

HI-FI CHOICE

THE FINEST HI-FI MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD | www.hifichoice.co.uk | december 2002

CD SYSTEMS

Beautiful solutions for serious sound



PHONO CARTRIDGES
GROUP TEST



EXCLUSIVE

THE BEST SPEAKER WE'VE EVER HEARD!

JBL's K2 scales the heights

AUDIOPHILE AV
New amps from Arcam, Denon Marantz and more



VINYL SUPREME
Michell's super deck is a music lover's dream



WONDER WIRES
Cables that will make your speakers sing



DECEMBER 2002 £3.50
13
future publishing
Media with passion
9 770955 111045

BUYER'S BIBLE

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HIGH PERFORMANCE HI-FI AND AV





SONY

Live in Your Living Room

Get closer to the music with Universal Music's release of the Rolling Stones re-mastered series. Available for the first time on hybrid Super Audio CDs, compatible with both regular CD and Super Audio CD players, the 22 title series includes classic studio albums such as Let It Bleed and Beggars Banquet, as well as the original UK versions of Aftermath and Between The Buttons.

Thanks to Super Audio CD technology, the titles and tracks have been meticulously restored to sound like the original studio recordings. Played on one of Sony's Super Audio CD Home Entertainment products, it's the next best thing to having the Rolling Stones live in your living room.

SONY



UNIVERSAL MUSIC INTERNATIONAL

PRESENT

THE ROLLING STONES

LIVE IN YOUR LIVING ROOM

FROM

≡ OCTOBER 2002 ≡



SUPER AUDIO CD

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www.superaudio-cd.com www.sony-europe.com/sacd



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Introducing an electrifying 'first' – a breakthrough for home entertainment. Now A/V sounds as good as NAD. For 30 years the critics have raved about NAD audio innovations. Winning awards has become something of a habit for us. Now you have the advantage of NAD sound quality in a more stirring, more emotion-packed A/V experience. Our engineers call it *PowerDrive™* and it's an NAD exclusive.

Film soundtracks truly come alive, music is maximized – suddenly your entire cinematic experience is heightened with sensational sound. To fully appreciate how NAD takes music and home entertainment further, contact Lenbrook UK for your nearest specialist NAD A/V dealer.

Shown here: T562 DVD/CD Player and T762 Surround Sound Receiver.

www.nadelectronics.com

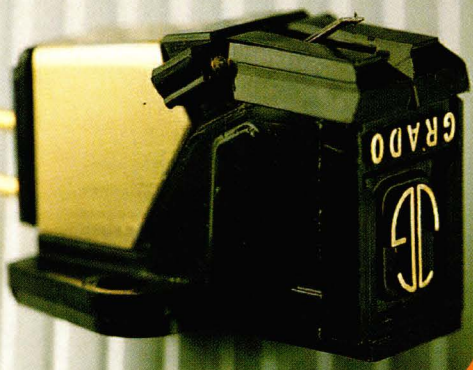
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tel: 01908 319360 e-mail: info@lenbrook.co.uk web: www.lenbrook.co.uk

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UK LTD

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AWESOME MONSTER OF A SPEAKER



72 STATEMENTS: MICHELL ORBE SE

LATEST MODEL IS A VINYL JOY



STAR RATINGS

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

AWARD BADGES

BEST BUY Best Buy	RECOMMENDED Recommended	EDITOR'S CHOICE Editor's Choice
<p>The <i>Hi-Fi Choice</i> Best Buy badge is only awarded to products found to offer exceptional performance and value for money in an <i>HFC Group Test</i>. Buy this kit with absolute confidence.</p>	<p>Awarded to outstanding products in our <i>Group Tests</i> 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.</p>	<p>Products in the <i>Statements</i> and <i>In-depth</i> sections that really blow us away are eligible for a special Award badge. The coveted Editor's Choice Award is reserved for high-end products of exceptional quality.</p>

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.



52 GROUP TEST: MULTICHANNEL AV AMPS AND RECEIVERS

THE JOY OF SIX (AND EIGHT)

NEW STEREO AMPS AND DVD PLAYERS FROM CYRUS

Cyrus has launched two new integrated amplifiers – the £800 Cyrus 8 and £600 Cyrus 6 – in continuing support of its core two-channel market.

The 8 replaces the existing Cyrus 7, highly recommended by *HFC* back in 1999 for its refinement and soundstage precision, and boasts some significant improvements. The new model is claimed to offer a 60 per cent reduction in high frequency distortion, a 60 per cent

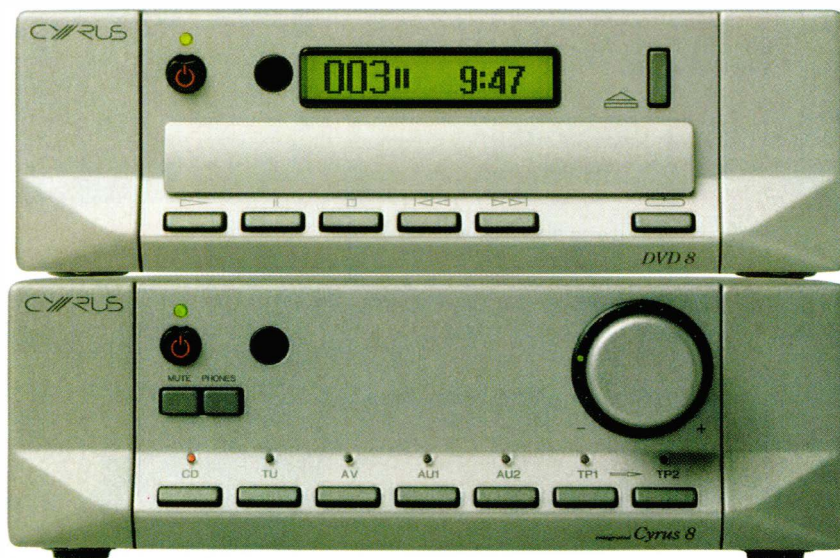
KEY FEATURES

CYRUS 8

- 2x70W
- 340W power burst ability
- 60% less HF distortion than Cyrus 7
- 100% higher current ability
- 60% bigger power supply
- Double the damping factor
- Wider bandwidth
- Faster slew rate

bigger power supply and double the high-current ability of the previous design.

Both models have been built on Cyrus's own integrated amplifier circuitry with the 8 offering 70 watts per channel – some 16 per cent more power than its predecessor. Based on the same circuitry but with a smaller power supply,



the Cyrus 6 offers 40 watts per channel and is upgradeable to full Cyrus 8 specification. Both models claim to offer a faster slew rate, wider bandwidth and a higher burst power ability for dynamic musical passages.

Also new from Cyrus is a one-box solution to high-end CD and DVD-Video replay, the £1,200 DVD 8, while the £1,000 DVD 7 receives an upgrade to become the DVD 7+.
 ☎ Cyrus 01480 435577 www.cyrusaudio.com



JOIN THE Q

NEW SPEAKER RANGE FROM KEF

KEF's has unveiled the XQ Series, designed to plug the gap between the existing Q and Reference ranges. With four all-new designs, the XQ Series uses the Uni-Q driver array from the Q Series, coupled with the 'super audio' Hypertweeters from the flagship Reference range. The look, described as 'flair with function', has apparently been created with sonics to the fore and all models can be supplied in a wide range of finishes including a maple veneer, 'pearlescent' white and one of four high-gloss lacquers. They're in the shops now with prices starting at £800 for the XQ2c centre channel.

☎ KEF Audio 01622 672261 www.kef.com



KEY FEATURES

- New transport plays CD-R/RW
- Modular D/A converter and analogue circuitry
- 24-bit Crystal D/A converter
- Pure Class A balanced analogue circuitry
- DC coupled output with DC servo
- VFL dot-matrix display
- SPDIF coaxial and AES/EBU digital outputs
- Balanced (XLR) and unbalanced outputs
- Remote control

SILVER SPINNER

NEW NAD CD PLAYER

NAD's new £1,200 Silver Series CD player, the S500i, replaces the existing S500 and boasts a wide range of upgrades over its predecessor. At its heart lies a 24-bit Crystal DAC combined with a 384x oversampling digital filter to extract maximum performance.

The players' internals are based on a double-sided PCB with separate power regulators for the various sections and the analogue stages are biased for pure Class A operation from input to output. Round the back, twin digital outputs nestle next to fully balanced XLR connections. It's due to hit the stores this month – keep your eyes peeled for a full *HFC* review soon.

☎ Lenbrook UK 01908 319360

www.lenbrook.co.uk

HI-FI CHOICE

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To make sure you get the best advice, *Hi-Fi Choice* employs the most talented and experienced writers in the business.



JASON KENNEDY

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.



PAUL MESSENGER

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*.



PAUL MILLER

Science officer Miller is hi-fi's undisputed king of lab testing. He employs his own specially designed equipment to pull apart every measurable parameter and explain its effect on a product's performance.



ALVIN GOLD

Alvin cut his hi-fi teeth in the retail trade, and has now been writing about his obsession for more than 20 years. In that time he has contributed to almost every hi-fi periodical you can think of (and several more besides). Few can match his encyclopedic knowledge of all things audio.



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?

As buying decisions go, few are more complex than putting together your ideal hi-fi system. You obviously want it to sound fantastic, a collection of components that makes music come alive and cuts deep to your emotional core. But you've also got to live with it. It needs to work with your room and choice of décor – it needs to be easy to use and a pleasure to own.

You buy *Hi-Fi Choice* to help with these decisions. Our exceptionally experienced team, in-depth reviews and unique approach to high fidelity entertainment mean results and opinions you can trust. Strewn throughout this richly packed issue you'll find a heavenly harvest of hi-fi – serious separates for exceptional stereo and multichannel sound. We've scoured the hi-fi planet for the pick of the crop so you can find that magic component, the one to take your system to the next level. And if you're starting from scratch, our collection of keenly matched CD systems (p30) provides specialist solutions for the perfect mix of music and style. I suggest you turn the page post haste...



Tim Bowers **editor**

Our next issue features the inaugural *Hi-Fi Choice* Awards – our pick of the year's best kit. Whether the system you're building is stereo or multichannel, AV or audio-only, this is the only Awards issue worth contemplating if you demand genuine high-fidelity performance. Don't miss it!

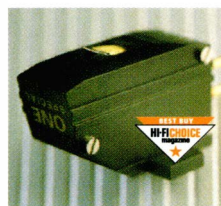
Star products in this issue



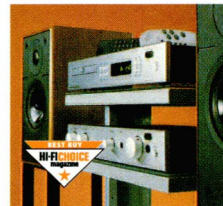
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Superlative loudspeaker



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AV processor and amplifier



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Prize-winning system

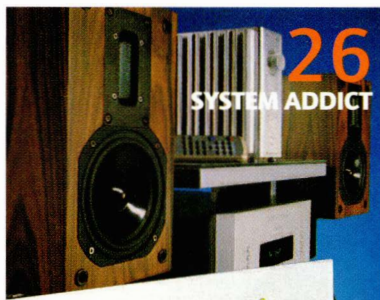
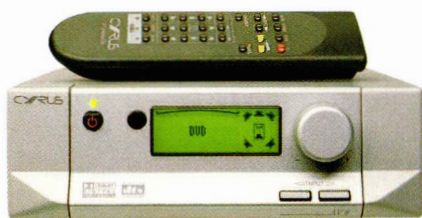
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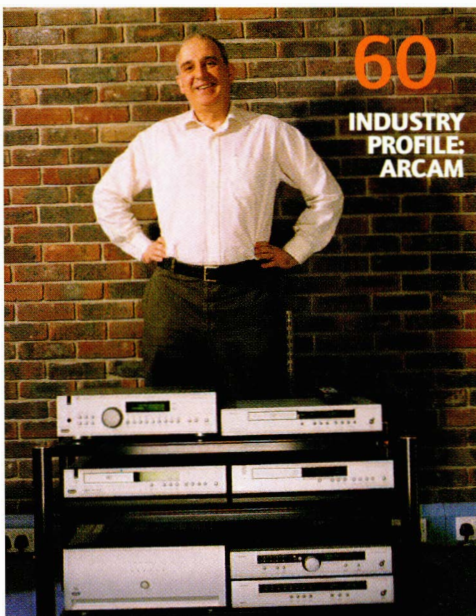
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Musical Fidelity
Tri-Vista SACD player

TRI SACD

MUSICAL FIDELITY ANNIVERSARY SACD PLAYER

SACD enthusiast Antony Michaelson is launching a two-channel SACD player to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Musical Fidelity this year. Forming part of 2002's new flagship Tri-Vista series, the player is said to have been produced in response to the falling prices of SACD OEM kits and the sales success of the Nu-Vista 3D CD player. Priced at £4,000, the new player sports the now familiar MF choke-regulated power supplies and the distinctive looks for which the brand is renowned.

A key feature of the Tri-Vista SACD is its digital input which allows further digital sources to benefit from the

player's 192kHz upsampling DAC. Similar to the Nu-Vista DAC, this modified version boasts increased choke regulation and uses the military-spec 5703 output valve – claimed to be the most reliable device of its kind ever made.

Also unique are the glowing feet which burn red on power-up, turning to amber during warm-up, before settling on a rather fetching blue as shown above. Look out for our exclusive review in two issues time.

☎ Musical Fidelity 020 8900 2866

🌐 www.musical-fidelity.co.uk

BRONZE BUDGET

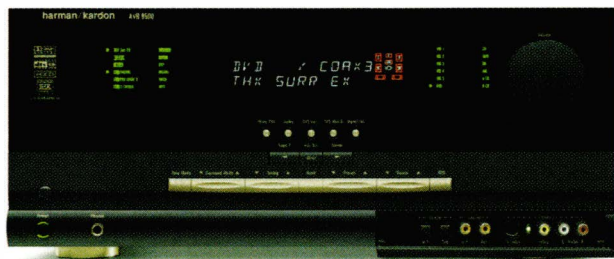
MONITOR AUDIO'S BUDGET BOXES

Essex-based loudspeaker manufacturer Monitor Audio has announced a new Bronze range to replace the existing entry-level Bronze line-up. Two standmounts, a floorstander and centre speaker make up the range, with prices starting at £150 for the pint-sized Bronze B1, rising to £350 for the top B4 floorstanding model.

All have MA's C-CAM (Ceramic Coated Aluminium Magnesium alloy) tweeter that extends to a claimed 22kHz plus second generation MMP MkII bass/mid drivers, which use a metal matrix polymer cone for increased rigidity.

☎ Monitor Audio 01268 740580

🌐 www.monitoraudio.co.uk



BIG AND CLEVER

HARMAN KARDON'S MONSTER AMP

Harman Kardon's new flagship AV receiver, the AVR8500, claims to incorporate the most advanced complement of features and technologies ever offered in a receiver. For £1,800 the THX Ultra-certified engine offers a wealth of decoding power and benefits from the latest Crystal 24-bit/192kHz DACs and DSPs, which Harman Kardon suggests users route their digital sources through for superior sonic performance. The multi-talented AVR 8500 is in the shops now.

☎ Harman UK 020 8731 4670

🌐 www.harmankardon.com

CHORUS FINE

CHORD'S NEW CHORAL RANGE

The new Chord Choral range features the Prima preamp (£2,750), Mezzo power amp (£2,300, pictured) and Symphonic phono stage (£1,995), and marks an attempt by Chord to make the high-end more affordable. The strikingly co-ordinated range is designed to match the existing DAC64 and is intended to look at its best when stacked as a system, though it features no source component. See Hi-Fi Show report, p14.

☎ Chord Electronics 01622 721444 🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk



Soundbites

DENON has a new 5.1 channel receiver priced at just £300. The new AVR-1603 features DTS, Dolby Digital and Dolby Pro Logic II decoding as well as six channel inputs for high-resolution disc players. A 24-bit DSP is used along with 24-bit/96kHz audio DACs, with the unit outputting a claimed 5x80 watts.

☎ 01234 741200

ONKYO's new DVD-based products released this month are described as "surprisingly affordable". The £400 DVD-SP500 claims a vast feature list for the money including Burr-Brown DACs, a subwoofer pre-out and a noise-free digital signal path. Also from Onkyo is the new slimline DR-L50 DVD receiver at £700, boasting an enormous range of features and decoding formats in a small, svelte chassis.

☎ 01788 573100

MARTINLOGAN is

enjoying a boom time this month with the announcement of the new Depth reference subwoofer. The active sub system uses three proprietary low-mass aluminium drivers configured to minimise cabinet vibration plus a 300-watt amplifier with a host of advanced trickery to reduce distortion and improve precision. Price and availability to be confirmed.

☎ 020 8971 3909

SENNHEISER has a new closed-back headphone aimed primarily at the DJ market. The new £40 HD 212PRO is said to be engineered both with a slight emphasis on the bass response and for longevity, with professional use in mind. All parts are easily replaceable and the headphones come with a three metre OFC copper cable.

☎ 01494 551551

Hi-Fi diary

NOVEMBER

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

16-17 Manchester Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Show
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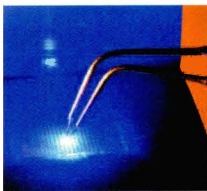
JANUARY 2003

9-12 CES, Las Vegas, USA
001 703 907 7041

FEBRUARY

21-23 Sound & Vision show
Bristol, 01242 239 839

RED FOR BLUE



The much-touted benefits of forthcoming blue laser optical disc technology could have a serious old school rival as Warner and Toshiba reveal that they're working on HD/DVD9. The new format, based on 'old' red laser technology as opposed to Blu-Ray, the industry standard for blue laser recording/playback, will

allow a single disc to hold an entire 'high definition' movie. The system uses MPEG-4 video compression instead of MPEG-2 to store HD video. With a data rate of 7Mbps, and the higher compression efficiency of MPEG-4, the new disc will store the same 135 minutes of movie material as today's MPEG-2 DVD, but in high definition quality.

Warner and Toshiba are hoping that manufacturers will build HD/DVD9 playback into future blue laser DVD hardware. The problem is that existing DVD players can't handle them – yet. One solution, floated by Philips, is that the discs could hold two video streams – one carrying MPEG2 information, the other carrying the extra MPEG4 data.

JIM ROGERS

NOVEMBER 1917–AUGUST 2002

Starting out making valve-based amplifiers and tuners including the Cadet range in Catford, London, hi-fi pioneer Jim Rogers was the first to produce the classic BBC monitor loudspeakers, including the legendary LS3/ 5A. He went on to produce the JR loudspeaker range which included very early examples of sub/ sat systems and active subwoofers.

ORCHESTRA GOES LIVE



The London Symphony Orchestra is changing the rules of the classical music industry. The LSO has formed its own record label, LSO Live, and produces live recordings at the Barbican hall in London. The orchestra's members are shareholders in the label and receive royalty payments based directly on the profits from its work. With discs priced at a

competitive £4.99 it's a bold step in a new direction. More info at www.lso.co.uk.

AUDIOPHILE EVOLUTION

Marantz's technical guru Ken Ishiwata (right) has been gazing into his crystal ball and thinks that the loudspeaker's future is a shaky one. He predicts that we will one day be able to bypass this major source of distortion and replace it with a direct connection to our central nervous system. But creating the ultimate analogue interface may prove a difficult process and it's safe to say that the KI Signature version is a little way off yet!



DSP REVIVES FORGOTTEN TECHNOLOGIES

New life is being breathed into 1950s speaker designs by DSP (digital signal processing) technology. Designer David Purton's work for new brand Omen Ra's OBT loudspeaker uses an open baffle fitted with a dual concentric mid and treble driver combined with a tubular bass section operating as a transmission line. Because there's no cabinet as such, open baffles are less resonant than boxes and they offer equal cone loading to the driver, their limitation being a high degree of room dependency. By using DSP equalisation David has been able to circumvent this issue.

The transmission line bass section incorporates a 25cm drive unit in a tubular enclosure that stands vertically behind the open baffle. The speaker can be driven passively or actively with single, bi-amp or tri-amplification. Omen-Ra installs its designs and tunes them to suit each room for £6,000. More info at www.omen-ra.com

AUDIO SYNTHESIS

Passive preamp pioneer Audio Synthesis has developed a new approach to the digital audio link for its DAX Discrete digital preamp/ converter. In place of a standard coaxial or Toslink optical connection, AS uses a twin ST optical link which it installs into your player so that the bitstream can be extracted directly from the transport. This is said to eliminate the jitter problems which tend to be associated with traditional S/P DIF connections and provides a link that is said to make CD performance comparable to that of SACD or DVD-Audio.

Place your bets now!

IT LOOKS A MILLION DOLLARS.



IT IS.

When the first AV8, Arcam's ultimate home cinema processor, finally rolled off the production line, it had cost Arcam over one million dollars in R&D, tooling, licensing fees and coffee.

This extravagance shouldn't come as a shock to those who know Arcam.

In the 80s, when many high-end manufacturers were simply tweaking mass market CD players, Arcam invested in designing and building their own standard-setting players from the ground up. And at the turn of the millennium when most specialist DVD players were expensive rebuilds of mainstream products, Arcam again designed and built its own line of DVD players that reviewers have called "the best players available at any price".

The AV8 and matching P7 seven-channel power amplifier continue in that Arcam tradition. While it cost Arcam an absolute fortune, it will cost you far less than you might expect. For the full story, contact us for details of your nearest Arcam FMJ specialist.

ARCAM FMJ

Tel: 01223 203203 www.arcam.co.uk

TIME MACHINE

FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice,
December 1997



The format war between DVD-A and SACD really fired up in 1997 and it was the tough job of the International Steering

Committee to decide on a universally agreed format by Christmas – which of course didn't happen. Hot product at the time was Musical Fidelity's flagship amplifier, the A1001. Priced at £2,500 this amp was highly anticipated in the light of the success of its forbear, the A1000 – widely regarded as one of the nicest-sounding amps around.

TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice,
December 1992



With the launch of the new MD format, the price of blank discs was set at £6, many times today's price. The pound was

on the slide, forcing UK hi-fi prices up by almost 20 per cent as importers faced increasing prices from the Far East. Two-box CD players were still hip and HFC ran an 11-way DAC test, paving the way for improved digital playback. Still going strong, our sister publication *Home Entertainment* was launched 10 years ago this month, bursting with reviews of VCRs, TVs and Laserdiscs – remember those?

SYSTEM BUILDER

EACH MONTH, WE PICK A FAVOURITE DISC AND BUILD A SYSTEM TO SHOW IT AT ITS BEST



ROLLING STONES

Sticky Fingers Virgin

One of the must-have Stones albums for any rock fan, *Sticky Fingers* is a rollercoaster ride of emotional ups and downs with some electrifying tracks like *Brown Sugar*, *Can't You Hear Me Knocking?* and *Bitch*. In extracting the oodles of raw energy the system suggested opposite doesn't even break sweat, capturing all the drive and animation of Jagger's vocals and Richards' riffs. Towards the back end of the album the soulful acoustic tracks *Sister Morphine* and *Moonlight Mile* cool things down and bring this superb collection of music to a close. And at a smidgen under £1,000, our affordable separates suggestions will rock you and your CD collection all year round.



CD PLAYER

NAD C541i £330

A real rocker, energetic and substantial sounding – good timing and sufficient resolution to pull out the detail in some of Keef's finest guitar work. *HFC 231*

SPEAKERS

NHT SuperAudio SB1

£300

With strengths in speed and timing, the little SB1 is the perfect box to keep rockers' rhythms intact. Its transparency should help uncover all the musical layers produced in the studio. *HFC 232*



AMPLIFIER Rotel RA-02

£350

A ballsy yet detailed amp that's bold, matter of fact and able to communicate exactly what's on the disc. *HFC 232*



SITE OF THE MONTH

play.com



Widely known as *play247*, the play website is electronic shopping for music, movies

and games made simple. Not only are CDs and DVDs aggressively priced, they are dispatched to your door in a matter of days with p&p included in the advertised cost.

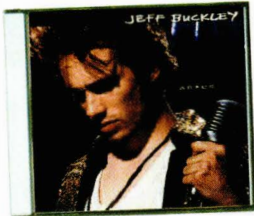
The site has a useful 'coming soon' section and boasts both DVD-Audio and SACD titles amongst its catalogue of music.

How about £13 for DVD-Audio discs and £15 for SACDs, including new releases? Play.com is a clear, easy to use website that takes the effort out of shopping for a bargain, which means more time for playing music.



CLASSIC DEMO DISCS

GREAT MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



JEFF BUCKLEY

Grace Columbia

A perfect showcase for his sliding, gliding, otherworldly voice, the late Jeff Buckley's only finished studio album is a masterpiece – a hi-fi workout that tests rhythmic capacity, midrange finesse and dynamic competence. Largely rock-based,

this is a heartfelt concoction of soaring vocal virtuosity and will test any system's musicality with its ever-changing mood. Highly recommended.

What's your favourite disc for hi-fi auditioning? Why not write in and tell us – 50 words on what and why – we'd love to hear about it. Email your choice to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk or write in to Classic Demo Discs, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #2

HANDY HINTS FROM JIMMY HUGHES – HI-FI'S SUPER TWEAKER



Shorting unused outputs...

Back in the seventies, many quality Japanese amplifiers came supplied with shorting plugs – blanked-off RCA-type phono plugs that had their positives and negatives connected together. You plugged them into unused audio inputs, though at the time no-one

seemed to know why – there was nothing mentioned in the instructions. Years later, it was realised that 'shorting' unused inputs actually improves sound quality, making things sound tighter, firmer and cleaner.

Alas, few (if any) modern amplifiers are supplied with shorting plugs. But you can make your own. Simply get a phono plug, and solder a piece of wire between the signal pin and earth. Insert plugs into all unused inputs on the back of your amp. Also 'plug' your CD player's unused digital output, but take care with analogue output sockets like Tape Out – if these are unbuffered, you'll lose volume and worsen sound quality by shorting-out.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

John Lee Hooker The Cream

Low Trust

J-Walk A Night On The Rocks

Cassius Au Réve

Underworld

A Hundred Days Off

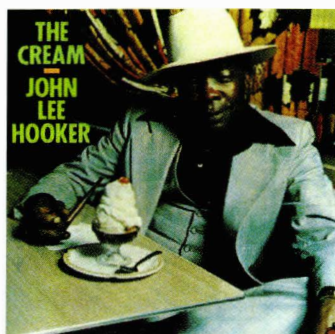
Gramophone Gramophone

Various Artists

Music From Vanilla Sky

Tracy Chapman Let It Rain

Various Artists Another Late Night: Rae And Christian



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY SPOTTED EMERGING BLINKING INTO THE DAYLIGHT AFTER COMPLETING THEIR LATEST MASTERWORKS



The Jam

JEFF BUCKLEY

The Grace EPs Columbia, 11 Nov
 A real collector's item this – a painstakingly compiled limited edition box set containing five EPs of material recorded by Buckley around the time of *Grace*, one of the most acclaimed and influential albums of the nineties. The package contains 19 tracks, including a dozen never available on album before, taken from live recordings and rare promo and Japan-only releases.

GEORGE HARRISON

Brainwashed Capitol, 18 Nov
 His last solo studio album was as long ago as 1987, but George Harrison was working on a new recording up until two months before he died. He left extensive notes on how he wanted the album finished and the project was finished off by Jeff Lynne and his son Dhani Harrison. "It's very reflective and poignant," according to a record label spokesman.

LOU REED

The Raven Reprise, Jan 2003
 Comprising songs originally written for a play about Edgar Allan Poe by Robert Wilson, Lou Reed's new album – the 31st of his long career – features guest appearances from David Bowie, Laurie Anderson and Ornette Coleman. And the man himself? "He's sounding like classic Lou again," says an insider.

PEARL JAM

Riot Act Epic, 18 Nov
 Co-produced by Foo Fighters/Soundgarden man Adam Kasper,

Pearl Jam's seventh studio album is being hailed as a return to form by band sources. "It sounds great," says guitarist Stone Gossard. "Everyone wrote and there's some really beautiful songs on there."

TOM PETTY & THE HEARTBREAKERS

The Last DJ Warner, 11 Nov
 "I see it as a little audio movie. There are a few characters and a loose concept plus a love song or two," Tom Petty says of his first album since 1999's *Echo*. Fleetwood Mac's Lindsay Buckingham is featured on backing vocals and Jon Brion contributes string orchestrations to three tracks.

ALSO COMING SOON...

ROCK/POP

U2 Best Of: 1990-2000 (Limited Edition 2CD + Bonus R1 DVD) (Island) 4 Nov
Badly Drawn Boy Have You Fed The Fish (Twisted Nerve) 4 Nov
Whitney Houston Just Whitney (BMG) 25 Nov
Johnny Cash The Man Comes Around (Universal) 4 Nov

CLASSICAL

Andrea Bocelli Sentimento (Philips) 4 Nov
Anne-Sophie Mutter Beethoven: Violin Concerto (Universal) 4 Nov
Hilary Hahn Mendelssohn, Shostakovich Violin Concertos (Sony) 4 Nov
Giuliano Carmignola Vivaldi Violin Concertos (Sony) 4 Nov

DVD

Hendrix – The Movie 11 Nov
The Lord Of The Rings: Fellowship Of The Ring – Director's Cut (4 Discs) 12 Nov
Minority Report 18 Nov
Spider-Man 18 Nov
John Lennon And The Plastic Ono Band: Sweet Toronto (1969) 18 Nov

SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

The return of The Hi-Fi Show & AV Expo to its former stamping ground of the Renaissance hotel in London's Heathrow (formally Penta and Ramada) brought a renewed vitality to the event

NEAT ACOUSTICS launched its Ultimatums, four 'ultimate performance' loudspeakers priced between £2,895 and £8,500. The MF9s were reviewed in an earlier issue but the birch plywood encased, isobaric bass loading and EMIT super-tweeter equipped MF5, MF5 and MF7 are all new. They feature Focal tweeters and predominantly first order crossovers with the "finest components". A luxurious birch veneer option adds something to the price but a lot more to the overall appeal.

GAMUT used two of its enormous S300 stereo power amplifiers (£19,950) to drive a Pipe Dreams line source speaker system in the Audio Reference room. At the front end of this system was Gamut's new £1,650 CD3 CD player, which is identical to the existing CD1 model except for its power supplies, while the C2R preamplifier (£1,300) boasts impedances inside and out that are designed to "frighten cables into good behaviour". This system gave us a first listen to the new ABKCO Rolling Stones SACDs, specifically *Let It Bleed* and fuelled our desire to get the whole set.

HARBETH'S Passport range marks its first venture away from square baffles into the fashionable territory of the slimline floorstander. The Passport 1 floorstander (c£900) uses 6.5 inch mid and bass drivers with reflex loading for the bass, while the Passport 2 is a two-way bookshelf design at £399. Both models were shown in prototype form with a maple finish making for maximum contrast against the mighty Monitor 40, a £4,195 model that represents the pinnacle of BBC-style speaker design.

PMC has put together the DB5.1, its first fully matched multichannel

system (£2,599), comprising four DB1 two-way standmounts, a DB1M-C centre channel with the same drive units in a horizontal cabinet and a TLE1 active sub bass unit. The system was driven by **BRYSTON'S** latest SST incarnation of its 9B power amp (£3,995 five-channel) which, like the majority of its power amp range, has been updated with a 20 per cent power increase, new output devices and a cosmetic makeover among other changes. The SST stereo range kicks off at £1,725 for the 3B SST (150 watts) and reaches its climax with the 500 watt 7B SST monoblock (£2,500 each).

TUBE TECHNOLOGY showed a range of hybrid transistor/tube components which consists of Fulcrum 24-bit transport (£1,000) and 64-bit/192kHz upsampling DAC (£2,500), Fusion CD64 64-bit/96kHz CD player (£1,990), Fusion HB70 hybrid amplifier (£1,550) and the Fusion FMT hybrid tuner (£950). The CD players incorporate the technology found in Chord's DAC64 including a RAM buffer to minimise jitter. The HB70 has a FET preamp with a tube input driver stage for the MOSFET power amp, while the FMT has a valve-powered output stage.

CHORD ELECTRONICS' Choral range formed the cutest high-end system of the show. Made to match the DAC64, Choral consists of Prima preamp (£2,500), Mezzo power amp (£2,300), Symphonic phono stage (c£2,000) and aforementioned D/A convertor (£1,900). Key to their appeal is the way the dedicated rack allows them to be shelved at an angle. Chord also unleashed a monster AV processor dubbed the DSP 8000 (£9,995), a 7.1 channel design that incorporates a serious analogue preamp alongside the

latest digital processing and conversion technology.

Ex **TRILogy** valve man Nic Poulsen has branched out into mains conditioning. **ISOTEK** makes a considerable range of attractively cased conditioners including the Qubes which are designed to accommodate substantial amplifiers – an area where most mains 'filters' fear to tread. The £1,495 2K Qube will supply amplifiers of up to 1,000 watts and can cope with transient swings of up to 4000VA. It comes fitted with a choice of alternative mains outlets or captive leads.

High-end importer **ABSOLUTE SOUND** had a stack of gorgeous new kit including the 'entry level' **KRELL** Showcase multichannel range (from £4,495), **SONUS FABER'S** 'mini Guarneri' range called Cremona (from £2,149) and the rather appealing **COPLAND** CVA306/CVA535 (£1,499/£2,249) multichannel pre/power amp combo. The CVA306 is one of the first all-analogue six-channel preamps to hit these shores – we can't wait to give it a spin. *[In the next issue in fact – Ed.]*

Courtesy of **PATH PREMIER**, US brand **AYRE ACOUSTICS** has returned to these shores with the AX-7 fully balanced integrated amp (£2,950), and the CX-7 fully balanced upsampling CD player (£2,950). **MARK LEVINSON** introduced two new power amps: No431 delivers 200 watts while No432 doubles that from a similar slimline case. Prices have yet to be confirmed but are said to undercut the models they replace. Also featured was the first closed back headphone from **STAX**, the SR4070 (£1,695), which uses electrostatic drive units and a bass reflex design and was originally conceived for the pro market in Japan.



Top: Harbeth's sleek new Passport 1 floorstander. Middle: Mark Levinson No432 power amplifier. Bottom: The standmount in KEF's new XQ range, the XQ3.



Top: Isotek's Qube range of power conditioners. Middle: Neat Ultimatum MF7. Bottom: classy new floorstander from Dali, the Euphonia MS4.

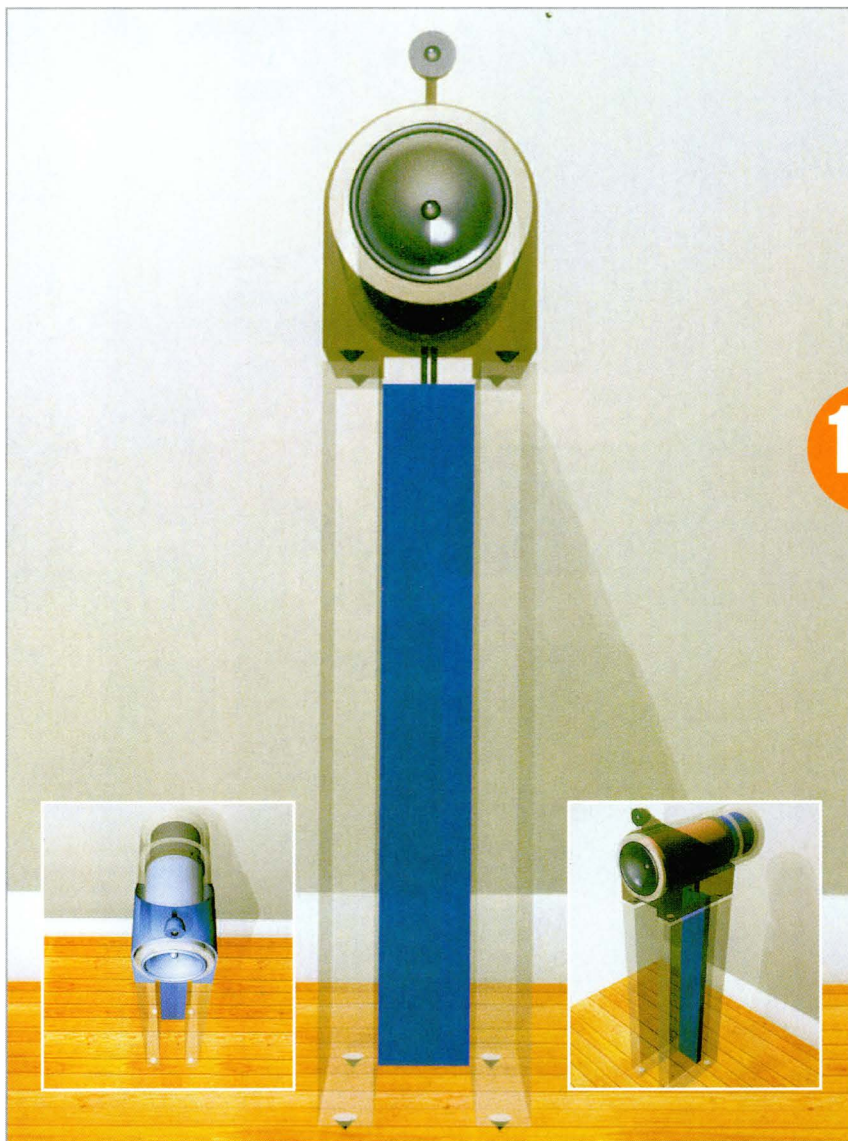
Top: Wharfedale's boat-tail styled Pacific Evo 30. Middle: Classé CDP-10 CD player. Bottom: EAR/Yoshino 899 integrated valve amplifier.

Top: Tivoli PAL portable radio. Middle: Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII. Bottom: Tube Technology's Fusion range of hybrid components.

Top: Gamut's monster S300, a power amplifier with wheels! Middle: Chord Choral high-end mini system. Bottom: Monitor Audio Silver Series S8 floorstander.

CONCEPT SPEAKERS

THE WINNERS OF OUR CYRUS 'DESIGN A SPEAKER' COMPETITION TELL US HOW THEY DID IT



Back in our August issue, we ran a competition in conjunction with Cyrus Electronics asking you to design your perfect pair of speakers. The entries poured in and the standard was remarkably high (you clever, clever people). Following much deliberation, Cyrus picked three winners. This is their story...

**1ST
PRIZE**



'JET' MODULAR LOUDSPEAKER

JASON DAMON "I wanted to design an inherently upgradeable loudspeaker that would function separately yet have the potential to incorporate a dedicated stand and power amp to improve performance. The design had to be unified with details to ensure ease of use, be unencumbered by unsightly cables and executed in a variety of finishes to satisfy the most demanding interior. A vacuum cavity dictated the form of the bass/mid enclosure and the screw-on power amp was inspired by a coffee percolator attachment."

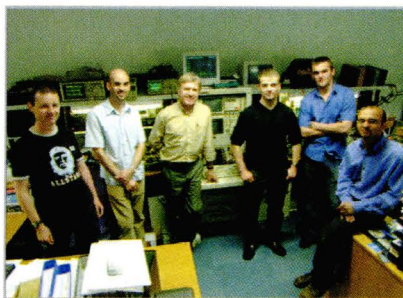
CYRUS "Our winner is tall, slim and topped off with a cylindrical unit. This wonderful design incorporated a variety of finishes, including some transparent materials and a variety of woods as well as different colours, to give a modern appearance and match customer's requirements. We thought it was a 'good, solid design', wouldn't be too obtrusive in a room setting and would fit in well to a home, office or commercial/industrial space. If you took away the stand, the actual speaker itself is fairly compact and very sleek. Similar to speakers currently being sold, this sort of design is already proven to be marketable."



'AERO' EGG-SHAPED LOUSPEAKER

HENK VOS "AERO is a concept utilising 'egg shaped' cabinets. This structure ensures no resonance or internal standing waves are created, which can affect the overall sound quality. The main cabinet is made of aluminium, which has a uniform density, and is cast as two separate halves during manufacture. The offset drivers help to create a more focused image and soundstage. The three milled aluminium spikes ensure that the loudspeaker stands firmly on the floor aiding sound quality. The loudspeaker is available in a range of colours and finishes to suit any environment within the home."

CYRUS "A very modern and funky design, similar to some current Italian designs - would appeal to the young. We liked the consideration given to the effect of shape on sound produced - the cabinets have no sharp edges to 'cut down resonance'. Thought was also given to methods of production - the main units are made of aluminium and moulded in two halves, and a variety of colours/finishes is available. It's small enough to be unobtrusive and fit in almost anywhere - there could be several in a room, for a home cinema system for example. It would fit in very well in a modern, design-conscious or gadget-loving home."



Our winners on a visit to Cyrus's design think tank.



'DIMINISHED DIPOLE' HYBRID LOUSPEAKER

ROSS HEYWARD "Though essentially a ribbon speaker atop a subwoofer, several established techniques have been combined in a fresh way. The large ribbons are arranged in a D'Appolito configuration around a tweeter/super-tweeter. These dipole devices are set in a damped aluminium enclosure with an inverted horn cross-section to reduce rear diffusion. This 'Diminished Dipole' arrangement allows nearer-wall placement than normal dipoles, without reducing the 'air' in a recording. The subwoofer, in order to be sufficiently rapid for the ribbons, is a powered, sealed-enclosure, isobaric arrangement with forward-facing 30cm units."

CYRUS "A very aerodynamic design, with a wedge-shaped base and tall, thin 'fin'. We liked the fact that it looked unusual. You'd need a lot of floor space for the base unit, but the rest of the speaker would be fairly unobtrusive. There's a slight retro feel about the look, although modern-looking materials were used. We think we could see this in a larger room but it could be acceptable even in smaller spaces because the volume is so low to the ground."



Incoming

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

EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★

B&W DM309 floorstanding loudspeakers £330

The 300 series has been around for a while now, so it may be surprising to learn that B&W has suddenly decided to add a new speaker to the range. That said, the DM309 certainly tops off a series of speakers that was beginning to look a little bit like a one-trick pony. Impressive though the DM303 bookshelf speaker is, these days even the most unassuming of entry-level speakers is expected to form part of a multichannel music and surround sound home cinema system, and it was looking a wee bit vulnerable. But with the addition of the DM309, the 300 series takes on a more well-rounded appearance, and offers interested buyers a wider selection of

SURROUND SOUND

The DM309 is the final link in B&W's 300 series. Together with the new ASW300 subwoofer it forms a highly impressive surround sound solution, especially if you partner them with a pair of DM303s at the back and the range's LCR3 as a centre speaker. The consistency of driver make-up and the closely matched tonality make this a great multichannel option, especially if you're particularly interested in two-channel performance to get the best from the excellent DM309s at the front. For music, we're not sure that the subwoofer is really necessary, as the floorstanding DM309s provide plenty of weight and power. But if you're looking for a system to play movies on as well as multichannel music, then it's a solid investment – especially as the whole package will only cost £900. Highly impressive.

KEY FEATURES

- Rear ported two-and-a-half way floorstander
- 26mm metal dome tweeter
- Two 160mm woven fibre bass/mid drivers
- Twin Flowports
- Nominal impedance: 8ohms
- Sensitivity: 88dB
- Dimensions: 20.1x91x30.5cm (WxHxD)
- Bi-wireable

options for a B&W multichannel system (see box).

The DM309 is derived from the seriously successful DM303. It shares the same 26mm metal dome, tube-loaded tweeter; a technology filtered down from B&W's Nautilus speakers, and designed to absorb unwanted radiation away from the rear of the diaphragm. It also has the same 160mm woven fibreglass bass/mid cone. But unlike some entry-level floorstanders, which are basically just a bookshelf in a bigger box, B&W has decided to double the number of bass/mid drivers. Also doubled is the number of Flowports at the back of the speaker – one at the top of the cabinet, and another towards the base.

The first thing you notice about the DM309 is its size – this is a big pair of





speakers for the money. Each stands 91 cm tall, and demands attention when placed on its solidly spiked feet. Finish is of a high standard considering the very reasonable asking price, from the beech finish of our review sample to the baffle – moulded in inert micra-filled polypropylene and dimpled to echo the Flowports – and the smart full-length black grille.

As for what it does, impressive though the DM309 looks on paper, it's even better in action. As many manufacturers have found, the first floorstander in a series will often find itself floundering – sometimes the extra weight and presence gained comes at the loss of subtlety and timing.

The DM309 avoids these pitfalls. Levels of detail and subtlety are impressively high, and it does a marvellous job of relaying the detail

“Impressive though the DM309 looks on paper, it’s even better in action.”

and atmosphere dug out by the Meridian 507 CD player and Cyrus 7 amp we used for much of the testing. Vocals are well formed and lifelike – Joni Mitchell's wonderful *Blue* was given a highly impressive run though. The speaker also proves itself to be agreeably agile, and offers a sense that you're hearing the whole story – highly impressive in a speaker at this price.

