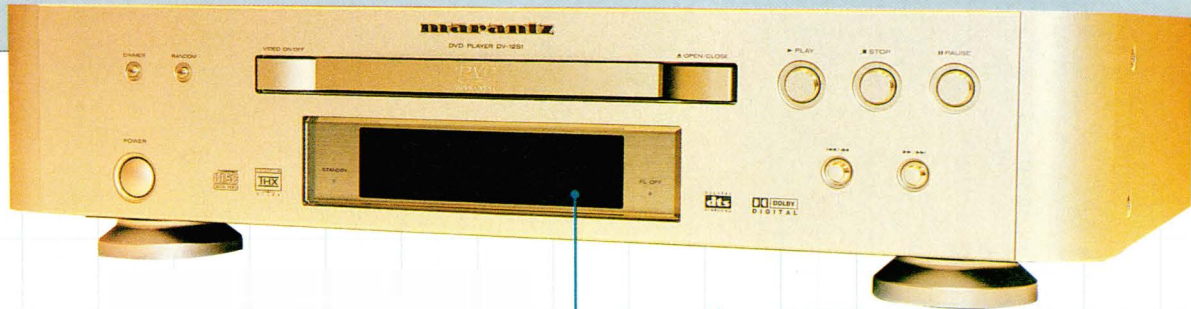


- KEY FEATURES**
- 12.5cm mid/bass drive unit
 - 25mm aluminium dome tweeter
 - 12mm internally braced MDF cabinet
 - Transmission line bass loading
 - Dimensions(WHD): 155x290x180mm

PMC DB1 LOUDSPEAKER

PMC's latest speaker is a compact standmount design promised to deliver surprising bass weight despite its diminutive size. It employs the same tweeter as the acclaimed FB1 floorstander and a scaled down version of its mid/bass unit, with a four-fold transmission line contributing to bass performance. Expect to pay £550 for a pair when they're launched in April.

PMC ☎ 08704 441044



MARANTZ DV-12S1 UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER

Hot on the heels of Pioneer, this is the UK's second Universal DVD player, compatible with both DVD-Audio and SACD music formats as well as DVD-Video and CD. It's the first DVD-A-compatible Marantz, made possible by the brand's split from former parent company (and SACD co-developer) Philips. It's THX Ultra certified, plays DVD-R/RW and CD-R/RW discs and is available in March for £2,500.

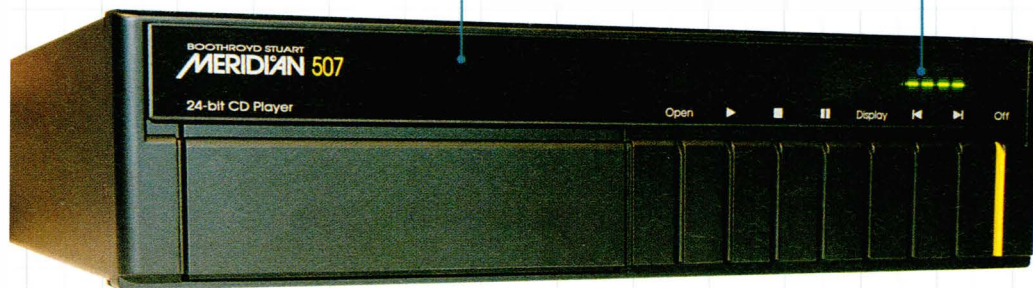
Marantz UK ☎ 01753 680868

MERIDIAN 507 CD PLAYER

The 507 is Meridian's new entry-level CD player, priced at £1,195. It employs 24-Bit/192kHz DACs, a six-layer PCB (printed circuit board) and four separate power supplies under the lid. It is also claimed to minimise jitter by employing a double buffering technique.

Meridian Audio ☎ 01480 445678

- KEY FEATURES**
- 24-Bit/192kHz DACs
 - CD-R/RW compatibility
 - Full RS232 control
 - Digital output technology evolved from 508 CD player



SOUNDPAX LOUDSPEAKER

Though not perhaps the last word in build quality, Soundpax Speakers have nonetheless achieved a world first – they're made entirely from cardboard. They cost £30 a pair and come flatpacked, using an NXT motor to vibrate the active panel and create soundwaves. The cardboard can be printed with any design – the one above features a fake drive unit. Initial demos suggest it sounds a little boxy!

NXT ☎ 01480 846100

TAG MCLAREN AV192R AV PROCESSOR

The forthcoming high-end (c£4,000) AV processor from TAG McLaren was given a public airing at the Bristol show. Still only a prototype, it's considerably more bulky than the existing AV32R and boasts a heavyweight specification to match. In the meantime, the AV32R has been upgraded to include 24-bit/192kHz DACs and a 5.1 channel input for DVD-A/SACD players, and there's also a new front-loading DVD player – the DVD32FLR.

TAG McLaren ☎ 0800 783 8007

- KEY FEATURES**
- 4x processing power of AV32R
 - 7.1 channel RCA/XLR analogue audio outputs
 - Nine digital audio inputs
 - Six analogue audio inputs inc 5.1 analogue pass through

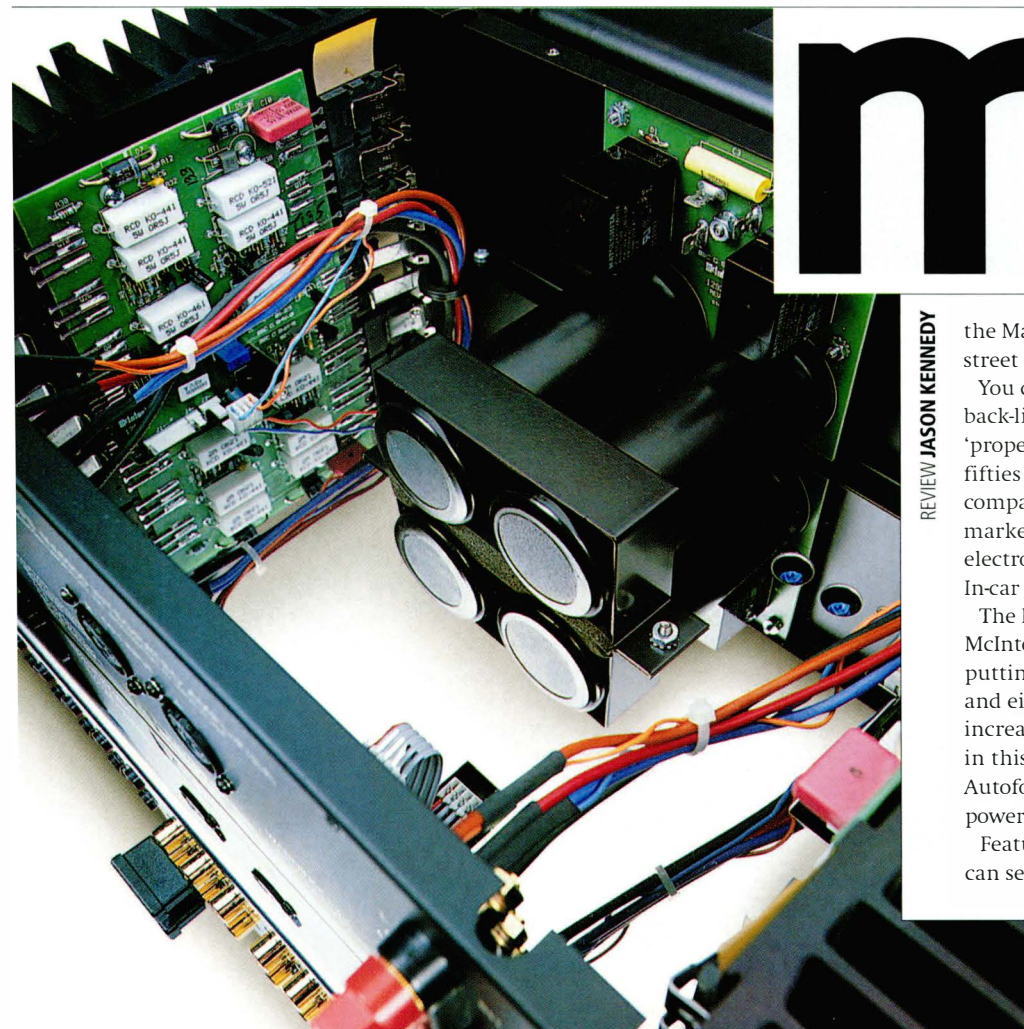


HIGH PERFORMANCE MCINTOSH MA6900 STEREO AMPLIFIER



BIG MAC

ANOTHER CLASSIC IN WAITING FROM THE ORIGINAL MCINTOSH.



m

McIntosh is not a brand we often see on these shores but it's been making kit in Binghamton, New York for over 52 years and is something of a legend in the industry. So much so that the computer company Apple had to do a deal with McIntosh before it could use

the Macintosh brand name, though word on the street has it that Apple got itself a bargain.

You can't miss a Mac; black glass fascias with back-lit legends and silver-rimmed knobs give a 'proper' hi-fi aesthetic harking back to the fifties yet it is one which has served the company well in this notoriously conservative market. McIntosh makes hi-fi and home cinema electronics and speakers alongside in-car hi-fi. In-car retro - excellent.

The MA6900 is the more powerful of McIntosh's two integrated stereo designs, putting out 200 watts a channel into both four and eight ohm loads. Usually an amplifier will increase its output as impedance decreases but in this instance the output stages have Autoformers (transformers) which balance power and load in a similar way to valve amps.

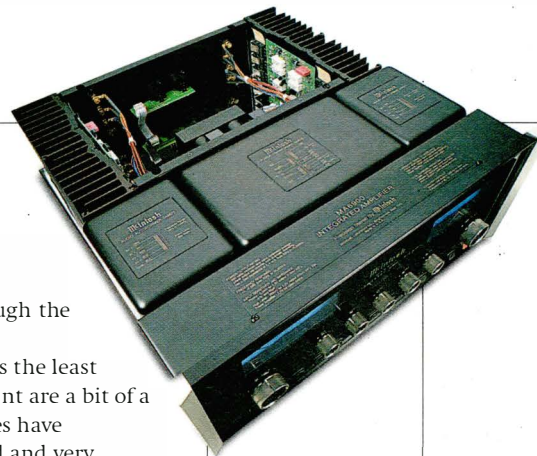
Feature-wise it is far from run of the mill. You can see from a glance that it's got tone controls,

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY

but rather than the usual treble and bass variety this collection of five are marked for frequency. Covering the gamut from low bass to high treble they allow a greater degree of response tailoring than usual. (They are said to be defeated or bypassed when set at the centre position.) There is no separate tone defeat button, but there are plenty of relay operating buttons for line inputs (one of which can be MM phono), mono, loudness, mute and speaker or preamp outputs. There's also a minijack headphone output which looks a little out of place, and a balance knob alongside some monster output meters. The latter are another Mac trademark and are logarithmically inscripted with two watts at the centre - I didn't manage to get the needles up to the 20 watt mark however hard I tried, but my

texture and you never feel as though the amp is having to struggle.

That aspect of its performance is the least valve-like I guess - tubes with grunt are a bit of a rarity. The midrange however does have similarities, being highly detailed and very revealing of differences within recordings. Effects pedals, ambiance and subtleties are picked out so that you get the impression of great transparency. Yet it seems more like a spotlighting of certain frequencies than transparency across the band. Cymbals for instance are often brought to the fore, as are voices. It does let plenty of music through, soundstage depth is well resolved and it is unusually good at phase-related information - sounds which have been manipulated so that



“THE MA6900’S BASS IS DEEP AND CHEWY WITH GREAT TEXTURE AND YOU NEVER FEEL AS THOUGH THE AMP HAS TO STRUGGLE.”

speakers are pretty efficient.

The back panel has a few more sockets than you might expect. There's a pre/power bridge, a connector for an external (second room) keypad, balanced and regular CD inputs and system links for both remote control and power switching, but unlike regular power on/off triggers the latter are McIntosh-specific. Speaker outputs are done valve-style with separate two, four and eight ohm taps to suit different speaker loads. Remote control is available from a system remote.

SOUND QUALITY

This amp took longer to warm up than most, sounding quite hard and forward until it got settled in but then its almost valve-like qualities began to shine through. The MA6900 has plenty of power, bass is deep and chewy with great



they move across, above and both fore and aft of the loudspeakers.

Compared to my ATC SCA2/Gamut D200 pre/power reference the Mac doesn't have quite the finesse and naturalness, but on the other hand it's £1,500 less expensive and built like the proverbial brick outhouse. It also carries more information on its back than the average owner's manual - it almost seems a shame to put it in the console that it so clearly craves.

CONCLUSION

This is clearly a very well built and sensibly designed amplifier - it looks bomb-proof without being too industrial. Sonically speaking it's not quite as refined as you might get with the best of the competition and it's a little short on fireworks, but it's capable of serious musical entertainment and its cool running bodes well for playing hard and long. And let's face it, there aren't many hi-fi companies that have been around as long as this one; Quad is the only one I can think of, so reliability can be taken as read. So if you fancy the styling and wouldn't mind a bit of American history to boot, go and listen to the original Mac. It certainly isn't an Apple.

£4,650, Absolute Sounds ☎ 020 8971 3909




Retro fifties styling is backed up by certain valve-like qualities in the sound.



AT A GLANCE

- **POWER RATING**
200W/channel
into 2, 4, 8 ohm
- **LINE INPUTS**
7 inc balanced
- **MM PHONO INPUT**
- **PRE/POWER OUT/INPUTS**
- **DATA AND POWER TRIGGERS**
- **SIZE** 44.45x19.37x 47.63cm (WxHxD)
- **IR/KEYPAD SENSOR INPUT**
- **WEIGHT** 33.8kg
- **GUARANTEE** 3 years





**"THE ELECTROSTATIC
PANELS ALLOW LIGHT TO
PASS THROUGH, WHICH
MAKES THEM LESS
DOMINATING VISUALLY."**

ELEC

IS AN ELECTROSTATIC SPEAKER PACKAGE FROM MARTIN LOGAN THE PERFECT SOLUTION FOR HIGH FIDELITY MUSIC AND MOVIES?

Let's get one thing straight. This system is not for you if you prefer nice, familiar, rectilinear wooden boxes. If you're a traditionalist, turn the page. This Martin Logan system (not, incidentally, the only home cinema system that can be assembled from their speakers) is a riot of shapes, planes and angles. Even the subwoofer subverts the

usual rules, despite being the nearest thing that Martin Logan offers to a conventional solution. The visually transparent electrostatic panels allow light to pass through, which, perhaps surprisingly, tends to make them less dominating visually, as does the compact footprint – under one square foot in the case of the main Aeon speakers – though space is needed behind to allow the sound to 'breathe'. This is an absolute requirement by the way. Being dipolar (i.e. radiating sound waves out-of-phase front and back), Martin Logan speakers are critically dependent on being used in an appropriate acoustic environment.

There is reason behind the apparent madness. Form definitely reflects function. A particularly interesting example of this involves the Descent subwoofer, the cross section of which is a modified hexagon, with three faces angled 120 degrees apart housing three parallel-connected 104mm drivers which are driven by a powerful 400 watt amplifier. The staggered layout should mean reduced room interactions and a lower resonance internal shape, as well as better power handling capacity. But the main benefit is the elimination of most forms of cabinet reaction as all three drivers act equally through a single point at the centre, effectively nullifying most enclosure vibration.

The Aeon comes closest to being what might be described as conventional by Martin Logan's house standards. It's a narrow but deep enclosure containing a single forward-facing 104mm bass driver in a sealed enclosure, surmounted by an electrostatic panel which takes over above 450Hz. The panel is curved over a 30 degree arc horizontally, which improves the very sharp dispersion typical of flat panel

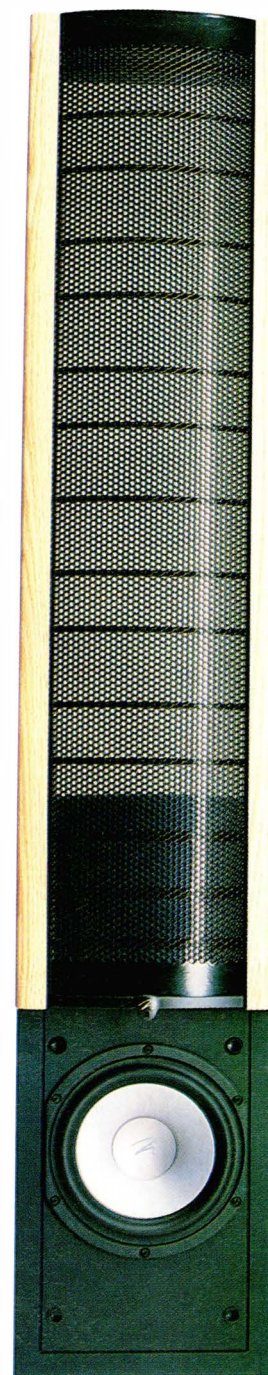
speakers, and which tends to impose an inflexible listening position. The Script surround effects speaker follows broadly the same, er, script except that it is scaled down in size, has a 500Hz crossover and instead of being free standing, is designed to be bolted to side or rear walls, using a very substantial metal bracket that allows the speaker to be swivelled over a wide arc. The Script is a dedicated surround effect speaker designed to cover down to around 70Hz (-3dB).

The other specifically home cinema loudspeaker is the Cinema (with a name like that, what else could it be?), which is a highly specialised centre speaker with a unique form factor that can be used above or below a TV, or even on the floor using an optional support which allows it to be tilted upwards. In this case, the electrostatic panel is curved inwards, with small bass enclosures at each end, and a dome tweeter taking over above 3.5kHz – the low frequency crossover is at 300Hz. The Cinema generates a much firmer and sharper image than the other speakers on their own and helps lock dialogue to the video action on screen.

SOUND QUALITY

There are a number of system matching, set-up and burn-in issues to be resolved (see box), but in a moderately large room, the system should soon sound at home. But this is emphatically not the biggest bang for your buck, pound, or euro, nor is it meant to be. Think of it rather as a way of extending a pair of Aeon hi-fi speakers into a surround sound context. As should already be apparent, no shortcuts other than those made necessary by the budget have been made. Overriding all else are the exquisitely transparent sounding electrostatic panels, which start and stop more quickly and cleanly than any moving coil transducer, and which in current form have a sweetness and evenness right across the operating band that sets new class standards.

But electrostatic panels don't reproduce bass, not at least unless they are unmanageably large, which makes hybrid designs with moving coil bass drivers almost mandatory. In the past, Martin Logan struggled to make its bass sections



TRO FUNKY

HIGH PERFORMANCE MARTIN LOGAN MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER SYSTEM

CLOSE UP



AEON MAIN SPEAKERS
The high-standing electrostatic transducer uses an ultra-thin, transparent diaphragm to diffuse the higher frequencies, while the low end is handled by an eight-inch aluminium cone.

DESCENT SUBWOOFER
Three drivers with aluminium core cones are specially aligned to cancel out each others' vibrations, which reduces cabinet movement and 'muddy' or 'fuzzy' bass tones.

CINEMA CENTRE SPEAKER
A one-inch vacuum-formed soft dome cone is flanked by twin 5.25-inch magnetically shielded polypropylene cones in asymmetrical chambers.

SCRIPT SURROUND EFFECTS SPEAKERS
These scaled-down versions of the Aeons use 6.5-inch polypropylene woofers and are designed to be fixed to walls.






“THE BASS IS ALSO SUPERB, THANKS TO THE DESCENT - EASILY ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE SUBWOOFERS OF RECENT YEARS.”



An infinitely adjustable phase control (unusual at this level) helps to ensure the sub synchronises with the other speakers, wherever you place it.

and electrostatic panels sing from the same song sheet, partly due to the different dispersion characteristics of the different technologies, but it does a much better job these days – its bigger systems (like the Prodigy, which has an appropriately prodigious price tag) sound virtually seamless. There are limits to what can be done with smaller speakers which demand a much higher crossover frequency, but the test system maintains an almost seamless performance through the frequency band, with just a hint of mid and upper bass warmth. It is also consistent between the different speakers, only the centre speaker sounding slightly out of kilter with the system as a whole, with a slightly sharper and more obviously localised imaging than the expansive sounding Aeon. The changes in timbre (and high frequency dynamics too) are subtle and the system still ranks as highly consistent from the imagery point of view, but it is not as completely seamless as the very best, especially the very best THX Ultra systems, which set the gold standard in this area.

But the Martin Logan system still enjoys a substantial musical advantage over other systems at the price. Imagery is explicit and well focused, and the midband has clarity and expressiveness, along with the kind of resolution that allows subtle ambient information full rein. Dialogue is highly articulate, without added chestiness or other box-related artefacts, and the system as a whole has a fluidity and grace unusual in a home cinema package. Given appropriate set-up, the bass is also superb, thanks to the Descent – easily one of the most impressive subwoofers of recent years.

CONCLUSION

This system raises some unusual questions. Are you interested in a high performance multichannel speaker package that is equally adept at music reproduction in stereo? Fed up with upended wooden coffins and the usual over-familiar clichés of the loudspeaker maker's art? Are you up for a system that makes an uncompromising design statement? If so, here is a contender that fills all these requirements, and that just might ignite your passion for surround sound in the home. This is a thoroughbred system, and unusually strong value for money for its type and sophistication. £9,991, *Absolute Sounds* ☎ 020 8971 3909

SYSTEM MATCHING, SET-UP AND BURN-IN

- The speakers are quite sensitive, and with a strong 'throw' by moving coil standards, they work in bigger rooms with less power than you might expect. But the Aeons especially are a punishing electrical load, and all five satellites demand a lot of the driving electronics thanks to their unusual transparency. Don't forget that each speaker needs an AC mains supply. This system worked well with TAG McLaren's processor and power amps, and it should be well matched to the top of the line amplifiers coming from Denon and Pioneer.
- The instructions give very explicit advice on speaker positioning. You will however need about a metre of space behind the main speakers. Happily the surrounds work well on the walls as intended and take very little real space from most rooms, despite being larger than most rear speakers.
- The instructions specify the need for a proper burn-in period, though they probably understate the amount of running-in required. We recommend at least a week.

Check here for your local dealer:

- Northwood Audio Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire 01296 428790 • Searle Audio Barrow in Furness, Cumbria 01229 821233 • Kronos Belfast, Northern Ireland 028 8775 3606 • LRG Belfast, Northern Ireland 028 9045 1381 • EDC Bexley Heath, Kent 020 8298 7880
- Kimberley Hi-Fi Bexley Heath, Kent 020 8304 3272
- Practical Hi-Fi Blackpool, Lancashire 01253 300599
- Sound Academy Bloxwich/Birmingham, West Midlands 01922 473499 • Canterbury Hi-Fi Canterbury, Kent 01227 765315 • Radiocraft Cardiff, South Wales 02920 231166 • Peter Tyson Carlisle, Cumbria 01228 546756 • Bennetts Retail Chelmsford, Essex 01245 490060 • Chester AV Chester, Cheshire 01244 320414
- Bennetts Retail Colchester, Essex 01206 544406
- The Hi-Fi Store Crewe, Cheshire 01270 583889
- Super Deal Audio & Visual Croydon, Surrey 020 8654 1231 • Barker & Wigfall Doncaster, South Yorkshire 01302 342376 • TN McKay Dumfries, Scotland 01387 254117 • Alphavision Eastbourne, East Sussex 01323 720646 • Bennetts Retail Farnham, Surrey 01252 737090
- Tru Fi Farnham, Surrey 01252 737090
- Halksworth Wheeler Folkestone, Kent 01303 255688
- Alan James Hi-Fi Glasgow, Scotland 0141 248 4434
- Rogers Radio Godalming, Surrey 01483 425252
- Bennetts Retail Great Yarmouth, Norfolk 01493 651885 • Teleskill Guernsey, Channel Islands 01481 722323 • Scarview Electronics Hammersmith, West London 020 8748 2059 • Ultimate Audio Visual Hertford, Hertfordshire 01992 583399 • Huddersfield Hi-Fi Huddersfield, West Yorkshire 01484 544668
- Bennetts Retail Ipswich, Suffolk 01473 610801
- Sound Engineering Jersey, Channel Islands 01534 721735 • Classic Hi-Fi Kettering, Northamptonshire 01536 310855 • Leicester Hi-Fi Leicester, Leicestershire 0116 253 9753 • Stratford Hi-Fi Leamington Spa, Warwickshire 01926 888644 • All Electronics Sales & Service Brixton, South London 020 8874 4433 • Spatial Audio & Video Central London 020 7637 8702 • Lassy Ltd East Sheen, South West London 020 8876 7632 • Scarview Electronics Hammersmith, West London 020 8748 2059 • Super Deal Plumstead, South East London 020 8316 5572 • Hi-Fi Confidential Victoria, South West London 020 7233 7225 • Babber Electronics West Ealing, West London 020 8579 6315
- Practical Hi-Fi Manchester 0161 839 8869 • Unilet Sound & Vision New Malden, Surrey 020 8942 9567
- Fenwicks Ltd Newcastle 0191 232 5100 • JG Windows Newcastle 0191 232 1356 • Bennetts Retail Norwich, Norfolk 01603 625955 • Audiocraft Northampton 01604 636291 • Forum Hi-Fi Sherwood/Nottingham, Nottinghamshire 0115 962 2657 • Tru Fi Redhill, Surrey 01737 763216 • Track-2-Track Sawbridgegorth, Herts 01279 721172 • SMC Sound & Vision Shrewsbury, Shropshire 01743 232065 • Super Deal Sidcup, Kent 020 8309 5400
- Dogra & Sons Slough, Berkshire 01753 535689
- Audiovision St. Neots, Cambridgeshire 01480 471115
- Musical Approach Stafford, Staffordshire 01785 255154 • Audiovision Stevenage, Hertfordshire 01438 355800 • PDS Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire 01782 744556 • Stratford Hi-Fi Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire 01789 414533 • Sound Academy Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands 01922 473499 • Quims Swansea, South Wales 01792 773644 • Tring Television Tring, Hertfordshire 01442 822450 • Sounds of Music Tunbridge Wells, Kent 01892 539595
- Upgrade Heaven Wakefield, Nottinghamshire 01924 332790 • Practical Hi-Fi Warrington, Cheshire 01925 632179 • Video Vision Welling Garden City, Hertfordshire 01707 323610 • Dades Ltd West Drayton, Middlesex 01895 420898 • Sound Advice Woodford Bridge, Essex 020 8504 5444 • Bowers & Wilkins Worthing, West Sussex 01903 264141 • Sound Cinergy Walsall, West Midlands 01922 457926
- Warrington Hi-Fi Warrington, Cheshire 01925 636215
- Worcester Hi-Fi Worcester, Worcestershire 01905 612929

Designed for vision...

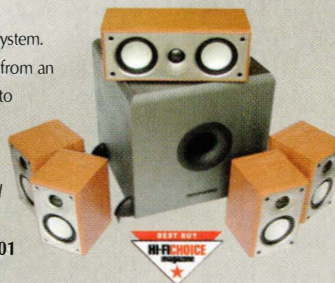
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PERFECT PARTNERS

EXCLUSIVE THE JEWEL IN ARCAM'S AMP RANGE IS AN INTEGRATED PLUS POWER COMBO THAT BEATS MOST BI-AMP PRETENDERS HANDS DOWN.

f

MJ was the upmarket range that pulled Arcam out of the doldrums a few years ago, and the A32 integrated amp, based on the DiVA A85 blueprint, has been introduced to headline the range in place of the established A22. Architecturally it is not quite the same as the A85. Even leaving the better quality aluminium and steel casework to one side, there have been subtle improvements

to the circuit topology, especially in the preamp section, and the power amp and power supplies have been beefed up to provide 100 watts per channel into eight ohms, or 140 watts into four ohms. There's no pretence of a doubling of power into the four ohm load, so a massive current yield is not really its forte, but it remains a powerful amplifier when used with all but the most difficult loudspeakers.

It is also a well-equipped one, with some unusual features, most of which are based around a slick microprocessor-driven interface:

input normalisation to balance sensitivity across sources with varying outputs, tone controls that can be assigned to chosen inputs and bypassed with others, switchable fixed gain for home cinema applications, and more. It also has a rotary encoder volume control with selectable gearing ratios. Of course the A32 is remote controlled, using a stick-type system handset. It's not the prettiest of its type, but it's serviceable.

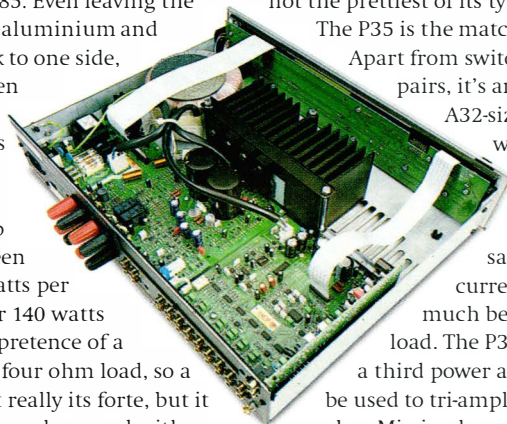
The P35 is the matching stereo power amp.

Apart from switching for two speaker pairs, it's an almost featureless A32-size component which, when used with the A32 allows bi-wirable speakers to be bi-amped, delivering the same volts but twice the current, and potentially much better control over the load. The P35 is also available with a third power amp module which can be used to tri-amplify an appropriate speaker. Missing however is the home cinema processor add-in for the integrated amplifier

that was available for the preceding Alpha 10 and FMJ A22 amps; a solution that simply lacks the flexibility to cope with today's demands.



