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Jason previously edited *Hi-Fi Choice*, but can now be found swanning about the wilds of Sussex indulging himself with the very best hi-fi money can buy. His own system is simply sensational (trust us) and his love of music knows no bounds.



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A former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice*, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for some 26 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer. He also writes for respected US hi-fi journal *Stereophile*.



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DAVID VIVIAN

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

Despite the conclusions one might draw, two-channel hi-fi is not dead. It lives, it breathes, and for music fans it still sounds like heaven. It's not the ubiquitous sonic proposition it once was – surround sound has gatecrashed the party and conquered the lower end of the audio scene. But climb further up the price ladder, to the heady heights of specialist components, and purist stereo still gives as good as it gets.

While the futurists and scaremongers were declaring two-channel buried, the dust began to settle and it seems we're now reaching a cooler, calmer plateau. Consumers have to make a choice between two-channel stereo or full-blown surround, and that's as much down to whether you want multiple speakers scattered around the room as it is about purist principles, or whether you have a preference for music or movies.

HFC features the best of both worlds, so you can make an informed *Choice*. Those considering a system that will handle both stereo and high-res multichannel music, along with video soundtracks in surround, will find our group of speaker packages from specialist brands (page 68) an illuminating read. Meanwhile, our collection of real world high-end systems (page 58) will appeal to those with a more purist outlook on life. If you have a passion for sound you've come to the right place.

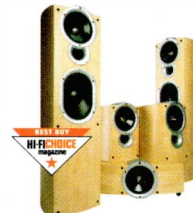


Tim Bownen **editor**

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STOP PRESS! Sorry if this issue is late getting to you. The repro house we went bust as we were going to press, but we've done our damndest to get it out on time

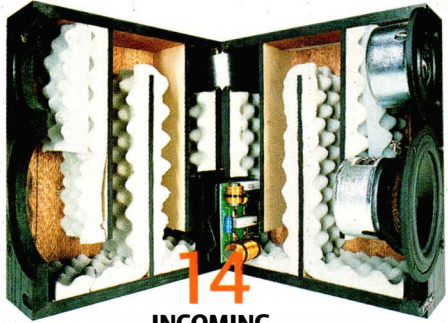
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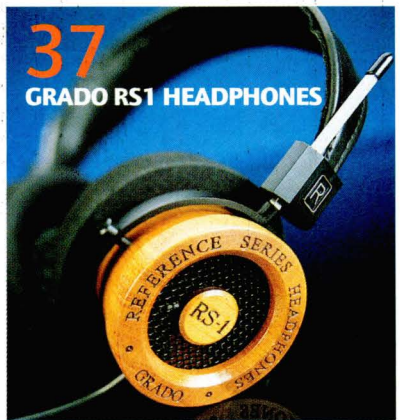
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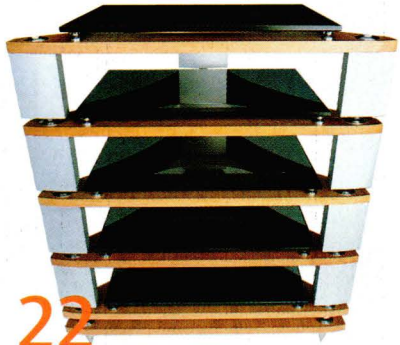
PMC's DB1 transmission line speaker and Linn's Classik Movie system



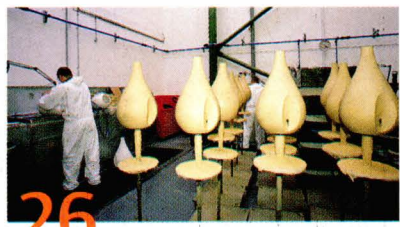
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STAR RATINGS

- ★★★★★ EXCEPTIONAL
- ★★★★☆ VERY GOOD
- ★★★☆☆ AVERAGE
- ★★☆☆☆ SOMETHING LACKING
- ★☆☆☆☆ RUBBISH

AWARD BADGES



Best Buy

The *Hi-Fi Choice* Best Buy badge is only awarded to products found to offer exceptional performance and value for money in an *HFC Group Test*. Buy this kit with absolute confidence.



Recommended

Awarded to outstanding products in our *Group Tests* that may not offer such exceptional value-for-money as a Best Buy, or may not be suitable for everyone, but still turn in a convincing performance.



Editor's Choice

Products in the *Statements* section that really blow us away are eligible for a special *HFC* Award badge. The coveted Editor's Choice recommendation is reserved for high-end products of exceptional quality.

For 27 years, our unique tests have brought you the most accurate guide to buying hi-fi. Our mix of thorough *Group Tests* and in-depth solo reviews ensures *HFC* is the magazine to trust.



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GROUP TEST: STEREO AMPS



THE COMPONENTS



Musical Fidelity CD-Pre²⁴ £1,999

Take a good quality 24-bit CD player, break open its digital circuit to allow extra digital inputs and mix in a fully-specced analogue preamp – less boxes and a more direct sound. Sprinkle all into a huge case and serve warm. Yum!



Musical Fidelity A3.2^{CR} £999

A no-nonsense 130 watts per channel stereo amp with a choke-regulated power supply to make for smoother sounds. The A3.2^{CR} comes complete with loop-through phono sockets for those intent on bi-amping – if 130 watts isn't enough.



B&W CM2 £550

Top-notch standmount two-way that features all the latest B&W innovations, including a 165mm Kevlar bass/mid cone, a Flowport dimpled rear port to reduce turbulence and the Nautilus tapered tube for absorbing unwanted energy from the back of the tweeter.

MUSICAL FIDELITY CD-PRE24 | A3.2CR | B&W CM2

SYSTEM ADDICT

Each month we ask a dealer to recommend a dream system. Then we check it out...

London's Tottenham Court Road is packed with dozens of electronics shops literally next door to each other. But while it may be the UK's Mecca for gadget geeks, decent hi-fi is surprisingly thin on the ground. But there are exceptions – the partially subterranean Hi-Fi Experience is one such oasis of good gear.

Unlike most Tottenham Court Road shops, a budget of £3,500 for a single source CD-based stereo system is entirely reasonable and the system can be auditioned in a living room-style listening room instead of a shop full of TVs and other kit. But what appeals to the West End stereo fan?

Hi-Fi Experience's system is distinctive and shows a satisfying level of hi-fi sophistication. It is fronted by the £1,999 Musical Fidelity CD-Pre24, a distinctive combined CD and line preamplifier in a single box. This is partnered with a £999 Musical Fidelity A3.2CR 130 watt stereo power amplifier into a pair of bookshelf B&W loudspeakers, the £550 CM2. Discounting tables, stands and cables, this system comes to £3,548, but you could easily factor in anything from £500-£1,000 for the vital ancillaries.

Each product in the chain needs some warm-up time from cold, and the bookshelf speakers demand a fair free-space distance and careful positioning on massy stands. But it's worth the effort. The system is packed with energy from top to bottom and copes with any form of music it is presented with. It has all that directness and vivacity expected from British kit like Naim Electronics, yet also has the smooth sheen and good soundstaging of American high-end gear. And it's keenly dynamic too. Spin up Sonny Rollins' classic version of *'Round Midnight* and the sax sound is smooth and dreamy. It's balanced so well, and drags you into the music so elegantly that you feel you want to take a solo too.

Bass notes are surprisingly deep from a small speaker. If your CD collection starts at Bassomatic and ends with Dub Syndicate, you will need a bigger speaker, but it was quite astoundingly

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
BUILD ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★
£3,548

CONCLUSION

A great system for a small room, just so long as you can give the speakers room to breathe – a natural, dynamic and polished sound. Musically enjoyable and exciting, too. Even deep bass is well tamed from the small speaker boxes. In short, well worth seeking out.

adept at reproducing the infrasonic booms and buzzes of the Spacemonkeyz vs Gorillaz track *19/2000*. At the points where physics prevents the replay of really deep bass, the system gently rolls off instead of falling apart. This means you can hear the bass line accurately, even if at the bottom end of the scale it lacks the forceful pounding required by dub reggae. You have to admire the integrity and precision of that bass, and in a small room, any more bass will overdrive the room acoustics anyway.

The only time the system shows a lack of scale and intensity is when trying to deal with the opening bars of Mahler's *Eighth Symphony*. With a pincer movement of orchestra and choir, all topped off with a full-frontal organ attack, very, very few hi-fi systems can cope with this onslaught without some constriction. Here it all sinks into a slightly distorted stringy-choiry thing with the occasional blare from the horn section and a blast of random organ notes. But, as soon as Mahler takes his foot off the loud pedal, the charms of the MF/B&W kit spring back. The choir and soloists in some of the softer moments take on a sumptuous, impassioned quality, more than enough to forgive the earlier transgression, just as you would forgive an actor sneezing just before delivering a perfect soliloquy from *Hamlet*.

Hi-Fi Experience lives up to its name; no greenhorn hi-fi dealer could put together a system that hangs together this well. It's sumptuous and natural and as smooth as a very smooth thing that has just been polished for good measure. It all adds up to three and a half grand well spent, particularly if your room is on the small side. **D**



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B&W
☎ 01903 750750



Pioneer DV-646A

UNIVERSAL SOLDIERS

PIONEER ANNOUNCES A TRIO OF UNIVERSAL HIGH RESOLUTION DISC PLAYERS FOR THE UK

➤ The race to make this year's must-have universal player has intensified this month with Pioneer announcing details of three new models to hit the UK.

In an exclusive world first Pioneer has produced the first all-in-one 'entertainment' system compatible with all disc formats including SACD and DVD-A. The new system, provisionally named the NS-DV1000, is packaged with a wide bandwidth 5.1 channel satellite speaker system with matching subwoofer. Crucially, the new system can play DVD-RW discs recorded in both the DVD-

Video and DVD-Video Recording (VR) format, allowing playback of DVDs recorded and edited in PC environments. A unique OEL display (Organic Electro-Luminescent) can be positioned remotely from the unit, giving motion graphics similar to those found in car audio head units. Manufacturing is likely to start next month, with an expected price of £1,300.

Also new from Pioneer is a stand-alone universal player, the DV-646A, priced at only £399. Compatible with all disc formats including DVD-A/SACD, the new machine also plays the DVD-VR discs and is compliant with future CPRM

(Content Protection for Recordable Media) recordings. This is a content protection system for forthcoming 'copy once' TV broadcasts, already being implemented in the US and Japan. Finally, Pioneer is set to release a replacement for the acclaimed DV-747A before Christmas. The new flagship DV-757Ai will be the first universal player to use the new IEEE 1394/1 (FireWire) standard for outputting encrypted high-resolution multichannel audio (see Industry and Technology news, p12).

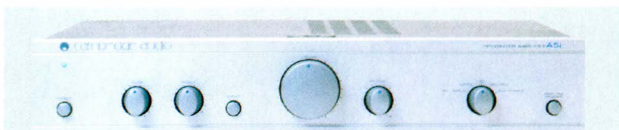
☎ Pioneer GB Ltd 01753 789789
 🌐 www.pioneer.co.uk

KEY FEATURES
 NS-DV1000
 ● Complete AV system compatible with DVD-Audio, SACD, DVD-Video, DVD-R, DVD-RW, CD-R, CD-RW, VCD, MP3

● Plays DVD-R/RW discs in Video Mode and Video Recording (VR) Mode

● Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS decoding

● Includes 5.1 channel amp and speakers



STARTER SOLUTION

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO'S BUDGET AMPLIFIER

➤ Budget super-brand Cambridge Audio has a new stereo amplifier it claims will redefine performance levels in its price category. The new AS1 replaces the existing A5 boasting an enhanced power supply courtesy of a larger transformer and increased power, up from 60 to 65 watts. Priced at £120 the new amplifier features an aluminium front plate with matching controls and a blue power LED. The new AS1 is expected in the shops in September.

☎ Richer Sounds PLC 0870 900 1000
 🌐 www.richersounds.co.uk

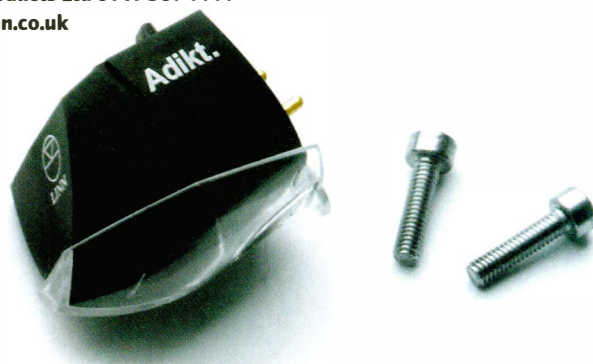
KEY FEATURES
 ● Minimalist audiophile topology
 ● 5 line inputs plus tape loop
 ● Buffered pre-out for bi-amping
 ● Low noise toroidal transformer

VINYL JUNKIE

LINN'S £200 MOVING MAGNET CARTRIDGE

➤ Ever wanted to live with an Adikt? Linn has made it possible with the launch of the new entry-level Adikt Moving Magnet cartridge. At £200 the new unit is claimed to offer a smooth and extended frequency response with superb trackability. Compatible with a wide range of tone arms, it also features a robust and replaceable stylus assembly and is said to offer audiophiles a "cost-effective means to sustain access to the world of accurate vinyl reproduction". The Adikt is available from specialist Linn dealers world-wide.

☎ Linn Products Ltd 0141 307 7777
 🌐 www.linn.co.uk





ACCORDING TO CHORD

NEW AV PROCESSOR TO BE UNVEILED AT THE AV EXPO SHOW 2002

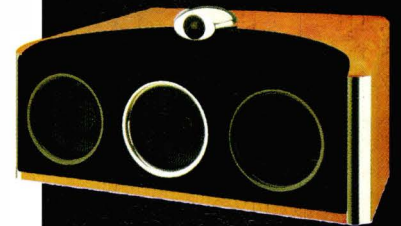
KEY FEATURES

- ⊕ Includes Chord's learning remote
- ⊕ 24-bit 96kHz A/D and D/A conversion
- ⊕ Dolby Digital, Pro Logic, Pro Logic II, Dolby EX, DTS, DTS ES, Neo 6, Neo 6: Cinema and Neo 6: Music formats

⊕ Anyone seeking high-end multichannel sound will be looking forward to 13 September, when Chord unveils its new £10,000 AV processor at the AV Expo show at London Heathrow. The new DSP 8000 is a fully specified 7.1 channel processor that claims to rise above the competition with two-channel performance. The processor is capable of running a fully balanced signal into a Chord power amp,

bypassing all digital circuits to give superior stereo performance from a multichannel set-up. Chord designer John Franks enthused: "I believe it is the first true high-end AV processor capable of fulfilling the requirements of the discerning hi-fi customer". The DSP 8000 will be hand-built to order with delivery expected in Autumn 2002. ☎ Chord Electronics 01622 721444 ☎ www.chordelectronics.co.uk

SOUND DESIGN by David Attwood is a new book on classic audio and hi-fi design that chronicles design evolution from the first radios of the 1940s to the present day. Sound design follows audio and hi-fi design decade by decade featuring over 200 colour pictures of the definitive design icons of each era. Also included is a directory of places to buy and sell classic hi-fi and a glossary of key terms. Sound design will be published on 19 September by Octopus priced at £20. ☎ 020 7531 8400



TANNOY has added a new centre speaker to its dimension range. The new Dimension TDC centre utilises Tannoy's WideBand technology with a frequency response that extends to 100kHz using Tannoy's 25mm titanium dome SuperTweeter. A 200mm dual concentric main driver and twin 200mm mid/bass drivers complete the cabinet make-up. The TDC centre is available now priced at £3,250. ☎ Tannoy 01236 420199

RUSS ANDREWS has a new range of mains extension blocks available with four, six or eight UK sockets. A choice of mains cable quality and length is on offer with the option to include a built-in silencer to suppress mains noise. Prices start at £150 for a four-way block fitted with a 1m Yello Power mains cable. ☎ 0800 373467

VINYL collectors will be pleased to learn about a new modular LP storage system called Format from Aphelion AV Concepts. The new storage system can be supplied in a range of wood veneers and features a 'no tools' 30-second assembly time. Prices start at £35 per module. ☎ 01604 409300



SUB CULTURE

B&W'S SUB HAT-TRICK

⊕ B&W has announced three new subwoofers. The final additions to the 600 Series are the ASW600, 650 and 675. The flagship ASW675 utilises a newly developed 250mm drive unit built in-house at B&W's Sussex factory and is driven by a full range 500 watt amp. These models replace the ASW1000 and all feature a range of facilities including speaker and line level connections and a low-pass filter defeat switch. Prices start at £400 with a choice of sorrento oak or black finish. ☎ B&W 01903 221800 ☎ www.bwspeakers.com

DAB GOES SUB-£100

PURE DIGITAL LAUNCHES WORLD'S FIRST SUB-£100 DAB DIGITAL RADIO

⊕ Digital Audio Broadcasting is set to reach a far wider audience this summer with the launch of the PURE EVOKE-1 DAB tuner priced at just £99. The long promised price point is now achievable using third generation DAB technology – a single-chip DAB/Audio processor, the Frontier Chorus FS1010. The chip, based on META technology is similar to a PC's CPU, allowing hundreds of tasks to be performed from a single processor. The EVOKE-1 is a standalone, portable unit with integrated loudspeaker, scrolling LCD text display and six station presets. The same chipset also features in PURE's new DRX-701ES DAB tuner, offering features such as USB connectivity for software upgrades, 99-station preset memory and a high sensitivity RF tuner module. The new DRX-701ES replaces the 601ES and is also down in price by £100 to £249. We can also confirm that VideoLogic Systems is changing its name to Pure Digital, to "reflect the changing nature of the division's product range". Pure Digital will continue to produce a wide range of consumer electronics and PC products with the VideoLogic name still being used for certain product categories. Both the EVOKE-1 and DRX-701ES should be in the shops by the time you're reading this. Expect a review of the EVOKE-1 next month. ☎ PURE Digital 01923 260 511 ☎ www.pure-digital.com



X-TUBE™

AIRCORE™ TECHNOLOGY SPEAKER CABLE



X-TUBE™ is a genuine breakthrough in loudspeaker cable design, the result of intensive research and development. All 3 models in the X-TUBE™ range utilise QEDs' unique, high resolution 'tubular conductor geometry' and are designed with one simple aim – to produce the very best performance possible from your hi-fi or home cinema system.

X-TUBE by QED, NATURALLY.



QED Audio Products Ltd.

† 01483 747474 e info@qed.co.uk w www.qed.co.uk

P U R E D E S I G N . P U R E P E R F O R M A N C E .

Soundbites

ERRATUM: the Martin Kleiser hi-fi shop, supplier of last month's System Addict set-up is in Beaconsfield Buckinghamshire, not Bedfordshire as we reported.
 ☎ 01494 681300



JM LAB has a new sub/ sat system with curvy cabinets. The Sib satellites and the Cub compact sub-woofer are available as a 5.1 channel package for £860, but can also be purchased separately for two-channel systems. The Sib with its C-shaped baffle, stands at just 250mm and features a 110mm synthetic cone, with a 19mm metalised plastic-dome tweeter. The Cub is a 300mm square cube with a 200mm synthetic cone that extends down to a claimed 33Hz.

☎ 0121 616 5126

READER CLASSIFIEDS ARE BACK!

Owing to popular demand we will be reinstating the classifieds section in *HFC*. Not only that, but all ads will be FREE! If you have any hi-fi kit to sell, submit your advert of up to twenty words remembering to include your name and phone number. Where possible, please email ads to:

dan.george@futurenet.co.uk

Alternatively, mail to:

Reader Classifieds, Hi-Fi Choice, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Ads will appear in one issue only unless re-submitted.

Hi-Fi diary

SEPTEMBER

6-8 Gothenburg Hi-Fi Show, Sweden
 13-15 The Hi-Fi Show and AV Expo
 London 020 8774 0847

OCTOBER

3-6 Stuff Live 2002, London
 020 8307 2300
 12-13 The Practical Hi-Fi Show,
 Manchester 01524 36991
 19-21 The VAD Hi-Fi Show,
 Netherlands a.neve@planet.nl

NOVEMBER

9-10 Dublin Hi-Fi & Home
 Cinema show
 Dublin 00 353 1 288 9449

STERLING EFFORT

ALL-NEW SILVER SERIES SPEAKER RANGE FROM MONITOR AUDIO

☎ Six new loudspeakers are set to roll out of the Essex-based Monitor Audio factory this summer. The all-new Silver Series speakers include new drivers with larger cones and redesigned cabinets. New C-CAM (Ceramic Coated Aluminium Magnesium alloy) drivers are said to be more powerful with lower distortion and improved frequency response. A new Silver 'S' tweeter, based on the brand's 25mm C-CAM Gold Dome unit now extends to 30kHz, a full 5kHz above the previous model. Monitor Audio's Technical Director Dean Hartley said: "Every single aspect of the range was analysed, we could have improved what we had, but instead we decided to design a whole new range from the ground up."

The new range comprises three floorstanders, two standmounts and a centre, with the £300 two-way S1 starting the line-up. Available in a variety of veneers, the first model due for release is the two-way S6 floor-stander (pictured) priced at £600.

☎ Monitor Audio 01268 740580
 www.monitoraudio.co.uk



ANNIVERSARY RUN

LIMITED EDITION CLS SPEAKER TO COMMEMORATE 20TH ANNIVERSARY

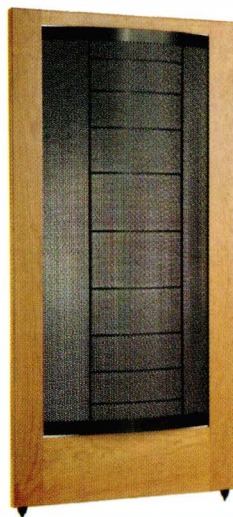
☎ In honour of Martin Logan's 20th anniversary this year, the Kansas based manufacturer has announced a limited edition run of the CLS

speaker system first manufactured in 1986. The speaker is ML's second design to employ the curvilinear line source (CLS) electrostatic technology, said to be capable of reproducing the entire audio spectrum from a single curved electrostatic transducer. The new CLS Ilz is near identical

to the original yet includes improvements to the crossover, panel construction and power supply design. It's handmade and available in a variety of

hand-finished hardwood options, with each pair being supplied with a plaque commemorating the 20th anniversary. The CLS' 17-year production run is set to end on December 31st 2002. Price and availability of the special limited edition speaker has yet to be confirmed.

☎ Absolute Sounds 020 8971 3909



DIGITAL SONNETEER
 SONNETEER REFRESHES BRONTË RANGE

☎ Bespoke British hi-fi manufacturer Sonneteer has added two new products to its existing Brontë range. The £700 Brontë CD player comes with a remote control and sports a 24-bit/96 kHz DAC.

The new one-bit £800 Brontë digital amp is claimed to be the only 'affordable' model to feature class T digital amplification – a highly efficient, wide bandwidth technology. With claimed 96 per cent efficiency, the new amp is remote controllable and offers 150 watts into four ohms.

☎ FTM marketing 020 8286 6661
 www.sonneteer.com



SECURE DIGITAL LINK

Pioneer's forthcoming DV-757Ai will be its first product with an industry-approved link offering digital transfer of wide-band audio to other components. The IEEE 1394/i.Link connection is a variation on the Firewire interface and provides a secure connection for all forms of digital audio up to 24/192 two-channel or multichannel 24/96 – the bit/over-sampling rates for DVD-Audio. It will also support compressed formats such as DTS, Dolby Digital and MP3.

RIAA TO SUE SWAPPERS

The music industry is set to get tough with music file sharers – even if they make no profit from the action. The RIAA (Record Industry Association of America) is reportedly planning to sue individuals it considers to be the largest MP3 sharers. The record industry claims CD

piracy has risen by 50 per cent in the last year, causing a five per cent downturn in profits.

How these individuals will be identified is just one of many problems in this process – the biggest is whether or not it is actually an infringement of copyright.

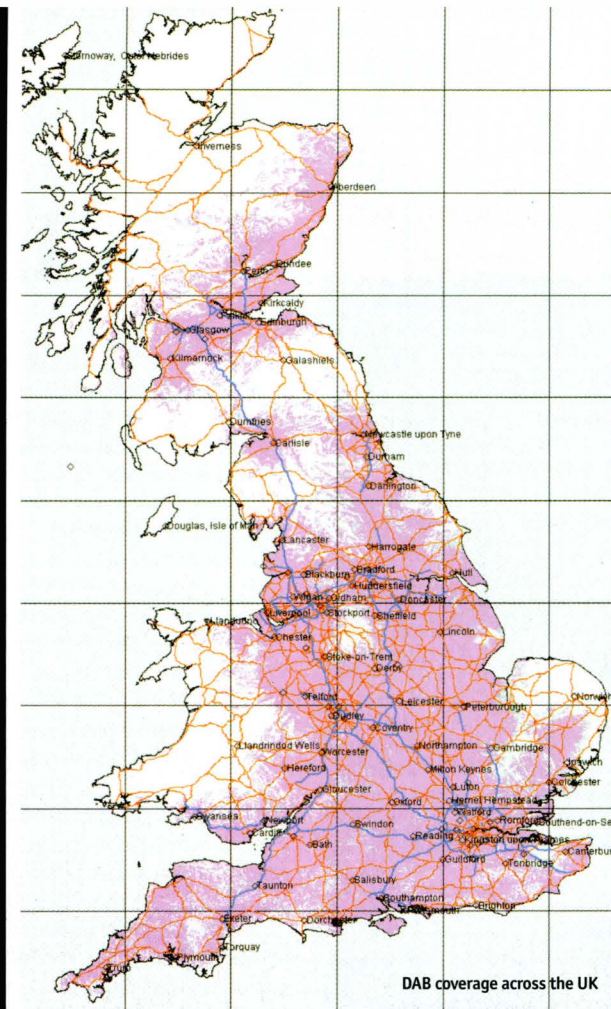
SPECIALISTS INHERIT STEREO

Big names in the audio business are moving out of stereo because they're not selling as well as AV equipment. But this could leave more room for small, specialist firms to improve their share of the market. Kenwood is to discontinue stereo separates, Pioneer stopped designing CD players three years ago and Marantz's European marketing manager recently described two-channel as "dead as a dog".

But this trend should leave more space for specialist brands such as Arcam which saw its highest CD player sales ever last year and finds this has driven sales of its mid to high-end amps.



Arcam FMJ CD23T



DAB coverage across the UK

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH DAB

DAB continues its roll-out across the country. The latest addition to the independent Digital One radio network are new transmitters in Redruth, Cornwall, Exeter and Brighton, along with Angus and Darvel in Scotland.

DVD-A PRICE DROP

Warner Brothers, the largest record company behind fledgling format DVD-Audio has given a boost to the medium in the US by cutting prices to the trade. Amazon.com is now selling all Warner titles for \$14.99, a price comparable to CD. A spokesman for Warner Music International says that the rest of the world should be seeing a price cut in the autumn.



NEXT-GEN DVD CHIPS

Chip specialist ESS is to incorporate decoding for AAC into its next generation of DVD processing chipsets. AAC is a music industry approved alternative to MP3 that offers higher audio quality in files that are 30 per cent smaller. It is backed by Dolby, Sony and AT&T among others.

Incorporating AAC technology

into DVD players will mean that playback of downloaded material becomes easier and as a result should aid the uptake of the format. However, with other DVD chips offering MP3 decoding, and this well-established format still offering tremendous access to 'free' music, AAC has a way to go before it gains a strong foothold.



Handspring with XiVA

PALM-SIZE JUKEBOX

CONTROL ALL YOUR MUSIC WITH YOUR PDA

More and more companies are adopting Imerge's XiVA and Soundserver technologies for their next generation multi-room products, allowing music and video material to be stored, accessed and managed on hard disc from anywhere in the house. QED is the latest to sign up, incorporating Imerge's hard disc 'jukebox' into its Systemline range. Imerge has also expanded its XiVA Tacta software so that you can use a PDA (like the Handspring model above) to remotely control your Soundserver via infrared link. There was a time when any big install would be based on a 200 or 400 disc autochanger but hard disc storage could shortly become the norm.

☎ Imerge 01954 783600

FIREBALL XL THRIVES

SINGLE DRIVER AND STORAGE SOLUTION

The new Fireball music control centre from US-based Escent Convergence combines hard disc storage with the ability to 'drive' external sources such as multi-disc players, download MP3 files and play Internet radio. Designed to integrate with multi-room home control systems such as Crestron and AMX, as well as audio

components from Marantz, Kenwood and Sony, the Fireball aims to provide a massive audio supply on-tap with a 700-hour MP3 (128Kbps) capacity. And if that weren't enough you can network the controllers for even greater flexibility and capacity. Pricing looks set to be around £2,100.

☎ See Hear 01795 597590

ROCK MUSIC

GARDEN SPEAKERS

Now that the garden is 'another room', it makes sense to have speakers there as well. And what better way to assimilate them than to disguise them as rocks! Terrasic Stone makes weatherproof speakers for all your rock garden requirements. Reports of speakers disguised as garden gnomes, fairies and flowerpot men have yet to be confirmed.

☎ Garden Light & Audio 01892 619319



HIGH RES VIDEO TAPE

JVC'S D-THEATER DIGITAL VHS SYSTEM IS COMING

The first example of JVC's 'D-theater' in the UK – a digital VHS high definition (HD) video player – caused a stir at this year's show. D-Theater HD software will be recorded in the D-VHS HS (high speed data rate) mode, an optional recording mode on D-VHS recorders that can capture HDTV broadcasts, currently only available in the US.

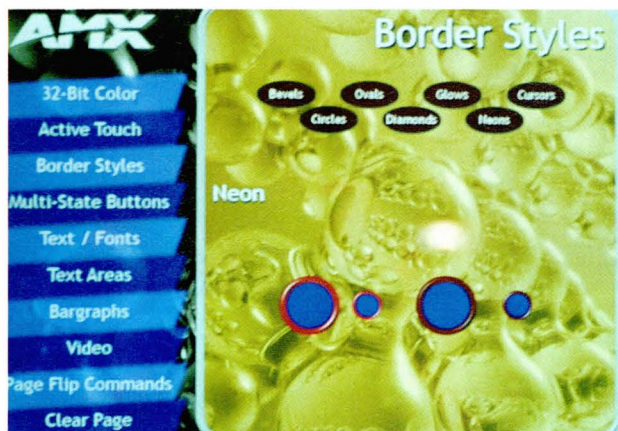
To make D-Theatre attractive to the film industry JVC has incorporated an encryption system into the format that seems to have got the ball rolling on the software front. Four

audiofile

CEDIA SHOW REPORT



The home installation specialists' annual expo in Brighton showed off all sorts of fancy new nick-nacks for wiring up your fully integrated home entertainment system. Jason Kennedy was there.



FEEL THE COLOUR

NEXT GEN CONTROL SCREEN

The TP14 is a new generation touch screen driver with superior graphics, sound and functions, launched by control panel specialist AMX. It offers 32-bit colours, four video windows, animated graphics and buttons, and even sound effects to go with those buttons. It's designed to run anything from high-end AV systems to complete heating, lighting and 'window treatments' (curtains), not forgetting Internet access, naturally. Photoshop-style programming gives the user a wealth of graphic options and there's the option to connect to third party touch screens for maximum flexibility. But it's flexibility at a price – the control system and software will retail for £6,000.

☎ AMX UK 01904 343100



of the big studios are already behind the format: Universal, Artisan, Dreamworks and Warner Brothers, with more set to follow.

The system's DVD-busting appeal is its 28.1 Mbps data rate for video (compared with DVD's maximum of 11.08 Mbps) and a higher 576Kbps bit rate for Dolby Digital (DVD is 448 Kbps), so if you have

an AV set-up that's up to the job the quality will make your local cinema look and sound shabby.

Software pricing looks to be in the region of £25 and titles currently available Stateside include *X-Men*, *Terminator 2*, *U-571* and the classic *Bikini Destinations!* JVC's D-VHS recorders start at £1,000.

☎ JVC 0870 330 5000

Incoming

First tests of essential new kit from hi-fi's front line



★★★★

Sony DVP-NS705 DVD/SACD player £250 EXCLUSIVE

At just £250, the DVP-NS705 represents almost the entry-level for Sony DVD players, yet it also comes with multichannel SACD playback. The design is taller than current credit card-slim DVD players, but feels easier to control – wafer-thin DVD players can be too slim to operate for many fingers. It has the clean lines and ergonomics of most Sony products, with all the main controls on the right side of the central display and disc drawer. The remote is a sea of grey buttons and could do with a backlight, but is functional. Similarly, the rear panel needs an extra Scart socket and component video outputs but at the price something had to give.

The DVP-NS705 behaves itself as a CD player. It may not have the dynamic range or the rhythmic coherence of a dedicated CD player, but it is extremely detailed and bounces along nicely in a kind of light, breezy manner. The shake-your-neighbours-foundations dub of *19/2000* by Spacemonkeyz vs Gorillaz

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ CD/DVD-Video/SACD player
- ▶ Full function remote control
- ▶ Single disc unit
- ▶ Multichannel SACD decoding through 5.1 outputs
- ▶ Dolby Digital/DTS decoding through 5.1 outputs
- ▶ Electrical/optical digital outputs
- ▶ Single Scart socket with RGB output
- ▶ Composite, S-Video outputs

lacks some of the subsonic energy used to turn house parties into street parties. However, it is not bright and has decent stereo separation, making a good fist of difficult piano pieces like the 1950s Glenn Gould Bach pieces.

With SACD music discs, the multichannel sound really begins to come into its own. Johann Fux's *Rondeau* on the *Exceptional Masterpieces* disc gives that uncanny in-the-room feeling, with the accuracy and sense of flow required by early music played on period instruments. This disc also has two-channel SACD and CD tracks as well as multichannel sound, so it allows you to compare the three side by side. Ultimately, multichannel SACD wins out, just because it puts you 'there', but the tonality and detail of stereo SACD against CD is easy to spot throughout.

Then there's DVD. While the picture quality is crisp and vivid, you can get sharper and more detailed pictures from more up-market players. At the price,

though, the images are exceptionally clean and detailed. Likewise the sound is a bit puffy in the bass through the 5.1 outputs, especially on DTS – Arnie sounds more chunky than muscular in *T2* – but through the digital outputs, the sound is on par for the money.

With so comprehensive a spec sheet at such a low price, the DVP-NS705V was bound to be interesting and it's amazing how well it delivers on all fronts. It opens SACD to a whole new audience; now it's time to get some SACDs into the shops, so all those who buy it as a budget DVD player can appreciate the full range of its talents.

