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JANUARY
2000 BEF 264

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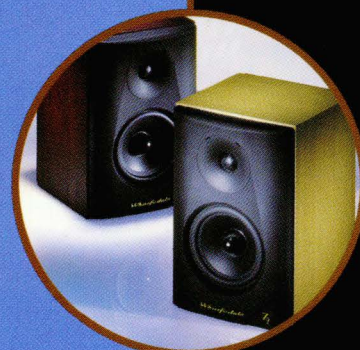
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Hi-Fi Choice is the UK hi-fi magazine representative of the European Imaging & Sound Association (EISA). Every year EISA honours the finest hi-fi and home cinema products throughout Europe.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

25 years young and still going strong, HFC is ready for the millennium with a plethora of new channels.



Welcome to the first issue of our 25th anniversary year, our last of the old millennium, and a new look at the increasingly popular world of multi-channel audio. We figured that with the imminent arrival of high definition multi-channel formats and the explosion of DVD-Video, it was about time we tried out this particular bag of audio tricks. So, having collected a stack of DVD players, multi-channel amplifiers and surround sound speaker packages, we sent them off to our hi-fi oriented reviewers – they're a game old bunch – and kept our fingers crossed. The results make interesting reading, and in each instance – source, amps and speakers – throw up some unexpected results. Equally, surround sound won't be a high-fidelity medium until uncompressed formats are available, but both DVD-Audio and multi-channel SACD are due in the coming year.

Over the past year I've attended a number of surround sound demonstrations for both SACD and DVD-A using prototype players and a variety of ancillaries. Some of these have been most impressive, notably Sony's IFA set-up where they stuck on some live Rammstein to tremendous effect through top-class equipment. On the other side of the coin, Marantz's Hammersmith demo using a decent receiver and Tannoy R1 speakers was perhaps more exciting because it used real world kit. Pioneer also put on an excellent show at Hammersmith using dedicated but not OTT kit.

One of the first high fidelity surround demos I heard was at Abbey Road studios, where Sony used hard disc to play back classical material through a quintet of B&W Matrix 801s. They managed to create a stunningly realistic sound even at that early stage in the game – about the time when it emerged that Sony was not sticking with the DVD forum but was going off with Philips to create what became SACD.

GET INTO THE...

While the world around me has been up to its ears in five-speaker and amp combinations, chez Kennedy things have remained quietly two channel. I've spent the month listening to Sony's latest SACD player and an awful lot of LPs courtesy of a new phono stage from an old source. Tom Evans of Acoustic/Pioneer Precision fame has put his moniker to a £1,500 phono stage that rejoices under the name The Groove.

You may recall that Tom designed the Michell Iso, the phono stage that put the genre on the map for a lot of people, a model he subsequently revamped with the Lithos power supply to tremendous effect. The Groove takes the Iso/Lithos as its starting point, but uses two in a dual mono

arrangement and wraps the sensitive parts in copper shielding that's so effective that the power supply can sit in the same box. The sonic result is subtle but extremely persuasive. The more you listen the more you want to listen – stick on favourite after favourite and new layers of detail appear out of the mix. I was genuinely surprised to hear exactly what was going on in the severely smooth instrumentation of JJ Cale's *Naturally*, an album I've listened to since the early seventies (thanks Dad).

Another dense but unusually rich album is Frank Zappa's wonderful *One Size Fits All*, which is packed with acoustic instruments and vocals that have a tendency to blend into a musical wash with most record playing systems. But via SME Model 20A/Wilson benesch Carbon and Groove, the sound-stage opens out and reveals what each player/singer is contributing while maintaining musical coherence and increasing your appreciation for the material.

One key to The Groove's success lies in its ability open out every recording and reveal the space that lies within. For a recording to sound real it must retain a sense of three dimensionality, a crucial element that is introduced by the space around instrument/voice and microphone, if not by reverb artificial or real. Of course, I thought I was hearing plenty of 3D stereo before this phono stage came along, but it would seem that I was not getting the full picture. There's an awful lot more in the groove of every one of your records than most replay systems will tell you. To hear more call Tom on (01443) 816856

Have a fabulous holiday and an excessive New Year.

St Kennedy

EDITOR'S CHOICE

There is quite a stack of tasty kit in the Rec/BB free sections of HFC this month and I have been very restrained in naming just two.

But Paul Miller along with many others have been highly impressed with TAG McLaren's AV32R processor, its first real post-Audiolab creation, and it warrants your attention if high fidelity surround sound is a goal.