Tonally the DM309 is very well balanced, the metal dome tweeter doing a fine job with high-level frequencies, and it also manages to

perform well down deep. Just as importantly the transition between the two extremes is nigh-on seamless, and the midrange is open and involving.

Dynamics are also first rate, and the grandstanding conclusion to Beethoven's *Ninth* was delivered in a thrilling and engaging manner, encouraging total immersion in the music. Soundstaging is commendable too, and although the speakers sounded just fine when we first plonked them down, some careful experimentation and a spot of toeing-in really paid dividends when it came to presenting a solid and stable sonic picture of a full-scale orchestra.

What the DM309 offers over its highly impressive brethren is a sense of power and authority that only bigger boxes can provide. Its delivery of Barry Adamson's densely produced *The King Of Nothing Hill* was surefooted and certain, and the '309 didn't put a foot wrong as Adamson made all kinds of unreasonable demands of it. The opening *Cinematic Soul* needs a tight, taught bottom end to cope with its funky bass refrain, and the DM309 complies with aplomb.

The speaker attacks the music played through them in a passionate and very

exciting manner, making it a pleasure to dig out all those albums you haven't listened to for ages a give them another spin.

It may have been a bit of a wait for this speaker to appear, but it was worth it. The DM309 avoids the usual failings of entry-level floorstanding speakers and offers all the subtlety and grace of the DM303, but with added weight and poise. It's simply one of the best floorstanders we've heard at this price.

☎ B&W 01903 750750
 🌐 www.bwspeakers.com



Acoustic Solutions SP110 DAB tuner £130

➤ This is more like it. If DAB is going to take off, seriously cheap hardware is essential, and apart from the Pure Digital 'DAB tranny' this is the cheapest yet. Acoustic Solutions sells through outlets like Dixons so finding one should be easy enough too.

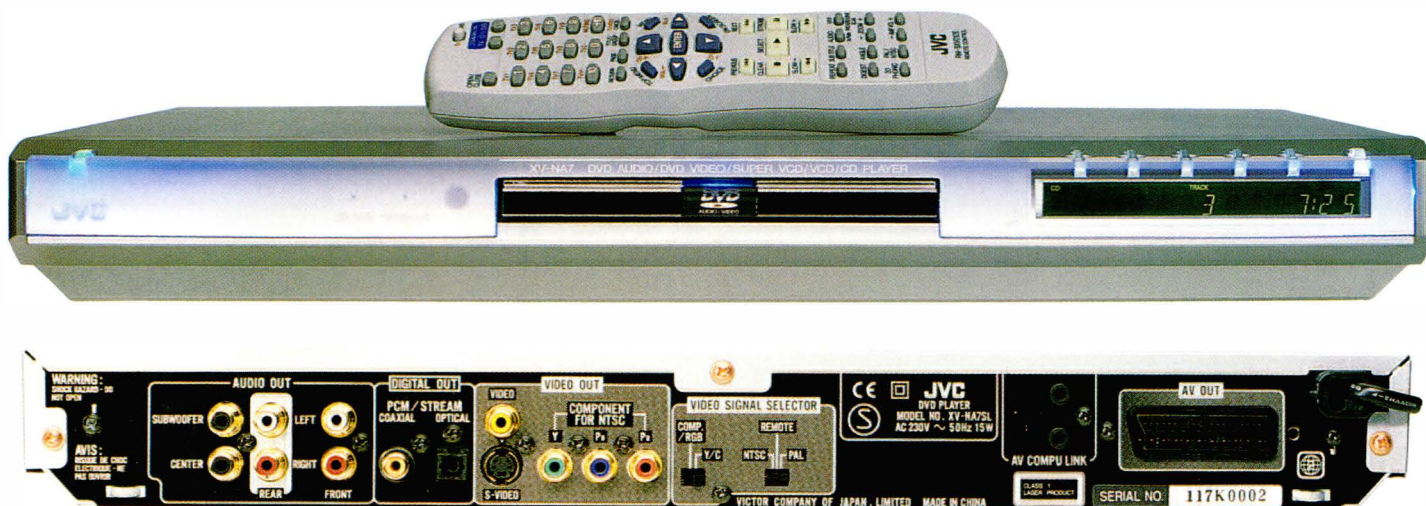
Compared with more expensive models, features are slightly thinned but not badly so. The digital output is only optical and there's no Radio Data Interface output (does anyone use it anyway?). Basic operation is exactly like every other DAB tuner to date and quite slick with it. There are four one-touch presets and choices as to how stations should be ordered in memory. Dynamic Range Control is supported (off/half/full) and display options include both signal strength and error rate. There's even a headphone socket. Build quality is on the cheap side but decent for the money, the essential bits being from Frontier Silicon (part of the same group as Pure).

Sound quality is a little rougher than from other DAB tuners (and measurements show some extra distortion), but ironically this may in some cases be an advantage as the roughness can help disguise the ills of most DAB broadcasts, including the slight 'twittering' quality that affects high-frequency-rich sounds including speech. At any rate, if you have intractable problems with FM or want to hear DAB-only channels, of which there are now several, this could be a life-saver and it's clearly good value – for now! Even cheaper units will doubtless appear before long. Meanwhile, check www.ukdigitalradio.com/coverage to see what you can receive in your area.

☎ Acoustic Solutions 01327 340601
 🌐 www.acousticsolutions.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- All-digital transmission system minimises interference
- In most urban areas can work perfectly well with indoor wire aerial
- No conventional tuning required, stations automatically stored by name
- Analogue and digital (optical) outputs
- Display options include station name, programme details and signal quality



EXCLUSIVE ★★☆☆

JVC XV-NA7 DVD-Audio/Video player £300

➤ Proof that DVD-Audio is destined for a popular audience comes in the shape of the JVC XV-NA7. For, although it is a minimalist product with only a handful of buttons on the front panel, the blue back-lighting pitches it far from regular hi-fi enthusiast fare. Placed next to regulation home cinema or hi-fi kit, this looks garish in the extreme, but it will partner other back-lit JVC gear very smartly indeed.

It is well specified, though, especially for the money. It has a combined colourstream component video/progressive scan picture output (unheard of at this price). Progressive Scan is only specified for NTSC discs (Arcam's new DV88 Plus is currently

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ One disc DVD-Audio/Video player
- ▶ VCD, DVD-R, CD-R/RW, DVD-R compatible
- ▶ MP-3 playback of internet audio recordings
- ▶ JPEG playback of still pictures
- ▶ Direct Digital Progressive Scan (NTSC only)
- ▶ RGB-equipped Scart
- ▶ Built-in Dolby Digital/DTS/MPEG decoder

the only PAL Progressive player), so it's a bit redundant considering this is a Region Two-only player, but a good hot-rodder should be able to bypass both the region lock and the NTSC-only nature of Progressive Scan.

The NA7 has just one Scart socket (with RGB picture) and the usual raft of video and audio outputs, including the all-important six-channel audio outputs for DVD-Audio (as well as decoded Dolby Digital and DTS for DVD-Videos). It can also accept pretty much every disc currently made (barring the different styles of rewritable DVD). Internally, the player features 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs and 10-bit/54MHz video decoding. The latter is good for the money, but

uninspired. Similarly, the rolling thunder of *Riders On The Storm* from the Doors' *LA Woman* DVD sounded too distant and just not thundering enough. Much of the sound is articulate and rich, but overall more impact is required.

The same applied to its lacklustre CD replay, leaving *There Goes The Fear* from Doves' *The Last Broadcast* sounding a bit sloppy and downbeat. It wasn't entirely uncommunicative, and the sound was detailed and had great vocals, but tended to play music on just one dynamic level.

The main saving grace is DVD-Video replay. Playing the new, remastered *Pulp Fiction* showed the player to be extremely colourful and capable of

“Overall, this is a good, but not inspiring player. DVD-Audio in particular is rather puffy and soft-sounding, too laid back and undynamic.”

DVD-AUDIO VS SACD

The contest to establish a high-resolution, CD-beating multichannel music format is gradually creaking into second gear. Until recently SACD seemed to have a substantial advantage, with four or five times the number of discs available to buy (though not in the high street) and some quite impressive label support including Universal, EMI, Virgin and Sony. But Warner's recent DVD-A 'relaunch' has given the format some renewed impetus, and HMV is now stocking DVD-A discs in many of its larger stores. Check future issues of *HFC* for breaking news (and see last issue of the story so far – back issues, page 137).

there are higher bit and sampling rates available on more expensive DVD players.

Overall, this is a good, but not inspiring player. DVD-Audio in particular is rather puffy and soft-sounding. It is far too laid back and undynamic – the energy of Missy Elliott is mostly lost here. *So Addictive* sounded warm and fluid, but the shock-jumps around the soundstage of *Get Ur Freak On* were just flat and

digging up black level information that often stays hidden at this price.

In short, this may be destined for a place among the mass-market stars, but despite an extremely easy operating system (including a series of very colourful menus) in sheer performance terms, this player simply hangs back compared to its more conventional-looking rivals.

☎ JVC UK Ltd 0870 330 5000
 🌐 www.jvc.co.uk

★★★★★

Pioneer VSX-D2011 multichannel AV receiver £900

Almost a year after their well received £2,700 VSA-AX10 flagship hit dealers' shelves, Pioneer has dealt a blinder with its new VSX-D2011. If you're familiar with the VSA-AX10, you'll do a double take when you see this one. The family resemblance is very strong, down to the copper screws on the top panel which betray the unusually rigid 'space frame' construction. The new model even includes a version of the MCACC auto set-up routine for loudspeaker configuration, levels, distances and tonal response, which can set separate five-band equalisers for each channel to make the system as tonally flat as possible, or matching the tonal balance of each speaker to the main front pair. The equaliser is not as precise as the VSA-AX10's, but the MCACC process here remains consistent in repeated runs, and much, much faster.

The VSAX-D2011 has some other tricks up its sleeve. One is upsampling which ostensibly resamples CD or DVD-Video sound digital data to 24-bit/192kHz spec, and processes it using a Legato Link 'time domain' filter. Power output is 100 watts per channel and all the standard flavours of Dolby and DTS are present, including Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS Neo:6 and DTS 96/24. The Pioneer supports 7.1 channel operation, but the rear channel can be routed to a second room, or used to

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 7x100 watts per channel (DIN, 8 ohms)
- ▶ 5 AV inputs (comp/S-Video)
- ▶ 2 component video inputs
- ▶ 5 audio only inputs (inc USB)
- ▶ 7.1 channel input
- ▶ 3 optical digital inputs
- ▶ 2 coaxial digital inputs
- ▶ FM/AM preset tuner
- ▶ Dolby Pro Logic II
- ▶ Dolby Digital EX
- ▶ DTS/DTS ES
- ▶ DTS 96/24
- ▶ DTS Neo:6

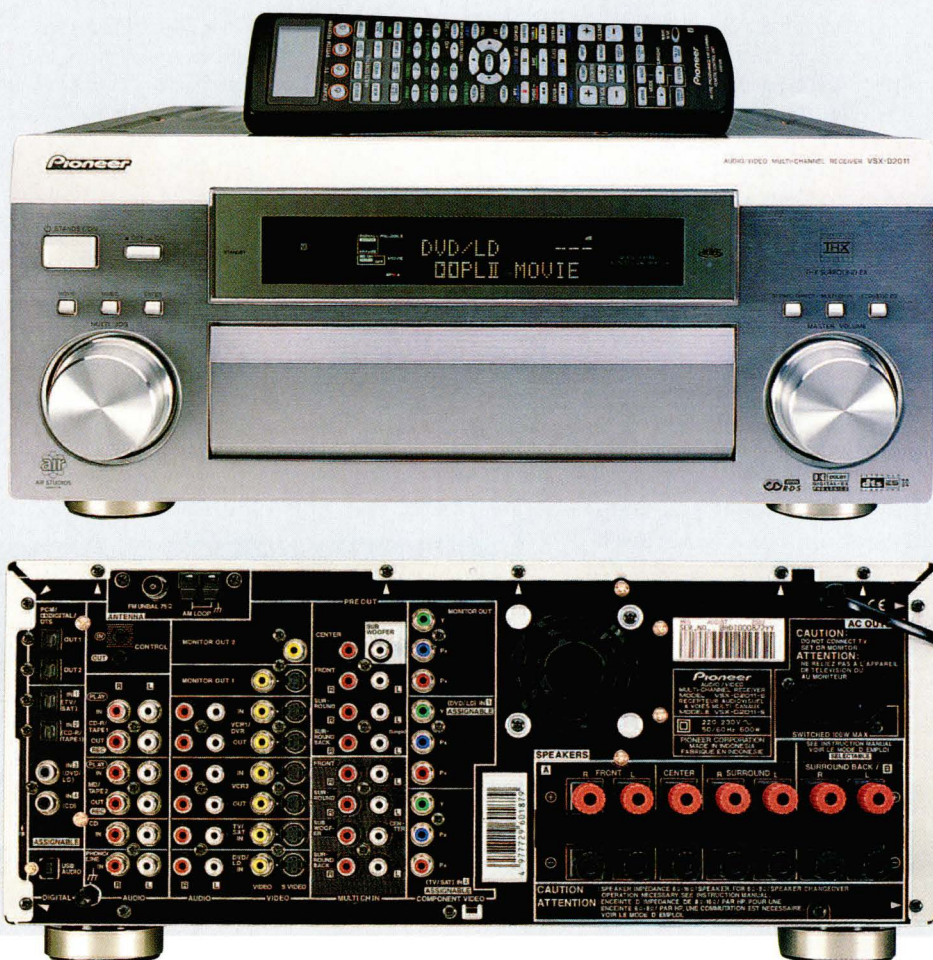
bi-amp the front main speakers if EX/ES is not required. On the minus side, the range of in and outputs is limited, and there's no electrical digital output, but there is a front panel input, including an optical digital socket. In an unusual departure, a USB input is fitted for stereo audio data – now you can find out how piss-poor MP3s sound through a decent replay system. The lack of a control input means this is not an upgradeable receiver like the top Denon and Pioneer models, but THX Select certification is offered.

It's a remarkable features list given this receiver's price, and compared to others of similar cost its performance is outstanding. Of course, it has its relative strengths and weaknesses.

Compact Discs and SACDs are handled well – very well for a sub-£1,000 AV receiver. But don't expect sound much better than a decent £300 or £400 two-channel amp, and on the whole the 'hi-bit' resampling circuits sound better on paper than they do in practice. On the other hand, multichannel home cinema material sounds lively and detailed, and the internal decoders work extremely well. The auto set-up is also a definite bonus, ensuring a consistency of performance other receivers can't match. Overall, it's a great option for anyone wanting an all-in-one solution for two-channel music and surround sound that doesn't cost the earth.

▶ Pioneer UK 01753 789500
 ▶ www.pioneer.co.uk

"It's a remarkable features list given this receiver's price, and compared to others of similar cost its performance is outstanding."



SOUND TECHNOLOGY

The core amplifier circuit is interesting. Based on power MOSFETs, the devices have temperature compensation on the semiconductor substrate (Kenwood was an early adopter of this technology, called TRAITR). This topology allows much faster response, more accurate bias tracking and lower distortion under dynamic conditions. Much effort has also gone into the internal layout of the amplifier, with excellent screening around critical areas. The physical design stresses rigidity and good damping of critical components, notably the mains transformer. Another element in the sound quality equation is the fine-tuning programme conducted in co-operation with Air Studio.



EXCLUSIVE ★★★★★
Cyrus AV8 AV processor £1,100

Despite what some manufacturers would like to imply, there is still a divide between hi-fi and home cinema. However, Cyrus's AV8 AV processor bridges the gap better than many products – it may even be the first true crossover product.

Based on the older AV5 (owners of the original Cyrus processor can upgrade to AV8 status in two stages, if required), the AV8 eschews video switching and processing because it makes the AV sound quality better. That's the spirit! It also does without Dolby Digital EX/DTS ES 6.1 channel processing – it stays with DD/DTS 5.1 and Dolby Pro-Logic II for ease of use.

And it really is easy to use. The AV8 comes complete with a small battery-powered lapel microphone as used by TV presenters – hook the jack plug to the socket in the rear panel, sit in your favourite chair and run the automatic set-up procedure. As long as the volume level is high enough, the system will sort out the size, position, distance and loudness level of the five main speakers with a high degree of confidence. The subwoofer needs to be manually set, despite improved bass management over the previous AV5.

Don't expect a plethora of inputs and outputs, or a raft of surround modes. The Cyrus AV8 takes everything down

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Sony transport mechanism
- ▶ AV processor for hi-fi systems
- ▶ No video switching
- ▶ Dolby Digital/DTS/Dolby Pro-Logic II
- ▶ Automatic level setting using microphone control
- ▶ MC-BUS connections

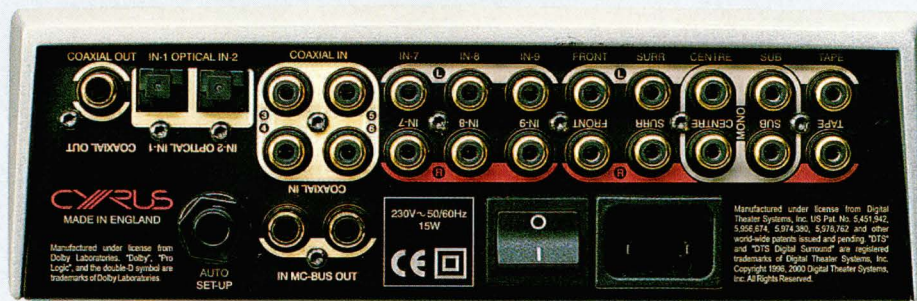
to the bare minimum. Aside from the microphone input and a Cyrus-to-Cyrus bus, the AV8 has two optical digital inputs, four coaxial digital inputs, two stereo analogue inputs, a tape loop and the six-channel outputs. Missing is a six-channel input, so you can't connect multichannel DVD-Audio or SACD (six-channel input and video switching are available separately, for an additional c£200 and c£500 respectively).

Similarly, the list of surround modes is curtailed, especially compared to the gazillions of surround options found on amps and receivers from the likes of Denon, Pioneer and Yamaha. There are a few DTS mixdown options and plenty of control of parameters in DPL II, but

these are useful features found on the latest Dolby/DTS chips.

There is a claim of lower jitter between the AV5 and AV8 and the sound quality seems to reflect this. Lower jitter can make a digital product smoother and more refined, and those are both immediate findings here. This is one of the most subtle, refined and listenable AV processors you can find today, more or less regardless of price.

Smoothness and refinement are not bought at the expense of the dynamism and energy of the AV sound. Whack on something bold, like the Mines of Moria scenes in *The Lord Of The Rings* and the power is breathtaking. But, unlike much that is AV-based, it performs well with more subtle sounds, such as the legendary fake documentary bits from *This Is Spinal Tap*, or the opening restaurant scene in *Pulp Fiction*. Both of



"Lower jitter can make a digital product smoother and more refined, and those are both immediate findings here."



Arcaydis Concept 1 loudspeakers £699 **EXCLUSIVE**

KEY FEATURES

- Two-way rear firing bass reflex design
- Dimensions 17x30.5x25cm (WxHxD)
- 88.75dB sensitivity
- 8 ohms nominal impedance
- Finish: 20mm American White Oak

➤ Despite its international composition, Worcestershire-based loudspeaker brand Arcaydis is confident the new Concept 1 speaks our language.

After four years in development the Concept 1 proudly sports drivers from some very reputable manufacturers. Take the Kevlar inverted dome tweeter for example, from the enormous Focal factory in France, and the bass/mid driver from respected US brand Morel. A high quality combination for sure, and what's more the cabinetry is all produced in-house, in this instance from high-quality American White Oak. The Concept 1 offers that individual look and feel that tends to endear the smaller brands to you, but build quality is equally small-scale, with the odd rough cabinet edge around the drivers.

The box is rear-ported, with placement from the back wall recommended at a

minimum 45cm, which in practice seems perfect. This position gave good, solid and plentiful bass – very impressive for the cabinet size, giving the Concept 1 authoritative weight on more demanding rock and dance tracks. Its power makes for a standmount speaker that's more than happy driving larger rooms and the choice of tweeter is a well researched match for the punchy bass driver. The Focal Kevlar unit bears many of the characteristics of a good soft-dome – treble is sweet, forgiving and will not fatigue with long-term listening. Some may prefer more explicit high frequency detail, but the tweeter contributes to the slight warmth of the overall balance and integrates nicely with the midband. If you're looking for a hand-finished speaker with great vocal imaging and a relaxed-neutral presentation, check it out.

☎ Arcaydis 01562 865788

🌐 www.arcaydis.co.uk

these speech-led pieces sounded beautifully articulate and precise, with plenty of detail but no aggressive edge.

It's rare to find an AV product that can be recommended to anyone who uses a DVD player, but this gets closer than most. You really could play an Arnold Schwarzenegger film back to back with a Merchant Ivory and the AV8 will cope with both easily. Yes, it is limited in inputs and functions, but as it is designed to work as an add-on processor for hi-fi systems, it could be the bridge between your CD and DVD players.

Best of all, the DPL II is just as subtle and refined as the Dolby Digital and DTS. This means TV signals – whether analogue or digital – sound rich, detailed and refined, making well-recorded TV like *Enterprise* sound so close to Dolby Digital as makes no odds. But even the brutal street sounds of Channel Five drama *The Shield* were presented well. This could so easily show up any rose-tinted air to the AV8, but instead just highlights that the AV8 can have a raw edge, too.

Normally, the lack of video switching and inability to handle DVD-Audio or SACD multichannel would be major stumbling blocks to recommendation, but when a product sounds this good, who's complaining? Stick an AV8 into your existing hi-fi system and make the jump to home cinema without tears.

☎ Cyrus Electronics 01480 435577
🌐 www.cyrus.co.uk

A WITHOUT V

The Cyrus AV8 is just one of a number of home cinema processors without onboard video switching. Manufacturers like Naim, Roksan, Myryad and Bryston have all produced AV processors that simply do not touch the video side of things, or have removed the video switching to an entirely separate box. It's no coincidence that the names connected with the divorce of audio and video are considered to be some of the best hi-fi manufacturers in the world. It is possible to keep video switching inside the processor and retain good sound quality, but it costs... Krell kinda cash!



ROUND-UP SPEAKER CABLES

The right wires are essential if your system is to reach its full potential. Here are six of the latest cables for your speakers



Acoustic Research Master Series £160 (4.5m)

▶ This chunky cable is packed and priced per mono length (15, 30 and 50 feet available – the price above is for 15ft stereo). It features a mix of high purity copper and silver-plated ditto strands to a nominal gauge of 10AWG – in plain English, that means a whole lot of copper, giving very low resistance. Long runs no problem! Banana plugs are included as standard, with other options available thanks to AR's modular 'Adaptatip'.

This is all very well, but unfortunately, the sound is not up to the promises implied by the generous construction. Most distressingly, it is distinctly dry in character, with a resulting lack in acoustic space around instruments and noticeably reduced size and clarity of stereo images. Bass is reasonably weighty but not very tuneful, and voices lack individuality. Dynamics at least are good, and loud music has plenty of impact. At its considerable price, value is not great and one can find cheaper cables that, frankly, are less boring.

☎ Recoton 0161 702 5010

🌐 www.acoustic-research.com



Black Rhodium AST200x2 £10/m

▶ The 'x2' bit means this is a bi-wire cable, with four cores in one jacket. But it can be used perfectly well for single wiring, and experimenting is no bad thing. The cores, of stranded tinned copper, are insulated with silicone rubber, a material with good electrical properties which Black Rhodium feels offers sonic advantages over conventional plastics.

It may be the silicone rubber that's responsible for a certain family likeness between many Black Rhodium cables: there's often some coloration, a slight departure from tonal neutrality that is not necessarily accurate but can be pleasant, even exciting. Specifically, the bass seems a little 'warmed up', which does no harm at all to general tunefulness. Treble is perhaps just a touch bright, and stereo images are generally solid though sometimes rather forward. Detail is good at any dynamic level, although bass can become reticent at climaxes. Recommended, though with caveats – listen first!

☎ Black Rhodium 01332 361390

🌐 www.blackrhodium.co.uk



Ecosse ES2.3 £12/m

▶ A perfectly standard 'figure-8' cable, though Ecosse uses 'Ultrafine' stranded conductors to maximise surface area, 800 strands making up three square millimetres of cross-section (implying moderate DC resistance). Insulation is a mixture of polypropylene and PVC, with cotton filler for mechanical damping, and overall the cable is rather springy and difficult to lay neatly.


Performance is moderate to good in most areas, with handling of dynamics and high levels probably the strongest suit. Tonal balance is consistent with level, which is always a bonus in itself, and that balance is on the whole neutral, with just a little seeming curtailment of both bass and treble extremes. However, there is often some veiling of detail and while stereo imaging is quite precise side-to-side it is less good in the depth dimension. Voices can occasionally sound dry, and deep resonant bass loses some of its vibrancy. A fair job, then, though not amazingly competitive.

☎ Ecosse 0141 353 0509

🌐 www.ecossecables.co.uk



Ixos Gamma 6006s Shimmer £5/m

 Ixos has been tweaking its 'Gamma Geometry' for a while now, and this version seems to be largely a cosmetic variant – attractive but not gaudy. Two finely-stranded conductors of moderate cross-section are held together by a length of solid insulator which keeps the conductors crossing each other without actually twisting together. Effectively, it's just a figure-8 cable though with slightly better rejection of interfering magnetic fields.


Sound is biased more towards excitement than neutrality. There's a good strong bass and a slightly forward treble, very immediate but slightly lacking in subtlety. A slight hardness can affect voices, and within a choir the individual voices are not so easy to discern. Stereo imaging is pretty good, while dynamics are just a little constrained. Despite that, the sound holds together well at climactic moments and overall there's a nice sense of cheerfully facing up to any sonic difficulties. At its budget price, it's recommended.

☎ Path Group 01844 219000

🌐 www.ixos.co.uk



QED XT350 £15/m


 This is the middle member of QED's new 'X-Tube' range, which features a pair of tubular conductors (effectively the braided screen from a coaxial cable), the idea being to reduce the influence of 'skin effect'. That apart, however, it functions as yet another figure-8 cable. Conductors are a mixture of plain and silver-plated copper, with fairly low resistance. A matching set of QED's 'Airloc' plugs will set you back a further £40. Tested on its own in *HFC 234*, the XT300 impressed with very decent bass and imaging. At a significantly higher price, however, XT350 doesn't seem to add much in any department. Yes, bass is pretty good, perhaps not quite as extended as Black Rhodium's AST200 but arguably more neutral, and imaging is among the better examples in this group. It's a little on the dry side compared to the very best at the price, and though there's an absence of really obvious foibles it's hard to recommend when its own little brother comes so close.

☎ QED 01483 747474

🌐 www.qed.co.uk



van den Hul CS122 Hybrid £10/m

 Yet another figure-8 cable, though with a central web to increase conductor spacing and decrease capacitance. Thanks to the use of three square millimetres of silver-plated copper, resistance is quite low, but van den Hul adds its trademark 'Linear Structured Carbon', claimed to improve low-level linearity. Insulation is vdH's own material, 'Hulliflex' – low-loss, quite flexible and halogen-free.

Results seem to vary somewhat with programme material. Initial listening with some fairly gentle classical music was encouraging, but more demanding material showed up some loss in the finer details. Dynamics are good, but the tone of bright instruments like trumpet and sax is often a little dry and very deep bass is also somewhat reticent. Choral voices seem somehow smoothed off, which is fine if you want to relegate your music to background duty but not ideal for concentrated listening. Mixed success, then, though perfectly pleasant.

☎ Tannoy 01236 420199

🌐 www.vandenhul.com



THE COMPONENTS



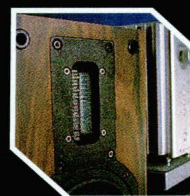
**Audio Analogue Maestro
CD player/ processor
£1,500**

Well made Italian player with one of the warmest CD sounds possible. Centre-transport design features balanced and single-ended audio outputs and digital audio in- and outputs, making it a true digital processor.



**Red Rose Spirit amp
£1,200 (£2,000 with
speakers and cables)**

Slim and tall 35-watt integrated ultra-minimalist amp with smooth and exceptionally dynamic sound. Functionally identical to the controversial Red Rose Rosette 1 amp, but strangely doesn't supersede it.



**Red Rose Spirit speakers
£1,200 (£2,000 with amp
and cables)**

Two-way, rear-ported, near-field monitor with a lovely finish and a ribbon tweeter. Designed to be used on tall stands in free space close to the listener. Clean, sweet sound, but the tweeter is extremely directional.

AUDIO ANALOGUE MAESTRO CD/SONY SCD-XB780 | RED ROSE SPIRIT AMP & SPEAKERS

SYSTEM ADDICT

Mark Levinson's latest Red Rose combo is a more affordable taste of real 'high end'

High-end audio can be a minefield. Will my Aardvark Gruntmaker amp be a good mix with my Santa Maria Conquistador speakers? It can be complex, but it's essential, as packaged alternatives are never as good. Or are they?

The American Red Rose Music £2,000 Spirit system comprises integrated amplifier, standmounted speakers and 15 feet of speaker cables, all optimised to work well together. Buying this as a system represents a saving of around £650 on the separate components.

The Spirit amplifier is a 35-watts-per-channel tall but thin integrated with just four line inputs (one of which has a tape output), a unique set of curvy side heatsinks and a pair of bulky four-way speaker terminals. The speakers have an even bulkier single set of terminals and a port around the back, with a 50mm ribbon tweeter and a 125mm polypropylene bass driver at the front. The 336J cables have, unsurprisingly, 336 strands of oxygen-free copper per side and have good spade lug terminals at both ends.

According to Red Rose, SACD is the way to go – a cheap CD/SACD player is all you need. British dealers are more pragmatic, and suggest a more upmarket CD player. So we tried both the Audio Analogue Maestro CD processor/player and the more down-to-earth Sony SCD-XB780 SACD player.

With the Maestro CD player, the Red Rose system takes on a super-smooth air. There is great insight to be had from


those ribbon tweeters and the amp is a little powerhouse. It's extremely quick and – in a small room, at least – fills the place with sound and even some decent bass. In a bigger room, the bass and dynamics begin to get a bit overawed by the amount of air movement required, but it always retains that high-end air. It makes *Sweetsmoke* from the Mr Scruff *Trouser Jazz* album sound gorgeous.

What the system does in spadeloads is produce a first-class image and the sort of silken sheen that only good high-end kit can muster. The ribbon tweeters have no harsh top-end and – while they can sound a bit phasey if you move too far from the ideal listening position – they manage to give a real impression of top-notch kit at a fraction of the price.

Moving over to the cheaper SACD/CD player is both good and bad. Good, because SACD is little short of magical through the Spirit system; bad because you lose some of that smoothness on CD in the process. It's not an entirely negative change, on the cheaper player

Underworld's new same-as-all-the-others disc *A Hundred Days Off* seems more vibrant and direct through the Sony. On the Audio Analogue, it was less bouncy, but had better air and deeper bass.

Finally, there's the interconnect cable upgrade. Once again, the Red Rose name springs up again, thanks to its Silver One interconnects. Not cheap at £299 per metre, the Silver One is a Litz design with silver strands which is very free sounding but never too sharp or bright. Ultimately, the combination of cheaper SACD player with Red Rose cable still cannot compete with Maestro CD player and 'el cheapo' cables, but it does redress the balance somewhat.

But let's not get sidetracked. The basic Red Rose system isn't for everyone – if you have an aircraft hanger for a living room, you'll need a different range of kit. But these are the nursery slopes of high end. If you can afford a good CD player, too, it's a bonus, but even with a cheaper player, this can demonstrate what high-end hi-fi sounds like. 

Sony SCD-XB780 SACD player £499



An SACD player isn't necessarily also a DVD player. This audio-only multichannel machine has impressive SACD

sound (stereo only in the context of this system). It's not bad with ordinary CDs either, even if its CD replay is (unsurprisingly) outclassed by the Audio Analogue Maestro.



CONTACT

This system was recommended for us to test by Custom Sight and Sound, PO Box 4146, Epping, Essex CM16 6HJ.  01992 571879

“Our new CD Champion”

★★★★★ **WHAT HI-FI**, March 2002

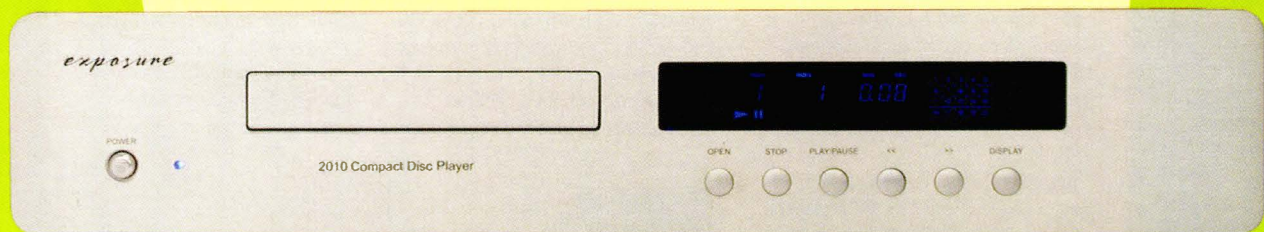


“It’s a firm Best Buy”

Hi-Fi Choice, April 2002

“In the final score the Exposure scores as a definite success”

★★★★ Hi-Fi World, June 2002



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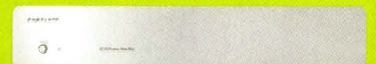
www.exposurehifi.com



Exposure 2010 Integrated Amplifier



Exposure 2010 AM/FM RDS Tuner



Exposure 2010 Power Amplifier

Exposure Electronics Ltd: The Works, 59 North Street, Portslade, East Sussex BN 41 1DH, England. Tel: +44 1273 423877 Fax: +44 1273 430619
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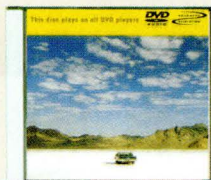
ChoiceCuts



Our favourite musical morsels, old and new

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

NEW MUSIC FORMATS



PHILIP GLASS

Koyaanisqatsi

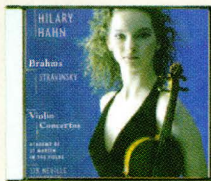
DVD-Audio

Nonesuch

Music: The result of a collaboration with filmmaker Godfrey Reggio whose film of the same name remains one of the most influential of its era (1983), this is Glass at his most engrossing.

The title means 'life out of balance' in the Hopi language and the powerful bass voices of the opening piece have a strong Native American feel. It is tremendously powerful and evocative, painting pictures as wide as the prairies and congested as a city at rush hour. Unlike the original soundtrack this 1998 interpretation by Western Wind vocal ensemble under Michael Riesman, runs to the full 65 minutes as it does in the film. **★★★★☆**

Sound: The sound is excellent, the mix surrounding you with instruments and voices to great effect. The best bit is the sub-bass system rattling organ, quality bass with real depth and colour. **★★★★☆ JK**



BRAHMS & STRAVINSKY VIOLIN CONCERTOS

Hilary Hahn (violin), Sir Neville Marriner (cond), Academy of St Martin in the Fields
Multichannel/stereo SACD

Sony S589649

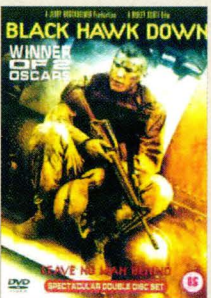
Music: To be brutally honest, Hilary Hahn is slightly weak in tone (try the cadenza in the

Brahms) and lacking the kind of unifying overview of the true greats. But her playing is subtle, expressive and full of nuance. It is also secure in intonation. There is never an ugly note – quite an achievement in the Brahms – with a maturity that belies her 22 years. Coupling the lush Brahms with the leaner and more acerbic Stravinsky may seem idiosyncratic, but the two spark off each other surprisingly well. **★★★★☆**

Sound: Whether the recording or the Academy have quite the sense of occasion and presence of the best is moot, but the recording is fine grained enough to allow every detail free expression. **★★★★☆ AG**

CINEMA SELECTION

Because these days hi-fi doesn't always just mean music



Cinema selection

BLACK HAWK DOWN

COLUMBIA TRI-STAR

Film: 'Contains frequent strong battle horror' was the warning on trailers for this film and they sure weren't kidding. Ridley Scott's version of a botched US raid on Mogadishu jangles your nerves to such a degree you'll be ducking for cover every time you hear a car backfire. It's very well made, and acted with conviction, but non-Americans might balk at the crass, skewed politics, in which Somalians are little more than cannon-fodder. The factual basis and 'realist' pretensions sit uneasily with the breathtaking action and dunder-headed flag waving, but its undeniably powerful and gripping. **★★★★☆**

Sound and vision: Both picture and sound are stunning – Scott's green-filtered war zone never looks less than nightmarish and the horribly convincing battle sounds are relentless. A very polished, punishing sensory assault. **★★★★☆ JF**

CD/VINYL



EST

Strange Place For Snow

ACT

Music: Esbjörn Svensson Trio is a Swedish group with a penchant for rhythmically strong, largely relaxed jazz that often hints at the work of Thelonious Monk but takes off into unusual places just when you start to take them for granted. The trio's sixth album sticks with the same territory but keeps pushing the boundaries of acoustic jazz, Svensson's often Keith Jarrett-esque piano shifting from introspective lyricism to rolling bass lines reminiscent of Ramsay Lewis at his funkier and with a strong ambient element never far from the surface. **★★★★☆**

Sound: Being largely acoustic there's plenty of instrument tone in the leading piano and supporting bass and drums – not perhaps as open and dynamic as it might be, but it's still pretty fine. **★★★★☆ JK**



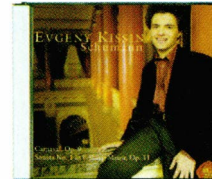
J-WALK

A Night On The Rocks

eastwest

Music: These newcomers from Manchester have pulled off one of the most sublime debut albums in recent years. Plundering their (no doubt extensive) record collections for the best northern soul, krautrock and good old-fashioned pop hooks available to man they've come up with a glorious mirror ball tour of clubland and beyond, from *Soul Vibration's* late night drive through soul's neon underpass to the roaring horn superhighway of *Scarlet Menace* featuring sometime Rae and Christian vocalist Veba. **★★★★☆**

Sound: Despite being largely sampled from dusty old rare grooves, these tracks have been scrubbed up a treat, putting a delicious spangly shine on old beats. **★★★★☆ DO**



SCHUMANN CARNIVAL OPUS 9, SONATA NO 1 IN F-SHARP MINOR, OPUS 11

Evgeny Kissin (piano)

RCA 09026 63885 2

Music: Russian child prodigy Kissin has lately come in for some critical stick from the music establishment. On this form however it is hard to see why. Kissin is not new to Schumann – they clearly have an affinity, Kissin playing with almost careless agility, leeching out the passion in the music. This is one of the best Schumann recital discs for some time, strongly idiomatic and one which manages the trick of making sometimes unmemorable music utterly unforgettable. **★★★★☆**

Sound: Made in Freiburg, Germany, this is a highly successful recording technically as well as artistically. The sound is clean and propulsive, with a subtle ambience providing an elegant ambient framework around the Steinway piano. **★★★★☆ AG**



BBC RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP

The Radiophonic Workshop/BBC Radiophonic Music

Music: The denizens of the now disbanded Workshop were sonic scientists who employed every tool they could buy or make to produce other-worldly sounds and innovative aural atmospheres. No *Dr Who* or *Blake's Seven* here, but plenty of the more outré entries in the Radiophonic canon including a thoroughly wiggled-out jingle for Radio Sheffield, classical adaptations for instruments and found objects and assorted electronic dreams and nightmares. **★★★★☆**

Sound: Basic by today's standards, the efforts of the Workshop through the sixties and seventies were very close to the cutting edge of electronic music and still leave many wires and valves showing. **★★★★☆ DO**

REVIEWS – DAVID VIVIAN

CD SYSTEMS

Who says good-looking systems can't sound superb too?

ON TEST



ARCAM/ELAC
£2,700



CREEK/EPOS
£2,497



CYRUS
£2,900



MARANTZ/
MORDAUNT-SHORT
£2,799



MYRYAD/
WATERFALL
£2,700



T+A
£2,500

Before you read on, cast an eye over the photographs on the following pages: six classy back-to-basics hi-fi systems that look the business and should, by reputation, sound even better. All rather more pukka than Darren Day's accent.

The aesthetically chilled yet seriously fit single or linked-brand solution is a killer concept, of course. It means you get your hi-fi with both barrels loaded: cool design values and solid gold sonics. And it means you don't have to put up with the kind of vacuous style-fi that doesn't back its swanky appearance with the necessary talent. Result.

Hopefully, this isn't being too presumptuous. The role call of real hi-fi heavyweights augurs well for a high standard. Arcam, Creek/Epos, Cyrus, Marantz/Mordaunt-Short, Myryad/Waterfall and T+A all represent the credible face of good looking kit and have been nurtured over the years on a sound-first ethic. Smart industrial design was wheeled in to acknowledge the acutely design aware mood of the nineties and has gained still greater impetus in the noughties. Mix 'n' match, while still the ultimate performance option, isn't the de facto force that it once was.

We've set the budget ceiling loosely at £3,000 – by no means cheap but realistic for anyone serious about listening to music at home who also wants to own a tasty slice of modern design and slick ergonomic convenience.

The starkest approach by far is from major German player T+A which has opted to shoehorn a CD, amp and tuner into a remarkably slim (if deep and weighty) casing. One-box perfection. Well, perhaps three when you add the equally

unfrilly Criterion TAL 90 stand-mount speakers.

The only other system that skews the regular-width matching CD and amp standard is the Cyrus CD7/aCA7.5/SmartPower silver brick tower block, which here benefits from a sound-massaging PSX-R regulated power supply. Its compact CLS 50 speakers, along with the Creek CD53/5350SE combo's Epos M12s, round off the standmount contingent.

Charge of the heavy brigade is led by the Marantz CD17 MkII/PM17 MkII KI pairing which teams up with lofty Mordaunt-Short 908 floorstanders. Arcam chose barely less imposing Elac 512s to partner its CD82T/A85 electronics while the especially pretty Myryad Cameo duo is joined by the seriously elegant glass columned Iguascu speakers from Waterfall. The style contest may already have a winner. But of course, all these systems have more serious agendas. ☐

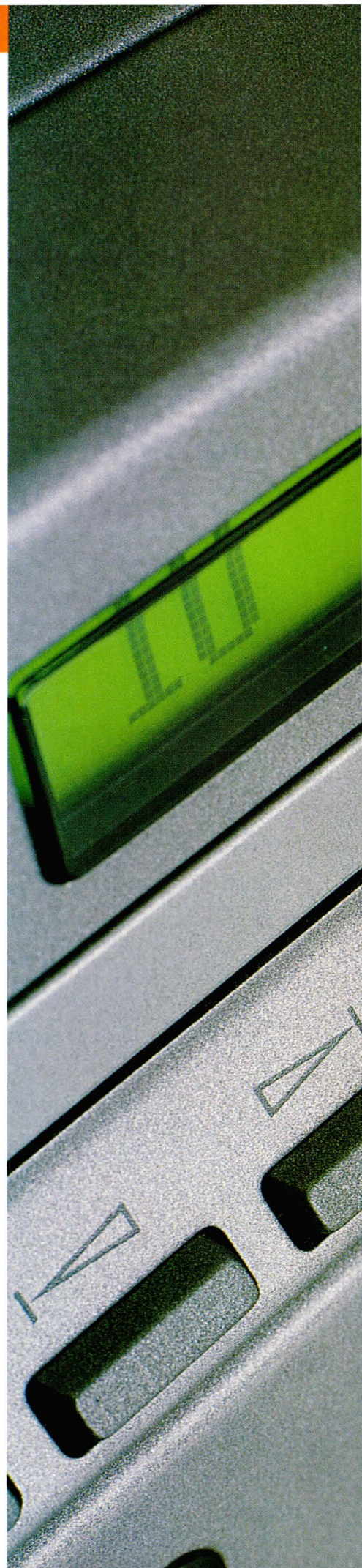
EQUIPMENT USED

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Cyrus CD7Q/PSX-R/Chord DAC64 CD player
Densen Beat 400 XS CD player
Chord CPM 2600 integrated amp
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20 speakers
AVI ProNine speakers
Ecosse MS-2.3 speaker cable
Nordost Red Dawn interconnects
Clearlight Audio equipment stand
Slate Audio speaker stands

MUSIC USED

Deep Purple *Live In Japan*
James Taylor *October Road*
Chris Botti *The Very Best Of Chris Botti*
Al Jarreau *All I Got*
Norah Jones *Come Away With Me*
N.E.R.D. *In Search Of...*
Sting *All This Time*
BBC Radio 3





☎ Arcam 01223 203200 ☎ Elac 0800 652 5002 🌐 www.arcam.co.uk, www.elac.com

ARCAM CD82T/ARCAM DIVA A85/ELAC 512 JET

£600/£800/£1,300 Total £2,700

You know where you stand with Arcam. Brand traits include clean design, solid build quality, a penchant for sophisticated user interfaces (balanced by fine control ergonomics) and decent performance. Just how decent has varied over the years but mostly veered between very good and excellent, so it isn't surprising that the Cambridge-based company engenders confidence across a broad customer base.