☎ Sony 08705 111999

🌐 www.sony.co.uk

MASS MARKET SACD

It seems yesterday when the first multichannel SACD player was launched and it cost thousands. Unofficially, this confirmed SACD's status as a high-end music carrier format for the consumer. But Sony knows a more mainstream audience is crucial if the format is to survive and thrive. To this end the company has introduced integrated 5.1 channel DVD mini systems with SACD (such as the £800 DAV-S800). And while the company still lists top-flight two-channel-only SACD players – the flagship SCD1 for example – nowadays virtually any DVD player from Sony comes with multichannel SACD playback as well.

“With so comprehensive a spec sheet at such a low price, the DVP-NS705V was bound to be interesting and it's amazing how well it delivers on all fronts.”



★★★★★

NHT SuperAudio SB1 speakers **£299** EXCLUSIVE

➤ Pint-sized it may be, but the glossy NHT SB1 has plenty to offer. The Stateside brand recently launched this diminutive speaker in the UK, a market increasingly demanding of svelte and stylish products to discreetly operate in modern lounges. NHT has been around since 1986, claiming its musical priorities lie with transparency and accuracy. Not a bad take on things – and something it has certainly achieved with the SB1. For die-hard black fans, the cabinet has a glorious deep gloss finish with a stylish rounded-edge look. Driver fit and finish is spot-on and at the back there are twin binding posts and threads for wall mount brackets.

Its tiny dimensions mean there's a minimum of cabinet influence on the sound, in fact the most striking thing the SB1 offers is its clean and open midband. Both tweeter and bass/mid driver are very well integrated and there is little to criticise in the midrange at

this price. The treble is clean and open, only complaining when pushed hard with challenging electronic music. As you might imagine with such a small driver, box and no reflex port, bass depth is limited. It's a fairly lean sounding-box overall, and bass lovers might consider adding NHT's matching subwoofer. But where it really impresses is with its speed and accuracy, providing strong and stable imaging with a smidgen of toe-in. Forgive the lean presentation and the little NHT will shame many big-name competitors in the crucial timing and transparency stakes, so much so it warrants five *Incoming* stars at the price.

☎ Peach Amber 01327 706560
 🌐 www.nhthifi.com



KEY FEATURES

- Two-way sealed box design
- 130mm polypropylene bass/mid driver
- 'SuperAudio' 25mm metal dome tweeter
- Frequency response: 68Hz- 22kHz +/-3dB
- Impedance: 8 ohms
- Dimensions: 160x260x170mm (WxHxD)
- Finishes: Black or white high gloss piano lacquer
- Wall mountable
- Magnetically shielded

★★★★★

Arcam DiVA T61 AM/FM tuner **£250**

➤ With digital radio (DAB) tuners set to fall below £100 over the summer, FM, although not without its advocates, has got its work cut out. Fortunately, Arcam is proving there's life in the old analogue dog yet, with the new DiVA T61. Not only does it look truly gorgeous in Arcam black or silver, it boasts a few nice touches that help fight the FM corner.

The RDS with RadioText feature, a first for the brand, gives scrolling station information if there is adequate signal strength – indicated by an LED icon on the display. This can provide

KEY FEATURES

- Twin audio outputs
- RDS and RadioText
- Dimmable display
- 12V trigger
- Voltage switching (for overseas use)
- Signal strength meter
- FM: 30 presets
- AM: 16 presets
- Dimensions: 430x85x290mm (WxHxD)
- Remote control

artist, programme and DJ details, phone-in numbers and such like. Also boasting twin audio outputs (think multi-room), the T61 has a 12-volt trigger jack and is claimed by Arcam to be its most sensitive model yet. The price tag includes a remote control which, though a touch tricky to use due to the reflective rounded buttons, can also control other Arcam components.

Dynamically, the T61 fares slightly better than some of the more expensive competition. Its sound is just a touch

on the relaxed side, which can be beneficial with speech, removing the kind of sibilance often associated with broadcast. With a good FM signal, the T61 performs well and sounds clear and detailed, with an attractive warmth DAB struggles to emulate. FM still makes a lot of sense for radio lovers and this tuner's mix of high quality build, facilities and sound make a tempting mix at £250.

☎ Arcam 01223 203200
 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk



marantz®



Experience the emotion - Total Eclipse!

The new Marantz Eclipse range is a stylish and versatile hi-fi system encompassing elegant, refined design and up-to-the-minute technology. The latest musical innovations, such as MP3 playback and rewritable CD, can be mixed and matched to form a sleek yet dynamic sound system. Proof indeed that you really can have beauty and intelligence.

Eclipse - get a glimpse at your local Marantz dealer.



Tel. 01753 680868 Internet: www.marantz.com

because music matters



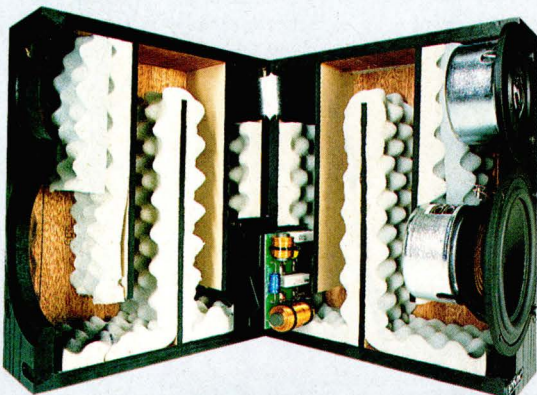
PMc DB1 speakers £555 EXCLUSIVE

Thirteen months of development is, by anyone's standards, a pretty long time. But then PMC's new DB1 is no ordinary speaker. It's claimed to be the world's smallest transmission line design – a construction method designed to extract maximum bass depth and dynamics with minimum distortion from, in this instance, a small driver and cabinet. This is no easy feat and because there's no computer software to aid design, the DB1 has been kept in R&D longer than we might have hoped – it had been slated for an April launch but only now is it making the shops. Transmission line speakers are not particularly common in audiophile circles, but the DB1 is aimed at both studio and home environments with more than a few pairs replacing the ageing monitors in some of the BBC's studios.

Based around the same drivers as the excellent FB1 floorstander, the little DB1's 140mm doped paper driver and 25mm alloy tweeter are squeezed into a compact cabinet dressed in a fine wood veneer. Build quality is excellent – it has to be to live up the demands of

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Two-way, full transmission line, mini monitor
- ▶ Frequency range: 50Hz-25kHz
- ▶ Sensitivity: 87dB
- ▶ 140mm LF Doped bass/mid driver
- ▶ 25mm aluminium alloy wide dispersion tweeter
- ▶ Two pairs 4mm binding posts
- ▶ Dimensions: 155x290x234mm (WxHxD)
- ▶ Finishes: Cherry, oak, black ash, studio black
- ▶ Available with shielded drivers (£50 extra per pair)
- ▶ Wall mountable



TRANSMISSION LINE SPEAKERS

Though notoriously difficult to implement to audiophile standards, transmission line speakers have a number of benefits over reflex-loaded designs. Relatively high sound pressure levels can be obtained from small drivers and compact enclosures, with increased bass depth and low distortion. It involves incorporating a long folded 'tube', lined with acoustic foam in the case of the DB1, behind the bass/mid driver. As sound waves travel through the tube the foam absorbs the higher frequencies while lower bass frequencies emerge from a vent at the rear of the cabinet. Exceptionally deep and clean bass is the intended result.

studio life after all. Twin binding posts for bi-wiring reside at the rear and just above these is space for attaching PMC's high-mass wall bracket for those with limited space.

The new DB1 can be used in both two and multichannel applications – its extended family, the TB2 standmount, FB1 floorstander and TLE1 active subwoofer all have a matched tonal balance. The DB1's tweeter is a wide dispersion design that's equally as useful in the home as it is in the studio. Its aim is to create a stereo 'sweet spot' that's broader than with conventional designs, so you and a couple of friends can enjoy a good stereo image even if you get stuck on the end of the couch.

Don't let the DB1's dinky stature fool you, this box goes loud. The sound is big, weighty and seemingly highly efficient, frankly hard to believe from such a small enclosure. The soundstage is huge – broad and open with very stable imaging that makes for an engaging performance. Treble has an explicit quality – PMC claims to have spent a very long time sourcing the metal dome tweeter and it's time

obviously well spent. The midband is equally absorbing, laid back but revealing with excellent timing and an unerring ear for detail. Put this box on the end of a transparent amplifier and it gives undergarment-disturbing insight into the music, to a degree that's rare at this kind of price.

But what of that transmission line loaded bass? Certainly, it goes deeper than you'd expect from a speaker of this size, and it's smoother than can be the case with some reflex (port) loaded designs. But on the minus side it sometimes lacks the solidity and definition one might hope for, particularly compared to some of the more agile standmounts around at similar price points, like Dynaudio's Audience 52.

Playing Radiohead's bass-loaded *Pulk/Pull Revolving Doors*, everything sounded great apart from deep bass, which was oddly slow and disjointed. Yet there's a huge amount to admire in what PMC has achieved with the DB1, and if the price is right you'd be mad not to give it a listen.

PMC Limited 0870 444 1044
www.pmc-speakers.com



Linn Classik Movie System One-box DVD/Receiver **£1,995**

It's not every day that Linn Products unveils a completely new format to complement its range of highly respected LP and CD products. But this time, Linn has not taken the top-notch source followed by trickle-down cheaper components approach it's used in the past; Linn's first DVD player comes with an integrated multichannel AV amplifier... and more.

The more includes a tasty AM/FM tuner (not quite a Linn Pekin, but no slouch either), Linn multiroom communications and – horrors – treble and bass controls. The multiroom environment is a variant of Linn's Knekt system, designed to run up to four slave Classik systems to a master Classik Movie. It has some funky multiroom modes too, including the brilliantly-named 'Party Poop' for those who want to opt out of a five-way amp fest. It delivers a healthy 75 watts (to a four ohm load) to each of five channels. It even comes in a choice of five colours – black, white, silver, pale green and pale blue.

This plug and play system focuses on ease of use. The remote is readily understandable, the manual is a model of clarity and the on-screen and front panel displays all combine to make set-up and use a doddle for all bar the most Luddite of technophobes.

Although it may be a one-box unit, don't mistake the performance of the Classik Movie System with that of the plethora of all-in-one home cinema systems you get in supermarkets – it is much, much better than that. It has some of the impact, pace and tidy dryness of the typical Linn sound and more hi-fi level dynamic range than any of the other integrated devices. And this applies to DVD and CD alike – for a DVD player, it is one of the best at playing CDs around (as you might expect from a company with the heritage of Linn). CD replay brings out the musicality and rhythm of any disc.

The Dolby Digital and DTS 5.1 channel sound is extremely crisp and the difference between the two formats

is abundantly clear on DVDs like *Terminator 2* – Dolby is good, but DTS is fantastic. Although the sound is dry and sounds are locked to the boxes, it takes hold of the speakers with the kind of steely grip normally only obtained from good separates components.

Two holes in the spec sheet rankle. The DVD player cannot output component video – the UK version has two Scart sockets, but they only support composite and S-Video. More significantly, the surround sound modes are only supported on the DVD/CD player; the built-in tuner and the auxiliary line or tape loop can only play in stereo. Fine if you use audio-only sources, but not so hot if you want to dig up the Dolby Surround of a TV or video source.

It's also not cheap – with £2,000 you could obtain even better performance and facilities from a well chosen DVD player and AV receiver. But would they look this neat? No, not a chance.

Linn Products 0500 888909
www.classik.com

“Don't mistake the performance of the Classik Movies system with that of the plethora of all-in-one home cinema systems – it is much, much better.”

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ CD/DVD/ multi-channel receiver system
- ▶ Dolby Digital, DTS and three-channel stereo modes (on CD/DVD only)
- ▶ 75 watts per channel (four ohm load)
- ▶ Line input and tape loop
- ▶ AM/FM tuner with 200 preset channels
- ▶ Multiroom connections for up to four extra Classiks



ONE-BOX WONDERS

DVD may be the most rapidly adopted new format of all time, but the majority of those buying into it just stick their player under the telly and play back audio through the TV's regular speakers, thus missing out on one of the format's great benefits – digital surround sound. The best option is to buy good quality AV amplification and speakers, but one-box home cinema products offer a convenient step-up solution. Linn's Classik Movie System is the very best of the breed – a beautifully neat product that's great for when a plethora of facilities or things like DVD-A/SACD playback are unimportant.



★★★★☆

Denon 201 style system £800

Denon has designed the 201 system to sound like classic Denon full-sized components – specifically, the CD is voiced like a DCD-835 and the amplifier is designed to perform like a PMA-255UK. And Denon knows a thing or three about budget tuners, too. Instead of using beefed-up mini-system technology, Denon's system sports scaled-down hi-fi electronics, such as independent power supplies. Aside from the optional £200 tape deck or £300 MiniDisc player, a pair of two-way speakers complete the line-up. These, too, are custom-voiced to match the 201 system, but

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ DCD 201 single disc CD player (£250)
- ▶ Optical digital output
- ▶ PMA 201 integrated amplifier (£250)
- ▶ 2x40 watts
- ▶ Three line, two tape inputs
- ▶ TU 201 tuner (£150)
- ▶ FM/LW/MW tuner with 20 preset channels and RDS
- ▶ SCM 201 loudspeakers (£150)
- ▶ 25mm soft dome tweeter
- ▶ 130mm fibreglass bass unit

this time by speaker expert Mission.

The combination of Mission midband bounce and Denon's no-nonsense approach to hi-fi makes for an alluring sound. It is not supremely detailed, but is always musical, especially with simply recorded music such as Nick Drake's folk-rock. Classical music lacks scale, however, though the sound is well balanced. Overall, the system is slightly pinched sounding, but otherwise disappears like good hi-fi should. Even the tuner picks up virtually noise-free stations from even the weakest aerial.

People purchasing systems like these

are unlikely to be the sort to commit to full-sized hi-fi separates yet, but the fact is you could buy a trio of full-sized Denon components and a pair of Mission speakers and undercut the list price of the 201 kit by several hundreds. This will sound better, but obviously lacks the style and the functionality of the 201 system.

The benefits of Denon's 201 are that it offers system style and convenience with *very nearly* separates sound quality. A great choice for the bedroom perhaps, or where space is limited.

Hayden Labs 01753 888447

www.denon.co.uk

★★★★★

Lehmann Audio Black Cube SE MM/MC phono stage £400 EXCLUSIVE

It's a wonderful time for record collectors. Sales of vinyl are going up for the first time in a decade. Those turntables and cartridges that are left are fantastic and fine add-on phono stages proliferate. The Lehmann Black Cube is a perfect example.

This is an inline phono stage, with a set of inputs on one side and two outputs on the other. In its SE guise, the Black Cube links to the PWX power supply with a 30VA toroidal transformer via a single lead. On the underside of the Black Cube are two sets of DIP switches that allow you to set the phono stage to match the MM or MC cartridge. The Cube itself is a passive RIAA stage with two op-amp driven amplifier stages. The passive RIAA stage is said to prevent phase errors.

This is fine stuff, capable of punching

far above its weight. It is so musical and precise, with powerfully solid images within a 3D hologram of a soundstage. Even the cavernous bass of Bassomatic's *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Bass* (you get the picture) is deep, powerful and controlled, yet it also has the dynamics to cope with Casals' *Bach Cello Suites*.

On listening to a product, if the only criticism you can come up with is that it's unattractive looking, you know you are on to a winner. If you have a good deck, it deserves the Black Cube SE.

Hi-Fi For Sale 0870 241 2469

www.hififorsale.com



KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Moving Coil/Moving Magnet phono stage
- ▶ Passive RIAA stage
- ▶ Optional PWX power supply
- ▶ DIP switches for MC loading



A3.2 SERIES.
MACHINED, MIL-SPEC ALUMINIUM FRONT PANEL.
PLATINUM PLATED FITTINGS. REMOTE CONTROLLED. PHONO STAGE.
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Eclipse TD508PA stereo amp/speaker system £1,175

➤ In truth, most stereo is not that ground-breaking – much of it obeys very definite rules. Speakers are usually rectangular wooden cabinets with traditional drivers on one face and amplifiers are 17-inch wide affairs with a plethora of inputs and a volume knob. But now it's time to chuck out that rule book – the Eclipse TD508 is here.

The system arrives in a mini system-sized box. Inside are two teardrop-shaped speakers, a conical amplifier and all the cables needed to get the kit up and running. The amp has no source switching – you can only feed it with a

IMPORTANCE OF IMPULSE

It sounds like a TV advert for deodorant, but to Eclipse, impulse is everything. The design of the speaker enclosure (with its teardrop shape, lack of crossover network and floating enclosure) and the amplifier (which is simply a volume control and a power amp chip) are to keep the impulse response of the system as accurate as possible. This speed of impulse is achieved even at the expense of a flat frequency response; Eclipse suggests that by getting the frequency response of a speaker correct, but ignoring the time domain, creates speakers that can never sound like the real instruments.

single line source, like a CD player or a line feed from a mixing desk or PC. The speakers, with their tiny 8cm full-range drivers need to sit in free space and are very definitely designed to work in a small room. Everything about the system has been designed to address the issue of time-domain in audio reproduction; even the speaker cables, which are so thin they make bell wire look like the QE2's tow rope.

It would be easy to underestimate and dismiss the Eclipse TD508 as a bit of a gimmick. Don't. What it offers is devastating insight into a recording, making unparalleled levels of information retrieval. The speakers point source behaviour coupled with their time domain accuracy makes them effectively disappear. So, play a well-recorded disc, like Bruce Springsteen's *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* or Starsailor's *Love Is Here*, and it sounds like there is a quiet live act playing in the corner. The attack of acoustic guitar strings and drum kits becomes especially understandable; you can hear the difference between makes of acoustic guitar and even grades of steel strings being used – it's that detailed. There are headroom issues – it simply won't play at ear-splitting levels – but many will trade balls-out volume for recording studio insight. What's

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Time domain faithful amp/speaker system
- ▶ Bizarre conical amplifier (volume knob at top of cone)
- ▶ 12 watts per channel
- ▶ single line input only
- ▶ Teardrop-shaped free-space speakers
- ▶ 8cm full-range drive unit
- ▶ Decoupled drive unit
- ▶ Integrated speaker mount, floor stands optional
- ▶ Speaker cables supplied

more, within its volume threshold, the sound produced is so dynamic, intelligible and clean that it feels like you've just plugged a CD player right into your ears.

This uncompromising clarity redefines the phrase 'double-edged' sword in hi-fi reproduction. Take a poor recording and the sound is horrible. At worst, it sounds as if the speakers are about to die screaming for release. You quickly begin to remember that this system has a non-flat frequency response as over-engineered bass tones either disappear or threaten to make the cones pop out and land in your lap. *19/2000* by Spacemonkeyz vs Gorillaz, for example, can only be played at a whisper lest it sends the cones into tachycardia, but even quietly you lose entire bass beats.

Ultimately, although it's a tough hurdle to get over, this is not simply a fault of the system; blame lies with the studio engineers that mix discs in the first place. If every studio on the planet mastered recordings using the Eclipse set-up for near-field monitoring, we'd get better, if perhaps bass-light, CDs. The Eclipse TD508 takes an uncompromising stance toward music, if only the recording industry would follow suit.

☎ Eclipse TD (UK) 020 7328 4499
🌐 www.eclipse-td.co.uk





Supports round-up

A few ideas for the most important pieces of furniture in your home



Atacama SE6 £100/pair

(plus 2x Atabites @ £20 per tub)

▶ This is effectively the replacement for Britain's most popular budget speaker stand, Atacama's SE24. Basic construction is similar, welding two U-section panels together to form a large central pillar, but there's an extra (hidden) steel baseplate, a smaller top plate, and the column is now attractively tapered.

Our flat-pack samples cost £100/pair for silver or graphite gloss, though a textured matt black is available for £90. Two tubs of Atabites high density filler were supplied with the review samples along with spikes for the base.

Sonically the SE6 proved a trifle disappointing. The bottom end is pretty clean, deep and free from 'thump', but the midband seems distinctly laid-back, lacking detail projection in the presence band in particular. This seems to smooth off leading edges, rendering voices in general and speech in particular just that little bit nasal and lacking in intelligibility.

☎ Atacama 01455 283251

🌐 www.atacama-audio.co.uk



Partington ANSA 60 £90/pair (plus £7 Toppers)

▶ In the super-competitive world of speaker stands, Partington has found the ANSA (sorry!) to bringing its entirely British stands to market for less than £100 per pair. Unlike close relative Dreadnought (see *HFC* 220), this £90 stand normally comes flat-packed. Elegant in charcoal or silver, a cast base with a generous footprint supports four slim tubular pillars linked by a steel web. Little self-adhesive Toppers to stick on the top surface cost £7 for six.

The impressive thing about this stand is its tendency to 'disappear' sonically. It delivers a sound which is notably restrained and laid-back, which might not suit every taste and system, and one can also accuse the bass of being a little lightweight. But it deftly avoids the thumpy thickening and colorations that other inexpensive stands bring to the party, and simply gets out of the way and lets the music do its thing. Lightweight, yes, but also very coherent and deft.

☎ Partington 01474 709299

🌐 www.partingtonspeakerstands.com



Soundstyle XT-122 £120/pair

▶ Available in silver or onyx (charcoal), this £120 flat-pack 570mm stand is built around a large-section ellipsoid pillar, taken from a rib-reinforced alloy extrusion. This is bolted between thick, flat, top and bottom plates, with the recommendation that the pillars be half-filled with some sort of damping material. Chrome floor spikes fix into round chrome bosses attached to the baseplate, while 'stud' spikes are screwed into the small top plate.

Sonically this is a tidy and mostly neutral sounding stand which delivers the sort of sound quality one's entitled to expect for a price that's just above the budget zone. The broad midband is very well handled, with little additional coloration, though the bass is a little less happy, with some lack of authority and thickening of textures, while the top end suffers a slight lack of ultimate incisiveness. On balance this is a good looking and decent sounding stand at a very realistic price.

☎ Veda-UK 01279 501111

🌐 www.veda-uk.co.uk

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ChoiceCuts



Our favourite musical morsels, old and new

Reviews by Tim Bower, Jim Findlay, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver

NEW MUSIC FORMATS



BEN ALLISON & MEDICINE WHEEL

Riding The Nuclear Tiger

DVD-Audio

Hi-Res Music HRM 2007

Music: One-time avant-garde alumnus Ben Allison plays acoustic bass, and Medicine Wheel do the rest, including sax, clarinet, trumpet, flugelhorn, piano, cello and drums. The style of this contemporary American jazz group's music owes much to Zappa in his Grand Wazoo period and just a little to the Lounge Lizards in their less abrasive moments.

It's rhythmically innovative but never strays far from the groove, seeking out new angles on classic riffs with an upbeat sound. **★★★★**

Sound: The 48kHz/20-bit original may limit the absolute potential with this disc but it's beautifully open and strong, with plenty of space for the instruments to breath – a good excuse, if any were needed, to get into DVD-A.

★★★★ JK



BJÖRK

Vespertine

DVD-Audio

Elektra

Music: Composed in Iceland and recorded in a New York loft with a diverse melange of musicians ranging from eclectic house impresario Matthew Herbert and Polish drum 'n' bass DJ

Bogdan Raczynski, *Vespertine* is a significantly quieter album than previous creations from this inventive performer. It stretches musical boundaries without breaking into dissonance and goes to places more ethereal than major artists have dared tread in many years. It's closest relatives aren't too close but include recent Radiohead and fellow Icelanders Sigur Rós. There is an unusual intimacy about the songs here, her oft fragile but intrinsically strong voice plays the vulnerable card with truly powerful effect. A shiny and beautiful record. **★★★★**

Sound: This is a delicate and esoteric recording that abounds in subtlety and there's no doubt that you'll need a decent system to appreciate it fully, but it's highly atmospheric and real with some wind chimes especially that warrant super-tweeting. **★★★★ JK**

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO 6

San Francisco Orchestra, Michael Tilson

Thomas (cond)

SACD multichannel hybrid

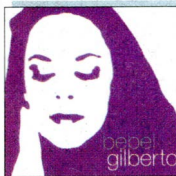
San Francisco Symphony B21936-0001-2

Music: Mahler's *Tragic* symphony is a violent and concentrated maelstrom, one that never fails to engage both the intellect and the emotions at the

most fundamental level. The symphony showcases what has come to be known as that perhaps most Mahlerian device: the famous three 'hammer-blows of fate' in the finale, the last of which falls the eponymous hero of the piece, Mahler himself – blows which were eerily echoed by real-life events. The sixth is a purely symphonic work, and along with the *Ninth Symphony* and *The Song Of The Earth*, is from the very peak of his oeuvre. **★★★★**

Sound: Recorded live as a tribute immediately after the events of 9/11, the sound is radiant, with a warmth and passion that perfectly reflects the rapt and concentrated performance. If you want a disc that displays the emotive power of classical music, this is the one. **★★★★ AG**

CD/VINYL



BEBEL GILBERTO

Tanto Tempo

eastwest/Crammed

Music: Effortlessly sensual, hypnotically soothing, the bossa nova princess's mix of traditional Brazilian styles with modern electronics should help keep the winter blues at bay. On this re-release of her only album she hooks up with everyone from The Thievery Corporation to Beastie Boys producer Mario Caldato Jr for the epitome of the chilled-out vibe. Her voice is calmer, and arguably a more deft instrument than her famous mother's (Miúcha) and the effect is a warm coconut balm for the ears – sexy and sinuous, smooth as melting chocolate and easy as breathing. **★★★★**

Sound: Production is laid-back but spacious – plenty of room for subtle percussive effects and distant saxophones drifting across the Rio tenements at dusk, beckoning you to surrender to the rhythm. **★★★★ DO**



BRAHMS CLARINET SONATAS

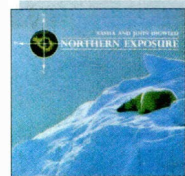
Antony Michaelson (clarinet)

Ingrid Jacoby (piano)

Musical Fidelity MF012

Music: When Antony Michaelson isn't running Musical Fidelity, he's indulging his passion for playing clarinet. These works – Opus 120 Nos 1 and 2 – are from near the end of Brahms' life, and the music has a valedictory quality, as well as a typically Brahmsian radiance and beauty. Ingrid Jacoby is sensitive and virtuosic – she goes straight to the music's core. Antony's playing has strength and projection, and has also gained recently in fluidity and confidence. **★★★★**

Sound: The recording (at the Maltings, Snape) successfully captures the vivid immediacy and warmth of the Maltings acoustic made famous by, among others, Benjamin Britten. **★★★★ AG**



SASHA AND JOHN DIGWEED

Northern Exposure 1/2/Expeditions

Ministry of Sound/INCredible

Music: Sasha and Digweed have blazed the intelligent house/trance trail for over a decade. In 1997 they created the first Northern Exposure – a series that took the superstar DJ mix album to new and blissful shores. The difference: unlike the majority of mix compilations you can actually *listen* to them without being off your face on disco biscuits. A warm, pervasive pulse underscores layered and quietly euphoric electronic vistas – not bangin' or 'avin' it, just intelligent ebb and flow. Though the series wasn't a great seller and S&D subsequently switched to harder, more fashionably progressive territory, these discs deserve their cult status as intelligent jewels amid the dumb, humdrum dross. **★★★★**

Sound: Clean and textured electronica, taunt and crisp when played through a good system. Mix compilations don't get much better. **★★★★ TB**

CINEMA SELECTION

BEHIND ENEMY LINES



FOX

Film: One of an inevitable slew of war movies to follow in the wake of 9/11, this is nonetheless an entertaining film. Original it ain't, sharing a plot and, in Gene Hackman, a lead actor, with Eighties 'Nam flick *Bat 21*, but it is gripping and tautly directed. The film, set at the tail-end of the Bosnian conflict, follows an American airman (Owen Wilson) shot down in hostile territory while trying to deliver evidence of Serbian war crimes. Some fantastic set pieces triumph over its implausible premise and gratefully gung-ho stance. **★★★★**

Sound & Vision: Picture is very sharp and the effects come across with startling clarity. The sound is also superb, with expert use of surround. The action sequences, which are worthy of a better film, are given handsome treatment in all departments. **★★★★ JF**

The world according to... **B&W**

John Bowers' dream was to build the perfect loudspeaker. How close he came only he knew – it's the perfectionist's call. But in choosing to pursue the unattainable, he probably built the perfect loudspeaker company

Bowers & Wilkins is still chasing the dream 15 years after its founder's death. Now owned by Joe Atkins – formerly a chartered accountant living in Toronto who was so impressed with B&W's North American performance that he bought the US distribution business, followed by the entire company – the Worthing-based manufacturer surges from strength to strength and has just opened a new factory utilising Japanese 'U cell' workflow techniques. Already impressive productivity is climbing further. Remember that B&W only makes hi-fi speakers (though it recently took on the distribution of Rotel and Canadian high-enders Classé), yet it has a turnover of £90 million – more than twice as much as Linn and Naim combined.

The unselfconscious desire to overachieve sparks, in part, from B&W's remarkable Steyning-based research and development facility set up by Bowers in 1982, 16 years after he and lifelong friend Peter Hayward first opened B&W's doors for business. It's probably the most advanced audio lab in Europe. The frankly unnerving

processing power assembled within its walls – caffeinated grey matter, fan-cooled silicon – is dedicated not just to designing a better loudspeaker but also understanding how loudspeakers interact with their surroundings and, indeed, their owners – so-called psycho-acoustics. Without doubt, the most celebrated owner of all is Abbey Road Studios in

plush Penthouse studio, half a dozen of the barrel-girthed beasts are lined up like menacing mechanoid sentinels in a sci-fi flick – the firepower is frightening. Cut to Steyning and B&W's most loquacious physicist and "prof-chic" cardigan model Peter Fryer who, a bit like Stephen Hawking, combines fierce intellectual intensity with a sense of humour

"The dauntingly large and heavy Nautilus 801 was designed largely with Abbey Road Studios' requirements in mind."

North London – the first purpose-built recording studio and, 71 years on, still comfortably ahead of the game. It's the right place to start. The dauntingly large and heavy Nautilus 801 was designed largely with Abbey Road's requirements in mind, and the association stretches back to the original and epochal 801 of 1979.

The only engineer we encounter on our tour of the premises is working in the elevated control room of the most famous recording space on earth – Studio 2, the one with "the sound", preserved in all its dog-eared school hall glory since The Beatles' final album, *Abbey Road*, was recorded there. It's actually the only studio in the entire building that uses Quedsted in-wall monitors instead of floorstanding B&Ws. No excuses required. B&W's monitoring pre-eminence is taken as read: there are more 801s here than you'll find on the shop floor of B&W's brand new factory in Worthing. In a side room off the

and infectious enthusiasm for his subject. He walks fast, and talks even faster, so better keep up.

PSYCHO-ACOUSTICS

The R&D facility was very much part of the John Bowers philosophy. He wanted a kind of 'think tank' that would be unencumbered with the day to day running of the business. It's often been compared to a university department, one that looks for the science behind loudspeakers and collaborates closely with the 'golden ears' who listen to them.

"It's astonishing how little is known about loudspeakers," Peter begins. "The physics are well understood – I'm a physicist and I try to push that forward. But there's an awful vacuum in the industry when it comes to psycho-acoustics. We always have several university collaborations going at any given time."

Back up seems essential at this level. Peter starts to run with the idea. "There's an awful lot that goes

Past Glories

801

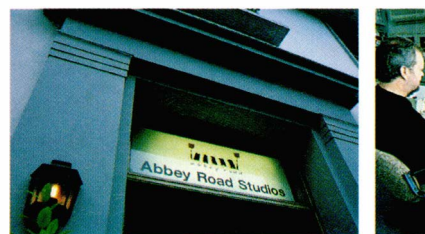
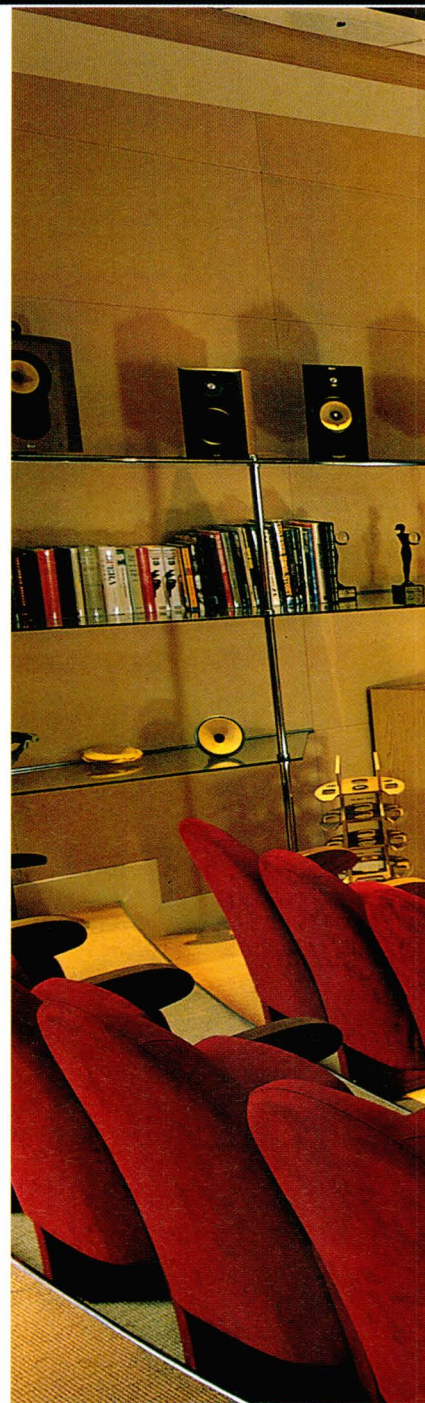
The now classic studio monitor was adopted by EMI as its standard classical monitor. Decca installed the 801s in all their recording studios.

DM6

The first UK-made linear phase speaker. Dubbed 'the pregnant penguin' because of its stepped baffle enclosure.

NAUTILUS

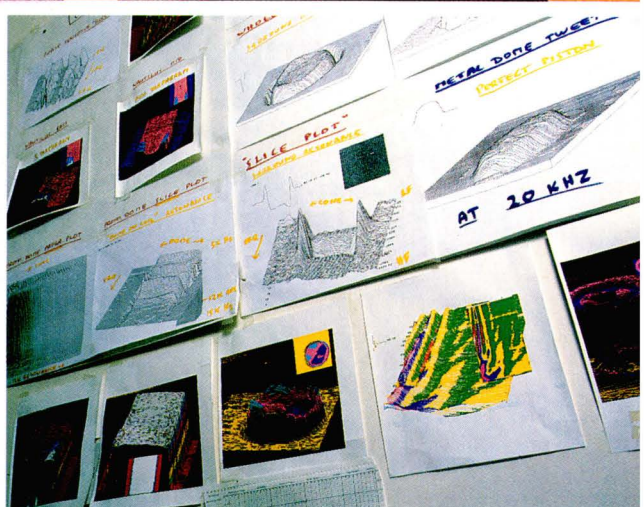
The £30K shell-shaped Nautilus was the best speaker B&W knew how to make. Over five years in development, much of its technology is now used in more affordable ranges.