The second awardee is Sony's luxurious SCD-777ES SACD player, a bargain high end CD player that just happens to play the new high resolution format as well. You won't find this quality at such a low price anywhere else.





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Is multi-channel set to replace two-channel stereo? Paul, who remembers the concept from last time around – in 'quadraphonic' form – contemplates the 'second coming' of surround sound.

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NEWS & VIEWS

Bong! The News At Whatever Time You're Reading This. With Tim Bown & Lee Dunkley.

NEWS IN BRIEF

TDK has added an 80-minute MiniDisc to its range. The MDRXG80 comes in response to the increasing number of CDs with more than 74 minutes playing time and costs £2.99 a shot.

In a second move, TDK has unveiled the XS-IV range of MiniDiscs aimed at the active lifestyle market. Both 74 and 80 minute lengths are available, priced at £2.49 and £2.99 respectively.



☎ (01737) 773773

WHARFEDALE has launched its first DVD player. The £180 DVD-750 is available in the UK exclusively through Tesco Superstores, reflecting the stores' growing DVD disc sales. Manufactured in China, the DVD-750 is built to Wharfedale's own specification and offers consumers the opportunity to experience the format at an extremely competitive price.

☎ (01480) 447715

BADA has rescued customers after the demise of Leeds-based retailer Image Hi-Fi. As Image Hi-Fi was a member, BADA has guaranteed delivery of almost £10,000 worth of hi-fi and A/V equipment to customers. As part of BADA's back-up, an extensive after-sales support service is available to all customers. For information about your nearest BADA dealer, contact:

☎ (0800) 596 4444



SONY claims it has created the first jog-proof personal CD player. The G-Protection Jog Proof D-EJ815 (above) incorporates a new anti-shock system that relies on faster recovery and data storage than ever before, enabling it to withstand three shocks per second. For the first time you can jog without interrupting the music – so what's your excuse now?

☎ (01932) 816000

A ONE-DAY HIGH-END SHOW is being held near Bath on Saturday 19 February. This will be the first time since the 1999 Hi-Fi Show in London that Spectral amplifiers, new to the UK, have been heard with the dCS Purcell and the new Delius DAC and Verity loudspeakers. Apparently, this system was voted one of the best at the show.

☎ (01225) 874728

CD FENDER is a cohesive polycarbonate film designed to protect the playing surface of CDs from damage. Suitable for all types of CD software, the CD Fender's protective film also claims to repair minor scratches and is easily removable. Cost: £4.99 per pack of five.

☎ (0207) 331 1300

Full Metal Jacket

Arcam has unveiled its latest component range, sporting new aluminium casework and circuitry plucked from the firm's most prestigious products. It's called FMJ – from the project's 'Full Metal Jacket' working title – and includes a CD player, two tuners and various amplifiers.

The FMJ CD23 CD player costs £1,100 and is based on the firm's successful Alpha 9 model, incorporating the same dCS Ring DAC and custom chip set. However, the new player features an improved motherboard and power supply configuration to further aid performance, with a high quality toroidal transformer now supplying the sensitive audio circuitry on the Ring DAC converter board. The chassis is made from a vibration-damping steel and polymer laminate, and the top case and front plate are both aluminium, the latter 8mm thick.

Similarly, the FMJ A22 integrated amp is based on the Alpha 10 blueprint. That means it offers the same impressive upgradability, with optional modules available to convert to multi-channel or multi-room operation. Power is rated at a meaty 100 Watts per channel



Arcam's FMJ range: from dark and curvy to sleek and shiny.

into 8 Ohms and the case is formed from an aluminium extrusion, with a heavy gauge aluminium cover and steel chassis for maximum rigidity and reduced microphony. It costs £1,000 in standard form, or you can buy it with the multi-room MARC module or home cinema DAVE add-on for £1,600 or £1,850 respectively.

Also available is the FMJ P25, a 100 Watts per channel stereo power amp which can be upgraded to three channels via another optional module. Use the two channel version (£750) to bi-amp with the A22, or add the three-channel model (£1,000) to an A22 DAVE for 5.1 channel surround sound.

These components will be joined shortly by the FMJ DT26 digital tuner (£1,000) and FMJ T21 AM/FM tuner, the price of which is still to be confirmed. The range will be stocked by a limited number of specialist dealers.

Arcam ☎ (01223) 203203



Indigo: multi-channel debutantes.