The stylish brushed chrome of the amp is let down slightly by the less shiny remote.



REVIEW ALVIN GOLD

SOUND QUALITY

On its own, driving Red Rose Classic speakers (a large, bi-wirable three-way design) through Nordost Valhalla cabling, the A32 is a clean, lively and agile amplifier. Despite its heritage, it doesn't really sound like the DiVA A85. It has a more neutral balance and a greater subjective bandwidth: as though there was more going on at the frequency extremes. You might describe it as a more grown-up sounding amplifier.

So how does the addition of the P35 alter the equation? As our recent *Bench Test* of two-box pre/power and integrated/power amps showed, all the theory about what kind of amplifier should perform best – are bi-amp combinations like this one really inherently superior to straight one-box amplifiers for example? – counts for nothing when confronted by the



differences were small and I was not always able to reliably distinguish between them.

However, what was abundantly obvious was the extra muscle and control produced by using both amps rather than just the A32, and the way that the sound was able to 'breathe'. Orchestral recordings were reproduced with

The A32 comes equipped with five line-level analogue source inputs plus two input/output loops. A phono stage is optional.

“WHAT WAS ABUNDANTLY OBVIOUS WAS THE EXTRA MUSCLE AND CONTROL PRODUCED BY USING BOTH AMPS.”

practicalities of individual designs. In that test, the Arcam combination (A85 and P85) was the only integrated/power combination in which the two components were closely enough matched to make the test meaningful. And it looks as though Arcam has pulled the rabbit out of the hat again with the two FMJ components. I formed a marginal preference for the P35 driving the tweeter and the A32 driving mid and bass units rather than vice versa, but the

more passion and flow, while the internal structure, the placement of individual instruments, was more focused, more grounded. Chamber recordings sounded larger in scale at the same volume, and even solo singers (Suzanne Vega unaccompanied in one example) had a more tangible presence.

CONCLUSION

The A32 is something of a star, and while adding the P35 is not an inexpensive exercise, it is a worthwhile one that takes the performance of the Arcam design to a new level.

A32, £1,099.90. P35, £799.90

Arcam ☎ 01223 203200



BI-AMPING

Bi-wiring: Amplifiers are normally connected to a single pair of sockets on the loudspeaker, but many speakers allow the tweeter and the bass/midrange unit to be separated electrically. This allows them to be driven by separate cable pairs which are connected at the amplifier end.

Bi-amplification: This approach takes bi-wiring one stage further, allowing each drive unit to be driven by a separate power amp, doubling the number of power amplifiers required. It won't increase the power on offer but is likely to decrease distortion and if both amps have identical characteristics, can improve sound quality.





YOUR FLEXIBLE

THE MC-12'S NEAR-ENCYCLOPAEDIC RANGE OF LISTENING OPTIONS OFFERS SOME SERIOUS DILEMMAS FOR SURROUND SOUND FANS.

Lexicon's latest MC-12 processor is an extraordinary device. The company has always been at the forefront of digital processing for surround sound and this design reaffirms its position at the top of the tree. Just as importantly, it really looks like a high-end product – the hewn-from-solid-aluminium fascia and the sculpted base of the balanced 'B' model give it the looks one expects of a megabucks component.

The name of the game here is flexibility. The MC-12 appears to answer just about every wish the surround

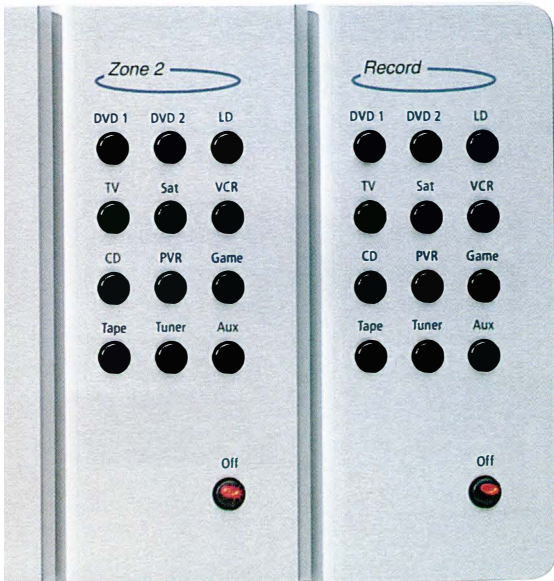
REVIEW JASON KENNEDY

sound enthusiast could have. The 12 in the name indicates the number of channels it will run, it's also the amount of analogue inputs and one less than the sum of digital inputs. What's more significant is that any connected source can be assigned to any input. This means that the same source can be assigned to two or more different inputs with different types of surround processing applied to each. So you would plug your CD player into the back and have the CD input handle it in analogue bypass mode like a regular hi-fi preamp, but you can also assign it to the LD input for instance and have it processed in Lexicon's 7.1 channel L7

mode. Each input can be configured to accept specific analogue and digital inputs and process them in whichever of the 26 listening modes is appropriate to that input type.

If that sounds confusing, fear not, it becomes a lot clearer when you start playing with the on-screen display. This reveals the multi-tiered arrangement for changing parameters and set-up. It arrived with the two basic options I needed already configured: L7 Film processing from a digital input and 5.1 analogue bypass mode from the 5.1 input used with high resolution DVD-Audio and SACD music players, but I didn't have too much difficulty taking the signal coming into the 5.1 input and channelling it through the MC-12's processing and trying different surround modes. The analogue bypass mode is the most direct route through the MC-12 because the signal only goes through the volume control, but you are then stuck with whatever speaker set-up facilities there are on the source.

The presence of 24-bit/96kHz A-to-D converters on inputs and 24-bit/192kHz DACs at the outputs means that you are getting high resolution conversion before and after the four 32-bit DSP engines do their stuff. If the DVD-A and SACD camps could get their acts together



FRIEND

and finalise a digital interface, a processor like this would really come into its own. As it is you have to choose between basic set-up (at the source) and an extra tier of analogue to digital conversion (in the processor).

The MC-12 is designed for the well-heeled home cinema enthusiast, the kind of movie lover for whom anything less than seven channels is a toy system. This is after all a full THX Ultra machine with decoders for all the existing Dolby and DTS surround systems and expansion slots to cater for any that arrive in future. The home cinema installer can also take advantage of the highly sophisticated triggers which can be programmed to initiate tasks specific to each input. The list of features goes on... But pages don't!

SOUND QUALITY

Describing the sound of this processor is a bit like shaking hands with an octopus - tricky. There are so many listening modes that one is overcome with variety and getting at the fundamentals becomes highly elusive. At the most prosaic level I compared its two-channel bypass mode with an ATC SCA2 stereo preamp. The latter, an all-analogue device, proved to be

cleaner and more relaxed with genuine stage depth, leaving the MC-12 to reveal a degree of electronic grubbiness. But it's clearly not a stereo preamp, it's a multichannel processor and in this respect it is extremely capable.

One factor that differentiates it from the competition is the existence of Logic 7 processing, Lexicon's own algorithm and one which comes in three flavours: L7 TV, L7 Film and L7 Music. These I compared with the more familiar alternatives from Dolby, DTS and THX and found that with L7 Music you get a generally more open, expansive soundstage coupled with some slightly odd tonal effects. Missy Elliot sounded like she had a cold and Joni Mitchell a little plummy. The trade-off for extra spaciousness is a loss of image solidity - DPL II Music provides a more anchored vocal and restrained image scale. In all instances analogue bypass gave a greater solidity to the sound but there were respects where the sound steering of imaginatively mixed albums, like Missy's, improved when passed through the processor.

With formats closer to its heart (i.e. films) the MC-12 proved more impressive. *The Matrix* provided a great opportunity for it to prove that action scenes can be explosive and powerful without battering your ears. I've had quite a few dems of the foyer scene, the one where loads of composite stone cladding are destroyed by gunfire but our heroes aren't scratched, yet I've never noticed the music that accompanies the action. Another strong point is dynamic range - other processors seem compressed compared to the MC-12 which can shock with dynamic swings while maintaining intelligibility.

With stereo TV I found DPL II THX to be the processing of choice. It's fairly conservative, keeping speech to the centre but opening up when genuine stereo material joins the fray. L7 TV had a peculiar echo effect, which can be defeated by turning down the rear channels for that input but seemed strange nonetheless.

One thing that did surprise me was that given the quality of digital conversion on offer its PCM digital input couldn't compete with analogue bypass when working with a CD player. Genuine 75 ohm socketry might have improved this.

In the context of seven ATC T16 active loudspeakers and a REL Stentor subwoofer I enjoyed some superb entertainment with the MC-12. There are moments on the Frankie Goes To Hollywood *Rage Hard* SACD that remind me of Pink Floyd, and this system really revelled in the manipulation of sound and the dynamics that Trevor Horn put in. Likewise Missy Elliot's



The MC-12 is an incredibly flexible beast, with 26 different listening modes and a huge variety of connection options round the back.



“DESCRIBING THE SOUND OF THIS PROCESSOR IS A BIT LIKE SHAKING HANDS WITH AN OCTOPUS - TRICKY.”

CLOSE UP

Listening Modes

1. L7 Film
 2. L7 TV
 3. L7 Music
 4. Dolby Digital
 5. Dolby Pro-Logic II
 6. Dolby Pro-Logic II THX
 7. Dolby Pro-Logic II Music
 8. Dolby Pro-Logic
 9. 2-Channel
 10. 2-Channel Surround
 11. Mono
 12. Mono Logic
 13. Mono Surround
 14. 5.1 L7 Film
 15. 5.1 L7 TV
 16. 5.1 L7 Music
 17. 5.1 THX Surround EX
 18. 5.1 2-Channel
 19. 5.1 Mono
 20. 5.1 Mono Logic
 21. 5.1 Mono Surround
 22. DTS-ES
 23. DTS-ES L7 Film
 24. DTS-ES L7 Music
 25. DTS-ES THX
- Note:** DTS Neo 6 and Neo 6 Music along with 5.1a versions of the L7 algorithm specifically designed for DVD-A and SACD are now being incorporated into production MC-12s.

SPEAKER SET-UP

One of the key factors with multichannel systems is speaker set-up and bass management. When you bypass the processing stages in the MC-12 you also bypass its not inconsiderable capabilities in these departments. The Lexicon allows you to set crossover points for each channel in the system, using a 24dB/octave filter in all but THX modes (12dB/octave), and with the aid of an SPL meter and tape measure you can set levels and distances. It allows for mono or stereo subs and treats LFE (low frequency effects) separately. You can further tweak individual channel levels for specific inputs while listening, and with practice (lots of practice) this can be done without a TV monitor by using the dot matrix display.

DIGITAL DISPLAY

Shows listening mode, source type, source mode and volume.

MODE SELECTOR

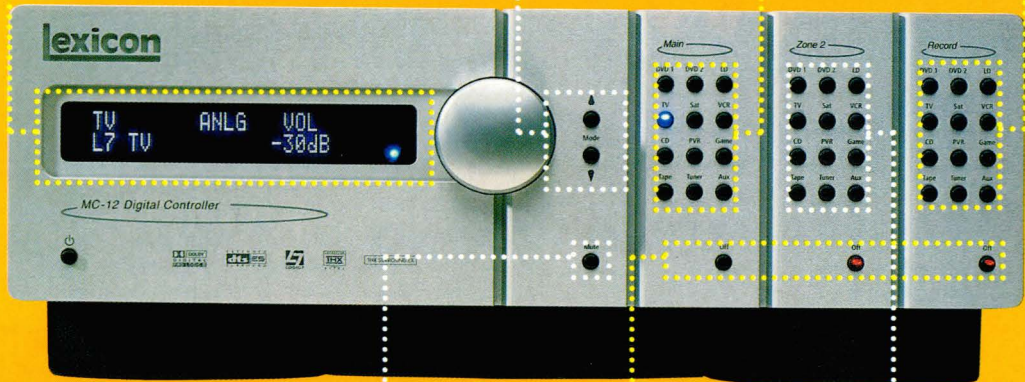
The up and down controls can be toggled to find the appropriate listening mode. They can also be set to select a default mode.

MAIN INPUT SELECTORS

These buttons allow you select each of the 12 available source inputs.

RECORDING SOURCE SELECTORS

Use these buttons to choose which source you'd like to record.



MUTE BUTTON

Also appears on the remote and can be set to Full Volume Off, or -40dB, -30dB, -20dB, -10dB.

ZONE BUTTONS

Select and deselect your required zone with these.

ZONE 2 INPUT SELECTORS

All the inputs from the main selector section but for a second room.

AUDIO INPUTS

Eight stereo analogue inputs, three of which may be configured as a 5.1 input (e.g. for DVD-A/SACD).

VIDEO INPUTS

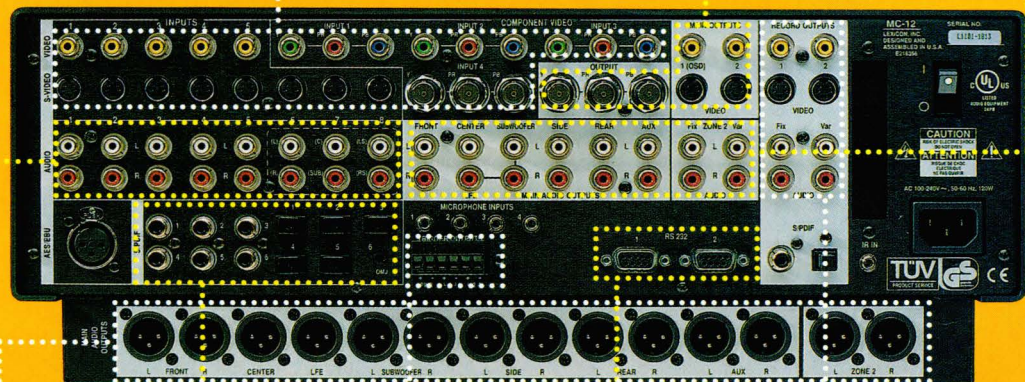
Four assignable component video inputs, five composite video inputs and eight S-Video inputs.

VIDEO OUTPUTS

Composite and S-Video outputs for the Main Zone.

AUDIO OUTPUTS

Six main stereo analogue outputs (plus two for Zone 2) provide plenty of options for partnering power amps.



XLR OUTPUTS

Additional audio output panel, specific to the pro 'B' version of the MC-12. Use if your power amps have balanced inputs.

DIGITAL INPUTS

Six coaxial digital audio inputs and five optical connectors plus one Optical Mini Jack (OMJ).

12 VOLT TRIGGERS

A set of trigger outputs can be used to send a control signal for automated devices, like blinds and lighting.

RS-232 PORTS

Two connectors for uploading software updates and home automation hook-up.

RECORD OUTPUTS

Audio and video outputs for recording.

first DVD-A has some superb use of the available channels which input extra life and energy. But why oh why did they have to censor the lyrics?!

CONCLUSION

I have only been able to scratch the surface of the MC-12's capabilities in this piece and if you want a better idea I suggest you visit a dealer or go to www.lexicon.com. I haven't even had a

chance to mention the two other zones it supplies; record and Zone 2 (another room). But the crux of the biscuit is that the MC-12 offers every facility the AV enthusiast could dream of and delivers a quality of processed sound that is extremely hard to beat. If you want complete control there's little competition.

MC-12B (balanced) £9,000. MC-12 (standard) £8,100
CSE Solutions ☎ 01423 359054

"I'VE HAD A QUITE A FEW DEMS OF THE MATRIX'S FOYER SCENE, BUT I'VE NEVER NOTICED THE MUSIC THAT ACCOMPANIES THE ACTION."

THE Hi-Fi BUGLE

Bringing You The Latest Information & Events



A Very Important Shows For All Seasons

It's always very nice to give good news. There is so much of the opposite these days isn't there? London is to get a brand new high quality Hi-Fi show this year - and no you won't have to wait several months to appreciate it! Less than a month to be precise.
The 6/7 April.

Conceived, created and commenced entirely in January this year, it's only through real enthusiasm from the trade that it's been possible to achieve it. The Organisers, who already have a successful and established event in the North have compressed 12 months work into three and come up with an ambitious and fresh event.

London of course has had it's own show in the Autumn for some time but future plans for this event have become confused and it's for this reason that many felt it essential that our calendar was assured of a major show for the Capital.

The venue will be the Renaissance Hotel at Heathrow which many of you will remember as the birthplace of Hi-fi shows added to which the Renaissance has just undergone a major and expensive refit. Already backed by four of your favourite magazines 'Hi-Fi Choice', 'Home Entertainment', 'Smart House' and 'Hi-Fi Plus, sales of stands are well advanced and by the time you read this advertisement we should have our website fully operational so tune in for the latest details at www.chestergroup.org

Deliberately capped at 55 exhibitors for this year (although brands will exceed a 100) our entire focus is to ensure you get value for money, top quality presentation and a jolly good day out.

We very much look forward to meeting you all at what promises to be a fresh and thoroughly enjoyable weekend for all those interested in top quality sound and vision.

Chesterfield Communications Ltd. are also organising other exciting audio events through out the year:

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'A new Spring Show for London'
The Renaissance Hotel Heathrow Airport
6 - 7 April 2002

The Belfast Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Show
'Welcome back'
Stormant Hotel, Belfast 2nd & 3rd
November 2002

The Manchester Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Show
'Now in its third year'
Hilton Manchester Airport 16th & 17th
November 2002

The Scottish Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Show
'Scotland get its own permanent show'
Thistle Hotel Glasgow 19th - 20th
September 2002

April Show Exhibitors

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www.chestergroup.org is updated regularly with the latest show exhibitors and products on demonstration.

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BRILLIANT CORNERS

DECADES OF INNOVATION IN LOOKS AND DESIGN PAY OFF IN PINK TRIANGLE'S FIRST EVER INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER.

If the success of a company were based on innovation and good intentions alone, then Pink Triangle would be as familiar a name now as it was during the 'turntable wars' of the late seventies and early eighties. In reality, Pink has had a rocky ride, though when it has occasionally ventured back into the limelight with products like the PIP preamplifier, or the Ordinal and DaCapo DACs, these novel electronics were greeted with almost unanimous praise from critics and consumers alike. I have little doubt that the £3,995 Integral amplifier will excite similar enthusiasm, but with new money and management behind the brand, it remains just as important that Pink Triangle can sustain this initial flurry of interest.

Sure enough, the Integral is Pink's first integrated amplifier, but the roots of the design can be traced back both to the PIP preamp and matching POP power amp, the latter having failed to make production some 16 years ago. Its styling is as novel as ever, albeit with a nod to products from the MF and Gryphon stables,

with its chromed centrepiece sporting both a motorised volume control and selection keys for its four inputs and two tape loops. There is even a pair of cylindrical supports under the heatsinking, positioned in line with the amp's centre of gravity so you can lift the unit without slicing your fingers off. Nice touch.

Around the back, a series of substantial, gold-plated phonos are joined by matching 4mm speaker binding posts from WBT. An additional set of balanced inputs is provided, while pre-ins and outs provide a route for future bi-amping should it be required. A rather less substantial remote control has been sourced from the Far Eastern 'parts bin' but, as this transmits RC5 code, it will also prove compatible with many ancillary components (CD players in particular) already in enthusiasts' systems.

Other than its common input selection board, the Integral is dual-mono throughout and more than meets its 100 watts per channel specification with 2x125 watts into eight ohms and 2x215 watts into four ohm loads. Under dynamic conditions, like real music, it's possible



REVIEW PAUL MILLER

to squeeze out some 155 watts, 285 watts, 485 watts and 310 watts into eight, four, two and one ohm loads respectively, which suggests the Integral will successfully grapple with almost any speaker likely to cross its path. Some technical issues remain concerning the 'symmetry' of noise, distortion and DC offsets between channels, but I feel confident any such wrinkles will be ironed out once the unit settles into production.

SOUND QUALITY

Auditioned with Theta CD and Sony SACD front-ends, the Integral swiftly showed its colours – or, more correctly, lack of colour – and demonstrated that costly pre/power combinations are by no means the only route to audio's high-end. There is a combination of grace and power about the Integral that

been artificially enhanced, while both the percussive highs and low bass rhythm sound that little bit smoother, that little bit more relaxed. Make no mistake, this is a true 'wideband' amplifier but it's the midband that consistently beguiles – deep bass and high treble play a supporting role without ever tripping up, but the frequency extremes are almost *too* transparent, too silky-smooth to advertise the Integral's presence. Which, in a less topsy-turvy world, would be a quality to applaud.

In short, this is the sort of realistic, free-flowing music that you do not forget in a hurry and yet, instead of describing its colour and beauty, the most experienced listeners will simply sit transfixed with their mouths lodged slightly ajar. And if it can keep these people quiet, Pink Triangle must be doing something very right indeed!

“THE INTEGRAL DEMONSTRATES THAT COSTLY PRE/POWER COMBINATIONS ARE NOT THE ONLY ROUTE TO AUDIO'S HIGH END.”

complements the greater bandwidth and expression of SACD. The two-channel version of the *Sacred Feast* SACD sounded tremendously open and atmospheric, the choir thrilling in its intensity without ever becoming hard or oppressive while the bass, though slightly understated, still contributed to an almost palpable ambience.

Vocal imaging is little short of astonishing. Ryan Adams could have been standing in the room performing his *Wild Flowers* track, the tactile force of his voice forming a rock about which the acoustic guitar, strings and vibes danced till the emotion all but dripped off the walls. The strings have a bite and resonance that fills the room without sounding as if they've

CONCLUSION

Fabulous though the Integral sounds, I am not even going to attempt to justify its equally fabulous price tag. It is worth noting that the Integral is assembled in the UK where small runs of custom metalwork, anodising and PCBs are prohibitively costly. Believe me, building *anything* in the UK is rarely a cost-effective option. Nevertheless, the Integral's price is almost incidental, for the very well-heeled audiophile will pay almost anything for a sound that takes him, or her, that little bit closer to perfection. And as we all know, perfection is very much in the ear of the beholder...

£3,995 Pink Triangle ☎ 0207 703 5498



INSIDE THE INTEGRAL

Ideally, the power transistors used in amplifiers would be very quick and linear devices but also sufficiently rugged to dump real-world current into the speaker load. These conflicting roles are at least partially satisfied in the Integral by the use of a cascode output stage.

In a conventional power amplifier, the output transistors get hot (and their characteristics change) as they soak up the difference between the signal level required to drive the speaker and the fixed power supply voltage ranged across them.

In PT's cascode arrangement there are two stages, a lower-level stage that defines the output voltage while sourcing the required current from a more rugged piggy-back stage that's connected in series. The lower operating temperature reduces the 'thermal cycling' experienced with conventional power amps, making it inherently more linear before corrective 'band-aids' like feedback are applied.



The very modern Integral's roots actually go back 16 years, to the design of the PIP preamp and POP power amp.

The Jimmy Hughes Experience

JIMMY HUGHES, HI-FI PUNDIT AND SUPERTWEAKER EXTRAORDINAIRE, INVITES DAVID VIVIAN INTO HIS AUDIO TEMPLE TO DISCUSS THE CORRELATION BETWEEN QUANTUM MECHANICS AND BLU-TAC.

Back when my age was a single syllable affair, I believed I could construct an internal combustion engine from stuff found in kitchen drawers. The trick was to find utensils and appliances so complicated their function was a mystery and somehow make them fit together – the resulting melange of metalwork would know what to do. But alas, it never did. Undaunted, I soon developed a worrying habit of plugging everything into everything else, just to see what would happen.

It's a wonder I made it to my first double syllable though predictable, perhaps, that I'd end up writing about cars and hi-fi. My miserable biscuit tin and egg whisk engines probably put me off tinkering with real motors for life and lined up a career in the driving seat rather than under the bonnet. Avoiding electrocution, though, meant my urge to connect things survived, if on a more metaphorical level in later years. Truth is, the very idea a hi-fi system's sound can be improved by things as diverse as blobs of Blu-Tac, black box "enhancers" and treatments skimmed from the fringes of fundamental physics, gives me goose bumps.

Which is why I've always known I'd never turn down the chance to visit Jimmy Hughes at his unusual (to say the least) split-level apartment just above Moorgate tube station near London's

Barbican Centre. For many of you, Jimmy will need no introduction. Not only is he a stalwart of British hi-fi reviewing and estimable classical music buff, but also probably the most fearless and gifted tweak guru on the planet. I've known him for years but never been invited to the inner sanctum of what must be the closest thing hi-fi reviewing has to the Batcave. But I'm here now, interviewing the man who really did plug everything into everything else.

HUMANISING TRANSFORMERS

The first thing I notice about Jimmy's system is that it has more junctions than the nearby Circle Line. This, of course, flies in the face of conventional thinking (keep things simple and signal paths short), but then Jimmy isn't a conventional thinker.

He surveys the profusion of boxes between the amp and the CD player and does some explaining. "A few years ago I started to experiment with line-matching transformers. (I think they're very popular in Japan). Various ideas have been put forward as to what they do. One is that they block radio frequency interference. The net effect seems to be that it kind of humanises the sound; seems to give it greater body and substance. I think transformers seem to do that generally. Some of the old jazz recordings from the fifties have this incredibly real, solid quality. And I think one of the reasons was transformers.

"JIMMY'S INNER SANCTUM MUST BE THE CLOSEST THING HI-FI REVIEWING HAS TO THE BATCAVE."





Hughes's way: (left to right) Papworth TVA15 valve amp (plus EAR amp not currently in use), Avid Volvere turntable, Luxman transformer (used for both CD and turntable), Chord's DAC 64 atop a Musical Fidelity A3 CD player, Audiolab PPA phono stage, Kuzma Stabi turntable.



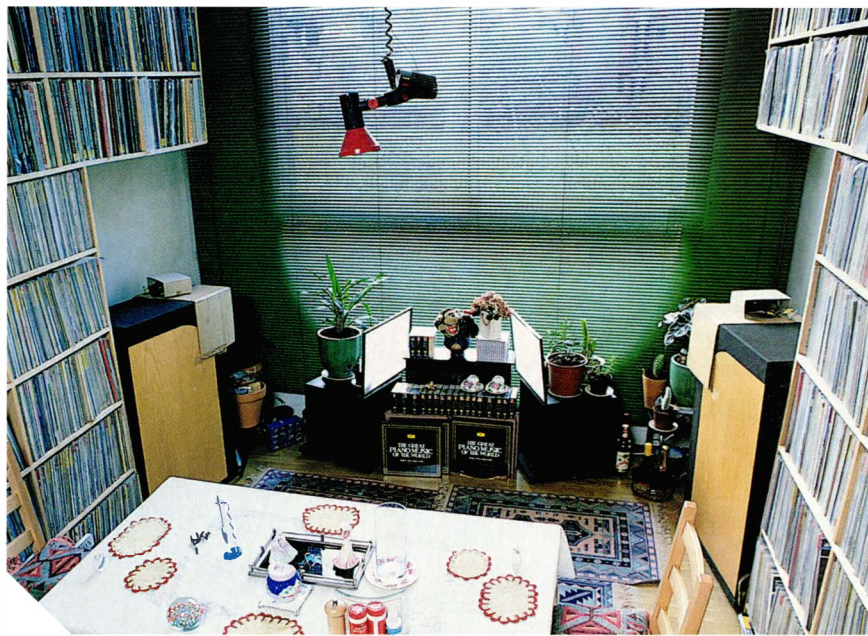
“I use two of them – a Luxman and a Marantz. There are also two valve line stages: a Musical Fidelity X10D and an American Audio Signal Enhancer which has a similar effect. The reason for them in the first place was to deal with the typical problems of CD – the thinness of sound, the lack of body and weight, and also the poor pitch definition.”

It’s probably appropriate that we should start off with the cure rather than the kit. Jimmy has never been dogmatic when it comes to equipment, though the Papworth TVA15 integrated valve amp he currently uses (a modest £1,700) looks every bit as exotic as his Avid and Kuzma turntables. His holy grail isn’t perfect hi-fi but a sound he likes and can live with. Price, type, power or brand aren’t the things that shape his audio world, though he is excited by his latest acquisition, Chord’s ultra-sophisticated DAC 64, which is fed from the transport of a Musical Fidelity A3 CD player. Jimmy reckons the Chord has injected new life and vitality into his system and made CD sound better than he would have thought possible.

THINK DIFFERENT

It seems almost too straightforward. Most of the major improvements to Jimmy’s system over the years have been driven by the man’s urge to experiment. “Back in the mid-eighties, I did actually move away from big, expensive speakers and, for about four or five years, used small, nondescript boxes made by Arcam (the Arcam 2). In a direct A-B comparison, the speaker was disappointing. But once I’d listened to it for a while and adjusted, I suddenly realised there was much more to it than

“Now make yourself comfortable David, we’ve still got another 15,997 albums to get through.”



“EVERYTHING STEMS FROM PITCH DEFINITION: TEMPO, CLARITY, DYNAMIC INFLECTION, RHYTHMIC VITALITY.”

I’d first realised and I started to find the music more involving. The speaker wasn’t drawing attention to itself.

“I used them for about four or five years. I only changed when the Impulse H1 (a bulky floorstanding horn speaker) came along. These were a much more ambitious design. In many ways, I was still unsure whether I wanted them.”

But the H1s (and second pair) are still here, jammed into the corners at the far end and lower level of this narrow room made thinner by the 16,000 or so LPs lining the walls. Pointing away from us.

“I use them back to front,” continues Jimmy matter-of-factly, now so comfortable with his paradigm shift that he doesn’t regard it as unusual. “It came about by accident. I had to review a speaker called the Shahinian Arc. I looked at them and, basically, it was difficult to work out which way they should go and, as it happened, I chose the wrong way – so they pointed away. But I was very impressed by what I heard.” The stuff of tweaking legend.