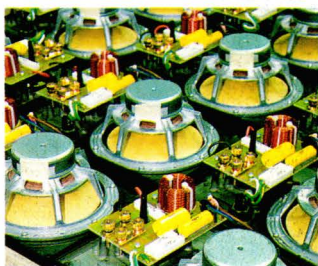
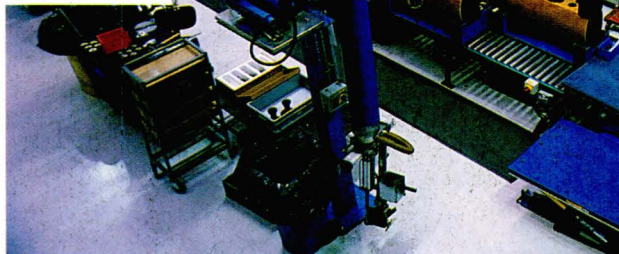
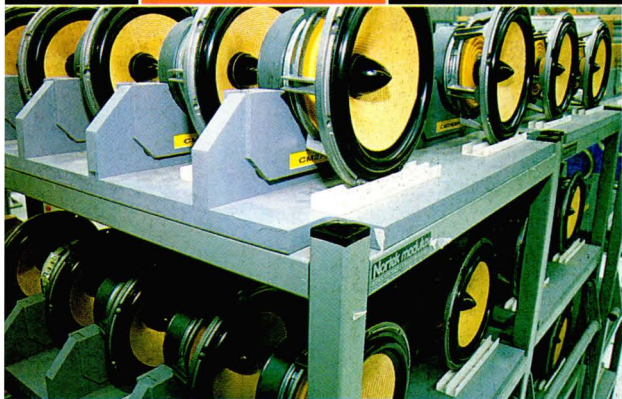




B&W pioneered the use of lasers in researching the behaviour of speakers in all conditions.

B&W's Steyning laboratory, led by Peter Fryer, is at the cutting edge of loudspeaker research.





B&W's Worthing factory has recently adopted highly efficient Japanese 'U cell' workflow techniques.

on with the ear-brain combination but surprisingly little detailed knowledge of how it all that works – how we work up a complete three-dimensional image of the sound in our brains.”

Fryer came to this conclusion having developed a machine – at huge intellectual cost – that could optimise speaker response in one position of the listening room perfectly. But it didn't really do anything. For once, Peter looks a little crestfallen. “When you had this thing going its effect was inaudible. I couldn't hear it. If you measured what it was doing it was reading enormous peaks and troughs in the frequency response. But you couldn't hear if it was on or off. Which means that most of the things you measure are irrelevant and the things that are highly relevant aren't measured. That came as a complete shock to me. Biggest disappointment of my life, actually.”

That's what's occupying the outer regions of Fryer's super-charged cerebrum right now. Back in the thick of the nitty gritty, though, it's all about compromise. “You have to decide which compromises you're going to make,”

says Peter, “and that's where the skill of the engineer comes in: what he's going to throw out and what he's going to keep in.”

BEST OF BREED

In a broader sense, though, B&W is more famous for what it's contributed to the speaker design canon than what it's left out. “We were the first to use lasers to measure how speakers behave,” explains Peter. “Kevlar was a major thing and it still is – or at least the woven fibre concept. It doesn't have to be Kevlar but, so far, it's the best fibre we've found. The fact it's woven is significant. With driver design it's always a delicate balance between the properties of the fibre itself and the amount of resin, and type of resin, you use. If you make it too stiff it becomes like a metal cone whereas Kevlar has high internal damping which seems to help it quite a lot.

“But we're continually looking at new fibres all the time and, indeed, new techniques for using existing fibres. So, yes, we started that and we had a patent on the use of woven fibre for about 20 years; it expired two years ago.

What else? “Matrix cabinet construction, of course. We were the first people to use tweeter tubes (though the idea was patented between the wars). Our combination of sphere enclosure and tube is patented, though, as is the surroundless mid-range driver.”

I'm detecting similarities here with the automotive ‘racing improves the breed’ maxim. The B&W way seems to be to trickle down the technology from the high-end ranges to lower level speakers. But those technically-advanced high-end products must cost a mint to develop, yes?

“The 800 series cost millions to develop,” confirms Fryer.

“Development of the original Nautilus went on for about five years, and consumed several people's full working time. It was worth it, but a lot comes out of fundamental research and brainstorming ideas.

“The best ideas are the ones that hardly cost anything and will be commercially realised almost immediately. I think using the surroundless Kevlar falls into that category. It's just a different way of doing the same thing but the

benefits are materially realisable and measurable.”

As we suspected all along, it's brain power that rules at B&W. Peter Fryer calls it “keeping an open mind”. ☺

☎ 01903 221500

🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

Current Key Products

DM602 S3 £300 HFC 227
Generous two-way standmount design has a good-size main driver with cast frame and 140mm diameter Kevlar cone, plus B&W's tube-loaded 25mm metal dome tweeter. Not exactly stylish but terrific sound per pound.

DM303 £180 HFC 226

B&W's budget champ looks like your average two-way standmount. Look closer and you'll notice the Nautilus traits: pocket-marked grey baffle, flared, dimpled port, and tube-loaded tweeter. A very ably balanced and communicative all-rounder for the money.



NAUTILUS 800 £11,000 HFC 231

New daddy of the high-end 800-series range, the 800 does not paint a romantic view of the music. It tells it like it is, with a sometimes uncomfortable accuracy that makes no attempt to glamourise any recording inadequacies.

"Sets a new standard at the price"

- Hi-Fi World (August 2002)

"The scale and authority of their performance is breathtaking"

- What Hi-Fi? (August 2002)



Since 1936, every Quad product has followed an underlying philosophy - to bring you 'the closest approach to the original sound'. This philosophy has earned Quad the respect of acoustic engineers, musicians, recording artists and music-lovers the world over and remains undiluted today.

Our all new 'L' Series loudspeakers are an accurate reflection of this philosophy. An even and extended frequency response, which is capable of incredible detail and resolution, creates a real 'window' on the recording. The sound stage is so vivid and expansive, you can virtually see the musicians in front of you.

The 'L' series loudspeakers are all finished in high gloss piano lacquers, either in pure black, maple, bird's eye maple or rosewood veneer. Prices start from just £380

If you would like to know more about our approach and for information on the full range of Quad products, including recent reviews, please call us today or visit our web-site for a free copy of our latest book.

0845 458 0011
www.quad-hifi.co.uk

Phone for free Product and Review book



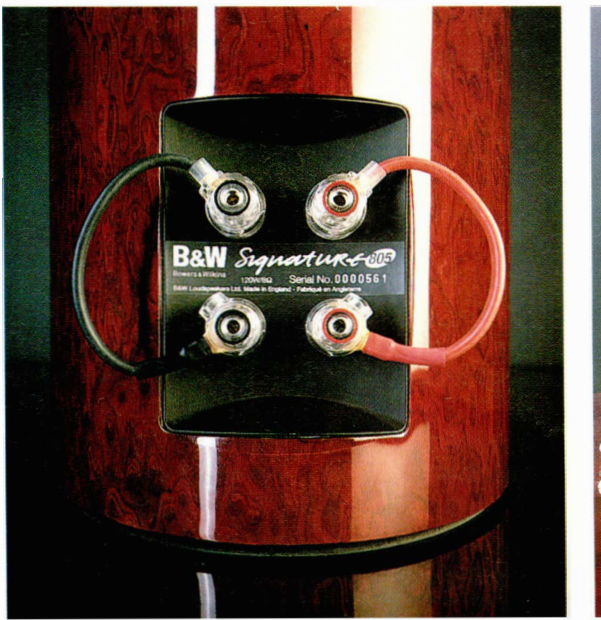
QUAD
...the closest approach to the original sound



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★



"This is the sort of speaker with which the connoisseur could identify the auditorium and the mixing desk, let alone the microphones and audience cross section!"



Small wonder

EXCLUSIVE Hot on the heels of the new range-topping Signature 800 comes a special version of B&W's most affordable Nautilus

You have to hand it to Bowers & Wilkins – it knows how to make the most of its R&D. In this instance the development work started nearly ten years ago with the original Nautilus loudspeaker, an iconic, ammonite-esque sculpture of an active loudspeaker that performed so well as a marketing device that it's probably one of the company's best known creations. But behind the style lay a lot of new technology and much of this was used in the Nautilus 800 range in 1998.

Now some four years later come two further refinements of the formula. The first is the 800, a new flagship model available in standard Nautilus and extravagantly finished Signature versions, reviewed last month. The second is the Signature 805 you see before you, an upgraded version of the standard N805, the baby of the Nautilus 800 range.

The most striking change is the finish. In place of an attractive but conventional veneer, B&W offers the Signature version in grey 'tiger's eye' or red 'bird's eye' (as here). This isn't the bird's eye one associates with maple but a very subtle man-made mottled effect in real wood. It makes for a very saucy looking speaker.

The drive unit array is completely different to the basic £1,400 N805. The pod-housed tweeter is same one used in the £16,000 Signature 800 – its magnetic pole piece is silver plated, the coil

B&W's striking new Signature finish options are backed up by some serious technology, much of which is derived from the flagship Signature 800.



VERDICT

B&W
Signature 805
standmount
loudspeaker
£2,250

▲ Transparency without tears – no grit, no grain, just expanses of acoustic space. The loudspeaker bargain of the year?

♥ It needs top notch ancillaries to sound this good.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
You won't get this degree of resolution out of a wider bandwidth speaker at anywhere near this price, and most of your music will sound considerably better through them. One of the best standmounts money can buy.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Drive units: 25mm metal dome tweeter, 165mm Kevlar cone bass/mid
- ▶ Sensitivity: 88dB at 8 ohms
- ▶ Crossover frequency: 4kHz
- ▶ Dimensions: 41.5x23.8x34.4cm (HxWxD)
- ▶ Weight: 9.5kg
- ▶ Finishes: Grey tiger's eye or red bird's eye
- ▶ Terminals: WBT palladium plated bi-wire

former is shortened and therefore lighter and it has a greater contact area with the dome. The crossover driving it is a high quality first-order design rather than the second-order one used in the standard model and incorporates thick film resistors from American company Caddock, a choice made after many hours of listening. The mid/bass section of the network uses big, low-loss ICW capacitors to drive a monster magnet on the back of a 165mm Kevlar driver. This driver also features a copper shrouded pole piece for greater conductivity and a solid aluminium phase plug where there is usually plastic.

These changes are said to produce a reduction in distortion of more than 60%, a pretty extravagant claim from a normally quite modest group of engineers, but if the standard N805 is anything to go by they could well be right. The tariff for this attention is a not insignificant £2,250 – an £850 increase in price over the regular N805, which remains in production.

PERFORMANCE

From the off it's clear that this is a no-compromise loudspeaker. It accepts that it is a relatively small volume design and therefore doesn't attempt low bass, and

TECHNOLOGY: MAKING A SIGNATURE

The Signature 805 incorporates technology developed for the Nautilus and Matrix ranges that preceded it. The mid/bass cabinet is inherently very stiff because of its curved shape but further stiffening is created by the matrix bracing inside. This is made up of intersecting MDF sections that create a multi-jointed latticework which allows air-flow but takes resonances to frequencies where they don't affect the drive unit.

The Nautilus tweeter pod has two functions. Its external shape stops diffraction, an effect where high frequencies travelling across a speaker's baffle are 'sprayed' randomly when they hit a hard edge, while its internal shape – a tapering tube starting directly behind the dome – allows rearward energy to escape with no danger of bouncing back at the drive unit.



Detail

REFLEX PORT
B&W's 'Airflow' port, dimpled to reduce turbulence.

BASS/MID
165mm woven Kevlar cone with high power magnet, copper covered centre pole, plus metal phase plug.

TREBLE
Contains 25mm metal dome tweeter with silver-plated pole piece and Nautilus pod.

FINISH
High gloss red 'bird's eye' real wood veneer.

CABLE TERMINALS
Bi-wire, palladium plated WBT terminals.

"It likes to play loud – all B&Ws do – but in exchange it will balance the relationships between instruments with uncanny poise."

◀ it majors on the extended high frequency potential of its very classy tweeter alongside the control offered by the big magnet on the mid/bass cone. The specs say that bass goes down to 49Hz (-3dB) though it sounds lower, presumably thanks to the room, while the treble's -3dB point is at 25kHz, extending to 50kHz at -6dB. The sonic effect of this range is an extraordinary degree of transparency. It initially sounds a bit tight and dry but with a bit of warming up, and the balance adjustments that our brains make automatically, this turns to solid and tight within half an hour. Then the degree of resolution on offer starts to become apparent.

One of the main contributions made by the tweeter is a tremendous sense of space – it opens up recordings so that you hear the boundaries of the venue and the position of the artists within it. Inevitably, instruments that create high frequency harmonics benefit from this

extension. Cymbals are a lot more real and brass sections reveal a shine that is usually denied them. With a decent recording, in this instance, his *New Features* on vinyl, the Signature 805's transparency reveals a distinctly physical sound with tremendous vitality, the saxophone sounding raw and strong without getting strident.

Bugge Wesseltoft's *Moving* elicits a spacious soundscape which seems to give instruments and voices a larger area in which to expand into the room, the bass on this sounding uncommonly visceral for such a compact design.

Further listening reveals a degree of transparency that one rarely encounters, brought about not merely by revealing detail that has previously been obscured, but more tellingly by the differences found between recordings. Playing a variety of recordings by the same artist (yes, I'm afraid I have to mention Frank Zappa here) it becomes apparent just



Too small for really deep bass, the 805 sensibly doesn't try to go too low. Two 800 Series subs are promised for next year.

how much variety you get with recordings from different venues, eras, studios and so on. This is the sort of speaker with which the connoisseur could identify the auditorium and the mixing desk, let alone the microphones and audience cross section!

Bass performance, though not of the stomach churning variety, is surprisingly powerful when you put an amp with plenty of grip at the other end of the cable. I used an ATC SPA2-150 to very good effect in this department, and was surprised at the grunt on offer. The speaker is as articulate in the bass as it is in the midrange – double basses have a realism that's engrossing while their electric brothers sound chunky and solid. There's always the option of using a sub-woofer to get those last few octaves which I did to entertaining effect with a REL Stadium III, and B&W promises two 800 Series subs next year which presumably will do the same trick.

Even without the REL this is a superb loudspeaker. It likes to play loud – all B&Ws do – but in exchange it will handle complex material as well as a lone voice, balance the relationships between instruments with uncanny poise and have you realising things about your music that other speakers don't even hint at. Does this make them fussy about amps and sources? You bet. The 88dB sensitivity rating doesn't spell it out but something like a hundred good clean watts are a prerequisite if you want to turn the volume up, and twice that certainly wouldn't go amiss. And of course high frequency exposure can be too revealing for some digital sources so try before you buy, but don't call the speaker harsh if that's the way things sound – just look further up the chain. ●

☎ 01903 221500

🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

ALSO CONSIDER

ATC SCM20 SL £2,051
Not too transparent but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp.

ELAC CL 330 JET £2,499
Impressive looking aluminium-clad standmount with an equally explicit and expressive sound.

JMLAB MICRO UTOPIA £3,349
Superb top of the line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication, though no deep bass.

SONUS FABER ELECTA AMATOR 2 £2,698
Highly musical and natural standmount with walnut construction and charming sound.

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EDITOR'S CHOICE

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magazine



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EXCLUSIVE

Taken to the Max

Max Townshend wants to build the world's finest hi-fi system. This is where it starts

REVIEW – Jason Kennedy

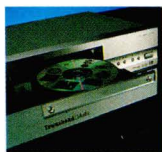
Max Townshend (of Seismic Sink and Rock turntable fame) is a man with a mission. He wants to create the best hi-fi system on the planet but doesn't have the resources to do it all himself. He's got the speakers – the substantial line source Sir Galahads – he's working on the amplification and for the all-important source he's decided to build on the extensive groundwork of one of the hi-fi world's giants – Pioneer. The Japanese innovator created the first and still (just) the only so-called universal disc player in the shape of the DV-747A earlier this year and the comprehensive nature of this machine, its ability to play any type of music disc you care to stick in it including both DVD-Audio and SACD, was intrinsic to its appeal. Max is very enthusiastic about both these high-res multichannel music formats because of the tremendous potential they have for bringing high fidelity within the music lover's grasp.

When the DV-747A was released it had no direct competition, but Max reckoned that with his company's electronics expertise even better performance could be teased from this £899 box. And it would seem that he was right.

Pricing a player like this is tricky. Initially it was intended to be a complete package sold through a distributor and

TECHNOLOGY: THE UPGRADE IN FULL

The obvious change is the Seismic Sink air isolation enclosure that forms the player's base. Unlike other Sinks this one incorporates a power supply comprising a very low noise transformer, a rectifier bank using soft recovery rectifier diodes to minimise RF pulse noise, common mode choke filtering to cancel radiation on the mains and a triple ladder network analogue filter to supply the new discrete filter, analogue stages and the critical digital stages. Inside the case you'll find discrete regulators: seven stages of filtering instead of one, a discrete component balanced filter and discrete component analogue stages, utilising audiophile grade capacitors and precision low noise resistors. A new master clock provides precision clocking and 'deep cryogenically' treated PTFE insulated copper is used wherever possible.



VERDICT

Townshend Pioneer DV-747A universal disc player

**£2,000 upgrade
£2,899 complete player**

▲ Extraordinary resolution and coherence from all music and video formats and fully featured to boot. Low price for the performance achieved.

● Doesn't look like a £2.5K player.

● If sound quality and versatility are priorities this is virtually unbeatable. The finesse it offers is world class.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Universal format player, accepts most variations on DVD theme including DVD-RW as well as all commercial music formats including DVD-A and SACD
- ▶ Special transformer for best isolation
- ▶ Precision clocking for improved picture and sound
- ▶ Air isolation
- ▶ Extra stiffening and constrained layer damping including analogue stages
- ▶ Comprehensive audio and video connections

dealer network in the usual fashion, but that meant it would have been competing with the likes of Mark Levinson and Meridian, and on grounds of appearance it wouldn't stand a chance. An alternative is to sell the modification directly to owners of the player which bypasses the margins of the usual intermediaries. This is the chosen route and the upgrade costs £2,000 if you have a DV-747A. Townshend can of course supply the Pioneer but it would be at the usual retail price of £899, making the package total £2,899.

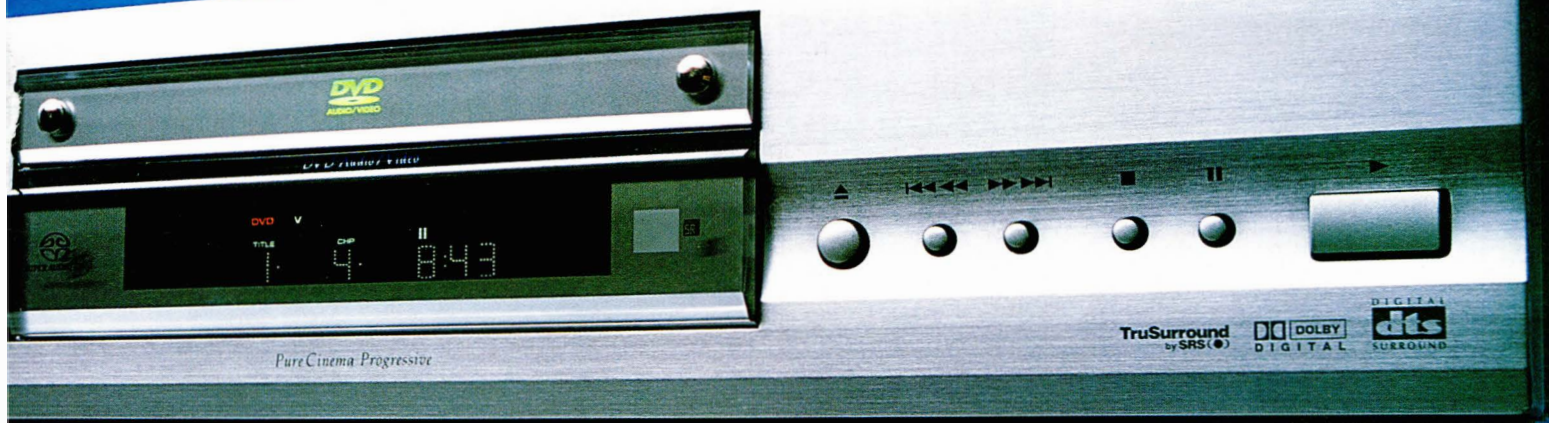
PERFORMANCE

With all these formats to play it's hard to know where to start, but CD seems like as good a place as any, after all it's still the one to beat in availability terms.

Keith Jarrett's *Paris Concert* features solo piano with plenty of atmosphere and this is what comes through loud and clear, the way he stomps out the time on the stage and 'sings' along to the piano



DVD PLAYER DV-747A



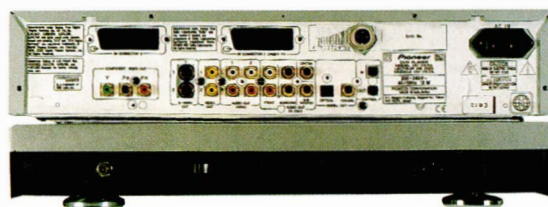
Townshend Audio

Townshend Audio

brings real presence to the piece. With this player his high-pitched wittings almost make sense and the ebb and flow of the playing prove totally bewitching. Resolution is superb, and if you don't get the architectural solidity of a dedicated player like the Mark Levinson 390S you do get a degree of openness that's extremely rare with the medium. Timing is spot-on – it's the key to Jarret's playing but often its subtlety is marred. With the Townshend you can hear where he's going and why.

It's the ability to replay music without messing up its finer elements that marks this machine out. Comparing it with a dedicated Sony SACD player revealed quite staggering amounts of harmonic detail that the admittedly less expensive but nonetheless very capable dedicated player failed to expose. The extra coherence and tonal richness from a solo guitar on the Red Rose Music dem disc is quite extraordinary – going back to the Sony made the piece sound messy. This is combined with a naturalness and presence that's quite uncanny.

DVD-A revealed the same kind of improvements, the Missy Elliott disc





exposing its edits and samples for the first time, not to mention the woman's unwholesome attitude being all the more distinct – she really is a bitch, but a damn fine musician too! There is some superb interplay on a new jazz disc from Ben Allison on the format and this is fully revealed on the Townshend, the tone of the instruments and low level detail coming through clear and strong without one ever getting a sense of the disc player's 'fingerprint'.

Dolby Digital and DTS tracks on DVD-Videos improved in much the same fashion – tone is richer, dialogue is clearer and space is better delineated. Rear channel effects aren't that much more stunning, but they are certainly no less. What's more clear cut is the increase in video resolution – colours are more

The Townshend/Pioneer combo might not be particularly eye-catching but the sound upgrade is worth it.

vivid and skin tones considerably more natural than the unmodified DV-747A can muster. Proof, if it were needed, that less noise really is less noise and everything works better in a 'quieter' electronic environment.

This is a player with the deftest of touches. It not only lets more music and playing finesse through, it interferes with the delivery less than virtually any other DVD-A or SACD player so far – a testament to its quality. The fact that it plays both formats is the icing on the cake. 

 Townshend Audio 020 8979 2155

 dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/townshend.audio

ALSO CONSIDER

MARANTZ SA-1 £5,000

Should give the Townshend a hard time with CD and SACD and looks the biz, but doesn't play any DVD formats.

MERIDIAN 800 V3 £10,805

Probably the best DVD-A player money can buy and offers Smart Link digital connection for matching processor, doesn't play SACD.

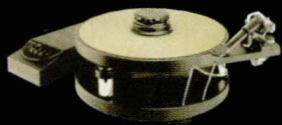
PIONEER DV-747A £899

The base player for this project is a remarkable device in its own right and tremendous value for money. Can be upgraded to Townshend giant-killer status when funds permit.

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Model 30/2



Series 300



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LIVING VOICE



Auditorium Avatar

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

Sale of Part Exchange and Ex-dem Items

	Sale	New
Proac Response 1SC including Target four leg stands.	£750	£1500
Impulse H2 Mahogany - boxed.	£1250	-
Cadence DS Rosewood.	£550	£1700
Living Voice Auditorium Walnut	£950	£1700
Linn Kelidh Walnut.	£390	£750
Rel Qbass subwoofer.	£200	-
Mirage M890i Canadian floorstanding speaker.	£390	-
Celestion A3 Rosewood - boxed - perfect.	£900	£1400
SJS Model 1 Line pre-amp.	£650	-
Conrad Johnson PV10 Phono pre-amp - new valves.	£700	£1400
AudioNote Soro Phono integrated - fully serviced + new valves.	£700	£1900
Cary 2A3 Stereo - new valves.	£775	-
Cary S500 Line pre-amp.	£350	-
Art Audio VP1 Phono - Special - Chrome.	£1000	£2000
Art Audio Concerto Power-amp 6550, inc Hovland caps	£1650	£2650
Art Audio Diavolo 6300B 15w - Black & Gold - inc volume pot.	£3000	£4200
Art Audio Concerto Line integrated 6550.	£1700	£2850
Canary 303 Mono power-amps. 12 months old - FAB.	£5750	£7250
Audio Innovations Series 500 Phono integrated - VGC.	£600	-
Audio Innovations Series 700 Line integrated.	£600	-
Border Patrol WE 300B Power-amp.	£3500	£4500
Croft EL34 Integrated.	£300	-
Tom Evans Groove Phono stage.	£1150	£1850
Audio Research VT100 Power-amp.	£3000	£4400
Border Patrol MB Power-supply.	£800	£1000
Wadia 861 CD player - substantial.	£5000	£7950
Helios Model 2 CD player.	£900	£1300
AudioNote DAC5	£10000	£19000
SME Series IV tonearm.	£800	£1200
Nottingham Analogue Interspace + RB300 + DNM Recca (new).	£900	£1033
Michell Orbe + RB300. 12 months - spotless.	£1700	£2450
Nottingham Analogue Space tonearm (carbon) 1yr	£325	£450

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Wood cup fever

Grado's headphone champs have fifties throwback style but plenty of noughties resolution

Despite looking like a relic of 1950s technology, Grado headphones first saw the light of production in the late eighties. This expansion from the company's bread and butter moving iron cartridges was presumably brought on by the market dominance of CD at the time.

The RS1 is Grado's Reference Series supremo and like some of the more exotic cartridges on the market its capsules are made of hardwood (mahogany) carved out to accept a drive unit. The wood forms a short tube or barrel that's vented on the outside – this usually gives headphones a more open sound at the expense of letting external noise in and music out, not that such things are a big issue in the home. In fact it can be quite useful to be able to hear the doorbell ring!

The drive unit diaphragms are made of low mass polymer and driven by UHPLC copper (ultra high purity linear crystal) voice coils – the same metal is also used in the Y-shaped connecting cable. The two capsules are matched to within 0.05dB while magnetic power is courtesy of neodymium. The RS1s have a steel headband with lightly padded leather upholstery, friction adjusters and an all-in weight of nine ounces (255g).

The RS1's solid hardwood capsules are vented on the outside for a more open sound.

VERDICT

Grado RS1 headphones
£750

▲ Dynamic phones with excellent bass resolution and neutral balance providing high resolution.

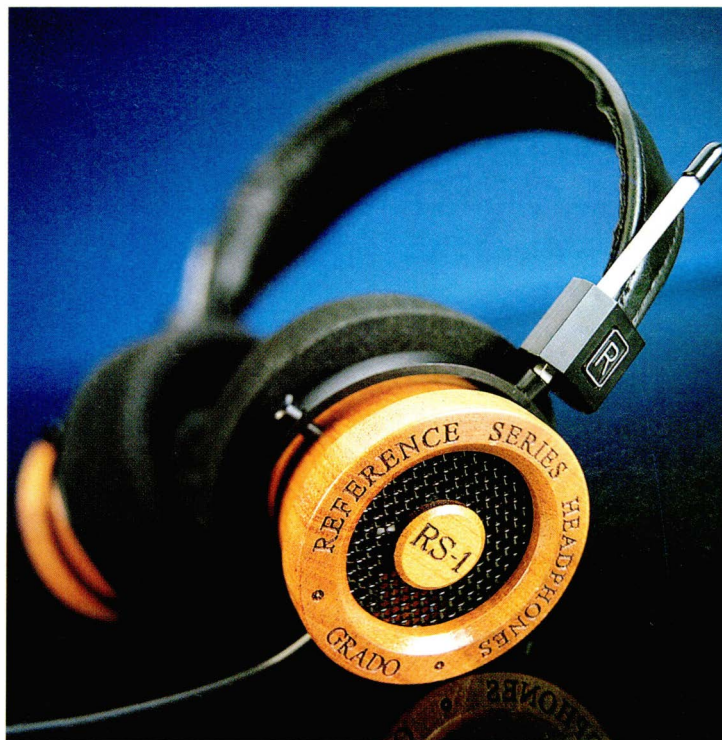
▼ Fit won't suit all and greater transparency can be had from electrostatics.

CONCLUSION

If they feel comfortable there are few better dynamic headphones on the market, but results depend on driving quality and a decent dedicated amp is essential.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Low mass polymer drive units
- ▶ UHPLC voice coils and two-metre cable
- ▶ Neodymium magnets
- ▶ Weight: 255g
- ▶ Gold plated quarter inch jack plug (3.5mm adapter supplied)
- ▶ Mahogany capsules
- ▶ Leather headband



PERFORMANCE

The RS1s turn in a bold, dynamic sound that, while it doesn't emphasise detail, does deliver plenty of resolution. The brushed drum work on EST's *Somewhere Else Before* forms a cocoon in which the piano and bass play out their musical motifs, an effect you don't get with speakers at all. The Grados are remarkably strong in the bass department too – when bass notes come along they are reproduced cleanly and without undue emphasis, a much more neutral design than lesser models in the range. Take The Irresistible Force's classic *Nepalese Bliss* – its low, low synth bass provides a full-on, enveloping experience when delivered in this intimate fashion. Cans this good

encourage you to shut your eyes and drift off – apparently it's even possible to levitate if you play Yes's *Tales From Topographic Oceans* all the way through, but that's a pretty high price to pay!

Back here on earth, Grado's finest gives considerable insight into the recording arts and lets you hear the engineer's ear view with unusual precision. Yes, £750 is a lot to pay for a pair of cans, but when they're this good you may never want to listen to conventional speakers again. ◉

☎ Grado 01284 701101

🌐 www.gradolabs.com

ALSO CONSIDER

STAX SYSTEM 2 £400

A luxury electrostatic that delivers five star sound and has remarkable transparency.

SENNHEISER HD600 £250

Very clean and revealing, this Sennheiser range topper has superb bass and considerable subtlety.

AKG K-1000 £450

Unusual design has very little contact with the ear and consequently has a very open sound yet it's not short on grunt.

Beauty in the beast

Denon ups the ante with an outrageously well endowed new version of its flagship AV amp

Where do you start with a piece of equipment that does its utmost to defy description by offering a such a staggering line-up of features and capability? Well, the beginning is a very good place...

The real Denon AVC-A1SR story starts with its predecessor, the AVC-A1SE, previous incumbent for the position of one-box AV amp with the most. Most what? Well in the 'A1SR's case it has more and better quality power, a higher rated power supply, and some important new spatial options including Dolby PLII and THX Ultra2, the more music-friendly and configurable version of THX Ultra. The digital engine inside has more than doubled in power. There are some neat hidden tricks too, including (in no particular order): a phono input that can be digitised and sent to the outside world, for archiving perhaps, a variable speed cooling fan, the ability to redirect unused amplifier channels to other rooms, video standards conversion, and the ability to work with component sources (projector and plasma users please note). There's plenty more where this little lot came from too. The *pièce de résistance*, however, is the proprietary digital input, which offers significant advantages for high-res multichannel sources like DVD-A and SACD (see box).

TECHNOLOGY: DENON'S DIGITAL LINK

The AVC-A1SR is only the second AV amp or processor (after Meridian) with a multichannel, high resolution digital input allowing high bandwidth DVD-Audio data to be transferred in the digital domain via a proprietary link from a suitably equipped player. The DVD-A1 is the first such player, reviewed in *HFC 230*, but our sample only worked with non-encrypted discs, which is likely to omit all commercial DVD-As!

But there are definite advantages in transferring high-res data in this way. It means fewer cables, shortens the analogue signal path and bass management can be performed locally and not by the player, which rarely addresses the task correctly. The link is even said to be DSD compliant – for a Denon SACD player to come, perhaps.

VERDICT

Denon AVC-A1SR integrated multichannel AV amplifier
£3,000

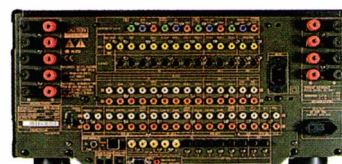
▲ Catch-all spec and elaborate engineering bridge the gap with the high end.

▼ Make no mistake – there's a steep learning curve.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
A very impressive amplifier which somehow manages to combine a very complete specification with good sound quality and a more than respectable power output.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 7x170 watts rms output
- ▶ 8 channels
- ▶ Proprietary multichannel 24/192 digital input for DVD-Audio (requires player with compatible output)
- ▶ 16 Burr-Brown 24bit 192kHz DACs
- ▶ Dolby Headphone 3D sound effects
- ▶ THX Ultra2
- ▶ DTS 96:24
- ▶ Dolby Pro Logic II
- ▶ 2 x 8-channel analogue inputs
- ▶ 2 Analog Devices Hammerhead SHARC 32bit DSP processors
- ▶ Touch screen remote
- ▶ Weight: 29kg



Denon's high-res multichannel digital input means high bandwidth DVD-A data may be transferred digitally from a matching player. Future digital upgrades are easy as the complete digital bay can be readily replaced, and is compatible between models.

System set-up is not for the faint-hearted, but provided you're familiar with the grammar of home cinema processors and amplifiers, you should be okay, though the sheer number of settings may surprise. The touch screen remote control, which draws some inspiration (but not enough) from the world of PDAs, is decent, but can be obstructive.

PERFORMANCE

This is an exceptional performer. The on-board power amps are extremely powerful in two-channel mode and barely sag with all channels in action, coping admirably with even challenging high-end hi-fi speakers. In stereo, the Denon will match many good component stereo amplifiers, and has a characteristically open, vivid and lively quality. The whole amplifier is genuinely seamless

and transparent, and the sophisticated bass management can be used or bypassed even with the Pure Analogue Path bypass mode selected, an area where the Denon is particularly impressive. The digital inputs driven from a CD player source are also extremely fine, and the Denon can quietly upgrade that old CD player (with digital output) very effectively indeed.