Arcam's sure touch with CD players is an enduring talent, especially in the midrange price band. The new £600 CD82T is its latest effort to blend performance, features, solidity and value in a box. Under the lid it uses 24-bit/192kHz Wolfson DACs (rather than the Burr-Browns of the £170 cheaper CD72T), configured in dual differential mode to optimise accuracy and lower the noise floor. Also notable are the high quality op amps in the output stage and the claimed jitter reduction through improved clock precision. Casework is robust and reassuringly unrattly while the large, comprehensive display and easy to use fascia buttons are satisfyingly intuitive in the usual Arcam fashion.

The £800 DiVA A85 integrated amp offers a similarly skilful mix of impressively weighty material value, plush specification, very grown-up control systems (software-driven definable volume display and relative input gain, for instance) and 85 watts

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
Plushly featured and steers a true sonic path with all types of music. Care in speaker positioning is rewarded with a well balanced but full-bodied sound.	
CHECKLIST	
DIGITAL OUT	✓
PHONO STAGE	OPT
TAPE LOOPS	2
TONE CONTROLS	✓
REMOTE	✓



ERGONOMICS

The Arcam amp has clear, neatly arranged back panel with well spaced sockets. Front panel controls on both units look and feel good but the amp's sophisticated interface is best accessed via remote which is well designed and easy to use.



per channel-muscular sonic aspirations that reach beyond its mid-fi price tag.

Certainly, it has sufficient grip and grunt to cope with the demands of the slim but meaty floorstanding ELACs. The 512 is essentially a cannily convenient marriage between the 180mm aluminium sandwich mid/bass driver and exquisite folded ribbon tweeter from the high-tech, curvy aluminium standmount CL330 and a conventional, floorstanding MDF box. The upshot is more bass extension (down to 30Hz) which, given the ribbon tweeter's 35kHz reach, gives the 512 plenty of wide bandwidth potential.

It is however essential that it is carefully realised in the setting up. These strikingly finished German speakers are very particular. They've got bass all right, it's just that most of it seems to be 'tuned in' by their truly massive rearward firing reflex ports. Anything approaching boundary proximity makes the lower octaves over-full to the point of boominess. Even pulled well out into the room, music with strong bass – such as Al

Jarreau's latest, *All I Got* – tends towards a leaden thumpiness. But there's a quick and stunningly effective fix – just push foam bungs into the gaping ports and suddenly the correct sense of proportion is restored.

Not just that, it all begins to sound a bit tasty. Arcam turns on the class here, playing perfectly to the Elacs' strengths. Treble – grainless, finely resolved – is well served by the 512's revealing ribbon tweeter. The synergistic balance continues through the midrange which has presence and clarity aplenty but not at all in yer face. And with the foam bungs, the bloated bass is transformed into something with shape, texture, agility and an unerring tunefulness.

The ensemble images beautifully, too, and because of its inherent smoothness it scores a level of listenability that will have broad appeal. All right, deduct a few points for it not sounding quite as transparent as the Cyrus combo. And, no, it doesn't do rock as thunderously as the Marantz/M-S system. But then this really isn't a character act. It lets the music speak. 🗨

020 8361 4133 www.creekaudio.co.uk

CREEK CD53/CREEK 5350SE/EPOS M12

£1,199/£799/£499 Total £2,497



Creek Audio – now 20 years old and a genuine Brit-fi stalwart – has moved away from the hair shirt audiophilia of its origins in recent years. The company says it has been "slowly but surely taking its products towards the high end". But, clearly, without the gilt-edged price tags. If that means getting the sonic goods without taking a hammer to the piggy bank, we're all for it.

These aluminium-clad 53-series models – while hardly pushing any design envelopes – look smart and unpretentious and, just as importantly, feel solid and well finished, if a little sharp around the edges. No monkey business with the controls, either, they come in both our favourite flavours – plain and simple.

Constructed in a modular way, the 5350SE has separate power amp, pre-amp and remote volume control circuit boards. The remote control circuit uses a motorised ALPS six-way rotary switch for moving between inputs. The amp's MOSFET output stage delivers an impressive 85 watts per channel into

eight ohms, 150 watts into four ohms.

The CD53's sonic abilities are founded on a Philips transport and digital control circuitry that has been matched to the Crystal Semiconductor Delta-Sigma 24-bit/192kHz DAC. Analogue filtering is performed using fully balanced circuitry and high precision resistors and film capacitors. A new, customised, ultra-low-jitter master clock and extra circuitry are said to minimise jitter from the Digital Signal Processor (DSP).


With Epos Acoustics these days part of Creek, the choice of speaker was never really in doubt. A direct descendant of the almost legendary ES12, the £499 M12 is an extremely substantially built and beautifully finished two-way standmounter with a 15cm injection moulded cone bass/ mid driver, 25mm aluminium dome tweeter and minimalist crossover. Its reputation for musical communication and subtlety precedes it.

For a long time, Creek kit was regarded as a good way to experience a reasonable copy of the Naim 'pace,

rhythm and timing' sound on the cheap. A back-handed compliment if ever there was one, though when listening to this system there's no escaping its strong foot-tapping quality. No bad thing, of course – a system that can't latch onto the pulse of the music is always going to sound rather dull.

This, however, is anything but. It was interesting to listen to the electronics with a few different speakers before hooking up the M12s. For all their brio and detail, the tonal balance certainly seemed a little bright and quite lean. A tendency towards edginess and over-emphasised sibilance was evident with some material, too, and not just Whitney Houston.

With the Epos M12s in situ, though, the system sounds plain terrific. The speakers restored an entirely natural-sounding balance, elbowed the edginess and introduced new levels of musical insight. Take Chris Botti's baleful trumpet on *Regroovable (The Very Best Of Chris Botti)*: smooth and sonorous yet imbued with just the right amount of bite. Bass is fleet-footed but surprisingly full given the size of the box. In fact, every style of music is faithfully served by the Creek combo, from Norah Jones to N.E.R.D.

It isn't just this system's ability to track a rhythm that helps to makes it so engaging – it possesses that rarer skill of cutting to the heart of the music without being too forensic. Synergy wins the day. 

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Creek boxes just about wing style scrutiny but the Epos M12s are gorgeous and work so beautifully with the front end the result is the best sound of the test.

CHECKLIST

DIGITAL OUT	✓
PHONO STAGE	OPT
TAPE LOOPS	2
TONE CONTROLS	X
REMOTE	✓

ERGONOMICS

The Creek CD and amp boast a workmanlike approach to ergonomics front and back. Rear panels are easy to get to grips with and are well planned and labelled. What fascia controls there are all have a taut, high quality feel but the remote is plasticky and looks old-fashioned.



01480 435577 www.cyrus.co.uk

CYRUS CD7+PSX-R/CYRUS ACA7.5/ CYRUS SMARTPOWER/CYRUS CLS 50

£800+£350/£700/£600/£450 Total £2,900

Few manufacturers of hi-fi seem to have got it quite as sussed as Cyrus. Style? Lego-by-Smirnoff and seemingly timeless. Technology? Scythes a perfectly judged path between exotic and affordable. Flexibility? Arguably the greatest Cyrus virtue of all and this system is an extremely good example. The CD7 disc spinner can be upgraded with the more sophisticated DAC board from the CD7Q. The aCA7.5 preamp or the SmartPower power amp (or both, even) will receive a similar performance lift hooked up to a PSX-R regulated power supply. CD7 too, come to that. On the basis that you can't improve the signal from the source, that's exactly where we decided to plug our single PSX-R outboard power supply in.

The £800 CD7 uses a Philips transport (capable of playing CD-RW discs) and a Burr-Brown PCM 1739 24-bit DAC built onto the main PCB. Fascia design is ultra neat but the small green LCD display looks low rent and isn't very easy to read. The remote is superbly clear and simple, though. And, of course, it all looks very cool.

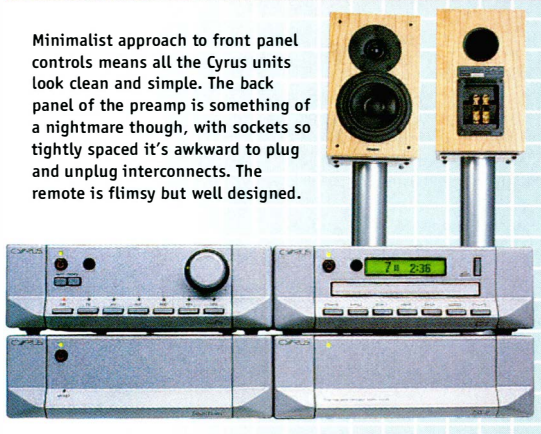
Bijou build is more problematic for the £700 aCA7.5 preamp which has to squeeze 12 pairs of phono sockets, a couple of balanced XLR inputs as well as sockets for the optional PSX-R outboard power supply and a pair of headphones into the limited area available on the back panel. Needless to say, it's

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
Typically strong Cyrus showing. Talent goes all the way from cool, compact style to clear, vibrant sound. Runs the Creek/Epos combo extremely close for top sonic honours.	
CHECKLIST	
DIGITAL OUT	✓
PHONO STAGE	OPT
TAPE LOOPS	2
TONE CONTROLS	×
REMOTE	✓



ERGONOMICS

Minimalist approach to front panel controls means all the Cyrus units look clean and simple. The back panel of the preamp is something of a nightmare though, with sockets so tightly spaced it's awkward to plug and unplug interconnects. The remote is flimsy but well designed.



cramped. No such worries for the £550 SmartPower, though. It has but one 'mode' switch which changes it from a 60-watts-per-channel stereo amp to a 110-watt monoblock.

Not a huge wad of cash in the pot left for speakers but £499 bags Cyrus's entry-level CLS 50, a well made and finished 8.5-litre reflex box equipped with a 12.7cm bass/mid driver, a 25mm silk dome tweeter and bi-wire terminal at the back. Claimed frequency response is 50Hz to 25kHz. Cyrus builds some superb speakers but, without wishing to sound too much like Simon Cowell, the CLS 50 isn't one of them. Actually, it's pretty good – fairly neutral, nicely voiced and very transparent through the midband – but, on the end of our reference systems, a little too polite and self-effacing for its own good.

Connected to the Cyrus electronics, though, synergy comes to the rescue like the cavalry, guns blazing. What had seemed a little limp-wristed suddenly sounds fresh, lively and clear. More surprising still is the new-found power,

grip and overall impetus of the bass which is smooth and nicely tuneful with both convincing leading edge definition and agility.

Pace and detail are outstanding. This system's notably quick on its feet and particularly strong in the areas of resolution and focus. This gives life and structure to CDs previously considered turgid and two-dimensional. Much of the credit goes to the CD player, which remains one of the very best at its price point. Its openness and penchant for capturing subtle ambient cues are especially impressive. Densely produced material – like Barry Adamson's *The King of Nothing Hill* for example – is unravelled with little effort and natural perspectives. You don't have to strain to hear exactly what's going on.

Simpler tunes are handled just as effectively, James Taylor being captured with just the right degree of nasality on his latest *October Road* CD. This system's powers of analysis are well developed and focused but, crucially, they don't put the freezer on the music's emotional heart. ○

☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk, www.mordaunt-short.co.uk

MARANTZ CD17 MKII/MARANTZ PM17 MKII KI/MORDAUNT-SHORT DECLARATION 908

£800/£1,500/£499 Total £2,799



Marantz has clearly taken a stance with these champagne-hued CD and amp behemoth siblings. It's almost as if they've been designed to satisfy a bizarrely loaded questionnaire. Are you fed up with titchy hi-fi? Do you mourn the passing of tone controls and gauges that light up? Got an aversion to silver and black? And, psst, wanna hi-fi that everyone will notice?

Well this is it. Big, bold and oh-so glamorous. Actually, we like it. As an alternative to skinny, bleached minimalism, it does a great job. The £800 CD17 mkII is the marginally leaner component. Fascia controls are full but not fiddly, the dot matrix display usefully large and legible. The basic digital hardware is hardly hot off the press but it is thoroughly engineered, comprising a dual differential version of the bitstream DAC7 (four D/A converters in all) and Marantz's discreet HDAM output op-amp. The transport reads CD-RW discs and the Marantz will respond to CD text where available.

The £1,500 PM-17 MkII KI amp is about three inches deeper than the CD player and weighs enough to make you wonder why there isn't more than the claimed 60 watts per channel. Then again, it's crammed with facilities. There are five source inputs (including a moving magnet/moving coil phono stage), 'source direct' defeatable bass and treble controls and HDAM four-gang active volume control with feedback to minimise noise at normal listening levels. The KI (Ken Ishiwata) Signature badge clicks audiophile credibility on a couple of notches with the usual smattering of high grade components and sturdier base plate.

Tall, deep and loaded with a novel side-firing, 25cm woofer housed in its own lower chamber, Mordaunt-Short's largest floorstander, the 908, rounds off the XXL theme nicely. The rest of the driver complement comprises a 13cm bass/mid unit and a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter and, with a claimed system sensitivity of 90dB/m, going loud is unlikely to be a problem.

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
The character act of the group, this system's imposing physical presence is mirrored by its big, generous sound. Well suited to rock but actually plays all styles well. Glam styling is certainly different.	
CHECKLIST	
DIGITAL OUT	✓
PHONO STAGE	✓
TAPE LOOPS	2
TONE CONTROLS	✓
REMOTE	✓

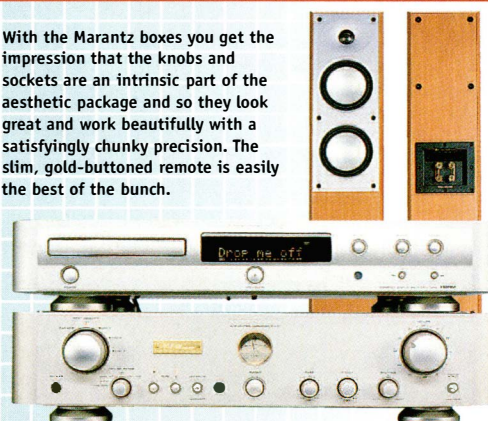
The sound of this system is every bit as substantial, physical and, indeed, room-filling as the appearance of its components. *Deep Purple Live In Japan*, for instance, is nothing more or less than Deep Purple live in Japan. This rig will whisk you back in time to the very venue – and, if you're not careful with the volume knob, reproduce the ringing in your ears as well. Which is both good and a little disappointing. What's great is that the Marantz/M-S is not a combo that will ever tie itself in knots trying to resolve musical minutiae. That simply isn't its style. It's much more of a broad brushstroke artist that puts scale and dynamics before itty-bitty detail. By the standards of this group, transparency isn't a notable strength.

Neither does it have the broadest spectrum of shades in its tonal palette. But it does sound convincingly weighty and it does sound controlled. It gets to grip with the 'architecture' of a performance better than most, especially as delivered by the big, sensitive Mordaunt-Shorts which really do seem to motor all the way down to 30Hz as claimed.

In a nutshell, what we have here is a system which is fully capable of projecting the big picture and presenting music in a tangible, coherent way with good drive and rhythmic integrity. Violets don't come into it, shrunken or otherwise. 📍

ERGONOMICS

With the Marantz boxes you get the impression that the knobs and sockets are an intrinsic part of the aesthetic package and so they look great and work beautifully with a satisfyingly chunky precision. The slim, gold-buttoned remote is easily the best of the bunch.



☎ 020 8863 9117 🌐 www.myriad.co.uk, www.waterfallaudio.com

MYRYAD CAMEO CD & AMP / WATERFALL IGUASCU

£600/£600/£1,500 Total £2,700

As we said right at the start, hi-fi doesn't come much prettier than this. The real eye magnets are the ridiculously elegant see-through glass cabinets of the Iguasgu speakers from French manufacturer Waterfall which, fortuitously for the purposes of this test, now shares UK distribution with Myriad among others under the BBG banner. The system all but chose itself.

The Myriad Cameo CD and integrated amp duo (£600 apiece) have been kicking around for a couple of years but look as if they were minted ten minutes ago. Head-on from a distance, each seems as slim as an After Eight mint. But it's largely an illusion of de-emphasis created by the arching bottom edge of the aluminium front panel. There's nothing wafer thin about the weight, either. Both units are well built but the amp is something of a hunk – you definitely feel you're getting your money's worth.

Myriad's 'My-Link bus' allows you to connect the two components so that they talk to each other. Which means single remote convenience and a degree of control intelligence. Press 'CD' on the remote from cold, for example, and both the CD player and the amp power up and the amp automatically switches to the CD input.

The CD player has a 24-bit/96kHz compatible DAC and a coaxial digital output. Amplification runs to 50 watts per channel and there are four line level inputs plus phono and two tape loops.

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



A system you'd buy for its looks alone but it's one of the best sounding, too. Glass Waterfall speakers are no gimmick. Good in their own right, they get superbly with the Myriad front end.

CHECKLIST

- DIGITAL OUT ✓
- PHONO STAGE ✗
- TAPE LOOPS 2
- STONE CONTROLS ✗
- REMOTE ✓



This system's slick lifestyle touches haven't been gained at the expense of solid hi-fi credentials.

Regular readers will be familiar with Waterfall's work in the transparent shape of the Victorias (designer speaker group test, *HFC* 225). The £1,500 Iguasgu is the next model down in the floorstanding range – essentially a two-way version of the 2.5-way Victoria with a shorter but well-built cabinet.

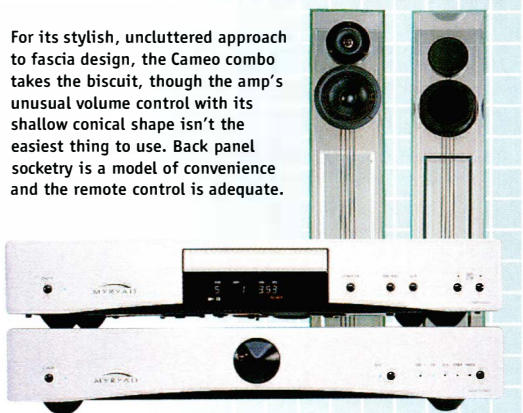
These components gel beautifully. Not surprisingly, the Iguasgu speakers give away a little bass weight and extension to the larger Victorias but they're still more than amply endowed in this area and capable of driving music along with authority. Lucid and surefooted, they'll field any genre you care to throw at them and hardly put a foot wrong. Deft handling of high frequencies is their forte: treble is smooth and clean with fine inner detail. Midrange presentation is crisp, lively and articulate, too. On the end of our reference front end, they were consistently musical and involving, if at times a little rose-tinted.

This open but slightly romantic character dovetails snugly with the even but cool tonal balance of the Myriad combo. No shortage of clarity, dynamics and control, though. The system displays a real sense of cohesion, fusing fine resolution with lively dynamics, if not the last word in transparency. The way it lets the music flow in a natural, unforced fashion is immediately captivating and won't cause fatigue over extended listening. Sting's live set *All This Time* is a good sounding CD, but this system's clarity, focus and retrieval of low-level detail made the recording simply seem more 'live' than on lesser systems. The rich double bass and subtle piano accompaniment to Sting's rasping vocal on *Moon Over Bourbon Street* was particularly fine.

By making the minimum number of concessions to half-pint convenience and gimmickry, the Cameo wears its purist colours on its sleeve. You'll have difficulty tucking this one away in a corner, but then it really is too good for that. A stunning looking combination, and a great sounding one too.

ERGONOMICS

For its stylish, uncluttered approach to fascia design, the Cameo combo takes the biscuit, though the amp's unusual volume control with its shallow conical shape isn't the easiest thing to use. Back panel socketry is a model of convenience and the remote control is adequate.



☎ 020 8863 9117 🌐 www.taelektroakustik.de

T+A K1/T+A CRITERION TAL90

£1,600/£900 Total £2,500



T+A stands for 'Theory and Application', a kind of 'vorsprung durch Technik' (advancement through technology) for the hi-fi generation. Parallels between this upmarket German audio company, founded in 1978, and that famous brand of meticulously designed and engineered Teutonic road warrior aren't so fanciful. Both make liberal use of aluminium, both revere clean, uncluttered styling and both reckon that the head is a more effective tool than the heart when it comes to achieving your goals. T+A states its mission thus: "the application of the basic rules of physics to reproduce music as faithfully as possible".

Which is very German but fair enough. The build quality and finish of the combined CD/amp/tuner K1 System and Criterion TAL 90 stand-mount speakers are comfortably the best of the group – almost unnecessarily good – but precision workmanship is something T+A prides itself on. Likewise its technical expertise. The amazingly svelte K1 is a packaging *tour de force*.

The unit contains a CD player with an 8x oversampling Sigma/Delta 24-bit DAC, a dual-gate MOSFET-regulated RDS tuner, a 70-watts-per-channel power amp and a generously featured preamp that, as well as handling the signals from the onboard sources, has two additional inputs (tape and aux) and timer/alarm functions. As supplied in bare alloy with black cheeks and trim it looks smart but stark, but there are three optional case colours and seven solid wood cheek panels, giving a total of 21 permutations.

The compact, two-way TAL 90 speakers are more innovative than their low-key appearance would suggest, totting a cabinet and bass/mid driver design that allows extreme cone travel for exceptional bass power and extension and an annular tweeter with a claimed frequency response that reaches up to 50kHz "and beyond". Both bass and tweeter output can be adjusted (flat, plus or minus).

In practice, the claim about the bass seems a tad boastful, at least in the context of this system. It sounds clear

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
Terrific one-box packaging, squeaky clean styling and ease of use are main draws but dry sounds lacks involvement. Much better than most lifestyle systems but not a match for the best here.	
CHECKLIST	
DIGITAL OUT	✓
PHONO STAGE	✗
TAPE LOOPS	1
TONE CONTROLS	✗
REMOTE	✓

and well balanced but it's actually a bit lean. The bass is smooth, fast and nicely integrated but the menacingly cavernous bottom end on *Black Amour* from the Barry Adamson CD simply wasn't happening – not with the right degree of menace, anyway; not even with the bass boost.

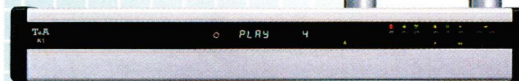
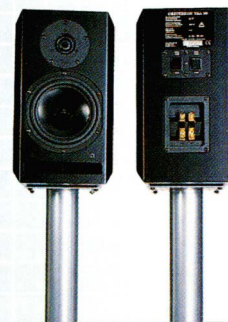
Treble is slightly cold and clinical, too. In conventional terms, both warmth and sparkle are lacking, but the good news is that the upper ranges are explicit and open and this quality is preserved down through the midrange. Stereo perspectives are well handled with good depth as well as width.

The system is also faithful to the tempo of music but, again, could do with more drive and propulsive energy when Deep Purple's drummer Ian Paice really puts his foot down. Partly this is due to the curiously over-damped sounding bass. Where's the kick and slam? A little too polite by the standards of this group.

This omission isn't terribly significant when relaxing to gentle classical works on FM (the tuner's a good one, by the way) where the fine midrange clarity and string tone hit the spot. James Taylor's superbly recorded *October Road* benefited from the T+A's good basic neutrality as well – it can sound a little too sugary on some systems. Quite a classy sound, then – even-handed, not coloured or musically manipulative, but, ultimately, rather dry and unfulfilling. 📍

ERGONOMICS

Basically a row of buttons, the T+A K1 System's fascia controls are nothing if not logical, though their labelling doesn't exactly jump out at you. The remote control is, perhaps, a more impressive piece of work, both stylish and easy to use. However, the rear panel speaker terminals are awkward to get to.



CD SYSTEMS CONCLUSIONS

As these separate set-ups prove, good looks and great sound really can go hand in hand

It seems almost trite to say that style and user convenience can coexist with sexy sonics. That's been the case for years. But, on the whole, this group shows that the art of making a classy one-brand style system has been honed to the point where it indeed offers a serious alternative to a similarly priced, hand-picked separates set-up from disparate sources.

In principle, it's even better than that because synergy – that elusive but vital quality where components combine to deliver a performance greater than their individual contributions – should come as part of the asking price. It does, too. Cosmetics apart, these are all systems that deliver in spades.

The stunningly well built one-box T+A K1 system sounds like real hi-fi, not a minimalist style-first confection. A decent tuner is part of the spec, as is enough power to fill a large room with music. In this company, though, it

struggles to shine, sounding just a little dry and cautious.

It's easier to fall for the big, glamorous sound of the Marantz/Mordaunt-Short combo with its deep bass and effortless dynamics though, it has to be said, it

isn't the most subtle or transparent of systems. Similarly, the Arcam/Elac and Myryad/Waterfall outfits combine exceptional style with excellent sound – both have their presentational idiosyncrasies but they're capable of communicating

music with its structure, timing and emotional power intact.

The Cyrus is top drawer, but it's perhaps just pipped by Creek/Epos for outright sonics. Not quite the snappiest dresser in town, but the most enjoyable performer. **C**



CREEK/EPOS

Perhaps curiously, the Creek electronics didn't quite hit the top mark when they were auditioned with a wide range of speakers, sounding fast and taut but also a little on the lean and bright side. With the Epos M12s hooked up, though, the resulting strong synergy rockets the performance into the stratosphere. Pity the Creek boxes don't look quite as sumptuous as the speakers.

HINTS AND TIPS

⊕ With looking good being such a large part of these products' appeal, the temptation to stack them will be strong. It's a bad idea. If you have to, put the amp on top of the CD player so that it can 'breathe'. Ideally, both components should be sited on separate shelves in a dedicated equipment support. This is high-performance hi-fi, after all.

⊕ Care in speaker positioning – and spending some time choosing specialist speaker cables – will be repaid in listening pleasure.

⊕ Spending time choosing specialist interconnects (generally it's a good idea to bin the ones in the box), will be repaid in listening pleasure. For a £3K CD/amp system, we'd recommend spending at least £50 per interconnect. If you really want to hear what your equipment sounds like, though, you'll need to spend more.

⊕ Don't ignore the mains. If possible, plug your hi-fi directly into the mains. If you have to use extension blocks, investigate the specialist mains products from the likes of Black Rhodium and Russ Andrews, which include cables, blocks and purifiers. Best of all, get a competent electrician to run a dedicated spur from the ring main just for the hi-fi. You'll be astonished at the difference.



CD SYSTEMS AT A GLANCE

MAKE	Arcam/Elac	Creek/Epos	Cyrus	Marantz/Mordaunt-Short	Myryad/Waterfall	T+A
MODEL	CD82T/DiVA A85/512 Jet	CD53/5350SE /512 Jet	CD7 + PSX-R/aCA75/Smart Power/CLS50	CD17 MkII/PM17MkII K1/Declaration 908	Cameo/Iguasco	K1/Criterion TAL 90
PRICE	£2,700	£2,497	£2,900	£2,799	£2,700	£2,500
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	Plushly featured and steers a true sonic path with all types of music. Care positioning speakers is rewarded with a well balanced but full-bodied sound.	Creek boxes just about wing style scrutiny but the Epos M12s are gorgeous and work so beautifully with the front end the result is the best sound of the test.	Typically strong Cyrus showing. Talent goes all the way from cool, compact style to clear, vibrant sound. Runs the Creek/Epos combo extremely close for top honours.	The character act of the group, it's imposing presence is mirrored by its big, generous sound. Well suited to rock but actually plays all styles well. Glam styling is different.	A system you'd buy for its looks alone but it's also one of the best sounding. Glass Waterfall speakers are no gimmick. Good in any case, they gel superbly with the Myryad front end.	Terrific one-box package, squeaky clean styling and ease of use are main draws but dry sounds lacks involvement. Better than most lifestyle systems but not a match for the best.

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EYRIS

EYE CATCHING SOUND

"...the Eyris 2 goes for a controlled sound that is as dry as a Martini and as natural as breathing..."



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ARCAM AV8 PROCESSOR AND P7 MULTICHANNEL AMP **£5,498**

ARCAM TAKES ON TAG MCLAREN'S AV32R – CAN IT MATCH THE CLASSIC AV PROCESSOR SPEC FOR SPEC?



Up until very recently, AV enthusiasts had little room to manoeuvre if they wanted a home-grown and thoroughly inclusive solution – TAG McLaren's AV32R was Hobson's choice. Arcam's launch of its AV8 processor and seven-channel P7 power amplifier, both THX Ultra 2 approved, looks set to challenge this status quo with an impressive blend of features, ease-of-use and speaker-wrestling power. At a heady £2,999, the AV8 processor is the stuff of aspiration, but when you consider Arcam has stumped up for every Dolby, DTS and THX licence under the sun, then it's not unrealistic. Surround modes include Pro Logic II, DTS Neo:6, 5.1 channel Dolby Digital and DTS, 6.1 channel DTS-ES Matrix and Discrete plus 7.1 channel THX Surround EX and ES. The only omission is DTS 96/24, although this looks likely to be included by way of a software upgrade.

The broadcast-quality video technology already implemented in the DV27 DVD player has been developed here for routing of composite, S-Video, component and RGB video. There are eight assignable digital inputs, an eight-way analogue multichannel input for connection to DVD-Audio and SACD players plus a host of tape/VCR and two-channel inputs. Automation is assisted by a bank of 12V triggers while an RS232 port allows the AV8 to be used with Crestron or AMX touch-screen controllers,

for example, in addition to facilitating software updates to the Flash memory chip.

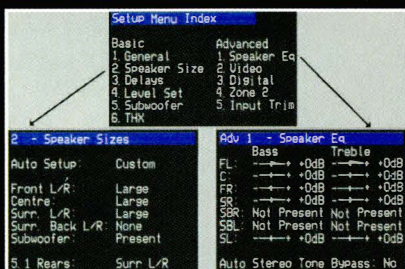
The look and feel of the AV8 complements Arcam's other FMJ separates, but the massive P7 power amplifier is another matter altogether. Tipping the scales at over 30kg and the bank balance at £2,499, this is Arcam's most ambitious example of power engineering to date. Its seven internal amplifiers are modular in design, each removable for servicing should either the DC offset, over-current (short circuit) and over-temperature protection fail to prevent damage from abuse. And abuse is the key word here, for while there's a big (90mm) vari-speed fan that draws air through the 'scoop' in its alloy fascia, neither this nor the protection are likely to whirl into life before your ears pack up.

TECHNOLOGY

Before embarking on the design of an AV processor, all manufacturers must first decide which decoder solution to implement. Arcam has opted for Crystal's CS49326 Dolby/DTS/EX and ES processor with the supplementary CS49330 back-end processor that provides THX EX decoding and improved bass management. This second processor also provides additional memory that the AV8 uses to offer up to 220msec of global audio delay. This is a useful feature in high-end AV systems

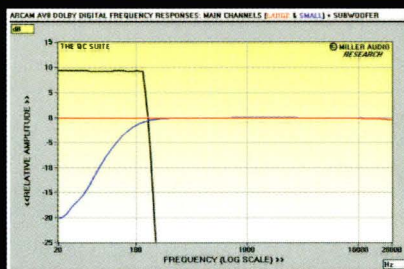
"Tipping the scales at over 30kg and the bank balance at £2,499, the P7 is Arcam's most ambitious example of power engineering to date."

SYSTEM SET-UP



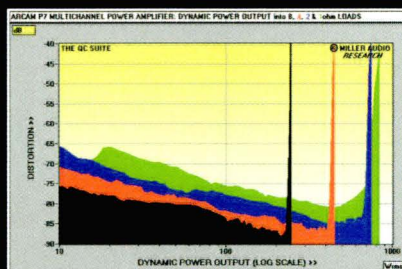
The AV8 has a comprehensive on-screen set up menu including (above left) basic bass management parameters and (right) variable crossover frequency settings for each channel in the system.

BASS MANAGEMENT



When the front, centre or surround speakers are set to 'Small' the bass response is rolled off (blue trace) and added to the subwoofer channel (black trace). This is the essence of bass management, a 'behind the scenes' feature accommodated, in the AV8, by DSP from Crystal.

POWER OUTPUT



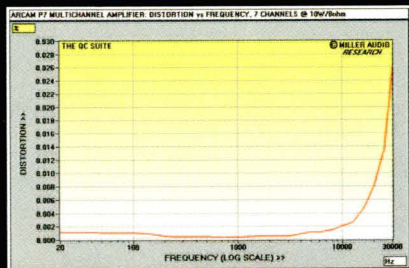
There's a slight increase in distortion at lower power under dynamic music conditions, but with massive peaks of 245W, 445W (10.6A), 745W (19.3A) and a whopping 830W (28.8A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads, respectively, the P7 will drive seven of the toughest speakers with relative ease.



where the picture on the screen can lag behind the audio if it's being fed through a scaler of some description. As there's no synchronisation between picture and sound on a DVD, this 'lip sync' facility can also be used to tidy up poorly mastered software.

Arcam was one of the first manufacturers to use Wolfson DACs in its CD and DVD players, and this policy is now extended to the AV8. The digital input receiver is

DISTORTION



Under ideal conditions, the P7 power amplifier delivers exceptionally low levels of distortion (<0.001%) through the midrange, increasing to a mere 0.008% at 20kHz, the notional limit of human hearing.

Detail

- Wolfson DACs are screened here.
- Analogue stages underneath the large video board.
- This board handles composite video input switching
- Arcam's comprehensive DSP lives under this cover. Incoming digital audio is also relocked here.
- The switchmode power supply is isolated under this screen
- The large board handles all the high quality video processing

SILVER ANNIVERSARY

SPEAKER CABLE WITH NEW 'AIRLOCK' TERMINATION

BRILLIANCE

Silver Anniversary, available in single and bi-wire, is just about every magazine reviewers favourite affordable speaker cable, with its brilliant, clean, accurate and neutral signal transfer. It is now available with the New Airloc range of performance enhancing connectors.

SILVER ANNIVERSARY by QED, NATURALLY.



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sourced from Crystal, however, while the matching 24-bit/96kHz ADCs (which allow analogue signals to benefit from the DSP options) come from AKM. The analogue stages are entirely home-grown of course and play a fundamental role in defining the 'sound' of the product as a whole.

Meanwhile, the design of the seven individual modules within Arcam's P7 is culled from the current-feedback topology of the popular A85 amp, which goes a long way to explain the great sound quality of this new beast. The modules are powered via independent secondary windings from two 1500VA transformers, which accounts for much of its bulk, and while they are all separated from one another they still communicate to a common system microprocessor via optically-isolated links.

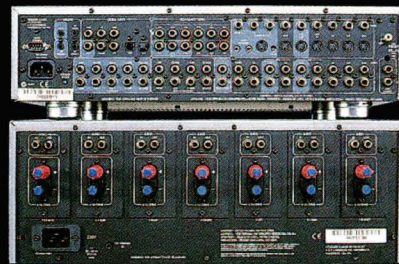
KEY FEATURES

Features on the P7 are few, although its multistage soft-start is kind to your fusebox. The seven status LEDs show each of the amplifier modules switching on in pairs while, around the back, Arcam has finally abandoned their unpopular (with me at least) BFA connectors in favour of chunky 4mm speaker binding posts. By contrast, features are what help sell the AV8, although the trick comes in providing great flexibility without baffling the operator.

Arcam achieves this by separating its system configuration menu from those features, including volume and tone adjustment, audio/video input selection, compression, lip sync, Pro Logic II music modes, and Zone 1/2 manipulation – all squirreled away onto its 'day-to-day' menu. Outboard processors are not equipped to deliver fancy graphics in the fashion of DVD players, and this is reflected in the primitive (but effective) text-based menus here.

Set-up menu offers six basic categories for optimising the AV8 with your speakers and five advanced categories to assign different video and digital audio inputs. This includes setting a trim level for the analogue inputs. You can adjust the EQ (bass and treble) for each speaker and also configure the Zone 2 set-up. The 'basic' pages offer large and small speaker choices and allow adjustment of channel delay (distance compensation), subwoofer level and crossover frequency.

Some options, like the crossover frequency, are fixed in THX surround EX mode (80Hz in this instance). THX offers very advanced parameters including boundary gain compensation (to prevent subwoofers from booming) and its 'advanced speaker array' feature which distributes sound to the rear and side channels in a controlled manner.



"Its delivery of conventional stereo CD is first rate, a combination of slick detailing with great sensitivity to the music's emotional content."

PERFORMANCE

Reflecting its versatility, the AV8/P7 was auditioned with a variety of analogue and digital multichannel audio sources, using Pioneer's DV-656 for digital DTS and Dolby feeds plus analogue DVD-A, and Sony's SCD-XA777ES for multichannel SACD. The P7 power amplifier comfortably exceeds its rated specification, delivering 2x190 watts into eight ohms and a full 2x325 watts into four ohms, with very little 'sagging' in its multichannel role where 5x180 watts or 7x175 watts is available *simultaneously* into eight ohms. As a result, my preferred combination of B&W's 802 (front) and 804 (centre/surround) speakers revelled in the capacity of this amplifier, producing a wonderfully clean, clear and detailed sound that lifted free of the five substantial boxes to fill every corner of the room.

Sandy Dillon's two and five-channel DVD-A recordings sounded characteristically raw and earthy via the AV8's multichannel analogue inputs. Her voice seemed to hang in the air, sending shivers down the spine of all who were in the room, while the ripple of applause painted a similarly clear and vibrant picture of the atmosphere at this live concert. This same sense of 'occasion' was apparent with multichannel SACD, from the eclectic David Bridie to the soaring chorus of the *Sacred Heart* disc, already something of a classic in its own right.

In truth, the two-channel software has the edge in respect of fine detailing, thanks in part to Arcam's 'Stereo Direct' mode which shuts down the DSP and routes the analogue input, via the volume control, to the analogue outputs. Uncompressed digital audio is currently limited to 44.1kHz CD and either 48kHz or 96kHz DVD-V, where available. Nevertheless, its delivery of conventional stereo CD is first rate, a combination of slick detailing with great

sensitivity to the music's emotional content. So while the technical content of the sound seems spot-on, so is its ability to convincingly *connect* with the listener.

Typically, any AV system that delivers the musical goods also makes a worthy fist of multichannel movie soundtracks, including special effects. Fortunately, the AV8/P7 is not the exception to prove the rule and goes on to lift the roof with THX spectacles like the *T2 Special Edition* and pod race sequence from *Star Wars Episode 1*. Once again, the AV8/P7 proves capable of recreating an ambience that's vastly in excess of the room itself. The open, coliseum-like venue that houses the pod race audience sounds as huge as it looks on the screen, while the manic panning of the pods from left to right, back and forth and even up and down is achieved with a confident smoothness by the AV8.

As the occasion demands, its sound will swing from extravagant to introspective, but it's never less than entertaining. In essence, this is one of the few AV combinations that allows the speakers to dissolve and the sound to take over. Highly recommended, albeit at a price.

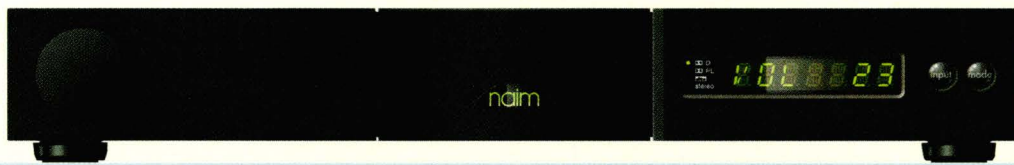
VERDICT

As the 'ultimate' processor, Arcam's AV8 meets TAG McLaren's AV32R head-on, for while the latter offers superior processing power and numerous upgrade options (including a DAB module), the AV8 brings more comprehensive video switching and a sound that's arguably more transparent and, frankly, believable. Throw the P7 power amplifier into the mix, and Arcam has a *combination* that, while costly, is more than a match for the best that the 'rest of the world' might care to place in its path.

☎ Arcam 01223 203200 ☺

🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

SEE WHERE IT TAKES YOU



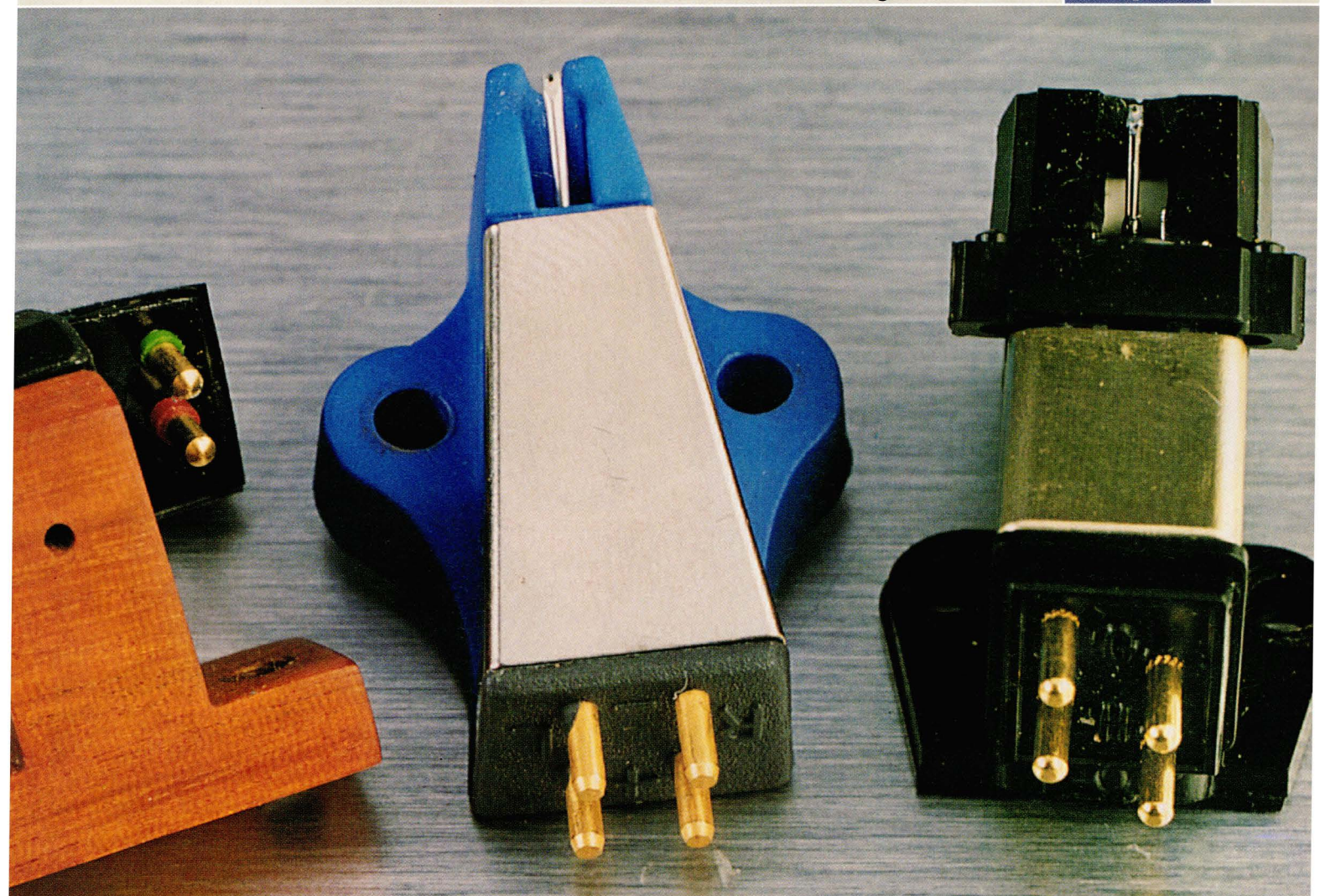
SERIES
5

Introducing the latest addition to the Series 5, the Naim AV2 (Audio Video) processor. It not only enhances anything you listen to, it makes everything you watch come to life. People talk about 'Surround Sound', at Naim we immerse you.


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THE ULTIMATE ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM



REVIEWS – Jason Kennedy

CARTRIDGES

Small but perfectly formed, a good cartridge isn't just a luxury, it's a necessity

Transducers are tricky things to make. They have to convert one form of energy into another for a start. Speakers convert electrical energy into vibrations in the air, cartridges convert vibrations from the wall of a groove in a piece of vinyl into an electrical signal. This is not an easy job, which is why cartridges, despite their tiny size, are expensive – sometimes very expensive – works of audio art. And like loudspeakers, their performance varies quite dramatically.