But hardly the whole story. “Since then there’s been lots of other things. For example, the speakers sit on Townshend Seismic Sinks, the drive units are decoupled from the cabinets with Deflex gaskets and then there’s the supertweeter. Unlike the Tannoy one it’s almost inaudible – with some music you might just be able to detect it. This supertweeter was actually a Peter Belt idea. (Note: Peter Belt is the inventor of some of the strangest hi-fi tweaks ever. Many worked and Jimmy was a fan but PB then started to base his tweaks on the theories of quantum mechanics which no one understands anyway. Jimmy and Peter fell out over the supertweeter.)

“For Peter they weren’t supertweeters. He had an idea that one of the problems with sound was that there was a time discontinuity with the recording, which was made in the past, and replaying it today in the present. The Motorola supertweeters were designed to combat that. I made the mistake of thinking they were high frequency units. Anyway, he took them back and I bought myself a set from Maplins. They’re pretty cheap and I used them and liked what they did.”

At the far end of the room, there are two small REL subwoofers (“I use two because there’s a cancellation in mono, and I keep them close together because one of the most important things is to have a solid, coherent central image”) and a hidden Goodmans car speaker connected to the right speaker. “All I wanted it to do was to focus the centre image,” explains Jimmy. “But I’m not even sure it does that. What it does is improve pitch definition.”

Pitch definition? Without that you can’t have good sound, contends Jimmy. Everything stems from it: tempo, clarity, dynamic inflection, rhythmic vitality. And it’s true, Jimmy’s system has all these things – and a quite remarkably effortless sense of purity.

“The big problem as I see it,” muses Jimmy, “is how to reconcile the need for high resolution, power, bandwidth – all those things – and also achieve a sound that’s comfortable, relaxing and easy to listen to, that isn’t showing you everything that’s wrong with the source. There’s a balance to be struck between a system that shows you literally everything and one that sounds authentic.”

Authentic rocks, by the way. **HFC**

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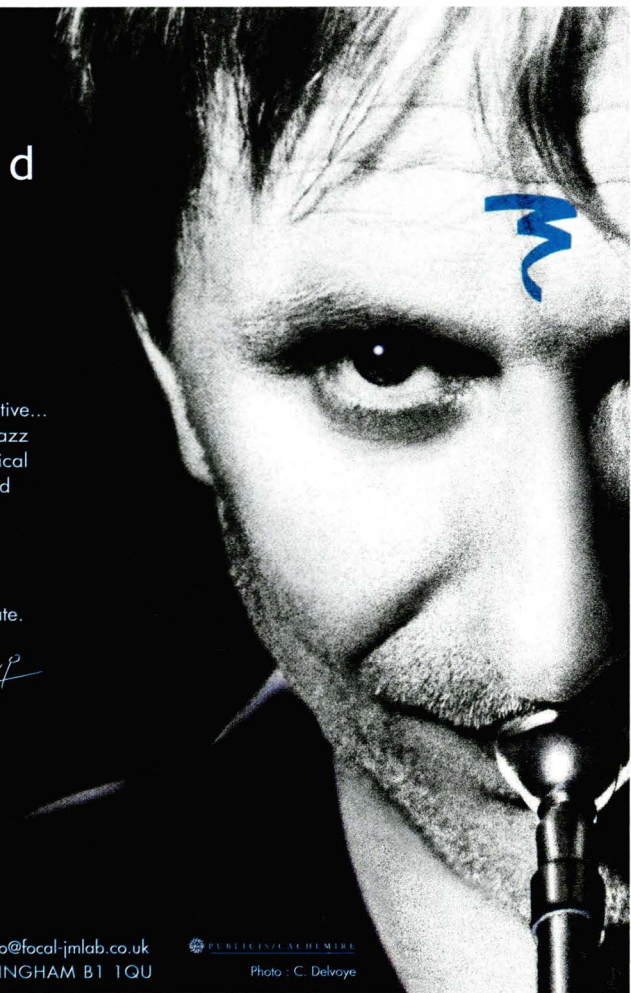
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LINN



SPEAKERS

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF EIGHT MID-PRICE SPEAKERS BY PAUL MESSENGER.

This group test has a nominal price spread from £300 up to £600, but in fact the participants have tended to cluster around specific price points – two models at £300, three at £400, plus three more sitting above £500. Emphasising the variety that distinguishes loudspeakers, the £300 Mission m74 is one of the largest and heaviest while the £600 Tannoy is the smallest and lightest, proving that size and price have little in common in speakerland.

Our eight include three standmounts and five floorstanders, the former naturally requiring the addition of proper stands to achieve their maximum performance. Fashion and perceived value might still favour the floorstander, but there remains plenty of basic engineering logic on the side of the standmount.

There's no denying the floorstanders tend to look better – less disjointed – though it's a shame none of our five came with additional plinths, which enhance both appearance and stability.

But the standmount has its own advantages, especially for simple two-way designs. The basic box dimensions give a better spread of standing waves, and they give a superior ratio of main driver cone area to box surface area, which helps minimise box coloration.

Seven of our candidates are two-ways, though there are variations in the sizes of the main drivers and the enclosures. Loudspeakers are all about compromise, and where the bigger floor-standing box with larger/multiple drivers is likely to go both deeper into the bass and louder with more headroom, it's also likely to have rather more box coloration and possibly less midband delicacy than the smaller standmount.

One crucial factor to consider when choosing speakers is where you're intending to put them. Some designs work best when sited well clear of walls; others need a nearby wall to 'lift' the mid-bass output and give a good overall balance. Manufacturers are increasingly supplying port-blocking foam bungs, which can help a free-space oriented design avoid sounding too heavy when placed close to a wall. The rules on speaker/room interaction are not hard and fast, and individual experiment is strongly recommended.

THE CAST LIST

Acoustic Energy Aesprit 300	£399.95
Arcaydis AKF	£299.00
B&W DM602.5 S3	£399.95
Castle Durham 3	£399.00
JBL Xti 80	£579.00
JMLab Chorus 715	£529.00
Mission M74	£299.90
Tannoy Eyriss 1	£599.90

EQUIPMENT USED

Naim CDS II CD player
 Linn LP12 turntable
 Naim ARD tonearm
 Linn Arkiv B, Dynavector XV-1 cartridges
 Magnum Dynalab MD 102 tuner
 Naim NAC52 preamp
 Naim NAP500 power amp
 Naim NACA5 speaker cables
 Kudos S100 speaker stands

MUSIC USED

Massive Attack - *Blue Lines*
 Christy Moore - *Live At The Point*
 Leftfield - *Leftfield*
 Mary Chapin Carpenter - *A Place In The World*
 Grainger/LWD/Wick - *By Plane From Paris*
 Mari Boine - *Eallin*
 Grateful Dead - *Reckoning*
 Cambridge Singers/Rutter - *There Is Sweet Music*
 BBC Radios 3 & 4

LISTENING PANEL

Russell Kauffman (B&W/Classe)
 David Inman
 Keith Haddock

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AESPRIT AE 300

SOUND ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

£399.95

CONTACT 01285 654432

www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

GUARANTEE 3 years

Acoustic Energy has long been known for using metal diaphragm drivers in sturdily built enclosures. While its initial reputation was built on some decidedly upmarket miniatures, the company has become much broader based in recent years, while still retaining some of those original roots. The Aesprits are a relatively new range of mid-priced models, combining metal-cone main drivers with a soft fabric dome tweeter, mounted in chunky real-wood-veneered enclosures. We first encountered them as a £1,230 five-channel system in our surround sound issue (*HFC 224*). That package consisted of three different models: AE 309 floorstanders, an AE 307 centre speaker and a pair of AE 300Cs at the rear. This Aesprit AE 300 is a fourth model from the range, sharing similar drivers and enclosure materials, but this time in a two-way standmount configuration priced at £400 for the pair.

Available in maple, cherry or black ash, the veneer used for our samples looks rather undistinguished, though the radiused baffle edges are a nice



The Aesprit's sturdy build structure means it's heavier than some floorstanders.

styling touch. The enclosure build is seriously solid and substantial – at 9kg, this standmount is actually heavier than the Arcaydis floorstander – thanks to a 30mm thick front panel, alongside 15mm sides and internal bracing.

This is a rear-ported two-way,

but the in room balance is impressively smooth and has fine bass extension, with ports open and the speakers clear of walls.

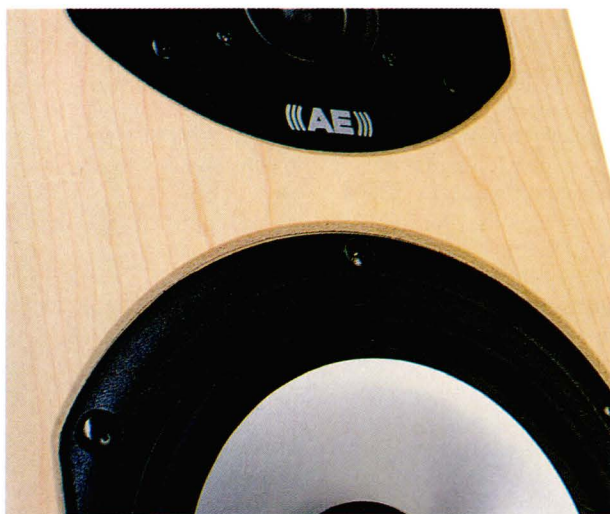
SOUND QUALITY

The 300 was a firm favourite with one panellist, who described it as: “The easiest listen of today”, praising the speaker for its impressive scale, good vocal clarity and fine image depth, and accurately identifying it as a big-sounding small speaker. Others were less complimentary. While they praised its good scale, balance and neutrality, they also complained of a lack of drive and drama. “A bit antiseptic... and... lacking in soul”, was how one panellist put it. “Clean and competent but a bit bland dynamically”, according to another.

CONCLUSION

The listening panellists might not have agreed on the AE 300, but they pinned down its contrasting sonic strengths and weaknesses pretty effectively. Fine image focus, impressive evenness, big scale sound and low coloration all deserve respect, but check you can cope with its modest sensitivity and limited dynamic ambition and expression.

“ITS FINE IMAGE FOCUS, IMPRESSIVE EVENNESS, BIG SCALE SOUND AND LOW COLORATION ALL DESERVE RESPECT.”



based on a plastic frame main driver with a 120mm diameter flared metal cone, plus a 28mm fabric dome tweeter. Both drivers are flush-mounted (though the main driver frame appears to be shaped for surface mounting). The enclosure has a generous 16-litre capacity, and the port is tuned to a low 35Hz. Bungs are supplied to damp/block the port output if required, for example if the speakers need to be close to a wall,

THE LAB REPORT

AT JUST 85.6DB SENSITIVITY (re. 2.83V/1m), the Aesprit 300 is by far the ‘quietest’ speaker of the bunch. However, any lack of ‘loudness’ is countered by its remarkably flat and uniform response, low distortion and relatively easy-going load. The latter includes mere +/-30 degree phase angles and an impedance minimum of just 6.2ohm at 170Hz. The averaged, third-octave response is especially smooth from 200Hz-8kHz beyond which there’s

some slight high treble emphasis, a feature that becomes steadily more apparent as you move off the main listening axis. This confirms the neutral but shiny sound of the Aesprit 300. AE has tuned the reflex port to a low 38Hz, which is accurately aligned to both the driver null, phase and impedance minimums. Even so, the roll-off of the alloy bass/mid unit is a little ‘peaky’ which, perhaps, is intended to provide an extra ‘crack’ to the bass.

EXCLUSIVE

ARCAVDIS AKF

SOUND ★★☆☆☆☆**VALUE** ★★☆☆☆☆**£299.00****CONTACT** 01562 865788

www.arcaydis.co.uk

GUARANTEE 3 years

One of the newer and smaller brands on the scene, Kidderminster-based Arcaydis has made one previous *Bench Test* appearance in *Hi-Fi Choice* (issue 211). That was an unusually compact £1,200 floorstander called the Concept 2, whose most surprising feature was an enclosure fashioned from solid American white oak.

This new AKF is also a very compact floorstander, but it comes in at the opposite end of the price spectrum, with a £299 price tag that seems unusually reasonable since it's finished in a real wood veneer. But not all real wood veneer is created equal, and that used here clearly comes from the less luxurious end of the market. Seeing the AKF next to one of the vinyl-covered offerings, one panellist insisted on his preference for the latter.

Sister model to the standmount

AKS featured in *HFC 224's First Impressions*, the AKF is a simple port-loaded two-way which uses the same 'inverted' driver array. The drivers are recessed into the front panel of the sharp-edged box, and the whole thing looks just a little home made, with the tweeter set a little too deep, and the main driver standing a little proud. A stick-on badge also stands proud.

The business end of things combines a 130mm cast frame main driver with a 100mm diameter plastic cone, and a 25mm fabric dome tweeter loaded by a short horn. A rear port augments the bass end and twin terminal pairs are fitted to enable bi-wiring/bi-amping if desired.

In-room measurements show a rather problematic bass alignment, with excessive output around the port-tuned frequency of 45Hz even when well clear of walls, alongside a distinct lack of relative output through the upper bass and lower midband. In contrast, the mid-to-treble voicing looks particularly well judged.

SOUND QUALITY

The listening panel responded well to the AKF, thanks mainly to good mid-band projection and voicing which seems to bring fine 'direct-coupled' communication almost as a matter of course. Dynamics are expressive, though voices do have a slight tendency to over-project, giving a slightly shouty, megaphonic character.

Deep bass isn't really on the agenda here – no great surprise given the ingredients, but what there is has welcome agility and continuity. But the lack of warmth and evenness

through the lower registers is a problem, leading to some inconsistency as one moves between different recordings and material with different spectral content. The left hand of a grand piano recording, for example, sounded notably weak.

CONCLUSION

The AKF is difficult to sum up. On the one hand it's a real-wood compact floorstander at a very reasonable price; on the other, it's neither the prettiest nor the best finished. The sound too contrasts good upper range projection with a lack of smoothness and warmth in the lower regions.



Floorstanders on a budget lose out on build quality.

THE LAB REPORT

NOTIONALLY, THE AKF IS A floorstander, but its restricted height means the listening axis will be *above* the top of the cabinet, assuming you are sitting on a chair and not the carpet. The uneven vertical dispersion of this speaker explains some of the remarks made by Paul's panel – particularly above the 2.5kHz crossover region where its output falls away by up to 6dB until the response is restored at 10kHz or so. This, in turn, influences its broadband sensitivity which falls 1.1dB below its rated 88dB (which

it certainly achieves at 1kHz/2.83V/1m), ensuring the speaker sounds quieter than you might expect. Loading is reasonably tough with an average of 8.8ohms and minimum of 4.25ohms. Distortion too is also pretty high with this speaker, typically exceeding 1.5% through bass and midrange at 96dBA. And the uneven bass? Well, that's due to an astonishing pipe resonance that escapes the reflex port at 220Hz, despite the system itself being tuned to a sharp 45Hz.

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EXCLUSIVE

B&W DM602.5 S3

SOUND ★★☆☆☆☆**VALUE** ★★☆☆☆☆**£399.95****CONTACT** 01903 221500

www.bwspeakers.com

GUARANTEE 5 years

B&W is the major world brand in hi-fi loudspeakers today, and its biggest sellers have been a succession of variations on the 600 Series theme, going back at least a decade. The most recent are the S3 versions, which follow several of the familiar themes, but also include a fresh and very attractive new cosmetic look, codenamed Sorrento.

Three of the models – the 601 S3, 602 S3 and LCR600 S3 – rated a collective Best Buy in our recent group test on surround sound speaker packages (*HFC* 224). This review, however, concentrates on the one all-new model in the latest range, the DM602.5 S3. Filling the gap between the established 602 and 603 models, it's a compact two-way port-loaded floorstander that's actually based closely on the 601 drivers, and is priced at £400/pair.

You can have your 602.5 S3 in traditional black ash woodprint, which is still popular in some parts of the globe. But I dare say a lot of potential customers are going to be seduced by the Sorrento option with its delightful blend of yellow and light grey, in which the really original bit is colouring the rubber surround of the main driver to match the front panel.

The main driver here has a cast frame and 120mm diameter Kevlar cone, while the tweeter is B&W's tube-loaded, Nautilus-inspired 25mm metal dome device. Although the 602.5 S3 is physically more than twice the size of a 601, it's actually acoustically only half as big again, with an active internal volume of around 16 litres. The lower section of the enclosure is blanked off, which is why the twin terminal pairs are quite high off the ground, ditto the front 'Flowport'. Bungs are supplied to block the latter if required, though in-room measurement shows a fine bass alignment with ports open in free space.

SOUND QUALITY

In complete contrast to our recent very positive reactions to the 602 S3,

the listening panel's opinions were decidedly mixed. Although this speaker handles bass power very comfortably, sounding articulate and agile, several listeners complained of a rather thrummy and hollow coloration in the lower midband, and ascribed this to the box contribution.

The midband here is decidedly laid-back and rather 'dark', so that voices sound a trifle shut-in, while the top end possesses a slight sting which listeners variously described as a little "squeaky" or "scratchy".

CONCLUSION

A good looking speaker in its pretty new suit of clothes, the 602.5 S3 doesn't, however, quite live up to the sonic promise set by its standmount 601 S3 and 602 S3 stablemates. It is certainly smooth-sounding and impressively evenhanded, with a strong and agile performance in the bass department. But its restrained midband and cautious overall balance give rise to a sound that's a little too reticent for its own good.

B&W's new floorstander looks the part, but there are stronger models in the range.



"THE MIDBAND HERE IS DECIDEDLY LAID-BACK AND RATHER 'DARK', SO THAT VOICES SOUND A TRIFLE SHUT-IN."

THE LAB REPORT

ONCE AGAIN, B&W CONTINUES

to rate its speakers with refreshing accuracy, even if this does mean acknowledging the DM602.5 is about 1dB lower in sensitivity than the DM602 and 2dB lower than the DM603 and CM4 models. But, like those designs, the two-way DM602.5 has a sober-looking response with, judging by the third-octave in-room trace, the possibility of sparking some bass modes around 100-200Hz. Using the port bungs may help if the '602.5 simply sounds too warm and cuddly.

Otherwise, the speaker has a fairly uniform mid and lower treble, with just a 1-2dB loss in output from the Kevlar bass/mid unit prior to handing over to its 'Nautilus' tweeter at 4kHz. Distortion, however, remains pretty low at ~0.5-0.7% right through this presence band (up to 96dBA). Once the Nautilus driver takes hold, this improves to ~0.2%. Otherwise, B&W's crossover network ensures the '602.5 provides some big swings in impedance (39 to 2.9ohm) and phase (+/-63/48 degrees) for the amp to deal with.

EXCLUSIVE

CASTLE DURHAM 3

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£399.00** **CONTACT** 01756 795333 www.castle.uk.com **GUARANTEE** 5 years

Notwithstanding its title, this is actually the fourth Castle to bear the Durham name. (Back in 1994 we reviewed one called the Durham 900, so called to celebrate Durham Cathedral's 900th anniversary.) And although this new Durham 3 shares a name with its predecessors, it's really an all-new, from-the-ground-up creation.

Priced at £399/pair, this compact two-way standmount is a little slimmer and taller than the classic proportions, and features Castle's delightfully classy real-wood-veneered cabinetwork with fine detailing and nicely post-formed edges all round the front panel. Drivers are flush-mounted, the tweeters are offset, and the speakers are therefore supplied in mirror-imaged pairs. There are nine different wood finishes to choose from – seven at the standard price, with yew and rosewood at a premium.

With an internal volume of around ten litres, the 130mm cast-frame main driver uses Castle's preferred woven carbon fibre cone, 100mm in diameter. Its voice coil has copper coated aluminium wire, the magnet assemblies are fully shielded and the metalwork has a T-shaped, drop-forged magnetic pole. The tweeter uses a small 19mm polyamide dome.

A rear panel port, tuned here to a

relatively high 65Hz, provides mid-bass reinforcement, and twin terminals permit the bi-wire/bi-amp option should you need it. In-room traces show a bass alignment that's very well suited to close-to-wall siting.

SOUND QUALITY

The modest size of main driver and enclosure inevitably acted as a constraint here, eliciting universal observations of a relatively small-scale sound from the panellists. However, despite its lack of genuine scale and authority, the reactions were mostly positive, with praise for the overall musical coherence and especially for its expressive dynamics.

There's some midband coloration here, partly as a consequence of wall reflections, and some nasal and 'cupped hands' effects are audible on voices. But the lack of chestiness on male speech is a compensatory plus, and the speaker shows fine tautness, agility and drive through the bass

region, propelling the music along with gusto and enthusiasm. The top end is perhaps a little too restrained, somewhat restricting the overall openness and transparency, but the ears seem to adjust quite readily to this and unwelcome over-emphasis is avoided.

CONCLUSION

Although deep bass isn't really on

Strong sound and convenient too as they benefit from siting close to walls.



"FINE TAUTNESS, AGILITY AND DRIVE THROUGH THE BASS PROPELS THE MUSIC WITH GUSTO AND ENTHUSIASM."

THE LAB REPORT

THERE IS SOME LOSS IN output around 5kHz where neither the woven carbon-fibre bass/mid unit or polyamide dome tweeter are performing optimally. Nevertheless, the healthy response up to 3-3.5kHz gives the Durham 3 its forward and lively balance even when auditioned 10-20 degrees off the main listening axis. The speaker is also substantially more sensitive at 90.9dB (2.83V/1m) than Castle's 88dB specification might suggest, though distortion is also a little

high at typically >1% through bass (where there are also big +60 degree swings in phase and 52ohm leaps in impedance) and midrange. Limited bass extension is another trade-off of its high sensitivity and a small enclosure volume. In this instance, the Durham 3's port is tuned to a high 65Hz while the -6dB roll-off of the bass driver is higher still at 100Hz. In the open, you can't expect much bass below 70-80Hz, although a deeper 60Hz is achievable in a bookshelf location.

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EXCLUSIVE

JBL XTI 80

SOUND ★★★★★**VALUE** ★★★★★**£579.00****CONTACT** 020 8731 4670<http://international.jbl.com>**GUARANTEE** 5 years

A legendary US brand that operates under the Harman umbrella, Harman's new UK

subsidiary took over distribution for domestic JBL product early in 2002, bringing worthwhile price reductions.

The Xti series first came to our attention in *HFC* 210, when a complete five-speaker multichannel package received a collective Best Buy rating. That combination featured the compact and rather cute floor-standing Xti 40 for the main front stereo pair, whereas this review covers its much bigger brother, the three-way £579 Xti 80.

It's a bulky but undeniably handsome loudspeaker, made in Denmark and very nicely finished in a polished, high quality beech or cherry real wood veneer, with black satin a third option. The hexagonal box shape is built from two three-part 'half-wraps', one for the front, the other for the back; they meet at the widest point

of the sides, where a black rubber strip fills the gap. It looks attractive, and also makes good sense from an acoustic point of view, in helping to spread the frequencies of internal standing waves.

The length is significantly deeper than the width, ensuring excellent fore-and-aft stability and somehow making them look slimmer than they actually are. Removing the rubber feet reveals sockets for the reversible 6mm spikes, which look a bit feeble, with a ball on one side and a rather blunt ninety degree 'spike' on the other – not too good for carpet-piercing.

This is a full three-way, with a pair of 6.5-inch bass drivers, each with 120mm paper cones, plus a port to handle the bass. The midrange driver has a 95mm cone and operates in its own sub-enclosure, while the tweeter uses a 25mm titanium dome. Just two pairs of terminals are fitted. Not surprisingly, in-room measurements indicate free space siting here.

SOUND QUALITY

One panellist reacted positively and with some enthusiasm to the Xti80, praising its dramatic impact, grand

scale and sheer entertainment value.

However, the others were much less impressed, comments including: "Big sound...but not quite coherent. Lots of headroom but a bit bland overall. Well behaved but not that communicative of subtlety or inner detail. Not very exciting or involving".

The last sentence in particular seemed to sum up my longer term, hands-on reactions, to a speaker which undoubtedly gives generous

scale and a fundamentally neutral balance, but which struggled to inspire any real enthusiasm.

CONCLUSION

A three-way like this JBL will always offer greater loudness capability and headroom than a two-way (or 2.5-way). As a result, the Xti80 is a real party animal, and a very good looking one to boot. But it also seems to have a little less coherence and delicacy than simpler designs.



The Xti 80's three-way design incorporates twin bass drivers.

THE LAB REPORT

COMPARISON WAS MADE

between this JBL and the B&W during Paul's listening tests and, indeed, both speakers have a broadly similar third-octave in-room response. Both show a tendency for bass heaviness and what might best be described as a 'gentle' treble, especially (in the Xti80's case) if the speaker is toed more than 10-15 degrees off-axis. A narrowband analysis suggests the integration of JBL's three-way system is less tidy than B&W's two-

way, with some peakiness associated with the midrange cone from 1.6-2.9kHz (where distortion climbs to a high 2.5% and there's an additional swing in phase) followed by a brief loss in output following the 3kHz mid/treble crossover. Then again, the Xti80 makes more of its input with an 89dB sensitivity, even if this is achieved with an arduous sub-4ohm load from 120-625Hz (3.3ohm minimum and 5.7ohm average) that makes the Xti80 the most current-hungry speaker here.

"IT GIVES GENEROUS SCALE AND A NEUTRAL BALANCE, BUT STRUGGLES TO INSPIRE ANY REAL ENTHUSIASM."

JMLAB CHORUS 715

SOUND ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

£529.00

CONTACT 0121 616 5126

www.focal-jmlab.fr

GUARANTEE 5 years

The leading French hi-fi speaker brand with a history going back more than twenty years, JMLab is still a relative newcomer here in Britain. The Chorus models represent the company's new entry level range (JMLab doesn't make 'budget' speakers as such), and are effective successors to the Tantals.

In fact this £529/pair Chorus 715 looks very like a straight replacement for the Tantal 515, which scored a *HFC* Best Buy back in 1998. The basic dimensions, drivers and overall configuration look virtually identical. Even the vinyl-finished cosmetic treatment is very similar, while the price has crept up just a little, from

£495 to £529 the pair.

High class Focal drive units are very much at the heart of the JMLab operation, even with this entry-level model. Those used here include a version of the famous 'inverted dome' tweeter, with its titanium diaphragm, while the main drivers have 'Polyglass' damped paper cones in cast chassis with generous magnets. (Polyglass, incidentally, is a surface treatment using microscopic glass spheres.) The two main drivers here operate in a two-and-a-half-way configuration, the upper one as a bass/mid unit, the lower one covering just the bass region, with further assistance from the front port.

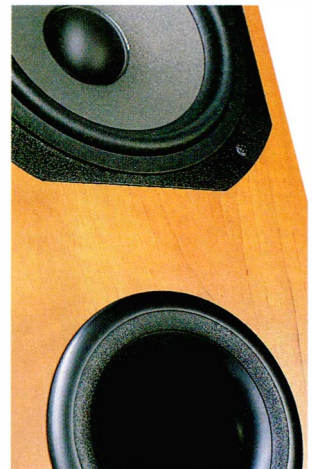
By comparison, the enclosure looks

a tad prosaic – neat enough, but sharp-edged and rather monolithic, especially with the long grille in place. Still, the drivers are nicely flush-mounted, and the vinyl, available in black ash, cherry or calvados, is easy enough on the eyes. Twin terminal pairs permit bi-wiring/bi-amping options, and floor coupling consists of four rubber feet, plus sockets for the supplied 8mm spikes. Room measurements suggest that some wall reinforcement might prove beneficial with this speaker.

SOUND QUALITY

The Chorus 715 delivered a solid performance in the listening tests, more than one listener praising its fine overall neutrality, accurate tonality, a fair measure of authority and strong dynamic drive and tension.

It doesn't set any new records in any one area, but is solidly better than competent across the board, with no obvious weak spots. There's maybe a little thickening of textures in the upper bass, giving a mild tendency to add a little 'honk' to cellos, and chestiness to male voices. But take plenty of



A big ol' block of speaker that delivers plenty of oomph at a realistic price.

time and trouble experimenting with placement here, in order to get the cleanest bass reproduction.

CONCLUSION

Providing you're not put off by the vinyl finish, the Chorus 715 has plenty going for it, the classy drive units delivering a fine combination of high sensitivity, wide bandwidth and good neutrality at a very realistic price. It is, in short, a worthwhile successor to the Tantal 515, and well worth the same Best Buy rating.

"LISTENERS PRAISED ITS FINE NEUTRALITY, ACCURATE TONALITY AND STRONG DYNAMIC TENSION."

THE LAB REPORT

PAUL MAKES REFERENCE TO the earlier Tantal 515 and, indeed, there are similarities in performance with the Chorus 715. Both offer a very high 91.5dB sensitivity, for example, and both feature a very broad bass alignment with the port 'tuned' to 25-125Hz (-3dB) and the bass driver(s) showing a steep roll-off following a bass peak. However, where the Tantal 515 showed some peakiness between 3-4kHz, the Chorus shows a *loss* in output through this very same

region almost immediately following the 2.4kHz crossover point. Distortion remains >1% through this region but has increased from ~0.7% to ~1.5% through the bass. Either way, with the '715 there is certainly some benefit in toeing the speakers inward by about ten degrees to achieve the smoothest balance. The Chorus 715 is also tougher to drive with a *decrease* in mean load from 9.5ohm (Tantal 515) to 7.0ohm and minimum from 4.0ohm to 3.4ohm.