Spatial processing and image steering is up to high-end home cinema standards. Soundfield generation has an uncontrived feel, and what was impressive about soundtracks like *Terminator* and *AI* was how credible they sounded. Dolby Pro Logic II is an excellent test here because it is processor intensive, and the AVC-A1SR gives an exceptionally consistent wrap and smooth image steering, with a light, agile and dynamic



"There are component home cinema processors and power amplifiers that sound a little better, but they invariably cost more, usually much more."

quality with stereo sources, including off-air stereo from a Sky digibox. DTS and Dolby Digital are everything they should be, again with that characteristic transparency and subtlety. From previous experience with a Snell THX Ultra2 speaker system driven by another amp, THX Ultra2 is a potentially more useful process than its predecessor, especially with music. The Denon has particularly strong support for 7.1 channel modes, and you can connect two pairs of rear speakers in different positions (eg corner and adjacent centre back), the Denon switching between them automatically according to the source material.

The AVC-A1SR is designed to be upgradeable, indeed the complete digital bay can be removed and replaced, and firmware updates will be available as new surround processes are released. But

this amp is not an ideal option for a fully upgradeable system, where separately housed processing and power amplification is a prerequisite. And although Denon has gone to great lengths with the handset, which could even stand in as a poor man's system install controller if you can't afford an AMX or Crestron, it is awkward to use as a straightforward remote control, partly because of the need to change display pages to access common functions, and partly because the LCD panel contrast is too low, though it is no worse than other similar controllers in this respect.

Of course the amp has its triumphs too. Highlights include first class digital processing, a power amp almost up to the standard of component monoblock amps, plus you do get an amazing amount of hardware for the money. There

are component home cinema processors and power amplifiers that when combined sound better still, but they invariably cost more, usually much more. The AVC-A1SR has been the best one-stop, one-box AV amp on the planet. At least this month... ☐

☎ Hayden Laboratories 01234 741200
 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

PIONEER VSA-AX10 £2,700

The VSA-AX10 is slightly less exactly specified than the Denon, but benefits from a more friendly, microphone-assisted set-up.

YAMAHA DSP-AX1 £2,000

A fine amp, but Yamaha's emphasis on DSP places it at odds with market trends.

MARANTZ SR-14EX MK2 £3,250

Needs extra power amplification for EX and ES-style systems, but otherwise a solid performance with movies and music alike.



“A key to this speaker’s superior performance lies in the clarity with which it reveals subtle differences of all kinds, both in musicianship and recording techniques.”



Separated at birth

EXCLUSIVE Naim's new compact floorstander is powerful enough to rattle the floorboards – but clever enough not to

Naim's SBL (Separate Box Loudspeaker) originally appeared about fifteen years ago, and with hindsight can be seen as one of the most influential designs in recent times – one of the very first of the now widespread compact floorstander breed. It remains as valid today as it was in the mid-eighties, which is why this brand new SL-2 successor shares many of its predecessor's features.

But the new model's audaciously curved lines look altogether prettier and more up to date, the thick, over-sized and gently curved front panel blending into the similarly shaped foam grille and effectively covering up all the gubbins behind. (The grille should be left on, for both aesthetic and sonic reasons.)

The SBL's fiddly and complex set-up procedure, which involved messing around with tubes of silicon sealant, has been simplified and made much more precise in this SL-2. Indeed, extra enclosure manufacturing precision lies at the very heart of this new speaker, and the very tight tolerances involved have a lot to do with its rather hefty £4,995 price tag.

Representing a clever combination of acoustic simplicity alongside mechanical complexity, the SL-2 follows Naim's 'standard' two-way driver line-up, using the company's own classy eight-inch paper cone bass unit, plus a Scan-sourced 19mm dome tweeter. The passive crossover is external here, and loosely

The SL-2's complex sealed-box system uses a small upper enclosure feeding into a much larger lower enclosure via a PAR (precision acoustic resistance) device. This increases the effective volume and hence bass extension, with resistance damping.

VERDICT

Naim SL-2 compact floorstanding loudspeaker
£4,995

▲ Magnificent communicator with loads of clear detail, wide dynamic range and great low bass extension.

▼ Tonal balance is a little 'cold', so harmonic structures are a little lacking in warmth and richness

CONCLUSION

This costly speaker has magnificent musical analysis and communication skills, in a package that's notable for its physical discretion.

KEY FEATURES

▶ Mechanically decoupled tweeter is mounted on long tubes directly from the cast plinth.

▶ Naim's 8-inch doped paper cone main driver pioneered the use of an extended central polepiece in place of a dust dome.

▶ Plates between two enclosures are precision machined to a flatness of 0.01mm.

▶ Integral cast stand is mechanically decoupled to avoid exciting the floor.

▶ Crossover network is mounted externally in plastic enclosure, to aid passive-to-active drive conversion.

TECHNOLOGY: MECHANICAL DECOUPLING

The most complex element in this loudspeaker design is found in the elaborate mechanical decoupling arrangements, which are used to avoid the vibrations generated by the main driver from affecting other parts of the system.

The two bass enclosures are constructed so that the smaller one simply rests on top of the larger one, with minimal contact area and no rigid coupling. The whole speaker is mounted on an integral frame-stand, the rear spikes of which are deliberately decoupled via leaf springs so that vibrations aren't fed into the floor.

The most elaborate section however, concerns the tweeter, which is mounted on a long tubular metal frame which is fixed (quite loosely) down at the support frame near the floor, travels up the back of the speaker without making physical contact with the enclosure, and is then fed through into the top enclosure so that its faceplate sits within a circular cut-out in the front panel, just above the main driver. It looks conventional enough, but poke the tweeter and it'll rock gently to and fro, without making any contact with the rest of the loudspeaker.

fixed onto the back panel, partly to keep it clear of the internal vibrations, but more particularly because it's actually an optional extra – Naim encourages active drive, where each drive unit has its own power amplifier and the crossing over is handled by an active filter unit between pre and power amps. While active drive is promoted, Naim has no truck with bi-amping or bi-wiring. The input terminals here consist of just a single pair of 4mm sockets, intended primarily for use with Naim's own cable and plugs.

The bass loading might be a sealed box, but it's a very elaborate one. The top third of the speaker comprises a relatively small enclosure for the main driver, but this sits on top of a much larger box, from which it's mechanically decoupled but acoustically connected via a PAR (Naim'speak for precision acoustic resistance). The plates between the two enclosures are precision machined to a flatness of 0.01mm, and the separation established via tiny and similarly precise spacers.





TWEETER
Mechanically decoupled 19 mm fabric tweeter sits within a hole built into the top enclosure.

BASS/MID
Naim's eight-inch paper cone main driver pioneered the extended polepiece and skeletal cast frame.

LOWER ENCLOSURE
Increases volume and hence bass extension, but with added resistance damping.

TWEETER FRAME
The tweeter is mounted on a long frame, fixed at the bottom to minimise physical contact.

CROSSOVER
Crossover is mounted externally in plastic enclosure, to aid passive-to-active drive conversion.

“The SL-2 has remarkable powers of musical analysis and communication, in a package notable for its physical discretion.”

IN-ROOM MEASUREMENTS

Sensitivity registers around 87dB – a little below average these days, but perfectly reasonable in the context of the ‘easy’ amplifier load (steadily above six ohms), and also the very impressive in-room bass extension. Indeed, with room-loading assistance the 20Hz output level is just 3dB below the midband datum, which is impressive for a two-way design. Still more so is the evenness through the low and mid bass, when the speakers are sited close to a wall. The sealed box loading helps avoid the mid-bass excess that usually accompanies deep bass extension, and this speaker stays within +/-4dB 20-100Hz despite room modes. The problem zone comes in the octave above that, 100-200Hz, which lacks 5dB of output on average – a scenario that is typical of Naim's two-ways. Further up, normal service is restored, with a smooth midband decade (200Hz-2kHz), a slight dip at the 2.2kHz crossover point, and a pretty well ordered treble, peaking slightly at around 7kHz.

Essentially, the idea is to create a speaker that's small mechanically but large acoustically. The small volume of the top box gives a fundamental resonance around 95Hz, which helps keep the cone from flapping away with large excursions, though the total box size via the PAR (which also adds damping) is large enough to drop the system's fundamental resonance to around 48Hz, and therefore deliver good bass extension.

PERFORMANCE

Like most Naims, the SL-2's bass alignment is intended for near-wall siting. This is a popular feature, as many prefer their speakers out of the way, but it's normally accompanied by increased midband coloration, the wall usually adding a sort of ‘cupped hands’ effect on voices. However that doesn't seem to be the case with the SL-2, which shows no evidence of such coloration, and is one of the least ‘boxy’ sounding speakers we've heard.



When not being displayed in hi-fi magazines, the SL-2's foam grilles should be left in place, for both acoustic and aesthetic reasons.

Indeed, the SL-2 upsets a number of general preconceptions about close-to-wall sited loudspeakers. Stereo imaging is excellent, which isn't supposed to be the case. Focus is very precise, and the speakers are perfectly capable of reproducing realistic depth perspectives.

The bass is among its best features, staying crisp, clean, smooth, even and agile, yet delving satisfyingly and surprisingly deep for such a compact enclosure. Another major strength is its prodigious dynamic range, attesting to the effectiveness of the cabinet control, ensuring magnificent detail and delicacy through the impressive agility and freedom from overhang.

The only real complaint is that the sound as a whole is just a little cold in tonal balance terms. Voices lack some body and warmth, and the resonant harmonic richness of cellos, for example, is quite obviously undeveloped. Voices too are just a little restrained, and a tad ‘shut in’ through the presence zone.

A vital key to this speaker's very superior performance lies in the clarity with which it reveals subtle differences of all kinds, whether in the quality and deftness of the musicianship, or the techniques of the recording engineers. It even lays bare the distinctive characters of the different media we use – not just the obvious differences between vinyl and CD, but the much more subtle distinction between the Nicam digital soundtrack accompanying terrestrial analogue TV, and the rather more compressed MPEG that comes with digital satellite TV.

The SL-2 might be costly, but it has remarkable powers of musical analysis and communication, in a package notable for its physical discretion. And that, in the final analysis, is precisely what most speaker designers and users are trying to achieve.

☎ Naim 01722 332266
🌐 www.naim-audio.com

ALSO CONSIDER

- B&W NAUTILUS 801 £6,000**
A very classy contender with twin eight-inch bass and great soundstaging from ‘teardrop’ midrange, if a tad laid back.
- TANNOY DIMENSION TD12 £6,500**
Big, good value Art Deco contender, its 12-inch dual-concentric driver gives magnificent authority and neutrality.
- WILSON BENESCH DISCOVERY £5,500**
Four-driver stand-mount with integral stand and hi-tech enclosure packs both considerable elegance and serious punch.

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



Sendor S8 - "Terrific performers for all types of music" November 01



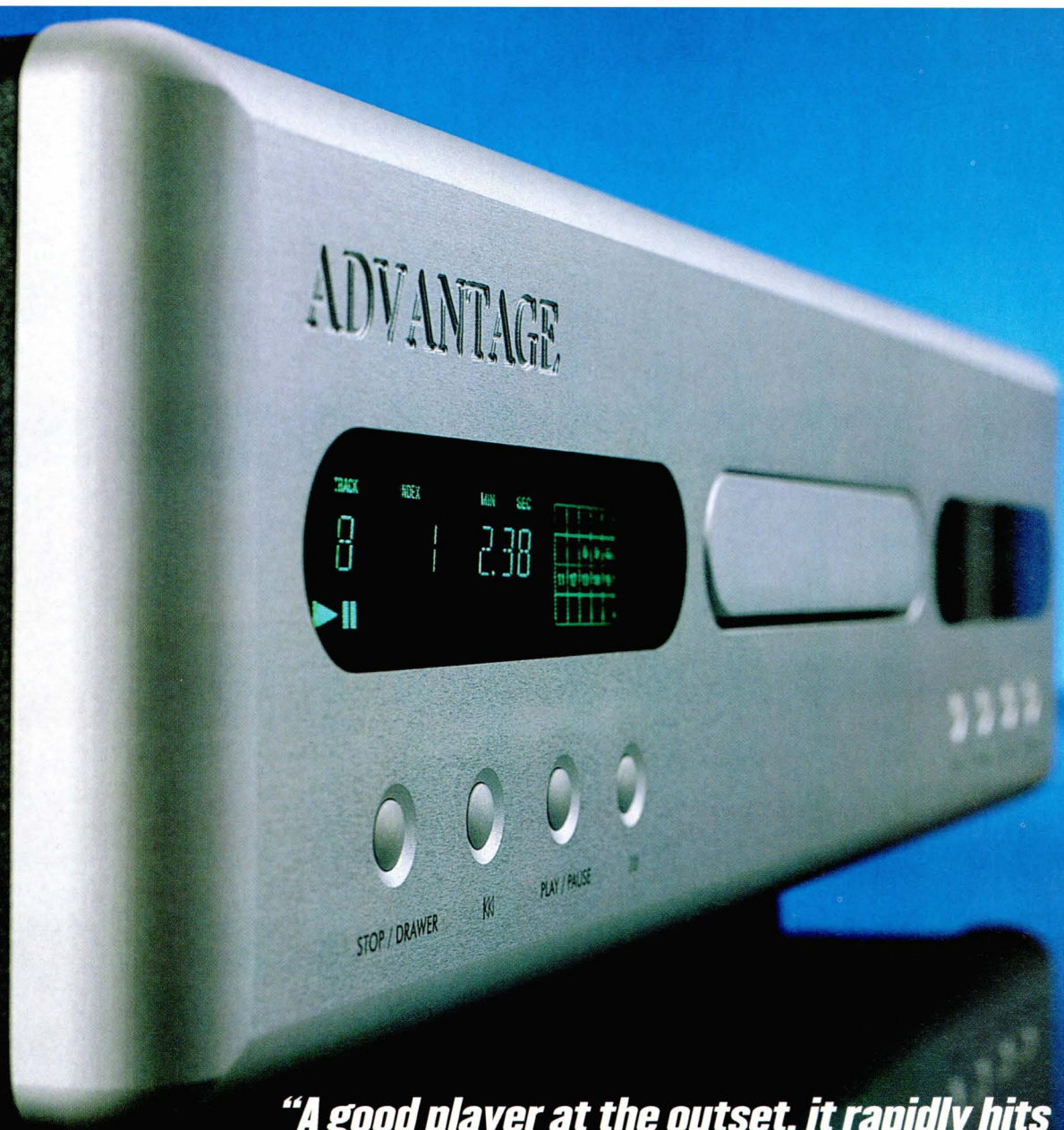
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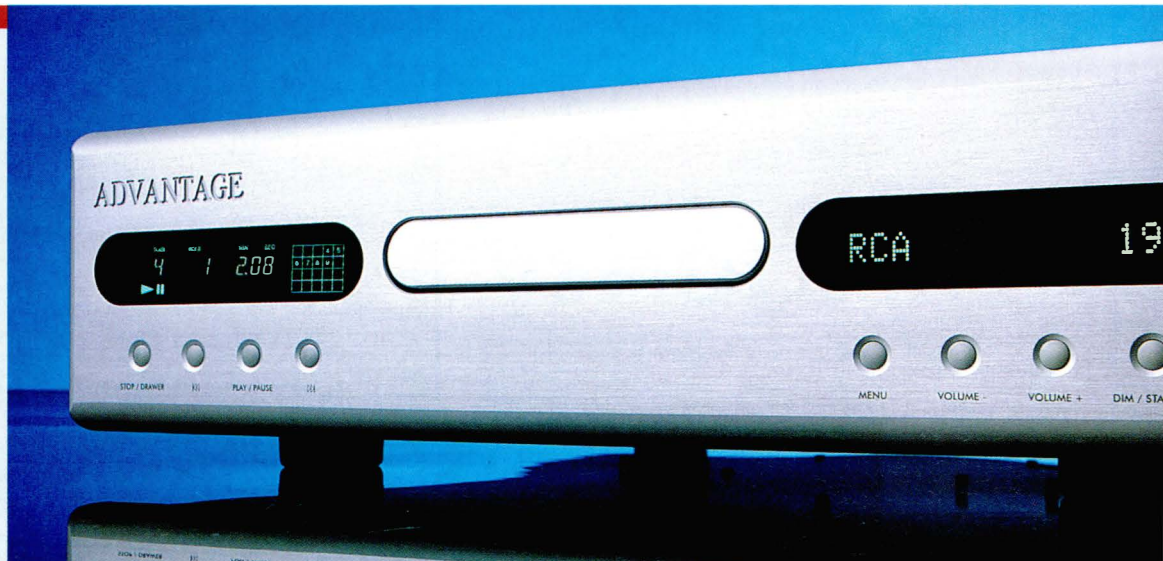


“A good player at the outset, it rapidly hits star quality and just keeps getting better. As long as you never switch it off, this is a gorgeous machine.”

SPEAKING VOLUMES

Advantage has been sold in the UK since the late 1990s, yet it is hardly a well known name. In fairness, part of this lack of presence is the company's strange inability to market itself. It has no Website, no real information available and remains a bit of a riddle.

Thankfully, this player speaks for itself. Aside from its sound, it's also impressively flexible. For example, its digital volume control means you can hook the player direct to a power amp without a pre, shortening the analogue signal path, and its digital inputs allow other digital sources to be rigged through in the same way.



Distinct Advantage

There's much more to Sweden than Abba, Ikea and meatballs, like beautifully smooth audio

VERDICT

**Advantage S1
CD player**
£3,150

▶ Modular CD player with a gorgeous sound that just keeps getting better and better.

▼ Needs to be left on to perform at its best; not the most ballsy sounding player at the price.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
Expensive but beautifully built player with a smooth, detailed and musical sound that demands constant power to come to life.

KEY FEATURES

▶ Modular CD player

▶ Optional DSP/analogue input cards

▶ Three digital inputs

▶ Three digital outputs

▶ Digital volume control

▶ Balanced and single-ended analogue outputs

Back in issue 193, *Hi-Fi Choice* tested the Swedish Advantage CD1. It was only just starting to reveal its hidden charms by the end of the review, but from the outset it was smooth and detailed. So it is with the new top of the range, the £3,150 S1.

The S1 has modular intent. It comes with a digital board as standard to cope with phono, optical and AES/EBU balanced digital inputs and outputs. There are also XLR balanced and single-ended phono analogue outputs, complete with a very high-quality 90-step digital volume control. The back panel also has removable back plates designed for intended upgrades, such as analogue input or room correction boards. There is even a 96kHz upsampler that can be switched on or off in the features list.

The built-in digital-to-analogue circuit board uses four Burr-Brown PCM 1704-K chips and an entirely discrete current to voltage stage. Similarly the S1 sports separate power supplies for the digital, analogue and transport mechanism.

It is extremely solidly built. The central transport mechanism is a standard CD drawer, but it is rigidly bolted to the thick chassis and the billet of alloy with the name stamped into the top right corner gives this player a solid, functional appeal. Even the remote control has the sort of heavy duty feel that could make it count as a blunt instrument in most courts of law.

While there is nothing fundamentally groundbreaking about the design or the modularity of the S1 player, it is built with such reassuring solidity (it weighs more than most integrated amps) that it is hard to fault.

PERFORMANCE

Even stone cold, like its CD1 predecessor, the Advantage S1 is packed with smoothness, packed with detail, just like every good aspiring high-end CD player should. Whatever music you place in the drawer, the sound quality has a silky sheen that tames even the cheapest, shouty stereo amplifier and possesses a level of detail retrieval that pulls almost every bit of info from the disc. Trouble is,



at first, this smooth and detailed sound can appear bland and unexciting. The smoothness almost seems saccharine and the detail seems strangely dull.

But keep at it, though. The burn-in time is vitally important, more so than almost any CD player apart from a Naim Audio model. Each disc played and each hour connected to the mains improves the sound and a few days into the procedure, the sound is changed almost beyond recognition. It's still smooth and detailed, but this seems strikingly natural and is complemented by so much more. Where before, the smoothness was sweet, now it's just smooth. Likewise the detail – before it warms up it is bland, a few days later, it is filled with information and makes you want to listen closer.

Now, the soundstage has filled out too, gaining depth and breadth that simply wasn't there before. It's like a speaker enhancement programme – play a large-scale orchestral piece like Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* and even the most congested box loudspeaker takes on electrostatic-like imaging properties. While it is not the widest soundstage on the planet (it lacks that CinemaScope image width of some of the top-end Japanese models) instead you get a soundstage that seems to stretch back into the next door neighbour's living room, akin to the likes of Wadia and Mark Levinson gear.

The disc drawer is flanked by two LED display panels – left is a standard CD display, the other is for digital volume and source.

Also, it becomes way more rhythmic and upbeat than before. This takes on even the complex polyrhythms of Eminem's excellent *Cleaning Out My Closet* without problems. But by comparison with the other joys of the player, this pacy quality is often left unnoticed against the smooth, wide and detailed sound. It is not a Linn CD12, but doesn't suffer from the 'beautiful, yet boring' audiophile disease either.

If ever there was a CD player that proved that running-in is absolutely vital, it is the Advantage S1. A good player at the outset, it rapidly hits star quality and just keeps on getting better. As long as you never switch it off, this is a gorgeously smooth machine. ◎

Metropolis Music 01892 539245

www.metropolis-music.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

AUDIONET ART V2 £2,300

Top-loading CD player with a choice of filters and a killer build. Sounds great, too.

WADIA 301 £3,650

Also with a built-in volume control, this revelatory CD player basically means you play more discs.

SONY SCD-1 £3,500

The first commercially available SACD player still sounds great with CD with stereo SACD.

EXCLUSIVE

One for all

1 Digital looks like turning the surround sound scene on its head with a 'single box' multichannel speaker that really works

VERDICT

1 Digital Surround Sound Projector
single speaker surround system
£25,000

It does what it says on the tin: surround sound without wires and speakers all round the room.

Doesn't compete with similarly-priced multi-speaker systems

CONCLUSION

The most impressive new technology in surround sound today. If things go to plan, licensed versions should be available at real world prices before too long.

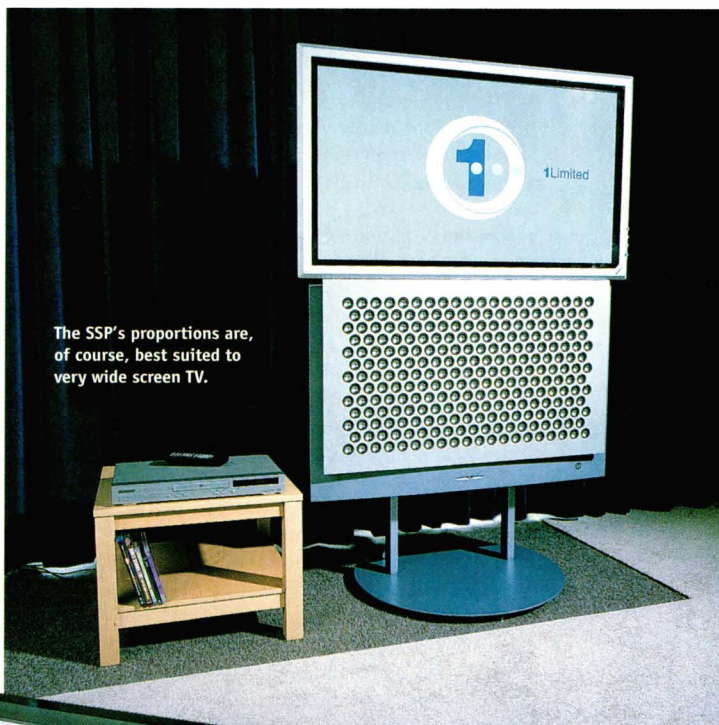
KEY FEATURES

- 254x20mm inverted dome metal drive units
- 508 watts
- 8 channels supporting 5.1, 6.1 & 7.1 formats
- Formats: Dolby Digital, DTS, MPEG, PCM; Dolby Pro-Logic/6-channel discrete
- Subwoofer output: digital coaxial & analogue
- Audio inputs: 4 optical digital, 1 stereo analogue

Back in the mid-nineties a scientist called Anthony Hooley began looking for funding to research and develop a true digital loudspeaker. He got the money, but for a long time he disappeared off the hi-fi map, busily wrestling with his creation. Until late last year when he reappeared brandishing not a digital loudspeaker but a single source surround sound speaker dubbed the Digital Sound Projector. This looked vaguely like the digital loudspeaker he initially touted, but now it was being promoted as an entirely different and potentially more commercial device, the manufacture of which he was hoping to license internationally.

Anthony Hooley's 1 Digital (formerly 1 Ltd) solution to getting surround around the room without wires and speakers takes the form of a single loudspeaker panel that sits underneath your TV. By literally projecting beams of sound onto the walls and ceiling of your room, it creates genuine surround sound, rather than just a virtual impression of it.

The Surround Sound Projector (SSP) is a multichannel processor, power amplifier and loudspeaker in a single flat package. It incorporates 254 drive units on an aluminium panel just 80cm wide by 42cm high. The drivers are inevitably small – 20mm in diameter – and tightly



The SSP's proportions are, of course, best suited to very wide screen TV.

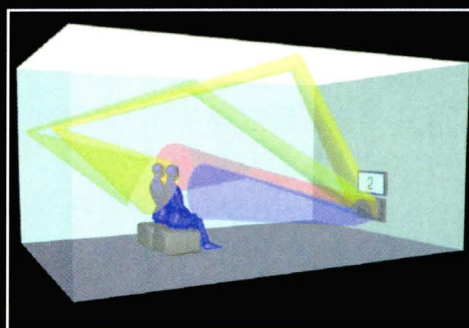


packed, but their aluminium inverted domes are relatively long travel devices with compact ring magnets. This allows the panel as a whole to produce usable bass down to 40Hz, although the standard set-up is rolled off at 80Hz leaving a sub to cover the lower octaves. As a panel of this size is not able to project frequencies much below 300Hz, this should not affect the surround performance.

It's possible to focus sound beams from the SSP to the extent that two people sitting side by side can listen to different instruments or voices without hearing any overlap. But in practise 1 Digital has realised it's preferable to broaden the multichannel sweet spot so that more listeners can enjoy a balanced mix.

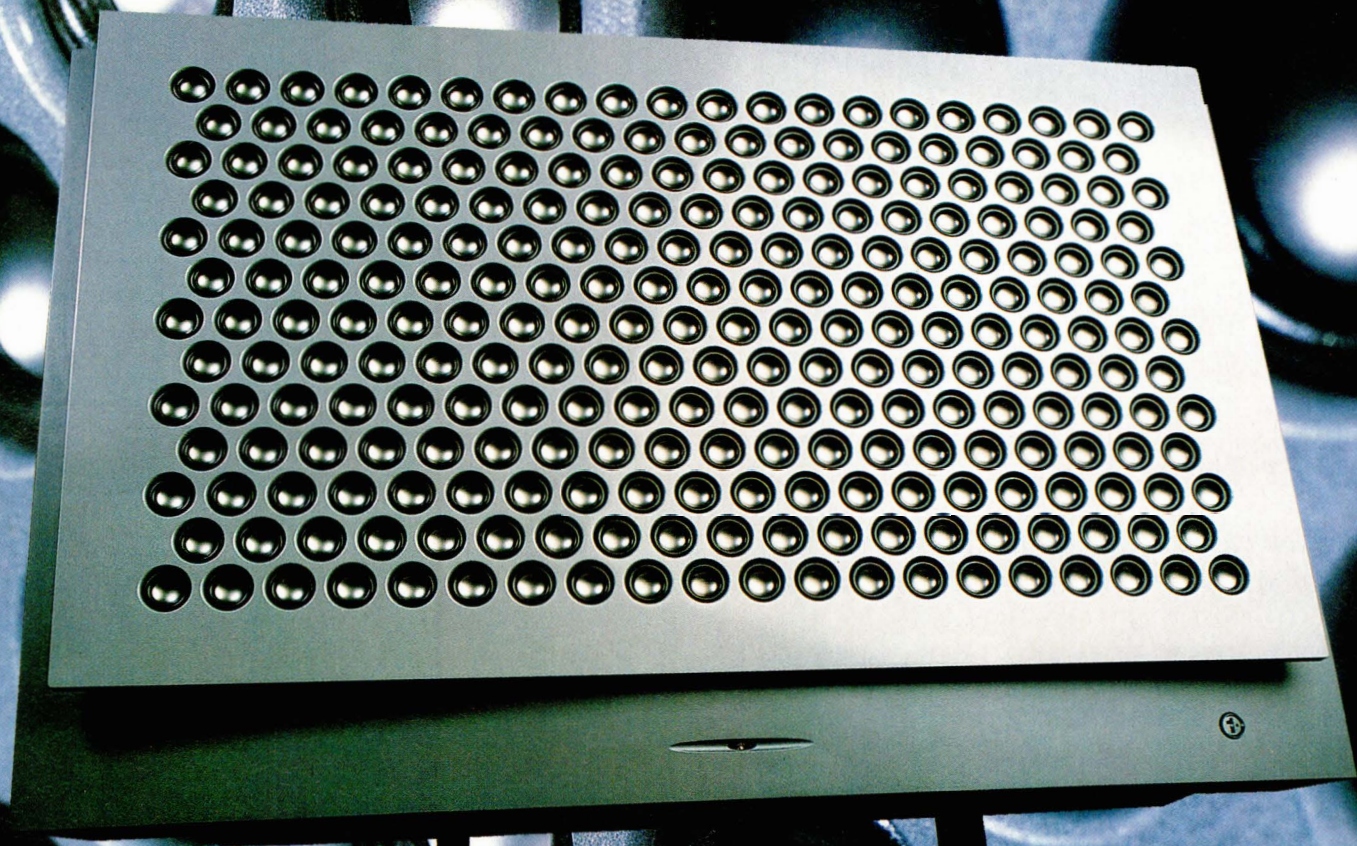
To achieve this the SSP is driven by 12 gigaflops (that's 12 billion operations per second!) of digital sound processing that computes the phase and timing of each signal. Each drive unit is actively powered by a two-watt class D digital amplifier mounted directly behind it.

HOW IT WORKS




The Surround Sound Projector effectively bounces sound off the walls of your room to give a surround sound effect without the hassles of additional speakers or trailing wires.

It is able to do it by using phased array technology similar to that found in radar and sonar systems. It staggers the timing of signals emitted from neighbouring drive units to give the output a precise dispersion pattern. This creates a sound beam that is directed at reflective surfaces in the room in such a way that you perceive the sound coming from that surface rather than from the panel itself.



“The Surround Sound Projector effectively bounces sound off the walls of your room to give a surround sound effect without the hassles of additional speakers or trailing wires.”

Two watts may not sound much but when you multiply it by 254 you get some idea of the real power that's available here. What's more, this power is effectively available to each of the possible eight channels you choose to utilise. This is because each drive unit contributes to each channel.

You could be forgiven for thinking that all this technology might be likely to lead to tremendous complexity at the set-up stage. However, as all the parameters (which even by high-end standards are unusually extensive) can be adjusted on the fly, and the company has produced software that will interact with a microphone in the listening position, it really boils down to a half-hour job once you know what you're doing. But learning the ropes in the first place might just take a little longer... 

☎ 1 Digital 01223 422290

🌐 www.1limited.com



A two watt drive unit may not be much on its own, but when joined by its 253 brothers its a surround sound colossus.

HOW IT SOUNDS

As we were only able to audition the SSP for a short period in unfamiliar surroundings it was not possible to make any absolute judgements about its performance. Instead, what you hold in your hands is a (very intrigued) first impression of a product that's still not completely finished. For instance it can't yet accept the six discrete channels of an SACD or DVD-Audio source – at present input cards accept Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM digital audio or two-channel analogue. Input modules for EX/ES 7.1 channels as well as six-channel discrete will be available for the September launch.

The first point about the SSP is that it works remarkably well – you get strong rear effects and all-round localisation is convincing. It's not the wishy-washy ambient haze of virtual surround from two speakers but distinct and discreet multichannel resolution. It produces acres of space and literally fills the room. Despite EQ filtering options, absolute results still seem to depend on the room and the earlier dem we had in a smaller room at CEDIA's show in Brighton were more impressive still.

The only reservations we could really draw are with bass and power. Bass drum on tracks from Missy Elliott's DVD-Audio proved difficult to reproduce evenly with or without a small REL subwoofer on hand. It's entirely possible that system tweaking might have improved matters but this aspect does need refinement. There is also, in a big room at least, a lack of authority or slightly grainy quality that gives the impression that absolute power could be limited. This could simply relate to the nature of the amplification rather than its current delivery but in a product at this price you could be forgiven for expecting less sense of strain.

On the plus side, DTS and Dolby Digital movie tracks sound open, clear and expansive. You can follow the dialogue and feel the ambience – for example, the opening battle scene from *Gladiator* sounded impressively big and real, in keeping with what you'd expect from high-end home cinema. The SSP is a unique product that delivers surround sound from a single box far more convincingly than anything that has come before. We await more developments with interest.

MAIN REVIEWS – Jason Kennedy | LAB REPORTS – Paul Miller

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Dedicated stereo amps can still get you the sound quality of an AV behemoth but at a fraction of the price

ON TEST



ARCAM A65 PLUS
£370



HARMAN KARDON HK 670
£299



MYRYAD Z140
£450



NAD C320BEE
£220



ROTEL RA-02
£349

The budget or entry-level end of the stereo amplifier market is under attack. Sales in this sector are largely features-led and when it comes to bells, whistles and lights, it's hard to beat an AV surround sound amp. Unless sound quality is an important factor you are unlikely to end up with a stereo amp to play your music on – after all, if you can get three extra channels and umpteen flavours of DSP to play with, why on earth would you go for a smaller box that only plays stereo? Well, you might want to enjoy your music on it for one thing, and come to think of it, what other reason would you buy an amp for anyway?

The upshot of this situation is that the big oriental brands are gradually filtering stereo amps out of their ranges – Pioneer has got there already and more will follow. We scoured the market for new affordable stereo amps for this group and did well to get five. The irony is that to get the quality offered by £220-worth of stereo amp out of an AV design you have to spend over three times as much. Which seems odd until you realise that the AV amp has two and a half times the output devices and digital processing to pay for, not to mention the surround sound licenses.

It's gratifying to see the hi-fi stalwarts are still bringing out new babies for your listening pleasure. The models gathered here are fresh for the season, either revised (Arcam has Plussed its A65 and NAD has BEE'd its 302), or totally rebuilt (Rotel has replaced its RA-971 MkII with the much slimmer

RA-02, while Myryad has done the same, with the T-series making way for the slimmer and sexier Z-series). Harman Kardon is attempting to break all records by making the most powerful, not to say physically heavy, integrated you can get for less than £300.

These are all good amps but which ones are the best? Have a look at the following pages to see what we think, and try to read beyond the star ratings, then take your shortlist and your speakers to a dealer and listen for yourself.