We've gathered half a dozen models, all of them high quality, spanning a wide range that will suit every type of vinyl lover from newcomers to old hands, and all manner of turntables and arms. ©

EQUIPMENT USED

TURNTABLE

SME Model 20/SME Series IV arm

PHONO STAGES

Trichord Dino/Dino+,
Tom Evans Audio Design The Groove

AMPLIFIER

Border Patrol Control Unit preamp,
Gamut D200 power amp

LOUDSPEAKERS

Living Voice Avatar OBX-R,
REL Stadium III

CABLES

Townshend Isolda,
Living Voice Potato Wire

STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Townshend Seismic Stands

MUSIC USED

Captain Beefheart & The Magic Band
Lick My Decals Off Baby
John Fahey *Let Go*
Massive Attack *Mezzanine*
Rachmaninoff/Dallas SO/Johanos
Symphonic Dances
Joni Mitchell *Mingus*
Cinematic Orchestra *Everyday*

ON TEST

CLEARAUDIO
SIGMA
£620

GOLDRING
ELITE
£250

GRADO
PRESTIGE GOLD
£110

LINN
ADIKT
£195

REGA
SUPER ELYS
£148

VAN DEN HUL
MC1 SPECIAL
£699

£250 ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.goldring.co.uk

GOLDRING ELITE

The least expensive moving coil in our group is this range topper from Goldring. A solid POCAN plastics body incorporates neodymium magnets and silver coil wires to produce a low output voltage but not one that's likely to phase a decent phono stage.

If your current cartridge is worn out you can save 20 per cent on the price by trading it in, bringing the cost down to a tempting £175.

The Elite put in a sterling performance, with a sophisticated sound compared to the moving magnet designs in this group. It made Captain Beefheart's voice sound powerful and engaging, with a strong sensation of the singer being in the room and dynamic, pacey playing from the band, making the performance gel. Joni Mitchell's high voice on *Mingus* sounded a little fragile and exposed but Jaco Pastorius's remarkable bass playing was as lyrical as ever. The Rachmaninoff revealed a vivacity and precision which is rare at the price – it could perhaps be more dynamic but not without greater

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
A taste of the high-end at a moving magnet price can't be bad. This is a remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone with its trade-in price.	
CHECKLIST	
TYPE	MOVING COIL
REMOVABLE STYLUS	✗
WEIGHT	5.7g
STYLUS TYPE	GYGER I



investment. John Fahey's guitars sounded lovely – sonorous and rich with plenty of energy but no strain.

The bass on Massive Attack's *Inertia Creeps* was fat and expansive, not sloppy, not incredibly deep either, but

very tuneful and engaging. In the scheme of things this is a low price for a moving coil and the tendency is to compare it with more expensive alternatives, but in the context of its price peers it's very hard to beat. 🎧

£110 ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.gradolabs.com

GRADO PRESTIGE GOLD

Grado cartridges are a variant on the moving magnet theme called moving iron. However, as they produce the same sort of voltage and work into the same 47kohm load as MMs they should be treated in the same way.

The one thing that marks this brand out is that it makes quite high-end models using this technique – no-one else makes a moving magnet in the £500 plus region.

The Prestige Gold is the top of the brand's entry level range. It has a plastic body with a removable stylus (achieved using the supplied tool) and comes complete with a pair of aluminium mounting bolts and a basic instruction sheet with no mention of stylus alignment.

In action the Prestige Gold is an impressive performer. Its only limitation seems to be at the top of the treble which could be more extended – though MMs rarely are. The midrange is excellent and the needle extracts great presence and vitality from vinyl without

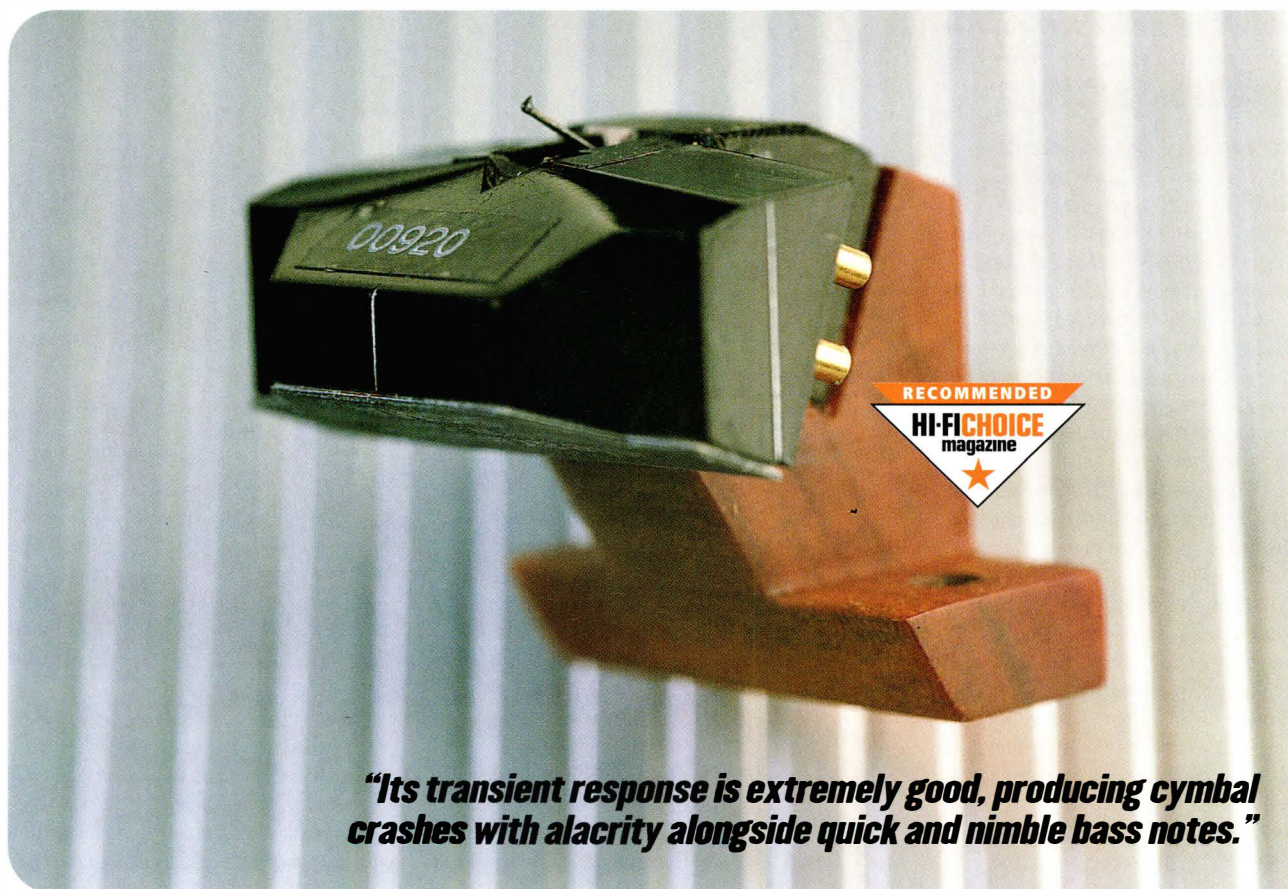
VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
Competitively priced and extremely capable cartridge which seems impossible to phase and produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss.	
CHECKLIST	
TYPE	MOVING IRON
REMOVABLE STYLUS	✓
WEIGHT	6g
STYLUS TYPE	ELLIPTICAL



becoming aggressive or coarse, as can happen. It images well, placing instruments and voices with decent precision, and it follows complex lines with apparent ease (Beefheart for instance).

Bass is deep and heavy with good chug factor, notes maintaining a

distinct beginning and end on Massive Attack's *Inertia Creeps*, with timing a strong point on all manner of material. It's also surprisingly open for a moving magnet cartridge, producing a rich balance with plenty of air. Remarkable at any price, let alone £110! 🎧



"Its transient response is extremely good, producing cymbal crashes with alacrity alongside quick and nimble bass notes."

£620 ☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.clearaudio.de

CLEARAUDIO SIGMA

Clearaudio is a 100 per cent analogue brand that's based in Germany and run by one Peter Suchy. He makes a range of turntables that typically use large acrylic platters, parallel tracking tonearms which support the cartridge on rails and a good variety of phono stages. Vinyl is pretty big in Germany and Clearaudio is big on vinyl, this being one of the least expensive of its broad range of cartridges, the fanciest running to several thousands of pounds.

The Sigma has the classic 'hammer-head' shape that Clearaudio specialises in, which means that the cartridge connection pins are quite far forward compared to most needles, and require extra long leads. Clearaudio supplies its own impedance-matched connectors for you to solder onto a set of leads, but nice as they are you still need longer than average leads to reach the pins and a complete set of leads would have been considerably more useful. I had to solder pieces of copper cable into the supplied plugs and attach my existing

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
The Sigma is a nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home on lower mass arms, but provides plenty of insight and engagement with less well matched ancillaries.	
CHECKLIST	
TYPE	MOVING COIL
REMOVABLE STYLUS	X
WEIGHT	4g
STYLUS TYPE	TRIGON II

leads to these in order to bridge the gap. A good dealer should be able to supply suitable leads though.

Clearaudio MC cartridges have gold, anti-reflection coils with a matched 60 ohm impedance. When used with appropriately matched cables and plugs this is said to minimise distortions caused by cable non-linearity.

The Sigma's body is made of Fernambuk, a hardwood which is said to be found in high quality violin bows. The resulting cartridge is extremely light, so much so that a small weight is supplied to put between cartridge and headshell for arms whose counterweight is too heavy to balance the needle alone.

Once installed the Sigma proved its mettle with the lively Beefheart track, revealing a slightly mid-strong balance that draws you into the voice on this superb track. There's a lot going on with Don van Vliet's singing and most of the affordable needles here tend to gloss over it but the Sigma, like the vdH, pulls out the intonations and

subtleties and makes the recording sound extremely authentic.

It's not as rich and dynamic as the vdH but its transient response is extremely good, producing cymbal crashes with alacrity alongside quick and nimble bass notes. You also get a strong sense of midrange transparency even though there is more body in the material than it reveals. The classical test piece had good instrument tone and plenty of recording character, if not the full dynamic power of the basses.

The Massive Attack LP revealed pretty decent if not fully extended bass alongside very convincing tambourine tone and a strong, dusty vocal that conveyed no small measure of menace.

The Sigma also has a fine sense of timing, the Fahey track sounding much more relaxed than usual and the Mitchell proving unusually engaging. It would undoubtedly perform better on a lighter arm such as Clearaudio's own tiny sleds and it leaves us intrigued about the more expensive models in the range. 🎧

£200 ☎ 0141 307 7777 🌐 www.linn.co.uk

LINN ADIKT

Linn's chunky Adikt replaces the long-running K9, so named because of its similarity to Dr Who's mechanical hound. This moving magnet design sports two distinctive 'horns' sticking out of its mounting surface behind the threaded inserts for the supplied bolts, intended to assist in the tricky job of cartridge alignment when a slotted headshell is used. Anything that makes this procedure easier has got to be a good thing, the only drawback being that some arms have just a pair of holes and combining the two requires some judicious hacksaw work!

The instructions accompanying the Adikt are the clearest of the bunch, especially if you have a Linn turntable, and anyone that's mastered an Ikea cabinet should benefit.

In use this proved to be a revealing and even rather compelling cartridge, which, while it lacks the sophistication of a good moving coil, makes up for it with muscularity and dynamics. The

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
The Adikt is a capable and confident needle with a good sense of musicality and a relaxed balance. It's a little material sensitive but in the right company it's a good entertainer.	
CHECKLIST	
TYPE	MOVING MAGNET
REMOVABLE STYLUS	✓
WEIGHT	7g
STYLUS TYPE	CYGER II



Rachmaninoff was up front and vivacious but not brash, and despite slightly thin strings the overall effect was extremely involving. Joni Mitchell's voice also stood out well, not perhaps reaching quite the highs it's capable of but never short on richness, likewise

Wayne Shorter's saxophone which made its presence felt more effectively than usual. Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* is the album if you want to hear the Adikt at its best, bass being a distinct strength while the soundstage opens up to a greater than usual extent. 🎧

£148 ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk

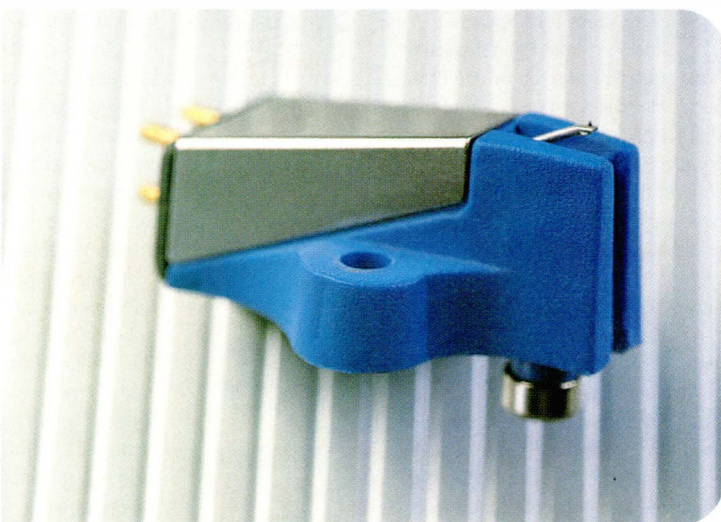
REGA SUPER ELYS

The Super Elys is the top model in Rega's small but distinctly formed range of cartridges, a range designed to complement the brand's well established Planar turntables. Hand made in Essex, Rega cartridges use a one-piece plastic body which does not allow stylus replacement. This is for the good reason that a solid body will have greater mechanical integrity than a two-piece one, and when it comes to the fine matter of tracing a vinyl groove, every bit helps.

The Super Elys has a third less wire in its coil windings than the standard Elys which makes it more efficient; it also has a third mounting point at the front for Rega RB tonearms. Owners of more chunky tonearms should note that the Super Elys is unusually shallow and the VTA (vertical tracking angle) cannot be perfectly set without the edge of the record coming into contact with the arm.

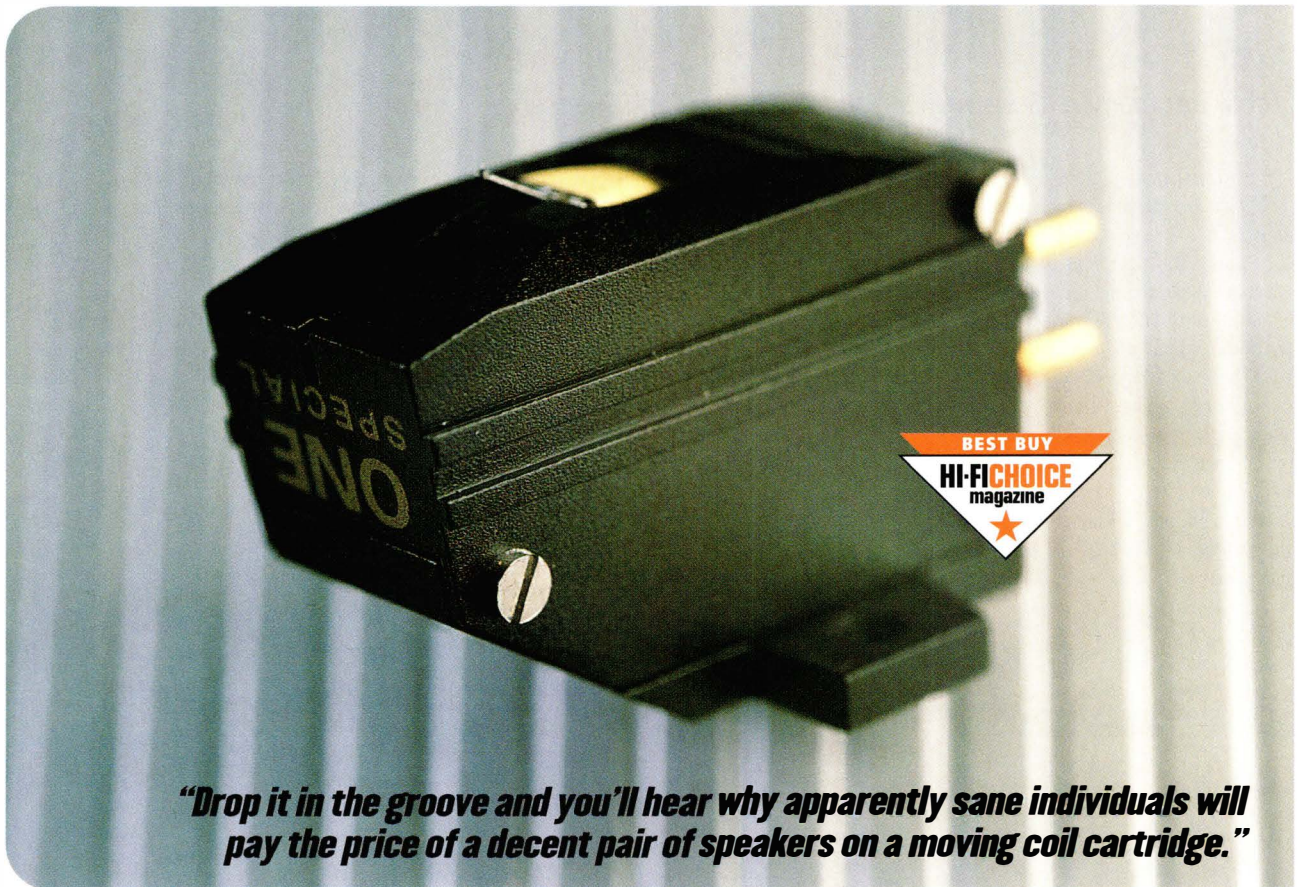
You can get pretty close though and once it's been run-in this cartridge calmed down and produced a decent

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
Solidly built for a 'magnet', the Super Elys is lightning-fast and surprisingly resolute, though possibly a little too lively for some.	
CHECKLIST	
TYPE	MOVING MAGNET
REMOVABLE STYLUS	✗
WEIGHT	4.6g
STYLUS TYPE	ELLIPTICAL



result. It's certainly on the lively side of neutral – there's no shortage of energy and enthusiasm – but it digs out the detail well enough. Bass is fast and tight with good channel separation and excellent timing, midrange is lively and energetic with plenty of bite and the treble is well extended.

It seems to be at its best with sparse, jazzy material like Joni Mitchell's *Mingus* CD, picking out the lovely bass playing and snappy drum kit with great effectiveness. If you're after edge of your seat entertainment with plenty of pace, this is the liveliest option in the bunch. 🎧



“Drop it in the groove and you’ll hear why apparently sane individuals will pay the price of a decent pair of speakers on a moving coil cartridge.”

£699 ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.vandenhul.com

VAN DEN HUL MC ONE SPECIAL

Although the van den Hul name is now synonymous with cables this Dutch company had been making fine cartridges for some time before the digital invasion, founder AJ van den Hul having started the company with handmade needles in the 1970s.

In a range that includes models costing thousands of pounds, the MC One Special is a relatively affordable example. It's a 'selected' version of the MC10 Special, a hand-built cartridge using silver wire coils and a boron cantilever (the tube that connects the stylus to the coils). Because of the relatively wide sample variations with cartridges, it's not unusual for makers to charge a bit more for selected samples of a particular model – ones that are found to perform better than the rest. Grado is another manufacturer that does this – the Prestige Gold on page 46 is a 'selected' version of the Prestige Silver, for which an additional £20 is charged.

Compared to its forebear, the MC One, this Special version has a thicker

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the asking price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light. If you've got a high-class turntable, arm and phono stage you're wasting them without a cartridge of this calibre.	
CHECKLIST	
TYPE	MOVING COIL
REMOVABLE STYLUS	X
WEIGHT	8.2g
STYLUS TYPE	VDH1

front pole and an extra small magnet which increase output and are claimed to enhance resolution. The cartridge has a relatively heavy aluminium body with threaded inserts to make installation less fiddly. It comes with the bare minimum of accessories and instructions – just the specifications inscribed on the inside of the box.

Lock it into the headshell and drop it in the groove and you'll hear why apparently sane individuals are prepared to spend the price of a decent pair of speakers on a moving coil cartridge. It reveals the third dimension, depth, and brings genuine stereo to the table. All the less costly cartridges here do this to some extent but next to them the vdH sounds like real three dimensional sound compared to a facsimile thereof. The inability to resolve this elusive aspect of reproduction is what kept CD from sounding convincing for so long and it's still got a way to go to match something like this cartridge.

The effect on music is to give the sound ample space to expand and take

shape, to sound solid in the true stereo sense. With the Beefheart this makes instruments and voices sound more real and vivid, better able to draw you into the music. You can fully appreciate the contortions of both singer and band to pull together this apparently disparate collection of noises into a musical whole, and you can enjoy the music all the more for it.

The Massive Attack LP revealed the cartridge's remarkable low frequency resolution, the various elements that make up the industrial bass sounds on *Inertia Creeps* putting in an appearance for the first time. Likewise, Joni Mitchell seemed almost in the room, transported from 1976; the sense of presence was stunning and the music made a lot more sense now that each player's contribution was put into perspective. With the Rachmaninoff you could revel in the natural tone of the instruments within the sort of soundstage an orchestra might inhabit, while the John Fahey piece was pulled together in all its zingy new steel string excellence. 🎧

CARTRIDGES CONCLUSIONS

There are many reasons why a good cartridge is indispensable


As with the phono stages reviewed last month there are no bad or even poor value cartridges in this tight little group, which made picking the winners extremely difficult. With a different turntable and arm the order could easily be changed though it's unlikely to be reversed. The cartridges in this group split neatly into moving magnets (MM) and moving coils (MC). Magnets are cheaper to buy and to use, and they work with just about any phono stage. Coils have a lot more sonic potential but require finer amplification.

At the bottom of the economic pile

we have the excellent Grado Prestige Gold, a remarkable device that's virtually impossible to beat at the price if you like a relaxed and rich sound. Next up is the compact Rega Super Elys, a cartridge made for Rega turntables and arms to the extent that it has a third fixing that other arms can't reach. It's lively and

exciting, sometimes too much so, but it will calm down with use. Our most expensive MM is the new Adikt from Linn, so-called perhaps because of the nature of vinyl enthusiasm – it certainly won't help you break the habit that's for sure.

The MCs kick off modestly with Goldring's excellent Elite, a model

that gives a true taste of the high end and reveals the superiority of its kind. The Clearaudio and van den Hul carts take you further into heavyweight territory with a beguiling sound that will leave your CD collection gathering dust, though the Clearaudio in particular needs careful partnering. 

TRY THEM WITH THESE

TURNTABLES

SME MODEL 10A £3,411
Gorgeous turntable and arm with build quality that would embarrass a Porsche, and it sounds superb.

AUDIO NOTE TT1/ARM1 £594
Great sprung turntable with decent arm will give musical results in most systems.

REGA P2 £198
Entry-level deck that's well built and capable of great results.

PHONO STAGES

CREEK OBH-8SE £160
Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from a very neat little unit.

TRICHORD DINO £300
Relaxed yet resolute with a natural balance and great flexibility.

TOM EVANS AUDIO DESIGNS

THE GROOVE £1,800
If you want to hear what your cartridge is really capable of, get one of these set up specially for it and bathe in audio ambrosia.

HINTS AND TIPS

⊕ To get the best from your cartridge you need to align its cantilever (the tiny arm with the stylus at its tip) with the grooves in the record – this requires an alignment protractor and a deal of patience. The former can be had from dealers or online retailers, the latter is not so easily bought.

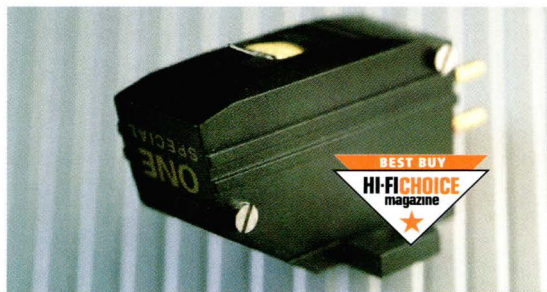
⊕ If your tonearm can be adjusted for height, set it so that the headshell is parallel with the record surface after you have set the tracking force.

⊕ It pays to get a phono stage that suits the parameters of your cartridge, some are less fussy than others but matching things like input impedance pays dividends with moving coils.

STAR PHONO CARTRIDGE

VAN DEN HUL MC ONE SPECIAL

It's perhaps inevitable that the best cartridge is also the most expensive. However, if you want to hear why hi-fi nuts still think vinyl is superior to CD this should make it obvious. With a sound that's live and vibrant, instruments that take shape before your ears and bass to die for, audio gratification doesn't get much better. Unless you can afford to spend more of course!



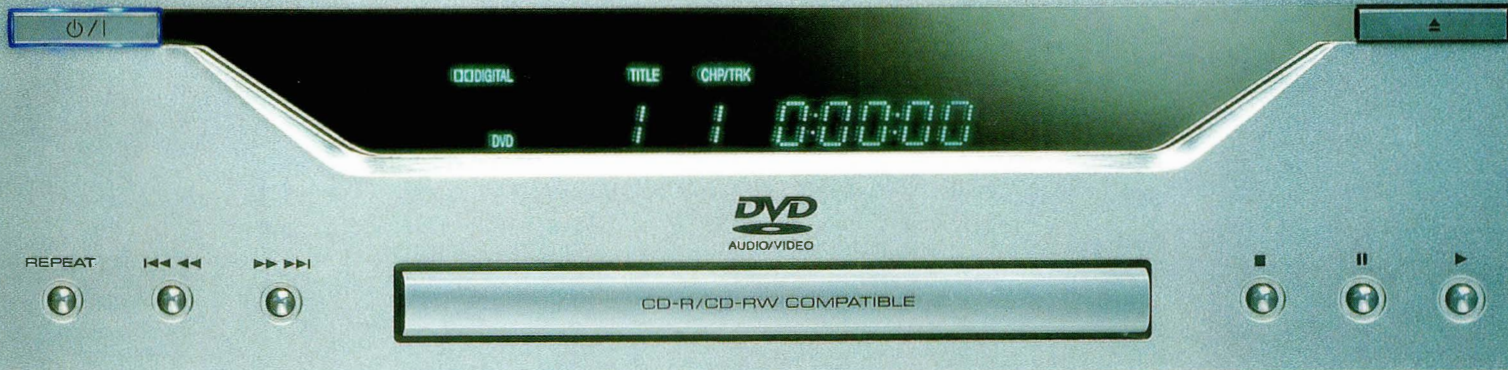
PHONO CARTRIDGES AT A GLANCE

	Clearaudio	Goldring	Grado	Linn	Rega	van den Hul
MAKE	Clearaudio	Goldring	Grado	Linn	Rega	van den Hul
MODEL	Sigma	Elite	Prestige Gold	Adikt	Super Elys	MC1 Special
PRICE	£620	£250	£110	£195	£148	£699
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	A nimble and revealing cartridge that provides plenty of insight and engagement.	A taste of the high end at a moving magnet price. Remarkably subtle and persuasive design.	Competitively priced, very capable cartridge produces rich, open and expansive music.	Capable and confident needle with a good sense of musicality and a relaxed balance.	Solidly built, it's lightning-fast and surprisingly resolute though a little lively for some tastes.	A gorgeous cartridge worth the price every time it lets you <i>hear</i> a once familiar track!
Output mV	0.6	0.5	4	6.5	7	0.65
Tracking force g	2.2	1.7	1.5	1.75	1.75	1.4
Input load resistance ohms	50	100	47k	47k	47k	200
Input load capacitance pF	not critical	100-500	not critical	150-200	100	not critical
Channel separation dB	35	25	25	25	27	>30

Perfect Compatibility



TEAC



LEGACY

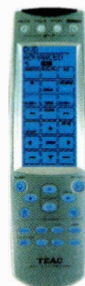
▲ Legacy. A totally new concept in sound and vision.

Forget everything you ever knew about component systems and start to appreciate the possibilities now available with Legacy.

▲ Touch-screen learning remote control.* Component hi-fi sound. Fantastic home cinema performance. Incredible new aluminium speaker system. Inspirational design. Legacy brings you a new dimension that is light years ahead.

▲ Call now and arrange an audition that will change your life.

LEGACY



TEAC Legacy. power▲performance▲style

*Touch-Screen Remote Controller included with Legacy AG-L800

www.teac.co.uk

TEAC

For information, call TEAC on 01923 819630

REVIEWS – Alvin Gold

AV AMPS

Is there such a thing as an 'audiophile' AV amp or receiver? Let's find out...

ON TEST



DENON AVC-A11SR
£1,800



JVC RX-DP10RSL
£900



MARANTZ SR9200
£2,000



ONKYO TX-SR700E
£800

Where other audio and video components have mostly been drifting down in price, DVD players being a spectacular example, home cinema amplifiers and receivers have been bucking the trend. At the same time, the nature of the beast has also been changing. A modern home cinema amplifier is an enormously more complex and capable beast than it once was. In early models, a basic Dolby Pro Logic matrix and a bunch of audio and video inputs were coupled to a fairly basic five-channel amp and power supply. Luxury models were more powerful, and included more complex named DSP acoustics (concert hall, club and so on). But sound quality that could be described as 'high fidelity' was barely on the horizon.

This test looks at three one-box home cinema receivers and one amp (*sans* tuner), not from the top of the market, which currently hovers around £3,000 for a one-box design, but far from entry level either. These are all high quality models, costing £800-£2,000, a price point for this type of product that didn't even exist a few years ago. They boast specifications that are not too distant from top of the market models, but it is true that for the most part they don't offer the same level of sophistication. None for example boasts THX Ultra2, a rigorous all-embracing standard that doesn't suffer the same shortcomings as its predecessor THX Ultra, especially when playing music. Other differences are harder to detect from the outside or to read off the spec sheet, but are more fundamental. Simplified, lower resolution digital circuit design is one such obvious example, though

other changes, such as less emphasis on toys like named DSP acoustics, are to be welcomed.

The best news is that sound quality is now very much part of the roadmap for manufacturers who know that models like these must appeal to an audiophile market if they are to maximise their sales. A key reason is more honestly specified power amps, along with a range of bypasses and other measures which have been introduced to improve signal purity, triggered by the need to cope with high resolution multichannel sources like DVD-A and SACD. ©

EQUIPMENT USED

SOURCES

Sony DVP-NS900V DVD/SACD player,
TAG McLaren Audio DVD-32FLR
DVD-Video player

LOUDSPEAKERS

Stereo: B&W Nautilus 800, Mission
m53. Multichannel: B&W Nautilus 800
(main), B&W Signature 805 (centre),
Mission m51 (surround)

CABLES

Nordost Valhalla speaker cables,
TAG McLaren interconnects & digilink

DISCS USED

STEREO CD

Norah Jones *Come Away With Me*
Alison Krauss *New Favourite*
Tracy Chapman *Tracy Chapman*
Marc Cohn *Marc Cohn*
Brahms/Colin Davis/LSO *Requiem*

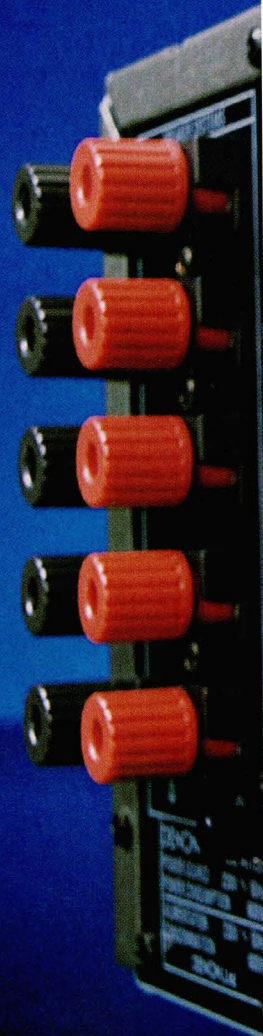
DVD-VIDEO

Saving Private Ryan (R1 and R2)
Terminator 2

Various DTS samplers

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

Chie Ayado *Life* (SACD)
Mendelssohn/Auryn Quartet &
Minguet Quartet *Octet op20 & Quartet
op44 no1* (DVD-Audio)
Mahler/Michael Tilson Thomas/San
Francisco Symphony Orchestra *Sixth
Symphony* (SACD)





MONITOR

COMPONENT VIDEO

IN

OUT

DBS/SAT

IN

TV

Y

PB/CB

PR/CR

Y

PB/CB

PR/CR

Y

PB/CB

PR/CR

MONITOR

COMPONENT VIDEO

OUT

S-VIDEO

1-MONITOR-2

OUT

VCR-1

VCR-2

VCR-3

DBS/SAT

V.AUX

VCR-1

VCR-2

VCR-3

VIDEO

S/NO. 1101500615

AUDIO

IN

OUT

IN

OUT

PRE OUT

PHONO

TUNER

CD

DVD

VDP

TV

DBS/SAT

V.AUX

VCR-1

VCR-2

VCR-3

VCR-1

VCR-2

VCR-3

IN CDR/TAPE

OUT CDR/TAPE

MULTI ZONE

L

R

IN DIGITAL

COAXIAL

OPTICAL

OUT



DENON AVC-A11SR AMPLIFIER £1,800 ☎ 01234 741200 🌐 www.denon.co.uk

A feature-packed amp, but does its sound match its benchmark big brother?

The AVC-A11SR is number two in the Denon hierarchy, about 10kg and £1,200 short of the flagship AVR-A1SR (it weighs 20.5kg and costs £1,800). Power is down too, but at 125 watts per channel (eight ohms 20Hz-20kHz, 0.05% THD) it remains a genuinely potent amp on paper, and it lives up to the promise in practice. Although the rating only applies to channels driven in pairs, in the real world the AVC-A11SR has real drive and authority at high levels with the test system, with 5.1 channels driven. The Denon also has an extra pair of speaker outputs, for 7.1 channel surround, or for use in a multi-source context.

The AVC-A11SR is THX Ultra certified, and was the world's first with DTS 96/24, and also the first with DTS ES discrete 6.1 and Dolby Pro Logic II with THX post processing. It also offers Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS Neo:6, with digital horsepower provided by two Ultra Analog 21162 Hammerhead 32-bit SCARC processors, combined with proprietary DDSC-D (Dynamic Discrete Surround Decoder-Digital) circuitry,

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

Flexible amp combining lots of civilised power, highly specified digital processing and class-leading D/A conversion. In its element with home cinema material, it's weaker as a surrogate for a purist stereo amp.

CHECKLIST	
DOLBY DIGITAL EX	✓
DTS ES	✓
DTS 96/24	✓
DPL II/DTS NEO:6	✓
THX ULTRA	✓
CHANNELS	7.1
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE IN	8

similar to the flagship model. All digital inputs can perform 24-bit/96kHz arithmetic with Alpha processing performed by the DSP to eliminate zero-cross distortion. Three wideband component video inputs are available, a facility mainly for progressive US Region 1 sources, but progressive is finally about to break in the UK too. Some powerful video bypass and 'straight line' audio features (Direct, Pure Direct and Tone Defeat) can be invoked when not using multichannel video sources, and the line inputs have an extended frequency response – up to 100kHz, for high-res audio sources.

This is an easy amplifier to set up and to drive, with a powerful on-screen menu system, though visually it is unimpressive, and the front panel fluorescent display is not one of the best. The remote control is a programmable point and squirt design, with a small LCD display to show which component is being addressed out of a total of eight, and other related status information. On the whole this is a well designed handset, with sensible control

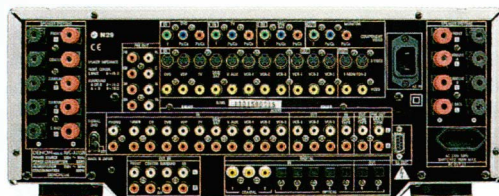
grouping and good use of colour to differentiate between control sets.

The AVC-A11SE works well as a stereo amplifier with the relevant bypasses engaged. There's plenty of power, the bass is solid and deep, and overall sound quality is essentially neutral tonally. That said, music reproduces with a rather dry and graceless feel, with some suggestion of spatially flat imagery detracting a little with at least some recordings. Tracy Chapman for example sounded lightweight, and the Brahms *Requiem* recording was upfront, but lacking clear differentiation between the different string and vocal sections. Sound quality holds up well through the digital inputs however, and bypassing your CD player's D/A converter may well provide an overall improvement in sound quality.

It is with multichannel, and in particular DVD-Video sources, that the AVC-A11SR really strikes out on its own. Spatial processing is audibly better than most, giving smooth and well focused imaging with Dolby Digital and DTS material alike, especially with moving sound sources. There is also a strong sense of soundstage presence, and a particularly well anchored feel with big-sounding recordings like the soundtrack to *Terminator 2*. Overall, the AVC-A11SR is thoroughly cinematographic in feel, and the slight loss of subtlety noted with CD and other stereo sources is less of a factor in the wider multichannel universe. **C**

SOCKETRY & CONTROLS

The Denon remembers the control settings for each input, which means the mass of controls under the front panel flap can mostly be ignored. There is adequate flexibility round the back for systems of arbitrary complexity, including three component inputs and an RS-232C control connector.





JVC RX-DP10RSL RECEIVER £900 ☎ 0870 330 5000 🌐 www.jvc.co.uk

Bells and whistles aplenty, but sonically this JVC is a mixed bag

The 7.1 channel RX-DP10RSL is a powerful, and fully equipped THX Ultra receiver rated at 120 watts (six channels, RMS eight ohms, 1kHz, 0.2% THD) and equipped with a 45-preset FM-RDS and MW tuner. An extensive feature list includes Dolby EX and DTS ES. A different source can be played in a second room, but when using the second zone speakers, the main room surround rear speaker pair is automatically deactivated.

The JVC's proprietary D/A processing employs upsampling from 44.1kHz sources 'for a more natural sound' – an oversimplification, and generally not justified by results. A DSP-generated 3D headphone circuit is also fitted, also proprietary rather than Dolby Headphone. The range of in and outputs is naturally more restricted than with the more costly models in the group, and only one of the five digital inputs is coaxial (there's no coaxial digital output). Although an AV input is fitted to the front panel, it accepts analogue audio signals only. Three band parametric equalisers are fitted for each speaker group (centre, main etc). An analogue input is available for high-resolution multichannel sources, and there are two component video inputs.

JVC has gone to some lengths to integrate the RX-DP10RSL with other JVC components by channelling CD and MD Text to the TV display, synchronising power on/off operations, and providing automatic source selection using the Compu-Link circuitry. The

remote control is a learning design with an RF output for Zone 2 use, which works through walls.

The JVC RX-DP10RSL is not the most transparent amplifier in the group by any means, but it's superior to the similarly priced Onkyo. It generally manages to sound authoritative and tuneful with music and film soundtracks alike, while retaining a measure of smoothness and character in its reproduction of vocal and instrumental timbre. There is some tailing off at high volumes, and the sound acquired a harsh edge when it was taken beyond 'moderately loud' in the test listening room. With a restraining hand on the tiller, however, this JVC is more than good enough to show that two-channel CD can play the socks off the multichannel data-reduced Dolby and DTS codecs – low performance home cinema amps often ride roughshod over the differences. Most impressive of all is the way the JVC rises to the occasion with large scale recordings. Material as different as the introduction to Brahms' *Requiem*

SOCKETRY & CONTROLS

No attempt has been made to rationalise the front panel controls, or (worse) the backlit remote control, which sprouts a bewildering array of poorly differentiated and labelled buttons. The rear panel is tidy enough however, and includes various proprietary Compu-Link sockets for system integration purposes.

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

The JVC offers a lot of raw power and ability for a very fair price, but consistently sounds best in its stripped down form which highlights the excessive range of unnecessary features.

CHECKLIST	
DOLBY DIGITAL EX	✓
DTS ES	✓
DTS 96/24	✗
DPL II / DTS NEO:6	✓
THX ULTRA	✓
CHANNELS	7.1
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE IN	8

and *Terminator 2* each sounded appropriately menacing and oppressive.

The JVC also impresses when driven by the multichannel SACD player – its smooth, wide ranging sound is easy and attractive to listen to. But this is not a particularly transparent design. Predictably it is at its best with analogue inputs, and with the 'line direct' switch engaged, which bypasses various internal circuits, including the parametric equaliser. The CC (Compensative Compression) Converter upsampling circuit adds a certain sweetness and repose to the sound, but also adds an undesirable veil. It gives a detached quality, and doesn't provide the claimed naturalness.

On balance there is just a little too much emphasis on tacked-on features of little intrinsic value, and which often actively impede sound quality. The array of DSP acoustic modes is surely redundant, the second room power amp detracts from main room performance and the equaliser and upsampling algorithm are demonstrably far from transparent. ☹





MARANTZ SR9200 RECEIVER £2,000 ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

Heavyweight contender impresses with both music and film soundtracks

The flagship Marantz SR9200 is well endowed, tipping the scales at nearly 20kg, and there are some unusual features, notably Scart socketry. A Scart input takes a feed from a video source, and an output patches into the TV. This allows the Marantz to talk to your TV display using RGB, which is visibly superior to S-Video over longer cable runs.

The trade-off is no component input, which is of little account in most cases, but a potential liability when progressive scan wends its way onto the European market, any day now. But component sources can be wired directly to the display device, probably a plasma screen or projector for progressive video.

As usual at this relatively high price level, it is easier to list the surround sound algorithms that are missing than those that are present. The only really notable omissions are DTS 96/24, the process designed to give near DVD-Audio performance from suitably encoded DVD-Video discs, and THX Ultra2 (it is already THX Ultra compliant). There are plans to add the

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



One of the true heavyweights in every sense, the Marantz majors on its UK customisation (Scart, LW etc), high output power and a slightly restrained, yet warm, attractive and articulate sound quality.

CHECKLIST

DOLBY DIGITAL EX	✓
DTS ES	✓
DTS 96/24	x
DPL II/DTS NEO:6	✓
THX ULTRA	✓
CHANNELS	7.1
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE IN	6

latter as a chargeable software upgrade, but although it should be technically feasible, there is no news on DTS 96/24.

The Marantz is HDCD compliant, and is also equipped with a well specified analogue tuner which includes LW as well as MW and FM with RDS. Up to 50 stations can be preset in random order, with tuning by an edgewise weighted rotary control, a welcome luxury. Supporting features include second room/second zone operation, with two power amplifiers assignable to the second room, or to the main one for 7.1 channel playback.

With a power amplifier section rated at 7x140 watts (8 ohms <0/5% THD 20Hz – 20kHz), the SR9200 is predictably powerful, and the current feedback amplifier runs surprisingly cool under an open throttle. At high volumes the Marantz sounds a little compressed, and even at more everyday volumes it is characteristically slightly soft, laid-back and perhaps lacking some bravado at times. On the other hand, it is strong on subtlety, detail and warmth – qualities that tend to favour

music sources in particular, whether stereo or multichannel, and this showed clearly during the audition.

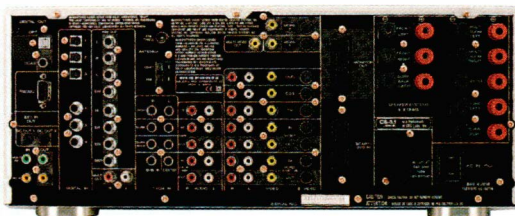
The Marantz is a good stereo amp, essentially the equal of a strong mid-market stereo model, and it was no less impressive with high-resolution multichannel music on DVD-A and SACD. Its performance with the test reference Mordaunt-Short loudspeaker system was agile and expressive with the *Mahler 6* (multichannel SACD) and tuneful and punchy with the Marc Cohn recording (stereo CD), displaying a level of consistency and a sense of warmth and fullness unusual in an integrated AV receiver.

Home cinema material is handled with equal aplomb. The SR9200 has enough resolving power to illustrate the inherent differences between Dolby Digital and DTS – both reproduce an enveloping soundfield, with smooth steering and good image focus, but DTS on the whole has a tendency to sound more organic, and to reproduce more image depth.

Dolby Pro Logic II processing was found to add considerable spice to Dolby Surround encoded material on VHS tape and off-air. But the digital inputs, powered by 24/192kHz Crystal DAC on each channel, in dual differential mode when operating in stereo, are not as transparent as, say, the £3,000 Denon AVC-A1SR – this was assessed by switching between analogue and digital inputs from the reference CD and DVD players. 🗣

SOCKETRY & CONTROLS

The most surprising inclusion is the pair of Scart sockets, one an input and the other an output. Although component video is not included, there is a front panel input behind the flap, multiroom connections, an RS232 interface and triggers for system control.