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MISSION M74

SOUND     VALUE     

£299.90

CONTACT 01480 423700

www.mission.co.uk

GUARANTEE 2 years



The third of Mission's Malaysian-built entry-level m7 series to come our way, these smart vinyl-finished speakers are notably good material value for money. In our June 2001 edition (*HFC* 215), it was hard to argue with the m73's proposition of a handsome two-way floorstander at just £199/pair. Now it's time to check out the m74, which carries a £299/pair price tag, but includes a second 6.5-inch main driver along with the first.

It's not only one of the least expensive in this test group, it's also among the largest and heaviest too, so basic material value for money is clearly very impressive. Naturally some economies are involved in such a package, such as vinyl woodprint surfaces, but the net result demands respect nonetheless. There's even a slight curve to the front panel, which is attractively different from the norm, while any unsightly driver mounting

hardware is covered up by a large shield-shaped plastic moulding with striped patterning.

The m74 has twin main drivers, each with 120mm woven glass fibre composite cones, mounted d'Appolito style above and below a central 25mm fabric dome tweeter. The enclosure comes in beech or graphite black finish, and has a considerable internal capacity of 40.5 litres, loaded by a large diameter rear port. It's deep enough to ensure good stability, and the spikes are silver-finished, chunky 8mm affairs. These are tightened with thumbwheels rather than lock-nuts, which had a tendency to work loose. A mole wrench sorted this out, but made them subsequently rather difficult to remove prior to re-shipping.

Listening room measurements show ample bass output even when the speakers are well clear of walls. Large foam bungs are supplied, which could be helpful in blocking the ports, especially if the speakers are likely to be placed close to a wall.

SOUND QUALITY

The listening tests here gave rather contrary results between two different presentations, perhaps reflecting the underlying

contrast between this model and the group norm.

On the one hand there's definitely a touch of boom 'n' tizz about this speaker, thanks to the combination of a full, deep bass with a treble that's definitely brighter than most, relatively speaking. The result is an impressively wide-bandwidth sound, with ample headroom and bags of weight, scale and sparkle.

The down side, however, lies in rather limp dynamic expression – very

like its m73 stablemate – and this found some listeners complaining that the m74 wasn't very good at sustaining interest and involvement. Perhaps because there's limited dynamic grip, the net result seems a little sluggish.

CONCLUSION

Although this m74 clearly offers greater headroom than the m73, any other advantages are difficult to pin down, and the strong, bright treble will not be to everyone's taste. That said, it goes loud with confident aplomb and delivers plenty of bass weight to boot.

With plenty of bass on offer, it's best to keep this speaker clear of walls.



"AN IMPRESSIVELY WIDE-BANDWIDTH SOUND, WITH AMPLE HEADROOM AND BAGS OF WEIGHT, SCALE AND SPARKLE."

THE LAB REPORT

THIS IS YET ANOTHER OF

our floorstanders that has the capacity to excite in-room bass modes but is the only one that actually *did* in Paul's listening tests. The big 'anti-turbulence' port is tuned quite sharply to a low 38Hz but there's also a quarterwave resonance at ~160Hz that escapes to join the peak output of the LF unit at the same frequency. Avoid room boundaries and particularly avoid aiming the rear of the cabinets anywhere near a corner. Otherwise, the

averaged third-octave response looks rather smooth with just a hint of extra treble that's easily tamed by sitting sufficiently *above* the tweeter axis. A narrowband analysis shows this to be a potentially aggressive peak around 11kHz, so just add a couple of extra cushions under your bum for good measure. I am pleased to report that the 'high sensitivity' m74 really does get very close to Mission's 91dB specification at some 90.7dB (500Hz-8kHz re. 2.83V/1m).

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EXCLUSIVE

TANNOY EYRIS 1

SOUND ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£599.90** **CONTACT** 01236 420199 www.tannoy.com **GUARANTEE** 5 years

As one of the biggest players on the scene, it's no surprise to find Tannoy indulging in niche marketing, creating speakers which make no attempt to set value for money records, but which offer something rather different in style and other respects.

That very much applies to the new Eyris range of models, which currently consists of three stereo pairs, a centre speaker and one especially shaped for rear surround sound duties. We covered the floorstanding Eyris 2 as a *First Impression* in March (*HFC* 225), so now it's the turn of the small stand-mount Eyris 1 to receive the full *Bench Test* group treatment.

It's actually the smallest model in our group test, with an internal volume of just 7.5 litres, yet it's also the most expensive, at £599/pair, the justification coming through a shape which gets away from the rectilinear box (physically if not acoustically) by mounting the tweeter in an elegantly arched top made from a mixture of shiny cast metal and moulded plastic.

The real wood veneered enclosure – finished in sycamore or American walnut – is solidly engineered with a hefty 30mm front panel and internal



The unusual cabinet shape incorporates a special 'WideBand' tweeter.

bracing, while the main driver's alloy frame has no fewer than ten fixing screws. Its 145mm frame and 110mm diameter blue paper cone fall roughly half-way between the two standard sizes used by other brands – perhaps hoping to achieve the best of both worlds?

The special tweeter uses a thin (25

micron) titanium dome to provide a 'WideBand' frequency response extending more than an octave above the normal limits of audibility (-6dB at 44kHz). A unique five-way terminal block incorporates an extra connection which (with three or five-

SOUND QUALITY

Liked well enough by three of our four panellists, the Eyris 1 was held back by its somewhat wayward balance. A rather restrained top end creates a slightly shut-in effect and adds some nasal character to voices, and this definitely upset one member of the panel.

But the others were much more positive, noting impressive freedom from boxiness plus considerable subtlety and delicacy through the midband. It delivers useful bass drive and slam, yet is also notably light on its feet, and above all possesses the coherence to communicate music in such a way as to lift the hairs on the back of the neck.

CONCLUSION

Idiosyncratic in both appearance and measured balance, the Eyris 1 nonetheless weaves a spell of considerable musical magic that is as seductive as its elegant appearance. Deservedly Recommended.

THE LAB REPORT

FEATURING A NUMBER OF engineering innovations, the Eyris offers a modest 87.4dB sensitivity but with a healthy 180W power handling that promises peaks as high as 105dBa in-room (per pair @ 2m). The speaker has a rich upper bass leading to a flat and uniform midrange, though there's some loss in output between 2.5-4kHz through what is, presumably, the crossover between its pulp bass/mid and titanium dome tweeter. Distortion also increases here from, typically, <1% to ~1.5%

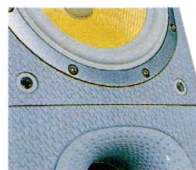
while Tannoy's 'WideBand' HF unit experiences an abrupt +8dB peak at 14-15kHz. Off-axis, the response turns down steadily, leading to a sound that lacks presence and brightness. The bass is slightly de-tuned, possibly on purpose, with the reflex port set to 58Hz, the driver null to 45Hz and minimum phase/impedance at 51Hz. Amplifier loading is not especially tough with swings in phase of just +40/-30 degrees and an impedance minimum of 5.1ohm at a safe 230Hz.



“THE SPECIAL TWEETER'S FREQUENCY RESPONSE EXTENDS MORE THAN AN OCTAVE ABOVE THE NORMAL LIMITS OF AUDIBILITY.”



SPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	ACOUSTIC ENERGY AESPRIT 300	ARCAVDIS AKF	B&W DM602.5 S3	CASTLE DURHAM 3
PRICE	£399.95	£299.00	£399.95	£399.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	Chunky real-wood standmount sounds big, smooth and shiny, but also dynamically limited.	Budget compact real-wood floorstander lacks some warmth, and could be better finished.	Pretty floorstander sounds rather laid-back and lacks the agility of its standmount stablemates.	A very attractive near-miniature wall-mount with a lively and communicative disposition.
GUARANTEE	3 YEARS	3 YEARS	5 YEARS	5 YEARS
THE LAB REPORT				
SENSITIVITY				
EASE OF DRIVE				
BASS EXTENSION				
LOW DISTORTION				
OVERALL RATING				

CONCLUSIONS

PAUL MESSENGER PASSES JUDGEMENT ON THE GROUP.

Hot on the heels of our April group test of British budget bookshelf speakers, the value for money aspect of this mid-price group is inevitably thrown into sharp relief. Do this month's contenders really justify their price premium over the beer budget models?

The answer has to be "yes", but with some pretty strong qualifications. Paying more can deliver superior performance, but it's not guaranteed. The more expensive speaker will normally sound better than its cheaper counterpoint, but the extra money is as likely to go towards creating a larger or prettier box as on improving sound quality.

Only three of our eight contenders were singled out for recommendation on this

occasion. Most of the others simply didn't seem to offer enough extra performance over cheaper stablemates. Mission's M74, for example, costs £100 (that's 50 per cent) more than the M73, for which you get an extra 6.5-inch main driver and a slightly larger box. It'll probably go a little louder too, but both models suffer from rather limp dynamics, and if anything the simpler '73 is marginally better balanced overall.

Much the same argument applies to B&W's 602.5 S3, which for all its neat appearance somehow failed to stir the soul the way the standmount 602 S3 did a couple of months earlier.

By stretching the point a little it's also appropriate to include the JBL Xti80 here. For all its fine perceived value, this big three-










way proved something of a sonic disappointment. Which was certainly not the case when we reviewed its much simpler and more compact Xti40 sibling a little over a year ago.

Our only Best Buy this time is Jmlab's £529/pair Chorus 715 – direct successor to the Tantal 515 which achieved a similar status in 1998. It's the only two-and-a-half-way in the test, combining high-class drivers in a vinyl covered box to deliver a fine overall balance alongside good sensitivity and real dynamic drive and grip.

Recommended flags go to the £399/pair Castle Durham 3, a lively near-miniature wall-mount in a very pretty little box. And the unusually stylish £600/pair Tannoy Eyris 1, which has limited grunt but succeeds through its exceptional midband delicacy.

“THE MORE EXPENSIVE SPEAKER WILL NORMALLY SOUND BETTER, BUT THE EXTRA MONEY IS AS LIKELY TO GO TOWARDS CREATING A PRETTIER BOX AS ON IMPROVING SOUND QUALITY.”

SPEAKERS AT A GLANCE

				
JBL XTI 80	JMLAB CHORUS 715	MISSION M74	TANNOY EYRIS 1	MAKE MODEL
£579.00	£529.00	£299.90	£599.90	PRICE
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	SOUND VALUE
Big and good-looking three-way goes loud with beefy bass delivery, but lacks coherence and lightness of touch.	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip.	Lots of speaker for the money, and a big, weighty sound, but a bit bright and also dynamically weak.	Pricy but very cute wall-mount miniature; oddball but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy.	CONCLUSIONS
5 YEARS	5 YEARS	2 YEARS	5 YEARS	GUARANTEE
				THE LAB REPORT
				SENSITIVITY
				EASE OF DRIVE
				BASS EXTENSION
				LOW DISTORTION
				OVERALL RATING



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SENSE AND SENSITIVITY

PAUL MILLER EXPLAINS WHY SPEAKERS DO THOSE THINGS THEY DO.

With speakers of such diverse stature it's perhaps not surprising that some are able to play louder than others, some extend further into the bass while others are trickier to drive. The ultimate loudness capability of a speaker depends on both its sensitivity and its power handling. Greater sensitivity means a higher sound level is achieved for a given voltage input (typically 2.83 volts measured at 1m distance). A speaker's power handling is a measure of how many watts are safely converted into sound and heat (through the voice coil) before damage results! This is linked to the speaker's *efficiency* which, despite the term being used interchangeably in other magazines, is not the same as its *sensitivity*.

SENSITIVITY OR EFFICIENCY?

Speaker efficiency is concerned with the conversion of electrical power into sound power, and few speakers are more than five per cent efficient in this regard. Now, a speaker with a healthy sensitivity is not necessarily any more efficient than its peers because its high sensitivity might only be achieved by dint of a lower impedance. As sensitivity is measured at a fixed input voltage of 2.83 volts, a speaker with a four ohm impedance will draw twice as much current as an eight ohm speaker, and more current means more power. So a four ohm speaker with, say, an 89dB sensitivity is actually less efficient than an eight ohm speaker of the same sensitivity.

Figure (1) explores the relationship between increasing sensitivity (red trace) and the *average* impedance that each speaker presents to the amplifier. It also clearly shows that size is no indicator of loudness, as the diminutive Castle Durham 3 outstrips the relatively huge JBL by some +1.6dB. All else being equal, this is the difference

between a 50 watt and a 70 watt amplifier. But things are not equal because the average 5.7 ohms impedance of the JBL makes it more current-hungry than the 10.7

ohms of the Castle. So the Castle (and Mission M74) are even *more* efficient than these differences in sensitivity might initially suggest. . .

The +5.2dB difference in sensitivity between the Acoustic Energy and Mission/Castle speakers is equivalent to the increase in loudness achieved by upgrading from a 60 watt to a 200 watt amplifier. This comparison is pretty accurate because all three speakers have a similar average load of approximately 11 ohms from 20Hz-20kHz.

BASS LOADING

All the speakers in this test use some form of reflex-loading to stretch their bass response down as far as possible. The length and diameter of the reflex tube is calculated so that its Helmholtz resonance (or that of the air within) boosts the flagging bass output of the main driver itself. 'Tuning' this port resonance to higher or lower frequencies will fundamentally affect the sound of the speaker. To achieve a seamless bass response, manufacturers will match the frequency and sharpness of this resonance to the roll-off of the bass driver. By contrast, some manufacturers will deliberately 'de-tune' the system to achieve a more prominent – though often one-note – bass effect.

Other manufacturers simply get it wrong. Figure (2) demonstrates that there's more to reflex-loading than sticking a tube in a box. The dotted blue trace comes from one of Choice's favourite little speakers, the Dynaudio Audience 42 (HFC215), and shows its port resonance tuned to a sensible 60Hz. The port's 'response' rolls gently away at higher frequencies (to the right of the graph) where the main driver takes over (not shown). Contrast this with the black trace of the Arcaydis AKF which, in every other respect, is precisely tuned to some 45Hz. Sadly, an additional resonance also escapes at a far higher 220Hz but at the same amplitude, colouring the main output of the speaker. This is probably a quarterwave resonance associated with the choice and length of plastic tube and an unfortunate oversight that, I imagine, may now be addressed by the manufacturer.

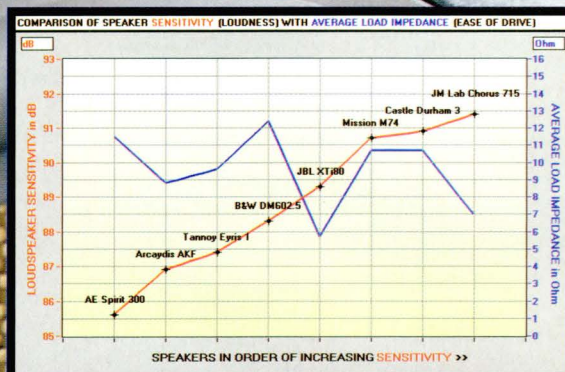
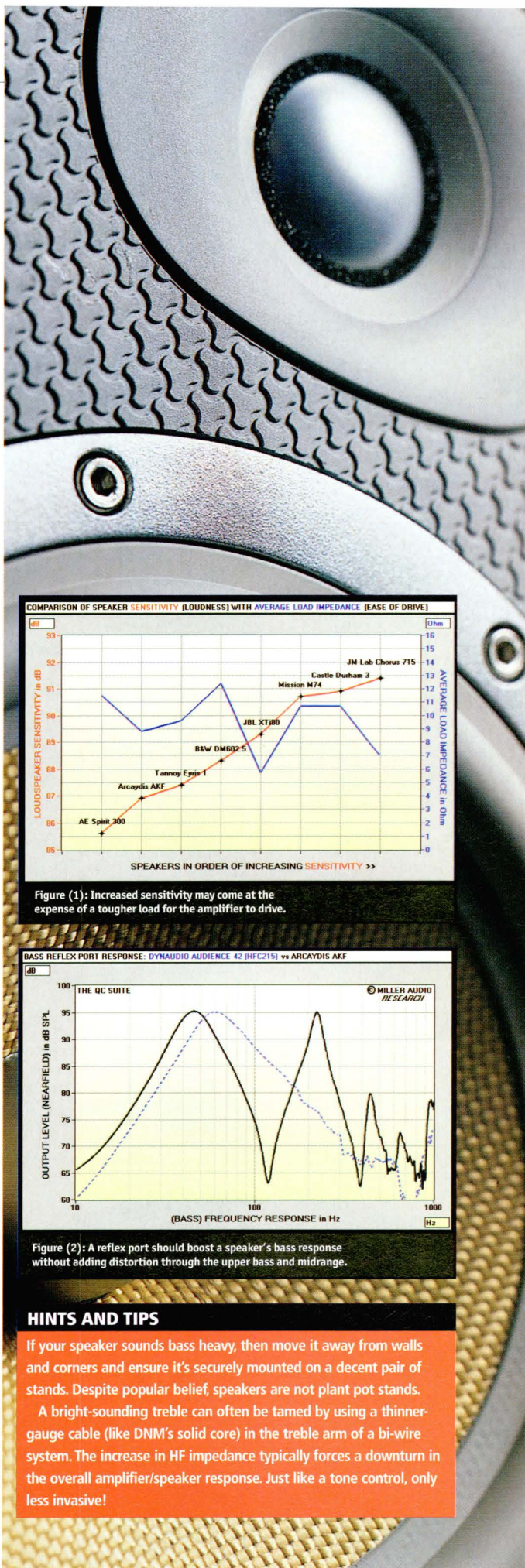


Figure (1): Increased sensitivity may come at the expense of a tougher load for the amplifier to drive.

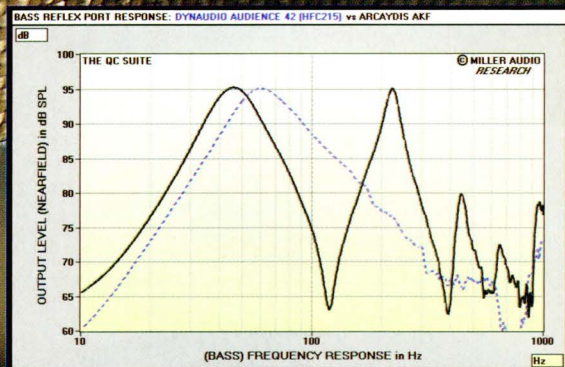


Figure (2): A reflex port should boost a speaker's bass response without adding distortion through the upper bass and midrange.

HINTS AND TIPS

If your speaker sounds bass heavy, then move it away from walls and corners and ensure it's securely mounted on a decent pair of stands. Despite popular belief, speakers are not plant pot stands.

A bright-sounding treble can often be tamed by using a thinner-gauge cable (like DNM's solid core) in the treble arm of a bi-wire system. The increase in HF impedance typically forces a downturn in the overall amplifier/speaker response. Just like a tone control, only less invasive!

SPEAKER CABLES

'Mid-priced' is a relative term, and many would regard paying £200 as a lot for a few metres of 'mere' cable, but these six models show plenty of sonic variety. Richard Black's got their measure.

BEST BUY

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



◆ Kimber 8VS

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★
£108.00 (1M TERMINATED PAIR)

Yet another variant on Kimber's well-proven braided construction. Eight cores for each conductor are woven together, and within each core are strands of varying thickness. Although outer diameter is on the large side, it's an easy cable to handle and lay.

Performance is rather lovely. Tonal balance is finely judged, with clear, extended treble and full but not over-prominent bass (very tuneful), while the midband is well defined and rich in detail, whether the music be solo voice or full orchestra. Imaging is very good with unusually assured depth, and dynamics are satisfyingly wide, with no loss of detail at heavy climaxes. All round, there's a creamy effortlessness about sounds through this cable which puts it among the front runners in its price range.

☎ 01539 825500 www.kimber.com

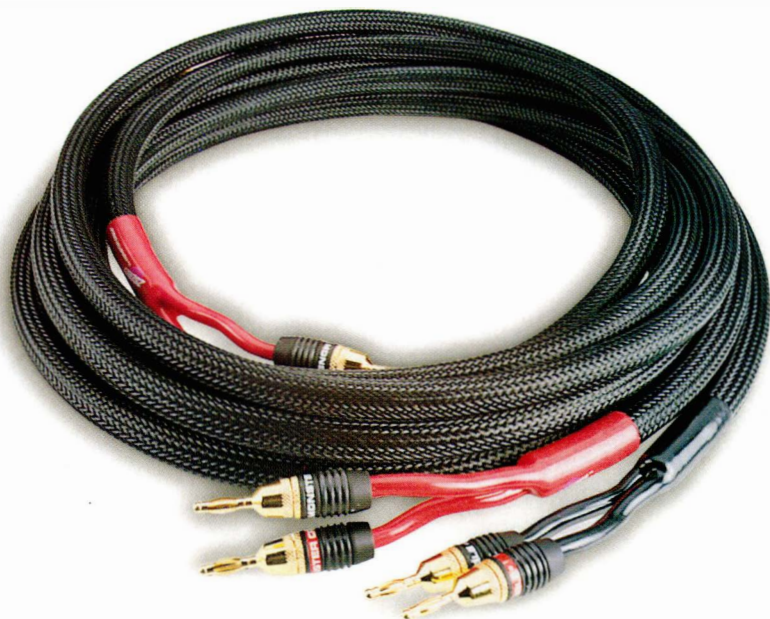
◆ Monster Z2 Reference

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★
£240.00 (3M TERMINATED PAIR)

This is a pretty bulky cable which is distinguished by several trademarked design features, the exact effect of which is arguable. Still, there's plenty of copper to ensure low losses, and Monster's connectors are clever and logical: simply buy banana plugs or spades and screw them on the 'Monster Lock' pins soldered to the cable.

Despite the voluminous claims for it, this cable failed to shine in the company of its peers. Disappointingly, it achieved quite good results in most areas but didn't seem to stand out in any. Bass is at least full in extent, but there's a degree of muddle which lessens its impact and tunefulness, while treble is a little dry and imaging lacks some depth.

☎ 01908 319360 www.monstercable.com



→ **Ecosse Reference Cables MS2.3**

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £86.00 (1M TERMINATED PAIR)

A fairly basic 'figure-8' cable with finely-stranded conductors, insulated in rather stiff dielectric and terminated in this case with spades rather than banana plugs. Resistance is pretty low and long runs should be no problem.

Detail seems generally good with this cable, if never truly outstanding. Bass is a little shy and extreme treble likewise, making results less engaging than one might wish. Voices in particular lack a little in the communication department. On the other hand, dynamics are full and climaxes can be very exciting: perhaps a touch rough on occasion but always delivered with verve and aplomb. A bit of a question of taste overall but worth a try if you value excitement over refinement.

☎ 0141 353 0509 www.referencecables.com



← **Supra Octopower 25**

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £77.98 (1M TERMINATED PAIR)

Originally developed for carrying power to car audio installations, this cable could comfortably handle enough current to jump-start a small automobile. By the same token, it's a top choice if for any reason you need to run very long cables: losses will remain vanishingly small. Construction is basic figure-8, stranded.

Unfortunately there's no guarantee of fine audio quality just because resistance is low, and once again performance is a bit lacklustre. Tonal balance is OK, but bass seems somehow sluggish and lacking immediacy, while the upper midband is quite hard and unforgiving, leading to a forward and aggressive quality with many instruments and voices. Imaging is a bit ping-pong and climaxes lack detail. Stick with (cheaper!) Supra Ply in preference.

☎ 01622 664070 www.supracables.co.uk



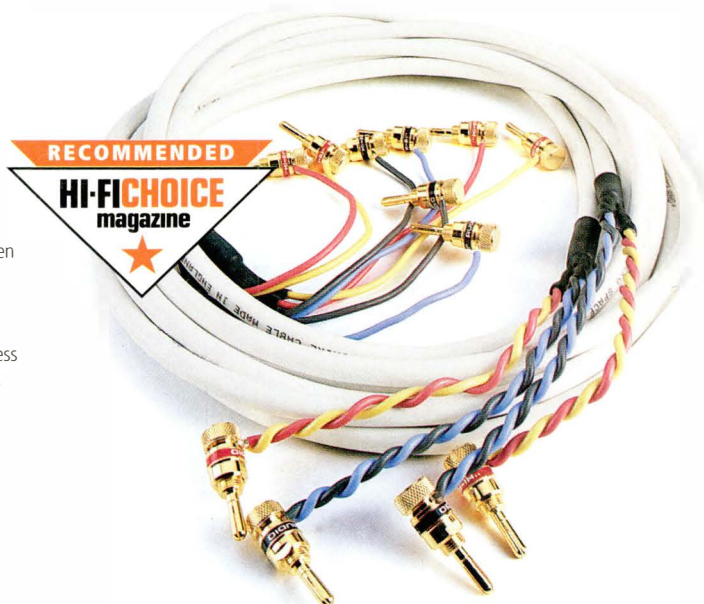
→ **Black Rhodium Aero Space Technology S130x2**

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £76.00 (1M TERMINATED PAIR)

Black Rhodium – formerly Sonic Link – specialises in the use of materials not often seen in cables. The AST range employs silicone rubber as insulator, giving low dielectric loss, while in this case four separate conductors allow for bi-wiring – connect them as two parallel pairs for conventional operation.

As with other 'AST' cables we've tried, bass impact scores highly but treble is less good, a little recessed and dry. There's a fair bit of detail if you listen for it, but it's not the most revealing. Stereo imaging is moderate but the whole image seems shifted forwards compared to other cables. It could be a great foil to bright but light speakers but needs careful matching.

☎ 01332 361390 www.blackrhodium.co.uk



← **van den Hul D-352 Hybrid**

SOUND ★★★★★ VALUE ★★★★★ £84.00 (1M TERMINATED PAIR)

This widely-spaced cable uses van den Hul's distinctive mix of copper and carbon conductors, with a generous helping of the former keeping resistance low. Despite the size it handles well and its geometry makes it a good choice for twitchy amplifiers such as some older Naim models. Very clever locking banana plugs were fitted for review.

There's a little dryness with some material but overall results are enjoyable. Detail is generally good, and although the bass might perhaps aspire to a little more weight it is always clear and tuneful. Treble is extended and open. Imaging is good, too, with decent depth, and voices are for the most part very natural – just occasionally a touch hard and forward.

☎ 01236 420199 www.vandenhul.nl



Conclusions

Another victory for Kimber, whose efforts seldom fail to please. Still, other cables offer excellence in specific areas and Black Rhodium's stonking bass, Reference's high excitement factor or van den Hul's open, airy quality may suit you as well or better. Also try the flat cables from Townshend, Electrofluidics and Goertz.



CD SYSTEMS

ALAN SIRCOM TAKES A TRIO OF SUPERIOR BRITISH SYSTEMS FOR A SPIN.

Three classic British hi-fi systems; three classic British hi-fi dealers; three thousand classic British quid. What could be simpler? We asked three of the best-known specialist hi-fi dealers in the UK what components they would choose to put together a two-channel, CD system for a typical customer with a budget of £2,500 to £3,000.

The dealers were Audio T of Tunbridge Wells in Kent, North London's Grahams Hi-Fi and the Peterborough branch of Sevenoaks. They put together a system comprising a Rega Planet CD with matching Mira amplifier plus a pair of PMC FB1 floorstanding loudspeakers; a Naim CD5 CD player and Nait 5 amplifier with a pair of B&W CM4 floorstanders and an all-Linn system, comprising a Genki CD player, Majik amplifier and a pair of Ninka floorstanding speakers with their optional higher mass polymer bases.

Interestingly, four of the five brands that make up the three systems here have been front-runners in the Brit-fi business for the last two decades. Chances are, if you walked into Audio T, Grahams or Sevenoaks at any time in the last 15 years or more, you would have bought a system made up of B&W, Linn, Naim or Rega components. By comparison, PMC is a relative newcomer in the demonstration suite, but a strong reputation in pro circles and a growing range of domestic product has put the brand firmly on the map.

So, does this mean the specialist hi-fi dealer and its favourite brands are stuck in a time warp? Not really; the brands may be unchanged, even some of the product names (Naims?) may be familiar, but the sound and the way they work is very different. A 'flat-earth' hi-fi buff of 15 years ago would have recoiled in horror from CD-based systems from any of these companies. Times have changed, and even the most reactionary companies have moved with the times. Almost.

The speakers are all floorstanders (the upmarket bookshelf was more a creature of the vinyl age), the amplifiers are equally happy with CD as LP (the Nait doesn't even include a phono stage) and the three biggest champions of vinyl are all producing natty CD players in their own right.

What has not changed with manufacturers and dealers, however, is unstinting dedication to producing good sound. And, by the looks of these three systems, that's set to continue no matter what the future may bring...

ON TEST

System One (Linn)	£2,635.00
Linn Genki CD player	£995.00
Linn Majik amplifier (line only)	£695.00
Linn Ninka loudspeakers	£945.00
System Two (Naim/B&W)	£2,819.00
Naim CD5 CD player	£1,125.00
Naim Nait 5 amplifier	£799.00
B&W CM4 floorstanders	£895.00
System Three (Rega/PMC)	£2,406.00
Rega Planet CD player	£498.00
Rega Mira amplifier	£498.00
PMC FB1 loudspeakers	£1,410.00

EQUIPMENT USED

Kimber 8TC speaker cable
Ecosse Reference Diva interconnects
Linn K400 speaker cable
Naim NAC A5 speaker cable
Quadraspire Q4 Reference equipment table

MUSIC USED

Douglas Adams/BBC -
The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy
Led Zeppelin - *BBC Sessions*
Ruben Gonzalez - *Introducing*
Schoenberg/von Karajan - *Verklarte Nacht*
Bill Evans/Jim Hall - *Undercurrent*
Barry Adamson - *Oedipus Schmoedipus*
Oeluis/del Mar - *A Mass Of Life*

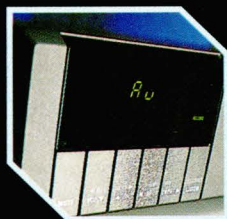


THE COMPONENTS



Linn Genki CD player £995.00

HDCD-compatible, fully featured but three-quarter sized CD player. Very clean and detailed with a good, upbeat sense of timing, but the Genki doesn't have a great deal of spatial information to offer astute listeners.