EQUIPMENT USED

Vinyl

SME Model 20A turntable, van den Hul Grasshopper cartridge, Audio Innovations T2 step-up transformer

Disc player

Townshend Pioneer DV-747A

Amplifiers

Harman Kardon HK5500 AV receiver
Pioneer A300R TE

Loudspeakers

Cyrus CL550, B&W Signature 805
Living Voice Avatar OBX-R

Cables

Townshend Cryogenic, Living Voice
Potato Wire

Stands & supports

Townshend Seismic Stands
Kudos S100

MUSIC USED

Ben Allison *Riding The Nuclear Tiger*
Various artists *Mark Levinson Live Recordings at Red Rose Music inc Bach guitar piece*
Various artists inc Sammartini *Exceptional Masterpieces*
Groove Armada *Goodbye Country (Hello Nightclub)*
Missy Elliott *Miss E... So Addictive*
Tool *Lateralus*



VOLUME

TONE DEFEAT

TREBLE

BALANCE

TONE DEFEAT

TREBLE

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BALANCE

TONE DEFEAT



ARCAM A65 PLUS £370

☎ 01223 203200 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

Arcam's newly-upgraded baby wins through on subtle observation and attention to detail

Arcam's baby amp these days is an attractive 40-watter called the A65 which, with its siblings, the A75 integrated and P75 power, has recently been upgraded to Plus status with a number of internal modifications to the output stage circuitry and input coupling. These are said to increase bandwidth and improve current delivery for a better transient response. We didn't have a standard A65 for comparison, but as you'll see, the end result suggests the effort has been worthwhile.

This is a full remote control design, the handset being a rather indistinct item which makes little effort to reveal the critical buttons, though as luck would have it they are on there, somewhere. The amp itself is pretty straightforward for a budget design – defeatable tone controls sit alongside a second set of speaker outputs and a balance control. There is the option of a phono stage but otherwise those sockets will take a line component.

It doesn't have the multiroom-oriented facilities of, for example, the Rotel or Harman Kardon in this test, but to be frank there's a limit to how many pairs of speakers you can drive with any amp in this price range, and that's usually one!

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★☆

BUILD
★★★★☆

VALUE
★★★★★

Extremely articulate and coherent integrated that will charm you with its midrange and high frequency sophistication. Power is limited but this is a quality not quantity device.

CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL ✓

STONE CONTROLS ✓

PHONO INPUT OPTIONAL

LINE INPUTS 4/5

TAPE LOOPS 1

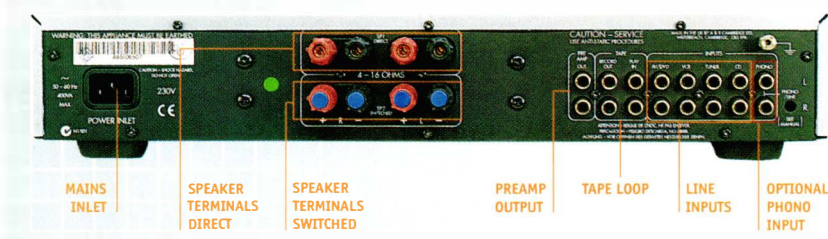
PERFORMANCE

Still, in many respects the A65 Plus is the most impressive amp in this group. It has a coherence and subtlety that only the Myriad can approach. Its best trick is to sort out the different instruments in a mix and present them so that each can be followed easily without upsetting the flow of the music. It handles microdynamics effortlessly, a good example being the Ben Allison track with its variety of acoustic instruments. With most of the competition here, certain instruments or frequencies tended to dominate and following the others can get difficult, but the Arcam revelled in each element of the mix, pulling out the important detail without sacrificing the rest of the music. Tool's sophisticated heaviness suffered a little from the amp's limited grunt – a more efficient speaker would help here – but the playing and the composition ring true. The Myriad for instance offers a bit more authority but the Arcam gives a degree of precision in

the mid and high frequencies that amps of twice the price would be jealous of. Its midrange is pretty damn gorgeous for a transistor design – it is fluent, times nicely and is nothing if not articulate. The only limitation is in the power department: if you want to play long and loud, get a bigger amp or seriously efficient speakers – 90dB at eight ohms or better should do the loudness trick if not the bass one. The A65 Plus is about finer things and if you prefer subtlety to power, it's hard to beat. Ⓢ

“The A65 Plus revels in each element of the mix, pulling out the important detail without sacrificing the rest of the music.”

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS



LAB REPORT

- ▶ The six million dollar question is “just what advantage does the 65 Plus offer over the 65?” Power output is unchanged at 2x50W/8 ohm and 2x70W/4 ohm, but has improved slightly under dynamic conditions to 81W, 145W and 228W (10.7A) into 8, 4 and 2 ohms.
- ▶ Protection is relaxed into 1 ohm loads, allowing 117W or 10.8A before the A65 Plus cuts out.
- ▶ Distortion, too, remains steady at around 0.005% through the midrange, increasing to 0.035% at very high frequencies, but is now a very low 0.0004% through the bass.
- ▶ Otherwise, most other technical parameters are unchanged. The S/N is held to 86dB, overall gain to +37dB, output impedance remains 0.06ohm and the response is very flat (-0.06dB at 20kHz).
- ▶ It's worth using the “Direct” button to bypass Arcam's tone controls which, even at ‘12 o'clock’, introduce variations of 0.3dB in response while adding about 1.5dB of extra noise (S/N drops to 84.5dB).
- ▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Modifications are subtle rather than fundamental as the technical performance of the A65 remains broadly unchanged.



HARMAN KARDON HK670 £299 ☎ 020 8731 4670 🌐 www.harmankardon.com

Makes up in raw power what it lacks in subtlety

With its 80 watts-a-side, this clean looking HK is the beefiest contender in the group, as far as manufacturer's ratings go at least. Such things rarely tell the whole story, that's why we've lab tested each model to find out what really lies under the bonnet. But for under £300 that's a lot of power, and if you look through the slots in the lid you'll see enough heatsinking to cool something offering even more, so perhaps there's something in it. *[It seems there is, see Lab Report – Ed.]*

Despite its minimalist appearance, the HK670 is a well featured budget model. There are tone controls with a defeat button, headphone socket and – a rarity in this group – separate listen and record selectors for the busy listener who wants to play his CDs while recording from the radio, for instance. There's also a phono stage for your vinyl and a selection of digital loop-through sockets so that you can direct digital signals from a CD player to a CD-recorder. This is a passive switching device no more but a potentially useful one for the digitally oriented.

System-style remote control is provided to run your HK CD, CD-R and tuner, and you can even drive a second

set of speakers if you can find some with a kind enough load – the terminals are marked for speakers with a minimum impedance of eight ohms.

PERFORMANCE

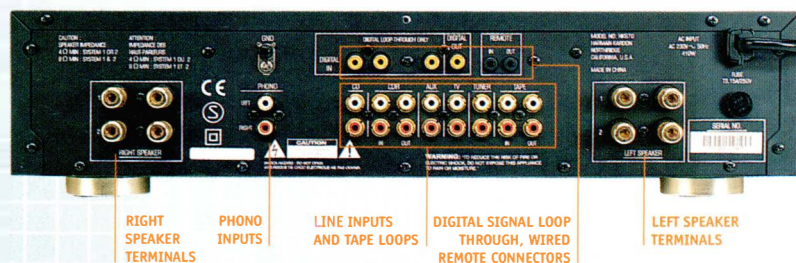
While not the most refined amp on test the HK displays some impressive sonic attributes. It sounds open and powerful, with strong dynamics and good bass extension for the money.

It has a particular penchant for punchy, rhythmic music. On test, The Missy Elliott DVD-A sounded solid and open. Likewise, the Tool disc sounded like it should – energetic yet controlled.

The relative subtlety of Ben Allison's jazz vibes sounded snappy, spacious and timely if a little overenergetic, while the ancient instruments on the Sarmartini piece revealed a good degree of their lovely woody timbre. But next to an amp like the Rotel the story is not quite so rosy, the comparison revealing a distinct shyness at high frequencies that makes the music seem darker than it should.

“This HK is enthusiastic and entertaining and what it lacks in sophistication it makes up for with gusto.”

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Remarkably well equipped amp with an energetic if slightly less than sophisticated sound that will suit the rock and pop enthusiast with a sympathetic pair of speakers.

CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
tone controls	✓
PHONO INPUT	✓
LINE INPUTS	4
TAPE LOOPS	2

The existence of a phono input is all the excuse we need to play a bit of vinyl but the result is not the sort that encourages such behaviour. Then again, adding a decent off-board phono stage will solve that problem if vinyl forms part of your listening repertoire.

This HK is an enthusiastic and entertaining amp. What it lacks in sophistication it makes up for with gusto, albeit not quite as much as the power rating suggests. Still, it's a lot of amp for the money and if you can't go an extra £50 for the Rotel or £70 for the Arcam, it's well worth a punt. ☐

LAB REPORT

▶ Source direct makes a big difference here, even with tone controls defaulted. With source direct, the response is flat to within $\pm 0.05\text{dB}$ over 20Hz-30kHz and the S/N ratio is 86.5dB. Without, the response varies by up to 1.5dB and the S/N ratio drops to 83.1dB.

▶ Distortion is pretty consistent at 0.0025% through bass and midrange across the bulk of the amplifier's power range, and only increases to 0.01% at very high frequencies where the influence of any corrective feedback is diminished.

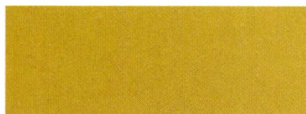
▶ The HK670 meets its 80W specification with 2x100W/8 ohm and 2x155W/4 ohm, increasing to 130W, 250W, 430W and a whopping 595W into 8, 4, 2 and 1 ohm loads under dynamic conditions.

▶ Harman claims $\pm 80\text{A}$ 'High Instantaneous Current' but this is not qualified by duration or distortion. In practice, the HK670 yields 24.4A for 10msec at $<1\%$ THD.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** The HK670 maintains HK's tradition for generous power output and combines this with a solid performance at a low price.

Custom Sight & Sound

Consultations
Demonstrations
Installations



RED ROSE MUSIC

Red Rose Baby Reference 2

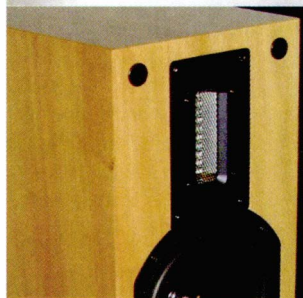
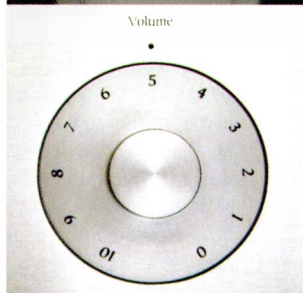
Conceived by Mark Levinson this fine system is capable of stunning performance yet is compact, stylish and incredibly easy to use.

Choose either the delightful Rosette 1 integrated amplifier or the more powerful Passion model to drive a pair of Rosebud ribbon hybrid loudspeakers and you have the basis of a quite magical system.

Complete your system with a fine CD front end such as the Audio Analogue Maestro or the awesome Wadia 301, add cables by Cardas or Red Rose and you have a music playing system to rival the very best available.

If you wish we can further refine the system with the use of custom made equipment and speaker stands from HNE and sophisticated power conditioning and distribution systems from Audioprism and Isotek.

Complete solutions from Custom Sight & Sound.

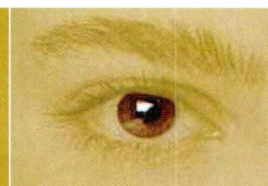


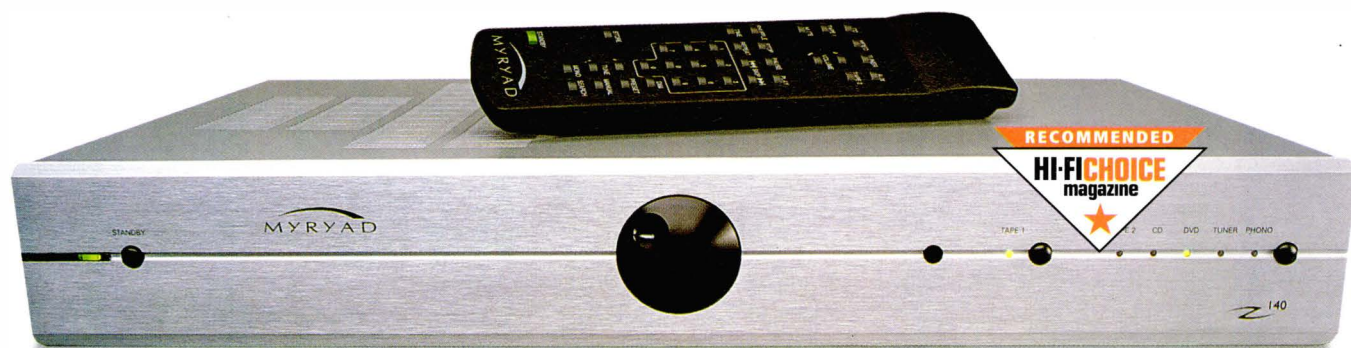
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- Audioprism
- Cardas
- Crestron
- HNE
- Isotek
- Linn Home Theatre
- Living Voice
- Lutron
- Red Rose Music
- Revox
- Runco
- Sony SACD
- Tact
- Triangle
- Wadia
- Wilson Benesch

Custom Sight & Sound

Incorporating Red Rose Music (London)
Phone-01992 571879 Web-cssinstall.co.uk
Mail-enquiries@cssinstall.co.uk





MYRYAD Z140 £450 ☎ 020 8863 9117 🌐 www.myryad.co.uk

Myryad's stylish Z series amp looks the part, but does it have the sound to match?

M yryad's new Z-series replaces the much less glamorous T-Series and forms the entry level range in the brand's armoury of audio and video components. The Z140 integrated is a slimline 50 watt beauty with one of the cleanest fascias we've encountered, yet with the remote in hand you can get it to do all the important things one might expect of a stereo amp. It doesn't have the tone controls found on its competitors here but there is a headphone socket of the mini-jack variety and a bi-amp or pre output for the matching Z160 power amp. There's also a phono stage/aux combination that gives you the choice of line or vinyl input according to your source requirements.

With similarly rated alternatives here at half the price you may wonder what Myryad has done to warrant the cost. One less obvious area is component quality – the Z140 uses high power Toshiba output transistors that are capable of supplying twice the rated output on offer. It incorporates the DC5 technology developed for the company's M1120 which shares the same passive style preamp section, and uses four regulated power supplies. It has even lavished the phono stage with precision polypropylene film/foil capacitors.

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



A highly competent and remarkably stylish little amp that delivers the goods musically whatever your taste. Not as powerful as some at the price but quality is the name of the game and this has it in spades.

CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
TONE CONTROLS	✗
PHONO INPUT	✓
LINE INPUTS	3/4
TAPE LOOPS	2

PERFORMANCE

Taking to the stage after the rather good Rotel, the Z140 quickly showed what an extra £100 can achieve if carefully spent. It brings more space, greater realism and more all-round integrity to the party, which goes a long way to making the listening process a gratifying one. It has a clean delivery that makes musical lines easier to follow – Ben Allison's rhythm section remained clear and coherent while the soloist was blasting away over the top. The Myryad has a clean, hard-hitting delivery that preserves instrument timbre, something that was clear on Groove Armada's *Suntoucher* which it delivered with grunt in the bass and clarity in the midrange. Switching to the Bach guitar piece the subtle timing came across well, the amp resolving the way the player emphasised certain notes to give the music fluency and precision.

More powerful material like Tool is likewise well served, the dynamics and grunt revelling in the amp's ability to

stay in control come what may. The Z140 has remarkable grip and tightness in the bass for an integrated 50-watter. The phono stage is no slouch either, with good timing and tonal shading not to mention fine resolution.

Being the most expensive product in a group is no guarantee of being the best, but this Myryad made a very positive impression right from the start. The Arcam and Rotel come close for considerably less money, but if you want an amp that will serve you through several speaker upgrades this Myryad is a great buy. **D**

LAB REPORT

▶ The Z140 meets its 50W specification with 2x65W/8 ohm and 2x95W/4 ohm and betters this with 95W, 160W, 240W (11.0A) and 269W (16.4A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 ohm loads under dynamic conditions.

▶ Distortion is typically very low, but there is evidence of crossover distortion at very low levels as the trend starts at around 0.003% (100mW), falling to 0.0006% (10W) and then steadily increasing to 0.004% at 50W.

▶ Distortion does increase through the treble, but never exceeds 0.007%, even at a high 20kHz.

▶ In common with previous Myryad amplifiers, the Z140's response is nearly ruler flat (+0.0/-0.1dB) while the low, sub 0.01 ohm output impedance suggests consistency with different speakers.

▶ The S/N ratio, while setting no records, is still the widest of the group at 88.5dB. Channel balance and DC offset errors are also very low (0.18dB at 0dBW and +1mV).

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** A meticulously engineered amp from Myryad and thankfully not a case of head before heart as the subjective tests show.

“The Z140 shows that an extra £100, if carefully spent, brings more space, greater realism and more all-round integrity to the party.”

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



PHONO/AUX
INPUTS AND
SWITCH

THREE LINE
INPUTS

TWO TAPE
LOOPS

BI-AMP
(PRE)
OUTPUT

SPEAKER
TERMINALS

MY-LINK CONNECTORS
FOR INTEGRATED
SYSTEM OPERATION

MAINS INLET
AND SWITCH



NAD C320BEE £220 ☎ 01908 319360 🌐 www.lenbrook.co.uk

NAD's latest budget stereo amp gets some added BEE sting

BEE, or Bjorn Erik Edvardsen in full, has a lot to answer for. Half the hi-fi nutballs in the country caught the audiophile disease because of a product that he created, the NAD 3020: a seminal amp that turned a generation on to hi-fi.

The new C320BEE was also created by Erik, as he's known in the fjords. Like its ancestor this is a grey-finished nonsense integrated amp with line-only inputs and a single set of speaker outputs mounted above NAD's trademark soft clipping switch – which we left on for this appraisal.

The BEE is a bit like what Marantz would call an SE version – it's an upgrade on its predecessor, the plain C320. Changes include an increase in rated power from 40 to 50 watts per channel, improved tone control accuracy and the use of a better quality volume control. Frills have been added in the guise of multiroom installation-friendly infrared connection port in and outputs for genuine remote control and a 12V trigger output for partnering components. The black and white remote is an attractive design which will also operate NAD source components.

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Spirited and enthusiastic with reasonable grunt and dynamics but slightly eager upper midrange that won't suit forward loudspeakers. But choose your ancillaries carefully and it's a lot of entertainment for the money.

CHECKLIST

REMOTE CONTROL	✓
TONE CONTROLS	✓
PHONO INPUT	✗
LINE INPUTS	5
TAPE LOOPS	2

PERFORMANCE

Of the two main speaker options used for this group the NAD is clearly more at home with the more modest, though nonetheless revealing, Cyrus CL50s. Initial listening was via the B&Ws but their especially revealing top end proved a little too much for what is after all a modestly priced amp.

It sounds as though Erik was aware of the C320's high frequency limitations when he created this version because there's a little extra bass to smooth things out, a good alternative to rolling off the treble as is often done with budget designs. This balance suits most compact speakers well as they can be a bit lean in the bass.

There's no doubting the energy and enthusiasm that the NAD brings – give it almost any piece of music, even a relaxed one like the Bach guitar and it'll dig out the life and vivacity. Laid back music sounds engaging and higher energy stuff has real 'oomph'. There's

“There's no doubting the energy and enthusiasm of the NAD, give it almost any piece of music and it'll dig out the life and vivacity.”

plenty of power too, the amp digging deep into the bass on heavy tracks and driving them with gusto. And it does a decent job of subtlety – next to an HK AV amp it sounds natural, even lyrical, with good image depth.

The C320BEE delivers plenty for its thoroughly modest asking price, though the competition is hotter than when the original 3020 first hit the streets. It's worth spending the extra on the Arcam or Rotel if you're able, but if your budget will stretch no further it's a lot of entertainment for the money. Ⓞ

LAB REPORT

▶ Tested without 'soft-clipping', the C320BEE provides some 2x80W/8 ohm which increases, barely, to 2x85W into 4 ohm loads under continuous conditions.

▶ NAD uses a loosely-regulated power supply, which emphasises power output under dynamic, music-like conditions. Here it delivers an impressive 144W, 255W, 400W (14.1A) and 470W (21.7A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 ohm respectively.

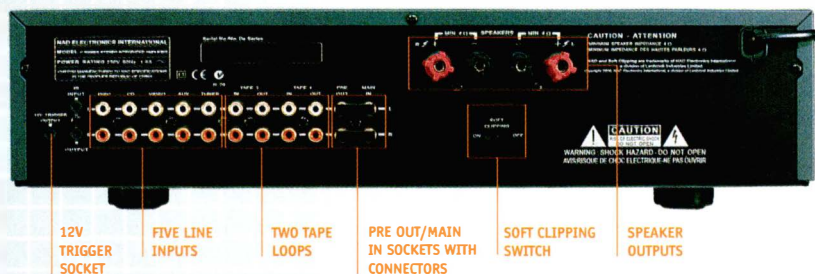
▶ Distortion is consistently low at around 0.003% up to its rated output through bass and mid but increases to 0.025% up to very high frequencies (20kHz).

▶ Whether 'Tone Defeat' is switched on or not, the C320BEE offers a flat (+0.0/-0.2dB) response, proving that the default tone position really is 'flat'. The modest 83dB A-wtd S/N ratio is dominated by a white 'hiss' rather than lower frequency hum.

▶ DC offset is very high at +95mV. This is more than sufficient to bias the position of the speaker cone(s) and can, depending on the speaker, have a marked effect.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** An amp suited to music with plenty of punch rather than sustained, high outputs. Either way, this is no run-of-the-mill amplifier.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS





ROTEL RA-02 £349

01903 750750 www.rotel.com

Rotel's new silver-clad integrated sounds alive with any type of music

Things have been happening at Rotel. Not only has the year seen the brand move from its long-term UK distributor, Gamepath, to its international distributor B&W, but we've seen the first silver components in the range for quite a while. The new integrated is this slimline RA-02, a 40 watts-per-channel replacement for the RA-971 MkII, and very cute it is too – an effect enhanced when you switch on and see the blue LEDs on power, volume and select knobs that sit on its 6cm high front panel.

Remote control seems to be mandatory on amps these days and the RA-02 is not challenging this state of affairs, though it has a similar sibling called RA-01 without the feature for £100 less. The fully stocked fascia features tiny and defeatable tone controls, balance, tape monitoring and speaker switching facilities. The remote is a system type capable of driving the matching Rotel tuner and CD player we looked at in the August issue of *HFC*.

The back panel has socketry for external remote control and 12V triggers, both elements designed to enhance multiroom use, and given the extra pair of speaker terminals on the RA-02 a practical option for simple second room operation via a keypad transmitter.

VERDICT
SOUND
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★★
BUILD
★★★★★
VALUE
★★★★★

Very agile and capable compact amp with good transparency and the ability to reproduce all music types with vivacity and depth through a variety of loudspeakers, but avoid the inefficient ones.

CHECKLIST
REMOTE CONTROL ✓
tone controls ✓
PHONO INPUT ✓
LINE INPUTS 4
TAPE LOOPS 1

PERFORMANCE

If the RA-02 is anything to go by, £350 is the sort of money you'll need to find if you want an amp that will make you spend more time with your music. Less expensive models in this group have foibles that will probably become apparent with exposure whereas this Rotel sounds like it will just keep on getting better the more you use it. While not quite as sophisticated sounding as the Arcam, this is still a subtle and clean amp with a good sense of timing and a little more punch.

Playing the Groove Armada disc displayed clear, crisp voice articulation and a natural treble that doesn't 'tizz' and spit. At the other end of things, bass is solid though a touch on the lean side, but the quality of the midrange makes up for it. The Sarmartini piece proved this dramatically, the instruments recreated in a three dimensional soundstage, alive and vibrant. If you like to hear the timbre of instruments, the richness on

show with the Rotel will turn you on.

Ben Allison's jazz band likewise comes alive in a spacious soundstage, the groove driving the music along without any of the edginess found with lesser designs. There is a slight hint of dryness in the treble but this doesn't undermine the sense of space and air, and doesn't become apparent until you hear something sweeter. Vinyl sounds remarkably listenable as well, albeit a little lightweight.

While this doesn't look like Rotels of old it has lost none of their charm and if you're serious about music the RA-02 will show you the fun side – after all, music is supposed to be enjoyed. **C**

LAB REPORT

▶ Although the RA-02 is only rated at 40W/8 ohm, you can rely on 2x55W/8 ohm and 2x80W/4 ohm, increasing to 88W, 148W, 195W (9.9A) and 158W (12.6A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1 ohm loads, respectively, under dynamic conditions.

▶ There's no suggestion of crossover distortion at low signal levels where figures of around 0.012% are broadly maintained up to 50W or so through bass and midrange.

▶ Unusually, however, second and fourth-order distortions gently increase through the upper midrange and treble, finally reaching 0.06% at 20kHz. This undoubtedly contributes to the RA-02's 'characterful' performance.

▶ The response has the mildest -0.2dB bass roll-off at 20Hz but is otherwise flat, extended and assisted by a consistent 0.04 ohm output impedance.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** A slim and capable amplifier with a gentle, rather than typically abrupt, increase in distortion through the treble.

"It may not look like Rotels of old but it's lost none of their charm and if you're serious about music the RA-02 will show you the fun side."

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS



AMPLIFIERS CONCLUSIONS

Jason Kennedy is relieved that budget stereo amps can still outperform more expensive surround options

All of these integrated designs outperformed the £750 AV amp that was on hand as a benchmark representative of the breed, proving the point that if it's music you're into rather than movies, a dedicated approach will give the best results – for less dosh.

The standard overall is pretty impressive here and the garlanded contestants are extremely strong performers for the money. It became apparent fairly early on that quality was improving with price, a result that one might expect though not one that is always the case. However, the Arcam and Rotel models did come very close to matching the Myryad's overall finesse and actually outperformed it in a few areas. Arguably the closest fought battle of the group involved the



Myryad's potency versus the Arcam's nimbleness, and the ultimate choice here will probably come down to the speakers used.

The two sub-£300 options, the NAD and Harman Kardon, both deliver plenty for the money. The HK scores with its power, drive and facilities, while it's hard to imagine a more engaging and musical amp than the NAD at £220.

But one of the most compelling conclusions from this group is that it's well worth spending more if

you can afford to. The Rotel has a beguiling midband and a cleaner sound than the cheapies here, and like the Arcam and Myryad it's good enough to see you through several speaker upgrades.

Loudspeaker choice is critical with amps of any price, but the lower down the scale you go the more likely you are to be limited in power terms, and, at an absolute level, by the amount of distortion created. If you want to play long and loud there's no substitute for good clean power, something the dearest contender here offers above the competition. However, if you have modest but efficient speakers any of these integrateds will give you years of musical entertainment, and you can even play your movies through them (in stereo) to great effect. Try it!

TRY THEM WITH THESE

CD PLAYERS

MARANTZ CD6000 OSE LE £300

Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context, this will suit any of these amps.

NAD C5411 £330

A dynamic, tonally varied and confident sounding player with class leading detail resolution.

ROTEL RCD-02 £379

An articulate sounding player, new from Rotel and an obvious match for the RA-02 amp.

LOUDSPEAKERS

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO ONE £180

Classy and sophisticated performer for the price, with laid-back sound and good looks. Good partner for the NAD.

B&W DM602 S3 £300

Large, lively standmount with fine bass and low coloration. Will suit the better amps in this group nicely.

MISSION M51 £300

An engaging new standmount from Mission – would make an interesting partner for the Arcam, Rotel or Myryad.



AMPLIFIERS AT A GLANCE

	MAKE	Arcam	Harman Kardon	Myryad	NAD	Rotel
	MODEL	A65 Plus	HK670	Z140	C320BEE	RA-02
	PRICE	£370	£299	£450	£220	£349
	SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
	FEATURES	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
	BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
	VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS		Articulate and coherent model that will charm you with its midrange sophistication.	Well equipped and powerful with a gung-ho sound well suited to modern music.	If you are after quality rather than quantity this is an impressive amp that will serve you well.	A substantial and engaging sound continues NAD's fine tradition for budget amps.	Agile and persuasive amp with a strong feature list and good transparency. Great value.

LAB REPORT

DYNAMIC POWER OUTPUT	AVERAGE	EXCELLENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT	GOOD
SPEAKER LOAD TOLERANCE	AVERAGE	EXCELLENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT	AVERAGE
AUDIBLE DISTORTION	GOOD	GOOD	AVERAGE	GOOD	AVERAGE
NOISE	AVERAGE	GOOD	GOOD	BELOW PAR	BELOW PAR
OVERALL RATING	60%	75%	65%	70%	60%

HINTS AND TIPS

Support: Place your amp on a dedicated equipment support or platform, preferably one that will isolate it from vibration created by the speakers. Avoid placing components on top of an amp – they need plenty of ventilation. If you have to stack components put the amp at the top.

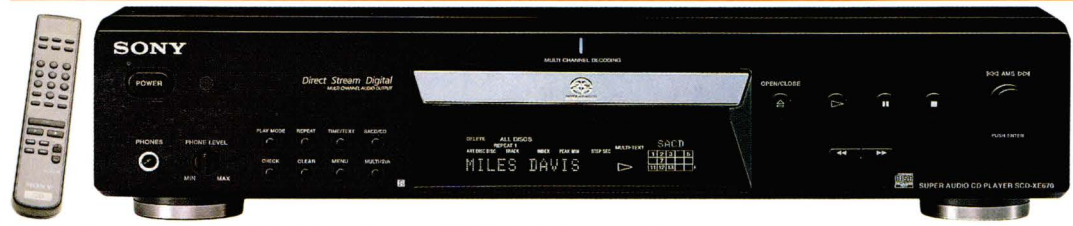
Connections: Use the best interconnect and speaker cables you can afford. Speaker cables can significantly affect the way an amp and speaker interact, see the Directory (p94) for recommendations.

Warm up: All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up and this is particularly true of amplifiers. If you can't leave it on all the time try to switch on at least 15 minutes before listening.

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MILTON KEYNES	01908 608 908
NEWCASTLE	0191 230 1392
NORWICH	01603 620 860
NOTTINGHAM	0115 924 1551
OXFORD	01865 243 444
PLYMOUTH	01752 222 256
READING	0118 959 1111
ROMFORD	01708 747 727
SEVENOAKS	01732 456 573
SHEFFIELD	0114 266 1616
SOUTHAMPTON	023 8023 1311
STOKE (HANLEY)	01782 289 009
SWINDON	01793 612 652
WATFORD	01923 218 888
WOLVERHAMPTON	NEW 01902 455 872

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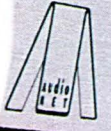
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Play

input

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-20.5

volume



SAM
STEREO-amplifier

SET

HIGH END FOR THE REAL WORLD:2

Our introduction to 'affordable' high-end audio two issues ago showed how it can be done. Now we show you how far you can go

As Laurence Fishburne says to Keanu Reeves at their first meeting in *The Matrix*, "If you take the red pill you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes".

Prepare to pop the red because, in part two of *High End For The Real World*, we're taking you all the way. Part one (*HFC 230*) will have acquainted you with the concept. Destination High End isn't an impossible ride if you don't have bottomless disposable. The search for sublime sonics and drop dead design needn't involve the wearing of hair shirts, remortgaging the house or any other kind of fiscal farrago.

Sure, £10,000 is a tidy sum – roughly the price of a 1.4-litre Ford Focus. But think about it – with a little care and cunning in your choice of hardware you can buy a system that delivers Ferrari-style satisfaction. Then consider that some high-end practitioners will happily sell you a hi-fi that costs two or three times as much as the Italian supercar legend. You see the attraction. Life-changing kit for £10K (or less) is a conspicuous bargain.

This month we've shifted the emphasis in an effort to well and truly nail 'the ultimate' within the realm of 'the affordable'. In short we've laid the foundation stones with three pairs of

frankly awesome speakers and designed systems around them. It's meant throwing less cash at sources and amps but, truth is, this is where the stunning value in serious hi-fi currently resides.

Lovers of big speakers are going to feel right at home. T+A's new transmission line/electrostatic hybrid, the Criterion TC2, sets the scene with a blend of imposing size, jaw-dropping build and technological bravura that melds perfectly with Audionet's Mercedes-like approach to electronics. German über-fi.

Tannoy's gorgeous supertweetered Dimension TD8 is every bit as much of a statement which requires, nay, demands the accompaniment of talented back-up. Meanwhile, classy Arcam A32/P35 bi-amp muscle and a price-conscious, vinyl-spinning package from German high-end heroes Clearaudio take care of business – yes, analogue fights its corner here. Finally, ART Loudspeakers' Expression might not be quite as big as the others (though the optional bass module turns it into a Goliath) but it is a seriously heavy hitter, accounting for just under half the price of a system that's completed by Sugden's Masterclass CD player and integrated amplifier. Eyes open, now. Welcome back to *High End For The Real World*.

➤ CLEARAUDIO CHAMPION ➤ ARCAM FMJ A32/P35
 ➤ TANNOY DIMENSION TD8 ➤ TOTAL: £7,715

ACOUSTIC ALCHEMY

This vinyl combo's delicate balancing act outstretches CD's range

Clearaudio Champion turntable £1,815

Most intriguing of this turntable's components is the Unify unipivot tonearm. Unipivots don't use conventional roller bearings but balance on a hardened steel axis and, in this case, a sapphire bearing. The arm tube is made of carbon fibre – extreme rigidity with low mass. It can be adjusted for vertical and horizontal tracking angle and takes any of Clearaudio's cartridges.

☎ Audio Reference 01252 702705

Arcam FMJ A32/P35 integrated/power amp £1,900

The A32's flexibility is impressive. Input sensitivity is adjustable for all inputs allowing volume levels to be equalised when switching between source components. Also, it has tone controls that can be individually adjusted and remembered for each input. All the variations (and there are plenty more) are accessed and controlled using the menu-driven display.

☎ Arcam 01223 203200

Tannoy Dimension TD8 speakers £4,000

Tannoy claims that even with CD (which only goes up to 20kHz), the benefits of its SuperTweeter can be heard. Its research has shown that it reduces phase error and improves transient performance which leads to increased tonal accuracy at all frequencies because the harmonics of instruments are not distorted in time. The accurate time alignment of the main dual concentric driver makes the most of this.

☎ Tannoy 01236 420199

We know what you're thinking: this is some strange brew. First rung turntable meets super-tweetered statement speaker meets the acme of entry-to-mid-level amplification. Not such fancy alchemy – more *Harry Potter* than *Lord Of The Rings*.