ONKYO TX-SR700E RECEIVER £800

01788 573100 www.onkyo.net

Onkyo's latest sub-£1,000 model is easy to use but a so-so performer

ostensibly, this amplifier offers most of the important features of many more costly amplifiers. In addition to regular 5.1 channel Dolby Digital and DTS, the TX-SR700E includes Dolby EX and DTS ES, and like all well dressed amplifiers it does Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS Neo:6 too, though it lacks DTS 96/24. But not all is as it seems. The 120 watts per channel power rating is referred to as a six ohm load DIN at 1kHz, which means somewhere around 100 watts when more stringently specified. The reduced power reserves are underlined by the Onkyo's weight, 'just' 13.5kg. The extended versions of Dolby and DTS (EX and ES) are also not quite what they seem, as the TX-SR700E is limited to a single mono surround rear channel. Even the loudspeaker sockets are not what they appear, as they don't easily accept 4mm plugs – contradicting the claim in Onkyo's literature.

There are four digital inputs, only one of which is coaxial; one of the three optical inputs is fitted alongside analogue audio and video connections on the front panel, allowing for quick and easy patching to a camcorder or a MiniDisc recorder. An analogue input is available for high-resolution multichannel sources, and there are two component inputs. Other features include a 12V trigger, automatic and manual input source selection (not unusual at the price, and standard with more costly models), switchable LFE crossover frequency settings, and a wide range of DSP soundfields. Unlike the

other models in our group, the Onkyo is not THX certified. Instead, a so-called Cinema Filter reduces HF levels to compensate for mixes that sound on the bright side because they were balanced for theatrical use.

Although the front panel looks rather messy at first sight, it does allow quick access to many of its settings, and it becomes surprisingly helpful after a little practice. The backlit remote control is simpler than the others in the test group, but it is well laid out and is also a very useable tool.

If only that pattern had carried through on audition. In stereo mode the Onkyo proves rather disappointing, with rough audio textures and a lack of real foundation to the sound. The bass is there all right, but seemed to carry little weight or projection through the test system. Instrumental textures sound upfront and aggressive, giving a superficial impression of good detail, but closer listening shows that it is not true detail, more a superimposed patina of roughness. Imagery also seems rather odd, as though there is some interaction between channels – speaker

SOCKETRY & CONTROLS

Standout back panel feature is the brightly coloured loudspeaker terminals that won't easily accept industry standard 4mm plugs. There's no RS232 interface either. But the apparently messy front panel control layout gives the user a lot of control without needing to rummage through nested on-screen menus.

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

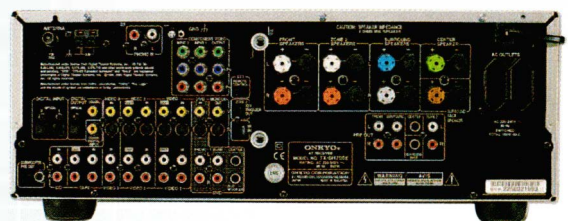
Good features and a powerful user interface are coupled to an audio section that is narrow in dynamic range and imagery, and rough in texture and tonality.

CHECKLIST	
DOLBY DIGITAL EX	✓
DTS ES	✓
DTS 96/24	✗
DPL II/DTS NEO:6	✓
THX ULTRA CHANNELS	✗
MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE IN	6.1

phasing was duly rechecked when this problem was identified, but it appears to be a characteristic of the amp.

There is some improvement with multichannel music and movies, as the extra speakers provide some averaging and make the shortcomings less immediately audible. But despite perfectly adequate steering through the Dolby and DTS decoders, imagery is curiously small in scale and unexpansive. The sound isn't very responsive dynamically either. It goes loud when impelled, but in a curiously uncommitted way, and there is little real drive in the sound when the horses are unleashed.

The Brahms *Requiem* test piece (on CD) sounded cluttered and a little aggressive – quite out of character for this exquisitely passionate and lushly scored piece of music. Somehow the Onkyo carries more conviction with film soundtracks, perhaps because they often drive the system harder towards the frequency extremes, and perhaps because both the Dolby and DTS codecs tend to mask some of the recording's shortcomings. ☹



AV AMPS CONCLUSIONS

Do these serious multichannel solutions perform as well with music as they do with movies?

Taking a step back and comparing this group with the best of their type irrespective of price is instructive. The losses of functionality and power are obvious enough, but what is often overlooked is that designs like the ones tested generally can't be upgraded in the way that is increasingly possible with high-end models, though THX Ultra2 is apparently a future possibility for the Marantz SR9200. None offers an automated set-up routine

TRY THEM WITH THESE

DVD PLAYERS

PIONEER DV-656A £400

Thus 'universal player' is compatible with DVD-Audio and SACD discs as well as DVD-Video and SACD, and delivers very respectably in all areas.

DENON DVD-3800 £1,000

A DVD-Audio/Video player with excellent picture and sound, and a good CD player to boot.

MARANTZ DV-125I £2,500

Superb DVD-Audio player which is close to state of the art as a CD player too – a real rarity.

MULTICHANNEL LOUSPEAKER PACKAGES

B&W DM600 S3 £900

With 602s at the front and 601s at the rear, this great value package does the business with stereo and multichannel.

KEF Q7 £1,400

With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished, and amazing value.

JMLAB ELECTRA £3,017

Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency, and easy to grow with an added subwoofer.


HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Never place other components immediately on top of an amplifier.
- ⊕ While following the broad set-up advice given by the maker, more natural results can often result simply by turning the rear channels down a little.
- ⊕ The best amps/processors can upgrade the performance of wilting CD players by taking a digital output to the amp's DAC.
- ⊕ Before getting down to serious listening, allow half an hour or so warm-up time in order to achieve the best sound quality.
- ⊕ Use all available bypasses (eg video bypass when using audio only, 'direct' when playing CDs).
- ⊕ Dim, or turn off display once set-up is completed.

comparable to the very effective system now provided by Pioneer in the £2,700 VSA-AX10, and the whole area of 'human engineering' is ripe for further development.

More significant, however, is that on the whole the models tested here simply don't perform as well even

when used in stripped-down form as simple analogue stereo amplifiers, either in stereo or in surround via their multichannel inputs. The best of the group sonically is the Marantz, but even it struggles to achieve the standard of sound quality that their own middle

ranking stereo amps routinely achieve. When playing two-channel music from CD, there is little to mask what's happening to the sound. With complex multichannel digital/analogue hybrids like these, there's no getting around the fact that you get what you pay for. 

STAR AV RECEIVER

MARANTZ SR9200

None of the models tested provides an unbeatable overall package, but if sound quality takes precedence over features, the Marantz is the clear winner. The UK-customisation is a clear benefit, though it is not ultimately decisive, but its warm, open and engaging sound quality over a wide range of power levels sets it apart from most AV amplifiers.



AV AMPS AND RECEIVERS AT A GLANCE

	Denon	JVC	Marantz	Onkyo
MAKE	Denon	JVC	Marantz	Onkyo
MODEL	AVC-A11SR	RX-DP10RSL	SR9200	TX-RR700E
PRICE	£1,800	£900	£2,000	£800
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
CONCLUSIONS	Superb spatial processing combined with powerful, though slightly opaque audio quality.	A solid and affordable, if rather too feature laden THX Ultra receiver. Unimpressive with music.	Powerful, cool-running UK customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality.	Raw tonality and cluttered imagery spoil an otherwise interesting receiver.
THX Select/ Ultra/ Ultra2	Ultra	Ultra	Ultra	×
2-way LCD touch screen r/c	×	×	✓	×
Multichannel analogue input	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multi-zone, multi-source	✓	✓	✓	✓
Front panel input	×	✓	✓	✓



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BeauhornTM

The Beauhorn Virtuosos simply manage to make music of all kinds more interesting and involving than conventional speakers.

Paul Messenger Hi-Fi+

Once you get the location and toe-in right the B2 is very definitely a Beauhorn. It has the same tactile immediacy and directness that its more sophisticated elder brother possesses.

Roy Gregory Hi-Fi+

**get that Beauhorn sensation -
the feeling that you are there**



The world according to... **ARCAM**

Over thirty years ago, a group of hi-fi boffins banded together to have wild times designing and making the best audio equipment they could. Then they discovered how to sell it...

Cambridge, the late sixties. Undergraduate John Dawson is secretary of the Cambridge University Taping Society. Mostly it's a front. CUTS is actually a coven of hi-fi enthusiasts. What will be called the Cambridge phenomenon in years to come is just beginning to explore its cradle.

In one of the myriad deals struck between the town's bright young aspiring entrepreneurs, Dawson persuades Clive Sinclair to let him have a batch of parts to build the revolutionary new Sinclair pocket calculator and sell it around the university.

Dawson's penchant for retailing soon embraces audio equipment. Later it turns to designing it. With partner Chris Evans – now boss of Myryad – he starts to develop semi-pro hardware for Allan & Heath and moves the operation from a small house into an attic called French's Mill.

As well as pulling in the work, Dawson is establishing a work ethic that will stay with him for

the next 25 years. It shouldn't break, especially in the field.

Dawson takes up the story: "We decided we'd build a hi-fi amplifier in which everything would go on one circuit board, including the pots (which we bought from Sinclair because they were winding down their hi-fi production – perfectly good pots). We'd use three transistors, even though the standard book design said use two. And put a toroidal

"What we discovered is that AV moves so fast, no sooner have you designed the thing than it's obsolete – a real nightmare."

transformer in because they were better and there was quite an industry making them locally. It all went into a fairly simple metal box. We called it the A60.

"We thought we'd build 50 of them and sell them to our friends, but our friends introduced us to dealers. I remember sticking the second unit we'd ever built under my arm and taking it round a few London dealers. Grahams, bless 'em, were wonderfully supportive. They played the unit and said 'yes, it's better than the NAD and, no, it's not as good as this Naim thing we have'.

"Actually, over ten years we built 32,000. And we can still fix them. I personally fixed my hairdresser's friend's one the other day – replaced the reservoir capacitors and it was as good as new. It was a great design, it was very reliable and it was the foundation of the company. And, of course, we could do it on a shoestring because we were used to living as students on

potatoes and air. But it gave us enough money to build up from three or four people to a dozen or 15 in this attic. And we actually took over the whole area and ended up with about 20 people there in 1980."

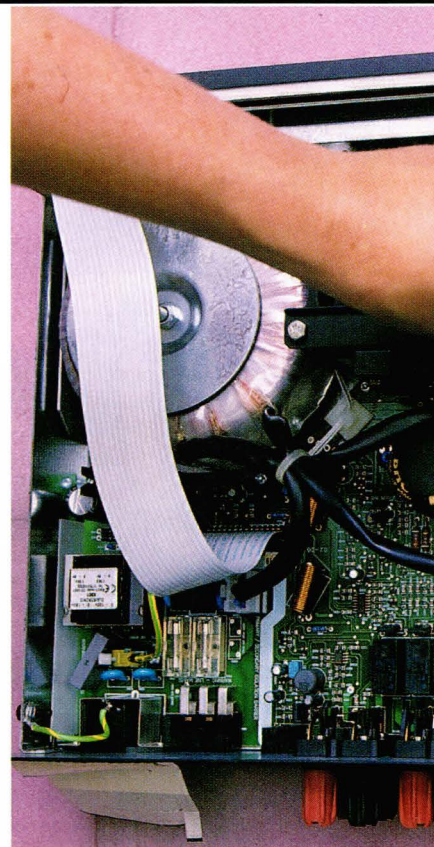
IN TO WIN

Today, Arcam – a clever diminution of the original A&R Cambridge concocted to end the confusion with American speaker brand

Acoustic Research (AR) – has an annual turnover of £12 million and employs around 100 people, a very high 17 per cent of whom work in R&D. North America is Arcam's biggest market, but the slightly more expensive FMJ range does particularly well in Japan and Germany.

"It's a sign of the times," reflects Dawson. "We had no software engineers when we started. None in the eighties. From the nineties we were starting to put micro-processors into products, which we had to program ourselves. By the late nineties we had a full time software engineer. And now, in 2002, we have five software engineers.

"We felt we had to start experimenting in the AV business and we've built a number of AV products with some modest success from Dolby Pro-Logic onwards. Our first Pro-Logic amp was called the Zeta One. What we rapidly discovered is that AV



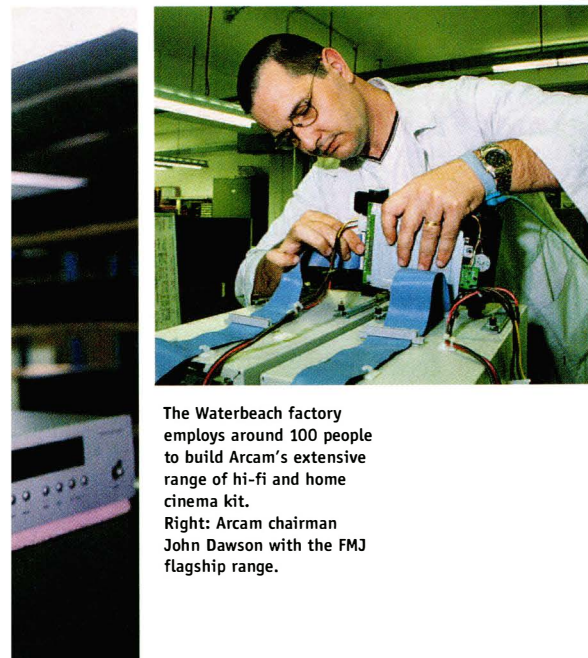
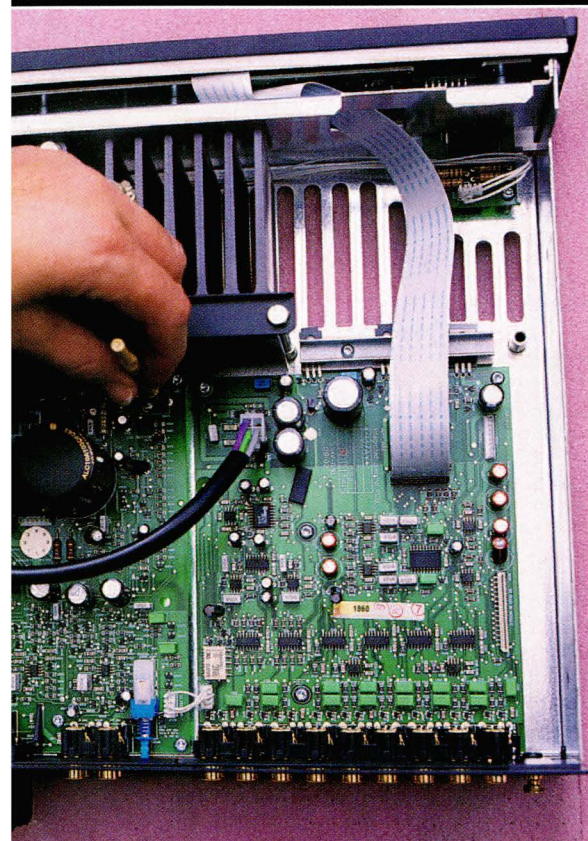
Past Glories

A&R A60

The classic integrated amp that put John Dawson and his team on the map. His aim with the A60 was to take out all the flaws (the rival Cambridge Audio P60 was somewhat fragile), an amp you could take out of the box, plug in and it would do the job. Reliability became the foundation stone of Arcam's philosophy.

ARCAM ALPHA 8

The Alpha 8 sat in the middle of Arcam's late-nineties CD line-up. It used a 20-bit PWM DAC and Sony transport mechanism, with a separate analogue circuit board mounted on a rigid aluminium platform to reduce the effects of vibration. Styling was typical of Arcam's curvy period but both build and sound quality were excellent.



The Waterbeach factory employs around 100 people to build Arcam's extensive range of hi-fi and home cinema kit. Right: Arcam chairman John Dawson with the FMJ flagship range.



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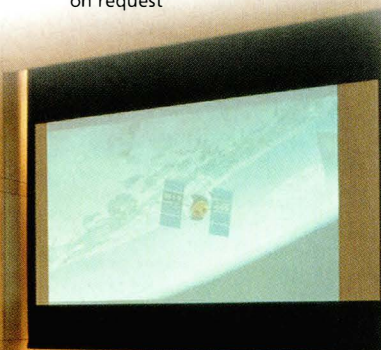
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moves so fast, no sooner have you designed the thing than it's obsolete – a real nightmare.

"In the last year or two we've grasped the nettle a bit harder by working with a Far Eastern partner on mid-market receivers, which led to the AVR 100 and 200. But then we decided we had to do an AV product really properly ourselves and that's what's turned into this humungous AV8 project and its giant companion power amp. (See review, page 40.) It's an entirely in-house project that's occupied a lot of engineers for a lot of time and cost upwards of \$1 million in pure R&D, which is a lot of money for a company of our size.

"It costs nearly £3,000 but we take the view that if you offer the customer absolute performance, he'll probably pay for it. If you offer not quite as good a performance for somewhat less money you probably won't get any sales. It's a 'you've got to be there or not at all' type of market. We have video engineers here as well as audio engineers and that's been the great strength for getting more advanced than most of the competition. It's part of the DVD legacy too; being able to put a lot of specialist knowledge into that."

SUCCESS STORY

It sounds like a classic success story. But an under-capitalised Arcam's future didn't look too rosy in the mid-eighties, as Dawson relates: "Ownership of the company changed when we had to recapitalise. Chris Evans left and we had to restructure to carry on. We did that by putting some of the money into venture capital and by throwing our full weight behind CD. The first junior Alpha prototype had just been done and it became the framework for a very successful range. We wanted to have a more entry-level range and that was the starting point.

"We realised that the way forward probably wasn't going to be a turntable, more speakers or another amplifier but this CD thing. The view we took was we'd seen a couple of other companies badging up regular CD players



Arcam employs up to 17 per cent of its staff in research and development, constantly working on new designs to feed the production line.

(Philips) and doing a successful job. But my view was that, as an engineering-led company, we should actually buy the bits, buy the licence (\$25,000), learn how to use these players and build them. After Meridian, we were the next company to do that. We saw what Meridian were doing – we were good friends with them.

"We were the first to use the Philips 16-bit chipset. This was a good move because it was better than 14-bit and it had a digital output. Our first CD player was the Delta 70. There was a matching amp called the Delta 90. They had metal fronts, all-aluminium chassis and some quite advanced stuff in them. Delta 70 hit the spot, priced £500 retail (which would be about £1,200 today) but it gave a lot of

dealers who were uncomfortable about selling CD – a lot of Linn dealers, in particular – a chance to sell something. I remember our friends at Grahams shifting unbelievable numbers. It wasn't a flawless player but it didn't have a lot of the digital edge a lot of players had at that time because we engineered it a bit better – even with the limited knowledge we had at that time."

Next up was one of Arcam's best loved products: an outboard DAC at an affordable price, the memorably named Black Box. "I remember taking one home and playing a couple of CDs I liked and getting goose bumps," Dawson recalls. "It was clearly better than the CD player." And an immediate hit. Arcam sold 5,000 Black Boxes in nine months and, by the end, production has crept well into five figures.

"Gradually the market slowed

down and eventually we walked away from it," recalls Dawson. "But by then we'd discovered how to make one-box CD players really first class. We've sold at least a quarter of a million of them, probably rather more, in the time we've been making them. So that's been a great business for us and we've continued to develop it and learn our trade and work with Philips and latterly Sony to hone those designs.

"I believe our company offers exceptional value for money for what it does. We're a little bit less afraid of asking more money for a product these days. When we built the first Alpha amp it was very much built down to a price. It had a frame transformer and this naturally coloured plastic front, which some people didn't like. When we painted the front black and fitted a toroidal transformer on the next generation we put the price up and sold more. There's a very clear lesson. People will pay for performance. And so we try to shoot for that performance and not cripple ourselves, if we can avoid it, by charging the lowest possible price." ☺

☎ Arcam 01223 203203

🌐 www.arcam.co.uk

Current Key Products



ARCAM AVR200 HFC 229

Not your typical AV receiver. Home cinema buffs may want a bit more low frequency muscle and a few more bells and whistles. But this good looking £800 box plays music better than most and is still highly competent with movies.

ARCAM DIVA DV88 PLUS

Arcam has positioned itself right at the cutting edge when it comes to DVD performance, but the £1,000 DV88 Plus is the first machine to provide 625p Progressive Scan video output from Region 2 PAL discs. It means better projector and plasma picture quality from UK release DVDs – a genuinely ground-breaking product.

ARCAM DIVA A85 HFC 214

The £800 DiVA A85 integrated stereo amp offers a skillful mix of impressively weighty material value, plush specification, very grown-up control systems (software-driven definable volume display and relative input gain, for instance) and 85 watts per channel.



COMPONENTS

Under the lid, the PRE G2's circuit layout uses carefully selected components throughout. For optimum performance, Audionet makes all its own operational amplifiers and signal cables. Volume is controlled by an electronically switched precision resistor network, linearised in real-time. Signal paths and control functions are optically decoupled.

All units use miniature surface-mount components to optimise high frequency performance, all signal paths are as short as possible and free from relays or chokes, and construction is magnetically and capacitively optimised. The AMP II MAX input stage is a double differential amplifier using low-noise double FETs. Double bootstrapping decouples these from an output stage of eight power MOSFETs.



MAX Power

Audionet is a high-end brand brought to the UK by Wilson Benesch.

We love the ART V2 CD player, but how does its flagship pre/power amp perform?

VERDICT

Audionet PRE G2/AMP II MAX pre/power amp combo
£13,800

⊕ Feels, looks and sounds exceptionally solid and powerful. Preamp is very well conceived, with sensible features and a classy handset.

⊖ Balance is very neutral but a shade polite and restrained: could be more delicate, incisive and transparent at the top end.

⊙ **CONCLUSION**
 Fine all-round powerhouse of an amp with great drive and drama, but a slightly restrained and cautious top end.

KEY FEATURES

⊕ Solid, stylish, remote

⊕ Dimensions: preamp – 43x14x42cm (WxHxD)

⊕ Dimensions: power amp – 21.5x28.5x50cm (WxHxD)

⊕ Double-mono preamp has five single-ended phono input pairs plus a pair of balanced XLRs

⊕ Free-running electronic volume control

⊕ Preamp allows the display to be dimmed or turned off

⊕ Power amps have mammoth ratings of 400/700/1,100 watts into 8/4/2 ohms respectively

⊕ Balanced XLR and single-ended phono inputs

⊕ Two pairs of WBT 4mm speaker sockets/binders

A leading German practitioner of the art of hi-fi electronics, Audionet makes no apology for taking a technology-led approach, describing its philosophy as: “an engineering solution to an emotional pursuit”.

The stereo amplifier system reviewed here consists of the £6,300 PRE G2 preamp plus two of the £7,500 per pair AMP II MAX monoblock power amps, both representing the most costly models that Audionet makes in their respective categories.

The pre and power amps supplied have little in common visually. The PRE G2 follows the standard ‘full width’ (430mm) format and is a homage to discretion and non-reflective matt black. AMP II MAX, however, is a ‘half-width’ component, just 215mm wide, with a shiny silver front panel. In fact both are available in either black or silver finish, and most combinations will go for one or the other, rather than a mixture.

Both components are unusually deep, especially the power amps, which in this MAX form stand quite tall too. Finding suitable matching furniture could prove tricky, not just to accommodate the unusual shapes, but also the massive 68kg (2x 34kg) of the monoblocks, and to provide adequate ventilation for the waste heat.

Weighing a substantial 18kg itself, the preamp is constructed in a rigorous double-mono layout so that inputs and outputs for the left channel occupy the left hand half of the back panel – those for the right channel are on the right.

It’s a line-level-only affair, with six inputs – five on regular single-ended phono pairs, the sixth using balanced XLR sockets. Outputs include regular and inverted phase phono pairs, a monitor-out pair (for recording), plus two pairs of balanced XLRs. (WB’s Craig Milnes favours using the simpler, single-ended connection, on sound quality grounds.)

The front panel has a single free-running electronic (constantly rotating) volume control, four poorly labelled buttons, and a usefully legible and flexible two-line alphanumeric display. A chunky,

“Unquestionably among the best sounding amplifiers we’ve heard here at Hi-Fi Choice, the Audionet is fundamentally a very confident combo.”

hefty and elegant remote duplicates all the functions, and is rather easier to use.

Besides input selection, volume (in 1dB steps) and mute, the preamp allows the display to be dimmed or turned off, the individual inputs to be labelled, and their relative sensitivities to be preset across a 12dB range. There’s a balance control, but no mono mode. Microprocessors keep everything under tight control, and users will become accustomed to the chatter of relays as one switches the components on or off, or changes between inputs.

Rated at a massive 400/700/1,100 watts into 8/4/2 ohms respectively, the power amps have balanced XLR and single-ended phono inputs, and two pairs of WBT 4mm speaker socket/binders, to assist bi-wiring. There are small alphanumeric displays here too, giving status and peak-power read-outs.

PERFORMANCE

Unquestionably among the best sounding amplifiers we’ve heard here at *Hi-Fi Choice*, the Audionet is fundamentally a very confident combo. It’s confident in the way it powers up, confident in its studied neutrality, confident in the way it drives the most difficult of loads, confident in its lack of

fuss and temperament, and distinctly confident too in the way it transmits confidence to the user.

Besides that unflappable spirit, this amplifier sounds very solid, well balanced and coherent. It has notably firm and clean bass, goes exceptionally loud without distress, and shows unusually close phase accuracy, which in turn provides very good stereo image focus and location precision.

The only fly in the ointment would appear to be that there does seem to be a slight lack of ‘sparkle’ and ‘air’ at the top end of the audio band. That last vestige of fine detail and transparency seems to be a little too reticent here, as if the amplifier was trying a little too hard not to cause offence. By the same token, percussive instruments – including piano – lack a little drama and ‘bite’. Played loud, the impact of a rim shot should make one blink, but that doesn’t really happen here.

On balance, the Audionet does tend to err a little on the side of politeness sonically, but cymbals are caressed with great subtlety and delicacy, and the general feeling of solidity is very reassuring overall. This is also a very pleasant unit to use. The remote handset has a nice feel and is very positive in operation, while the preamp has sensible facilities and features, providing good feedback from its generous display, and the power amps have seemingly inexhaustible reserves of headroom and power. ⊕


📞 Wilson Benesch 0114 285 2656
 🌐 www.audionet.de

ALSO CONSIDER

AUDIO RESEARCH LS25/VT100 £12,199
 Not so much a fine valve amplifier as a fine amplifier full stop – now in MkII form.

MARK LEVINSON No380/No344 £9,490
 Preamp has precision and warmth plus unusual configurability. Power has authority and transparency to spare.

NAIM NAC552/NAP500 £22,745
 Extravagantly priced and idiosyncratically connected, but the delightfully delicate sound is musically very informative.



Beryllium has the highest stiffness-to-density ratio on the planet (much higher than aluminium or titanium), making it ideal for tweeter diaphragms.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



"By the end of day one, I was inexorably coming to the conclusion that this was the finest pair of speakers to ever grace my listening room."

EXCLUSIVE

Height of excellence

JBL has gone back to its roots with this defiantly different, but undoubtedly awesome überspeaker

VERDICT

**JBL K2 S9800
loudspeaker
£20,000**

Wonderful dynamics, dynamic range and resolution, superb neutrality and enormous headroom. Music-making comes so naturally to these magnificent monsters.

Big and bulky looking, especially from the front, and a very expensive proposition by any standards.

CONCLUSION

Awesome. Can't bear the thought of losing them. Extraordinary subtlety and textures, especially with acoustic and orchestral material.

KEY FEATURES

Essentially a giant two-way, with added super-tweeter above 10kHz

15-inch (381mm) paper-coned bass/mid driver

Three-inch (76mm) beryllium dome upper midrange driver, loaded by a 90x50 degree bi-radial horn

One-inch (25.4mm) beryllium diaphragm super-tweeter, loaded by a 30x60 degree bi-radial horn

Cabinet: 25mm MDF combined with Sonoglass resin

Battery used to pre-bias main capacitors, so avoiding crossover distortions

Dimensions: 50x129x38cm (WxHxD)

Weight: 90kg (each)

JBL – the initials of the late James B Lansing – has been the biggest name in professional loudspeakers since the very earliest days. The man himself was involved when the 'talkies' first came to the movies way back in 1928, and the company he founded continues successfully to straddle the worlds of Pro audio and domestic hi-fi. It's now part of the Harman Group – the largest and most resourceful of the specialist hi-fi operators, and a real global operation.

The first K2s originally appeared in 1989, succeeding 1985's Everest. All, including these latest 90kg monsters (codenamed S9800) were originally and primarily developed for the Japanese home market, with which JBL has a rather special relationship. However, this K2 S9800 was formally launched to the international market, with a UK price of £20,000 per pair, at this year's Berlin Show.

The K2s are certainly very different from the sort of speakers normally encountered in Europe, or indeed, the US of A, though one can detect some historical precedents in a couple of JBL's past 'classics'. In a sense the K2 S9800 may be seen as an updated floorstanding variation on themes first set by the highly successful 4320 Studio Monitor, and its domestic L300 derivation, from the 1960s and 1970s.

The choice of drive units does much to determine a size and shape which is certainly unfashionably wide, tall and unavoidably intrusive, even though the standard of construction and finish is impeccable. Irregularly shaped and built from a mixture of 25mm MDF and Sonoglass resin, our samples came in a very classy but rather funereal high gloss dark charcoal grey with black highlights – light grey is an option.

This is essentially a giant two-way (although a third driver, acting mostly as a supertweeter, comes in above 10kHz, for the final audible octave plus ultrasonics). All three drive units are very unusual, nay, unique in the modern scheme of things. The bass and lower mid, right up to 800Hz (which means more than half the audible bandwidth, extending nearly two octaves above

middle C) is handled by a port-loaded 15-incher that uses a traditional paper pulp cone, foam surround and Alnico (aluminium/nickel/cobalt alloy) magnet. The materials might be nostalgia in excelsis, but the execution, especially the advanced motor design, is anything but.

A rather special horn driver then takes over for the three and a half octaves from 800Hz up to 10kHz. This has 90x50 degree bi-radial flares, driven from a three-inch (76mm) beryllium dome compression driver, codenamed 435Be.

On the top, the type 045Be super-tweeter has a one-inch (25.4mm) beryllium diaphragm, again horn-loaded by a 30x60 degree bi-radial horn. Beryllium is a very tricky metal to work, and nasty poisonous stuff to boot, but because it has the highest stiffness-to-density ratio on the planet – much higher than aluminium or titanium – it's ideal for tweeter diaphragms. JBL might be the first to use it, but it won't be the last.

The crossover has high-power air-cored inductors, and uniquely (and cleverly) uses a 9V PP9 battery to pre-bias the twinned capacitors, improving their linearity and avoiding 'crossover' distortions. Pre-sets allow subtle adjustments to the spectral balance.

MEASUREMENTS

Simply plonked down in the usual clear-of-wall location, the K2s easily delivered one of the smoothest and flattest in-room far-field averaged traces I've ever recorded, with a gently downtilted overall characteristic that looks close to ideal. They got lucky, true, as none of the subsequent alternative sites worked quite as well. There's actually a little too much output around 500Hz, and some unevenness above 7kHz, but this is still a very impressive result. Keep them well clear of walls, however, to avoid over-emphasising the mid-bass at the expense of the upper bass.

The absence of any notches is very noticeable, helped by the fact that the main horn runs from 800Hz right up to 10kHz, and therefore avoids the usual crossover difficulties located in the ultra-sensitive 2-4kHz presence zone.

Under 'real world' conditions, sensitivity registered around 93dB, very close to the manufacturer's specified 94dB, and substantially above the normal marketplace average – all the more so because the speaker provides a very easy amplifier load, which never falls below six ohms. Solid state amps work fine, of course, but the characteristics would seem ideally suited to lower power valve amps too.





BASS/MIDRANGE
Bass and lower mid is handled by port-loaded 15-incher that uses traditional paper pulp cone, foam surround and Alnico magnet.

UPPER MIDRANGE
90x50 degree bi-radial horn handles the three and a half octaves from 800Hz up to 10kHz, driven from a three-inch beryllium dome compression driver.

SUPER-TWEETER
The type 045Be super-tweeter has a one-inch (25.4mm) beryllium diaphragm, loaded by a 30x60 degree bi-radial horn.

BATTERY
The crossover uniquely uses a 9V PP9 battery to pre-bias the main capacitors, avoiding crossover distortions.

PERFORMANCE

First reactions were exceptionally good, so much so that, by the end of day one, I was inexorably coming to the conclusion that this was the finest pair of speakers to ever grace my listening room. All speakers involve a collection of compromises, and the K2 is no exception of course, but when it comes to adding up the pluses and subtracting the minuses, this speaker is massively in credit. For starters, it's exceptionally neutral and well balanced, and while that isn't a totally essential requirement for good quality, it definitely helps. Kept well clear of walls, the bass here is



Crossover presets allow subtle adjustments to the frequency response.

fulsome without in any way becoming overbearing, and also seems beautifully agile and free from overhang. It might not be the last word in grip or drive, but it knows how to carry a tune, and remains clean and clear, and notably even and unflappable, even when playing at silly levels. The K2's best trick, however, is the way it handles the micro-dynamics – the tiny low-level detail that conveys the subtle texture of massed orchestral strings, for example, or provides clues to the size of a choir or auditorium, and makes audience applause sound creepily realistic – even at very low levels. A

Radio 3 Prom, featuring Esa-Pekka Salonen and the LA Philharmonic playing Beethoven's *Ninth*, created gripping dynamic tension from the very first bars. A couple of opera-loving friends even commented that the overall dynamic range of the Karajan/BPO version of Verdi's *Othello* seemed wider than usual with these speakers.

That said, horns are not to everyone's taste, and some might find this speaker a little too ruthlessly revealing, preferring something a little more laid back and restrained. Certainly it does have some aggressive tendencies, especially when it's being worked hard, and takes no prisoners among poor quality software, sources or amps. But its ability to 'suck in' the listener, and create involvement in even unfamiliar material is, in this listener's experience, unparalleled.

Horns are the audio equivalent of a magnifying lens, giving high gain (ie sensitivity/efficiency) at the expense of a relatively narrow angle of dispersion/distribution. One effect is a greater ratio of direct to room-reflected sound than one encounters with conventional direct radiator designs – in this respect the K2 is much more like the Tannoy TD12 than the B&W Nautilus 800, for example.

This in turn contributes to the very precise imaging, with fine phase coherence, impressive transparency and convincing depth perspectives. The two drivers covering the top half of the audio band are set slightly above seated ear height, adding attractive extra height to the proceedings.

The K2's driver complement might be totally unconventional in today's market context, with a pretty unfashionable size and shape too. But it has strong historical precedent on its side, delivers a thoroughly impressive measurement set, and sounds absolutely wonderful too. It's a shame the high price will put it beyond most people's reach. 📍

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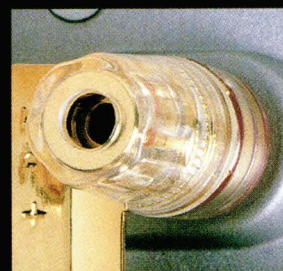
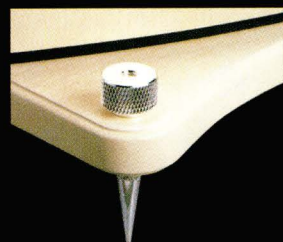
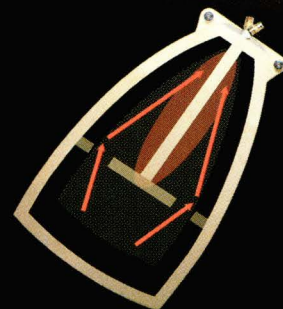
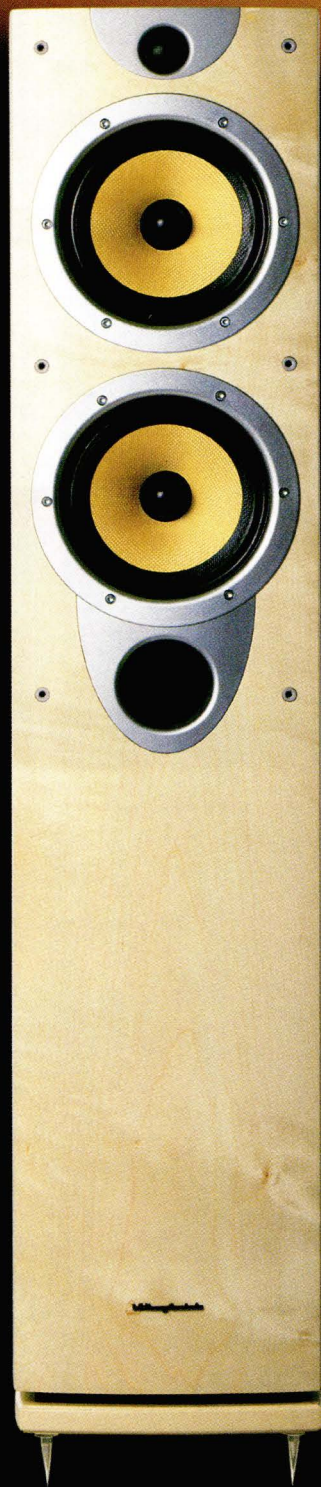
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EXCLUSIVE

Swedish style

Matching the S1 CD player for charm, does the S-100 integrated have the same class?

Think solid; that's the first impression of the Swedish Advantage S-100 line-level integrated amplifier. Solid, heavy and built like a tank. The rounded alloy front panel seems about an inch thick with the Advantage logo stamped in about a quarter of an inch deep in big serif capitals. Despite a minimalist outlook, the rest of the amp is just as solid – it includes a 900VA toroidal transformer, making it one of the heaviest two-channel 100-watters around.

It's a balanced design, with separate single-ended circuits for positive and negative phase signals. Most of the amp works in Class A, except the final power output stages. As such, the design runs reasonably cool, but has most of the benefits of Class A construction.

The term minimalist doesn't do it justice – the front panel has just three buttons and a central volume knob, although the dark panel on the right hides a basic LED read-out. There isn't even an on-off switch, but this is no real issue, as in the manual Advantage makes a big play about the amplifier needing a five to six week run-in period before the S-100 gives its all. It's quite a manual, too, given the amp's simplicity – a well turned out ring-binder, a natty way to present what looks like ten laser-printed A4 pages. There is a remote control, but if you also use the S1 CD player, it's of little or no use.

The LED display has its uses; not only does it display balance and volume level,

LESS IS MORE

Advantage hasn't got the largest range (or the highest profile) in hi-fi – just this integrated amp, the S-1 CD player (tested in *HFC* 232), a line preamplifier, a 150-watt stereo power amp and pair of 250-watt monoblocks. The S-100 is the cheapest of Advantage's amplifier products – the S-2 preamp partnered with a pair of 250-watt S-250s will set you back a healthy £8,700! All the products feature a common design philosophy, though. They all sport balanced and single ended inputs and outputs and they all have the sort of build quality that puts many more costly products to shame.

VERDICT

Advantage S-100 integrated stereo amplifier
£2,550

➤ Beautifully built, will last a lifetime. Good, basic amplifier design. Sounds very uncoloured yet powerful. Good with virtually any music.

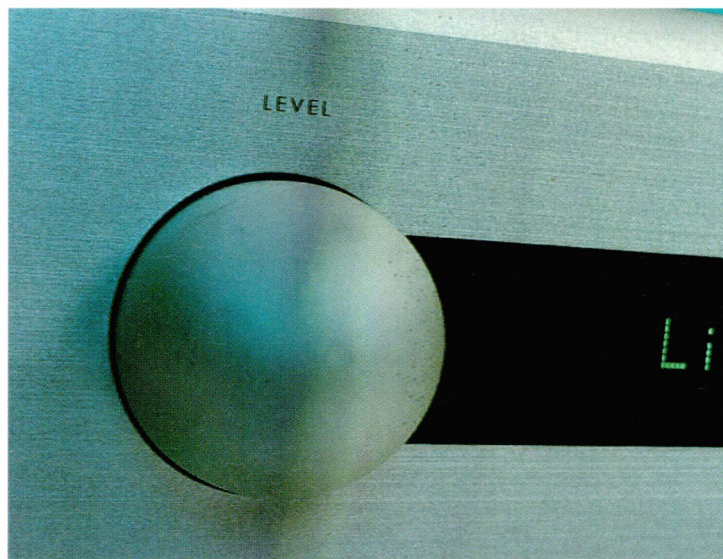
➤ Few amps are this lacking in character, so careful system matching is needed to prevent your system from sounding bland. Runs in at glacial speed.

CONCLUSION

One of the least 'amplifier' sounding integrated amps around. If you want your amp to last forever and have next to no intrinsic sound, give this one serious consideration.

KEY FEATURES

- 2x100-watt MOSFET integrated amplifier
- Single balanced input
- Five unbalanced inputs
- Tape outputs
- Preamp outputs
- Dot matrix display
- 900VA toroidal transformer
- WBT speaker terminals
- Adjustable input sensitivity



it can also be used to assign names to each of the five unbalanced inputs and the single XLR balanced socket. One of the five single-ended inputs can be assigned as tape outputs, although the inclusion of a tape monitor circuit would be all the better and the input sensitivity of each input can be adjusted, to prevent huge volume changes from source to source. If you plan on by-passing the power amp stage (or use an AV amp)

there is also a pair of phono amp outputs and even a special Surround mode.

PERFORMANCE

That months-long run-in is no joke. The amp sounds okay cold, but gets better as the warm-up kicks in. After the proper time, it really comes on song. This is one of those beautifully-made Nordic amplifier designs that also sounds good.

But 'good' is hard to pin down with the



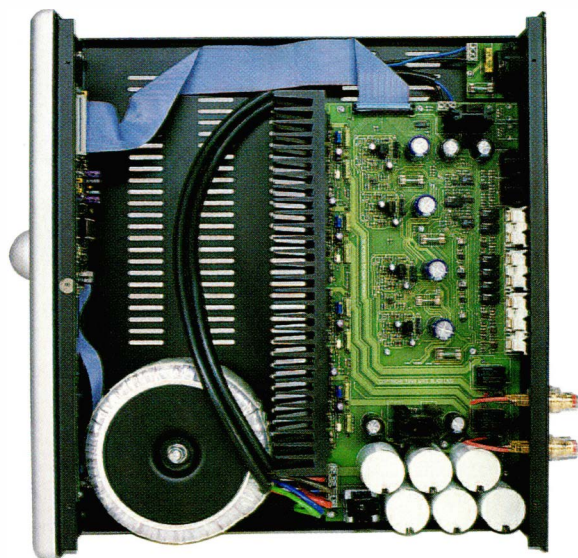
ADVANTAGE

LEVEL

CD 4 12

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

"If the Advantage S-100 sounds duff, blame other parts of the system."



The S-100's clean lines on the outside are mirrored by the simplicity of its internal topography.

S-100. It is one of those amps that shows its presence by its absence of signature, not by making its mark on the music. It is incredibly precise, yet also quite warm and rich sounding. The S-100 doesn't place emphasis on the rhythmic or the soundstaging properties or even its striking detail; it does all of these things well, without drawing the least attention to itself. Take the seriously compressed, ready for VH-1 mix of Eminem's *The*

Eminem Show for example – the S-100 adds or subtracts nothing, it just sounds like you'd expect it to.

This lack of character makes the amplifier inherently good at almost any musical genre, from large scale opera to simple bloke-with-a-guitar folk-rock and genteel dinner jazz. It gives the speakers as much soundstage information as they can handle, with good width and depth detail (and even some image height).

Then, there is the precise detail and vocal articulation which takes a good CD replay one step closer to the studio. Even the dynamic range is good; although perhaps not as dynamically alive as a capable triode valve design, the S-100 is more keenly dynamic than most solid state integrations, regardless of price.

In fact, only reference-grade kit offers even less character between the source material and the listener. It may also offer more bottom end grip over difficult speakers, but the law of diminishing returns kicks in rapidly.

There are rumours online of people trading in Krell integrations for the Advantage S-100, and this isn't hard to imagine in some respects. If you need a similar bold, bolted-down sound without the almost larger than life scale of the Krell, the Advantage is the logical choice.

If the Advantage S-100 sounds duff, blame other parts of the system. This may be the Advantage's *bête noir*. While the Advantage CD seems a logical match, we are used to matching speakers to compensate for a bright-sounding or a bassy-sounding amplifier in an almost unconscious manner. As such, you may find the speakers you have traditionally loved and cherished sound somehow artificial and inconsistent.

But it is hard to make the S-100 sound duff – most of the time it simply gets extremely close to making the best of whatever job it has to do with the minimum of fuss and bother. And that is a remarkably hard task to perform in the real amplifier world. ☹

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EXCLUSIVE

AC/DC

The Michell Orbe has been upgraded with a new DC motor, but is the Spider Edition any more of a rock 'n' roll animal as a result?