Linn Majik amp £695.00 (line only) £845.00 (phono)

Very flexible amplifier designed to work on its own or as part of a multi-room system. Curious (but not unattractive) and precise performance without much sense of space. Produces a very fast, very tight sound.



Linn Minka speakers £945.00 (without granite polymer bases)

Pretty floorstander that should always be used with optional polymer bases. Tightest bass in the test, but not the speaker for soundstage fans, especially in the context of this system.

SYSTEM ONE**Linn**

LINN GENKI CD PLAYER | LINN MAJIK INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER | LINN NINKA FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS

Sevenoaks of Peterborough was the only dealer to produce a one-brand system for our group, but it's one hell of a brand. Linn was the high-end turntable manufacturer that took on the giants of hi-fi and won.

Linn has a predilection for using the letter 'K' in its weird product names. The Linn Genki CD player (Genki being Japanese for standard measurement, health, vanity and about a dozen other translations) is Linn's entry-point CD player and the only HDCD model in the group. Compared to the minimal lines of the Naim and Rega players, this is fully featured; it even has a local volume control with variable outputs for multiroom systems or direct connection to a power amplifier.

The Majik amp delivers 33 watts per channel to the two sets of BFA speaker terminals. It's designed to act as a standalone integrated amplifier or, by using its rear 'Sneaky' port, blend into a Linn Knekt multiroom system. Like the Genki, the Majik is more feature-rich than the other amps in the test; its control panel allows some control over the sound and the Majik even has a headphone socket. The amplifier is heavy on the microprocessors (even that headphone socket is digitally controlled) and comes in two guises; with and without a phono input for a turntable.

The Ninka speaker is the company's mid-range two-way floorstanding speaker, with a tapered shape that's bigger at the front than the back and the most complex rear terminal panel on record. Linn is keen on providing actively powered speakers and this model has connections for single wiring, bi-wiring, tri-wiring and active power. It can also be upgraded with optional polymer bases (an extra £165), which we've used here. These add extra mass to the speaker, widen its footprint and lower its centre of gravity – don't even think about using the Ninkas without them. The speaker's 90dB sensitivity and four ohm impedance ratings make it easy for the Majik to drive and lengths of thick, bi-wire Linn K400 cable are mandatory.

A stem-to-stern Linn set-up creates a very different sound to the hi-fi norm; that doesn't make it bad, just different. From the outset, the Linn kit is incredibly detailed sounding and dynamic, but notably short of spatial information, air or ambience. Strangely, however, this doesn't

seem to matter too much; it somehow feels like you are sitting closer to the live source.

The Ruben Gonzales tracks showed this off to its best effect. On the one hand, this CD's remarkably live, spacious sound was stripped away, but the sound of each instrument was more precise and more detailed because of it. This has the tightest, fastest and driest bass of any of the systems and everything sounds both unforced and vivid. It's all very enjoyable, but totally different from the sound produced by almost every other hi-fi system you care to mention.

Although the speakers need to be almost a metre from the walls, the Linn system creates a Phil Spector-esque wall-of-soundstage. The image is precise and focused between the speakers, but there is little image depth and little width to the soundstage. At its worst (the Bill Evans track), sound is confined to the boxes almost entirely. At its best (Schoenberg), it feels like there is an orchestra crammed into your living room.

Linn's laudable concept is to deliver the music at all costs. Sounds produced by the Linn are highly listenable, precise and very musical, but if you want soundstaging, look elsewhere. This is a love-it-or-hate-it sound, and it's difficult to swallow if you are used to the artifice that hi-fi systems normally produce, but those who love it will be Linn's for life.

**Dealer details**

SEVENOAKS SOUND
& VISION,
Peterborough,
Cambridgeshire
☎ 01733 897697
www.sevenoakshifi-peter-
borough.co.uk

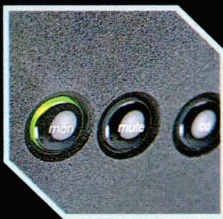


THE COMPONENTS



Naim CD5 CD player £1,125.00

No frills swing arm CD player, without even a digital output to its name. Comes with two transit screws; one for the transport and one to unlock the isolation for the circuitry. Very tuneful overall, and a lot of fun to live with.



Naim Mait 5 amp £799.00

A 30 watt integrated amplifier that sounds like a powerhouse. Extremely rhythmic and expressive. Not, perhaps, the most detailed amp and it won't appeal to soundstage fiends, but if you like your music loud and lively, this is the one.



B&W CM4 speakers £895.00

Very stylish, beautifully made floorstander with new-technology speaker cones and a very precise performance. Its big and smooth sound quality makes an enjoyably musical match with the meaty, beaty and bouncy Naim kit.

SYSTEM TWO**Naim and B&W****NAIM CD5 CD PLAYER | NAIM NAIT 5 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER | B&W CM4 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS**

Grahams Hi-Fi is one of the stalwarts of the UK hi-fi industry; Grahams and Naim Audio go together like peanut butter and Nutella. And, unsurprisingly, this £3,000 system features Naim kit. Still, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

The Naim CD5 CD player costs a healthy £1,125, but is Naim's entry level model. It has all the usual Naim CD touches – a swing-out disc drawer with a magnetic puck to hold the disc in place, the CD transport and the main circuit boards are held in place by transit screws (the circuitry sits on its own vibration-isolating mechanism), it uses a locking DIN socket instead of the more common phono plugs and there is no digital output at all. It can be upgraded by using a separate power supply like the Naim Flatcap 2.

The Nait 5 amplifier is styled identically. It's hardly a powerhouse on paper, delivering a suggested 30 watts per channel. It has a brace of DIN sockets instead of phonos and is also readily upgradable; the upgrade can involve adding a separate power amplifier (the NAP 170) or a beefed-up off-board power supply (the Flatcap 2). Both products tend to work best with Naim's own interconnect and NAC A5 speaker cable, and have on/off switches on the back panels for a reason – the kit should be powered permanently.

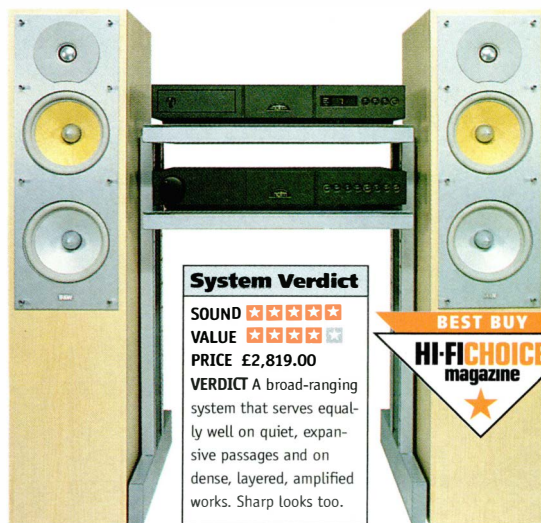
The two-and-a-half way B&W CM4 has all the minimal elegance of the Naim kit, but it's a lot less black. With a cool ash finish and contrasting silver baffle board, not to mention its distinctive yellow 165mm Kevlar mid/bass driver and additional 165mm aluminium-coned bass unit, this looks as modern as rectangular boxes get. The claimed 90dB sensitivity and nominal eight ohm impedance make the speaker ideal for an amp like the Nait 5, despite B&W's suggestion that the CM4 is best with amps between 50 and 150 watts.

This set-up is the *ER* cardiologist of hi-fi; if there's a musical pulse, no matter how faint, the Naim/B&W rig will bring it to life and get your foot tapping. This made the Led Zeppelin tracks sound powerful, exciting, live and loud, with just the right combination of raunchy and seedy overtones that Led Zep should have. You just want to reach for the volume knob, crank it loudwards and blast your air guitar. Stick on Ruben Gonzales, Barry Adamson or Bill Evans and the same thing occurs,

strangely enough. It's a very different kind of sound from the Rega/PMC system (see following page). That set-up is a paragon of spatial information and musical detail, but the Naim/B&W system maxes out on the sheer enjoyment of the performance, with information retrieval a close second. This system still offers a high degree of detail, but the acoustic (or the tape hiss) does not dominate over the entertainment factor and get in the way of the music.

Classical music cuts are similarly expressive. The Schoenberg piece suddenly begins to sound like incidental music from a 1930s horror film and the Delius sounds like Wagner-lite. Once again, the accent is not necessarily on holographic soundstages or pin-sharp detail, but instead on musical communication. Strongly vocal-led works, such as *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide To The Galaxy* disc used during this review, sound a bit 'spitchy' and sibilant, lacking the naturalistic vocals of the Rega/PMC kit, but still managing to come across with excellent intelligibility.

This Naim/B&W system neatly follows the 'source first' concept: to get the best sound, spend the bulk of your money on the source and balance the rest between amplifier and speakers. This was of prime importance back in the days of the LP, but still has its worth in the CD age, and this combination proves it. It's a system of rare musical communication and a sharp looker to boot.

**System Verdict**

SOUND ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £2,819.00

VERDICT A broad-ranging system that serves equally well on quiet, expansive passages and on dense, layered, amplified works. Sharp looks too.

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

GRAHAMS HI-FI,
London N1
☎ 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk



THE COMPONENTS



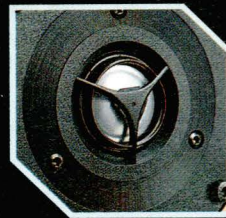
Rega Planet CD player £498.00

A distinctive top-loader. Completely manual and free from anything apart from the most fundamental controls, it has a sweet and extraordinarily un-hi-fi like naturalness that perfectly suits acoustic music.



Rega Mira amp £498.00

Ultra-minimalist 60 watt integrated amplifier with a sweet, natural sound. Not quite powerful enough to drive the FB1s (a Maia power amp would help), but sounds lovely with small, well-recorded music nonetheless.



PMC FB1 speakers £1,410.00

A taller than average transmission line floor-standing speaker, with loads of bass, but one that remains tuneful and accurate. The bass wallows a little, but would tighten up with a bigger power amplifier.

SYSTEM THREE**Rega and PMC**

REGA PLANET CD PLAYER | REGA MIRA INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER | PMC FB1 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS

There's a thin line between 'purist' and 'puritanical'... and Audio T's choice of Rega kit crosses that line. Rega's Planet CD player and Mira amplifier strip away anything not essential to making music through a pair of loudspeakers. Welcome to fundamentalist-fi.

For a start there's no balance control on the Mira amplifier (even the channel selector is hidden 'behind' the volume control - you have to press the volume knob to change sources). The manual top-loading Planet CD player comes without a standalone pause button and remote control is an optional extra. The one frivolity on either product is an on/off button with a little red LED in the centre, but we recommend keeping both products switched on all the time, so don't get hooked on pressing them.

By contrast, the PMC FB1 two-way floorstanders are tall, slim and biwireable; everything a thoroughly modern domestic loudspeaker should be. They are taller than most however, thanks to a transmission line system designed to increase the bass response of the doped 170mm bass unit.

Of the three systems here, this proves the most faithful to the original recording. The silk-smooth strings of the Berlin Philharmonic were brought to the fore in the Schoenberg passage. This had a remarkably sumptuous and clean midband with a treble that was as smooth as befits a von Karajan cut. There was also a fine sense of image depth, which was mirrored in all the tracks played.

The downside of this master-tape fidelity came through in the Bill Evans cuts. Tape hiss was more noticeable on this system than the other two, but can be forgiven, given the excellent guitar and piano sounds and the system's ability to differentiate the two sounds when they are playing in harmony.

But there are limitations, too. The bass sounded ponderous and lumpy, especially with Barry Adamson's deep and rhythmic bass lines. This also made the loud Led Zep sessions simply fall apart, sounding brash and bright, as if the amplifier had reached its limits when everything got turned up to 11. Suddenly, the soundstage would close in upon itself creating a small knot of sound between the two speakers. Reaching for the volume control helped bring back the live feel, but Led Zep is not meant for low-level listening so this

kind of defeats the object. The Barry Adamson tracks similarly could overwhelm the system at times. The track *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Pelvis* began with an excellent, bouncy 4:4 rhythm packed with detail and lots of out-of-the-box soundstaging, but when all the instruments begin to create a wall of sound and the full mix swings in, the ability to differentiate different instruments falls a bit flat.

Give this kit a small, well-recorded combo, however, and things soon change. The Ruben Gonzales tracks sounded like they were made for this system. Your room becomes a slightly dilapidated and live-sounding Cuban studio with an old bloke at a piano and all his septuagenarian mates sitting around your speakers just having a good time and playing some fine cha cha cha sounds. You will want to grab a significant other and dance.

This Rega and PMC system is accurate and musical, but doesn't scale very well. In this respect it would likely perform better with the addition of Rega's £498 Maia power amp, bi-amping the speakers and solidifying the bass. As it stands, however, it sounds fantastic with small, well-recorded groups and has an infectious sense of rhythm, but needs a more powerful amplifier to show what the Planet CD and excellent though somewhat demanding and space hungry FB1s are really capable of.

**System Verdict**

SOUND ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £2,406.00

VERDICT Generally lively, musical and faithful to the original recording but struggles a bit at high volume and with bass-heavy music.

RECOMMENDED**HI-FI CHOICE**
magazine**Dealer details**

AUDIO T,
Tunbridge Wells, Kent
☎ 01892 525666
www.audio-t.co.uk

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CONCLUSIONS

ALAN SIRCOM PONDERES OUR SYSTEMS' VIRTUES.

You'd be surprised how close these three systems really are. They all have an agenda, but it's a very good one; to make the most musical hi-fi system possible. And, to a very large extent, every one of them succeeds. Most people would be more than happy living with any of these set-ups.

They are all fine-tuned; and not everyone will want the same form of fine-tuning from their music. Another observation that must be noted is that we are at the start of the running-in process; each of the nine components tested here requires running-in times measured in months. Many of the issues raised will become less important with time, as the system beds in and the listener becomes more familiar with its sound.

Audio T's Rega Planet CD, Mira amplifier and PMC FB1 system worked well, though suffering from a lack of grunt in the bass and less solidity than would have been desirable – it could perhaps have benefited from the addition of a more powerful amplifier. Even so, the sound was excellent, especially with



smaller, open and well-recorded tracks. The Rega kit may take 'no frills' to new levels and the PMC speakers are taller than most floorstanders, but if you're into acoustic music you may well find it a highly attractive blend.

Linn Products' trio of components, as

selected by Sevenoaks of Peterborough, is one of the most distinctive and musical sounding systems you will find. The combination of Majik amplifier, Genki CD and Ninka speakers (with optional plinths) is extremely tight, dry and controlled, yet highly dynamic and musical. And that will endear it to many listeners. Those used to more conventional-sounding hi-fi will balk at the lack of space and air, and the sound is unlike any other, but it has an immediacy that counts for a lot.

The most balanced and musically enjoyable system of the three wins its Best Buy by a nose. The Naim CD5 CD player, Nait 5 amplifier and B&W CM4 speaker system supplied by Grahams Hi-Fi of north London could find the rhythm in a dial tone and is excellent for those who like their music to come alive and want to recreate the passion of music making. Just never turn the system off... and don't lose that CD puck!

"THE NAIM/B&W SYSTEM COULD FIND THE RHYTHM IN A DIAL TONE AND IS EXCELLENT FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO RECREATE THE PASSION OF MUSIC MAKING."

SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE



DEALER	SEVENOAKS	GRAHAMS HI-FI	AUDIO T
CD PLAYER	LINN GENKI	NAIM CD5	REGA PLANET
AMPLIFIER	LINN MAJIK	NAIM NAIT 5	REGA MIRA
LOUDSPEAKERS	LINN NINKA	B&W CM4	PMC FB1
SYSTEM PRICE	£2,635.00	£2,819.00	£2,406.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	There's no half measures with this system; either you will love the dryness and detail or you'll wonder where all the soundstage went.	Excellent, open sound with good recordings, but could do with a bigger amplifier to show off the CD and speakers to full effect.	Highly musical system that could have you dancing to a funeral march. When things sound this fluid and funky, who needs the 'nth' degree of fine detail?

Tuners

JASON KENNEDY EXPLORES THE MERITS OF FM AND DAB, AND RIDES THE SONIC AIRWAVES IN SEARCH OF PERFECTION.



Radio is a fantastic musical resource, and the closer your tastes are to the mainstream the more it has to offer. But even if you prefer something more unusual there is some excellent programming out there.

In many ways the BBC is more valuable as a radio resource than as a TV one – there's no real Channel Four equivalent on the national FM band – and it's left to the BBC to provide for more refined tastes. If you're prepared to stay up late enough or you can organise timer recording – with your VCR perhaps, if it's got audio-in sockets – there is some genuinely unusual music being played. Check out the excellent Late Junction on Radio Three for a round-up of world, folk and ancient music or Gilles Petersen on Radio One for jazz-influenced dance styles. Even Radio Two puts on some interesting stuff when it thinks no one's listening!

Which is all a rather roundabout way of saying that if you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi you're missing out. But fear not, we have gathered the reviews of our favourite models and assembled them on the following pages.

DAB OR FM?

Digital audio broadcasting or DAB is said to be available to 80 per cent of the population and the long term plan is to switch public broadcasting over to digital, but hardware prices have yet to come down to a point where this would be acceptable. Its advantages over FM include hiss-free reception, the potential for a wider range of stations and the ability to display comprehensive information about both the station and the programming. FM's RDS system means that station names and occasionally even track titles are displayed but the range of information is relatively limited.

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable.

What is clear however is that there are more and more radio stations broadcasting on DAB which aren't available on FM, and if it's niche programming you're after they have a lot to offer.

TUNE

102.2

SCAN

TUNE

22

FM

MHz

AM

PRESET

SATELLITE AND WEB RADIO

A lot of the new DAB stations can also be found on satellite and the web. The former can be found on the Sky network while the latter can be streamed from any computer that's linked to the Internet. Inevitably the need to take up a phone line and the limitations that places on the data rate means that web radio does not compete in terms of sound quality, but the variety of programming is impressive.

Satellite programming is best served by a dedicated receiver, examples of which are readily available on the web. We've not been able to compare the sound of satellite with DAB or FM but again this is a format where variety of stations is a key selling point. For instance if you enjoy live classical music, satellite is hard to beat.

TWIGS

All hi-fi tuners require a separate aerial to give of their best. An area where DAB generally scores over FM is that full reception can be had with a compact indoor aerial – though you will need a specific DAB aerial, not an FM one.

FM aerials vary from the T-shaped wire devices you can pin to the wall right through to the kind of multi-element behemoths that the whole neighbourhood can enjoy! If you're in a built-up area there's a lot to be said for an aerial rotator that you can adjust indoors – it's the most effective way of avoiding interference from taxis and pirate stations.

As a decent aerial requires rooftop mounting and the way it's oriented is fairly critical, it makes sense to get a local specialist to install one for you (check the Yellow Pages). They will know the best transmitter to aim for and they'll be able to attach it securely to the building, an important consideration with larger models.

CHOOSING A TUNER

Even taking into account the cost of having an aerial installed it is still less expensive to get into FM than DAB. This is because the digital format's hardware prices have not yet dropped below the £249 mark, whereas you can get a decent FM tuner for close to half that.

Although our recent tuner tests have come out in favour of some extremely competitively priced models there's still a lot to be said for some of the high-end options available from Naim and Magnum Dynalab among others. If you are going to do a lot of radio listening these all-analogue designs give fantastic results which more than justify their cost.

However, you can get a capable tuner for under £200 and for most systems and average usage you'll find that such a model will be more than adequate. You may discover that some models are more fussy about signal strength than others, so if you're unable to use an external aerial choose one that will run on the proverbial damp piece of string.

GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR TUNER

Following the creed that 'what goes in must come out', the quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So for FM tuners get a decent external twig or aerial and connect it up with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial.

Mount the tuner on its own shelf or support and try to isolate it from vibration. Just like any other audio component, tuners are affected by mechanical resonance. Use good quality, shielded interconnects – any hi-fi set up is only as good as its weakest link.

WHERE TO FIND US

BASINGSTOKE 01256 324311

2 Feathers Lane

E-mail: basingstoke@audio-t.co.uk

BRENTWOOD 01277 264730

30 Crown Street

E-mail: brentwood@audio-t.co.uk

BRISTOL 0117 926 4975

65 Park Street

E-mail: bristol@audio-excellence.co.uk

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E-mail: camberley@audio-t.co.uk

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E-mail: cardiff@audio-excellence.co.uk

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LONDON: W. HAMPSTEAD

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190 West End Lane

E-mail: hampstead@audio-t.co.uk

OXFORD 01865 765961

19 Old High Street, Headington

E-mail: oxford@audio-t.co.uk

READING 0118 958 5463

4 Queens Walk, Broad Street Mall

E-mail: reading@audio-t.co.uk

SOUTHAMPTON 023 8025 2827

10-12 Hursley Road

Chandlers Ford

E-mail: southampton@audio-t.co.uk

SWANSEA 01792 474608

9 High Street

E-mail: swansea@audio-excellence.co.uk

SWINDON 01793 538222

60 Fleet Street

E-mail: swindon@audio-t.co.uk

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

01892 525666

6 High Street

E-mail: tunbridge@audio-t.co.uk

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Independence House

The Trinity

E-mail: worcester@audio-excellence.co.uk

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If you want your Hi-Fi equipment neatly and attractively integrated into your home we can plan out the system to be installed, the choice of the equipment to be used, where it will be installed in your home and how it will be connected. Call us for advice on how you can enjoy music all round your home.

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SONANCE
SONY
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TAG McLaren
TALK
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TEAC
WILSON
BENESCH
YAMAHA

Not all products are stocked by every shop so please check with your local branch before travelling

*Subject to status. Written details on request



Arcam DT-81

£649.90 DAB Digital Radio Tuner ★★★★★

The least expensive DAB tuner Arcam has produced so far is based on the same Gold Card technology as its more expensive FMJ model. What differentiates this one is the less sumptuous but still very tidy casework. Features run to the usual DAB in and outputs alongside a data interface and FM tuner loop-through sockets.

On initial power-up it loads all the available stations in your locality and you can access them by turning the knob – there are no frequencies to remember, just station names to scroll through. You can assign 16 of them to presets.

This is a particularly clean and extended sounding tuner with neutral tonal balance and stable stereo imaging. Quality inevitably varies with the broadcast but with a good transmission its intrinsically open sound makes the most of DAB's advantages.

This is a highly professional DAB tuner that equals the best available today and betters the majority. At the price it's excellent value.

Arcam ☎ 01223 203200

Cyrus FM7.5

£400.00 FM only Tuner ★★★★★

Another 'one size fits all' half-width Cyrus product, the FM7.5 eschews all wavebands save FM and doesn't even bother with RDS (the system that displays station names and other enhancements) – it's a purist design through and through. Facilities include seven presets and a rotary tuning dial which can be operated in fine mode for optimising reception of slightly off-tune transmissions.

Built on fairly standard circuits, Cyrus has spiced up the power supply arrangements in order to optimise performance. The result is a sound that doesn't blaze any new trails but is better than average for its class. At its best with a really clean signal, the sound is admirably clear with good bass extension but can get slightly splashy at big climaxes. With an indoor aerial the sound loses a little detail but remains full-bodied and inviting. Cyrus has managed to balance this tuner for all musical styles and the FM7.5 should win fans outside the Cyrus fraternity.

Cyrus ☎ 01480 435577



"CYRUS HAS MANAGED TO BALANCE THIS TUNER FOR ALL MUSICAL STYLES AND THE FM7.5 SHOULD WIN FANS OUTSIDE THE CYRUS FRATERNITY."

Denon TU-260L II

£129.99 FM, MW, LW Tuner ★★★★★

Denon's TU-260 has been the budget tuner to beat for a decade and in MkII form incorporates Long Wave and RDS, not to mention a nice rotary tuning knob and a few more presets (40).

In automatic tuning mode it finds stations swiftly enough and locks on, in stereo, even if they're very weak. There's also a handy 'auto preset memory' function. This is a very quiet tuner and its tonal character is neutral right across the band, with firm, secure and deep bass which helps to underpin any kind of material. Loud music remains clean and detailed, apart from some very slight coloration and

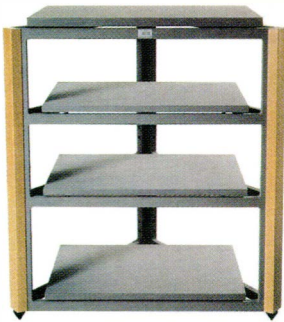


veiling in demanding textures. Ambience and detail are well preserved, too. With an indoor aerial, performance is still good, but as the signal fades, hiss rises and the sound becomes rougher. But at the price, this Denon remains an absolute bargain.

Denon UK ☎ 01753 888447

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"A top performer with matching price tag. Stunning neutrality and laid back with it, detail and control were always in abundance." - **Hi-Fi Choice**

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"The Aspekt works well with a wide range of equipment from Rega's £300 Brio amp through to our reference Krell set-up."

Verdict: One of the best equipment supports around. If your system justifies the outlay give it a go. - **What Hi-Fi**

"It simply clarified music heard from equipment sited on it. The definition of an acoustic guitar's plucked harmonics was perceptibly, and repeatedly, improved, and there was less smearing of instruments in the soundstage." - **Hi-Fi News**

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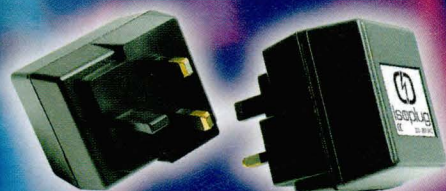
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The **SubStation** [above] removes harmful pollution, and mains noise, this allows your system to attain its full potential. It is the first mains product that can be configured to personal requirements. It stops mains noise from entering AND leaving the load. It offers you the greatest scope for your Hi-Fi. It Features 6 high quality dedicated outlets at the rear, including an earth post. It is fully upgradable and comes with a life time guarantee as standard. **Prices from £395**

isoTek redefining mains distribution and filtration. The **SubStation** [left] and the **IsoPlug** [bottom] are just a few of the highly regarded mains solution products that go to make up the IsoTek range.

Computers, washing machines, TVs put noise onto the mains, this results in degraded sound from our Hi-Fi's or A/V systems. The **IsoPlug** [bottom] plugs into mains sockets next to these noisy appliances to stop noise pollution. Guaranteed.



Only £29.95 each



Harman Kardon TU940

£179.95 FM, MW Tuner ★★★★★

A bulky affair, this budget Harman Kardon scored points for its rejection of pirate stations on initial fire-up and continued to impress right through the review. Equipped with RDS and switchable IF bandwidth (useful in crowded reception conditions), it displays signal strength and will scan the FM band and load stations to each of its 30 presets at the touch of a button.

It also works rather well with a decent signal, producing a clear, hearty and involving sound. It has natural tone and strong but not over-emphasised bass alongside taut midrange. Treble could be smoother but there is always plenty of life in the sound. Dynamics are also well served, with a better grip on the detail in loud passages than most of its competitors.

With the added bonus of better than average AM reception this tuner looks like a no brainer of a choice, and it's attractively priced too.

Harman Kardon UK ☎ 020 8731 4670

Marantz ST6000

£179.90 (black) FM, MW, LW Tuner ★★★★★

A very smart and well equipped tuner for the price, the ST6000 made a very good impression among far more ambitious designs in its original review group. Features include twin aerial sockets, switchable IF bandwidth and full RDS which also sets the time on the built-in timer. Presets extend to 30 per band, which amounts to 90 in total and signal strength is displayed.

Extremely accomplished sonically its only weakness is bass which is a little on the restrained side. But the midrange and treble are very clean and the overall sound remarkably pure, with excellent detail resolution. All in all a relaxed and enjoyable listening experience.

It doesn't suffer unduly when signal strength fades and the IF (Intermediate Frequency) bandwidth switch, which allows you to cut down on background noise, can be a lifesaver in bad reception conditions.

Smart, easy to use and competitive — with weaker alternatives available at twice the price this is a tearaway Best Buy.

Marantz UK ☎ 01753 680868

“MIDRANGE AND TREBLE ON THE ST6000 ARE VERY CLEAN AND THE OVERALL SOUND REMARKABLY PURE, WITH EXCELLENT DETAIL RESOLUTION.”



VideoLogic DRX-601E

£299.00 DAB Digital Radio Tuner ★★★★★

Because prices haven't yet tumbled as much as was hoped, VideoLogic's first 'affordable' DAB tuner is still the one to beat on value grounds. What's more, because there aren't that many options for decoding chips on the market it is equipped with the same guts as some of the more expensive alternatives.

Features include loop-through connections for your analogue tuner, optical and electrical digital outputs (for a CD recorder or DAC) and support for the Dynamic Range Control system used by some broadcasters.

VideoLogic has managed to make savings with the smaller display, less expensive casework and presets (nine) on the remote only. But sonically there's little if anything to give away the DRX-601E's low price — it might be



slightly less secure in the bass but essentially you get the same detailed, clear reception as the competition.