It's easy to get the wrong idea until you look more closely. The Champion may be an entry-level model, but it's certainly not low end – it's German superdeck maker Clearaudio's entry-level model and, at £1,815, as supplied with the Unify Carbon-tube unipivot arm and Sigma-Gold moving coil cartridge, 'cheap' it ain't. With its sexy amalgam of premium quality GS-Acrylic clear black chassis, silicon-acrylic platter, carbon arm and outboard synchronous motor module, it also manages to look reassuringly posh. In fact, it's precisely the sort of death-defying price versus performance high-wire act that we need to kick off the show.

Arch ground-level hi-fi specialist Arcam hooks up from the opposite direction with its FMJ A32/P35 integrated/power bi-amp combo. By sidestepping its traditional business while no-one was looking, it produced what it describes as "the best integrated amp we've ever made" and an equal partner in the P35 power amp. It means you get all the usual features and flexibility casserole (including a fine MM/MC phono stage) but drizzled with extra virgin audiophile oil and wrapped in a smart metal jacket with marvellously feelgood alloy fascia. Bi-amping closes the argument: 100 watts a side for the Tannoy's tweeters (concentric and super) and 100 watts for the bass/mid driver. As they used to say on *The Fast Show*: gripped.

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★
BUILD ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★

© Strange DNA, but sublime. This is the system that pulls the white rabbit out of the hat – the context looks a little dodgy but the result lives and breathes. It's also capable of delivering a serious dose of decibels, cleanly and with faultless control. The turntable's a gem, the Arcam amps are talented beyond brand expectations and the speakers rock. A kind of magic, then, though fortunately more David Blaine than Paul Daniels.

Tightly. Tannoy's £4,000 TD8 – the 'baby' floorstander of the sumptuously built Dimension family – is a relatively easy load to drive. Its 90dB sensitivity and six ohm impedance mean that even a limp-wristed valve amp can generate plenty of volume. Much of the efficiency stems from Tannoy's trademark dual concentric driver technology which, in principle, hasn't changed for decades.

A seminal 'point source' design, the tweeter sits in the centre of the main driver system with its lightweight composite fibre cone and double roll surround. Since both low and high frequencies are generated from the same point in space, the idea is that there are no time and phase differences between harmonics below and above the crossover point as there would be with discreet drive units. This results in an enhanced midrange performance with the added benefit of tight, fast and well extended bass, says Tannoy.

But it's upward extension that marks the TD8 out as something special and an attractive match for a good turntable with a moving coil cartridge that can reach above the high frequency ceiling imposed by CD. It has a super-tweeter. Not only does this hike the frequency response well into the ultrasonic (54 kHz), but its pebble-shaped enclosure also looks terrific (almost jewel-like) against the velvet baffle trim of what Tannoy describes as the TD8's "immensely strong multi-faceted trapezoidal design". The curved cabinet is constructed from birch ply and internally braced to improve rigidity. Lift it, rap it with your knuckles, set it down on its solid aluminium cones and spikes. It's a piece of work.



“Analogue is warm and cuddly, right? Not the way the baby Clearaudio and its unipivot arm play it. Try fresh, incisive and almost digitally clear.”

PERFORMANCE

Analogue is warm and cuddly, right? Not the way the baby Clearaudio and its wobbly (but remarkably easy to use) unipivot arm play it. Try fresh, incisive and almost digitally clear. Rhythmically lucid and surefooted, too, with oodles of inner detail. That's what turntables do best. This one keys in to up-tempo material enthusiastically. Bass is solid, well-shaped, nimble and quite dry in character but that seems to suit the slightly fuller and warmer tonal character

of the Arcam amps and the wide bandwidth Tannoy's just fine.

The result is gracefully balanced. At modest listening volumes, the super-tweetered Dimensions enjoy a sense of harmonic richness and effortless bass extension that makes them truly unfatiguing to listen to for long periods. Slap on some after dark jazz – say Joe Sample's *Ashes To Ashes* – and the system relaxes beautifully, sounding expansive, airy and tactile.

With all that bi-amped Arcam juice on

tap, though, it can also hurtle through the attention barrier. Rock played at high levels has tremendous drive and impact. The TD8 has the great gift of sounding simultaneously agile and muscular. High energy cuts – Lostprophets' *Fake Sound Of Progress*, for example – are underpinned by that powerful, fast and ever-tuneful bass. The sonic picture this system paints is particularly clear and finely resolved – one that's clean at high volumes and superbly controlled at the frequency extremes. Virtuoso vinyl. 🎵



Sugden Masterclass CD player £2,500

This is Sugden's take on the "ultimate" 16-bit CD player. The company felt that Philips' TDA 1541 DAC and 7220 filter were by far the best sounding 16-bit devices. Separate analogue and digital power supplies are used throughout, and the analogue output stage operates in class A. Incidentally, Galaxy studios in Belgium, which has hosted everyone from Lauryn Hill to Michael Nyman, uses three of them in their recording and playback suite.

Audio Synergy 01924 406016



Sugden Masterclass Integrated amplifier £3,000

The quoted power output of 34 watts per channel is actually very generous for a single-ended power stage operating in pure class A. Wide bandwidth is another Sugden speciality incorporated here, as are the meaty power supply and short signal paths. The circuit boards use gold tracks to aid longevity and the unit is unfortunately let down by a truly horrible remote handset.

Audio Synergy 01924 406016



ART Expression speakers £3,995 (including stands)

ART's "flagship feature" is the Expression's velvet-coated Kevlar bass-mid driver cone. ART reckons that conventional paper, plastic or metal diaphragms impart their own character on the sound but that Velvet Kevlar is acoustically inert, giving better detail and subtlety. The 28mm silk dome tweeter is mildly horn-loaded in an "acoustically engineered" faceplate.

ART 01292 319416

➤ SUGDEN MASTERCLASS CD ➤ SUGDEN MASTERCLASS INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER ➤ ART EXPRESSION ➤ TOTAL £9,495

SYNERGY MASTER

It's that rare and beautiful thing in hi-fi – the perfect match

Predicting that Sugden electronics and ART loudspeakers would be a marriage made in hi-fi heaven required no great feat of clairvoyance on our part. The companies – which are based in Yorkshire and Scotland respectively – know it. People at hi-fi shows have heard about it. Sometimes products just click. It's that old black magic called synergy and this beefy bundle of Brit-fi has enough of the stuff to power a small town.

Or certainly heat one. Sugden's Masterclass Integrated amp is a hot product in every sense of the word. You probably know the story here. Sugden loves sweet-sounding Class A amplification like Simon Cowell loves the feeling of belt under armpit. It believes that pure Class A, single-ended operation is sonically superior to all the alternatives. Judging from the exquisite performance of its smaller integrated, the long-running A21a, it has a strong case. The consequence of this approach, though, is bags of thermal output (enough to warm your hands by on a chilly morning) for a comparatively modest power output. For its flagship integrated amplifier, Sugden has pushed this up to 34 watts a side; still pretty feeble for a £3K amp, you might think. But when it comes to misleading quotes, the Masterclass integrated leaves Steven Byres for dead. In a good way, as we'll hear.

Another snub to convention is dealt by the Masterclass CD player. Digital evolution has made 24-bit digital to analogue converters almost the de facto standard for up-market machines, but not this one. The way Sugden tells it,

VERDICT
SOUND
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★☆
BUILD
★★★★☆
VALUE
★★★★★

© If Sugden and ART share a philosophy, it seems to be to "rescue music from technology". Neither company is in a desperate hurry to embrace the brave new digital world but by putting musical performance first and polishing up an act based on tried and trusted principles, it isn't doing too badly at all. This may not be the sexiest looking hi-fi in the world, but hear it once and you will fall deeply in love.

16-bit chipsets still sound best for CD and one particular combination of DAC and filter – Philips TDA 1541 and 7220 – sounds best of all. Hardly bog standard, of course. Both the Philips mechanism and digital circuitry are extensively modified in-house.

Masterclass aesthetics tend towards the butch rather than the beautiful but the no-nonsense functionality and sturdy construction are appealing and the engineering tip-top. The CD player totes both standard single-ended phono sockets and balanced XLR outputs and BNC connections for digital ins/outs and of the amp's four line inputs, one is balanced XLR. There's a moving magnet input for a turntable, too, but the sexiest things on the back panel are the gorgeous fit-all WBT binding posts.

If the brutally unfriendly ART Expression speakers and dedicated sand-filled stands look tough, almost pro-plain, in the supplied battleship grey (though ART will paint them any colour you like to order), they're anything but unsophisticated. Acoustic Reproduction Technology is brothers Derek and Ramsay Dunlop (of Systemdek turntable fame) and the Expression, sans bass module, is the smallest model in their mission to put music-first principles back into speaker design.

Not to imply any daintiness, here. The stands are very heavy and sturdy, the Expressions themselves deep and solidly built. Never mind the width, anyway: ART is on a quality kick and the Expression uses extremely high quality drive units in an effort to recreate realistic scale and dynamics from what, by the standards of this group, is a bijou box.



"Sometimes products just click. It's that old black magic called synergy and this beefy bundle of Brit-fi has enough of the stuff to power a small town."

PERFORMANCE

Ever doubted the maxim "more than the sum of its parts"? You should hear this. Individually, these are all outstanding performers. Together they harmonise like a gospel choir under the direction of Quincy Jones. This is a music-making ensemble – 'hi-fi' seems almost too clinical a term to describe what it does.

But what it does is this: it allows you to forget that CD ever sounded hard and edgy; makes you realise that you don't actually need valves to achieve breathtakingly natural textures and limpid transparency; and convince you that small speakers really can sound big, uncompressed and dynamic.

It's pure relief. This system removes the

tenseness from listening to hi-fi. You want to fall into its arms and let it massage your temples. The way it gets you closer to the music is uncanny. On guitarist Martin Taylor's meticulously produced and played *Nitelife*, new layers of resolution subtly unearth previously unnoticed details. Yet tonal and the unforced transient accuracy just seems so... well, unforced.

No, an exclusive playlist of Motörhead won't be well served by the Sugden/ART combo – which isn't to say it can't do loud and muscular. In fact it does it so well, the amp's modest output spec seems ludicrous. It's just that there's so much more it can do to make your day. ☺



Audionet ART V2 CD player £2,300

Upstream of the 24bit/96kHz delta-sigma DAC, Audionet's 'intelligent sampling' circuit not only upsamples the CD signal but claims to eliminate clock jitter as well. Signal processing has two settings: 'lagrange' (for timing and rhythm fans) and 'audionet' (more laid back and airy). The output stage sports MOSFET solid-state devices running in Class A, and both transport and converter are fed by separate 50VA toroidal transformers.

Wilson Benesch 0114 285 2656



Audionet SAM V2 amplifier £2,300

Audionet's clean-looking integrated has a routine five line-level inputs, a single tape loop and a pre/out but uses a microprocessor to monitor temperature, electrical stability and mains phase and give a status report on the large, blue LED display. Click touch. As is the ability to add phono and DAC modules. Clumsier is the PDA-style touch screen system controller (an extra £230) that passes for a remote.

Wilson Benesch 0114 285 2656



T+A Criterion TC12E speakers £5,500

T+A calls them "the most sophisticated and innovative passive loudspeakers ever built". Contentious claim, but they must be in with a shout. Tooling costs were allegedly frightening, not least to realise an entirely new form of cabinet construction in which up to 11 layers of beech veneer are laminated in a cross-grain pattern and bonded under pressure and microwave energy in three-dimensional moulds.

BBG Distribution 020 8863 9117

➤ AUDIONET ART V2 ➤ AUDIONET SAM V2
➤ T+A CRITERION TC12E ➤ TOTAL: £10,100

MASSIVE ATTACK

A brutishly heavy, but disarmingly true-sounding system

This is a heavy system. Especially the speakers. If you have any friends who can do that pneumatic pecs, ripping shirt, Incredible Hulk thing, get them to help you wrestle the boxes from their cartons.

Don't bother if your listening room is on the cosy side, though. The big T+A transmission liners aren't really comfortable in small spaces, aesthetically or sonically. Even with a 1.5dB bass cut (the crossover allows +/- 1.5 dB adjustments to the nominally 'flat' response for bass, mid and treble) there are tracks where these modest behemoths will produce low frequencies that skew a natural-sounding balance. Ideally, they need room to breathe. And then... well, we'll come to that.

If space is a factor, here's a suggestion. Replace the towering T+As with the Wilson Benesch Arcs that featured in our first installment of *High End for the Real World* (HFC 230). WB handles Audionet in the UK (because the electronics work well with their speakers) and this is a stunningly good, space-efficient combo.

But we're asking rather more of the Audionet electronics here. They've got to make sense of £5,500 three-way transmission line speakers that stand 120cm tall, 40cm deep, weigh 54 kilos each and have electrostatic tweeters. T+A kit – of which there is much – goes down a storm in Germany but, so far, hasn't pressed all the right buttons in the UK. The Criterion could change that. It's a truly ambitious high-end design that costs about half what you might expect.

Without an all-new laminate moulding construction technique, the Criterion's resonance-stifling wine bottle shape wouldn't have been possible. The narrow

VERDICT
SOUND ★★★★☆
FEATURES ★★★★☆
BUILD ★★★★★
VALUE ★★★★★

Ⓞ The build quality of this system is completely off the scale for the price. Material value is extraordinary, too, though given the German pedigree, we were half expecting that. What we weren't prepared for was the performance. At the system permutations stage we covered, anticipating fireworks, but we got old-school neutrality and finesse. We thought the sound would be showy but it's just effortlessly subtle, natural and dynamic. If it was an engine, it would be a V12. A Merc V12.

upper baffle and curved surfaces are designed for optimum radiation and phase characteristics. Panel joints and edges are incredibly precise. These are quality items.

The folded transmission line augments the output of the carbon fibre coned 220mm bass drivers down to a claimed 30Hz. More critical, though, is the hand-over of dynamic driver to electrostatic at 2500Hz. A special glass fibre mid-range driver has been developed to up the ante in linearity and speed before the tweeter takes the response all the way up to 40kHz. SACD and DVD-A ready, then.

But it can wait because, in the Audionet ART V2, we have a top-loading CD player of truly Terminator-class – built to savour. The manual sliding lid and magnetic stabilising puck are nicely esoteric but it's the ART's weight that makes it a singular product. At 18 kilos, it's heavier than most serious power amps. Blame the resonance-killing ten kilo slab of granite that forms part of the bass, onto which the electronic components and the clock circuit are mounted in "floating" form. The idea is that the mass damping gets a stranglehold on error-inducing vibes at their root.

The matching SAM V2 integrated amp totes an identically-sized casing fronted by a half-inch thick aluminium fascia. The projected image is velvet-gloved power. Which is no idle boast. Inside is a 700VA mains transformer with separate output for pre and power sections. The latter produces 110 watts into eight ohms and 200 watts into four ohms.

PERFORMANCE

Although notional 'best of all worlds' hybrid speakers set out to excel with their



“The more you listen to it, the more classically BBC-neutral it sounds – except with bass to die for and a sense of realistic image scale that you simply don’t get with small speakers.”


grasp of ‘high fidelity’, it’s surprising how many forget to make music.

Driven by the immaculately clean, controlled and muscular Audionet duo, the Criteria and their electrostatic tweeters don’t have the hyper-airy, supernaturally transparent sound you might expect (or fear). In fact it’s initially disconcerting because you simply can’t hear the usual treble artefacts: the fizz, the edge, the

shine. Some might even call it dull, but it’s probably truer than a lot of hi-fi which sounds a little bright. For a German rig this is almost a volte-face.

The more you listen to the Audionet/T+A combo the more classically BBC-neutral it sounds. It could almost be an LS3/5A-Quad system. Except with bass to die for – extended, powerful, tuneful – and a sense of realistic image scale that

you just don’t get with small speakers, no matter how agile they may sound.

Marcus Miller-styled bass guitar wasn’t as leading-edgy as we’ve heard it but what funk, weight and effortless control! Power with poise sums it up. It doesn’t matter what you play – from ELP to LSO – nothing fazes this system, nothing gets the better of it. It’s high end on a grand scale that’s a joy to live with. 

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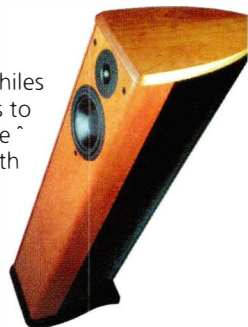


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REVIEWS – Alvin Gold

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

No longer just for movies, the best multichannel packages are fast becoming a worthwhile choice for forward-thinking music fans

When the history books are written, the big change that we are living through is the one that's dragging us out of the two-channel stereo world to a new, multichannel paradigm. This move is the cause of much beating of breasts by traditionalists, who regard anything with more than two channels as somehow beneath their dignity. The answer to this can be summed up in two words: face facts. In the past, recordings were two-channel, not because it was the right number – three speaker stereo was regarded as

better over half a century ago, by stereophonic pioneer Alan Blumlein among others – but simply because two was a magic number at the time for purely technical (read convenience) reasons. And multichannel does not necessarily mean movies. With high resolution audio coming on-stream, multichannel is intrinsic to the future of recorded sound. Anyone who thinks otherwise is simply blind – sorry, deaf – to what's happening around them right now.

This test is a little different to the multichannel speaker tests

you may have read in other magazines, because it is not just centred on performance with movie soundtracks (though they are a consideration). Much of the focus is divided between two-channel sound quality with stereo CD using the 'main' speakers in the package, and multichannel operation with DVD-Audio and SACD – if they work with music, they should do the job with movies too. The six packages assembled for this test come from quality brands with a deserved reputation in the world of stereo, the aim being to find the most effective solution to deal with both music and film.

As you will read, there are some fundamental differences in the approaches adopted by the six manufacturers. The main stereo pair in each case is quite distinctive, with little sign of convergence, perhaps because loudspeaker problems tend to be endemic and gross. There is even less agreement about how to turn a stereo pair into a fire-breathing five-channel speaker system, or indeed whether it needs a sub-woofer – a question that doesn't normally arise with systems designed primarily for home cinema. Anyway, read and enjoy, and we'll see what conclusions we can draw, both specific (which systems sound best) and general (what kind of system you need to do a particular job). ☉

EQUIPMENT AND DISCS USED

Multichannel amp

Denon AVC-A1SR

Stereo amps

Classé CP65 preamplifier
2 x Classé 350 monoblock power amps

CD/DVD-Audio player

TAG McLaren DVD32R + DPA32R
(as stereo D/A)

Cables

Nordost Valhalla & SPM Reference speaker cables
Nordost Quattro Fil & TAG McLaren interconnects

Stereo music (CD)

Lambchop *Is A Woman*
Edie Brickell *Picture Perfect Morning*

Alison Krauss And Union Station
New Favorite
Marc Cohn *Marc Cohn*
Maazel/Pittsburgh Symphony
Orchestra *Respighi Pine Of Rome*

Multichannel music

Michael Tilson Thomas/San Francisco
Symphony *Mahler Symphony No 6*
(SACD)
Donald Runnicles/Atlanta Symphony
Carmina Burana (SACD)
Gillian Weir/English Chamber
Orchestra *Poulenc Concerto For Organ*
(SACD)
Queen *A Night At The Opera* (DVD-A)

Films (DVD)

AI
Terminator 2
Saving Private Ryan
Thirteen Ghosts

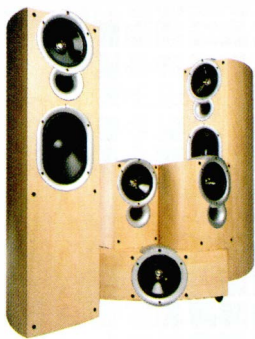


ON TEST

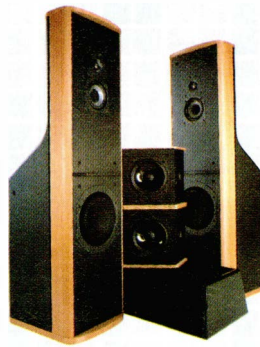
CASTLE CAV2
£2,000



JMLAB ELECTRA
£3,017



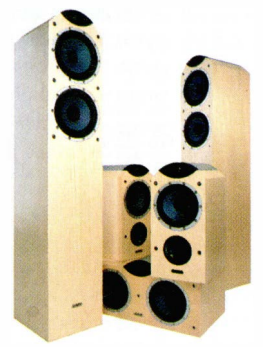
KEF Q AV7
£1,300



MIRAGE OMNI 2
£2,650



RUARK CONTEMPORARY II
£2,920



TANNOY EYRIS
£2,300



CASTLE CAV2 £2,000

☎ 01756 795333 🌐 www.castleacoustics.co.uk

Front: Harlech S2 £1,000 Centre: Keep 2 £250 Rear: Richmond 3 £280 Subwoofer: Classic £800

Bass is particularly well served by Castle's CAV2 combo. With new carbon fibre cones and some enclosure revisions since the original version, the Harlech S2 has a well extended bass performance in its own right, thanks to its quarter wave bass loading. Twin bass drivers power long, differentially tuned 'pipes' which reach the world through a downwards facing vent and a narrow gap between the base and the plinth. Yet the Classic system is still supplied with a solidly built subwoofer, with a hefty ATC driver and a superb wood veneered enclosure.

The centre and surround speakers are more conventional. The Richmond 3 (rear) is a sealed box design, and can be used with its back to a wall, but it remains a fairly deep, chunky box. The Keep 2 (centre) is a well built and compact design, with drive units related to the Harlech's, but different enough – the bass/mid units have fixed polepieces to help tailor the response and dispersion at the top of its passband, for example – to raise suspicions about voice matching.

PERFORMANCE

Castle enclosures are always classy, real wood veneered affairs with good detailing. They are available in a wide variety of styles, most at a standard price. The sensitivity of the Harlech is about average, and power handling quite strong, so this is a system that is best matched to reasonably powerful amplifiers. It can, however, begin to sound uncomfortable if driven too hard, and more than any of the other systems, it doesn't suffer inadequate sounding electronics lightly. The system 'shouts' when overdriven, and the subwoofer loses its composure, but at moderate volume levels the sub holds its own

with its opposite number from Ruark, itself a better design than most.

Starting with the Harlech S2 as a stereo pair, adjectives that jumped out include woody, solid and energetic. You would probably not choose this speaker for its midband refinement or the precision of its imagery, and the balance tends to favour the higher octaves, which lack sweetness and can be a touch strident. Orchestral strings were sometimes a little edgy (Dvorak), and though the bass is well extended, the balance is on the lean side.

Despite these failings, the Harlech is an engaging and honest transducer, with great immediacy, plenty of detail, strong dynamics and presence – qualities that in combination help make music happen

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
At its most convincing with music, this is not the sweetest or most neutral package around, but its vitality and energy carry all before it, and as sometimes happens, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.	
CHECKLIST	
BI-WIRABLE MAIN SPEAKERS	✓
MAIN SPEAKER VENT POSITION	BASE
REAL WOOD FINISH	✓
ADJUSTABLE CENTRE ORIENTATION	✗
REAR SPEAKER TYPE	DIRECT

with a meaningful sense of occasion. It is beautifully built and a lot of fun to listen to, which is why some listeners love it to bits.

The Keep 2 and Richmond 3 are not perfect voice matches for the Harlech S2, but they are impressive in their own right and they do work extremely well together, making this one of the better systems for multichannel music. Classical material, with its reliance on natural tonality, is not always best served by the package, but the tactile quality and strong dynamics work well with chamber music generally, and piano in particular. There are no caveats about a wide range of other music types, whether from discreet multichannel sources or stereo using matrix Dolby Pro Logic II surround, where the Castle system's solidity, projection and fine detailing dominate. 🎧



DETAIL

Harlech S2 Bass unit and offset tweeter, in inverted mirror image pairs. Base plinth with stand-off to allow air egress from concealed downwards facing port. Additional upward firing bass/mid unit.

Keep 2 Two bass/mid units flanking central tweeter, in standard D'Appolito configuration.

Richmond 3 Bass unit & offset tweeter, in inverted mirror image pairs.

Classic subwoofer 12 inch driver with a 20Hz-200Hz frequency response.

EXCLUSIVE

JMLAB ELECTRA £3,017

0121 616 5126 www.focal-jmlab.fr

Front: Electra 906 £1,149 Centre: Electra CC900 £719 Rear: Electra 906 £1,149

One of the few European speaker manufacturers to have made real inroads into the serious end of the hi-fi and home cinema markets in the UK, JMLab is based in St Etienne, south east France, and became famous over here with the high-end Utopia series. The Electra range is mainstream by comparison, though it draws on Utopia ideas and technologies.

Characteristic are the faceted angled semi-time-aligned sub-baffles which focus the sound on a single point at a standard listening distance, the heavy enclosures, and the unusually extensive internal bracing and damping. The drive units are made in-house by Focal, the house drive unit brand, and the roll call includes a sophisticated inverted dome tweeter and bass/mid drivers whose cones are made from glass tissue skins sandwiching a central foam layer, which offer strong mutual damping and stiffening.

The system is configured differently to the others in this test. The main four satellites are identical, large standmount designs, and there is no subwoofer, so there is no pretence that bass extension matches the systems with full size front speakers, still less those with subwoofers. But the solution adopted here means that the rear channels are treated identically to the front, and moreover the massive centre speaker acts to guarantee that for once this most vital channel of all is not short-changed.

PERFORMANCE

Although the system clearly doesn't fully exploit the subterranean depths that make depth charging, U-571-style, such an awesome pit of the stomach experience, there is more than enough grunt for most musical purposes, and film soundtracks aren't given a raw deal either. Even with music discs played in stereo, the system has a muscular, solid feel to the point of sounding heavy handed at times, probably because the loss of pitch definition at the low frequency extreme happens here higher up the frequency band than with the other systems.

In multichannel home cinema trim, however, the system goes through something of a transformation. Multichannel operation helps free the sound from the confines of the enclosures, and the music acquires a degree of consistency and solidity regardless of which point of the compass the sound is coming from. Along with this, dynamic contrasts are exceptional – the Poulenc (multichannel SACD) sounded bold and exciting, with a strong sense of image scale.

VERDICT

- SOUND ★★★★★
- EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★
- BUILD ★★★★★
- VALUE ★★★★★

Against the odds this is an unusually fine multichannel system, more convincing in this role than it is in stereo, where it can sometimes sound slightly heavy handed. With mainstream pop and rock, it just goes with the flow, with real control and conviction.

CHECKLIST

- BI-WIRABLE MAIN SPEAKERS ✓
- MAIN SPEAKER VENT POSITION FRONT
- REAL WOOD FINISH ✓
- ADJUSTABLE CENTRE ORIENTATION ✗
- REAR SPEAKER TYPE DIRECT

The reasons for the Electra system's success as a multichannel system are: one, the centre speaker yields very little to the main front speakers other than some timbral variations when heard from off-axis (this comes with the territory, unfortunately). Two, the use of identical drive units all round guarantees much tighter voice matching and consistency. The rear speakers of course concede nothing, and it is obvious that sounds from the back of the room really do sound more muscular and out of the box than usual, and more importantly perhaps, the whole soundstage is unusually homogenous and consistent, making films like *Saving Private Ryan* even darker and more gripping than usual.

Switching to Dolby Pro Logic II with stereo sources (TV for example) tends to give a light, airy balance, which almost seems to be a trademark of the PLII system, and this helped draw the best from the JMLab package. If you are determined to go the extra nine yards, JMLab offers a matching subwoofer, the Electra SW900. Ⓞ



DETAIL
 Electra CC900 Two 165mm bass/mid units flanking central tweeter, in standard D'Appolito configuration.
 Electra 906 Top to bottom – inverted tweeter, 165mm bass/mid driver, port.

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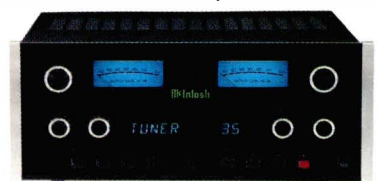
feel just right and massive construction suggests a long term investment rather than just an acquisition. In fact it's worth knowing that in the United States McIntosh enjoys the highest level of customer loyalty in the industry.

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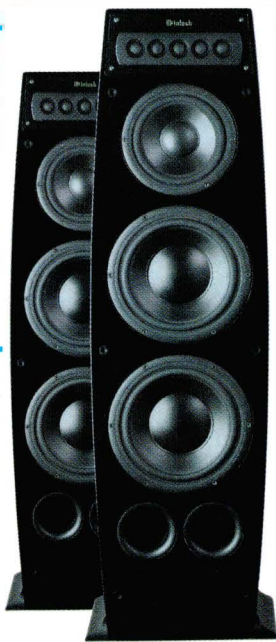
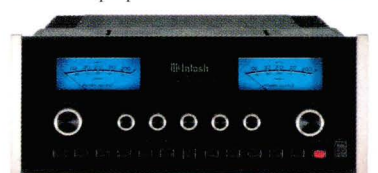
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NORTHAMPTON: 01604 637871 (Please check first for stock availability in our regional stores) PETERBOROUGH: 01733 341755

EXCLUSIVE

KEF Q AV7 £1,300

01622 672261 www.kef.com

Front: Q7 £800 Centre: Q9c £250 Rear: Q1 £250

One of the more distinctive systems of the six in this group, these new Q Series speakers use the latest (fourth generation) Uni-Q drivers, which now feature metal dome tweeters and some subtle redesign of tweeter position and main unit surround to ensure a smoother treble response. Because Uni-Q drivers place the tweeter at the acoustic centre of the bass/mid unit, the polar response is independent of axis (ignoring enclosure influences), and their response shape is much smoother off-axis, especially where conventional speakers are

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★★

Uni-Q has been systematically developed to a state of refinement that once seemed improbable, and is combined here with sophisticated enclosure design and the cost benefits of off-shore manufacturing. Stunning value for money.

CHECKLIST	
BI-WIRABLE MAIN SPEAKERS	✓
MAIN SPEAKER VENT POSITION	FRONT & REAR
REAL WOOD FINISH	✗
ADJUSTABLE CENTRE ORIENTATION	✓
REAR SPEAKER TYPE	DIRECT

weakest, around the crossover frequency. The spectrum of room reverberations, which start with off-axis radiation, is known to affect perceived sound quality.

The package here also features some quite radical enclosure shapes, with faired-in Uni-Q drivers and intersecting curves seemingly inspired by the Ford Focus design school, and curved main panels to improve stiffness without increasing mass, and to reduce (more correctly, de-tune) internal resonances. The vinyl wrap covers look better than most, and the system as a whole is visually very striking, though it won't blend well with traditional furnishings.

All three speakers have generous power ratings, and are quite abstemious about how they use amplifier power, so this is a good choice if you have a largish room and not too much power on tap.

PERFORMANCE

This system came as a shock on audition, but in the right way thanks to its firm, open and explicit midband, its sharp, articulate treble, the depth and articulation of its bass, and its ability to generate a deep, wide and consistent soundstage. In fact, soundstaging is little less than remarkable, working almost as well even when listening from off to one side as it does on the central listening axis. Good imagery is to be expected as this is what Uni-Q is all about, but the top to bottom definition and transparency of the design was a real surprise, and is a clear step or three up the ladder for Uni-Q technology.

Although the bass lacks some of the brute force physicality available elsewhere in this project, it consistently manages to plumb depths that other comparably sized speakers struggled to achieve, even at more modest volume levels. And the bass is as tuneful as its timing is excellent. As a tool for listening to music in stereo, the Q7 is a star.

Without doubt however, the test system comes into its own in multi-channel mode with music and also film soundtracks, where its bandwidth and general capabilities are best put to the test in smaller to medium size rooms and at moderate listening levels, though it should be easy to scale up by adding a subwoofer without breaking the bank. But even as it stands, the KEF system is a highly articulate one, with the discipline and transparency needed to cope with good multichannel recordings like the San Francisco Symphony *Mahler Six*, and the control needed to tame the excesses of the Telarc *Carmina Burana*. The only problem identified in test concerned the Q9c and Q1 speakers' lower registers, which have a slightly different character or 'colour' to the Q7, almost certainly cabinet-induced. This was identified when testing the speakers separately, but was only audible when the system was playing with the centre speaker, and then only occasionally. At the price a Best Buy award is mandatory. Ⓞ



DETAIL

Q7 Top to bottom – 165mm Uni-Q driver with centre-mounted tweeter dome, midrange loading port and 228x152 mm 'racetrack' bass unit, which harks back to famous B190 'rectangular' (actually elliptical) unit of the seventies.

Q1 165mm Uni-Q driver/tweeter dome.

Q9c 165mm Uni-Q driver/tweeter dome, midrange loading port.

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£1095

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EXCLUSIVE

MIRAGE OMNI 2 £2,650

☎ 01787 249656 🌐 www.miragespeakers.com

Front: OM-7 £2,000 Centre: OM-C2 £600 Rear: OM-R2 £400

The essential idea underlying Omnipolar speaker design comes from the Mirage Book Of Words, which says "To realistically portray a recorded sound, a loudspeaker must control both direct *and reflected* sound within the listening space" (our italics). The reflected element is conveniently ignored in most designs. The key part of the Omnipolar system is the shallow box section above the base, which is home to mid and treble units on both front and back surfaces. This upper part is reminiscent of a ribbon or electrostatic loudspeaker, and although it is neither, the idea of sound which is generated equally in the forward and back planes from a single panel – or in this case two closely spaced baffles – is a common factor.

Omnipolar generates a very wide dispersion output in front of and behind the speakers. A low 2kHz crossover frequency widens midband dispersion, and low order, phase-coherent crossovers improve off-axis behaviour further, the two sections operating in phase.

This generalised description applies to the main OM7s, but it is harder to see how the OM-R2 surround and OM-C2 centre speakers, also billed as Omnipolars, fit with these ideas. In fact they pursue similar ends with drive units on two (centre) and three (surround) surfaces, with a roughly similar effect. A matching subwoofer, the BPS150i, is available for £695, or for £3,300 as a complete system.

PERFORMANCE

Differences in voicing between the various speakers were experienced in practice, but the crucial match between the centre and the two main speakers is not too distant. In particular, the centre speaker is larger than usual and has a wider operating bandwidth than the others (JMLab excepted), and this gives it a dynamic strength, especially at lower frequencies, that is at least in touch with the main speakers. The OM-R2 surrounds are excellent. They offer wide dispersion and a spacious, detached, yet far from amorphous soundfield, but their bass is more

limited than the centre speaker, and something a tad larger and more muscular would have been even better.

But this is nitpicking given the larger picture, and for once the term larger picture is more than just an empty phrase. Mirage Omnipolar speakers don't just look different, they sound different, and on their own or as a system, the OM-7 projects a large-scale stable image that sounds right almost irrespective of where you sit. One of the claims is that the speakers can be sited almost anywhere, but this certainly isn't true. The usual rules apply, in addition to which the main speakers need lots of space to breathe, so don't even think about this

system for small, cluttered rooms. But you can sit almost anywhere, even well off-axis, and the sound stays consistent yet well focused when you do so.