Michell's top ranking vinyl spinner the Orbe is a pretty wild machine. In its SE or Spider Edition guise it's a take-no-prisoners turntable with few embellishments, just a form-following function aesthetic nicely crafted out of aluminium and acrylic. What marks this latest version of the Orbe SE out from its predecessors is the inclusion of a DC motor, but as the casing and power supply look identical in their distinctly purposeful way, you can't see any real change at a glance. The difference however, is quite radical. Until now, all Michell turntables have used AC motors because they are relatively simple to keep running at the correct speed – elaborate power supplies have their advantages but they are not essential. However, since the AC motor that Michell had been using is no longer made, an alternative had to be found and the only suitable option turned out to be a DC design. DC motors are inherently smoother than their counterparts but require more sophisticated electronics to

MOTOR TORQUE

Ever since its beginnings in the seventies Michell Engineering has used DC motors in its small but perfectly formed range of turntables, so the announcement by Papst that it would cease making the motor that is at the heart of both Gyro and Orbe turntables came as a serious blow to the company. Founder John Michell spent two years scouring the world for a replacement of similar quality and came back empty handed – apparently none of the AC motors used by other brands were good enough for his high standards.

This, combined with John's illness at the time nearly spelled the end of Michell Engineering. But at the eleventh hour he found a DC motor that had the desired bronze bushing bearings and provided a clean, powerful drive for his turntables. This motor has been incorporated into both Orbe and Gyro, and a new VC power supply has been designed by Graham Fowler (of Trichord fame) to drive them. In the case of the Orbe a feedback loop is connected to a tachometer to ensure that RPM speed remains constant despite variations in bearing oil viscosity and stylus drag.

VERDICT

Michell Orbe SE (DC) turntable
£1,825

▲ Very high neutrality, high quality engineering for the price, good isolation and truly excellent sound.

▼ Tricky to set up and a magnet for dust – the 'optional' dust cover could be considered essential.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
Fine example of the turntable art does justice to the best of ancillaries and provides a transparent window onto the wonders of analogue audio entertainment.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Spider double chassis
- ▶ Damped suspended pendulum subchassis
- ▶ 60mm thick, high inertia acrylic/vinyl platter
- ▶ Screw-down record clamp
- ▶ Inverted bearing
- ▶ Custom armboards available for any tonearm
- ▶ Standalone DC motor with built-in tachometer control
- ▶ VC power supply
- ▶ Optional dust cover
- ▶ Finished in black or clear acrylic with black metal parts

keep running at a constant speed. This hurdle has been overcome with the VC supply and the resulting deck should be even better than its predecessor. Existing Orbes can be upgraded to DC operation but as this requires a replacement of both motor, housing and power supply, it costs £750.

The Orbe design is a combination of the years of refinement that went into the brand's mainstay, the Gyro, plus an OTT platter, power supply and motor. It uses a chassis suspended on three springs that hide under cylindrical caps and offer a fair degree of tuning capacity. The instructions suggest that you merely centre the springs and set the chassis height a millimetre above felt washers that prevent acrylic coming into contact with metalwork, but you may find that getting this right is more painstaking than you might expect!

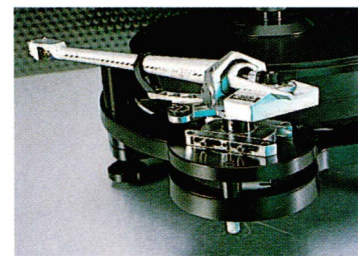
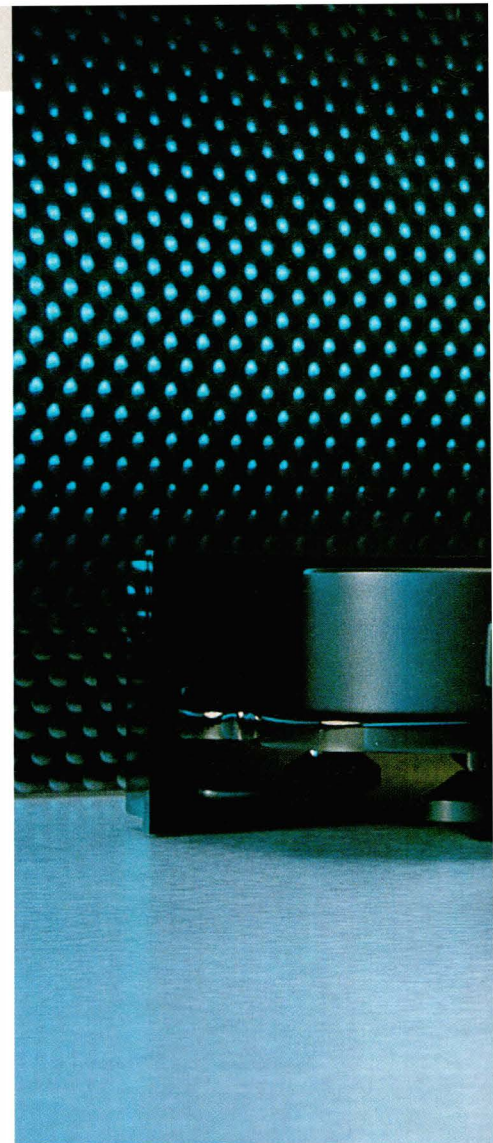
Getting the deck up and running in the first place is straightforward and it's only when you want to get the last ounce of performance out of it that an hour or so of careful tweaking is required. It's one of those products where the skills of an experienced dealer are worth paying for. If you don't have that luxury, the key seems to be making sure that the deck has a nice even piston bounce and sits close to the spider.

Being a vinyl and acrylic composite, the Orbe's deep platter is less hefty than it appears and sits on an inverted bearing that cleverly pumps oil to the thrust point for minimum friction. The platter is driven by a thin O-section belt and speed is changed by moving the belt from one pulley to the other.

PERFORMANCE

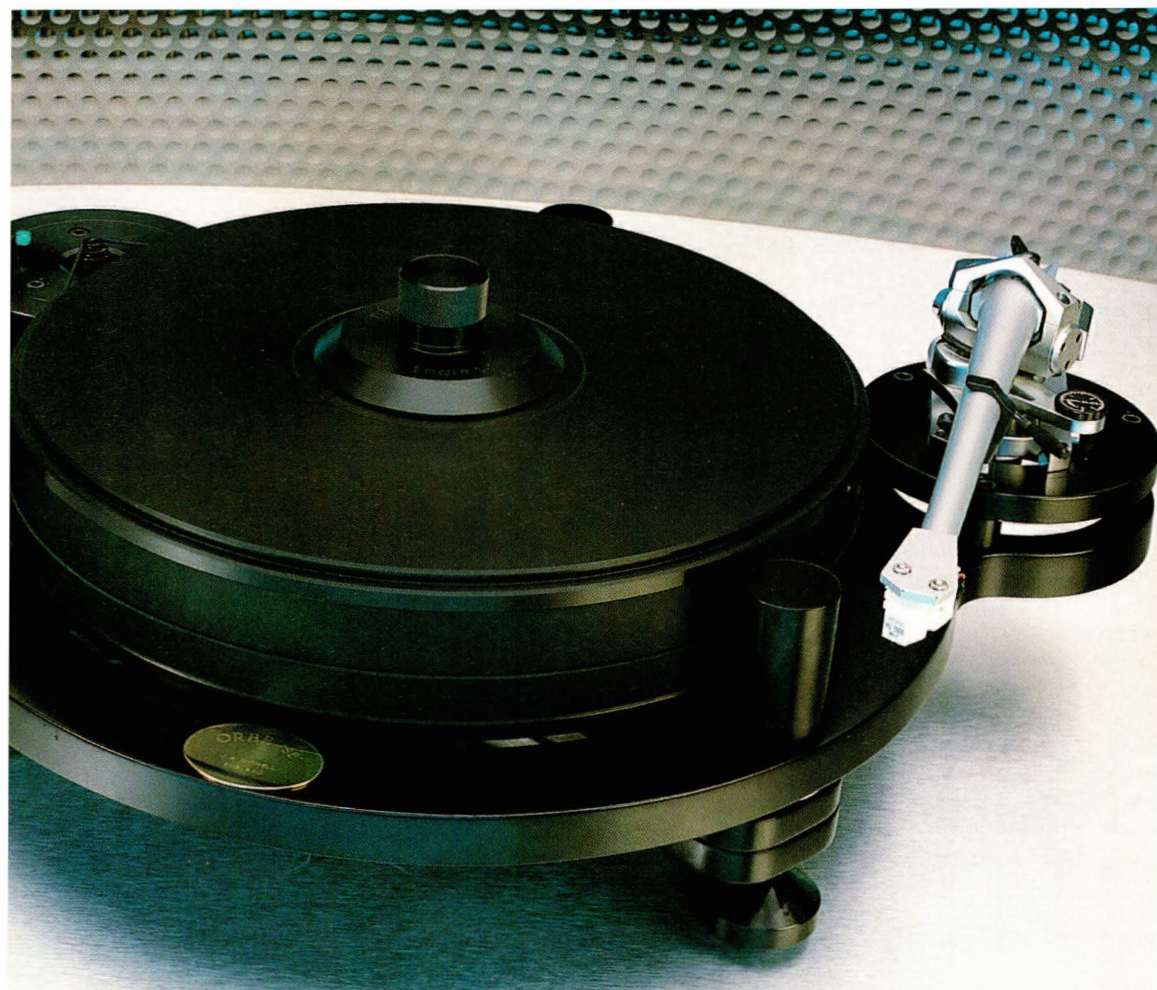
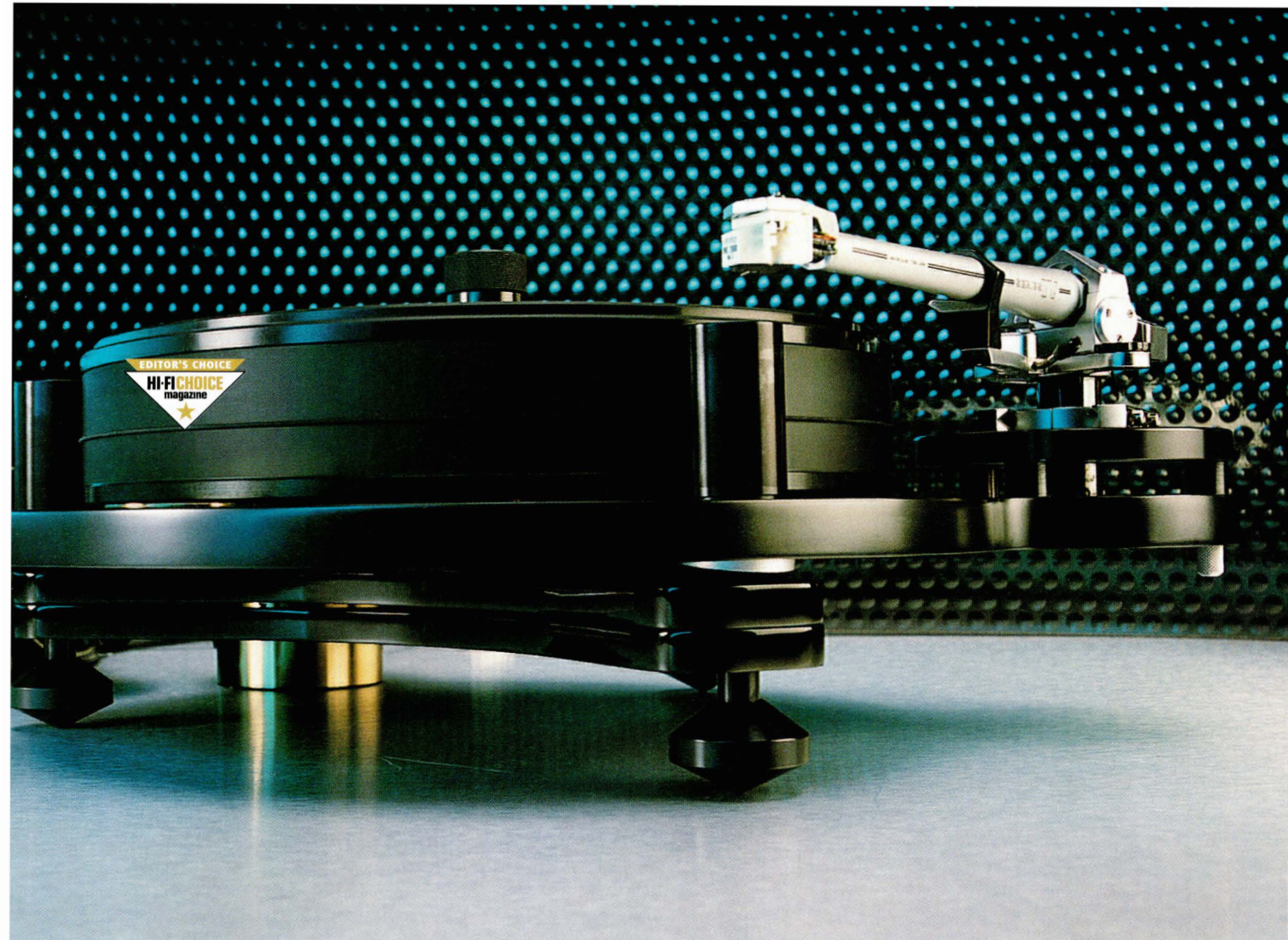
Listening kicked off with the SME Series IV arm and Ortofon MC2000 II cartridge from my living room system (every room should have a record player you understand). With this highly capable duo at its service the Orbe SE put in a sterling performance that's seemingly devoid of coloration and is very faithful to the music.

First up was a rerelease of Captain Beefheart's second most freeform

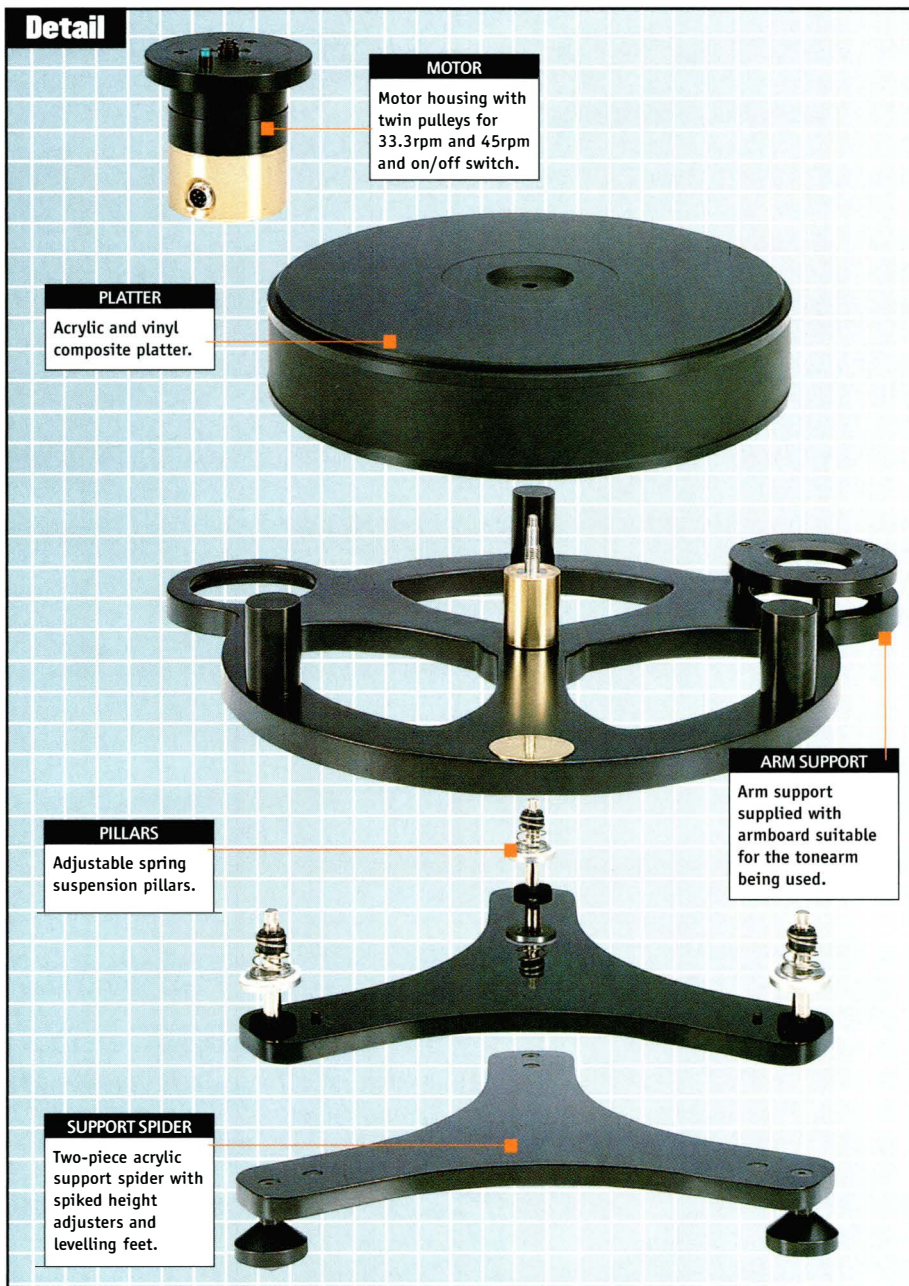


Don't forget your tonearm! The Michell Orbe SE doesn't come with one as standard, but an SME Series IV like the one pictured here is a top quality match.

creation, *Lick My Decals Off Baby*, which lays down a convoluted yet musical beat behind the best abstract blues vocals in the business. The Orbe SE copes easily with complex rhythms, revealing what the guitar, bass and drums are playing without losing touch with the flow of the music. You can listen to the inner detail but the whole is complete and fluid, which with dense material is not so easy. John Fahey's beautiful *Let Go* is a guitar duet of power and insight – with this deck you hear his breathing and the space the musicians recorded in. This is the best rendition I've heard of this old fave – the Townshend Super Tweeters



***“The Orbe SE
copes easily
with complex
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with the flow of
the music.”***



“High frequencies are clean and open while the midrange is particularly explicit – a fine result for any turntable let alone one as well priced as this.”

first album retains the distinctive acoustic of the church it was recorded in, and for that matter the character of the Calrec microphones used in its creation.

In the greater scheme of things, or compared to a considerably more expensive reference (SME Model 20), bass is a shade light and image depth not quite as expansive as it could be. Image *width* however is first class and changes dramatically with different recordings. Dynamics could be more energetic but they are again highly sensitive to the material, whereas timing is first class – not emphatic but on the ball. Bass is always tuneful and quick and the rest of the (frequency) band flows right along with it. High frequencies are clean and open with no sense of restraint while the midrange is particularly explicit. This is a fine result for any turntable let alone one as competitively priced as this – there are few alternatives that provide this degree of neutrality and resolve and none cost less.

Its strongest asset is the ability to open up new material, letting the music flow unhindered so you can get straight to the creator's message rather than be distracted by the mechanics of the piece. This is surprisingly hard to do with hi-fi, requiring fluency and detail in fine measure, but the new Orbe SE has got what it takes. **Ⓢ**

Michell 020 8953 0771
www.michell-engineering.co.uk

◀ may have had something to do with it, but the turntable is clearly no slouch. Playing more vinyl it became clear that the system was being held back by the limitations of the cartridge, which isn't usually the case with this particular Ortofon unless you have been spoiled by something better. That something is the vdH Grasshopper III GLA, a rare and remarkable needle that can 'out-dynamic' all comers. Once safely ensconced, it took performance up into the higher reaches of vinyl gratification. If you've never heard a great record player and you're not comfortably well off, don't: it's an expensive and compulsive quest that only the wisest survive! However, you do

get to visit musical nirvana on a regular basis, so it's a price worth paying. Back at the turntable things are hotting up. Rock-jazz supremos Him lay down some elastic bass and heavyweight brass courtesy of the Orbe SE and aforementioned ancillaries. Leftfield keep things cooking with their bass-powered *Inspection Check One*, the key track on 1995's *Leftism* and one of the finer examples of white dub on the planet. The Orbe SE is a highly revealing turntable, it exposes the character of each recording to the full. So Terry Callier's seventies material has a relatively crude feel next to his more recent work, while the Cowboy Junkies'



VC power supply

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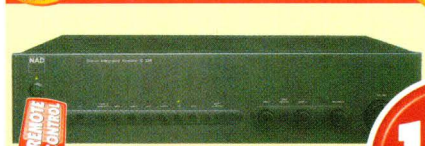
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EXCLUSIVE

Little miracles

Is Mirage's radical Omnisat package the best sub/sat system yet?

Unconventional speaker maker Mirage has pursued its wide imaging goal (see box below) with bipolar loudspeakers, that radiate sound from behind the loudspeaker as well as in front. Omnipolar technology, the key to the design of the satellites in this system, takes a more direct approach to the same end. Here the sound is radiated through 360 degrees in the lateral plane. There are two drive units – one midrange and one tweeter – mounted vertically one above the other, both in close proximity to acoustic reflectors. This much has been done before – the devil lies in the detail. The reflectors are slightly offset and tilted, and are shaped to modify the dispersion pattern to provide some frontal bias so that the proportion of sound that reaches the listener directly and from reflections approximates to the 30/70 split typical of the live experience. The geometry is also inherently time aligned on the forward listening axis.

This explains why the satellites look so odd when undressed, though the fencing mask-style cover helps tone it down a little. Or perhaps not. The satellites are well built using hard plastics, and are fitted with a single pair of quality 4mm binding posts. The test system was

THE 'CANADIAN SCHOOL'

The movers and shakers within Mirage who determine the technological focus of the company were in at the birth of what might be described as the Canadian school of loudspeaker design. The impetus came from the celebrated series of listening tests conducted by the Canadian National Research Council of loudspeaker sound quality. Using large numbers of listeners and loudspeakers under controlled conditions, the tests were designed to identify those qualities that predisposed for good perceived sound quality.

The key factor identified in the tests was broad dispersion. But it was important that reflected sounds from the walls of the room were as undisturbed by crossover phase problems as possible, because the delayed reflections have a direct effect on perceived sound quality.

VERDICT
Mirage Omnisat 5.1 channel sub/sat speaker system
£1,695

▲ Wide, stable imagery, good height and scale, strong focus and transparency.

▼ Some relatively innocuous coloration artefacts.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
 Recommended if you want a multichannel system that won't dominate the home, but which offers a grown-up performance with real scale and transparency.

KEY FEATURES
 ▶ Vertically arranged drivers with acoustic mirrors to control directivity

▶ 360-degree dispersion, forward biased to ensure firm image focus

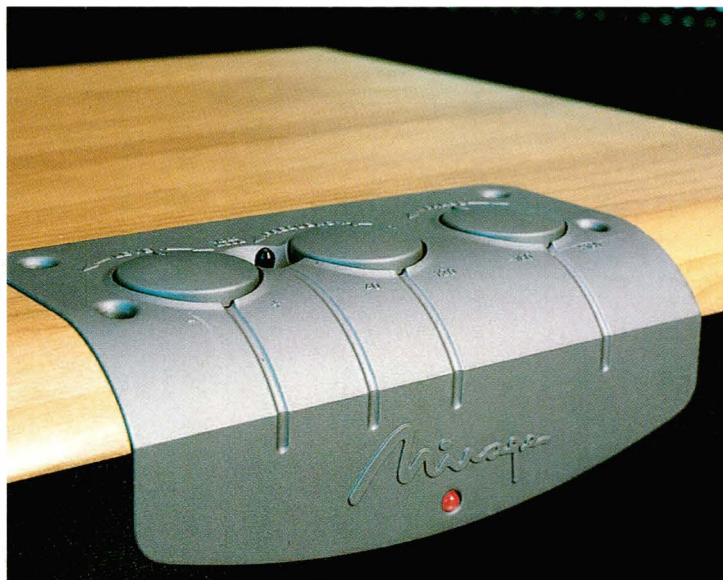
▶ Satellites and sub woofer available separately

▶ Satellites are time aligned on listening axis

▶ Flexible positioning

▶ Magnetically shielded satellites and subwoofer

▶ Finishes: satellites – black, white, platinum, black/platinum. Sub – black, cherry



supplied with stands for the satellites which feature a sliding connector arrangement to fasten the speakers on top, and integral cable management.

The subwoofer supplied with this test system, and this is the first time it has broken cover, is the OM-200, which turns out to be a substantial and attractive reflex-loaded design with two drivers, one at each end of the enclosure. The major controls (level, low pass filter and variable phase) are all featured on the front panel, where they can be easily accessed with the subwoofer in place. This subwoofer is the preferred partner for the Omnisat satellites.

PERFORMANCE

Ostensibly just another compact sub/sat package, the Omnisat system is not as compact as some. The subwoofer is far too serious to belong in most miniature systems, and the Omnisat satellites sound too grown up, even if they're compact enough to qualify. The package is also priced over the heads of other systems of this type, and offers an unusually wide choice of configurations – from 2.1 (stereo satellites plus a sub) to full-blown 7.1, with a various subwoofers available to match.

ALSO CONSIDER

JMLAB COBALT PACKAGE £1,707

A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communications skills.

SPENDOR S3 PACKAGE £1,630

Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness are well suited to small rooms.

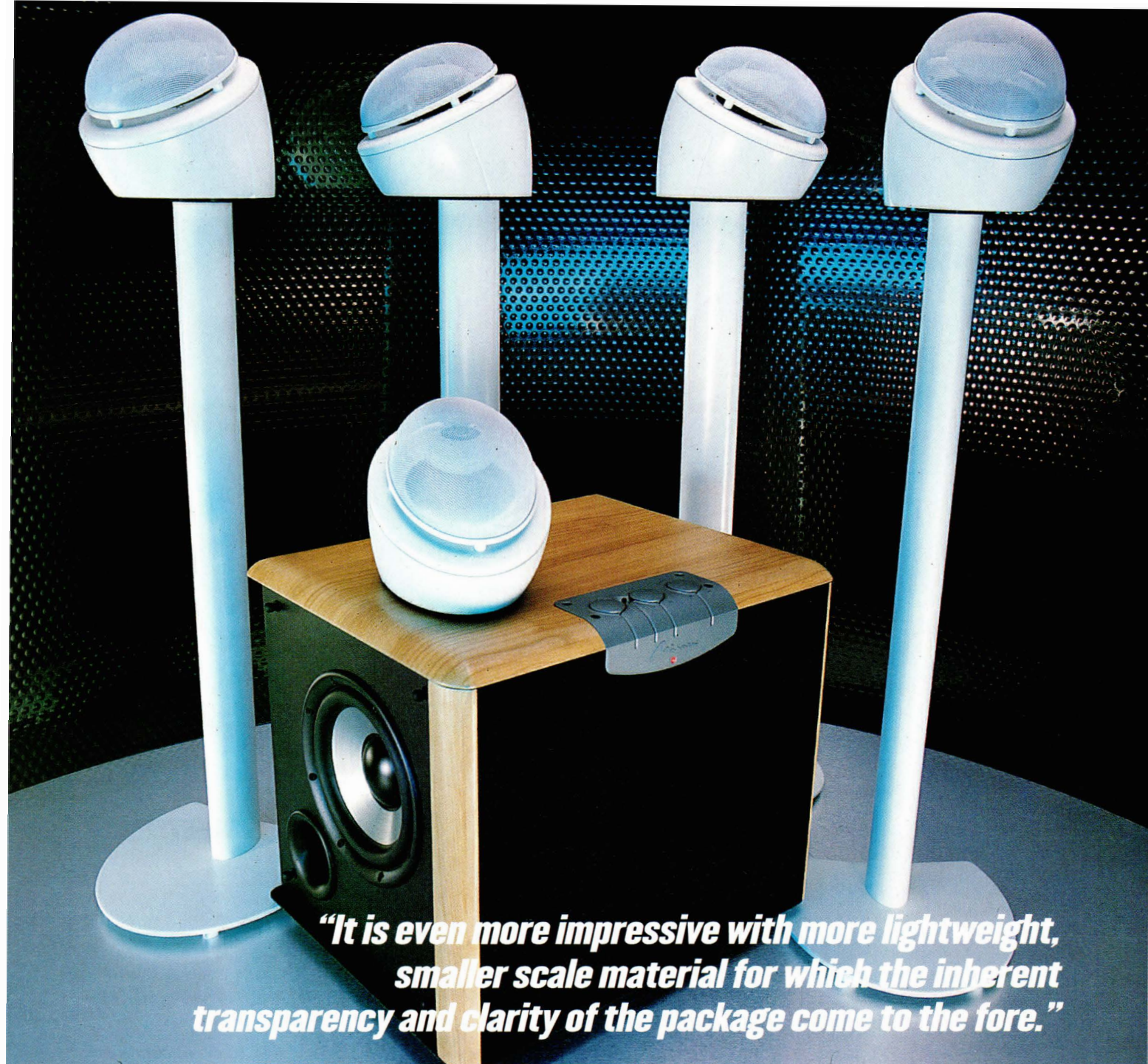
MORDAUNT-SHORT DECLARATION £1,600

Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority but must be 5.1 connected.

The basic balance is light, airy and open, with gentle, forgettable colorations rather than anything too obvious. The bass is well extended and agile, a great improvement on an earlier subwoofer that was originally being partnered with the Omnisats before the OM-200 became available. The bass now sounds like a continuous extension of the satellites' capabilities.

But it's the way the system generates an enveloping soundfield that defines this package and the Omnipolar technology it employs. At a normal listening range, it produces an image higher than the speakers (unless the Omnisats are turned through 180 degrees, in which case the sound seems to emerge magically from the floor).





"It is even more impressive with more lightweight, smaller scale material for which the inherent transparency and clarity of the package come to the fore."






Far left: The Omnisat's drivers fire upwards onto acoustic reflectors, which disperse sound around the listening area. Left: The new OM-200 subwoofer has a driver at each end.

There is enough forward bias in the sound to give a firm sense of location to individual instruments and voices, and the overall image is decidedly large in scale, extending well beyond the speaker baseline in each plane.

Reproduction of film soundtracks is not as muscular as some full-size systems, but it fills the room impressively and sounds more agile and transparent than one might expect. That's also the case with multichannel music, with which this system excels. Hooked up to a Sony SACD player and a Pioneer VSA-AX10 amp playing even quite heavyweight symphonic music, the sound is stable, solid and expansive. But it is even more impressive with more lightweight, smaller scale material for which the inherent

transparency and clarity of the package come to the fore.

Those more interested in the ideas than in execution should bear in mind the key importance of Omnipolar to Mirage's future. The Omnisat is not in any sense the last word from Mirage, but simply the first fruit of a new direction which will eventually see the technology employed in speakers at various price levels. It is a bold move, as well as being an innovative one, and on this showing it has something important to contribute to the art of music reproduction, as well as being a successful compact multichannel speaker system in its own right. Watch this space. 

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MS DYNAMITE

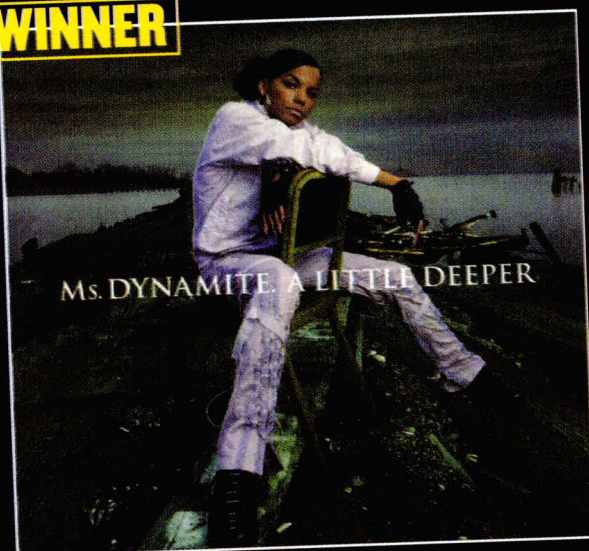
A LITTLE DEEPER Polydor

★ At last, an authentically British female R 'n' B/hip-hop voice to rival such American giants of the genre as Mary J Blige and Lauryn Hill. The debut album from Ms Dynamite – 21-year-old North Londoner Niomi McLean-Daley – is urgent, assured, strongly individual and highly politicised. The beats are aggressive and tough-edged, but it's also highly listenable with a smart pop-crossover appeal. A record which confounds expectations of home-grown British urban music.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 4, 0:10:

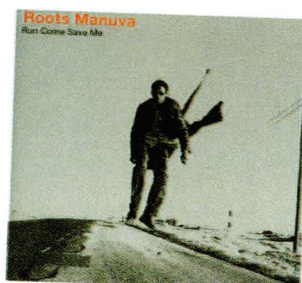
You could pick the bass line from almost any track, but the moment the beat kicks in on *Put Him Out* is particularly dramatic.

WINNER



MERCURY MAGIC

The Mercury Music Prize is the hippest and broadest ranging awards event in the music calendar. We sampled each of the twelve finalists in search of their best hi-fi moments



ROOTS MANUVA

RUN COME SAVE ME

Big Dada

★ London-based rapper Roots Manuva (aka Rodney Smith) has his own roots deep in British sound system culture, which means he's far too streetwise merely to emulate the best-known US hip-hop exponents. The beats are every bit as tough and muscular as you'd want, but less expected is the warmth and humour with which he infuses his cliché-free lyrics as he raps about string vests, cheese on toast and paying his council tax. The first great British hip-hop album and a unique take on a now ubiquitous form.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 17, 1:20

The inspired use of a sample from Richard Harris's *McArthur Park* which weaves in and out of the song's rhythmic underpinning.

THE STREETS

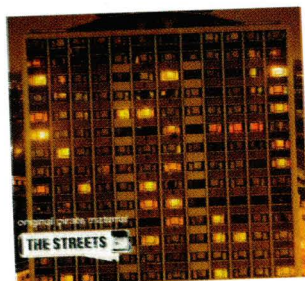
ORIGINAL PIRATE MATERIAL

Locked On 679

★ Raised in a Birmingham tower block, 22-year-old Mike Skinner caused a sensation in the music press with this, his debut album, although the mainstream media largely ignored him. *Original Pirate Material* is an unmediated observation on what it means to be young and British in 2002 that might easily have been subtitled 'a day in the life of a geezer'. Deploying a flat monotone delivery, Skinner's voice is an acquired taste but he's the beat poet of his generation and the authentic voice of alienation in Blair's Britain.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 5, 0:15:

The Wagnerian, melodramatic, chopped-up orchestral sample on *Same Old Thing*.



THE CORAL

THE CORAL Deltasonic

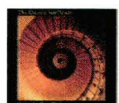


The Coral are all aged between 18 and 21 and the debut album from the Merseyside six-piece sounds like a crazed trolley dash around the entire supermarket of popular music. From sea shanties to wiggled-out psychedelia, the eclecticism is breathtaking and although logic says it shouldn't work, their youthful enthusiasm combined with the more knowing production of the Lightning Seeds' Ian Broudie, sees them through with flying colours as every track seems to contain a fresh surprise.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 3, 1:48: The Hank Marvin-styled guitar reverb and spooky melodic on the reggae-tinged *Shadows Fall*.

ELECTRIC SOFT PARADE

HOLES IN THE WALL DB Records



Like The Coral, teenage brothers Tom and Alex White are part of a generational shift that has created seismic changes in British music over the past 12 months. *Holes In The Wall* is instant, youthful, brash and exuberant with influences ranging from Pink Floyd to the Verve. It's a record which places Electric Soft Parade in the vanguard of the current charge of young British bands and provides evidence that we don't always have to be looking to America and the likes of the Strokes and the White Stripes for excitement.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 11, 4:40 The final, rippling psychedelic echoes on *Biting The Soles Of My Feet*, like the Beach Boys at their most acid-addled.

BEVERLEY KNIGHT

WHO I AM Parlophone



The history of British R 'n' B – particularly where female performers are concerned – is littered with one-hit wonders who have swiftly faded due to mediocre material. Wolverhampton-born Beverley Knight has always had the voice. Now on her third album she's finally found the songs and production to do herself justice. Less pop-glossy than Gabrielle but still radio-friendly, *Who Am I*, which includes the magnificent single *Shoulda Woulda Coulda*, marks something of a coming-of-age not only for Knight but for British R 'n' B in general.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 2, 1:25: The sparkling clarity of the multi-tracked vocals on *Fallen Soldier* as they pan between both channels.

GEMMA HAYES

NIGHT ON MY SIDE Source



Gemma Hayes saw off strong competition from the likes of Beth Orton and Thea Gilmore to emerge as the only female singer-songwriter among the Mercury's dozen albums of the year. *Night On My Side* is a debut of confidently mature songs, full of spiky arrangements and performed with considerable panache by the Tipperary-born 25-year-old. But the ace in the pack is the recruitment of American producer Dave Fridmann (Mercury Rev/Flaming Lips) whose clever sonic touches assist her to transcend the usual limitations of singer-songwriter albums.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 6, 2:25 When a gentle acoustic-based song turns into a sonic storm of noise on *Lucky One*, like the Velvet Underground just took over the folk club.

GUY BARKER

SOUNDTRACK Provocateur



The jazz album of the year, trumpeter/composer Guy Barker's *Soundtrack* is a homage to his love of classic film scores. With a long pedigree which includes years with the LSO and backing everyone from Frank Sinatra to Liza Minnelli, he brings all his experience to bear on a superbly vibrant set of cinema-influenced compositions, characterised by virtuoso playing and playful melodies. As an instrumental album it's unlikely to cross over to a non-jazz audience, but it's terrific on its own terms.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 8, 0:01: The dynamic way the horns kick in on the intro of *Sounds In Black And White* to evoke a thousand old Saturday afternoon movie repeats.

JOANNA MACGREGOR

PLAY Sound Circus



The pianist Joanna MacGregor has her roots in both jazz and classical music and *Play* is a mostly solo piano album with a vastly varied repertoire that travels from Bach and Byrd to Cage and Ligeti via tango and township jazz. She's undeniably a virtuoso performer. Yet there's not a trace of indulgence here and her own vibrant musical personality shines through the diversity of the material to give the record a powerful coherence and an appeal far beyond the traditional classical realm.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 6, 4:30: When her exuberant piano rhythms pick up on Talvin Singh's tablas on *Endgame* so that she's playing it almost like a percussive instrument.



DOVES

LAST BROADCAST Heavenly

★ Dogged by unbelievable bad luck which included the death of their manager and a studio fire which destroyed everything they had, Manchester's Doves finally made their debut album two years ago with *Lost Souls*. That album was shortlisted for the Mercury but the follow-up is even better – a record of epic grandeur, full of ringing guitars and irresistible tunes which deservedly went to number one on its release in April.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 9, 1:10: You probably know it backwards from the hit single, but it has to be the joyous, surging rush of the drums and crashing cymbals of the first chorus on *Pounding*.



THE BEES

SUNSHINE HIT ME We Love You

★ The biggest surprise and the quirkiest album to be recognised by the Mercury judges, former school friends Paul Butler and Aaron Fletcher made The Bees' debut album in a shed on the Isle of Wight. It sounds as though it's all samples but was actually recorded live without the use of computers. Genre-defying in a way that at times recalls Beck, *Sunshine Hit Me* oozes a warm and ramshackle charm that is unlike anything else in British pop at the moment. In turn bizarre, engaging and intriguing, it's an album that dares to be different. Perhaps not the best record of the year – but certainly the most fun.

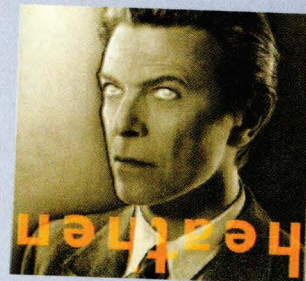
HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 2, 1:20: The swelling stabs of Hammond organ on *Angryman*. It sounds like a sample, but isn't.

DAVID BOWIE

HEATHEN ISO/Columbia

★ At 55 and after 22 studio albums, David Bowie remains admirably determined not to repeat himself. But after experimenting in recent years with contemporary styles such as drum and bass, *Heathen* is less determinedly futuristic and finds him reunited with his first producer Tony Visconti and returning to a more traditional style of songwriting. It was greeted with a decidedly mixed set of reviews on its release in June, but there's still nobody who does Bowie quite like Bowie.

HI-FI MOMENT: TRACK 4, 1:55: Pete Townshend's buzzing guitar solo recalls the glory days of Ziggy Stardust and Bowie's original Spiders From Mars guitarist Mick Ronson.



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RETRO

KRELL KSA-50 STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER



At the beginning of the eighties, the hi-fi market was thriving as never before, but its thinking was already moribund. The prevailing orthodoxies mandated Linn turntables and Naim amplifiers, and the source (arbitrarily declared to be the turntable) was deemed to be of overriding importance, followed by the amplifier. In this scheme of things, the loudspeakers were of little account. The power amp of choice that any self-respecting, red-blooded audiophile aspired to was the Naim 250. It was an iconic design and undeniably a great amplifier despite its (then) kitchen sink finish, and its propensity to intrusive mechanical noise from rattling transformer laminations ("unavoidable with the best sounding transformers", I was told at the time).

Krell launched its first product, the KSA-100 stereo power amp, in 1980 around the stratospheric £3,000 mark (closer to £10,000 today). The KSA-50, its smaller sibling, was released barely two years later at an almost unheard-of £1,500, and in the UK this model brought the brand widespread attention. Much larger than the Naim, it had the over-engineered look with massive grab handles attached to its blue steel fascia that came to be a caricature of the US high end. Its power rating was 50 watts, which doesn't sound much today, but this was a massive Class A design with full time fan cooling and an enormous power supply which delivered 100 watts into four ohms, and 200 watts into two ohms.

But even this wasn't the KSA-50's defining characteristic. For those who fell under its spell, this amp provided new levels of insight and set new standards of musical performance. I for one ended up buying one for my own use, and so did at least two other UK reviewers to my knowledge. The KSA-100 really did seem like overkill at the time, but the KSA-50 was just about part of the real world.

It really was a revelation. This was so even in my system, which was heavy Linn/Naim-centric, and which included Linn Sara speakers and a Naim 12S preamp; the Krell displacing a Naim

"For those who fell under its spell, the KSA-50 provided new levels of insight and set new standards of musical performance."

250. Any foreign component into such a system was likely to sound like an interloper, potentially spoiling its balance and integrity. And in a sense this is exactly what it did, opening out the musical vistas of the system to an extraordinary degree. After switching to the KSA-50, there was no going back.

It scored in just about every way you can imagine, but there were several standout attributes – killer features that defined the Krell sound at the time, and to an extent do so even today. I can still remember the shock on first hearing the wide, open stereo soundstage, which extended in front of and behind the plane of the speakers, and which even extended beyond their width. The Krell uncovered a previously unsuspected wealth of detail on supposedly familiar records. Imagery like this was simply unheard of in a stereo system, and was even frowned on by some. Still is. The bass was also in a different class, and this was quite a surprise given the acknowledged excellence of the established opposition. It was more dynamic, more open, more physical and clearly in better control. This went hand in hand with the complex, multilayered midband – moving into the world of Krell was almost like walking from a stark black and white world into one full of vibrant colour. Only the treble sound at times seemed a little too upfront to be completely credible.

In the years following the KSA-50 the market has seen new barriers broken in power amp design, not least by Krell itself, and of course by many others too. But in the UK market at least, this was the model that set the pattern for the next two decades. I haven't heard a KSA-50 in anger for a long time, but I have a touch of envy for anyone who still does.

Alvin Gold



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MUSO

SIMON & GARFUNKEL'S GREATEST HITS



There have been many Simon & Garfunkel compilations, but none match that aura of perfection which Simon, Garfunkel and Roy Halee, their genius engineer, caught in the studio and transferred to 1972's *Simon & Garfunkel's Greatest Hits*. For many this was their introduction to the S&G soundworld, the goose pimple effect of their incredible harmonies sung twice and double-tracked to make four voices, their painstaking attention to detail and use of unusual sound colours like bass harmonica on *The Boxer* or the Peruvian Los Incas recording on *El Condor Pasa* (borrowed by DJ Shadow for his album *The Private Press*).

Perhaps the most important factor about *Greatest Hits* is that it's one of the very few early commercial packages to contain new versions of famous songs that were better than the recorded originals, including *For Emily*, *Whenever I May Find Her*, *The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)*, *Homeward Bound* and *Kathy's Song*. All were live, surrounded by plenty of atmosphere and applause and were recorded in New York in 1968, thus making *Greatest Hits* a uniquely available rarity!