Given the way DAB operates, the differences between tuners will not be enormous and there's no doubt that this VideoLogic competes with the high-end competition head on.

VideoLogic ☎ 01923 277488

FORUM HELP

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

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your hi-fi queries:

Forum: Help

Hi-Fi Choice

99 Baker Street

London W1U 6FP

Or e-mail:

dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



AKG FOR ME

I have been trying to get my hands on some AKG K100 headphones but have not been able to find a retailer or supplier. Where are they hiding?

Greg Coltman, via e-mail

AKG are distributed in the UK by Arbiter Group PLC and they can be contacted on 020 8202 1199.

NAIM A CD

I am considering upgrading my CD player for something more in line with the rest of my Naim system and I've recently started auditioning players up to £1,500. So far the Naim CD5 has come out on top but I still have some reservations. I enjoyed its bass extension and pace, particularly with jazz, but I found it uncontrolled and messy at elevated listening levels. Any suggestions?

Graham Liprotg, via e-mail

The CD5 is a fine and rhythmic player, and would integrate nicely in your system, but there are alternatives. Last month's CD *Bench Test* found the the new Cyrus CD7Q to be an excellent all-rounder at £1,150, and the Arcam CD23T (also £1,150) is a great alternative with a subtler approach. If you fancy blowing all your stash try the Primare D30.2 at £1,500, which should give both the musicality and control you desire.

Cyrus CD7Q



B&W DM602 S3

CELLAR DWELLER

After converting my cellar into a liveable room I wanted to put some hi-fi down there. The problem is which speakers to choose from to partner my Rotel RA971 MkII integrated amp. I have shortlisted the B&W DM600 S3, DM601 S3 and the DM303. I enjoy listening to music loud at times and my music collection is varied. The room is not large, which speaker would work best do you think?

Eric Goulding, via e-mail.

In a smaller room with your 60 watts of power, we'd be inclined to suggest the excellent value DM303. But as you suggest you like to go loud, the big sounding DM602 S3 might fit the bill. We recommend trying to leave a deposit with your dealer and take both models home for audition. Your cellar is probably a challenging room to drive acoustically, so don't rely too much on dealer demos!

SURROUNDED

I'm upgrading my system and I am looking for a DVD player and 5.1 receiver with suitable speaker package, probably with no subwoofer. Stereo CD sound is very important, so can you recommend a selection of components with a total budget of £1,200-1,500 including cables?

Alastair Henderson, via e-mail

How about using our Best Buy multichannel system from HFC 221, comprising the £399 Onkyo TX-DS494 and the £500 Mordaunt Short Premier package? This would leave you with a good few source options such as the excellent Sony DVP-NS700V at £400, a DVD player also capable of SACD playback and more than competent with CDs too. To allow a bigger budget for cables, you could try Denon's accomplished DVD-100 at £300, with a few runs of the Ixos Gamma speaker cable at £2.99 per metre.



Onkyo TX-DS494 and Mordaunt Short Premier system

HOOKED

In the review of the Sony MZ-G750 MiniDisc player/recorder a PC Connection Kit is mentioned as an add-on to talk to PCs. Can you give me any more information on this or point me in the right direction where to look next? If this kit allows the PC to download music to the MiniDisc recorder then it's the answer to my prayers!

Michael James, via e-mail

Sony does in fact produce the add-on. The link is called a PCLK-U5 kit and will allow you to transfer MP3 files to MiniDisc for around £50. You will need a digital optical input on your MiniDisc player and suitable software to re-code your MP3 files to MiniDisc's ATRAC format. Contact your local Sony Centre for details.

Pioneer DV-747A



MULTICHANNEL MADNESS

I have seen advertised a DVD player that has a 5.1 channel output with all the connections for speakers on the back of the player. I thought that speakers had to go through an amplifier?

Simon Hickling, via e-mail

What you've seen is the DVD player's 5.1 channel analogue audio output. You're correct in that you will still need an amplifier to drive your speakers, just make sure it's of the multichannel variety if you're using a 5.1 speaker system. A standard two-channel stereo integrated amplifier will still work with your DVD player, but only if you're happy with stereo sound.

MULTIROOM

I am in the market for a new hi-fi system with a DVD player as a source. I also want to be able to play CDs in my lounge and hear music in my adjacent dining room. Can you recommend the best way to do this for around £500-£600?

Phil Goodman, via e-mail

For stereo sound, you'll need two pairs of speakers and a two-channel amp with two sets of speaker outputs. We suggest the five-star Mission M70s at £99 per pair, with an amp like the Cambridge Audio A5, available through Richer Sounds for £120. This would comfortably leave you with £200 for a DVD player, for which we'd recommend the Philips DVD-712, plus some left over cash for interconnects and speaker cables.



Cambridge Audio A5

SHELVED PROJECT

I read with interest your reviews of hi-fi furniture and supports in HFC 217, but can you tell me if wall-mounted supports are available? I'm after the type with cable management down the back, do you know of a manufacturer?

Clint, via e-mail

A good place to try would be Custom Design in Newcastle. They specialise in making hi-fi furniture to order and would be happy to discuss specific requirements. Give them a call on 0191 262 4646.



Custom Design Elite 4 rack

VOYD CONTACTS

I bought a Voyd mini reference turntable some years ago and lately its double drive belts started to fail. To my surprise Guy Adam and his firm seem to have disappeared from Cheltenham and it looks as if they've ceased to produce and trade this equipment. Can you tell me where I can find such drive belts, or failing that what other substitutes can be used?

Louis Nagi, via e-mail

Sadly Voyd ceased trading some six years ago now, but as an alternative you could try finding a suitable replacement belt from London Sounds on 020 8868 9222. They'll probably want to see the belt before recommending the most suitable alternative so you'll need to take it down there or perhaps send it in the post.



Voyd turntable



PRO-JECT Debut II Turntable £109.95

"The original Debut turntable romped away with a Product of the Year Award in 1999, and the MKII version continues the extremely good work. It's a simple affair, that's easy to set up, but don't let the price fool you - it sounds a whole



lot more expensive than that. This is a fine turntable, and it clearly reveals the benefits of listening to vinyl, with a rich and detailed soundstage, and a good dynamic response.

It's available in six funky colours, so you should find one to suit your decor, and at just a smidge over £100, you can have no excuse not to keep that old vinyl collection in employment for a good few years yet."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2000

Selected outlets are Project Turntable Centres. Colour Options are available at additional cost

Turntables & Tuners

Arcam DIVA T51 Tuner	£279.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner.....	£109.95
Linn LP12/Basik/Akito Turntable	£1749.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner.....	£129.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable	£1017.95
Project Debut Phono Turntable.....	£139.95
Sony ST-D777ES FM/DAB Tuner.....	£429.95
Videologic DRX-601E DAB Tuner.....	£279.95

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3 Series

A3 CD Player £799.95 A3 Amplifier £849.95

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

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



CD Players

Arcam DIVA CD62T.....	£349.95
Arcam DIVA CD92T.....	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD23T.....	£1149.95
Denon DCD485	£139.95
Linn Genki.....	£994.95
Linn Ikemi.....	£1949.95
Marantz CD4000.....	£99.95
Marantz CD6000Ki Signature.....	£449.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista 3D.....	£2999.95
Roksan Caspian MKII	£894.95
Roksan Kandy.....	£494.95
Rotel RCD1070.....	£499.95
Sony CDPXE570.....	£119.95

B&W DM601S3 Speakers £249.95

"Ultimately it's the 601 S3s' lack of any weakness that makes them so special. Their talent is so widespread that most of the competition is left reeling. Detail, resolution, dynamics, insight... everything is present and correct, and these speakers rate highly in every area.

What more can we say? These new B&Ws are a terrific buy. The price rise over their predecessors pits them against tougher rivals, but on this showing B&W has little to worry about. Unlike the competition."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? January 2002

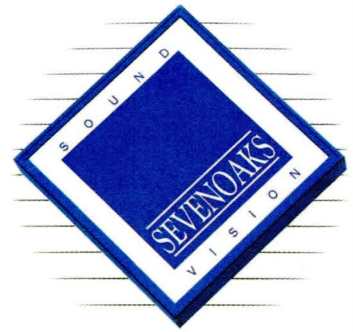


Recorder Selection

Marantz DR6000 CD-RW.....	£349.95
Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW.....	£199.95
Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc.....	£229.95
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....	£119.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....	£199.95

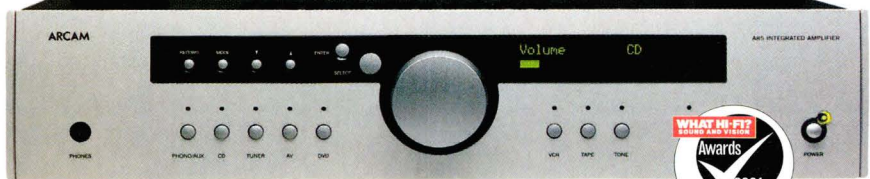
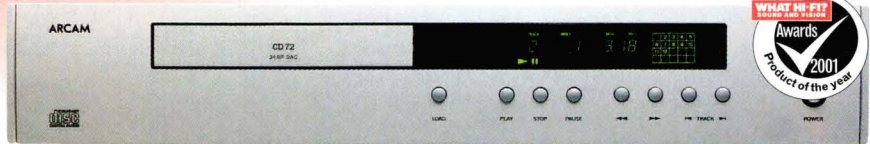
Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 10th April 2002, E&OE.





Amplifier Selection

- Arcam** DiVA A65 Plus Amplifier **£349.95**
- Arcam** DiVA A75 Plus Amplifier **£449.95**
- Arcam** FMJ A32 Amplifier **£1099.95**
- Cyrus** ACA7.5 Pre Amplifier **£699.95**
- Cyrus** Smart Power Amplifier **£549.95**
- Denon** PMA355 Amplifier **£229.95**
- Linn** Kolektor Pre Amplifier **£494.95**
- Linn** LK85 Power Amplifier **£494.95**
- Marantz** PM4200 Amplifier **£159.95**
- Musical Fidelity** A300 Amplifier **£1399.95**
- Musical Fidelity** NuVista Amplifier **£2974.95**
- Roksan** Caspian MKII Amplifier **£794.95**
- Roksan** Kandy Amplifier **£494.95**



Stereo Amplifiers Best Buy £601-£1000

ARCAM

DiVA CD72T CD Player

£399.95

DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier

£749.95

DiVA CD72 "The CD72 will have you jumping out of your seat from the very first notes. Both powerful and punchy, it delivers every ounce of air and detail present from detailed midrange to smooth, singing treble. Sometimes a product comes along that sets new standards..." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001**

DiVA A85 "You'll have realised by now that we rather like this amp. It took us completely by surprise, and further strengthens Arcam's already impressive product range... The A85 is superb, and we can't wait to put it up against its peer in a group test." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? March 2001**



MONITOR AUDIO

Silver 8i Speakers **£699.95**

"No other speaker in this test can match the Monitor Audios when it comes to delivering seismic basslines with sofa rattling power and weight. That this part of the spectrum also enjoys plenty of speed and control confirms the Silver 8is' position as bass kings... A great speaker needs more than simply great bass, however, and the Silver 8is do far more than merely thump. With the likes of Curtis Mayfield's 'Move On Up', they produce a sound of such verve that it becomes hard to sit still... They produce music with plenty of excitement - but don't forget the subtleties too. Add excellent build and an easy load and these Monitor Audios make a formidable case for themselves." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? April 2001**



Videologic

DRX-601ES Digital Tuner **£329.95**

"New name, new format, new winner: the Videologic story is as simple as that. The £299 DRX-601E digital tuner came out of nowhere to establish the firm as a major player in the digital tuner market. With this upgrade, Videologic goes one step further: it's still a DRX-601E at heart, but quite apart from the sleek silver styling and sexy blue LEDs it now has a better, white-on-blue display, and what the company calls 'Psycho-acoustic Compensation' - a form of signal processing designed to make the tuner sound less digital.



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**



CYRUS

CD7 CD Player £799.95
7 Integrated Amplifier £699.95

Cyrus 7 CD "This player is just as convincing with thundering orchestral strings and brass, making a great job of Bernstein's recording of Mahler's Symphony No 5 and it has the definition to unravel the instrumental strands in the Kronos Quartet's disc of Phillip Glass string quartets... It's that that makes it special - and this is a very special player indeed."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? November 1999

Cyrus 7 Amplifier "This is a fabulous amplifier. It's fast, punchy and has bags of power on tap but crucially delivers huge sackfuls of subtlety when the music requires. Some of the other amplifiers in this group may be better with particular genres of music but as an all-rounder it takes some beating." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? November 1999

MISSION

78 Series

782 bases its performance on a 165mm Nomex bass unit fitted to a reflex enclosure ensuring excellent low frequency extension from a graceful and compact cabinet. The **783** houses a larger 200mm bass unit with massive motor system, capable of floor shaking, yet tightly controlled low frequency extension. Both use Keraform midrange drivers for outstanding clarity and midrange detail coupled to superb dynamic range together with Mission's silk dome tweeter.

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

780 "Versatile and with a sound that works well with a wide variety of hi-fi kit, these speakers were worthy of this title last year, and this year have achieved the tough task of making it the double."

★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001



Speaker Selection

Acoustic Energy AE1 Series II.....	£699.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM603 S3.....	£599.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black).....	£799.95
KEF Cresta 2.....	£119.95
Linn Katan (Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple).....	£894.95
Mission 780.....	£299.95
Mission M71.....	£119.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Wharfedale Diamond 8.1.....	£99.95



Q3 Speakers £399.95

Like its award-winning predecessor, the floorstanding Q3 offers exceptional value for money. With the new Ferrofluid-cooled metal dome neodymium tweeter derived from the Reference Series unit, the coincident source 160 mm (6.5") Uni-Q driver creates a spacious and intricate sound image throughout the room, and bass extension from the large front-firing port is accurately controlled to preserve the clarity of the midrange. KEF's unique bracing system increases cabinet rigidity to minimize distortion, and the sophisticated crossovers are connected directly to the bi-wire terminals for optimum signal integrity.



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System Selection

- Cyrus** Quattro Ex Power Amplifier & Speakers . **£849.95**
- Denon** 201 Ex Speakers **£649.95**
- Denon** DM50 Ex Speakers **£279.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 19 Inc Speakers **£599.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 21 Inc Speakers **£699.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 22 Inc Speakers **£799.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 25 Inc Speakers **£899.95**
- Tag McLaren** Aphrodite Ex Speakers **£2994.95**
- Teac** Reference 100 Inc Speakers **£299.95**
- Teac** Reference 500 Ex Speakers **£699.95**
- Yamaha** Pianocraft E150 Inc Speakers **£249.95**



LINN

Classik Music System **£999.95**

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

"Since the Scottish company added a tuner to the amp/CD player, mouths have gaped even wider in appreciation. The addition of colour options panders to the public's taste for kit to match their interior design, but it doesn't just look lovely in the lounge: the Classik sounds simply marvellous. Boasting fine impact and drive, it retains its grip even as it thumps out rock and dance tracks. Ask it to play quiet acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001



TEAC Reference 300 System **£549.95**

"Teac's Reference 300 system is an absolute belter. The company's Reference series has won lots of awards and many admirers in the past, and the 300 range at £200 less than the bigger 500 series, is no disappointment. Your £600 buys you everything but speakers: an amplifier, tuner, CD player and cassette deck... As beautifully built as we've come to expect from Teac, this system delivers the goods with style." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001

DENON

D-M30 CD Receiver **£229.95** SC-M50 Speakers **£69.95**

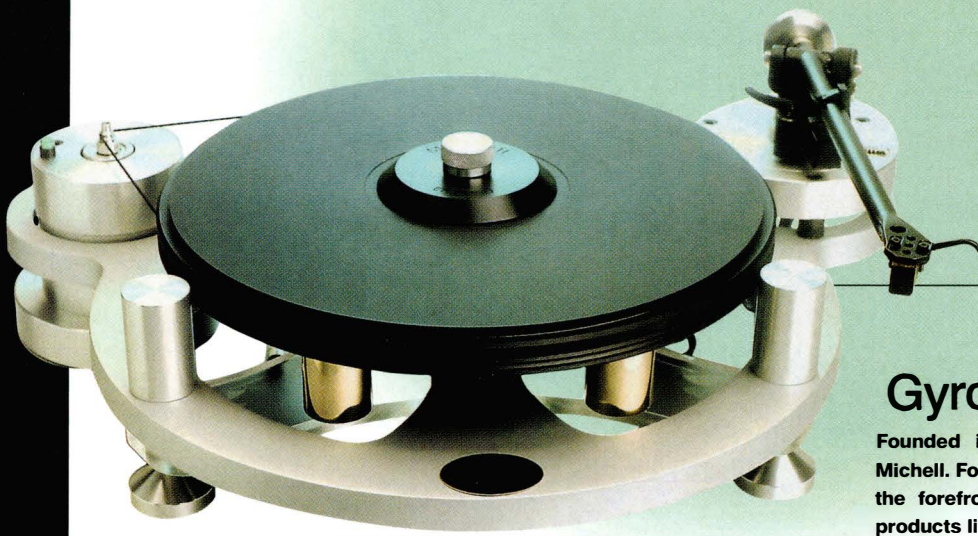
"Denon's gorgeous D-M30 has a fine pedigree - and a record of success. Its forebear the D-M3 kept impressing us with its balance of good looks and great sound, winning two What Hi-Fi? Awards on the trot. Now the latest generation takes home a Product of the Year gong two years in a row. On its own merits, too, as this is much more than a rehash of the D-M3. Upgraded audio circuitry, improved power supply and the Mission-designed speakers all improve the package. The sound is superb, well-balanced and weighty... It's a big system in a very cute box." ★★★★★ What Hi-Fi? Awards 2001

Optional Recorders:

CDR-M30 CD-RW Recorder • DMD-M30 MiniDisc Recorder • DRR-M30 Cassette Deck

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 10th April 2002. E&OE.





J A Michell Gyro SE Turntable **£1017.95**

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

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

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



LINN

Genki CD Player **£994.95** Majik Line Amplifier **£694.95**

Genki "Tempting though it is to think of Genki as a Glaswegian word, it's actually Japanese, and the nearest definitions we could find involve vitality, vigour and spirit. And used as adjectives, these words go a long way towards describing the sound of the Genki, which always manages to communicate the music first and foremost, and let the rest of the hi-fi thing look after itself.

It's a very well-thought-out player, too, from its clear and simple control layout to the provision of four sets of analogue outputs, two at fixed level, and two with level control. Completing the package is a 24-bit Burr-Brown DAC and Pacific Microsonics HDCD filter. Few owners will worry about all that stuff, however, as they'll be too busy enjoying the way Genki plays music, its purity of tone and sense of drama on Mozart's Don Giovanni being a fine example of its talent. By any standards this is a superb player, and not just one for the army of Linn enthusiasts." ★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? March 2000**

Majik The Linn Majik is a sophisticated control amplifier complete with on-board stereo power amplifiers. A core entry-level product for powerful and flexible control of hi-fi, video or multi-room installations. "Sneaky" add-on modules expand its functions. It can accommodate many source components. The Majik is available in two versions: The 'Phono' version has five line-level inputs and one Moving Magnet phono input and the 'Line-level' version has six line-level inputs.



A limited edition of 500

Musical Fidelity has enough nuvistor tubes to build 500 Nu-Vista 3Ds and also to hold a spare set for every unit. (The limited edition Nu-Vista preamp, power amp and integrated are proving to be remarkably reliable, with a tube failure rate of about 0.1%). Music lovers don't need SACD technology, they just need a better CD player. Now a lucky few will be able to own the Nu-Vista 3D compact disc player. Out of the total production of 500, 265 are allocated for sale in England, and of these, 97 have already been reserved.

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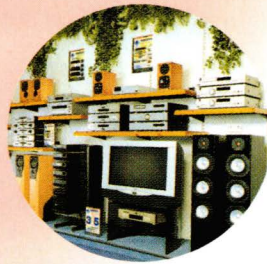
3D CD Player **£2999.95**

Nu Vista

"It's hard to put your finger on exactly why and how the 3D CD Player turns in such a performance and to a certain extent it's a pointless exercise: it just does. OK, so at three grand it's a serious financial commitment, but if you're after a CD player to last 'til you take your final breath it could well fit the bill. Get a move on, though, numbers are limited to just five hundred and they'll sell, believe me. Simply get a listen to one and go back to your reference player - all will be revealed." **Hi-Fi World October 2001**



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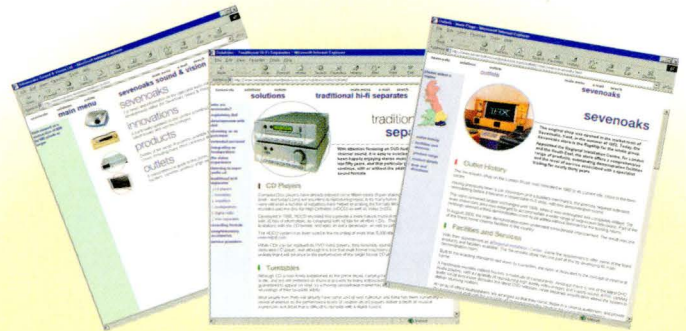
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Friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.



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The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its 44 outlets nationwide. The website is designed to provide you with answers to the questions you may have when buying new equipment.

The site has comprehensive guides to a range of products and technologies from vinyl and compact disc to all the latest formats, including DVD Audio, SACD and widescreen plasma monitors and front projection systems.

There are regularly updated stock clearance lists with hundreds of products on offer and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest outlet.

For impartial advice and information, just click on sevenoakssoundandvision.com

stock clearance

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

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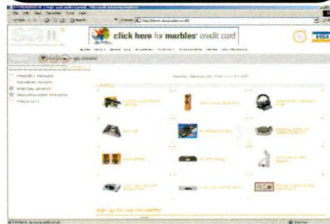
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To target this audience please contact Ben on 020 7317 0259

(readership survey April 2000)

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Midland Audio X-Change Ex-Demo & Second Hand Items

CD players DACs & Transports	Was	Now
Accuphase DPT5V 24/192 CD Player SH	7500	6499
Advantage S1 Re-sampling CD Player 3 months old SH	3750	2500
Audio Research CD2 CD Player SH	3250	2249
Audiolab 8000 DAC 93 model SH	850	299
Dos Elgar 24/192 DAC SH	8500	5999
Dos Purcell 24/192 Upsampler SH	3500	2299
Eisenstein 'The last Record Player' Valve CD Player x-demo	320	1999
Roksan DA2 DAC SH	599	299
Roksan DP1.5 Transport SH	995	449
Roksan DS5 PSU SH	579	325
Sony S52ES SACD x-Demo	1200	899
Sony SACD1 SH	4000	2795
Teac P700 Transport SH	1099	599
Turntables Tonearms & Cartridges		
Audio Note AN-S2 Transformer SH	450	279
Audio Note IO Kondo Built SH	2500	749
Basis 1400/RB250 (New & Boxed)	1300	899
Basis 2000 Turntable x-Demo	1999	1399
Basis 2001 Turntable x-Demo	2999	2399
Basis 2004 Turntable x-Demo	4500	2999
Conrad Johnson EV-11 Phono Stage x-Demo	1499	1349
Kuzma Stogi/Stabi S Turntable (New & Boxed)	1299	1099
Musical Fidelity X-LP2 Phono stage SH	500	349
Roksan Antares X Phono Stage SH	425	279
Roksan DS1.5 PSU x-Demo	695	499
Roksan Radius 3 / Tabrizi MC30 Supreme SH	1150	599
Unison Research Simply Phono SH	495	325
Preamplifiers		
Audio Analogue Bellini Preamplifier x-demo	575	399
Audio Note M Zero R x-Demo	599	449
Audio Note M Zero SH	449	275
Audio Note M1 Phono Preamplifier SH	750	449
Conrad Johnson Premier 17LS x-Demo	4500	3999
Conrad Johnson PV 14L x-Demo	1999	1750
DNM Primus preamplifier x-demo	2100	1799
Krell KAV-S Processor/Preamplifier DT5/AC3/Pro Logic SH	1499	5499
Sugden AU41C Preamplifier SH	499	249
Amplifiers		
Accuphase E211v Integrated Amplifier New	1995	1499
Accuphase E307v Integrated Amplifier New	3295	2799
Audio Analogue Donesetti Power Amplifier x-demo	599	425
Bow Technologies Wazoo XL Amplifier (New&Boxed)	2495	1950
Conrad Johnson MV 55 Valve Power Amplifier SH	1995	1099
Conrad Johnson Premier 11 Power Amplifier (New&Boxed)	3695	2799
Densen Beat 300 power Amplifier x-demo	795	599
DNM 3C Power amplifier x-Demo	1900	1499
Electrocompaniet AW60 (New&Boxed)	999	699
Electrocompaniet ECI-1 Amplifier SH	3250	1599
Graaf GM20 OTL Stereo Valve Amplifier SH	3295	1995
Roksan Rok S1.5 Power Amplifier SH	1499	995
Sugden AU41P Power Amplifier SH	499	349
Unison Simply 4 Valve Integrated x-Demo	1600	999
Loudspeakers		
ATC SMC 305SL Active Speakers Yew SH	7850	4499
Audio Note AN-J Stands SH	300	175
Audio Note AN-J D Bk SH	985	499
Audio Physic Virgo 2 Birds eye maple x-Demo	3250	2499
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Boston Acoustics VR 10 Centre Channel (New&Boxed)	1750	1295
Robertson Audio DX7 Cherry x-Demo	995	599
Totem Tabu Mahogany x-Demo	2300	1599
Totem Arro MKII Cherry New& Boxed	1095	849
VelodyneTX810MK2 Subwoofer SH	695	349
Cables & Accessories		
Audio Note AN-V 1m Silver interconnect SH	420	199
Audio Note AN-V 2m Silver interconnect SH	70	25
Audiophile Systems B&S Platform SH	349	199
Bow Technologies Wind Remote (New&Boxed)	240	150
Cardas Quadric 5C 1mRCA SH	N/A	149
Goertz M1-2 2x2.5m Copper Ribbon Speaker cable	650	399
Goertz M1-2 2x6m Copper Ribbon Speaker SH	1098	499
Kimber Select 1020 0.5m SH	850	499
Kimber Select 1130 0.5m Balanced SH	495	229
MIT M1330 Proline 1m Balanced interconnect SH	N/A	45
Naim Audio2x5m Speaker cables white SH	950	499
Opera Lux 3 Tier Table Clear/Stainless x-Demo	395	199
QED Genesis Silver Spiral 2K 3M SHH	99	49
Roksan HAO1 1M interconnect SH	49	25
Roksan HAO1D 0.5m Digital Interconnect SH	160	99
Siltech Amsterdam 2x4m Speaker Cable	325	159
Sound Style 4 Tier in Green SH	750	499
Slax Classic System II Electrostatic Headphones SH	775	499
Tara Labs 'Floating Ground/Slater' New	2175	1499
Tara Labs 'The One' 1m Balanced New	450	299
Tara Labs RSCAIR 1m AES/EBU 110 ohm Digital New	345	199
Tara Labs RSC Air 1m RCA 75 ohm Digital New	599	299
Transparent The Wave 2x7m SH		
Tuners & Tape Decks		
Audiolab 8000T Tuner SH	850	499
Magnum Dymalab FT4R Remote Switcher for FT101A/Etude (New&Boxed)	450	299
Nakamichi DR10 Cassette deck	699	399
Nakamichi DR8 Cassette deck (New&Boxed)	499	299
Teac T-BX10 Tuner SH	399	179

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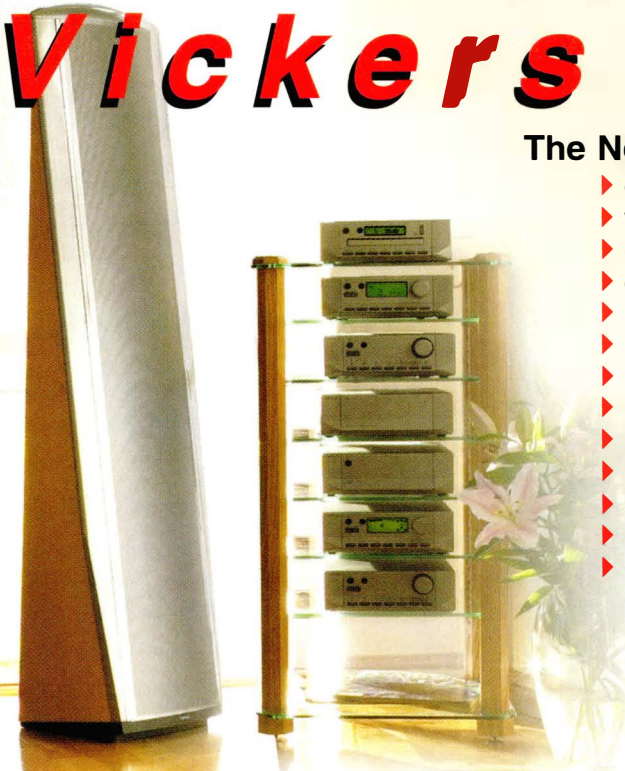
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PAIR IMF TLS50 (transmission line) speakers, plus stands. Excellent condition light oak wood veneer. Best offer secures. Buyer collects. Call 01787 269559 (Sudbury).

KB INTERLUDE STEREO radiogram circa 1960, slow deck otherwise f.w.o. £45 but good home more important than price. Call 020 7485 9179 (NW5).