Tonally, the package is on the dark side. It has a bass that is deep and full, and an output that declines perceptibly towards the far treble, but the effect is very slow and progressive, and the balance is in fact an attractive one. It gives a proper sense of weight, and just slightly rich and very well differentiated tonal colours. It produced wonderfully visceral results with the Alison Krauss and Union Station disc, with right-on timing and a huge, well focused soundstage for a stereo recording. But this was as nothing compared to the multi-channel San Francisco Symphony *Mahler Six* which rook root in the listening room in a quite extraordinary way. 🎧

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
Excellent with music (stereo and multi-channel) and films, the system's limitations are easy to live with, and it has strengths – stability, consistency of imagery, and an ability to make rooms work acoustically – that are very special.	
CHECKLIST	
BI-WIRABLE MAIN SPEAKERS	✓
MAIN SPEAKER VENT POSITION	REAR
REAL WOOD FINISH	✗
ADJUSTABLE CENTRE ORIENTATION	✗
REAR SPEAKER TYPE	OMNIPOLAR

CHECKLIST	
BI-WIRABLE MAIN SPEAKERS	✓
MAIN SPEAKER VENT POSITION	REAR
REAL WOOD FINISH	✗
ADJUSTABLE CENTRE ORIENTATION	✗
REAR SPEAKER TYPE	OMNIPOLAR

DETAIL	
OM-7 Top to bottom	titanium dome tweeter, 110mm polypropylene cone midrange and (in base section) 200mm polypropylene bass driver.
OM-R2 Two titanium dome tweeters	on two end panels. 165mm polypropylene bass/mid driver on large centre panel.
OM-C2 Titanium dome tweeter,	140mm polypropylene bass/mid unit, 140mm passive bass radiator.



KRELL

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Lower_Showcase Cinema Amplifier

Far right_Krell FPB 750MCX Amplifier



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☎ 01702 601410 🌐 www.ruark.net

Front: Prologue II £1,250 Centre: Dialogue II £425 Rear: Epilogue II £345 Sub: Log Rhythm 150 £900

The latest version of the Contemporary series introduces new drive units and enclosures as well as a voicing makeover. The result with the Prologue II main speaker is a wider low frequency bandwidth, and a better, more consistent balance. The enclosures (it would be a travesty to call them boxes) are wood veneered in four flavours, and are finished to a high standard, with subtle edge treatment underpinning their stature as furniture. The front panels are tilted back, providing some time alignment on the forward listening axis, and the enclosures are front vented, the port adding relatively subtle enhancement to an already solid bass performance.

The supporting act is in keeping with the main speakers. Included are a relatively conventional, but solidly built and internally braced D'Appolito centre, and the latest iteration of the already well known Epilogue surround speaker, which in its other life is a compact two-way hi-fi design. The enclosure is fairly deep and rear vented – space is required for it to work well, so it's not the most discrete rear speaker in the world. The Log Rhythm 150 subwoofer is another enhancement of a well established and successful design: a mid-size, sealed box unit, very well engineered but now with a more powerful amplifier.

PERFORMANCE

The Prologue is an accomplished full-range loudspeaker in its own right, and for music in stereo, it works best with very subtle reinforcement from the subwoofer, or none at all. Because the Log Rhythm has two separate sets of inputs and gain controls, it is easy to set up differentially for music and films using settings appropriate for each role, and the slightly over-damped character of the Prologue bass makes it an excellent candidate for subwoofer reinforcement. As usual with subwoofers, the Log Rhythm is not hard to adjust so that it completely spoils the party, but with care and a little practice, it can provide seamless

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
The intelligently conceived Ruark system gives a solid, if not spectacularly consistent performance with multichannel music and films, but for stereo use the Prologue II is one of the more capable speakers in its class.	
CHECKLIST	
BI-WIRABLE MAIN SPEAKERS	✓
MAIN SPEAKER VENT POSITION	FRONT
REAL WOOD FINISH	✓
ADJUSTABLE CENTRE ORIENTATION	✗
REAR SPEAKER TYPE	DIRECT

extension practically down to frequencies you can count, and is notably free of boom or excess. Paradoxically however, the real (and largely unrecognised) benefits of a good subwoofer are higher up the spectrum. Adding bass has an across the board effect, enhancing perceived musical dynamics, and enriching tonal colours.

In five-speaker trim with multichannel music, the system is well behaved, with the same smooth, open middle registers that make the Prologue such a compelling performer in stereo. The top to bottom refinement and transparency also stand it in good stead with DVD-Audio and SACD multichannel titles (including the Mendelssohn and the Mahler in this case), but the centre image lacks the

dynamic freedom and scale of the main speakers, and this applies with bells on to the diminutive Epilogue, despite the close voice match of the three speakers under many conditions. The smaller speakers inhabit a universe with different dynamic values and with diminished scale. It is the subwoofer that really makes the system work with special effects-rich Hollywood material like *AI* or *T2*. Special effects in *AI* are spectacularly deep and realistic (realistic to what we won't address here). With music too, the subwoofer makes a useful contribution, though you'll probably need to throttle back a little from the optimum film setting to achieve the kind of balance and consistency across the frequency band that multichannel music demands. 🎧



DETAIL

Prologue II Two 180mm bass/mid units, sandwiching offset tweeter (supplied in mirror image pairs), reflex port at bottom.
Dialogue II Two 140mm bass/mid units flanking central tweeter, in standard D'Appolito configuration.
Epilogue II Tweeter, 140mm bass/mid drivers.
Log Rhythm 150 subwoofer 300mm driver.



The Date : Saturday 16th – Sunday 17th November 2002
The Venue: The Hilton Manchester Airport

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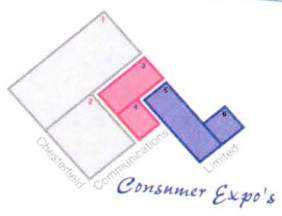
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EXCLUSIVE

TANNOY EYRIS £2,300

☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

Front: Eyris 3 £1,200 Centre: Eyris C £500 Rear: Eyris 1 £600

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



No-one could accuse this Tannoy package of being 100% accurate, yet its beautiful build and refined, expansive sound has real appeal, particularly in music mode.

CHECKLIST

BI-WIRABLE MAIN SPEAKERS	✓
MAIN SPEAKER VENT POSITION	REAR
REAL WOOD FINISH	✓
ADJUSTABLE CENTRE ORIENTATION	✗
REAR SPEAKER TYPE	DIRECT

DETAIL

Eyris 3 Top to bottom – super tweeter >44kHz, 175mm bass/mid unit, bass only unit.

Eyris 1 Top to bottom – super tweeter >44kHz, 145mm bass/mid unit, reflex port.

Eyris C Super tweeter >44kHz at top, two 145mm bass/mid units below.

All three speakers have five-way rear terminal blocks with separately packed shorting wires if single wiring is desired. The fifth terminal can be connected to the amplifier earth point.

Eyris, (pronounced eye-ris), takes its name from the eye-shaped pod on top which houses the tweeter, whose response extends to over 44kHz. The tweeters are matched here to paper pulp cone bass/mid and bass units, the material chosen because it can be formed into very light, well behaved cones, the lightness allowing them to turn on and off quickly enough to work well with the ultra lightweight titanium tweeter domes. The main Eyris 3 cones are 175mm in diameter, while the centre and surround use 145mm cones, so although they use similar crossover

operating points and slopes, there are bound to be some differences in dispersion and general behaviour in the octave or so below the 2.2kHz crossovers.

The Eyris range is equipped with sharp-edged, rectilinear wood-veneered enclosures, the main departure from the straight and narrow being the 'power hump' around the tweeters. Build quality is of a very high standard, and Tannoy has gone half way to producing an ideal centre speaker by positioning the tweeter well above the bass unit plane, but it has retained the twin bass arrangement which is responsible for sharp peaks and troughs in the horizontal polar response, a problem with most centre speakers, unfortunately. Presumably a single drive unit of the size used here would have prejudiced power handling and bass response.

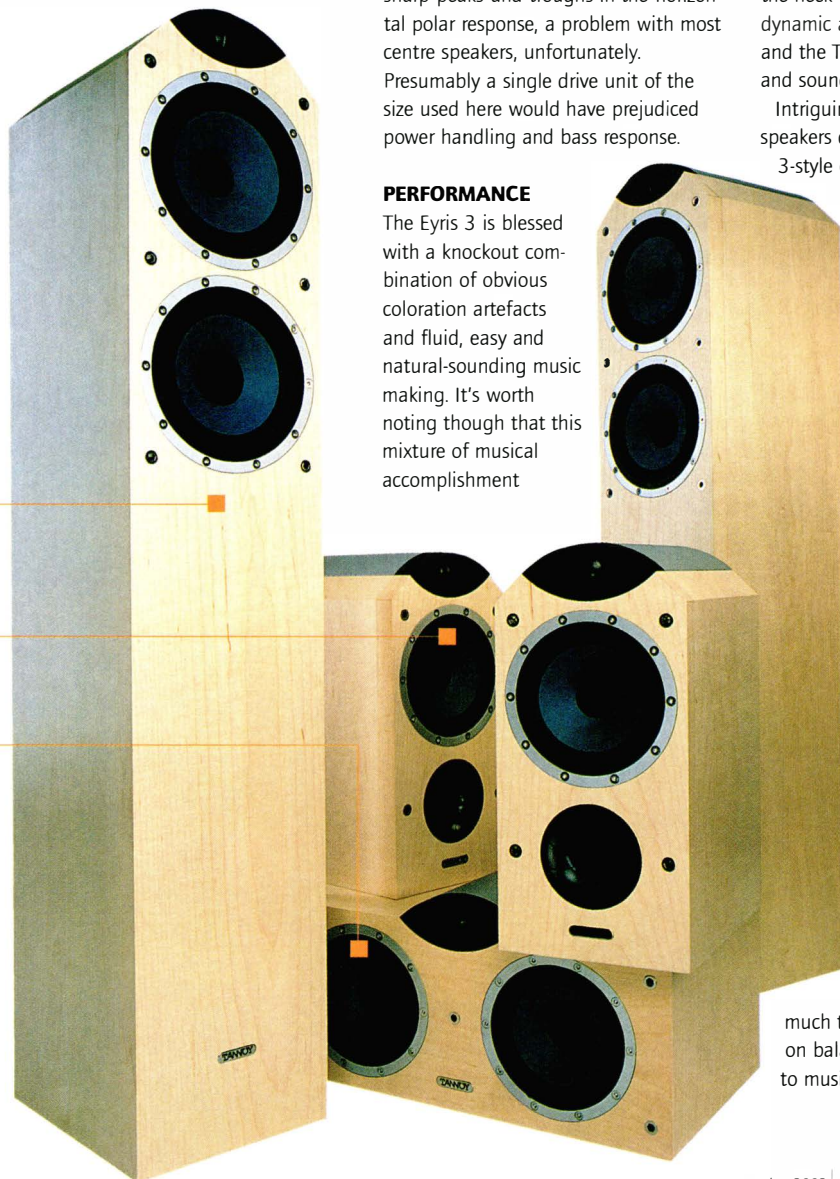
PERFORMANCE

The Eyris 3 is blessed with a knockout combination of obvious coloration artefacts and fluid, easy and natural-sounding music making. It's worth noting though that this mixture of musical accomplishment

tempered by objective shortcomings is the rule rather than the exception in the loudspeaker kingdom, so the Eyris 3 is in good company. Above all this is a speaker of exceptional refinement. Despite some box-like artefacts and some obscuring of fine detail, vocals sound more human and organic than usual – try Alison Krauss's *Let Me Touch You For A While* for a masterclass in expressive vocal reproduction. The midband is unusually subtle and expressive – the *Mahler Six* proved a gripping experience in stereo, one that literally raised the hairs on the back of the neck in some passages. But dynamic ability plays little part in this, and the Tannoy system's bass is lean and sounds rather muted dynamically.

Intriguingly, the centre and surround speakers don't suffer unduly from Eyris 3-style colorations, and this hints at an obvious shortcoming with this system, namely a lack of accurate voice matching. The centre speaker sounds slightly different to the main speakers even in the mid and upper registers where they are supposedly on an equal footing. Sounds panning across the soundstage, which happens all the time in film soundtracks, but which is less of an issue with music, sound flatter and more forward as they pass through the centre position, though there is a useful side effect in the shape of better vocal articulation, making dialogue easier to follow.

Despite such foibles, this Eyris combo is an accomplished solution for those who want surround sound with genuine hi-fi refinement. It looks gorgeous, it's well built and there is much to admire in its sound, though on balance it remains more attuned to music than to movies. 🎧



AV SPEAKER PACKAGES CONCLUSIONS

Alvin Gold finds much to admire in this unusually fine crop of multichannel packages

There is one very important feature which effectively divides the group into two unequal parts. Most of the packages take little or no account of the real requirement of hi-fi multichannel operation, which is that all the satellites, including the centre speaker, really should have the same driver complement and layout, and the same enclosed volume if possible. Far too many compromises are usually made to ensure that the centre speaker will sit on top of the TV, a real world requirement, but with some effort and imagination there are better ways. JMLab's system, for instance, uses four identical satellites and a large centre speaker. In many ways this is the most nearly ideally designed system of the six for multichannel use, and because it is also well engineered at a basic level, it is also good in stereo. But it doesn't have the LF bandwidth of the others – you'll need a sub for that, and this will push the cost up.

Another model that addresses the same problem in a very powerful



and elegant way is the KEF, whose Uni-Q drivers are a god-send for multichannel use thanks to their uniformly smooth sound over a wide listening arc, and in both planes. The Uni-Q centre speaker suffers some enclosure-induced colorations that are much less obvious in the main speaker, but this is still one of the most elegantly designed centre speakers on the market. The *coup de grace* of course is that silly asking price. How they get away with it is anyone's guess.

Then we come to a real oddball, in the nicest possible sense. The Mirage system is based on the OM-7 Omnipolar loudspeaker, which is close to being omnidirectional, and which has the effect of pushing the walls of the listening room out-

ward, giving the impression of a huge listening space and scale but (and this is the really clever part) without losing stereo focus. The partnering speakers are not quite the OM-7's equal in this enterprise, but they're still very impressive.

The three remaining packages are much more stereo focused designs, with minimum adaptation needed to suit them to multichannel, and in their way they're all excellent systems for much the same reason. All have main speakers which are very good stereo performers in their own right. Many will enjoy the Tannoy's refinement, though its midband may be a little too idiosyncratic for some tastes. If so, the polished Ruark will be difficult to beat, albeit at a price premium. The Castle system is cheaper than either and very expressive, the only real objection here being a rather aggressive mid and upper midband. All three are matched to centre and surround speakers which are fine in their own way, but which fail to fully exploit the multichannel potential of the main stereo pair. 🗣️



MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER PACKAGES AT A GLANCE

	Castle	JMLab	KEF	Mirage	Ruark	Tannoy
MAKE	Castle	JMLab	KEF	Mirage	Ruark	Tannoy
MODEL	CAV2	Electra	Q AV7	Omni 2	Contemporary II	Eyris
PRICE	£2,000	£3,017	£1,300	£2,650	£2,920	£2,300
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
CONCLUSIONS	An engaging (if slightly brash) performance with music in particular, but some mismatch between speakers.	Bold and solid package, tremendous consistency and easy to grow with an added sub-woofer.	With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies.	Impressive main speakers are less than an ideal match for the centre and surround speakers. Great sub though.	The centre speaker is not an ideal match, but this is a refined sounding package, particularly with stereo.

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DISC PLAYERS

MARANTZ DV12S1 £2,500

One of the only DVD-Audio players that cuts the mustard with stereo CDs.

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The first any-disc player: DVD-A and SACD compatible, it's a more than tidy performer with no obvious snags.

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Full-featured yet well tamed integrated with clever and effective assisted set-up.

DENON AVC-A15R £3,000

State of the art in one-box multichannel amp, needs dedication to set up.

SONY VA777ES £1,500

A good all-rounder with sophisticated and subtle sounding design.

BEST IN GROUP

BEST FOR STEREO

The genesis of each of the six systems is firmly stereo high fidelity, so it was no shock to find that the main stereo pair in each case is a good one. The Tannoy Eyris 3 is arguably the most musically refined, though KEF's Q7 is capable of remarkable things for its price.

BEST FOR MULTICHANNEL

The JMLab system takes the needs of home cinema into account at a fundamental level, by using identical satellites all round and including a very grown-up centre speaker. Some may want a little more bass extension, achieved with the matching Electra subwoofer. The KEF package is stunning value, and the Mirage combo is capable of remarkable results with both music and movies.

BEST FOR BOTH

If cost is no object, the Mirage OM-7 has a great deal to recommend it, including superb and very natural imagery. The tonal balance may not suit all tastes but it is an unusually fine sounding multichannel music and movie system. If cost is an important consideration, then go for the KEF.

HINTS AND TIPS

- 🗣️ Use plinth and spikes, at least for main speakers.
- 🗣️ Avoid shelves for smaller speakers, as they tend to resonate.
- 🗣️ Use the best quality cables you can, bi-wiring where possible.
- 🗣️ A stable platform above the TV is usually preferable to placing the speaker straight on top of the TV itself.
- 🗣️ Keep rear of speakers unobstructed if ports are fitted on the back panel.
- 🗣️ Subwoofers are usually best placed adjacent to the TV, and usually sound better with the low pass filter near the lowest setting.

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Turntables & Tuners

Arcam DIVA T51 Tuner	£229.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner.....	£109.95
Linn LP12/Basik/Akito Turntable	£1749.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner.....	£119.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable	£1017.95
Project Debut Phono Turntable.....	£144.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours).....	£129.95
Sony ST-D777ES FM/DAB Tuner.....	£499.95
Videologic DRX-601E DAB Tuner.....	£279.95

Debut II Turntable (Black) £114.95

"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? SOUND AND VISION Awards 2000**

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



MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

A3.2 CD Player £999.95

A3.2 Amplifier £979.95

Replacing the What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Award Winning A3 CD and Amplifier, the new A3.2 models have been further refined and re-styled. The A3.2 CD Player now incorporates the same DAC, filter assembly and control mechanism as the highly-acclaimed Nu-Vista CD Player. The A3.2 Amplifier draws on experience gained through the development of the Nu-Vista M3 amplifier and as such has inherited many of its qualities, producing a sense of ease and flexibility that is normally only associated with far more expensive designs.



CD Players

Arcam DIVA CD62T.....	£369.95
Arcam DIVA CD92T.....	£899.95
Arcam FMJ CD23T.....	£1199.95
Cyrus CD7Q.....	£1149.95
Denon DCD485	£139.95
Linn Genki.....	£994.95
Linn Ikemi.....	£1949.95
Marantz CD4000.....	£99.95
Marantz CD6000Ki Signature.....	£449.95
Meridian 507.....	£1194.95
Musical Fidelity A308 SM	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista 3D.....	£2999.95
Roksan Kandy KC1.....	£544.95
Rotel RCD1070.....	£494.95
Sony CDPXE570.....	£109.95

Recorder Selection

Marantz DR6000 CD-RW	£329.95
Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£199.95
Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc.....	£229.95
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....	£119.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....	£199.95

B&W Bowers & Wilkins DM601S3 Speakers £249.95

"Ultimately it's the 601 S3's 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? SOUND AND VISION** January 2002

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 28th August 2002, E&OE.



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Amplifier Selection

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£369.95
Arcam DiVA A75 Plus Amplifier	£469.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1149.95
Cyrus ACA7.5 Pre Amplifier	£699.95
Cyrus Smart Power Amplifier	£549.95
Cyrus 5 Amplifier	£499.95
Denon PMA455 Amplifier	£199.95
Linn Kolektor Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier	£149.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308 Amplifier	£1999.95
Roksan Kandy KA1 Amplifier	£544.95
Rotel RA-02 Amplifier	£349.95
Sony TA-FE570 Amplifier	£149.95



Stereo Amplifiers Best Buy £601-£1000

ARCAM SOUND & VISION

DiVA CD72T CD Player

£449.95

DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier

£799.95

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? SOUND AND VISION 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? SOUND AND VISION 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? SOUND AND VISION April 2001**

Videologic DRX-601ES Digital Tuner **£299.95**

"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? SOUND AND VISION Awards 2001**





CD Players
Best Buy £501-£800



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? SOUND AND VISION** 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? SOUND AND VISION** November 1999

MISSION

78 Series

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Off RRP on all
78 Series Speakers

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? SOUND AND VISION** Awards 2001



Speaker Selection

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One.....	£179.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three.....	£349.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM602 S3.....	£299.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black).....	£799.95
KEF Cresta 2.....	£99.95
KEF Q3.....	£399.95
Linn Katan (Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple).....	£894.95
Mission 780.....	£269.95
Mission M71.....	£129.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Wharfedale 8.1.....	£99.95



Q1 Speakers £249.95



"Overall the Q1s are excellent speakers. Some rivals may edge ahead on a short audition, but give these standmounters a little time and they're sure to impress. Are they better than the likes of B&W's 601S3 or Mission's 780s? The answer will have to wait for a group test. But until then it is fair to say that these are the most competitive speakers that KEF has had at this price point for years"

★★★★★ **WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION** May 2002



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System Selection

- Cyrus** Quattro Ex Power Amplifier & Speakers ... **£849.95**
- Denon** 201 Ex Speakers **£629.95**
- Denon** DM50 Ex Speakers **£269.95**
- Linn** Classik Music System Ex Speakers **£999.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 19 Inc Speakers **£549.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 21 Inc Speakers **£649.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 22 Inc Speakers **£699.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 25 Inc Speakers **£799.95**
- 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**



ROKSAN

Caspian MKII CD Player
Caspian MKII Amplifier

£994.95
£894.95

Caspian Amplifier "The Caspian has been around for a few years, but Roksan has developed it to a point where it now leads the class in all-round terms. In specific areas other amps equal it, but overall none can beat its combination of clarity, timing and dynamics. The Caspian is a worthy winner."

★★★★★ **WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION** February 2001

Caspian CD Player "If you can stretch to it, though, Roksan's Caspian is the player to go for. Yes, it's the most expensive here, but no rival can touch it when it comes to bringing music to life - regardless of genre. And that's what hi-fi is all about."

★★★★★ **WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION** May 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? SOUND AND VISION** Awards 2001



Systems
Best Buy £501-£1000

DENON

D-M30 CD Receiver
SC-M50 Speakers

£229.95
£69.95

"Denon's gorgeous D-M30 has a fine pedigree - and a record of success. Its forebear the D-M3 impressed 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? SOUND AND VISION** 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 28th August 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. In the early eighties, the revolutionary GyroDec Turntable, with its elegant and effective suspension system, was introduced. The Gyro SE is a smaller and cheaper package that retains the classy sound of the GyroDec and can be upgraded to the full GyroDec specification by adding a plinth and dustcover.

Price includes Rega RB300 Tone Arm

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY

A308 Amplifier **£1999.95**

The New A308 Series from Musical Fidelity has been designed to follow in the footsteps of their superb limited edition Nu-Vista products. Using easier to manufacture casework and newly developed circuitry has resulted in both a huge price reduction and superior sonic performance in several areas. The A308 sound is completely seamless and integrated with no harshness, grain or edginess. Bass performance is both fast and deep, imaging is three-dimensional. The immediately noticeable quality of the new A308 circuitry is its incredible high frequency performance which is smooth, sweet and extended. To achieve the build quality Musical Fidelity want, a huge investment has been made in production, tooling and custom extrusions which not only look handsome, but also offer excellent mechanical integrity. In brief, the A308 series has genuine state-of-the-art electronics housed in solid, well made metalwork and gives the music lover a true audiophile product with a great sound, great circuits and great build quality.



Genki CD Player **£994.95** LINN 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.

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 28th August 2002, E&OE.



more entertaining



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Please call to verify hours of business.

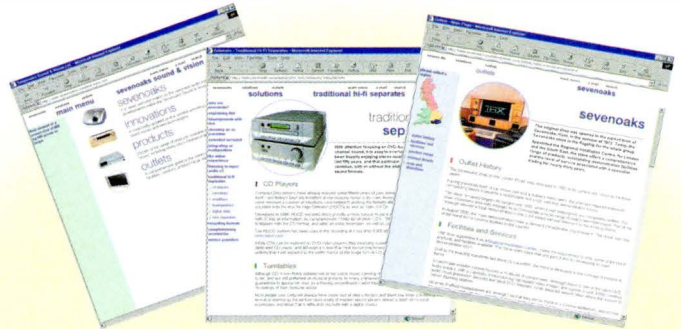
Contact our outlets via **E-Mail** outlet@sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

who are sevenoaks?

Founded in 1972, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision are one of the largest and most successful hi-fi and home cinema retailers in the country.

Each Sevenoaks Sound & Vision outlet stocks a wide range of quality products, covering all categories of specialist home entertainment, from DVD Players to Widescreen Plasma Televisions and Projection Systems, all at highly competitive prices.

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



sevenoaks online

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.co.uk

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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Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock. †Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

pricing policy

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

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

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 in the high end *Statements* section. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers an outstanding level of performance.



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NETWORK: see Crossover.

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

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

PRESENCE: Critical section of the spectrum to the various drive units 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
	Arcam Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful	5			●	●	40	217
	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
BB	Arcam FMJ A32	1,100	Remarkably flexible and well featured with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	●	100	228
BB	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5			●		150	228
	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
	Audio Analogue Maestro	2,600	Beautiful powerhouse housed in a massively engineered chassis, big sound and silky smooth presentation	4	●	●	●		150	228
R	AVI 52000MI	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	Canary Audio CA-608	1,695	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
	Cymbol CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40	178
	Cymbol CA3	999	Great sense of timing and good all round coherence with plenty of get up and go	6			●		60	228
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-25SUK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high fidelity operation	5			●	●	30	208
	Denon PMA-35SUK	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 live speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70	181
R	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 Venticinque	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6					25	202
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
N	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-300iL	3,698	Good looks, stunning build and great all-round sound. Needs more inputs and a headphone socket though	4			●		200	229
	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 overcontroller' 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
R	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	●	100	228
	Mark Levinson No383	5,500	Extremely versatile design that thinks and acts like a serious pre/power. Sounds superb	5			●		100	212
	McIntosh MA6900	4,650	Heavyweight design from a classic brand that makes a very easy to listen to sound and will drive almost anything	7	●		●	●	200	227
	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
	NAD 5300	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
	Opera Aida	795	Low power (in practice) minimalist integrated amp, but the mahogany wings don't help it to fly	5	●	●			60	201
	Pathos Classic One	995	Unusual looks and even more unusual electronic design, but compromised musical potential	5			●		55	202
R	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) 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
R	Præcisa Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			●		100	189
R	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●	●	50	208
R	Primare A20 MkII	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but balsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			●	●	70	181
BB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance, and healthy power yield	6			●	●	100	214
	Red Rose Music M5	8,000	Sophisticated integrated valve amp with powerful, refined sound and beautiful build	4					45	219
	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
N	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
BB	Rotel RA-931 MkII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●				35	208
BB	Rotel RA-971 MkII	275	Improved RA971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6					60	196
	Rotel RA-972	400	Better in the treble than the bass, which is a little too rounded and woolly	6			●		90	205
	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
	Sugden A2 1a	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
	TAG McLaren 60iRv sl	1,000	Highly coherent and solid sound with a slightly loud balance and plenty of features	6			•	•	60	228
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			•	•	65	196
R	Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			•		50	175
	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, edgy and glassy sounding amplifier, though the balanced input may appeal to some	6			•		60	214
R	Token Audio K50	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5					50	186
	Tube Technology Unisig Sig	2,400	A very attractive product which combines many classic valve attributes to good effect	5	•				30	202
	Unison Research Unico i	800	Open, engaging sound from an Italian charmer with limited bass power but plenty of spirit	5			•		100	228
	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 combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A-85 virtues with others, plus extra gravitas and range	7			•	•	85	225
R	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,900	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	7	•	•	•	•	100	227
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	5			•		60	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
EC	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	1					20	231
	Bow Technologies Warlock/Walrus	6,490	Heavyweight dual mono pairing with superb build and rich, refined sound	5			•		150	216
R	Bryston BP20/3B-ST	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	8			•	•	120	212
BB	Bryston BP-20 4BST	3,375	Quick, articulate and powerful, this is an excellent all round amp which controls difficult loudspeakers superbly	8				•	250	230
	Chary 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
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
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
R	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	•	•				191
	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 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
EC	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Looks can be deceiving; slim box, powerful and fast sound. One of the best power amplifiers in production	1					125	230
	Kolektor/LK85	990	Beautifully turned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all-Linn 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
EC	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after NuVista	4	•	•	•	•	250	231
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 fulfill the demands of the most dynamic material	1					350	199
R	Myyraad 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-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
	TAG McLaren PA20R/100P	1,699	A blast from TAG McLaren's past highlights how far the brand has developed	6			•	•	100	225
R	TAG McLaren DPA32R 250MR	4,940	In a class of its own for extendibility, can double as excellent D/A, and is tremendously subtle, though it can sound constrained dynamically	6			•		250	230

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
	Thule Spirit PR150B/PA150B	1,600	The limitations in the sonic performance mean that the competition has more to offer	6					150	212
R	T+A PA 1520 R	2,400	Powerful, punchy amp has many positive qualities, but sometimes seems to try too hard	8				●	260	230
	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
	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 Discaver 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
MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS



STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
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R	Arcam AVR200	800	Arcam upgraded its AVR100 giving it Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo sound, bit bass-light for multichannel	6			●	●	70	229
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
	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multichannel sound	4			●	●	75	198
R	Denon AVR-3802	850	Feature-packed AV receiver with a good tuner, but low on grunt and excitement, especially in stereo	4	●		●	●	110	229
BB	Denon AVC-A15E	2,500	A powerful, articulate 7.1-channel integrated amp, loaded with features and equally at 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
BB	Harman Kardon AVR 5500	749	Powerful sounding receiver with some clever features like an automatic set-up. Powerful but a bit hard-edged	8			●	●	85	229
	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
	Lexicon MC12 Pro	9,000	Balanced output equipped behemoth of a 12 channel processor that does everything you can imagine and more	12			●		N/A	227
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
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Super-powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, has marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	6	●	●	●	●		230
R	Myryad 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
R	Onkyo TX-DS595	450	Unexciting but generally competent home cinema amplifier has some strong ergonomic features	7	●		●	●	70	223
BB	Onkyo TX-DS696	850	Excellent all-rounder for both hi-fi and home cinema use. Slightly characterful, but very smooth performance	7	●		●	●	100	229
	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 unsuitable	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
	Pioneer VSA-AX10	2,700	Seven-channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and EQ, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD	8			●	●	150	229
	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 STR-VA555ES	1,000	Feature-rich AV amplifier that performs extremely well as a multichannel device, but less so with stereo	10	●		●	●	110	229
	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			●	●	N/A	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 A/V solution without complex processing. Visually stunning but low on grunt and detail	6			●	●	70	215
	Yamaha RX-V1000RDS	800	Solid mainstream performer is more convincing as home cinema amplifier than for multichannel music	8	●		●	●	100	217
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	2,000	An anorak's delight, and one of the most flexible and effective soundfield creators ever conceived	11	●		●	●	110	210

CABLES



SPECIFICATIONS

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRAINED	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
R	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried	●		●		●			200
EC	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
BB	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	115	Disappointing beside other Kimber products: great bass, but suffers from dryness	●		●		●			224
BB	Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble — excellent performance all round	●		●		●			188
R	Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed	●		●		●			176
BB	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 5S35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic		●	●		●			188
	Profigold PGA301 MkII	40	Mellow and well rounded, but can seem a little heavy		●	●		●			211
R	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
R	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced, and easily rivals more expensive cables		●	●		●			211
BB	QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value		●	●		●			176
R	QED Qnect 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid		●	●		●			188
R	QED Qnex Silver Spiral	90	A great cable for lovers of big sounds		●	●		●			200
	Reference CS 1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at dimaxes		●	●		●			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		●	●		●			176
R	Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss		●	●		●			200
R	Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable		●	●		●			188
	Straight Wire Encore II	100	Slightly variable bass performance is a weakness in this otherwise capable cable		●	●		●			200
BB	Supra EFF-ISL	80	Excellent sound in all areas — nothing to criticise		●	●		●			188
R	Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plumminess offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results		●	●		●			188
	Tara Labs Prism 55-i	195	Good with laid-back music, but seems lazy with more exciting material		●	●		●			200
BB	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value		●	●		●			200
BB	van den Hul The Bay C5	39	Terrific detail, nice balance — a great cable		●	●		●			224
BB	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent		●	●		●			188
R	van den Hul D102 MkIII HB	80	A fine cable, but the competition has crept up and it no longer leads the pack		●	●		●			200
R	Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round with just a hint of bass congestion — very good value		●	●		●			224



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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound		●		●	●		E	207
	Chord Optilink	40	Beautifully made, but performance is practically indistinguishable from other, cheaper, Toslink leads							O	207
	Ixos 1051-100	39.95	Plenty of bass, and detail seems good, but there's a loss of involvement		●		●	●		E	207
BB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced		●		●	●		E	207
R	Ross OP004	19.99	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value							O	207
	SonicLink Digital Optical	30	Possibly slightly more detailed than other opticals, but still no match for a decent electrical digital link							O	207
	Straight Wire Info-Link	300	A good cable, but bass seems a little light and detail suffers a little at climaxes		●		●		●	E	207
R	van den Hul Optocoupler	49.95	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types							O	207

LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●		●		●	●		183
R	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	Black Rhodium Aero Space S130x2	76	Great kick in the bass, but the treble can sound dry and recessed. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●	●		227
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	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●	●		227
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round	●		●		●	●		203
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 8VS	108	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●	●		227
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
	Monster Z2 Reference	240	Basically competent but never outstanding, and suffers some bass muddle. Price for 3m terminated pair	●		●		●	●		227
	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-her-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
	QED Original	2.50	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel	●		●		●	●		157
BB	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●		●	●		192

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LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	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
	Supra Octopower 25	77.98	Very low losses over long runs, but essentially sound is lacklustre – sluggish bass and hard treble. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●			227
R	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues – and very minor vices – across the board	●		●		●			183
R	Tara Labs Prism Nexa	9.95	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	●		●		●			215
	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail	●		●	●	●			203
	TCI Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	●		●		●			203
R	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	●		●	●	●			203
R	van den Hul The Snowline	5.49	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●		●		●			215
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	●		●		●			203
R	van den Hul D-352 Hybrid	84	Can be a touch dry, and bass is not massively extended, but mid and treble are pleasantly airy and detailed. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		●			227
	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 BJB4F)				●	●			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 BX PRO	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-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●		●		●		●	164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	●			●		●		●	171
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest 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