Of equal significance is that it unusually mixed the tracks into one another without a break. The Columbia LP (CK 9914/CS 9914) split neatly into seven songs per side, side A ending with *Scarborough Fair*, side B beginning with *Homeward Bound*. The late 1980s CD (CBS 63699/CBS 4624882) made the segueing complete as these songs neatly dovetail into one another. The album features myriad delights, from the opening motorik rhythmic drive of *Mrs Robinson* (1968) with Simon's acoustic guitar flourishes standing out as exceptional, through to the clattering *Cecelia*, put together in George Harrison's apartment in Blue Jay Way, Los Angeles, complete with piano bench, dampened strings, soda-bottle sounds and Hispanic celebration, which pointed to Simon's world music future.

In-between is a treasure trove of gems including Art Garfunkel's greatest vocal performance on the live version of *For Emily*, *Whenever I May Find Her* (an advantage of the CD version is that it's not hindered by surface crackle as you will get on the

"It's one of the very few early commercial packages to contain new versions of famous songs that were better than the recorded originals."

old original orange CBS pressings) and the lyrical and musical genius of *The Boxer*. This was the first of S&G's cinerama production jobs courtesy of Roy Halee and effects were layered one atop the other to reach the grand finale of crashing waves and strings – at one point they went out to a church in Columbia University to record piccolo and tuba parts.

Perhaps the ending of *Bridge Over Troubled Water* is a bit over the top, but that's a small criticism when you've also got *The Sound Of Silence*, *Scarborough Fair*, *I Am A Rock* and the stunning *Bookends* on one remarkable album.

In the 20 years since the album's vinyl release and its transfer to CD it has never been remastered. Roy Halee confessed that early CDs were mastered from high-generation LP-equalised tapes which resulted in a loss of frequency, dynamic range and increase in tape hiss. He considered a remastering process difficult because the masters and multitracks had deteriorated to a point of "practical unusability". But in contrast, in 1997 Bob Irwin and Vic Anesini said they spent three years locating the original master tapes and session reels in Hollywood, Nashville and New York. They listened to each vintage first album pressing and referenced the remasters against these to produce the *Old Friends* boxed set in 1997.

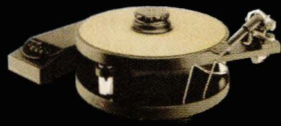
Even so, the quality of *Simon & Garfunkel's Greatest Hits* on both vinyl and CD is extremely good. With the exception of *Sound Of Silence* (which had a vaulting improvement using the new Super Bit Mapping process in 1997), the lack of remastering won't affect enjoyment of an enduringly classic album. In 2000, *Simon & Garfunkel's Greatest Hits* was awarded Diamond status in the US for sales in excess of 10 million copies. ●

Mark Prendergast

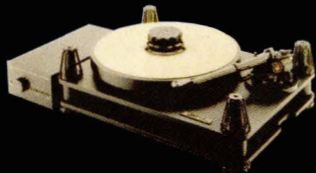
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Living Voice Avatar Cherry 1999	£1900	£2700
Living Voice Avatar OBX-R Rosewood 2000	£2500	£4000
ProAc Response 1SC Mahogany. Boxed. Current spec.	£550	£1200
Dynaudio Confidence 3. Rosewood, boxed, June '02	£3000	£4800
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn, mahogany	£1500	£3400
Snell Type C. Rare floor standing 3 way	£500	
Celestion A2 Rosewood, boxed.	£600	£1400
Art Audio Diavolo (black/gold) 300B SE integrated 13w	£2500	£4500
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Art Audio Symphony (full chrome) 300B SE 10 w. int.	£2250	£4000
Art Audio Concerto 6550 push pull line integrated	£1400	£2650
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Tube Technology MAC mm and mc phono - as new	£900	£1400
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SJS Electroacoustics Arcadia line pre - rare	£600	
Conrad Johnson PV10 phono and line pre (new valves)	£400	£1500
AudioNote Soro Phono integrated. Serviced, new valves	£700	£1900
Cary 2A3, 8 watt stereo with Cary pre amp. New valves.	£700	
Musical Fidelity M3 NuVista integrated amp. 6 months	£2250	£3000
Mark Levinson 334 Power amp. April '02 boxed perfect	£4500	£6000
XTC pre power 4 channel 400 watt beefcake amp	£1800	£4000
Trichord Dino phono stage and power supply. June '02	£400	£500
Audio Research LS2 B line pre	£1250	
Resolution Audio 2 box upsampling CD player Aug. '02	£2000	£2850
Musical Fidelity NuVista CD player. April '02 boxed.	£2250	£3000
SME Series IV	£850	£1250
SME Series V	£1250	£1650
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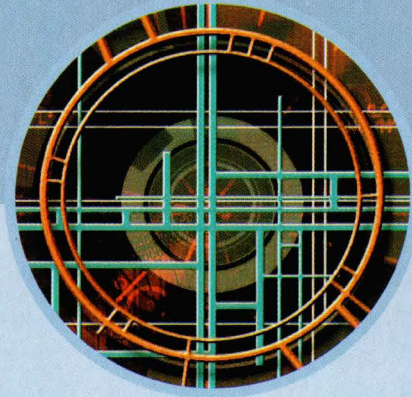
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DIGITALIA

DIGITAL AMPLIFICATION



Only the longest serving *Choice* readers will remember our first review of a truly digital amp, a revolutionary product from Toccata employing its 'EquiBit' technology. This took the digital output from a CD player and maintained it in the digital domain right up until it hit the speaker terminals. The amp sounded superb, offered a healthy 100-watt power output and ran as cool as a cucumber. Now, some seven years later, rather than dominating the market there is a meagre handful of these amps available. This includes the TACT Millennium which is a direct descendent of the 'proto-technology' explored all those years ago.

To understand why conventional analogue amps still rule the roost and why digital is struggling to get out of the starting gate, we need not only to appreciate the potential advantages of digital amplifiers, but also the hurdles that must be overcome in realising that potential. Class A and AB amp designs waste up to 50 per cent of their output as heat, as high bias levels are used to ensure the power transistors remain conducting (or partially conducting) through the entire cycle of the musical waveform.

In Class D or digital amps, output transistors act as switches, which are either fully on or fully off. As switches cannot dissipate heat, the technique promises 90-100 per cent efficiency. As the continuous 'curve' of a musical waveform cannot be reproduced by single on/off states, a Class D amp represents this signal by varying the length of *time* that these switches are held on and off. This is known as Pulse Width Modulation or PWM.

Theoretically, the whole process is more elegant in a *digital* Class D amp because the PWM signal can be derived directly from the digital output of the CD or DVD player. Furthermore, the PWM output stage can then be switched at a rate that's synchronous with the incoming sample frequency (44.1kHz, 48kHz, 96kHz etc). 'Theoretically' because the majority of digital amps currently available have analogue rather than digital inputs, including those based on Tripath's Class T derivative.

Nevertheless, the fact that CD or DVD-A data, for example, must first be decoded and converted to analogue (via a DAC in

the DVD player) before being re-sampled and digitised (via an ADC in the amplifier) is about as daft as it gets. A whole host of processing and distortion could be avoided if the data remained in the digital domain throughout. Once either IEEE1394 FireWire or HDMI interfaces are approved for DVD-A and SACD players, there will be even less excuse for this not to happen.

While ideal on paper, the practical implementation of a PWM encoder and switching stage that offers the dynamic range and bandwidth appropriate for DVD-Audio and SACD is exceedingly difficult. There's also a real 'art' in designing the robust analogue filter stage required to isolate the audio from the high voltage, high frequency switching components. Particularly while maintaining performance, sound quality and passing strict EMC regulations on radiated interference.

This is why, for years, Class D technology has been used in 'non-critical' audio applications where high power and high efficiency are valued above performance parameters like noise and distortion. In-car audio springs to mind. Toccata was well ahead of the game in developing a truly audiophile digital amplifier, but the technology and all its rights, was bought lock, stock and barrel by Texas Instruments who recognised its potential in broader, more lucrative markets.

Recently, Texas announced the availability of its TAS5000-series PWM modulators (offering 32-192kHz input sample rates) with companion TAS5100-series 'H-bridges' – the final MOSFET switching stages. All we need now is for an audio company to run with the ball. Fortunately, the options are opening up, with proprietary technologies including Sharp's 1-bit PDM, B&O (Powerhouse) and Sony's S-Master (with Mitsubishi and Sanken) all competing with solutions from Crystal, Analogue Devices, D2Audio and Philips. Many of these offer 192kHz digital inputs and full compatibility with SACD's 1-bit DSD data.

Are we about to witness the birth of a new generation in amplifier technology? I certainly hope so, but after seven years of anticipation, I've given up holding my breath. ☹

Paul Miller

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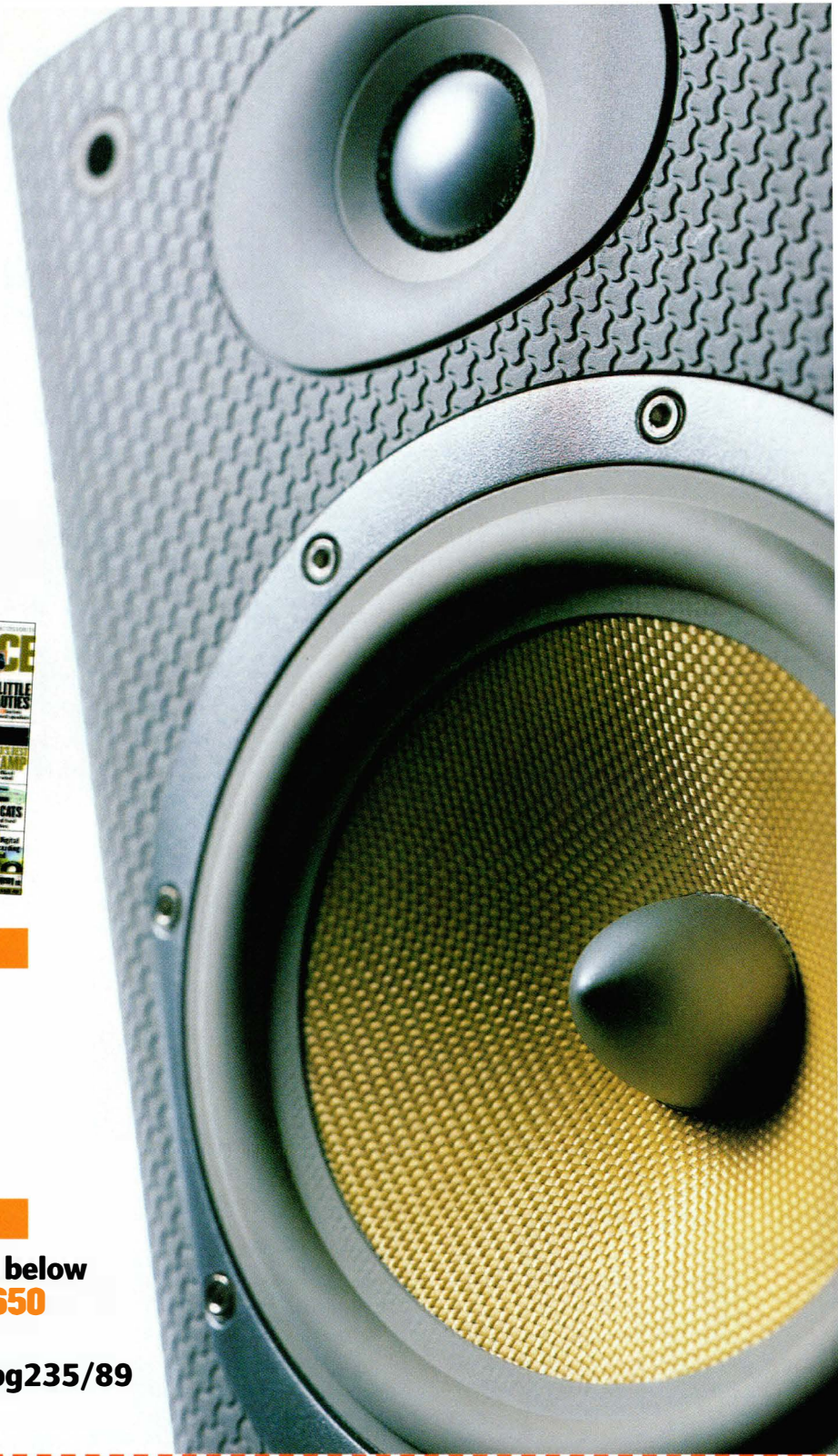
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NAIM NAC72K Preamp, Serial No 60956 £250. Call Alan on 01865 821530 Eves (Oxford)

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DUAL 701 DD turntable Shure V15 boxed £100 tandberg TA300M amplifier £40. 01708 457691 (Essex)

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NAD C270 power amp, boxed with manuals, mint £230. 07833 718 426 (Gwynedd).

CLEARAUDIO BASIK MM/MC phono amp: See Hi-Fi plus. Boxed with manual £175. 01903 247779 (Sussex)

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8466 9736 (Kent).

ROTHWELL INDUS passive preamp £375, Quad 34 preamp grey RCA inputs £195, Tjoebe 99 valve CD player £225. 01202 481 386 (Dorset)

AUDIO SYNTHESIS Silverblue SQ solid silver interconnects, WBT phonos 2x0.5m £90 each pair, 1x0.75m £100. All three £200. Terry 020 8482 0363 (Enfield).

STANDS UNIQUE Sound Support 10 (Natural Ash) 4 shelf hi-fi stand, mint condition. £200 Tel 01633 281436 (South Wales)

AUDIONOTE Mzero preamp, pair P zero monoblocks, CDT zero CD transport, DAC Zero, AZ speakers and cables. Brand new boxed £2,000. 01992 300713 (North).

SOUNDCRAFTSMEN Pro Power 4 amplifier, American mosfet 225wpc, excellent build quality and sound. £475 with free matching preamp. 01954 780329 (Cambridge).

MERIDIAN 508 CD player, as new, boxed in immaculate condition, balanced outputs plus RCA. New machine forces sale. (£2,000) £850. 07753 625783 after 7pm (London).

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RUARK EPILOGUE speakers and dialogue centre. Royd Abbott speakers. Arcam 10 AV amplifier

(Dave) and Arcam 10P amplifier.

01525 221830 (Beds)

QUADRASPIRE Q4 natural wood 4-shelf rack, beautiful hi-fi furniture, stunning condition (£280) £150. 07753 625783 after 7pm (Kent).

CASTLE CHESTER speakers in luxury yew veneer, 95cm(h) 25(w) 18(d), excellent condition, nice furniture too! £375. 01954 780329 (Cambridge).

MARANTZ CD-75 II CD player, Rotel RA-840-BX3 amplifier, Denon DRM-600 cassette deck, Wharfedale 505.2 speakers, stands. £200 ono. Mike Steer 07976 919497 (Oxon)

ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS Model 1 speakers with Foundation stands, £250 ono. Also Opera Mini speakers £200 ono. 01179 686424 (Bristol)

MUSICAL FIDELITY XA2 amp.

Perfect working order, excellent condition, original box and instructions. £299. Robin 01253 739195 (Lancashire).

LINN GENKI CD (black) and Kolektor

WANTED

CELESTION KINGSTON with original stands, good condition (technically & optically). email: minihan@gmx.net; fax: +49 40 36038 65724 (Germany).

preamp (silver), both as new, boxed, manuals, remotes. Bargain £795 together. 01954 780329 (Cambridge)

ROKSAN KANDY KA-1 amp in silver, with manual and remote.

Stunning condition and sound, HFC recommended (£475) £250. 07753 625783 After 7 pm (S.London).

SONY TA-FA30ES integrated amplifier £150, excellent condition. 0121 744 1528 (Birmingham).

PMC FB1 speakers (£1,410) £750, MF A3.2 24/96 player (£1,000) £600, Aura power amps x2, 250 watts bridged (£1,000) £250 each, all mint 2 months old. 01904 708832 or 07762 360699 (York).

SONUS FABER MINUETTO speakers, handcrafted in Italy, walnut and leather, 8 ohms, £400. Bill 01723 516869 (N.Yorkshire).

PROAC TABLETTE 2000, black, boxed as new. One year old with Atacama SE24 stands. (£730) £400 ono. 07771 508444 day or 01205 722000 eves. (Lincs).

BUYING TIPS

Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

Usually, speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amps, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be trouble – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!

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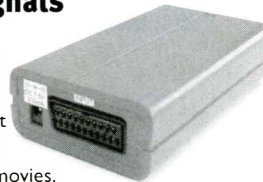
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How to use this guide

The *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* is the best way to make a shortlist of components for your system. Pick the ones that best suit your taste and budget, then use our *Dealer Classified* section to find specialist outlets where you can audition these components with your favourite discs.

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



Despite the emergence of new formats and the resurgence of an old one (vinyl), CD is still the king of formats if you require breadth of choice. And despite the fact that other sources will play CDs, if you want to hear your discs at their best there's little substitute for a dedicated CD player.

It's also the most enduring format on the market. Despite high-resolution contenders like SACD and DVD-Audio, nothing has been able to undermine this universally popular format.

CD players work by reading a stream of 1s and 0s off a disc that spins at a constantly changing speed (to counteract the increasing length of 'groove'). This bitstream is then digitally filtered before undergoing digital-to-analogue conversion in the DAC (D-to-A convertor). Thereafter, the signal is filtered



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

The processes of reading the disc and converting the data are sometimes split between a CD transport and separate DAC in so-called two-box players. A popular approach with very high-end kit, this separates the electronically noisy elements from the sensitive analogue stages, but can introduce timing errors known as jitter, therefore one-box players usually offer best results where budget is a consideration.

SUPER AUDIO CD



SACD or Super Audio CD is a relatively new audio-only format introduced by Sony and Philips. It offers higher resolution than CD in the form of considerably greater bandwidth and improved dynamic range. It also has the potential for uncompressed six-channel surround, and most new discs take advantage of this. SACD discs are usually hybrids and will play on normal CD players, but you won't be able to appreciate their highest quality or their multichannel capability without an SACD-compatible player. Some SACD players also play DVD and even DVD-Audio – these are listed in our DVD section.

Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

A DAC or digital-to-analogue convertor is a fundamental part of any CD player and converts the digits read from the disc into an analogue music waveform which is amplified to line level.

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

Discs are read by a transport or disc drive, which creates radio frequency 'noise'. Separating the DAC means the conversion can be done with less interference.

CAN I USE AN OUTBOARD DAC WITH MY INTEGRATED CD PLAYER?

Yes, if it has a digital output – and most do.

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

No. All analogue cables are suitable for connecting a CD player to an amp. Digital specific cables with 75ohms impedance are useful when connecting the player to a digital recorder or DAC.

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

Oversampling involves multiplying the sampling frequency by a whole number, usually between four and 32, but sometimes higher, and is designed let the DAC to work in a more linear fashion. Upsampling is where the data stream is stretched out by interpolation and is typically used to refer to large changes in sampling rate such as from 44.1kHz to 192kHz.

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

Yes. The vast majority of SACD discs are hybrids, with a CD layer that all CD players can read.

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

No, the same applies to DVD-As. But you can play CDs and DVD-As on normal DVD players.

TOP BUYS



NAD C451i £330

Dynamic, tonally varied and confident sound combines with class-leading detail resolution. Excellent value and highly entertaining.



Marantz CD6000 KI Signature £500

An affordable high-end machine, this very impressive player has it all: brawn, finesse and class. Not to mention the full range of features.

Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE CD PLAYERS

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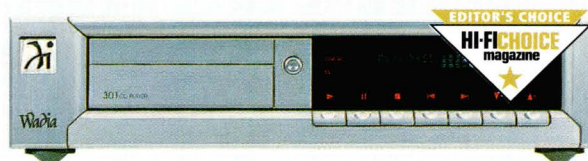
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				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	
UP TO £1,000											
	Arcam CD92	900	High-resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing								212
	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use								202
	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness								217
	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks								212
	Exposure 2010	600	Undistinguished in the final analysis, but the 2010 nevertheless is a return to form for this famous marque								231
	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal								212
	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain								217
	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	500	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built								231
	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step								206
	NAD C 541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money								231
	NAD Silverline S500	1,000	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear								195
	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well								231
	Rotel RCD-1070	495	Technically sound and well equipped, if a little lacking in excitement or involvement								226
	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability								212
	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD is a distinctly superior package, with above average performance.								234
	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast and the availability of a complete upgrade path makes this a good long-term proposition								195
ABOVE £1,000											
	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,200	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility								226
	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
	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well-built player – balanced outputs too								226
	Cyrus CD7Q	1,150	This refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range builds on the qualities of the lesser models								226
	Marantz CD17 MkII KI Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)								226
	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound								231
	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE ²⁴	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities								229
	Naim Audio CD5	1,150	Recommended subject to audition – a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses								212
	Naim NACDSII/XPS	6,265	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results								188
	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality								226
	Sony SCD-333ES	1,200	High-end multichannel SACD player is excellent with CD, impressive in surround								224
	Sony SCD-XA77ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch								223
	Sony SCD-1	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous, but it's a slow operator and doesn't support multichannel								194
	Wadia 301	3,650	Insightful player with digital preamp options and good onboard volume control. Try it direct for maximum effect								228

SPECS KEY **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a DAC or digital recorder. **CD-RW COMPATIBLE** Will play CD-RW (rewritable) discs, most CD players can cope with CD-Rs. **CD TEXT** Will display album and track titles from inserted disc. **BAL ANALOGUE OUT** Balanced XLR output connections for similarly equipped amplifiers. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the CD player. **VARIABLE OUTPUT** Player features both fixed level and variable, volume adjustable outputs



Primare D30.2 £1,499

A top-class player with a characteristically powerful and authoritative, but also a subtle and engaging sound. It works best in high-grade, high-resolution systems.



Wadia 301 £3,650

Revelatory player that gives new insight into everything it plays, can be used directly into a power amp to good effect and has an optional digital preamp function.

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players – you can't really beat a multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are remarkably good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD, apart from being the first digital video format for the home, is that it offers discrete multi-channel sound. In the case of plain DVD video discs, this music is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit onto the disc alongside the video data. You



can use a DVD player with your stereo system by connecting the stereo outputs, though this won't give the surround benefits that the format specialises in.

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

Use the analogue outputs for CD, DVD-A and SACD, and the coaxial digital output for DTS and Dolby Digital movie soundtracks.

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

The best connection is component video closely followed by RGB Scart, which is clearly superior to S-video and the basic composite video option.

DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear the benefits of surround sound. DVD players can be used with stereo amps to great effect, but you won't be able to decode the Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks on movies.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

Not unless you have a progressive scan/NTSC compatible monitor or TV – as yet there is no PAL version.

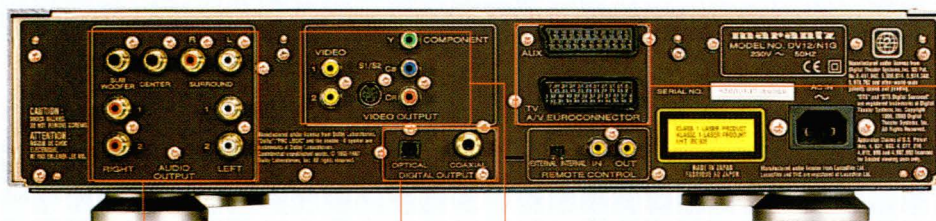
DVD-AUDIO



DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs. The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player. While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for

information – lyrics, images and so on. To save you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, and this would seem to be the best route if you want to enjoy high-resolution digital audio. If you're after a high-end model, look for one with a 'high bandwidth' digital audio output as well as 5.1 analogue outputs.

CONNECTIONS



ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS: For stereo and multichannel connections, use these for best results with DVD-Audio, SACD and CD.

DIGITAL OUTPUTS: For Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM audio bitstreams.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow sockets are composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component which gives best results, while the black multipin socket is S-video, which sits qualitatively between the two.

SCART CONNECTIONS: These are a good-quality option for video, especially ones that output RGB.

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
R	Arcam DIVA DV88	1,000	Video player built with non-obsolence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player						213
BB	Denon DVD-3800	1000	High and progressive DVD-Video player with good CD and DVD-Audio capabilities, priced below its station.						234
R	Harman/Kardon DVD25	350	Reasonable video player is an excellent CD player, making this a good choice for buyers who put music first						228
R	JVC XV-SA72SL	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike						220
R	Pioneer DV-545	330	Stylish and well-equipped slimline DVD-Video player that is an extremely attractive all-rounder						221
BB	Pioneer DV656A	400	"Universal" SACD/DVD/Audio/Video player does everything moderately well or better, and is an excellent buy						234
EC	Pioneer DV-747A	899	UK's first universal player, compatible with virtually everything. Remarkably good with every format						226
BB	Toshiba SD-510E	320	Great all-rounder DVD-Audio from a slightly idiosyncratic player at a new low price point for Toshiba						228
R	Yamaha DVD-S1200	700	Clean, agile sound quality, and decent, if unexciting, DVD-A performance round off a good, if costly, player						228
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse						230
EC	Marantz DV8300	1,400	Universal machine with a great sense of timing and comprehensive features						233
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
EC	Meridian DVD596	2,485	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 DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs						230
R	Pioneer DV-939A	1,200	Near state-of-the-art video and attractive, easy-on-the-ear music-making, from CD and DVD-Audio alike						213
BB	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player – in this context, pricing is competitive						213
EC	Townshend DV-747A	2,899	Major upgrade to Pioneer machine turns it into a giant slayer of a disc player, available as an upgrade to existing owners						232

SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.

TOP BUYS



Pioneer DV-656A £400
The least costly universal player to date - good CD, SACD, DVD-V and DVD-A playback.



Denon DVD-3800 £1,000
This DVD-Audio compatible player is excellent with music and equally sharp with video.



Sony DVP-NS905V £400
SACD-compatible DVD-Video player offers excellent audio and video performance.



Marantz DV8300 £1,400
A superb machine compatible with virtually all formats including DVD-Audio and SACD.



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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.



TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce.

Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

TOP BUYS

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



NAD 533 £220

A simple and well-founded turntable combined with a tonearm, which is fine value for money and helps to deliver an impressive level of performance at a very modest price.

RECOMMENDED
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Rega P3 £298

Latest version of a hi-fi classic is a very capable deck for a very modest price, with very little serious competition from other makes. A great turntable for the money and a very safe buy.

BEST BUY
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Audio Note TT1/ARM1 £594

Simple, unpretentious and relatively inexpensive, Audio Note's TT1 delivers a real taste of high-end performance at a realistically affordable price.

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

A beautifully made turntable that delivers a high-end vinyl experience without costing the earth. Neutral, even-handed, detailed and frankly spellbinding.

Our favourite TURNTABLES

BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE

Record players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Acutus	5,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	●	●			194
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			●	●	223
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dual CS415-2	160	No denying it's cheap and cheerful, but it does what it's paid for happily enough	33/45			●	●	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc are still top rank	33	●		●		103
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michell Gyro SE	829	Stripped-down version of classic GyroDec, offering strong and lively sound	33/45	●				223
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michell Orbe SE	1,725	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	33/45	●				192
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	33/45			●	●	203
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●		214
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega Planar 25	619	Great-looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	33/45		●			203
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	●	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●		195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●		186
<input type="checkbox"/>	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	33/45	●	●	●		203
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	33/45	●	●	●		205

Our favourite PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
			MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	ISSUE NUMBER
Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford		●		203
Audio Technica AT110E	29	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	214
Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	●			223
Dynavector DV-20X L	350	Articulate-sounding with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high-quality turntable and arm		●		192
Dynavector DRT XV-1	2,900	Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three-dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining		●		208
Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300	A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings		●		192
Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	192
Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192

Our favourite PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
			MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	ADJ GAIN	ADJ IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
Creek OBH-8SE	160	Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from this neat little unit	●				223
Lehmann Black Cube	275	Creates a well balanced sound that has few limitations and plenty of good qualities. Very flexible for the price.	●	●	●	●	234
Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	●	●		●	201
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
Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension alongside good tonal colour this is the one to beat, excellent value for the money.		●			234
Tom Evans Microgroove Plus	700	Stunning detail, gives new insights into familiar discs		●			223
Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP		●			201
Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility.	●	●	●	●	234

TURNTABLE SPECS KEY **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you.

SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type.

REPLACEABLE STYLUS Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

DAB or FM?

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

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

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

RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio for details.

TOP BUYS



Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget tuners, with great sound and plenty of features.



NAD S400 £600

A nicely judged performer that maximises the potential of FM broadcasting.



Pure DRX-601E £300

This 'budget' DAB model can meet much more expensive alternatives head-on.



Arcam DT-81 £650

Highly professional implementation of DAB technology makes this one of the best options on the digital tuner market.

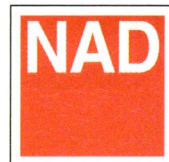
Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY
 RECOMMENDED
 EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROTARY TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM, M, L	64					193
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM, M, L	64					193
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7					211
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Harman Kardon TU940	180	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30					221
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90					211
<input type="checkbox"/>	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29					193
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30					230
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30					230
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good, honest, budget tuner – loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30					221
DAB TUNERS										
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16					221
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure DRX-601ESM	330	Cheap, small and capable, but with major tonal variations from neutral which confuse the issue	DAB	90					230
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pure DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB separate to date, and concedes little if anything to more expensive models	DAB	9					211
<input type="checkbox"/>	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

SPECS KEY **WAVEBANDS** Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. **PRESETS** How many stations can be stored in memory. **RDS** Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). **REMOTE CONTROL** For the couch potato. **SIGNAL STRENGTH METER** Useful for setting up an aerial. **ROTARY TUNING KNOB** An ergonomic alternative to buttons



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DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard disc recorders

MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard disc

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HD (hard disc) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with those of MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



Philips CDR802 £300
Multidisc recorder that's slick and accomplished, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



Marantz DR6000 £400
Quality in a box – it eschews gimmickry, but it does a simple job very well.



Sony MDS-JE480 £130
Entry-level MD recorder that does exactly what it says on the tin, at a bargain price.



Yamaha CDR-HD1000 £700
First of its kind – a CD player and hard disc audio recorder. Effective but pricey.

Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HD recorders

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	
CD-R/RW RECORDERS							
R	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	218
RE	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		● ●	233
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1		● ●	205
RE	Philips CDR802	299	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound recorder at a good price	2		in ● ●	233
RE	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●	205
R	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well-equipped, well-priced CD-R/RW deck	1		● ●	218
RE	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single-deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good, if characterful, player	1		● ●	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		● ●	218
MD RECORDERS							
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●	205
R	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●	233
HD RECORDERS							
R	Yamaha CDR-HD1000	700	CD-R and hard drive in one – save your music to hard disc, edit, then dump to CD-R for MiniDisc style flexibility	2	20	● ●	223

SPECS KEY **DECKS** Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision

Stocks a comprehensive range of DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma monitors, televisions and projection systems from all the leading manufacturers.



From starter systems to custom designed multi-room and home cinema installations, our friendly staff are available in all outlets to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

If you're interested in home entertainment and want to avoid the confusion, contact your local Sevenoaks Sound & Vision outlet on freephone 0800 587 9909 and experience more.

0% interest free option* is available on most products. *Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

**Hi-Fi Separates & Systems • Home Cinema
Plasma & Projection • Multi-Room Systems**

MUSICAL FIDELITY *Tri-Vista 300*

In celebration of the company's twentieth anniversary, Musical Fidelity are introducing the limited edition (500 only) Tri-Vista 300 'super' integrated amplifier. Delivering an enormous 340W per channel, the 300 uses Tri-Vista mini-tubes similar to the Nu-Vista tubes previously used in Musical Fidelity's highly acclaimed, limited edition, Nu-Vista series of products. The Tri-Vista Series will shortly be enhanced with the addition of 800 Tri-Vista SACD/CD Players, 300 Tri-Vista Pre-Amplifiers and Power Amplifiers.

Tri-Vista 300 Integrated Amplifier £3994.95



New Outlets in Poole, Shirley (Solihull), Swindon and Wolverhampton

We are delighted to announce that towards the end of October our new store at Latimer House, 44-46 High Street, Poole will be opening - please call 01202 671677 to confirm before travelling. Additional new outlets in Shirley (Solihull), Swindon and Wolverhampton are due to open* over the next few months. For further details please see our outlets listing on Page 7.

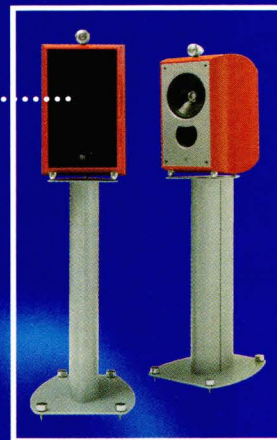
*Subject to legal completion.

Outlets Nationwide

Aberdeen • Bedford • Birmingham • Brighton • Bristol • Bromley • Cambridge • Cardiff
Chelsea • Cheltenham • Crawley • Croydon • Edinburgh • Epsom • Exeter • Glasgow
Guildford • Holborn • Hull • Ipswich • Kingston • Leicester • Leeds • Lincoln
Liverpool • Maidstone • Manchester • Newcastle • Norwich • Nottingham • Oxford
Peterborough • Plymouth • Poole • Preston • Reading • Sevenoaks • Sheffield • Southampton
Southgate • Swansea • Swiss Cottage • Tunbridge Wells • Watford • Witham (Essex)



By combining technologies from their Reference and Q Series, KEF have introduced the new XQ speaker range. Featuring KEF Uni-Q® 'point source' arrays for unrivalled off-axis performance and 'super audio' Hypertweeters™, the XQ range fully exploits the wide bandwidth of digital formats like SACD and DVD-A. The range comprises the XQ one and three stand mounters, the XQ five floorstanders and XQ two c centre speaker. All XQ models are available in a variety of finishes.



www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

experience

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PRO-JECT

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

Turntables & Tuners

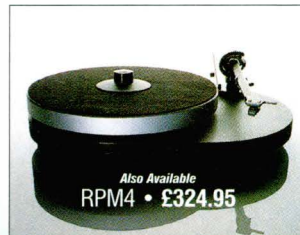
- Arcam** DIVA T61 Tuner **£249.95**
- Denon** TU260L MKII Tuner..... **£109.95**
- Marantz** ST4000 Tuner..... **£119.95**
- Michell** Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable..... **£1017.95**
- Project** Debut Phono SB Turntable..... **£159.95**
- Project** Debut II Turntable (Colours)..... **£129.95**
- Project** RPM4 Turntable..... **£324.95**
- Sony** ST-D777ES FM/DAB Tuner..... **£549.95**
- Videologic** DRX-601E DAB Tuner..... **£249.95**

is a fine turntable, and it clearly reveals the benefits of listening to vinyl, with a rich and detailed soundstage, and a good dynamic response.

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2000

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



ROTEL RCD-02 CD Player £379.95 RA-02 Amplifier £349.95

RCD-02 CD Player "Whether it's the raw, and sometimes just plain barking vocals of Tom Waits, or the stinging guitar stabs of Pete Townsend on some old Who tracks, the Rotel is one of those players that can't help but bring a smile to the face - it's a breath of fresh air."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ September 2002

RA-02 Amplifier "The amp has a fast, detailed and yet satisfyingly full presentation. That allows it to make a fine job of the beats of Groove Armada's *Goodbye Century* set without losing sight of the fine details of the mix, and also husking out Marianne Faithfull's deliciously smutty vocals on *Kissing Time* with real relish. Add in decent levels of equipment - and the convenience of remote control, and we reckon Rotel has a winner on its hands."

Also Available
Marantz PM4200 • £149.95



WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2002

(((AE))) AEGIS EVO Series ACOUSTIC ENERGY Evo One Speakers £179.95

"The original Aegis Ones were great speakers, to the extent that they were category winners in our 1998 awards. Since then a host of new models have raised the standards in the sub-£200 category, and the Aegis Ones soon went from stunner to also ran. AE's response to that is an EVO version.



The Aegis Ones genes are clearly evident. The original's refinement and bass weight are preserved and backed up with better openness and more free-flowing dynamic ability. The old speakers would have delivered a cool and calm version of Pink's *Missundaztood* set - they'd be enjoyable, but would lack a little drive and excitement. The new speakers, however, address those limitations... Add authority and good stereo imaging to the list of plus points and it comes as no surprise to find these speakers at home with classical, too. Indeed, running



through our test room's extensive CD library we couldn't find a genre that these AE's weren't happy playing." WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ July 2002

CD Players

- Arcam** DIVA CD62T..... **£369.95**
- Arcam** DIVA CD72T..... **£449.95**
- Arcam** DIVA CD92T..... **£899.95**
- Arcam** FMJ CD23T..... **£1199.95**
- Cyrus** CD7..... **£799.95**
- Denon** DCD485..... **£139.95**
- Linn** Genki..... **£994.95**
- Linn** Ikemí..... **£1949.95**
- Marantz** CD4000..... **£99.95**
- Marantz** CD6000Ki Signature..... **£399.95**
- Meridian** 507..... **£1194.95**
- Meridian** 588..... **£2099.95**
- Musical Fidelity** A308CR..... **£1999.95**
- Musical Fidelity** NuVista 3D..... **£2999.95**
- Rotel** RCD1070..... **£494.95**
- Sony** CDPXE570..... **£109.95**

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 13th November 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	£599.95
Cyrus 5 Amplifier	£499.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£229.95
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
Sony TA-FE570 Amplifier	£149.95



ARCAM
SOUND & VISION

DiVA CD82T CD Player DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier

£599.95
£799.95

DiVA CD82T "Arcam's latest sounds like a more mature version of its little brother. On an initial listen the increased solidity and refinement are obvious, but over time the subtler dynamic shading and more assured handling of transients come to the fore... The Arcam CD82T is one of the best CD players available at this price point." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ September 2002**

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



Also Available **NEW** Arcam
FMJ AV8 & P7
£5,499.95



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2002
Hi-Fi & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
SPEAKERS
£201-£350

B&W Bowers & Wilkins DM602S3 Speakers £299.95

"But the B&W 602 S3 are our winners. They're big and not particularly beautiful, yet if it were our money they're what we would buy. No rival can match the wide ranging dynamics or low frequency performance of these not so compact standmounters. Add all-round sonic excellence and the choice is easy. Give them sufficient space to breathe, then sit back and enjoy the music."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Supertest Winner August 2002

Also Available (Pictured Right)
B&W CDM NT Series • Prices start from **£749.95**



PURE DIGITAL DRX-701ES Digital Tuner £249.95

This new tuner from the recently renamed Pure is based on the 2001 Award-winning Videologic DRX-601ES, but under the lid is an all-new third-generation digital radio engine, in the form of Frontier Silicon's Chorus FS1010. Its biggest advantages are lower energy consumption and above all cost - it's the major reason why the DRX-701ES is £100 less than last year's model.

The tuner uses 24-bit/192kHz conversion with 4x upsampling and data interpolation, and is powered by a low-noise toroidal transformer - such attention to sonic detail pays off. Digital outputs are provided



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product of the year
2002
Hi-Fi & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
TUNERS
Pure DRX-701ES

Also Available
Denon TU260L/II • **£109.95**

on electrical and optical feed, but most people will use the analogue out, and these sound very good indeed. As usual the tuner is subject to the signal quality off-air, but when it's fed from a high-quality outdoor aerial and a good signal it's capable of a crisp, powerful and detailed presentation. Even more populist music stations like Radio 6 benefit from the mix of a neutral balance and fine weight, while speech is also neutral and easy to follow... If you want a quality home tuner for digital radio, you need look no further." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002**



CYRUS

CD7Q CD Player £1149.95
7 Integrated Amplifier £699.95

Cyrus 7Q CD "How it compares directly (with the competition) is a matter for a group test, but I can tell you now that it'll be a close one, because the CD7Q is a fantastic CD Player, offering all you'd expect from a disc spinner at this price, and more... The CD7Q's a major upgrade from the class-leading CD7. Its weighty, detailed sound puts it at the pinnacle of CD players at this price."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ July 2002

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ November 1999

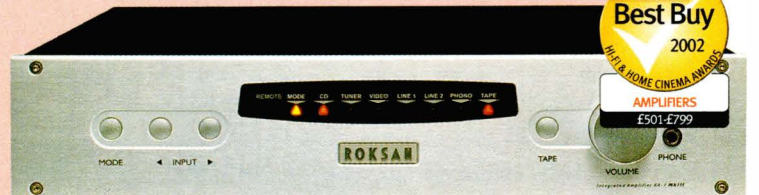


Also Available
Cyrus 7 CD £799.95

ROKSAN Kandy KA1 MKIII Amplifier £549.95

"When we last reviewed Roksan's Kandy integrated amp in February it fought off serious competition to come top in a *Supertest*. This is its replacement, the MkIII.

Internal changes include an updated power supply for the preamp section and identical mono modules for the left and right power amp sections. Roksan also claims 50 percent lower distortion on line-level inputs and a whopping 150 percent less on the phono input. The rated power output is an impressive 120 watts per channel into 8 ohms, and this amp has a confident, muscular way with music that bears this out. But don't be fooled into thinking this amp is raw but unrefined. With Van Morrison's *Down the Road* the Kandy has the guts to render the performance exciting and dynamic, but also the guile to deliver subtle details.



The upgraded Kandy MkIII is an

excellent amp; the MkII version was impressive, but MkIII is a stunner. It betters all the amps here in the timing department, and has a wonderfully robust character that works well with all types of music. It manages to retain the good points of the MkII while adding extra resolution and subtlety. All the amps here have a place in the market. It's just that at £550 the Kandy really does set the pace."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002



Also Available
Roksan Caspian/II Amplifier • £894.95



QUAD

11L Speakers £379.95

"Quad is best known for its superlative electrostatic designs, which start at £3500. So any £379 pair of speakers that carries the company's name has to be going some to avoid tarnishing the family reputation. The first surprise is that the 11Ls come in real-wood veneers covered with piano-gloss lacquer. This type of finish is almost unheard of at the £1000 mark, let alone at this price. Has anything been sacrificed for such a luxury finish? Here's the second surprise: apparently not.

The final surprise? Well, saving the best for the last, the sound quality of the 11Ls is phenomenally good. These are small speakers at just 33cm



Also Available
Mission 780 • £269.95



tall, but the scale and authority of their performance is terrific. The laws of physics dictate bass extension limitations, but thanks to a clever dual rear firing port arrangement the 11Ls plumb the depths with the determination of a rottweiler, even when placed in free space.

If you're in the market for a pair of top quality standmounters these Quads are a must listen. Quite simply, they're good enough to scare the competition big time."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2002

Speaker Selection

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 DM601 S3.....	£249.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black).....	£799.95
KEF Q1.....	£249.95
KEF Q3.....	£399.95
Linn Katan (Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple).....	£894.95
Mission 780.....	£269.95
Mission 782.....	£629.95
Mission m71i.....	£129.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Ruarik Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Wharfedale 8.1.....	£99.95

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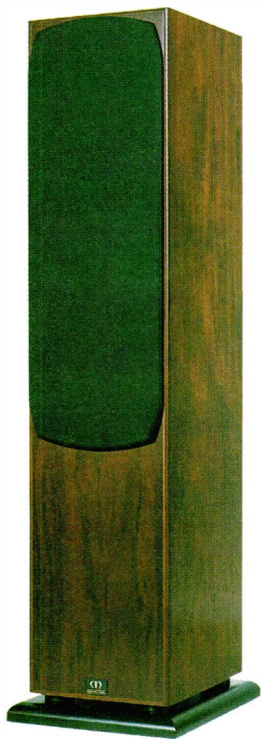
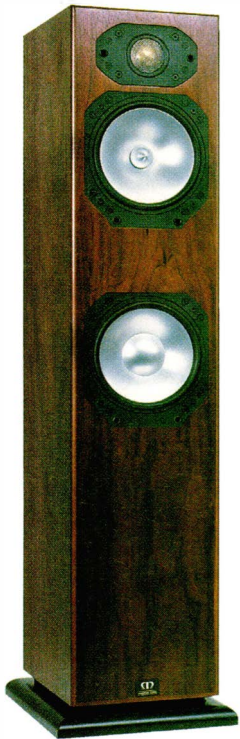
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MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

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-s yled. 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.



MONITOR AUDIO Silver S6 Speakers £599.95

British loudspeaker manufacturer Monitor Audio has introduced a replacement series for its acclaimed and award winning Silver Series speakers. "The aim has been to offer real advances in performance and value", says technical director Dean Hartley. Every single aspect of the existing range was analysed, every user comment studied. We could have improved what we had, but instead we decided to design a whole new range of speakers from the ground up." New models include the S1 and S2 standmounters, the S6, S8 and S10 floorstanders.

"With a close-miked track such as James Taylor's *Line 'Em Up* from SACD they really deliver the character of the singer's voice and they're just as expressive with the cultured rhythms of Groove Armada's latest outing, having just the right mix of rhythmic control and fluidity... But amazingly the best is yet to come: these are simply beautiful speakers for classical music, once a few days' thrashing has tamed their initial rawness. With the latest release of Holst's *The Planets* on DVD-Audio, they thunder out *Mars* with true conviction.