BURMESTER 785 PREAMP, black MM, MC, £395 ono. Marantz CD12/

CDA12, £2,700. Call 01708 457691.

MERIDIAN 200 TRANSPORT re-clocked, £375. Vimax 24bt DAC, Kessler rave review, £775. 4.8m OPC/silver bi-wire, £110. Call 029 2023 5881.

ACCUPHASE C275 with phono, £3,000. Koetsu Red Signature, unused, £600. Celestion SL600 Si as new £250. Call 020 7226 2690.

CELESTION SL600 SI SPEAKERS, excellent, bi-wirable, £330. Royd Sorcerers bookshelf speakers (cost £600), £250. Linn Powertek power amplifier, £160. Call 0151 548 9079.

JMLAB ELECTRA 905 SPEAKERS, cherry, as new, £600 (£1,200). AVI S2000MP preamp, £400 (£1,000). Call Brian: 07866 775488 (Edinburgh).

FARADAY SIREN LOW DENSITY concrete cab speakers, £295. Good con, brill sound. www.faradaysound.co.uk. Call 01603 766668 (Norwich).

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AUDAX HM170 CARBON FIBRE drive units or similar HDA units. Audio Innovations P2 phono stage. Email coffeedans@hotmail.com or tel 01642 594645 (Stainton).

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...

When 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CLASS A: 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: Fore-runner 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 ills.

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 Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful	5			●	●	40	217
BB	Arcam Diva A75 Plus	450	Quick, lively and well presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●		●	●	50	224
BB	Arcam Diva A85	750	Much enhanced design topology give a more hard hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7			●	●	85	214
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 loose	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	Solid and capable on paper, this is a bit of a blunt instrument when let loose on the music	5					150	181
	Cymbal CA1	499	Lacklustre 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 5350SE	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
	Ezo Aria HE	449	Quick, detailed but aggressive and sometimes coarse sounding amp. Beautifully turned out, though	5				●	40	208
	Graaf Ventingque	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6					25	202
	Hofl 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
R	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5	●		●	●	60	224
	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	Extremely 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 short 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
BB	NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and some 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
	OperaAida	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) good 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
K	Præcis 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 overly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●		50	208
BB	Primare A20 MkII	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but ballsier 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
	Red Rose Music Passion	2,999	Basically equipped amp from Mark Levinson that has speed and power if not the last ounce of resolve	5				●	100	226
	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
BB	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
R	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
	Rotel RA-1070	1,000	Well equipped powerhouse has features designed to support multiroom operation, but sonically it lacks subtlety	7	●		●	●	100	224
	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

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208
BB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5	●	●			25	224
	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 straggled	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
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 2.1	850	Not as clear or as lively as some, but essentially musical, and upgradeable for multichannel audio purposes	6			●	●	100	224
	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-A808	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●		●	●	55	196
	Thule IA60B	700	Dry, etude 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 Unisig Sig	2,400	A very attractive product which combines many classic valve attributes to good effect	5	●				30	202
	Unison Research Aria SR1	1,250	Drop dead gorgeous looks from this valve/MOS hybrid, but sonically it is lumpy and awkward, with poor definition, albeit with good image scale	5			●		80	224
	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
BB	Arcam A85 int & P85 pwr	1,249	Well thought through integrated/power amp combination suit all systems, but delivers classic A-85 virtues with others, plus extra gravitas and range	7			●	●	85	225
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	5			●			221
	Audio Analogue Bellini/Donizetti	1,155	Curious pre/power amplifier has a number of objective and subjective character traits that make it difficult to recommend	5	●				60	225
	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	216
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 tube 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 value preamp	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Creek P43R/A43	1,050	Great value and a podium performance earning a best buy	6			●		140	212
	Crimson 610C/620D	775	Limited in what it does, the Crimson combo has real precision, verve and timing within those limits. Preamp is due to be replaced shortly	4	●	●			55	225
	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	7			●	●	60	212
	Cyrus aCA7.5/PSX-R/aPA7	2,950	Very stylish four-box modular system, slight forwardness delivers oodles of clarity and detail	7			●	●	150	216
	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●				191
R	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1					100	183
R	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 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
	Exposure 2010 I/2010 P	1,098	Interesting match of integrated and more powerful power amp is not as sure footed or as dynamically consistent as some rivals	6			●		75	225
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	Preamp/amp combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●		125	195
	LFD Mistral Linestage/Power	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					60	165
	Linn Kolektor/LK85	990	Beautifully turned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all-inn system	9	●	●			62	212
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II/SM-17	1,699	Flexible, beautifully made and as smooth as silk, but ultimately the combination fails to build on the unaided PM-17 II in biamp mode	6	●	●	●	●	60	225
	Michell Orca/Alecto mono	3,600	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound	6			●		100	187
R	Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	879	Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	1					100	155
	Moth 30 Active LV/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 160W power amp	5			●			166
R	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness	6	●					200
	Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfil the demands of the most dynamic material	1					350	199
	Myryad MA120	450	Based on M1120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with M1120	1					60	165
R	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	6			●	●	120	212
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
R	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,699	Powerful, smooth, but slightly uneven performance in some combinations, but excellent control and separation in others	6			●		100	225
	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	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	5						178
	Rotel RC-1090/RB-1090	2,650	Prodigious powerful pre/power combination with a wide range of inputs, but not ideally subtle or uncoloured	7	●	●	●	●	380	225
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
	Samuel Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia – precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●		201
	TAG McLaren PA20R/125M	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	TAG McLaren PA20R/100P	1,699	A blast from TAG McLaren's past highlights how far the brand has developed	6			●	●	100	225
	Talk Hurricane 2L/Tornado 2	1,249	Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6					65	165
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●					188
	Technics SU-C1010	300	Although the sound's basically all there, it's arguable that a good integrated offers more, for less	6	●		●			200
	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean	1					100	187
	Thule Spirit PR150B/PA150B	1,600	The limitations in the sonic performance mean that the competition has more to offer	6					150	212
	Unison Research S8	2,950	Outrageous Italian styling and an equally melodramatic sound, with splendid voice projection and tension	5			VOL		24	216

PHONO STAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Symphono	740	Slightly inconsistent balance mars the performance of this lively performer			●				201
R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character			●				189
	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough		●	●				189
	Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	350	Quite unusual design in many ways: sound is mostly good but never quite shakes off a 'synthetic' quality			●				189
R	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise			●				189
BB	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, with any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage		●	●				189
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too		●					189
R	Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist		●	●				201
R	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer		●	●				201
R	Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price		●	●				201
R	QED Discsaver DS-1	35	It's cheap, it's cheerful, it's OK – perfectly adequate for use with a phono-less integrated, though not very refined		●	●				189
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components		●	●				189
R	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for information retrieval off any LP			●				201

AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam AVR100	800	A solid sounding and well-engineered A/V amp with an affordable price tag. Good with music and well suited to smaller rooms	6			●	●	70	215
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P	2,500	Packed with a diversity of electronics that against engineering odds sounds extremely good	5			●	●	110	198
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema – what more could you want?	7			●	●	100	210
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights. Currently lacks 5.1 input for DVD-A/SACD	6			●		120	219
	Cyrus AV5	1,000	Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multichannel solution for music fans	4			●		N/A	201
	Cyrus AV5/SmartPower	2,650	Refined, detailed and attractive, but ultimately lacking in balls	3			●		60	210
	Denon AVR-1602	350	Low-cost home cinema amplifiers don't usually set out to excite, and this one is no exception. Listenable, but dull	6			●	●	80	223
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multichannel sound	4			●	●	75	198
BB	Denon AVC-A15E	2,500	A powerful, articulate 7.1-channel integrated amp, loaded with features and equally and home with music and film soundtracks	12	●		●	●	170	215
BB	Harman/Kardon AVR5000	600	Complex and capable home cinema receiver features automatic setup, HDCD and excellent interconnection possibilities	8			●	●	70	223
	JVC-RX-8012R	400	Undistinguished home cinema receiver with USB in, and modestly satisfying sound at lowish power levels	9	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-X9050D	399	There are some benefits from THX Select processing in home cinema mode, but musically this is a rather mechanical, unengaging performer	7	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-V7773D	800	Bold, detailed presentation, but there are some technical limitations and a slightly mannered quality, especially with music	10			●	●	120	210
	Kenwood KRF-V9993D	1,300	Complex amp that rocks with home cinema but loses out with music	7	●		●	●	110	215
R	Marantz SR5200	400	Marantz provides undemanding but broadly satisfying listening from a well engineered, near budget home cinema receiver	8			●	●	90	223
BB	Marantz SR-5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	5			●	●	105	198
BB	Marantz SR-7000	700	Excellent at the price, and almost equally effective with two-channel music and multichannel AV	9			●	●	100	210
	Marantz SR-14EX Mk2	3,250	A weighty beast, with 7.1 processing but only five channels of amplification as standard. Highly capable with both music and movies, but rather costly all-in-all	8			●	●	140	215
R	Myriad MDP500/MA240/MA360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	9			●		120	215
BB	NAD T761	650	First-rate home cinema amplifier that sounds more powerful than its specifications imply, and competes with specialist stereo amplifiers	9			●	●	80	223
	NAD S170/S250	5,700	Flexible and fine sounding THX Ultra processor/five-channel power amp combo with great timing	9			●		125	225
	Nakamichi AV-10	1,000	A very powerful AV receiver that's easy to install and set-up with a civilised and subtle performance	4			●	●	140	198
R	Onkyo TX-DS595	450	Unexciting but generally competent home cinema amplifier has some strong ergonomic features	7	●		●	●	70	223
	Onkyo TX-DS787	900	Obstructive ergonomics and messy sound undermine basically well-equipped receiver	7			●	●	100	217
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unsubtle	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSX-D810S	450	Thin, raw sounding AV receiver fails to stir the right nerve endings, but is materially fair value	7			●	●	100	223
	Pioneer VSA-E08	1,300	THX circuitry gives home cinema material a boost, but this is not an obvious first choice for music	10	●		●	●	100	210
	Primare P30/A30.5	3,700	No 5.1 channel input for DVD-A/SACD but capable of almost uncomfortable realism with real solidity and drive	8			●		120	210
R	Roksan DSP/5 ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels	4			●		80	210
	Rotel RSX-972	1,000	Not the brightest tool in the Rotel toolbox, and pricing is surely rather optimistic too	8			●	●	75	217
R	Rotel RSP-976/RMB-1075	1,700	A potent and enjoyable two-box beast that gets to the heart of both music and movie sound	8			●		120	215
R	Rotel RSP-985/RPB-985 MkII	2,400	The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive combo	3			●		130	198
R	Sony STR-B1070	600	Technical intriguing AV receiver which succeeds in extracting detail and space from recordings that sounded coarse and unexpansive elsewhere	10	●		●	●	100	223
	Sony TA-E9000ES/N9000ES	2,300	Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile but fails to cut the sonic mustard	5			●	●	110	198
R	Sony VA777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all rounder	9			●	●	100	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,749	A flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Would form the heart of a top-class multichannel system in standard or 7-channel 'EX' form	6			●			215
	Technics DX-950	279	Ultra-low cost home cinema receiver is impressively equipped for the price, but musically it lacks grace and air	5	●		●	●	100	223
	Technics SA-DA10	500	Lower mid-market AV amp has all the right ingredients, but fails to stir the soul	5	●		●	●	80	210
	Technics SE-A1010/SU-C1010 x3	1,350	A preamp plus three stereo amps provide a six-channel AV solution without complex processing. Visually stunning but low on grunt and detail	6			●		70	215
	Yamaha RX-V1000RDS	800	Solid mainstream performer is more convincing as home cinema amplifier than for multichannel music	8	●		●	●	100	217
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	2,000	An anorak's delight, and one of the most flexible and effective soundfield creators ever conceived	11	●		●	●	110	210

CABLES



SPECIFICATIONS

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral; probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction								188
R	Acoustic Research Master	70	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection								224
	Audioquest Sidewinder	40	Suppresses the sound. At this price it's a disappointment								211
R	Audioquest Coral	99	Slightly forward imaging hardly detracts from its excellent tonal qualities and detail								200
R	Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble								211
	Cable Talk Professional 3	75	Plenty of bass, but suffers rather from congestion								224
	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
	Chord Silver Siren	75	Dry and undynamic, though tonal balance is good								224
	Chord Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried								200
R	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price								211
R	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass								224
	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
HB	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness								211
	Ixos Gamma 1001	70	Nice and dynamic, and bass is good, but treble disappoints and it can become rough								224
	Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though								176
	Ixos 1000	90	Nothing badly wrong, just a little bit bland and outshone by others at the price								200
	Kimber Crystal-Cu	5	Disappointing beside other Kimber products: great bass, but suffers from dryness								224
HB	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
HB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound								224
	Neotech NA11085	100	Balance is OK, but detail could and should be better								224
R	Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music								188
R	Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable								176
	Precious Metals SS35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic								188
	Profigold PGA301 MkII	40	Mellow and well rounded, but can seem a little heavy								211
R	Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension								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
	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced, and easily rivals more expensive cables								211
HB	QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value								176
R	QED Qnect 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid								188
R	QED Qnex Silver Spiral	90	A great cable for lovers of big sounds								200
	Reference CS1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at climaxes								188
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
R	SonicLink Message (Lilac)	60	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass								188
	Sonic Link SG Voices	95	Bass reach is splendid, though there's some coloration: scores highly for emotional impact								224
	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
HB	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
	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value								200
HB	van den Hul The Bay C5	39	Terrific detail, nice balance — a great cable								224
HB	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
R	Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round with just a hint of bass congestion — very good value								224



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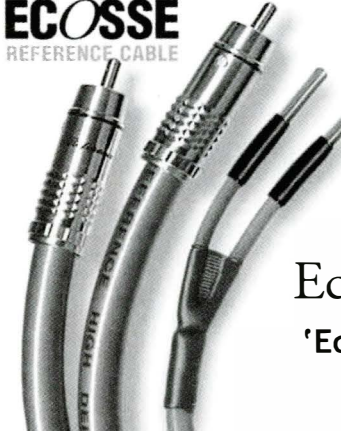
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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DIG CABLE TYPE					ISSUE NUMBER		
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER		SILVER	
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 1051-100	39.95	Plenty of bass, and detail seems good, but there's a loss of involvement		•		•	•		F	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
	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	DIG CABLE TYPE					ISSUE NUMBER		
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER		SILVER	
	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
	Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained					•			157
	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices					•			203
	Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass					•			192
	DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble extension				•				168
R	Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	•		•					192
	Chord Company Rumour 2	10	Performance is listenable enough but fails to excel in any area	•							203
BB	DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire				•				133
	Ecosse Reference CS-2.15	5.75	Stereo and rhythm are good, but persistent dryness detracts significantly	•				•			215
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round	•			•				203
	Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system	•							168
BB	Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value				•				157
R	Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative				•				157
R	Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	•			•				168
BB	Ixos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price, strong and consistent	•				•			203
R	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant – though only slightly	•				•			192
BB	Kimber 4PR	4.90	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right		•		•				192
R	Kimber 4VS	8.50	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	•				•			183
R	Kimber 4TC	18.80	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	•				•			168
BB	Kimber 8TC	348	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	•				•			203
	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unobtrusive music – can be dry and edgy	•				•			183
	Monster Cable Z1	12.50	Slightly bass-rich balance, and could do with a bit more detail	•				•			215
	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-ye-face', and bass is not always even	•			•				192
	Ortofon SPK100	3	Grey-sounding — strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance. A bit bass-shy, too					•			133
	Ortofon SPK200	4.99	Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	•				•			183
R	Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass – if slightly bright at times					•			133
	Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures	•				•			183
	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion	•				•			203
	Prowire Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board	•				•			203
	Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound – but too messy and bloated for its own good	•				•			183
	Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality	•				•			157



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LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel								157
BB	QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●		●			192
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding								168
R	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid-back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●		●		●			215
	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging: good, but not the best at its price								203
	SonicLink S300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces	●		●		●			168
R	SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced								157
R	SonicLink AST75	2.95	Unusual materials and rather unusual performance too, strong on excitement and with plenty of bass	●		●		●			203
R	SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together								157
	SonicLink AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details								192
BB	SonicLink Rebel	7.50	Plenty of bass, but without sacrificing upper frequency clarity or dynamics								215
	Straight Wire Duo	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style	●		●		●			203
	Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music	●		●		●			192
BB	Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience	●		●		●			183
	Supra Classic 6.0	4.95	It's all there, but a persistent lack of detail seriously mars the view	●		●		●			215
R	Supra Ply 3.4	6.95	Clean sound which stays together well at high levels, with full bass – perhaps a touch of treble restriction								183
R	Supra Ply 3.4/5	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
	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodic music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail	●		●	●	●			203
	TCI Python	7.99	No single major slip, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	●		●		●			203
R	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	●		●	●	●			203
R	van den Hul The Snowline	5.49	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●		●		●			215
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	●		●		●			203
	XLO Pro 600	16.50	Decent bass and good treble, but sounds confused with densely-scored music	●		●		●			215

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS								
R	Audiolinx Blue Max	100	Expensive, but good value considering the improvement offered				●	●		PLT	218
	Audio Note AN-MP	99	A noticeable improvement on standard mains cable, but not as great as others				●	●			218
	Audiosource bbc	48	Very good value, extremely sharp detailing – maybe too sharp				●	●		PLT	218
BB	Audusa Eupen CSA	48	Reasonable cost, outstanding performance and a strong recommendation				●			●	218
	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 transformer that bolsters clarity, openness and gives an increased refinement making for a purer and natural sound								206

CASSETTE DECKS



SPECIFICATIONS

CASSETTE DECKS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY B	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	ISSUE NUMBER
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 three heads and dual capstan transport	●	●	●			●		●	146
R	Pioneer CT-5550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●	●			●		●	164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been recommended	●	●	●			●		●	171
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest three-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

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CD PLAYERS



ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Advantage CD15	3,995	A CD player of some stature – what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●	●							193
	Alchemist Kraken	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere	●	●	●							190
R	Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●	●	●							169
	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 CD92	850	High resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing	●	●	●							212
R	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility	●	●	●							226
	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 Series 21 MC4	999	Solid, if not stolid player designed for a long lifetime, and musically proficient, if lacking in airs and graces	●	●	●							226
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	1,899	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●	●	●							194
	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well built player – balanced outputs too	●	●	●			●				226
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
BB	Cyrus CD7Q	1,150	Refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range, builds on the qualities of the lesser models	●	●	●							226
R	Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor	●	●	●							191
R	Denon DCD-655	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems	●	●	●				●	●		200
R	Denon DCD-835	230	Refined sound with terrific bass extension. Some slight coloration	●	●	●				●	●		217
	Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●	●	●				●	●		179
	Densen B-400	1,280	Bold, purposeful sound, but lacks subtlety, and has some ergonomic flaws	●	●	●							212
	Docet-Lector CDP0.5T	999	Valve powered CD player lacks resolving power, though it musters considerable physical presence	●	●	●							226
BB	Exposure 2010	599	Smooth, restrained but warm and physical balance from this well turned out and well priced player	●	●	●							226
	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
R	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright sounding player with strong multi-room appeal	●	●	●							212
	Marantz CD5000	150	Well equipped budget player sounds thin and rough at times	●	●	●				●	●		202
	Marantz CC3000	150	Ragged sounding multidisc player, but it is cheap and well-equipped	●	●	●						●	204
BB	Marantz CD6000	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too	●	●	●							207
BB	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain	●	●	●							217
BB	Marantz CD6000 KI Signature	500	Excellent all rounder, a well-appointed, good-value package	●	●	●							212
R	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step	●	●	●			●	●			206
R	Marantz CD17 Mk II KI Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)	●	●	●							226
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	Meracus Tanto	1,395	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics – but it's not cheap	●	●	●							169
BB	Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●	●	●							176
	Meridian 588	£2,100	Not the most immediately striking CD player, but its neutrality and timing prove beguiling	●	●	●			●				225
	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
	Myriad 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 C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●	●	●							184
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-S507	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
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality	●	●	●							226
	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 a 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-1070	525	Though technically sound and well equipped, the Rotel failed to generate much excitement or involvement	●	●	●							226
R	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability	●	●	●							212

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even-handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	●	●								163
	Sharp DX-SX1	2,700	Stylish player with a slightly forward but extremely nimble sound. Connects to matching digital amp via dedicated umbilical	●	●				●	●	●		211
R	Sony CDP-XE330	100	Unrefined, but lively, detailed and highly affordable	●	●					●			202
	Sony CDP-XE530	140	Well-equipped, but raw, scrappy sounding player lacks depth and weight	●	●				●	●			200
BB	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●	●								195
R	Sony DVP-NS700V	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
EC	Sony SCD-333ES	1,200	Entry-level high-end multichannel SA player is excellent with both CD and the new format, but particularly impressive in surround	●	●							●	224
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 it's a slow operator and doesn't support multichannel	●	●			●				●	194
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1.1	649	Attractively turned out, with bare bones features (though the power supply can be augmented), the Thunder 1.1 gave equivocal results on test	●	●								226
	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 the availability of a complete upgrade path makes 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	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
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 upgradeable 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	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	Chord DAC 64	1,900	Beautifully encased converter with variable input buffering but inconvenient input socketry and a sound that doesn't quite match the looks	●	●				●				225
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



DVD PLAYERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam DIVA DV88	1,000	A DVD-Video player built with non-obsolescence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player	●	●								213
	Arcam FMJ DV27	1,600	Spirited CD performance and a great DVD-V upgrade path	●	●								219
BB	Denon DVD-1000	300	Fine, stripped down player concentrates on the essentials, and scores a direct hit	●	●								216
R	Denon DVD-1500	400	Colourful and engaging (if lightweight) sound, with excellent picture quality	●	●								207
BB	Denon DVD-2800	750	First-rate all-rounder, this is a gimmick-free design that is well-built and offers good CD and DVD sound quality and finely resolved pictures	●	●					●			221
R	Denon DVD-3300	1,000	Sometimes slightly inconsistent and strident sounding in all modes of use, but it pulls a little more off disc too	●	●					●		●	213
R	Encore DV-450	200	Superb value for money, though mainly of interest to the videophile on a shoestring	●	●					●			207
	Harman/Kardon DVD10	299	Bulky DVD-Video player with unexciting picture quality, and promising but ultimately unexceptional CD replay performance	●	●								221
	Hitachi DVP-705	380	Mild mannered player works best with Radio 2 music, and gives clean, well-endowed picture quality to match, along with sharp pricing	●	●								216
	Integra research RD-V1	2,700	Refined in use and on audition, but a lack of resolving power and an unbalanced feature set militate against this model	●	●							●	220

DVD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	AS/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	JVC XV-542	250	Unpreprocessing DVD-V player fails to excite with DVD material, or as a surrogate CD player	●		●							221
R	JVC XV-SA725L	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike	●		●						●	220
	JVC XV-D723GD	500	Convincing DVD-Audio player that is ultimately let down by poor CD performance	●		●	●						206
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	899	The first multi-disc DVD-Audio player is physically large and ergonomically obstructive, but it is a smooth, slick operator	●		●			●		●	●	213
	Marantz DV4100	399	The DV4100 is a DVD-Video player for videophiles, but don't put the CD player out to pasture just yet	●		●							221
EC	Meridian DVD596	2,350	Very dassy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●		●							218
	NAD T-550	500	Soft-centred but likeable player in the classic NAD mould	●		●							202
	Nakamichi DVD-10s	600	Well engineered, but lacklustre specifications, moderate performance – and overpriced	●		●							216
	Onkyo DV-S939	1,999	Superb build, plenty of features, but more convincing as a video player than an audio one	●		●						●	220
	Panasonic DVD-RV41	300	Well presented DVD-Video player has an attractive, but far from high resolution sound, and picture quality also lacks definition	●		●							221
	Panasonic DVD-RA71	449	Well priced, but rather slack sounding with DVD-A material, but CD sounds OK and DVD-V is excellent	●		●			●			●	220
	Panasonic DVD-A360E	580	Powerful equipment, and unthrottled digital output notwithstanding, sound quality is modest at best	●		●			●				198
	Panasonic DVD-A7EB	699	Chopped down Technics DVD-A 10 retains most of the flagship's headline features with well balanced, but less refined and less articulate sound	●		●						●	213
R	Philips DVD-712	200	Rough and ready looking DVD-Video player turns out to be well equipped, and an unexpectedly vital performer, on screen and via loudspeakers	●		●							221
R	Philips DVD957	400	Slightly ill-disciplined, but a bold, enthusiastic player which engages even if it doesn't always convince	●		●			●				216
	Philips DVD960	530	DVD-V player has strong sound quality and good, though slightly washed out, pictures	●		●							207
R	Pioneer DV-545	330	Stylish and well-equipped slimline DVD-Video player is an extremely attractive all rounder	●		●							221
BB	Pioneer DV-636D	400	Bold, dynamic and detailed sounding player, with slightly simplified video feature set, sharper pricing and A1 pictures to match	●		●							216
	Pioneer DV-646A	530	One of the first DVD-RW compatible DVD-Audio players is informative but not the sweetest sounding machine around	●		●						●	220
R	Pioneer DV-939A	1,200	Fine player with near state of the art video performance and attractive, easy on the ear music making, from CD and DVD-Audio alike	●		●			●				213
EC	Pioneer DV-747A	899	UK's first Universal player, compatible with DVD-A and SACD as well as DVD-V and CD. Remarkably good with every format	●		●						●	226
	Primare V10	700	Beautifully presented DVD-video player gives superb picture quality and so-so CD replay	●		●							221
R	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possesses a strong picture quality and decent CD player	●		●							206
	Rotel RDV-995	700	Bold, sometimes aggressive sounding player needs RGB output to bring picture quality up to scratch	●		●							216
	Sanyo DVD1500	219	Compact, low cost player is a quite strong video performer, but lacks the wherewithal to succeed as a surrogate CD player	●		●			●				216
BB	Sony DVP-NS400D	300	Midrange DVD-Video player has some interesting features that enhance picture quality and usability	●		●							221
	Sony Art Couture DVP-5435	350	Looks to die for and decent on-screen results, but sound is flat and grey	●		●							216
	Sony DVP-CX850D	600	Lacklustre sound quality is a disappointment, but the price is appealing for a 200-disc DVD player	●		●						●	204
	Sony DVD-S9000ES	1,200	First DVD machine to play SACD has a 'Lexus' sound style that never really gets its hands dirty	●		●							210
	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	A tour-de-force of engineering, albeit with matching price tag. But picture quality is second to none	●		●							212
	T+A DVD 1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-audio upgrade path	●		●			●				213
	Technics DVD-A10	899	Well built, early generation DVD-A player with full on-board DVD-Video decoding and a more than workmanlike sound	●		●			●			●	213
	Thompson DTH-4500	229	DVD-V player comes with an excellent multi-component remote control, but fails to deliver the goods, with bland sound to match the iffy visuals	●		●			●				221
	Theta DaVD	4,650	A top-notch CD transport, that also plays DVD-Video discs well. Pricey for a DVD transport, but worth it	●	●	●	●						191
	Toshiba SD500E	599	OK DVD-Video player, but lacklustre with music, especially when reproducing high resolution DVD-Audio material	●		●						●	213
BB	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player; in this context pricing is competitive	●		●						●	213
	T+A DVD-1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-Audio upgrade path	●		●							213

DIGITAL RECORDERS

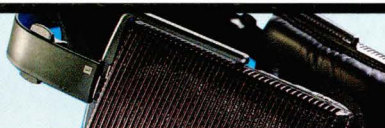


SPECIFICATIONS

CD RECORDERS (CD-R/RW), MINIDISC (MD), HARD DISC (HD)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	FORMAT	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing a CD player and hard disc recorder. Sign of things to come?	2	CD/HD		●	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
	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	A hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	1	MD	●	●	205
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, ratty build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	It may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	1	MD	●	●	205
	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
	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
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Midi-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	1	MD	●	●	177
	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
BB	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
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that receives its Recommendation due to price	1	MD	●	●	205
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
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
	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
R	Yamaha CDR-HD1000	700	CD recorder and hard drive in one – save your music to hard disc, edit then dump to CD-R for MiniDisc style flexibility	2	CD-R(W)/HD	●	●	223a

HEADPHONES

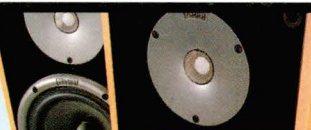


SPECIFICATIONS

HEADPHONES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 'phones						250	60		186
	Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass						210	40		194
	Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100 per cent						210	40		186
	Beyer DT531	105	Average performer from an established player. Lacks punch and bite						245	250		205
R	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor						200	250		172
BB	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads				1/2		295	250		186
	Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable						120	32		172
BB	Grado SR-60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	32		194
R	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality						200	32		186
R	Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the music						200	32		163
	Grado SR-325	300	Elegant sound across the frequency spectrum; let down by old fashioned ear-piece design						200	32		205
	JVC HA-G77	40	Too coloured for general recommendation, and lacking detail						260	32		219
	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design						165	1/R		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 midrange 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 midrange and overexerted bass						247	32		205
	Sennheiser IS 380	55	As close as you'll get to real hi-fi with infrared phones at this price. Inevitable hiss spoils the illusion						192	1/R		172
	Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance – but detailed, and comfortable to wear						210	64		219
R	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-damping headband						255	150		172
BB	Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable						255	150		157
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort						270	120		205
	Sennheiser HE 60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with a pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy						260	N/A		163
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 infrared design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven				1/2		226	1/R		172
R	Vivanco SR950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones						252	32		194
	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable						280	9,000		186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss						240	9,000		186

LOUDSPEAKERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STEREO SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19, 36, 24		86	6	30			226
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 309	700	Real wood heavyweight with fine neutrality and dynamic range; could have more brio	21,98,30		90	5	23			224
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone standmount 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 standmount 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/standmount 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	45			214
R	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	45			221
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,020	350 watts combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,71,6,48		A	A	38			218
	ATC SCM70A SL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127,40,46		A	A	20			205

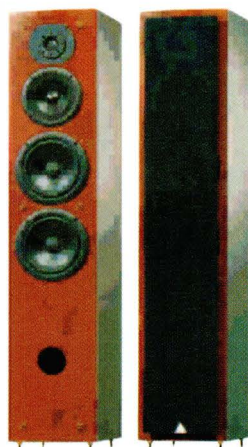
STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
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 standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		92	4	20	●		204
R	Audio Note AN-J/SpE	1,675	Retro styling but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,58,5,24,5		90	5	38	●		219
R	Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little underdeveloped	19,106,27	●	90	4	20	●		190
R	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too	20,102,30	●	89	4	22	●		180
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
R	AVI Positron	899	This 'mini-floorstander' is capable of great precision and delicacy, but in a rather small-scale way	17,57,4,24,5	●	85	6	40	●		174
BB	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband, and a restrained top end	20,33,23		88	4	23		●	226
R	B&W 601 S2	200	A smooth and sophisticated standmount combines good drive with fine neutrality	20,5,36,23		89	4	30	●		207
BB	B&W 602 S3	300	Large lively standmount with fine bass and low box colour; comprehensively vindicates a timeless formula	23,49,29		89	3	22	●		224
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
R	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		89	7	30	●		208
R	B&W CM4	900	Beautifully styled trend-setting floorstander has a big but rather dull sound	20,91,29	●	91	3	35	●		219
R	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
H	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
R	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
R	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	Blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17		91	4	50		●	225
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	●	94	3	40	●		204
R	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-yer-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32	●	92	5	28		●	180
R	Carlsson OAS2.2	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-yer-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50	●		201
R	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 Stirling	730	Handsomely veneered compact floorstander with expressive dynamic vigour, but a little hard and unforgiving too	20,88,24	●	90	6	28		●	224
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
R	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
R	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
R	Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid-back for its own good	20,36,26		87	3	40	●		190
R	Chario Academie Millennium 1	1,399	Pretty but pricey, with a smooth even balance but limited dynamic expression	21,37,31		87	4	42	●		219
EC	Chario Academie Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●		190
R	Cyrus CL570	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32		87	8	40	●		211
R	Cyrus Icon	2,500	First high-end NXT speaker with huge omni-directional soundstage. But they have limited dynamics and unusual imaging	34,125,29	●	84	8	18	●		216
BB	Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32	●	91	4	25	●		174
R	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	429	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18		87	3	50		●	190
R	Dali 8008	540	Deep bass and high sensitivity from a large vinyl-clad floorstander which could have more transparency and tension	25,5,101,35	●	93	4	22	●		224
H	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	●	89	4	41		●	225
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24,5,106,36	●	93	2.5	20	●		204
R	Dali Grand Coupe	1,333	Big sounding standmount with laid-back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29		85	5	45	●		219
BB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	Expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but an aristocrat amongst the breed. Is there a better small speaker around for the price?	17,28,5,24		87	4	40	●		215
R	Dynaudio Audience 72	1,100	Very competent in most respects, but doesn't quite grab the attention; could be more communicative	20,97,26	●	89	3	20	●		211
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Stand-out performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		88	3.5	45	●		219
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII	1,842	Wonderful voice-band delicacy and loads of deep bass from a very elegant and compact box	21,95,29	●	85	4	20	●		167
R	Elac CL102 II	599	Chunky floorstander with classy drivers has a neutral, slightly 'shiny' character, and could have more punch	20,95,28	●	88	9	23	●		199
R	Elac CL 310i Jet	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	12,3,20,8,28,2		86	4	42	●		191
R	Elac CL 330 Jet	2,500	Arguably the most 'technical'-looking speaker in the world. Design matched by an equally explicit and dynamic sound	18,28,35		88	4	40	●		225
R	Eltax Liberty 3+	150	Bright, bassy, laid-back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20,5,38,34		86	4	25	●		187
R	Eltax Linear Response	249	A curiously dumpy shape, but smooth, laid-back performer is easy on the ears, with fine tonal accuracy	25,35,32		85	4	40	●		177

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STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dBW)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Eltax Chroma Front	300	Gorgeous shiny styling package at an ultra-competitive price, suffers from an excess of rather flabby bass	19,98,28	●	87	4	25	●	●	201
R	Energy e:XL 25	400	Neat slimline design delivers a fine all-round performance for the price, but could sound smoother	15,87,31	●	90	4	25	●	●	201
	Energy Veritas 2.2	1,295	Luxury three-way standmount has unusual features, and a very clean, laid-back sound with good bass	46,22,33		88	4	25	●	●	223
R	Excel 202A	1,795	Very pro-styling, a compact active monitor in BBC tradition – neutral, unboxy and laid-back	15,21,5,36		A	A	25	●	●	214
BB	Epos M12	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
	Genelec HT206	1,400	Baby active monitor goes very loud for its size. Very neutral but a tad boxy	20,31,24		A	A	40	●	●	214
R	Heybrook Prima 2	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18		87	6	50	●	●	179
	Heybrook HB1	180	Good value but an uneven performer, the HB1 provides plenty of fun with the volume turned well up	21,38,25		88	3	50	●	●	207
BB	Heybrook Heylette	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19,5,30,22		88	4	45	●	●	187
BB	Heybrook Optima	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29	●	94	4	30	●	●	193
BB	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	23,5,36,27		89	6	45	●	●	201
	Heybrook Ultima	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29		89	6	25	●	●	174
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30		88	11	27	●	●	199
	Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31		90	6	25	●	●	180
BB	Infinity Alpha 30	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
	Infinity Alpha 40	500	Cool hi-tech looks and drivers, but sounds closer to competent than emotionally engrossing	22,92,33	●	89	4	20	●	●	224
	Jamo EB00	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17,5,33,29		87	3	30	●	●	207
R	Jamo E 850	300	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	17,5,87,34	●	86	5	30	●	●	224
	Jamo A410PDD	£650	Clean-edged and space-efficient solution with neat wall-mount sub for anyone who wants to move into decent 5.1 channel sound	Various	●	N/A	5	35	●	●	225
	Jamo D830	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	24,5,38,32		88	5	30	●	●	211
BB	JBL LX2	250	Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with enthusiasm	22,40,27		87	8	40	●	●	170
	JBL Ti200	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30		92	5	40	●	●	193
	JBL SVA1500	700	A distinctive Pro-style bi-radial horn tweeter, with a fun sound, enlivened by a juicy bass thump	17,5,51,31		86	8	40	●	●	174
R	JBL SVA 2100	1,250	Monstrously large and brutish styling, goes very loud as well as deep. Fine focus but some boxiness	37,114,52	●	91	8	<20	●	●	180
	JBL LX70	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy, scratchy treble	26,5,94,30	●	91	4	33	●	●	183
BB	JBL Xt140	500	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass, and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	88	6	40	●	●	210
R	JMlab Cobalt 816	860	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	90	3	22	●	●	224
R	JMlab Electra 905	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23,5,47,28		90	4	40	●	●	204
	JMlab Cobalt 826	1,229	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	91	3	35	●	●	219
EC	JMlab Micro Utopia	2,749	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41		89	3	50	●	●	220
R	JMlab Mezzo Utopia	7,250	Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	35,115,47	●	92	4	30	●	●	186
	JPW 201	150	Looks very sharp with shiny silver front and clever grille, but sound is a bit small and midband coloured	15,5,26,24		86	4.5	45	●	●	226
	KEF Cresta 2	149	A good-looking value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24		91	4	40	●	●	195
R	KEF Reference One-Two	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
	KEF RDM Three	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27	●	90	4	40	●	●	189
	KEF Reference Model 2	1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	23,103,34	●	89	4	30	●	●	167
R	Keswick Audio Torino	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	26,93,28	●	90	4	20	●	●	167
R	Linn Kan	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19		86	4	45	●	●	187
	Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23		A	A	40	●	●	214
BB	Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21,5,98,29	●	91	4	25	●	●	180
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21,5,104,27	●	91	8	40	●	●	218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	21,5,104,27	●	89	8	45	●	●	196
	Magnat Vintage 320	350	Loads of speaker for your money, but the sound is thick, heavy and lacking in presence and authority	25,102,30	●	90	4	20	●	●	201
	Magnat Vector 77	450	Tall, dark and a lot of speaker for the money. Beautiful balance, but lacking in subtlety and transparency	22,115,29	●	89	5	30	●	●	183
	Magnat Vintage 710	800	Very competent but didn't particularly stand out; distinctive styling and slightly shiny sound	20,27,42,32	●	90	5	25	●	●	211
R	Magnat Vintage 720	1,200	Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity	29,113,32	●	88	4	20	●	●	180
	Martin-Logan Prodigy	8,967	Combines the finesse of an electrostatic with the grunt of cleverly engineered cone bass to good effect	42,179,71	●	91	4	28	●	●	204
BB	Meridian M33	1,495	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		A	A	45	●	●	214
	Mirage FRX7	550	Neat slim floorstander has a heavy, laid-back balance, probably better suited to movie than music reproduction	17,5,95,32	●	90	4	25	●	●	204
	Mirage OM-5	3,000	A meaty model that goes loud without distortion, digs deep with aplomb and creates plenty of depth of image	133,30,42	●	90	6	22	●	●	206
	Mirage OM-10-1	2,000	Tall black omni-bi-pole has plenty of bounce and dynamic vigour, but is more room sensitive than most	23,118,30	●	88	4	20	●	●	210
R	Mission 700	130	A lot of speaker for the money. Good bass weight and extension and goes loud with ease	18,34,26		87	8	40	●	●	179
R	Mission 771e	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22		86	6	45	●	●	207
R	Mission M71	130	Neat looking and very discreet sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28		88	4.6	40	●	●	226
BB	Mission M73	200	Sharply priced and good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,87,5,31	●	88	3	25	●	●	215
	Mission 780	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16,5,28,27		86	6	40	●	●	201
R	Mission 773e	400	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all-round entertaining sound	17,5,88,26	●	92	4	30	●	●	193
R	Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	183
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 on serious weight and authority	23,115,30	●	93	3	25	●	●	204
	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
	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
	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
	Mordant-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget standmount 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
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	88	6	20	●	●	226
	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

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Oheocha D2-Iso-5	2,500	Radical aluminium pawn-shaped cabinets combine with multiple drivers to make a subtle and refined sound	37,94,37	●	89	8	30	●	●	217
	Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31	●	90	4	40	●	●	190
R	Opera SP-1	525	SP1s make a strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Unspared back goes wrongers for the appearance, sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23	●	86	8	50	●	●	225
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
BB	PMC FB1	1,275	Hangsome 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	A	25	●	●	214
	ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact standmount is classically balanced, if a little on the bright side of neutral	19,36,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	204
	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
	ProAc Reponse 1.5	1,790	Gorgeous but pricey floorstander has lovely midband voicing but limited bandwidth resolution	19,98,25	●	86	7	35	●	●	219
	QLN Signature	1,000	Attractive pyramidal standmount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	●	83	4	25	●	●	167
	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
	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	Beely 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
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
	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
	Sequence 400	300	Very affordable pseudo panel offers flexible design options and acceptable sound. Limited bass, though, and doesn't like playing loud	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
	Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready standmount 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
	Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspended bass integration	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
	Solloquy 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
	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
	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
	Sony SS-LA500ED	340	Versatile metal minatures with integral stands. Given a little more bass and a slightly less excitable treble, they'd be hard to resist	17,25,19	●	89	4	55	●	●	225
	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 S3	600	Beautifully voiced and unboxy sub-miniature lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	16,5,30,5,21	●	82	6	30	●	●	224
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
	Syn Factory U-Vola	1,480	Hefty oval shaped speakers designed to be hung from the ceiling. Sound is tight and detailed but also a little flat	21,42,21	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
EC	TAC McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	91	6	38	●	●	215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	92	2.5	23	●	●	225
	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
	Tannoy mX1	120	Smooth and very well behaved but a bit dull and unexciting; makes a good surround speaker	16,5,30,22	●	87	4.5	40	●	●	226
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
	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	230	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
	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
	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 ST-100	1,200	This add-on supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage, but at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
R	T+A Talis TL53	1,799	Super slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver effortlessly musical results with superb imaging. Great marriage of style and sonics	15,130,17	●	90	4	30	●	●	225
	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 XS	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
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with absolutely any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way, too, though bass is detached	21,100,21	●	90	4	45	●	●	225
R	Wharfedale Diamond 8.2	150	Sonically a bit crude and in yer face, but neat styling and plenty of speaker for your money	21,36,5,25	●	86	4	30	●	●	226
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	520	●	●	189
	Wharfedale Diamond 7.2	140	A good-hearted, lively and up-front performer that's a little lacking in subtlety and smoothness	19,29,5,23	●	88	4	45	●	●	169
	Wdale Diamond 72Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24	●	88	4	40	●	●	187
	Wharfedale Pacific Pi-20	350	Good material value and a decent fun factor, though a somewhat wayward balance compromises neutrality	22,95,28	●	87	4	25	●	●	224
	Wharfedale Pacific Pi40	500	A lot of speaker for the money, but bass is unruly, even in a large-sized room. The smaller Pi30 might give a better bottom-end balance	22,113,36	●	89	3	25	●	●	215
R	Zingali Overture 25	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●	195

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub which comes with handy infrared remote control	41,37,29,5	●	A	A	35	●	●	225
	Castle Classic 8	800	Adequate performance, but misses the mark at the price	●	●	A	A	20	●	●	225
	Jamo D8SUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the D8SUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,51,45,55	●	A	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	A	25	●	●	210
	M&K MX700	1,595	Fine dynamic sound with music or movies. Compact unit but expensive and short on features	●	●	A	A	●	●	●	225
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	●	A	A	27	●	●	225
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	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	A	25	●	●	210
R	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	41,5,62,33	●	A	A	18	●	●	225
	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	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	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	A	20	●	●	210

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SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
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
BB	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	●	A					225
R	Soiloquy S10	1,050	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/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AE Aego2	300	Not quite a serious hi-fi speaker system, but a seriously fun type product for all that (19x35x27cm sub)	7,10,9		A	n/a	45	●		218
R	Bandor Trident II	776	Loudness is limited, but overall sound is impressively homogeneous and coherent (31x46x31cm sub)	12,13,10,12		83	6	25	●		218
R	Boston Micro 90	650	Lacks warmth but the midband is smooth and impressively evenhanded (37x36x39cm sub)	10,17,14		88	4	28	●		218
R	Cabasse Jupiter/lo	1,230	A sub/sat combo that really competes with proper stereo speakers. Striking styling and stereo imaging (40x43x41cm sub)	15 diam		94	2	30	●		218
R	KEF KMS2002	499	Looks the business, but lacks deep bass and the presence/treble is also too restrained (32x36x32cm sub)	13,23,14		85	3	45	●		218
R	Mission FS2	450	Intriguing NXT speaker technology has minimal visual impact, and lacks dynamic precision (32x47x25cm sub)	13,5,28,4,5		86	6	40	●		218
R	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

SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	High value floorstander has deep and even bass and a smooth neutrality thereafter	19,90,25	●	90	5	22	●		198
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit pkg	1,230	Could sound more exciting, but imaging, solidity and neutrality all impressive. Poor centre magnetic shielding	var	var	90	5	23	var	var	224
R	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20,9,55,32		90	5	20	●		198
BB	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. Decent size, high quality drivers in standmount enclosures still make sense, whatever the prevailing fashion	var	N	89	3	22	●		224
R	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
R	Castle package	1,199	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	var	var	85-90	6	28		●	224
R	Dali Blue system	1,007	Incorporates some interesting ideas, and decent value for money too, but a rather movie-oriented package	var	var	88-93	4	22	var	var	224
R	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
R	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31	●	91	5	28		●	198
R	Dynaudio LR/C 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
R	Infinity Alpha package	833	Distinctive high tech styling, fine build and advanced drivers. Sounds thoroughly competent, but didn't excel	var	var	84-89	4	20		●	224
R	Jamo E8 package	775	A tad bright for some tastes, and without quite the grip and drive to make the most of multichannel material	var	var	86	5	30		●	224
R	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
R	JMLab Cobalt package	1,707	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	var	var	88-90	3	22		●	224
R	KEF Q-series package	880	Cleverly designed, vinyl-finished UniQ package packs a goody thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
R	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
R	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		92	4	120		●	198
R	Mission M package	480	A very inexpensive and good looking system, but the surround bits are better suited to movies than music	var	var	88	4	25	var	var	224
R	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
R	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
R	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	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
R	Spendor package	1,630	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness; best suited to smaller rooms	var	var	82-86	6	30		●	224
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
R	Wharfedale Pacific package	700	Plenty of loudspeaker for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward but unquestionably entertaining	var	var	87	3	25		●	224

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis Centre	140	Good value centre-front speaker but a tad shut in and with a slightly obvious top end (price per speaker)	46,17,20		89	5	50	●		198
R	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
R	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,29		88	8	45	●		198
R	Definitive Technology CLR2002	595	Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,17,5,31		90	4	40	●		198
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	Monitor Audio Silver Centre 10i	300	Neat and good-looking partner to the Silver 5is, but a little more forward, and quite expensive too	50,17,21		87	4	100		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short MS 504	200	Smart yet discreet and a good match for the 502. Sounds clean and expressive, and is well priced	50,19,20		88	3	120		●	210
R	PMC TB2M/C	325	This bulky centre speaker is quite pricey, but it combines good transparency with some authority	40,20,31		87	6	50		●	210
R	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

SPECIFICATIONS

PERSONAL STEREO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa HS-PX307	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette		●				204
R	Aiwa AM-HX50	180	Neat play-back only personal with an impressively full-bodied sound, though short on detail	MiniDisc		●				204
	JVC XL-PG31	60	'Challenging' looks and frankly unpleasant sound add up to a player that's best avoided	CD						216
	JVC XM-R700SL	250	The most expensive player here, but its in-ear-face sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Kenwood DPC-X517	100	Clean, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD						216
	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 FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa MM-VX100	130	Aiwa's expertise in the personal stereo field is visible, but performance is only average	Solid State	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
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
	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	●		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 Iomega 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 Yepp YP-305	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/ATRAC3	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/ATRAC3	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	●		MP3/MP3Pro	USB	10GB	223

RECORD PLAYERS

SPECIFICATIONS

TURNTABLES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	●			33/45	●	●	●	●	203
EC	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
R	Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,950	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
	Moth Alamo	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
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

TURNTABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBGRASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	●			33/45			●	●	164
	Pro-ject Classic Cherry	450	A great-looking turntable with a generous and dynamic sound, but lacks something in overall coherence	●			33/45		●	●		203
	Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best	●			33/45	●		●		192
R	Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	850	Don't think of this as a deck with a good arm, but as a scaled-down Oracle Delphi — it's that good	●			33/45	●	●	●		138
BB	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	●			33/45			●		214
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 midband detail	●			33/45		●	●		159
R	Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight	●			33/45	●	●			159
EC	SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	●			33/45	●	●	●		195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	●			33/45/78	●	●	●		186
BB	Thorens TD166 W/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges	●			33/45	●		●	●	103
	Thorens TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●			33/45	●	●	●		159
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
R	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limpid quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●			33/45	●	●			136
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	●			33/45	●	●	●		205

CARTRIDGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE 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
	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
	Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life'. Is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail		●		0.1	6	103
BB	Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price		●				103
R	Dynavector DV-20X L	299	Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high-quality turntable and arm				0.25	8.6	192
	Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent		●		0.15	5.3	158
R	Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm		●		0.25	12	84
R	Dynavector Te-Kaitora	1,698	A real smoothie, but pricey. Worth checking out for its delicate laid-back transparency and low needle-talk				0.25	8.5	175
EC	Dynavector DRT XV-1	2,500	Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining		●		0.3	13	208
	Goldring 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
	Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though	●		●	6.5	6	91
	Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest		●		0.5	8	103
	Goldring Excel VX	525	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
	Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users	●			1.7	6.5	175
	London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records	●			5.0	6	84
	Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge — smooth, agile and dynamic in character		●		0.5	8	192
R	Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed		●		0.3	7	158
EC	Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			0.5	8	215
	Lyra Parnassus D.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	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
	Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable		●		0.5	11	139
	Ortofon MC25FL	250	A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP		●		0.5	11	139
BB	Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300	A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings		●		0.5	10.7	192
	Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525	Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings		●		0.5	10.7	158
EC	Ortofon Rohmann	1,000	A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound		●		0.25	8.5	175
R	Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere — one of the very best		●		0.12	10	84
	Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo		●		0.12	10	91
	Rega Bias	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 Reca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	6.5	6.3	192
	Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	●		●	6.5	5	91
BB	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties — one of the best around for less than £300		●		2.5	9	192
R	van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●		●	5.5	6	103
	van den Hul DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy		●		0.35	7.6	158
R	van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass		●		0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-One	900	This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale — worth all the extra money		●		0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal		●		0.4	6	72
R	van den Hul Frog	1,500	Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm		●		0.65	7	175
R	van den Hul G' hopper IIIGLA	2,800	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse		●		0.4	6	122
R	Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive		●		0.58	6	158
R	Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573	Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound		●		0.45	7	175

TONEARMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High		●			79
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	he ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
BB	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low		●		237	60
R	Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though	Low		●		240	91
R	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low		●		233	60
R	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low		●		233	60

STANDS & SUPPORTS

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	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
R	Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5	45.5			4	Glass	193
R	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 Isochelf	1,100	An enthusiast's 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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	Sonus System Elite	330	Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands	68	50		●	4	Glass	206
R	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
R	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar stands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency	72.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	206
R	Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	193
R	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

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Alphason Akros II 60D	79	Good-looking, well-equipped with decent ingredients. Evenhanded but lacks dynamic enthusiasm	62	16.5		●			220
R	Alphason HD5	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5, 15.5		●			189
R	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15, 12.5		●			189
R	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51, 40.5	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
R	Atacama R724/Atabite	250	Good basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine-sounding stand at its price	61	16, 21.5		●	●		220
R	Cyrus CLS50 stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19					220
R	Custom Design R/5300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original with better focus and detail	61, 56, 51	16.5, 18		●			202
R	Elemental Isotube SZse	599	Stands of distinction, able to free the speaker's sound from its box in a way budget stands simply can't	61	23, 27		●	●		189
R	Gale t60	70	Neither the least expensive nor the prettiest, and the sound is undistinguished too	63	16.5		●			220
R	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
R	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19, 15		●			202
R	Mission Stancette	60	Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price. Sounds OK considering	60	16.5, 22		●			220
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	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
R	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16, 17		●			202
R	Target HM60	106	A solid and well-built stand laid-back to the point of coma	40-70	16.5, 19		●			202
R	Towshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers	4	38, 48					202

TUNERS

ANALOGUE TUNERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			●	●	193
R	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64		●	●	●	193
R	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			●	●	211
BB	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40	●			●	193
R	Denon TU-1500RD	250	A well balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension	FM,M	40	●			●	184
	Magnum Dynalab FT11	499	All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality	FM	3			●	●	184
BB	Harman Kardon TU940	179	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30	●			●	221
	Leak Trough Line - GTA	300	A renovated classic with a style all of its own coupled with an emotive and gutsy performance	FM	0			●	●	206
	Linn Pekin	545	Smart and high-tech tuner which integrates well with Linn systems but offers less appealing performance out of that context	FM, M	80		●			211
R	Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80		●	●		142
	Marantz ST-17	600	Great looks, but sound let down by opaqueness due to pilot-tone breakthrough	FM, M, L	60	●			●	221
BB	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM,M	60	●				184
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
	Myryad T-10	530	A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price	FM	20			●	●	184
	NAD C440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM,M	30	●				193
	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40			●	●	166
	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat fascia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50		●		●	184
	Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	193
	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
	Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM,M	20					166
R	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good honest budget tuner: loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	●		●	●	221
	Sony ST-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
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	157

DIGITAL TUNERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DAB	FM	AM	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DRT	800	The first DAB tuner and arguably still the best, but the system's still not perfect	DAB	7		●	●	●	●	●	199
R	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16		●	●	●	●	●	221
	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7		●	●	●	●	●	211
	Cymbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8		●	●	●			199
	Pision Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate – great gadget, sound variable	DAB			●	●	●			211
	Radi DAB-606	199	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless	DAB	30		●	●	●			221
	Sony ST-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
	VideoLogic DRX-601ES	349	Tweaked version of 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste	DAB	10		●	●	●	●	●	221



Sound Fantastic



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

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

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

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Home Entertainment, May 2001



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Our kit-packed April issue puts five top-name home cinema projectors through their paces – but there's only one outstanding winner for the ultimate in big-screen home cinema. Also rated: LG's massive 60inch plasma screen, Philips' stunning new Pixel Plus TV and Pioneer's universal DVD player – the first in the world to play both DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD high-end music formats.

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ISSUE 102 ON SALE 22.03.02

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SERIOUS DVD

All joking aside for our test of DVD players, not a one of them under £300 and including the new music formats DVD-A and SACD. We'll be checking them for films as well as music to find the best all-rounder of the bunch.

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THE BLACK STUFF

Our comprehensive consumers' guide, the Buyer's Bible, concentrates on vinyl next month. We'll be reviewing some of our favourite current turntables as well as offering loads of advice on how to choose and get the best from your deck.

REGA PROFILE

More hot news for vinyl fans – the inside story on the legendary vinyl innovator, together with a review of the latest version of its P9 flagship turntable.

PLUS

US digital specialist **Wadia's** latest high-tech CD player makes an exclusive first appearance in *Hi-Fi Choice* and the frankly awesome **Infinity Prelude** floorstander-cum-apartment-block stereo speaker system gets the full in-depth test treatment.

It's all in the **new-look Hi-Fi Choice**, next month.

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What's the delay?

SIGNAL DELAYS ARE THE BANE OF MULTICHANNEL HI-FI, BUT WHAT CAN BE DONE, ASKS JASON KENNEDY.

Time spent with the Lexicon multichannel processor reviewed in *High Performance* this month has been quite an education. I've tended to shy away from home cinema in the past because until I heard a superb system in my own room I didn't think that it could add much to what is a largely visual experience, and of course, there's the question of where to put all the extra speakers.

With the advent of high resolution multichannel music formats (DVD-A and SACD), surround sound is much more relevant and the Lexicon, alongside a 7.1 active speaker system from ATC and REL, was primarily installed for these formats. Although it will operate in analogue bypass mode, so the multichannel analogue signal from the player avoids the processing circuits and is solely influenced by the volume control, that is the least of the Lexicon's capabilities. The presence of all that processing power does have a bearing on its sound in bypass mode and what the music lover needs is an all-analogue multichannel preamp.

But such a device would not get to grips with one of the issues that's central to multichannel systems – signal delays. Unless you can sit pretty much in the middle of a circle with the speakers at specific points around you (called the ITU standard), you need to use delay processing. It's not just a matter of volume level for each channel – that would be easy to tackle using analogue circuitry – it's a question of the arrival time of that signal.

ANALOGUE OR DIGITAL?

Multichannel processors, be they in the amp or the player, have the facility to dial in the distance between the listening position and each loudspeaker. Amplifiers offer more flexibility in this respect than players as this process is



traditionally carried out by the amp in home cinema set-ups. The difference between the Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks found on movies and the high resolution formats (DVD-A, SACD) is that the former can be taken digitally from the player to the processor, whereas high-res signals have to be sent in analogue form via six separate interconnects. (Meridian's new MHR standard for digitally transmitting DVD-A gets around this problem.) As it stands you can send an analogue signal to the amp and carry out your speaker delay settings and bass management after analogue to digital conversion.

I compared the effect of a processor-delayed 'normal' set-up, with rears closer than fronts and centre closer than right and left front, with a minimum processing ITU-style set-up and the most obvious effect was a focusing of the music in front of me. Almost as if the processed set-up was not getting the level right on the rear channels, even though I set it up with a decent SPL (Sound Pressure Level) meter. It didn't

give me the expansive image scale that I have heard with more audiophile surround systems and left me wondering whether home cinema processors would ever be suitable for high fidelity applications. The Lexicon MC12 is certainly a very sophisticated processor and its bypass mode is pretty clean, but next to a preamp with no processing onboard it just sounds crude.

Hopefully Meridian's new digital connection (and other forthcoming solutions) will answer this dilemma. Presumably its DVD-A transports output an untouched bitstream for the external processor to work with. I've no doubt that the main man there, Bob Stuart, will have found a superior connection to the RCA phono termination, a digital connection that often does more harm than good. The other solution is the all-analogue six-channel preamp and a 'hair shirt', forget-the-home-cinema, ITU set-up. In the real world it's not hard to see which approach will win.

Jason Kennedy is *Hi-Fi Choice's* former editor and a late convert to the possibilities of surround sound.

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Wilson Benesch has consistently developed products that captivate the hearts and minds of discerning audiophiles throughout the world. From turntables to tone-arms and in 1995 ^ the A.C.T. One ^

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has become synonymous with outstanding performance. The companys range of products fulfils every stereo or multi-channel system requirement. Continual dedication to research and innovation, combined with excellence of build and sterling reliability have been rewarded by continued growth. Chord users include many of the most demanding customers in the audio world, both from professional and high-end customer domains.

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