CD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	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
	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 Analogue Maestro	1,500	Super smooth CD replay from this CD 'processor'. Fantastic casework compliments a loveable sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	228
EC	Audionet ART V2	2,300	Built to last forever, this CD has a dark natural sound with excellent bass and would be cheap at twice the price!	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	231
	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	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
R	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-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
R	Exposure 2010	600	Undistinguished in the final analysis, but the 2010 nevertheless marks a return to form for this famous marque	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	231
	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 multichannel 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 Sig	500	Impressive mid market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built.	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	231
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
EC	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high resolution sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	231
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
EC	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE24	2,000	Gorgeous looking, substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	229
	Myryad MCD 600	1,299	Abundance of detail and resolution from this 'Super DAC' CD player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
R	NAD C520	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
	NAD C521	200	Good timing and excitement, but not good at holding the listener's attention	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
	NAD 523	250	Lacklustre musical presentation was disappointing on test; so was the absence of a digital output	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
	NAD C540	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the C540 is smooth & elegant with just a hint of aggression	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
BB	NAD C 541i	330	High octave player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	231
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-5507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
	Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	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
H	Rotel RCD-02	379	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	231

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
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
	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-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 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
EC	Wadia 301	3,650	Highly insightful player with digital preamp options and very good onboard volume control, try it direct for maximum effect	●	●	●		●		●			228
	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	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	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 engrissing	●		●							144
	Roksan Atessa 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	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
	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



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	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam DIVA DV88	1,000	A DVD-Video player built with non-obsolence 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
	Denon DVD-1600	500	Classy to look at and to use, picture quality is good, but CD and DVD-A performance is a little soft and wayward	●		●				●		●	228
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
EC	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	Great CD playback from this stunning player. Build as solidly as they come	●		●						●	230
R	Harman/Kardon DVD25	449	Reasonable DVD-Video player is an excellent CD player, making this a good upgrade choice for buyers who put music first	●		●						●	228
	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
R	JVC XV-SA72SL	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike	●		●						●	220

DVD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ASSEMBLY 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-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
EC	Marantz DV-12S1	2,500	THX Ultra progressive DVD-A player is a classy all rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode	●	●	●	●					229
	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 DVS596	2,350	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●	●	●	●					218
EC	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in CD and DVD-VIA replay, with flexible modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-band digital outputs	●	●	●	●					230
	NAD T531	330	Standard far eastern DVD-Video player in NAD clothing fails to stir the juices	●	●	●	●					228
	Onkyo DV-5939	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-RA61	399	A nice DVD-Video player cohabits with a relatively nondescript DVD-Audio section	●	●	●	●					228
	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-A7EB	699	Chopped down Technics DVD-A10 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
	Philips DVD Q50	300	Designer DVD player with oddball ergonomics and lacklustre audio performance, but video performance is fine	●	●	●	●					228
R	Philips DVD957	400	Slightly ill-disciplined, but a bold, enthusiastic player which engages even if it doesn't always convince	●	●	●	●					216
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-543S	350	Looks to die for and decent on-screen results, but sound is flat and grey	●	●	●	●					216
BB	Sony DVP-NS900V	500	A great all rounder, and an excellent example of the current strengths of the SACD format	●	●	●	●					228
	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
BB	Toshiba SD-510E	320	Great all rounder DVD-Audio from a slightly idiosyncratic player at a new low price point for Toshiba	●	●	●	●					228
	Toshiba SD500E	599	OK DVD-Video player, but lacklustre with music, especially when reproducing high resolution DVD-Audio material	●	●	●	●					213
EC	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
R	Yamaha DVD-S1200	700	Clean, agile sound quality, and decent, if unexciting DVD-Audio performance round of a good, if rather costly player	●	●	●	●					228

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)	●	●	218
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Imerge M1000	3,300+	One-box hard disc solution for multi-room installations. Stores 100s of CDs with web-interface but sound is uninspiring. Single-room S1000 also available	2	CD/HD	●	●	223
	JVC XM-448	220	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
R	Kenwood DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	1	MD	●	●	191
	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	Mid-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	●	●	223

HEADPHONES

HEADPHONES

SPECIFICATIONS

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
	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
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal						250	66		194
	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
	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor						200	250		172
	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
	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
	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality						200	32		186
	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
	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
	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
	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 overexcited bass						247	32		205
	Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance – but detailed, and comfortable to wear						210	64		219
	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband						255	150		172
	Sennheiser HD 590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort						270	120		205
	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
	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
	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way						295	50		205
	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
	Vivanco SR2225	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
	Vivanco SR950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones						252	32		194
	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable						280	9,000		186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss						240	9,000		186

LOUDSPEAKERS

STEREO SPEAKERS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dBm)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	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 300	400	Chunky real-wood stand-mount sounds big, smooth and shiny, but also dynamically limited	21, 40, 30		86	6	24			227
	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
	AR 520	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
	Arcaydis AKF	299	Budget compact real wood floorstander lacks some warmth; could be better finished	17, 77, 21		88	5	38			227
	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
	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
	ATC SCM10A	1,299	Stylish, active power houses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	A	45			221
	ATC SCM50A SL	7,020	350 watts of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,71.6,48		A	A	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
	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

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dBm)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
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
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
BB	B&W DM602 S3	300	Large lively standmount with fine bass and low box colour; comprehensively vindicates a timeless formula	23,49,29		89	3	22	●		224
BB	B&W DM602.5 S3	400	Pretty floorstander sounds rather laid back and lacks the agility of its stand-mount stablemates	20,5,88,29	●	89	4	38	●		227
BB	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	88	3	25	●		231
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
R	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		89	12	28	●		199
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
EC	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocally challenges for world domination. Dynamically very superior to 801, and one of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	92	3	20	●		231
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 OA52.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37		90	8	20		●	195
R	Castle Richmond	250	Tiny real-wood miniature has a lightweight but very coherent sound, a bit in-yer-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50	●		201
R	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wall-mount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22		90	5	45	●		227
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 Howard S3	1,350	Looks gorgeous, and is a solid all rounder too, with uniquely spacious imaging; difficult to justify price premium over Harlech	21,99,32		88	8	38	●		229
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
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 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 CLS70	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
R	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 62	729	Pricey but cute vinyl floorstander is a class act sonically – lightweight but clean and dextrous	20,86,26		87	4	30	●		231
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
BB	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36		90	4	30	●		229
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 JET 205	649	Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall	20,33,29		87	4	40	●		231
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 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

TRIANGLE

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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
	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	25	●		201
	Heybrook Ultima	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29		89	6	45	●		174
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30		88	11	27	●		199
	Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	●	90	6	25	●	●	180
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
	Infinity Prelude MTS	9,700	Strikingly slim, elegant 'tower'/subwoofer combo sounds exceptionally clean, neutral and spacious; clever bass tuning	24,94x52		88	4	<20	●		228
	Jamo E800	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 T1200	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30		92	5	40	●		193
	JBL Xt1 80	579	Big and good looking three-way goes loud with beefy bass delivery, but lacks coherence and lightness of touch	23,100,32		89	4	28	●		227
	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	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
EC	JBL Ti-2K	1,250	Very elegant and solid standmount with boat-tail rear end and highly detailed, spacious sound alongside weighty bass	42,28,42		88	8	45	●		230
BB	JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28		90	4	22	●		227
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
BB	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 Katan	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19		86	4	45	●	●	187
R	Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23		A	A	40	●		214
BB	Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21.5,98,29		91	4	25	●		180
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21.5,104,27		91	8	40	●		218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with 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 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
	Mission M74	300	Lots of speaker for the money, and a big, weighty sound, but a bit bright and also dynamically weak	20,97,33		90	5	25	●		227
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 Si	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
	Mordaunt-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget standmount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25		87	4	45	●		207
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	●		189
R	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander with complex mechanical decoupling has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28		90	6	40	●		229
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/m)	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. U-shaped back does wonders for the appearance, sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23	●	86	8	50	●	●	225
[R]	PMC TB2	700	A worthy and prettier successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type class for neutrality and transparency	20,40,5,31	●	88	8	30	●	●	211
[R]	PMC LB1	999	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26	●	87	6.5	40	●	●	199
[R]	PMC FB1	1,275	Handsome floorstander has the lively coherence of a simple two-way alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	88	6	20	●	●	204
[R]	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
	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
	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	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom'n'tizz'	22,5,92,5,26	●	90	5	25	●	●	193
[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]	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 Prologue II	1,250	An attractive shape and a compact enclosure alongside a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22,5,96,24	●	92	8	40	●	●	229
[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
[R]	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 suspect bass integration	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
	Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	35,5,19,30	●	91	8	45	●	●	196
	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 miniaturs 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
[R]	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency in a good-looking floorstanding package, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	89	8	40	●	●	229
[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]	TAG 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 Revolution R1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●	187
[R]	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 Eyris 1	599	Pricey but very cute wall-mount miniature; oddball but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17,35,26	●	88	6	40	●	●	227
[R]	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26	●	88	4	20	●	●	231
[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]	Tannoy Eyris 3	1,200	Strikingly unusual styling with top-mounted supertweeter, the sonics show fine scale, weight and spaciousness, but lack dynamic excitement	20,102,26	●	89	6	38	●	●	229
[R]	T+A Talis TLS3	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
[R]	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
[R]	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	92	3	40	●	●	219
[R]	Triangle Celius 202	1,095	Very tall and not too pretty, it has magical midrange communication skills, but could be smoother, warmer and richer	22,113,30	●	94	4	28	●	●	229
[R]	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Cosmetically weird, but very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness, and splendid stereoimaging. A genuine classic	41,109,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	229
[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	21,61,56,1	●	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
	W'dale Diamond 7.2 Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24	●	88	4	40	●	●	187
	Wharfedale 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 2S	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy, impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●	195

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
[R]	Acoustic Energy Aesprite 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	●	35	●	●	225
	Castle Classic 8	800	Adequate performance, but misses the mark at the price	●	●	A	●	30	●	●	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	45,5,41,45,5	●	●	●	20	●	●	210
	M&K MX70	795	Cutely compact and entertaining too, but lacks the ultimate extension to justify its high price	37,32,30	●	A	●	25	●	●	210
	M&K MX700	1,595	Fine dynamic sound with music or movies. Compact unit but expensive and short on features	●	●	A	●	●	●	●	225
[R]	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	●	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	●	25	●	●	210
	Polk PSW430	400	A lot of subwoofer for your money, but lacks deep grunt and is more movie than music oriented	38,5,45,46	●	A	●	25	●	●	225
[R]	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	41,5,62,33	●	A	●	18	●	●	210
	REL Q400E	1,000	A class system, and good for movies, but has a tendency to thicken textures and add a bit too much 'thump' to music	39,42,43	●	A	●	16	●	●	217
[EC]	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	●	A	●	16	●	●	217
[R]	REL Strata III	800	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42,52,33	●	A	●	20	●	●	210

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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
SB	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
	Soliloquy 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 Aegeo2	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
	KEF KMS2002	499	Looks the business, but lacks deep bass and the presence/treble is also too restrained (32x36x32cm sub)	13,23,14		85	3	45	●		218
	Mission FS2	450	Intriguing NXT speaker technology has minimal visual impact, and lacks dynamic precision (32x47x25cm sub)	13,5,28,4,5		86	6	40	●		218
	NHT Super Zero/Sub One	1,000	Decent enough, but not the prettiest nor the best value around for music replay – one for movie fans (40x41x42cm sub)	14,23,14		84	8	30	●		218
R	Ruark Vita 100	900	Not the cheapest sub/sat, but certainly one of the most accomplished, sonically and visually (30x42x30cm sub)	11,20,17		86	6	40	●		218

LOUDSPEAKERS

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
SB	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
	Acoustic Energy Aespritt 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	20,5,55,32		90	5	20	●		198
SB	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	var	89	3	22	●		224
	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
	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
	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31	●	91	5	28		●	198
	Dynaudio 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
	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
	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
	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
SB	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
	KEF Q-series package	880	Cleverly designed, vinyl-finished UniQ package packs a goodly thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
	Martin Logan system	9,991	Stunning electrostatic-based multichannel package, as adept with stereo music as it is with surround sound	var	var	89	4	20	●		227
	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		var	210
R	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		92	4	120		●	198
	Mission 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
	Mission Cinema 8 package	1,400	Beautifully styled and cleverly designed package, but could have more grunt and drive for the price	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
	Polk RTE 1000p	1,300	Tall elegant tower with built-in powered bass 'subwoofer' that needs using with discretion. Bright but engaging	20,110,35	●	91	4	25	●		198
	Monitor Audio Silver series	1,000	Great-looking conventionally styled package lacks something in dynamic drive and tension	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority but must be 5.1-connected	var	var	n/a	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
	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
SB	Tannoy mXAV4 package	500	Lacks grunt, grip and authority, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
SB	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
SB	Tannoy Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29	●	91	4	20		●	198
SB	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
	B&W Nautilus HTM1	1,500	Very bulky for a centre speaker, though very capable too – a little less laid back than its siblings	76,37,30		89	4	30		●	210
	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,29		88	8	45	●		198
R	Definitive Technology CLR2002	595	Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,17,5,31		90	4	40	●		198
	Jamo Concert Center	550	A decent balance match but lacks the class and grip of the Concert 8s, and is bulky and pricey too	55,22,30		87	5	100		●	210
SB	JBL Xti10C	200	An elegant, cleverly designed centre and a good match for the 40s. Better value than most too	51,19,5,27		88	5	50		●	210
	KEF Q95C	200	This artfully designed UniQ centre looks much better than most on top of the TV set	40,17,17		89	3	120		●	210
	Mirage OM-C2	600	Large but discreet omni-bi-pole matches OM-10-1 well but lacks tight focus, and seems expensive	64,18,5,31		88	4	50		●	210
R	Mission 77C	199	A good centre-front match for 77-series, the triple tweeter might be a curiosity, but voicing is very good	42,17,21		91	4	100		●	198
	Mission 78C	350	Makes a good visual and sonic match for the 782, but quite pricey by comparison, given the ingredients	45,17,19		86	3	100		●	210
	Monitor Audio Silver Centre 10i	300	Neat and good-looking partner to the Silver S1s, but a little more forward, and quite expensive too	50,17,21		87	4	100		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short MS 504	200	Smart yet discreet and a good match for the 502. Sounds clean and expressive, and is well priced	50,19,20		88	3	120		●	210
R	PMC TB2M/C	325	This bulky centre speaker is quite pricey, but it combines good transparency with some authority	40,20,31		87	6	50		●	210
	Polk CS 1000p	999	Monstrously large and heavy centre-front speaker, presumably for those with monstrous intentions	87,22,35		92	4	25	●		198
R	Rega Senta	185	The very compact Senta is sensibly priced, a bit bright maybe, but articulate and expressive	32,16,21		89	4	120		●	210
SB	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
SB	Tannoy Saturn S6C	200	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	38,21,29		89	6	25	●		198

PERSONAL / INTERNET

PERSONAL STEREO

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa HS-PX307	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette		●				204
R	Aiwa AM-HX50	180	Neat play-back only personal with an impressively full-bodied sound, though short on detail	MiniDisc		●				204
	JVC XL-PG31	60	'Challenging' looks and frankly unpleasant sound add up to a player that's best avoided	CD						216
	JVC XM-R700SL	250	The most expensive player here, but its in-ner-face sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Kenwood DPC-X517	100	Clean, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD						216
R	Panasonic RQ-SX71	70	A sleek aluminium body, decent sound and superb features	Cassette		●				204
	Panasonic RQ-SX91	80	A super-slick personal for well-heeled cassette users. Sound is rather bright	Cassette		●				204
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 CD-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
	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
R	DigMedia Music Store	350	Innovative CD/hard drive combo with optional solid state portable. MP3 with or without a computer	CD/HD			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	Novel MP3 player that uses Omega Click! discs for storage. Chunky but quite effective, and discs are much cheaper than memory cards	Click! Discs	●		MP3/WMA	USB	40MB	213
R	Neo-25	420	Sparsely equipped but efficient hard drive portable with an exceptionally high potential capacity. Average in the sound department	Hard Drive	●		MP3	USB	10GB	213
	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-30S	200	Tiny MP3 player with a solid, punchy sound. Some limitations but a cool design	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	223
	Sanyo SSP-PD7	250	Cute but pricey with limited supplied memory, but sound is good and it's one of the first to employ AAC coding	Solid State	●		MP3/AAC	USB	32MB	213
	Schneider MPMan F20	99	The world's first MP3 personal. Basic but still good value	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Smart Portable MP3 Disc Player	119	CD personal that also plays MP3 tracks burnt onto CD-R discs	CD			MP3			208
	Sony NW-M57	249	A gorgeous little personal using Sony's Memory Stick storage. Good but pricey	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	208
	Sony NW-M59	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

TURNTABLES

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	SEMI-AUTO	AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	●			33/45	●	●			229
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	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 SUBCHASSIS	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
EC	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter, and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	●			33/45		●	●		228
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 VI/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges	●			33/45	●	●	●	●	103
	Thorens TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●			33/45	●	●	●		159
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
R	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limp quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●			33/45	●	●	●		136
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	●			33/45	●	●	●		205

CARTRIDGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MC	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
BB	Ortofon Rohmann	1,000	A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound		●		0.25	8.5	175
R	Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere — one of the very best		●		0.12	10	84
	Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo		●		0.12	10	91
	Rega Bias	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 Reza	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●			6.5	6.3	192
R	Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	●			6.5	5	91
BB	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties — one of the best around for less than 300		●		2.5	9	192
R	van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●			5.5	6	103
	van den Hul DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy		●		0.35	7.6	158
R	van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass		●		0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-One	900	This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale — worth all the extra money		●		0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal		●		0.4	6	72
R	van den Hul Frog	1,500	Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm		●		0.65	7	175
R	van den Hul G' hopper GLA II	1,999	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	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
BB	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low		●		237	60
R	Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though	Low		●		240	91
R	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low		●		233	60
R	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low		●		233	60

STANDS & SUPPORTS

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aavik C4	200	Attractive wood finish stand with a very large footprint but sound is a little coloured	77	47			4	MDF	206
R	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47			4	Wood	193
	Apollo Symphony	245	Simple steel and glass stand which majors in excitement factor but lacks precision	73	46.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5	45.5			4	Glass	193
	Apollo Mezzo Soprano	340	Heavyweight contender packing a big sonic punch. Looks cool, but can contribute a bit of character	68.5	53.5, 44			4	Glass	217
R	Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67	48.6			4	Wood	193
R	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50, 50		●	4	Glass	217
BB	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43			4	MDF	193
R	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
BB	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well damped design. Its performance makes the price tag seem rather good value	75	53.5, 45			4	MDF	217
	Custom design E'lite E4	250	Fairly laid back for a glass/steel rack. Just loses out sonically to the competition	51	62, 51			4	Glass	217
R	Custom Design Aspect650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46		●	4	Glass	206
R	Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49		●	4	Glass	193
	Kestrel Furniture Nightingale	495	Well engineered furniture quality rack with thoughtful extras. Large with pleasing but not winning performance	91	62.5, 53.5			5	Wood	217
	Mana 4-tier	500	The ultimate statement in steel and glass; adds resonance in a way you'll love or hate	87	45		●	4	Glass	206
	Projekt Furniture A4	215	An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound	56	48		●	4	Wood	193
R	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49			4	MDF	206
R	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49, 39.5			4	Wood	217
	Sonus System Elite	330	Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands	68	50		●	4	Glass	206
	Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73	46		●	4	Glass	193
R	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, 5 shelves too! Well balanced and under 200	92	50, 40			5	Glass	217
	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar stands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency	72.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	193
BB	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8		●	4	Glass	193
BB	Towshend Seismic Sink Stand	900	Serious resolution and stunning isolation from air decoupled self levelling design. If you have the cash, buy one	61	53, 39.5			4	MDF	217

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason Akros II 60D	79	Good-looking, well-equipped with decent ingredients. Evenhanded but lacks dynamic enthusiasm	62	16.5		●			220
	Alphason HD5	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5, 15.5		●			189
	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15, 12.5		●			189
	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51, 40.5	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
	Atacama R724/Atabite	250	Good basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine-sounding stand at its price	61	16, 21.5		●			220
R	Cyrus CL550 stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19					220
R	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original with better focus and detail	61, 56.5	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
	Gale t60	70	Neither the least expensive nor the prettiest, and the sound is undistinguished too	63	16.5		●			220
	Green Apple Diamond Bevel	225	Sounds soft, gentle and somewhat dulled at the top, but takes top honours for style	61	15					220
R	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean, sweet and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20		●			220
R	JPW HS1	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61	19, 21		●			189
BB	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20		●			220
R	Mana Sound Base	175	The Sound Base plinth simply improves the sound of every speaker placed on it	8	29, 32					202
	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19, 15		●			202
	Mission Stancette	60	Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price. Sounds OK considering	60	16.5, 22		●			220
	Mordant-Short Atlas	90	Shiny silver Atlas looks great, but sound doesn't transcend the very basic engineering	53	17.5		●			220
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than most of the competition	50-100	19, 22		●			189
R	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15		●			220
R	Partington Dreadnought Ult.	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	20.5, 23.5		●			202
	Quadraspire QS speaker stand	150	Styled to match the company's equipment racks, a very decent sounding stand at a fair price	62	14					220
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33.5, 24					189
	Sonus Systems Excel	110	Strong performance when filled with sand but design flaws let it down	65, 45	20, 22.5		●			202
R	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16		●			220
	Sound Organisation Z524	69	A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes	61	16, 17		●			189
	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16, 17		●			202
	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
SE	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
BB	NAD S400	600	One of the best around - bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●	●		●	230
	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance: slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40	●			●	166
BB	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	●			●	230
	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
R	TAG McLaren T32R+DAB	2,290	Classy hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB and a joy to own and use	DAB,FM,M,L	99	●	●		●	230
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●		●	157

DIGITAL TUNERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DAB	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
	Psion Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB		●	●	●	●	211
R	Pure DRX-601ESM	330	Cheap, small and capable, but with major tonal variations from neutral which confuse the issue	DAB		●	●	●	●	230
	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



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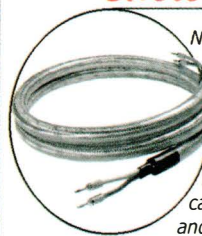
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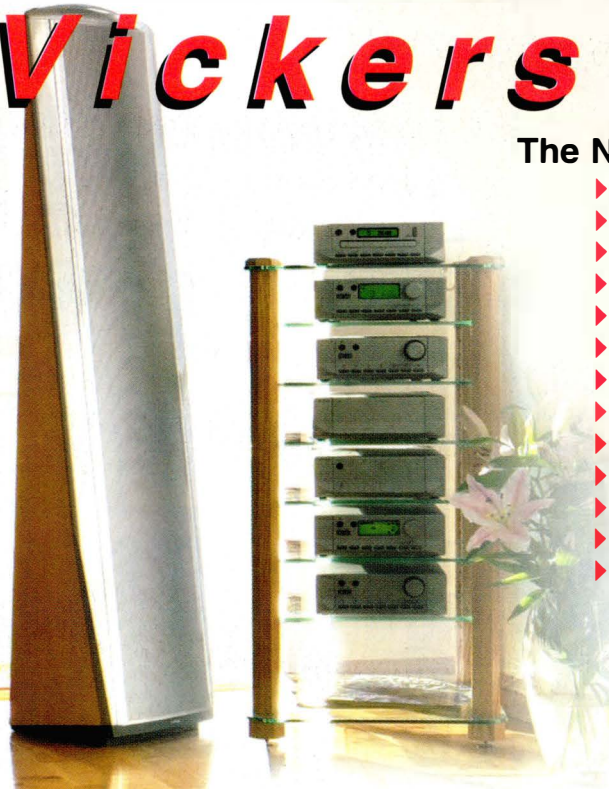
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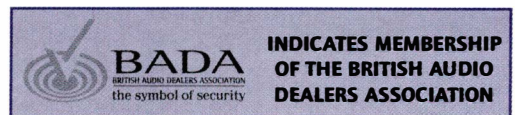
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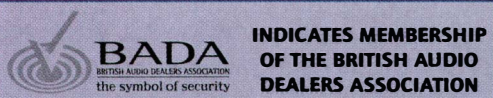
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THE SCOTTISH HI-FI+HOME CINEMA SHOW

The Date : Saturday 19th – Sunday 20th October 2002
The Venue: The Thistle Hotel, Cambridge Street, Glasgow G2 3HN

Why you should be there...

- Scotland's premier showcase for hi-fi, home cinema, multi-room audio and home entertainment
- Unprecedented range of products and systems on show
- CD, vinyl and DVD based systems
- Video projectors and Plasma screens on demonstration
- Dedicated Custom Installation section for ideas on discrete installations
- Exhibitors already confirmed include ART Audio, Focal JM Lab, Kef, Naim Audio, Rega, Tannoy, etc.
- Magazine sponsors include Hi-fi +, Hi-fi Choice and Smarthouse
- Dealer sponsors include Loud & Clear, AudioSalon and Stereo Stereo
- Glasgow City Centre venue – easy to find, good transport links, shopping and other attractions nearby

Show activities

- Welcome presentations every 30 minutes
- Live music and recitals throughout the weekend
- Seminars and presentations from manufacturers and industry representatives
- Bring & Play your own CDs, vinyl and DVDs
- Freebies and giveaways from the shows sponsors
- Café area to relax and recuperate
- Family entertainment including video games on the big screens

Advance Tickets

£4 available by e-mail, fax or letter to: CCL Chesterfield Communications Ltd, Events House,
1 Chester Road Tattenhall, Chester CH3 9AE Tel 01829 770884 Fax 01829 771258

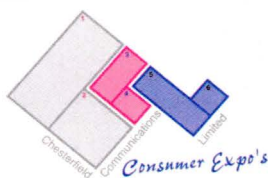
Discounted Tickets £3 before 31/07/02

Over 45 exhibitors are expected to attend the show in 2002. Individual product demonstrations will take place over the top three floors of the hotel, with a full size trade hall and lecture theatre on the ground floor.

The show will open from 10am – 6pm on Saturday 19th and 10am – 5pm on Sunday 20th.

Admission on the door will be just £5, family ticket £13, 2 adults and all children 4 – 14

Further up to the minute information will be available at our website www.chestergroup.org, please email us with your comments, and with what you would like to see at the show.



Exhibition organisers

CCL Chesterfield Communications Ltd
Events House, 1 Chester Rd Tattenhall, Chester CH3 9AE
Tel 01829 770884 Fax 01829 771258
Mob 07810 697123

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BACK ISSUES



APR 2002/ISSUE 226

- Bench test: CD players
- British budget speakers on test
- Buyer's Bible: stereo amps
- UK's first DVD-A/SACD player



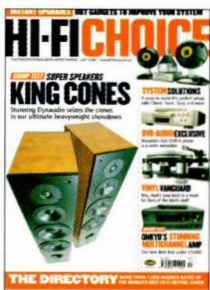
MAY 2002/ISSUE 227

- Bench test: speakers £300-£600
- Group test: CD separates systems
- Round-up: speaker cables
- Buyer's Bible: FM and digital tuners



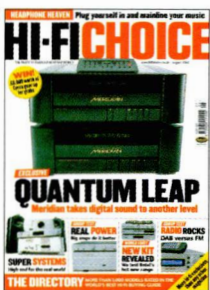
JUNE 2002/ISSUE 228

- Group: DVD-A, V and SACD players
- Group: stereo amps £800-£2,400
- Wadia's latest CD player
- Buyer's Bible: turntables



JULY 2002/ISSUE 229

- Group test: speakers £1,000-£2,000
- Group test: multichannel receivers
- System Solutions feature
- Marantz DV-1251 DVD-Audio player



AUGUST 2002/ISSUE 230

- Group test: radio tuners
- Group test: high-power amplifiers
- High end, real-world systems pt1
- Meridian DVD-A/V processor



SUMMER 2002/ISSUE 231

- Hi-fi that rocked the world feature
- Group Test: CD players £300-£800
- Group Test: speakers £500-£1,000
- Musical Fidelity A308R pre/power

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NEXT MONTH...

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

Thinking of digitally archiving your old vinyl, or simply making a compilation to suit that certain mood? Our unmissable digital audio recorders test examines the very latest formats including CD-R, MiniDisc and hard disc to see who's king of the 1s and 0s.

STATEMENTS

We go under the lid of **Naim's** new flagship preamp the NAC552 to discover if it lives up to its aspirational price tag. **Marantz's** universal DVD-Audio/SACD spinner is put to the test, along with **Denon's** latest DVD-A player and **Densen's** new '17-Bit' CD player. Plus more hot high-end products from **Audio Research**, **Lumley** and **Musical Fidelity**.

NAIM EXPOSED

Our man in the field has been invited to tea at **Naim's** HQ in Salisbury. Expect an in-depth report on one of Britain's most prestigious hi-fi, er, names, and some lovely pictures of the factory.

SERIOUS STANDMOUNTS

Ashamed of your big bulky speakers? We've cherry-picked some of the most gorgeous standmounts around. Tested to the max are models from **Sonus Faber**, **Energy**, **Harbeth**, **Infinity** and little-known Italians **Diapason**.

PLUS

A frankly awesome range of high quality kit tested including **Linn's** new ADIKT cartridge, the new **Cambridge Audio** A5i amplifier, speakers fresh off the line from **Arcaydis**, **QED's** new X-Tube speaker cable, **REL's** new Quake subwoofer and more!

HFC233 on sale 4 September



Densen B-400XS '17-bit' CD player

High end for peanuts

David Vivian reviews expensive high-end systems for a living. This is the one he actually paid for

Enough is never quite enough is it? Writing *High End For The Real World* (p58) left me gasping with lust and wonder. For £10K, or thereabouts, it's entirely possible to buy a hi-fi system that sounds so good you're almost obliged to use a cliché that includes the words 'million' and 'dollars'.

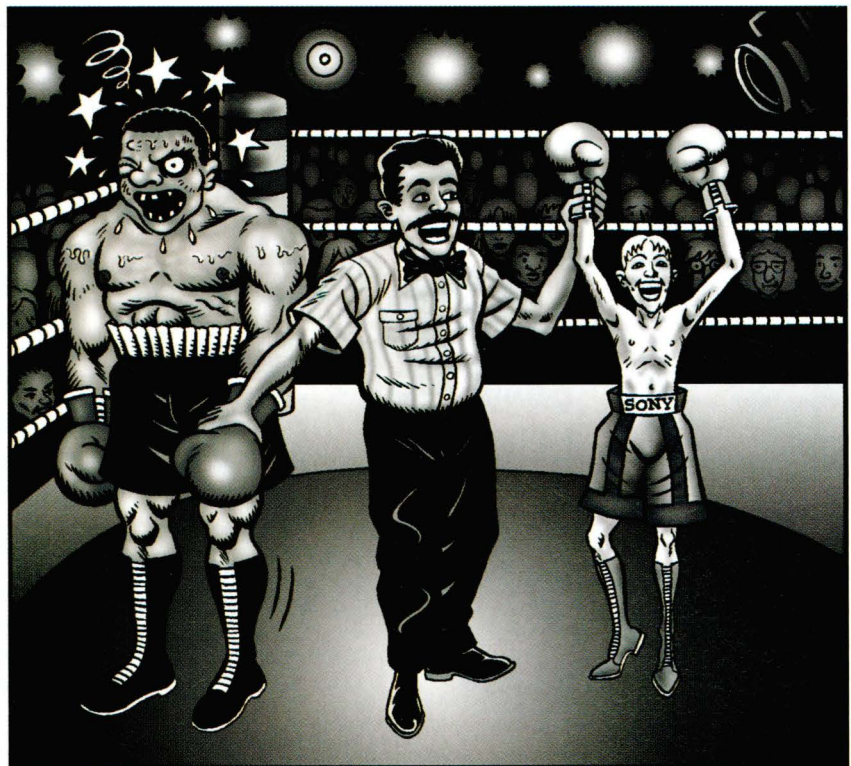
I guess some of you are expecting me to put together a million dollar system to make sure. Must admit I am kind of curious. If such a thing exists, perhaps we'll feature it here at some future date.

What happens now, though, is a little more extreme. Never mind high-end for the real world, how about high-end for peanuts? High-end that positively forbids a phone call to Zürich or any form of macho platinum plastic unsheathing. Flog your shoelaces. Stick your hand down the back of the sofa – this is a small change affair, back pocket fluff.

CHEAP AND (VERY) CHEERFUL

I'll explain. Most days I stroll around Maidstone after lunch. My route takes me past the window of Richer Sounds which I occasionally glance at on the hoof to see if it's possible to buy a DVD player for under a fiver yet. This particular day my gaze stuck on the piles of cardboard and kit while my torso and legs continued down the road.

It would have been so easy to miss – Sony's SCD-XE670 looks just like one of its budget CD players. Black. Plastic. Unremarkable. But a familiar squirly logo on the transport drawer made me pause, and I knew I had a hi-fi bargain of colossal proportions. A CD spinner, yes, but also a second generation stereo/multichannel SACD player. The same machine that one esteemed reviewer reckoned played stereo SACDs so stunningly well in a suitably revealing system it was a match for a £20,000 CD player.



“£20K’s worth of sonic jollies for 120 quid? It must be an all-time no-brainer.”

Launched in December 2001 for £300, the SCD-XE670 was massive value. When I later backtracked from Richer Sounds to the local Sony Centre, it was marked up at £250. But by then I already had a Sony box under my arm. £20K's worth of sonic jollies for 120 quid? All-time no-brainer. Not only that, it came with Sony's 'Ultimate Collection' volume 1 and 2 double SACD, probably worth about £40. Which took my SACD collection to three – sadly, roughly one per cent of the entire Sony catalogue.

GIANT KILLER

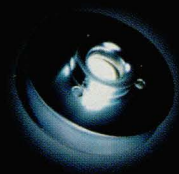
Naturally, I wanted to see just what this esoteric beer budgeteer was capable of and organised a face-off between it and my

regular Cyrus CD7 Q/PSX/Chord DAC 64 CD reference (about £3,500) feeding a Chord CPM 2600 integrated amp and Wilson Benesch Arc speakers. With the very best SACD recordings – James Taylor's *Line 'Em Up* or Roger Waters' *Perfect Sense*, say – the Sony just edged it. With lesser material, CD replay through the Cyrus-Chord combo sounded better. Still a fantastic result.

So here it is, the world's cheapest high-end system. Sony SCD-XE670 (£120), Sennheiser HD600 headphones (discounted from £250 to £150 if you look around) and a QED headphone amp (frustratingly, another £80 but the Sony's headphone output is rubbish). Total £350. Well, it's one helluva start.



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