These are rather magical speakers, with a poise and grace that belies their ability to turn on the power when required. Pair them with a good CD player and suitably accomplished amp, and you won't go far wrong."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002



Also Available
Gold Reference GR10 & GR20

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW Recorder £199.95

"While it looks simple, the Pioneer has an impressive array of features, including the handy double-speed disc finalization and CD-Text compatibility. Internally, the PDR609 is a big step up from the Award-winning PDR-509 it replaced: the DAC is now a 24-bit/96kHz number, aided and abetted by Pioneer's Legato Link conversion technology, and it has 24-bit A-to-D conversion, which is ideal for copying your vinyl onto CD. If this is your plan, you'll appreciate that the Pioneer makes it easy to create first-rate copies from any source, helped by the manual recording-level controls. It was hard to tell our copy of Jim White's *No Such Place* from the original.



Also Available
Marantz DR6000 CD Recorder • £299.95

While the Pioneer's replay quality can't match the Marantz, it costs £120 less, which would buy you a lot of blank discs. If you've already got a dedicated CD player, we'd go with this recorder." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2001**

Recorder Selection

- Marantz DR6000 CD-RW.....£299.95**
- Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc.....£229.95**
- Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....£119.95**
- Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....£199.95**



TAG McLaren



Aphrodite Music System **£2994.95**

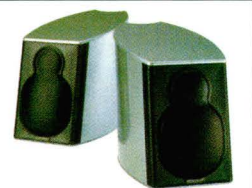
"TAG McLaren, by the company's nature, have always had it in their blood to produce a stylish product. After all, they are tightly linked to Formula 1 racing which very much has its own charisma. The alluring shape of the Aphrodite, reviewed here, is their attempt

Aphrodite

to bring some of that style into high-end audio. For too long the stylish one-box system has looked the business but more often than not failed to deliver the goods when it comes to sound and TAG wanted to put an end to that.

Firstly, there's the look and build of this beauty. The minute you lay your hands on the cold metal you know this is one very, very serious attempt to bring a one-box system up into the echelons of the real high-end. It weighs a fairly substantial 10 kilos and is housed in a classy, ergonomically rounded, brushed metallic chassis that's available in a variety of carefully judged colours. The case houses a CD Player, FM tuner and amplifier that delivers 50W per channel into 8ohms - enough muscle to run most modern speakers comfortably...

This system is a serious proposition for those in the market for a high-end sound from user friendly equipment. Few separates systems can deliver such quality, plus style, for the same cost... Although expensive, the Aphrodite offers good value for those in the market for a sophisticated product - and it's miles ahead of certain 'lifestyle' systems that offer poorer build quality and sound, for little less cost." **Hi-Fi World November 2002**



TAG McLaren • Calliope Speakers **£1994.95**

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

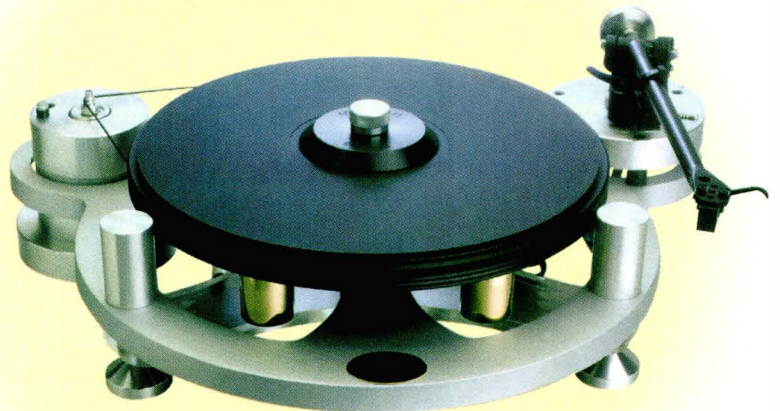


Founded in Borehamwood by mechanical engineer John Michell. For over thirty years, Michell Engineering have been at the forefront of quality audio, with world-wide appreciated products like the GyroDec and Orbe Turntables. In the early eighties, the revolutionary GyroDec Turntable, with its elegant and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

"The beautifully engineered Gyro SE not only looks the part but has a wonderfully clean and fluid sound." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001**

Price includes Rega RB300 Tone Arm



Systems Best Buy £1000 plus



LINN

Linn Classik Music System **£999.95**

Music System **£999.95**

The Classik Music System is an alternative to the sound and looks of mass market compact systems. Designed to be useful throughout the home, the Classik is simple and stylish with all the advanced features needed to satisfy the most

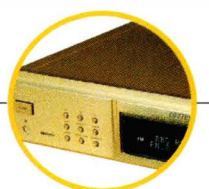
demanding hi-fi enthusiast or discriminating music lover.

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

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 13th November 2002, E&OE.



Classik • Movie System **£1999.95**



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scotland and north

- Aberdeen** 491 Union Street **01224 587070**
- Edinburgh** 5 The Grassmarket **0131 229 7267**
- Glasgow** 88 Great Western Road **0141 332 9655**
- Hull** 1 Savile Row, Savile Street **01482 587171**
- Leeds** 112 Vicar Lane **0113 245 2775** Open Sunday
- Liverpool** 16 Lord Street **0151 707 8417**
- Manchester** 69 High Street, City Centre **0161 831 7969**
- Newcastle** 19 Newgate Street **0191 221 2320**
- Preston** 40-41 Lune Street **01772 825777** Open Sunday
- Sheffield** 635 Queens Road, Heeley **0114 255 5861** Open Sunday

midlands and east

- Bedford** 29-31 St Peters Street **01234 272779**
- Cambridge** 17 Burleigh Street **01223 304770**
- Ipswich** 12-14 Dogs Head Street **01473 286977**
- Leicester** 10 Loseby Lane **0116 253 6567**
- Lincoln** 20-22 Corporation Street **01522 527397**
- Norwich** 29/29a St Giles Street **01603 767605**
- Nottingham** 597-599 Mansfield Road **0115 911 2121**
- Oxford** 41 St Clements Street **01865 241773**
- Peterborough** 36-38 Park Road **01733 897697** Open Sunday

midlands and west

- Birmingham** 12 Queensway Arches, Livery Street **0121 233 2977**
- Bristol** 92b White Ladies Road, Clifton **0117 974 3727**
- Cardiff** 104-106 Albany Road **029 2047 2899**
- Cheltenham** 14 Pitville Street **01242 241171**
- Exeter** 28 Cowick Street **01392 218895**
- Plymouth** 107 Cornwall Street **01752 226011**
- Poole** Latimer House, 44-46 High Street **01202 671677** Opening late-October*
- Shirley (Solihull)** Opening Soon Subject to Legal Completion **0121 733 3727**
- Swansea** 24 Mansel Street **01792 465777** Open Sunday
- Swindon** Opening Soon Subject to Legal Completion **01793 610992**
- Wolverhampton** Opening Soon Subject to Legal Completion **01902 312225**

london and south east

- Brighton** 57 Western Road, Hove **01273 733338**
- Bromley** 39a East Street **020 8290 1988**
- Chelsea** 403 Kings Road **020 7352 9466**
- Crawley** 32 The Boulevard **01293 510777**
- Croydon** 369-373 London Road **020 8665 1203** Open Sunday
- Epsom** 12 Upper High Street **01372 720720** Open Sunday
- Guildford** 73b North Street **01483 536666**
- Holborn** 144-148 Grays Inn Road **020 7837 7540**
- Kingston** 43 Fife Road **020 8547 0717** Open Sunday
- Maidstone** 96 Week Street **01622 686366** Open Sunday
- Reading** 3-4 Kings Walk Shopping Centre **0118 959 7768**
- Sevenoaks** 109-113 London Road **01732 459555**
- Southampton** 33 London Road **023 8033 7770**
- Southgate** 79-81 Chase Side **020 8886 2777**
- Swiss Cottage** 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd **020 7722 9777** Open Sunday
- Tunbridge Wells** 28-30 St Johns Road **01892 531543**
- Watford** 478 St Albans Road **01923 213533** Open Sunday
- Witham (Essex)** 1 The Grove Centre **01376 501733**

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.

new outlets

Towards the end of October, our new store at Latimer House, 44-46 High Street, Poole should be opening - please call to verify before travelling. Other new outlets in Shirley (Solihull), Swindon and Wolverhampton will be opening* over the next few months. Full details to follow soon. *Subject to legal completion.

staff wanted

We are currently recruiting staff at several locations. If you are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, have good customer service skills and would like a career within the audio/visual industry, call Janyss Ness on 01732 466214 for more information.

croydon store re-fit

We are pleased to announce that the Croydon store has now been completely refurbished and we would like to take this opportunity to invite customers new and old to come and see the new look shop.

sevenoaks online

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its 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.

0% finance option†

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.

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that trannies can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use trannies; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo

amps tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

TOP BUYS



Rotel
RA-02 £349

A terrific budget integrated from Rotel's latest line-up. Offers pace, guts and finesse, wrapped up in a prettier package than one might traditionally expect from the marque.



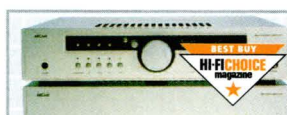
Arcam
A75 Plus £470

One of the latest in Arcam's long amplifier lineage, and a sub-£500 star. Bass is more propulsive than Arcams of old, coupled with subtle attention to sonic detail.



Sugden
A21a £899

Build quality is not very slick and it runs uncomfortably hot. But don't worry about the low power specification – sound is in the very top class.



Arcam
A85/P85 £1,330

Bi-amp combo featuring Arcam's £800 integrated and matching power amp. The resulting sound is both robust and finely detailed across myriad music types.

Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A85	800	Much enhanced design topology gives a more hard-hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7		●	●	85	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus 5	500	An enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7		●	●	45	205
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best-sounding audio brick around	6		●	●	60	196
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high-fidelity operation	5			●	30	208
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal, but a bit on the bland side	6		●		50	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kenwood KAF-3030R	200	Kenwood's best amplifier for some years has a lean bass, but excellent mid and treble	5		●	●	50	217
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5		●	●	60	224
<input type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity X-A2	500	A chip off the old block; sounds very similar to the X-A1 and XA-100R	6				75	208
<input type="checkbox"/>	Myryad Z140	450	Slimline beauty with genuine integrity and coherence, if relatively limited power	5	●	●	●	50	232
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail and a strong power yield	7		●	●	60	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
<input type="checkbox"/>	Naim Nait 5	825	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	6		●		30	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6		●	●	120	205
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6		●		70	201
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-931 MkII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4			●	35	208
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
<input type="checkbox"/>	Canary Audio CA-608	2,250	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PM-14 MkII Kl	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	100	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	YBA Intégré	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6		●		50	214

Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
UP TO £2,000									
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam A85/P85	1,330	Integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A85 virtues plus extra gravitas and range	●	●	7		85	225
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	100	227
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5			221
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●	●	6		140	212
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●	30	216
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	●	●	7		60	212
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and with a little fruitiness	●		6	●		200
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after Nuvista	●	●	4	●	250	231
<input type="checkbox"/>	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	●	●	6		120	212
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	●	●	7	●	200	200
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6	●	50	213
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite B BEST BUY R RECOMMENDED E EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

 continued

Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
ABOVE £2,000									
R	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	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	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		150	221
EC	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●			20	231
R	Bryston BP20/3B-ST	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	●	●	8		120	212
RH	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
RH	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6		120	216
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		●			700	234
EC	Mark Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Pre has precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	●	●	6		125	195
EC	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
EC	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6			233
R	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,700	Powerful, smooth, though slightly uneven with some speakers, but excellent control and separation in others	●	●	6		100	225
R	TAG McLaren DPA32R/250MR	4,940	In a class of its own for extendibility and it's tremendously subtle, though it can sound constrained dynamically	●	●	6		250	230
R	T+A PA 1520 R	2,400	Powerful, punchy amp that has many positive qualities, but sometimes seems to try too hard	●	●	8		260	230

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies

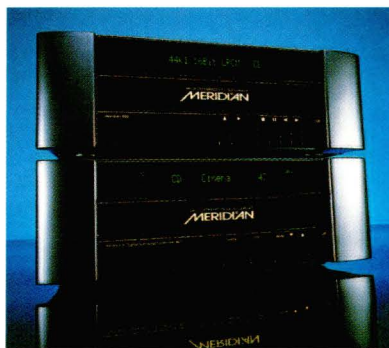


The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 systems are where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have amplification on board and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as

their movie DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking

with stereo. There are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



NAD T761 £650

The simple fact is that it does the job better than most others under £1,000, whether singing piano or forte, and none of the features it doesn't have were missed.



TAG McLaren AV32R EX £2,994

A superb multichannel processor – THX Ultra-approved and fully 7.1-compatible. Now includes a 5.1 analogue bypass for DVD-Audio and SACD.



Denon AVC-A1SR £3,000

Denon's AV behemoth is arguably the best integrated multichannel amp to date – superbly cinematic and one of the very few with genuine 'hi-fi' music credentials.



Bryston SP1/9B THX £7,100

Purist hi-fi meets surround amplification and decoding with the minimum of musical compromise. Processor/preamp now features 7.1 and 5.1 analogue throughput.

Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE AV AMPLIFIERS

Multichannel amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	7.1 COMPATIBLE
INTEGRATED AV AMPS							
R	Arcam AVR200	800	Upgraded AVR100 with Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo, a bit bass-light for multichannel	●	6	70	229
EC	Denon AVC-A1SR	3,000	An AV amp with genuine high-res hi-fi credentials. Includes a ground-breaking 'wide bandwidth' digital audio link	●	8	170	232
R	Harman Kardon AVR 5500	749	Powerful-sounding receiver with some clever features, such as an automatic set-up, but a bit hard-edged	●	8	85	229
BB	Marantz SR-5000	430	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	●	5	105	198
BB	NAD T761	650	First-rate home cinema amp that sounds more powerful than its specs imply, and competes with specialist stereo amps	●	9	80	223
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,850	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad subtle	●	9	160	210
EC	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
R	Sony VA777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all-rounder	●	9	100	210
AV PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS							
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights	●	6	OPT 120	219
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	●	6	●	230
R	Myryad MDP500/MA240/360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	●	9	OPT 120	215
R	Roksan DSP/5 champ/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels	●	4	80	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,994	Flexible A/V processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel system in standard or seven-channel 'EX' form	●	6	●	215

SPECS KEY: **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.



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Five Stars for Value

**Does the best price always mean the best deal?
Ask the UK's top twenty specialist hi-fi dealers.**

"I thought I had this buying hi-fi business sorted out. I bought all the hi-fi magazines and read them thoroughly, because I reckoned their experts knew exactly what they were talking about - at least a lot more than I did! It was reassuring to see the same product names cropping up regularly and I figured the writers' experience and guidance would steer me straight to the system of my dreams. The trouble is I've ended up more confused than when I started".

One reviewer said a product I fancied was absolutely brilliant but another said it was nothing special at all. How can that be? Surely one CD player is pretty much the same as another? And how can a loudspeaker that's one magazine's top recommendation not get so much as a mention in any of the others? I don't mind admitting it, I'm completely lost."

Plan B - I'm going for a deal

"So, I've decided to adopt plan B. I'm sure there can't be any really dramatic differences between all this gear and it's all bound to work together properly, so I'm going to check the price lists and the adverts and shop around for the best deal. I know getting the right hi-fi is important hey, I'm as mad about music as anyone but if I can get close to the mark and save a few quid, I'm sure I'll end up with a good system and be happy. I know there are specialist shops out there that do demonstrations and reckon they've got all the solutions but, to be honest, I'm a bit scared of going to one. I'd really welcome some advice and guidance but I don't know all the technical jargon and I'd feel daft sitting there trying to 'hear the differences' if I couldn't. Anyway, a friend told me that these shops only sell the really expensive gear and that they're not interested if you don't have loads of money to spend."

And so another hi-fi buyer starts his journey down the road to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a permanent overdraft.

There is only one way to buy a hi-fi system that will prove satisfying, reliable and

deliver true value for money, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Let's face it, you wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details and a photograph. Even if you're spending far less, say buying a jacket or a pair of shoes, you want to try them on to make sure they fit you.

Buying a hi-fi system is no different. It doesn't matter what the specifications say or what the 'experts' think: if it doesn't measure up to what you want from a system, then it's not the right choice. Knowing that you've bought a room full of five-star favourites or best-buys is no consolation when you can't bear to listen to them for more than five minutes. Even that ten per cent discount on the price won't make them sound any better.

Buying or being sold to?

Mind you, most of us are easily suckered when it comes to buying hi-fi. Given the choice of venturing into the unknown territory of a specialist dealer's shop and exerting some influence over what we buy, or taking what looks like the easy route having adverts and magazine reviews push us along a path sweetened with discounts and special offers - we opt for the latter. We don't buy a system, we allow ourselves to be sold one. We side-line our own ideas about quality and personal satisfaction and buy someone else's opinion of what's good for us and good value for our money.

Take control!

Now there's a group of long-established, independent specialist dealers who are



“ You wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details. ”

totally committed to putting the customer back in the driving seat. They're encouraging the buyer to take control with a little help and guidance provided where required. They know how difficult it can be to establish the true quality and worth of hi-fi and home cinema systems. They know that without experiencing the performance of the systems they offer, you can't possibly assess the value of them. That's why their idea of 'selling' is to play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost

certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. With the dealer's help and advice you will be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met ... and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problems you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand into your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure that you're entirely happy with the way it works.

Why bother?

There is, of course, one question that hasn't been answered: why should you and these dealers go to all this trouble? Well, from your point of view maybe it's because a good deal is about a great deal more than just price. unless you've got money to burn,

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

you'll be living with your new system for years - years during which most of those five star products will probably stop shining quite so brightly. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

Listed below are 20 of the best hi-fi shops in the country. They all have lots of stars. You'll find them on the shop floor: they're the people waiting to guide customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road
020 7226 5500

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea
020 7924 2040

W4 MARTIN-KLEISER
109 Chiswick High Road
020 8400 5555

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High St. 01233 624441

Beaconsfield MARTIN-KLEISER
9 London End
01494 681300

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245

East Grinstead

AUDIO DESIGNS
26 High St. 01342 314569

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street Hampton Wick
020 8943 3530

Lakeside Retail Park
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
Dansk International
Furniture World
01708 680551
Rayleigh, Essex
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High St. 01268 779762

Ringwood, Hampshire
PHONOGRAPHY
Star Lane 01425 461230

Southend-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
132/4 London Road
01702 435255

Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI

213-217 Tarring Road
01903 245577

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE
3 Church Lane
01295 272158

Birmingham
SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street, Bloxwich
01922 493499

Leicester CYMBIOSIS
6 Hotel St. 0116 262 3754
Northampton LISTEN INN
32 Gold St. 01604 637871
Shrewsbury
CREATIVE AUDIO
9 Dogpole 01743 241924

NORTH

Cheadle THE AUDIO WORKS
14 Stockport Road
0161 428 7887

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STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



Tannoy
Mercury MX3-M £230
Could be more dynamic, but beautifully balanced and voiced floorstander that offers low midband coloration and good transparency at a very modest price.



Dynaudio
Audience 42 £400
It might be expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but it's an aristocrat among the breed, and we'd be surprised if there's a better small speaker around for the price.



PMC
FB1 £1,410
A well-built floorstander that delivers the goods sonically, with the sort of subtlety and delicacy that's likely to have strong audiophile appeal.



B&W
Signature 805 £2,250
You won't get this degree of resolution out of a wider bandwidth speaker at anywhere near the price, and most of your music will sound considerably better through them.

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST BUY
RECOMMENDED
EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24	A	30	●	●	226
R	AR S20	150	Might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20,37,28	A	28	●	●	215
R	Audio Note AZ One	449	Delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29	●	A	30	●	215
R	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	599	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30	A	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	A	23	●	●	226
BB	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29	A	25	●	●	234
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	●	A-	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	A	30	●	●	208
R	Bluroom Minipod	249	Blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17	A	50	●	●	225
R	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	A	45	●	227
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	A-	45	●	●	193
BB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24	A	40	●	●	215
R	Dynaudio Audience 62	729	Pricy but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●	231
R	Elac JET 205	650	Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall	20,33,29	A	40	●	●	231
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	●	A-	25	●	201
BB	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act	20,38,26	A	40	●	●	215
BB	Heybrook Optima	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29	●	A+	30	●	193
BB	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	24,36,27	A+	25	●	●	201
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned and sounds a bit coloured, but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30	A+	27	●	●	199
BB	Infinity Alpha 30	300	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression	22,86,29	●	A	30	●	215
R	Jamo E 850	400	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	18,87,34	●	A-	30	●	224
BB	JBL Xti40	430	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	A	40	●	210
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	●	A-	22	●	227
R	JMLab Cobalt 816	899	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	A	22	●	224
R	KEF Q1	250	Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall	22,35,30	A	30	●	●	234
R	Mission 771e	199	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband and real wood finish	17,31,22	A	45	●	●	207
R	Mission M71	129	Neat-looking and very discreet-sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28	A	40	●	●	226
BB	Mission M73	199	Good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,88,31	●	A	25	●	215
R	Mission 773e	399	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral, but still delivers an all-round entertaining sound	18,88,26	●	A-	30	●	193
R	Mission 782	699	Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills	17,82,28	●	A	25	●	199
R	Mission 775e	799	Lots of speaker for the money, and musically involving too, if a little short on serious weight and authority	23,115,30	●	A	25	●	204
BB	Monitor Audio Bronze 2	180	A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all-round sonic performance	19,35,27	A	30	●	●	207

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Do you want to choose your hifi in a comfortable and relaxing environment . . . ?

Do you want friendly and helpful advice (and a cup of tea) . . . ?

Do you want to buy your system based on what you hear (and not what somebody tells you) . . . ?

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Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS *continued*

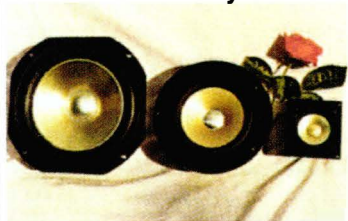
Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
R	Monitor Audio Bronze 3	270	Good value with better dynamic expression than most of its ilk	19,87,24	●	A	30	●	215
R	Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,31,20		A	30	●	211
R	Opera SP-1	525	A strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		A	50	●	225
RE	PMC TB2	700	A worthy successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type for neutrality and transparency	20,41,31		A	30	●	211
R	Sonus Faber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		A	40	●	233
R	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced, unboxy, lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	17,31,21		A-	30	●	224
RE	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	19,33,25		A	45	●	207
RE	Tannoy Revolution R2	400	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	●	A-	20	●	193
R	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricy but very cute wallmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17,35,26		A+		●	227
R	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26	●	A	20	●	231
RE	Tannoy Mercury mX3-M	229	Beautifully balanced and voiced, with low coloration and good transparency, but could be more dynamic	19,87,25		A+	45	●	234
RE	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	A-	40	●	219
R	Wharfedale Diamond 8.2	150	Sonically a bit crude and in yer face, but neat styling and plenty of speaker for your money	21,37,25		A-	30	●	226

ABOVE £1,000

R	Arcaydis Concept 2	1,199	Solid oak floorstander is a little lazy sounding, but is well balanced and smooth with modest coloration	19,90,26	●	A-	25	●	211
R	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent, but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		A-	65	●	219
EC	ATC SCM10A	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	45	●	221
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		A	38	●	218
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		A+	20	●	204
R	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling, but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,59,25		A	38	●	219
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		A	28	●	199
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	●	A-	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	●	A-	34	●	186
EC	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●	231
EC	B&W Signature 805	2,250	Staggering transparency and resolution for the money, one of the best standmounts money can buy	24,42,34		A-	42	●	232
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	●	A-	40	●	204
RE	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	●	A	50	●	219
R	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricy compared to some though	21,99,32	●	A+	38	●	229
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	●	A	41	●	225
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	25,106,36	●	A-	20	●	204
RE	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	A	30	●	229
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Outstanding performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		A-	45	●	219
R	Excel 202A	1,795	Very pro-styling, a compact active monitor in the BBC tradition – neutral, unboxy and laid back	15,21,5,36		ACT	25	●	214
R	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●	233
RE	Infinity Intermezzo 2.6	1,600	Bi-amp speaker sounds laid back and 'disappears' acoustically; highly enjoyable, looks and sounds great	25,38,29		A+	27	●	233
EC	JBL Ti-2K	1,250	Solid standmount with boat-tail rear end and highly detailed, spacious sound alongside weighty bass	42,28,42		A	45	●	230
RE	JMLab Cobalt 826	1,279	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	A-	35	●	219
EC	JMLab Micro Utopia	3,349	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41		A-	50	●	220
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		ACT	40	●	214

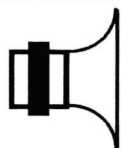
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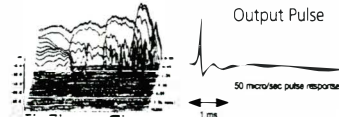
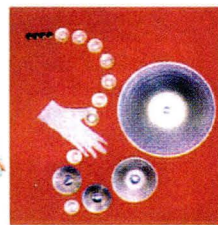


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Our favourite BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	●	A+	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	22,104,27	●	A+	45	●		196
BB	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		ACT	45		●	214
R	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40	●		229
EC	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	A-	20	●		200
EC	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20		●	232
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	A-	20	●		226
R	PMC LB1	1,150	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26		A-	40	●		199
BB	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	A	20	●		204
R	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude, 'in yer face' balance and great dynamics	20,40,32		A	25	●		214
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	A-	20	●		221
R	Ruark Prologue II	1,250	Attractive shape with a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22,5,96,24	●	A+	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	●	A	38	●		219
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	A	20	●		211
R	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large standmount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33		A+	50	●		219
R	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	A+	40		●	229
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	A+	37	●		223
EC	TAG McLaren F1	17,995	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	A-	25	●		202
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	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	●	A-	23	●		225
R	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This add-on supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while broadening the soundstage, but at a price	15,10,5.6	●	A+	N/A	●		206
R	T+A Talis TLS3	1,799	Super-slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver marvellous musical results with superb imaging	15,130,17	●	A	30	●		225
R	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30		●	229
EC	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	A+	50		●	191
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid back, but also very charming and musical	17,97,30	●	A-	25	●		199
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way	21,100,21	●	A	45	●		225
EC	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	●	A-	20	●		234
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	A-	45	●		212

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a

video monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floor-standing or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position – this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £750
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



KEF
Q AV7 £1,300
With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



JMLab
Cobalt package £1,797
There's no avoiding this package's fine underlying sound quality – both stereo and multichannel are reproduced with aplomb.



Mirage
Omni 2 £2,650
Dark tonality but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies alike.

Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE

Multichannel speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis	650	High-value package with deep bass and smooth neutrality	A+	5	22	●		198
BB	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures (uses 602 S3s at the front)	A-	5	22	●		224
R	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28		●	224
BB	JBL Xti-series	980	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all-round tension	A	5	40		●	210
R	JMLab Cobalt	1,797	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	A	5	22	●		224
R	JMLab Electra system	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
BB	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●		232
R	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
R	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25		●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2	2,485	Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight	A	5	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	A	5	25	●		210
R	Spendor S-Series	1,650	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness	A	5	30	●		224
BB	Tannoy mXAV4	500	Lacks some grunt, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence. Excellent value	A	5	20	●		210
R	Wharfedale Pacific	700	Plenty of speaker package for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward, but unquestionably entertaining	A-	5	25	●		224

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass

FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners)

Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

BEST BUY RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE

Bass speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER	
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub, which comes with a handy remote	41,37,30	200	35	225
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225
R	REL Strata III	700	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	100	20	210
R	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
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	200	16	217
BB	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	300	30	225

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.

BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.

Display Stock Clearance

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Arcam DV88 Player



Limited quantity available in Black or Silver

What you get!

- Available for audition
- Full two year warranty

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Excellent DVD & good CD replay at a bargain price. Few only! Composite, S-video, component output & analogue audio output

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- Local Delivery & installation

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- Full two year warranty

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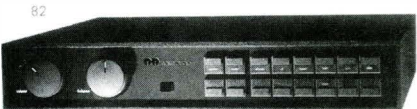
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- Local Delivery & installation

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FMJ A22 Amp/Dave (was £1849) **£999.00** ■ FMJ P25 3 Ch Amp (was £999) **£599.00**

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- NA CDX Player (£2470) **£1729**
- NAP 180 Power Amplifier (£1220) **£859**
- NAP 250 Power Amplifier (£1910) **£1339**
- HI - CAP Power Supply (£795) **£559**

Was £2500
£1795

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 - Upgrade to Mission M51 spkrs add £115
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Pro-ject * Pioneer * Rega * REL *
Sennheiser * Sugden * TAG * Yamaha

THE A LIST

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Arcam DiVA CD82T CD Player NEW!	£599.00
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Arcam DiVA DV88 Player	£999.00
Arcam FMJ DV27 DVD Player	£1595.00
Linn Genki CD Player	£995.00
Naim CD 5 Player	£1150.00
Linn Kolektor LK85 Pre/Power	£950.00
Linn Pekin Tuner	£540.00
Naim Nait 5 Amplifier	£825.00
Naim NAT05 Tuner NEW!	£740.00
Naim AV2 Processor NEW!	£2200.00
Rega Planet 2000 CD Player	£408.00
Rega P 2 T/T inc RB250 arm NEW!	£198.00
Rega P 3 T/T inc RB300 arm NEW!	£298.00
Pro-ject Debut MM inc Arm/Cart	£115.00
Sugden Bijou Amp & Preamp	£1228.00
TAG McLaren AV32R Processor	£2299.00
TAG McLaren DVD32R DVD Player	£3995.00
AVI Neutron Speakers	£409.00
B&W DM 601/3 Speakers NEW!	£240.00
B&W VM2 Speakers	£550.00
B&W VM1 lifestyle 5 Spkr+Sub NEW!	£850.00
KEF KTH2005 lifestyle 5 Spkr+Sub	£799.00
Linn Katan Speakers NEW!	£635.00
Mission M51 Speakers NEW!	£299.00

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Lexicon MC1 Processor (was 5500)	£3995.00
Linn Karik/2 CD Player S/H (new 1850)	£895.00
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Linn Kan Speakers (was 325)	£239.00
Linn Keosa Speakers (was 45)	£279.00
Linn Ninka - Cherry Spkrs (was 985)	£725.00
Linn Keilidh Spkrs Black S/H (new 775)	£365.00
Linn LK140 Power Amp (750)	£550.00
Linn Keltik Speakers Wal (was 6000)	£3495.00
Linn LP12/Lingo/Akito S/H (new 2250)	£1195.00
Marantz DV4100 DVD (was 399) 50%	£179.00
Marantz DV7000 DVD (was 599) 50%	£269.00
Naim NAP 250 Power Amp (was 1805)	£1445.00
Naim NAP 250 S/H Power Amp (145)	£999.00
Naim NAP500 Power Amp (10995)	£7995.00
Naim Intro Speakers Beech (790)	£579.00
Pioneer LCV10 Laptop DVD (999) 60%	£399.00
ProAc Tablette 2000 Speakers (64)	£456.00
Rotel RV985 DVD Player (was 625) 50%	£299.00
TAG DV32R DVD Player (was 3995)	£2995.00
Yamaha DSP AX620 Amplifier (399)	£239.00

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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals

enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

STEREO HEADPHONES

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
			ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●		●	190	●	219
AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		●		●		190	●	205
AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250	●	194
Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●		●		200	●	194
Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise.		●		●		200	●	230
Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●		270	●	205
Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			●	●		250	●	219
Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics		●			●	160	●	205
Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●		295	●	205
Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates		●		●		250	●	219

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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Esoteric High Fidelity Cables

Dealers in: Absolute • Audio Note • Audioquest • Deltec • Electrocompaniet • Harmonix • Kimber • Mandrake • MIT • Siltech • Symo • Transparent • Van den Hul • WBT • and others

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... in **YOUR** system
... for **YOUR** ears
... in **YOUR** home

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CABLES

Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA phono plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection. Speaker cable is sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing the best cables is not quite as

straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances

electrical varieties sound better than optical, but if you are after a smoother sound the light carriers have the advantage, as they do if long lengths are needed (10m+). Optical outputs tend to have Toslink connectors (around 99 per cent), but some electrical digital outputs are of the superior BNC type, which uses a bayonet-type socket. Check which type your digital component has before buying a digital interconnect.

Our favourite CABLES

Interconnects and speaker cables

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
			STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS							
Acoustic Research Master	50	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection	●		●		224
Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble	●		●		211
Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●		●		211
Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●		211
Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●		224
Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●		211
Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●		224
Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension	●		●		211
Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price	●		●		211
QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●		211
Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●		234
van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance -- a great cable	●		●		224
van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●		234
Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round, with just a hint of bass congestion. Very good value	●		●		224
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS							
Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●		E 207
QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E 207
QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E 234
Ross OP004	20	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value					O 207
van den Hul Optocoupler MkII	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O 234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE							
Black Rhodium Aero Space S130x2	76	Great kick in the bass, but the treble can sound dry and recessed	●		●		227
Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●		227
Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere -- one of the best cables available all round		●	●		203
Ixos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price; strong and consistent	●		●		203
Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right			●		192
Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		227
Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●		203
QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●		192
QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid back, but good tone and detail -- wears its achievements lightly	●		●		215
Supra Ply 3.4/S	7.95	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●		203
Tara Labs Prism Nexa	9.95	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	●		●		215
Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor		●	●		203
van den Hul The Snowline	5	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●		●		215

SPECS KEY **STRAINED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E -- electrical, O -- optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

The **CONDUCTOR** CA 1

"...this is a great cable for the money" WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

The **LEGEND**

"no nonsense incredible sound...against high-end interconnects at twice the price it stands out as good value for money" HI-FI NEWS 2002

ES 2.3

"...make no mistake ES 2.3/CS 2.15 is superb" WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

"a fine audiophile sound that is clean as a whistle" HI-FI WORLD 2002

MS 2.3

"...they communicate a room-filling sound that few cables at this price - or any price manage"
WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

The **PRODUCER**

"at this price you won't get a better digital lead" WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

The **MAESTRO** MA 2

"sonically they amaze, high end owners take note" WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★

The **COMPOSER**

"easily our cable king...it's hard to believe the price tag" WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★



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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



In hi-fi there are two types of stand. One is a rack that holds turntables, amps, CD players and so on and is described as an equipment support, and the other is a speaker stand. The latter comes in three basic varieties, two for standmount speakers: lightweight, multilegged types; and heavy designs with fewer legs and the ability to be mass-loaded for extra solidity. The lighter variety is

said to have a quicker sound, while heavyweights give deeper bass and a calmer sound. The third speaker stand type is a platform that sits under floorstanding speakers or speaker/stand combinations, the pneumatic Townshend Seismic Sink being an example.

There are two speaker-to-stand interfacing options: spikes or Blu Tak in each corner of the top plate. Try both and take your pick.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Equipment supports

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
			HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47		4	MDF	193
Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
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
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53.5,45		4	MDF	217
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
Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49	●	4	Glass	193
Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45x34		5	Glass	232
Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple, but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49		4	MDF	206
Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
Townshend 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

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

Speaker stands

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
			HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18	●		3	202
Cyrus CLS50 Stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19			1	220
Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18	●		2	202
hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20	●		1	220
Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
Partington ANSA	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18X15	●		4	232
Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15	●	●	5	220
Partington Dreadnought Ultimate	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	21,24	●		1	202
Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		4	220
Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48				202

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on. SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.

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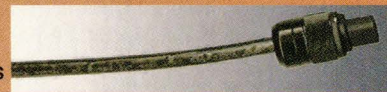
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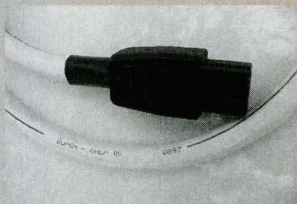


AUDUSA - Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) shown with Marincos IEC 320



under influence of an alternating magnetic field. Consecutively magnetizing and demagnetizing the material will cause considerable losses of high frequency energy. This energy is absorbed in the ferrite grains and converted into heat. This

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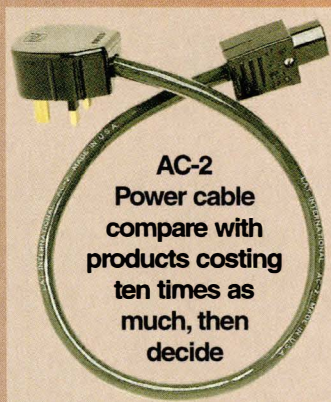
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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

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 The 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 have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

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. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

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.

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

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 digital audio format that typically contains five or more entirely discrete channels, eg 7.1 EX where side and rear 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.

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB, it has over four times the data capacity of CD.

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.

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.

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

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 are 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.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

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

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

SACD (super audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

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, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-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.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed

sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, transparent. A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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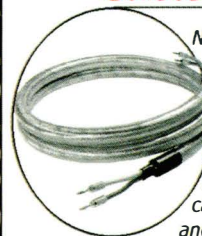
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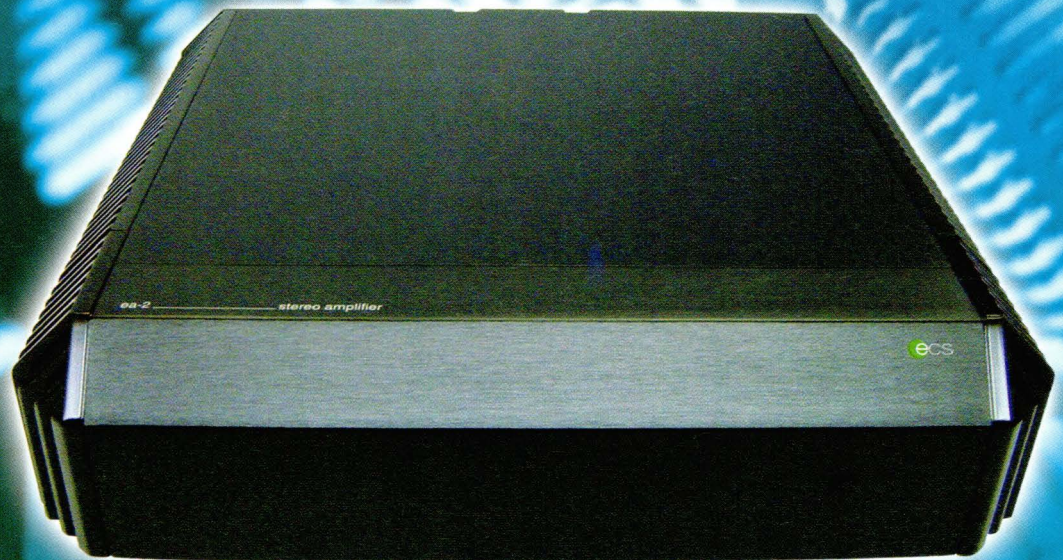
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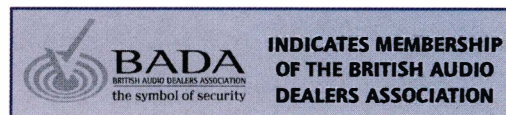
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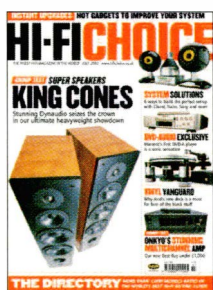
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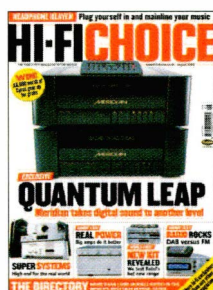
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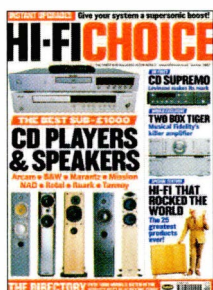
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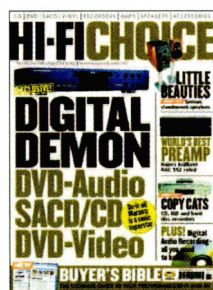
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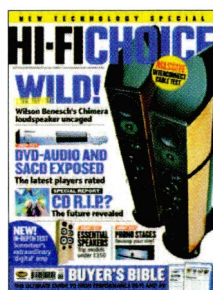
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NEXT MONTH



Classé CDP.3 CD player

IN THE NEXT BUMPER ISSUE OF HI-FI CHOICE

THE HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2002

The unmissable guide to the best hi-fi of 2002. We've revisited every component tested in the last 12 months and selected the *crème de la crème* in all categories and at all to prices to bring you the ultimate guide to state-of-the-art hi-fi and AV. Published in plenty of time for Christmas, we'll empower you to make the right purchases first time for superior sound (and video too).

STATEMENTS

A fine selection of prestige gear in next month's HFC: **Dali** is back in the UK, proudly showing off its Euphonia floorstanding speaker. **Krell's** flagship CD player is put to the test – is this how all CD players should sound? **Copland** goes high-end multichannel with the CVA306/CVA535 pre/power surround sound combo and we bask in the wholesome glow of **Steinhart's** pre/power valve amp.

IN-DEPTH TEST – PIONEER DV-757Ai

We thoroughly examine **Pioneer's** ground-breaking DV-757Ai 'universal' DVD-Audio/SACD player. It's the first machine to incorporate a standardised FireWire 'wide bandwidth' digital link, so don't miss our definitive review of this milestone product.

INSTANT UPGRADES

More low-cost ways to tweak your system and bring sonic synergy to your pile of boxes.

PLUS

A fantastic collection of fresh kit coming your way including the **Classé** CDP.3 CD player, **TerraTec's** hard disc recorder, **Panasonic's** new DVD-Audio player, **Cyrus's** DVD 7+ and more!

HFC236 on sale 27 November

For tweak's sake

David Vivian investigates the weird world of the obsessive tweeker

The following hi-fi system tweaks are real. They were submitted to an American website called Audio Tweaks, mostly by US audiophiles. The great thing about American audiophiles and, indeed, Americans in general, is their slim-to-non-existent grasp of irony. This means that at no point do they get the tap on the shoulder from their inner sense of the ridiculous, which we can only guess is in a permanent state of hibernation. No tweak is too weird, too strange, too out there to be considered as anything other than deadly serious.

1. Put plants near your turntable. Use plants with large leaves, which need a lot of watering and place them as close as possible to the turntable. The relative humidity will prevent the build-up of static charges. It also helps a little in dampening any resonances.
2. Wrap your system's power cables and interconnects with tin foil from the kitchen to reduce radio frequency interference. This will improve soundstage accuracy.
3. Squirt superglue over the crystal clock in your CD player. Since the crystal clocks in CD players are sensitive to vibration, stabilising it by covering it with superglue will help and improve the player's ability to extract low-level detail.
4. Spray some Johnson's Pledge in the air. Now swipe your CD label side down through the cloud of Pledge. This works in two ways: it kills static and also fills any micro holes in the CD's surface. The result is a much more 'analogue' sound.
5. Place three crystal balls purchased from a novelty shop onto a wooden base with three holes drilled into it and use as an equipment support. The sound will become more full-bodied, focused and musical, especially with transistor amps.
6. Try to listen to your favourite records after a good sleep. Try and wake up at 3am after it has rained and it is quiet outside. The



“Put plants near your turntable. The relative humidity will help to prevent the build-up of static charges.”

situation after the rain in early morning is perfect for listening to music on a good audio system. Your ears and your brain are in the best condition to respond to musicality.

7. Use ChapStick to fix a scratched CD. But only if the CD is scratched to the point where you don't even want it anymore. Don't risk it on a CD that skips on just one track. If it doesn't play any more it's worth trying. Apply a thin layer of clear ChapStick to the underside of the CD. Then wipe it evenly with a tissue. If done correctly, it fills all of the scratches and will play without skipping. Works about 50 per cent of the time.
8. Use your chimney flue as a subwoofer. Typical chimney lengths are 20 to 30 feet; this corresponds to low 30Hz wavelength. A modest driver will produce dramatic results since you are providing a natural resonance chamber. Experiment with sealing the

rooftop end to tighten bass and prevent debris from entering the chamber. Works best in longer chimneys, obviously, but even 20 feet will give you phenomenally tight bass in the 40Hz range.

9. Put a single sheet of single-ply toilet paper between your speaker and its stand. The size of the toilet paper should be slightly smaller than the top plate of the stand, and single ply works differently than two-ply. The sound will be more natural, punchy in the bass and smooth in the midrange.
10. Put your bookshelf speakers on cement blocks, raising them to the proper listening height. This is superior to any speaker stand since it does NOTHING. No damping and no coupling – no coloration added. Just put heavy cement blocks on the top of each other and put your bookshelf speaker on it. It looks very odd, though. ☹



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