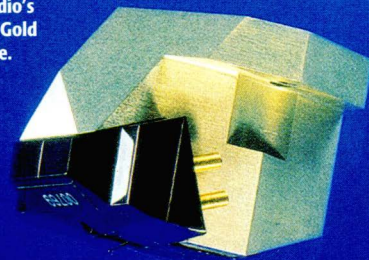
Getting the blues

Indigo is a new name in hi-fi loudspeakers, aiming to combine studio-quality sound with home-friendly design. The first products to emerge are the three-strong Home & Studio range, designed for high performance in compact spaces and suitable for both stereo and multi-channel applications.

The Indigo One is a 27cm tall monitor incorporating a 13cm laminated mid/bass cone and 25mm titanium dome tweeter. Then there's the Indigo Two, a wider type of speaker intended for main/centre channel use. It employs the same drive units as the One, but includes two mid/bass drivers instead of one. The Three is a highly efficient monitor standing at 30cm and featuring a larger 17cm mid/bass cone with central phase plug.

Prices for black-finish versions are £300, £350 and £450 for the One, Two and Three respectively, while cherry models cost £330, £400 and £500. There's also an active version of the Three (black), priced at £900. A range of speakers at lower prices is due to follow soon; meanwhile, we'll review the Indigo Three next month. Indigo Technologies ☎ (01480) 861175

Clearaudio's Victory-Gold cartridge.



Stylish stylus


Clearaudio claims its new Victory-Gold turntable cartridge is the lightest moving magnet model ever produced. Its aerodynamically shaped body features no parallel surfaces and is made of a special metal alloy called MgAlSi, an exceptionally hard and light material said to have excellent mechanical properties.

The result is a body mass of just 8g, and a moving mass of 0.009g – claimed to be the lowest ever for a cartridge of this type. A Boron cantilever and 24-carat gold coils are also featured, contributing to its "startling tracking ability, linearity, transparency and dynamics". Price is £960.

Audio Reference ☎ (01483) 575344



Big Beat CD!

 Densen's long-awaited CD player is upon us at last. The Beat B-400 has been in development for more than three years, and might prompt the question: why bring out your first CD player when the world's focus is switching to DVD? "Because it had to be perfect," is Densen's response – after all, we're now at the pinnacle of CD technology, and the format isn't going to disappear just yet.

The B-400's transport mechanism is custom-made by Sony and uses a laser with glass optics instead of plastic ones. This is said to minimise scanning errors and ensure a longer life. All the transport control electronics are proprietary Densen designs and are placed under the board to maintain the shortest possible signal path.

Two microprocessors are used instead of the usual one, the primary unit handling digital transmission and the secondary chip controlling the display, remote

control interface and so on. This eases the load on the main processor and, combined with highly accurate clock circuitry, creates a level of jitter claimed to be so low it's immeasurable.


The 'converter stage' is employed on a separate board to allow for future upgrades. It incorporates Pacific Microsonics' popular HDCD-compatible PCM100 digital filter and twin DACs, one for each channel. As to the type of DAC used, Densen refused to say: "There is too much focus on the type number and too little focus on the music," said Thomas Sillesen, Densen's president. Well, yes, but... we'd still kind of like to know.

Densen claims the B-400 is an extremely musical CD player, the closest you'll get to the original master tape. If true it may have been worth the wait – we've been after it for almost a year, ever since its UK debut at last February's Bristol hi-fi show, but that's nothing. According to Densen, a number of customers actually paid for their B-400s several years ago! It's available now – we hope – and costs £1,000.

Densen ☎ (01582) 561227




Meridian's new line

 Meridian has extended its multi-channel line-up with yet another digital processor. The 568 weighs in somewhere between the excellent 561 (see p.56) and astounding 861, as the company continues to cement its position at the vanguard of digital surround technology.

Priced at £3,600, the processor caters for all the decoding options currently available, including MLP – Meridian's own 'lossless' compression system now accepted as a mandatory part of the specification for the forthcoming DVD-Audio format. It's designed to work in tandem with another new product, the 562V.2, a sophisticated audio/visual switch box which costs £1,385 and provides complete control over every element of sound and vision. Together they promise a powerful solution for the reproduction of both music and film; they're available now.

Meridian Audio ☎ (01480) 52144

Evocative Elacs

 German loudspeaker manufacturer Elac has a new two-way bookshelf speaker, the CL 82 MkII. The £400 model is a touted as a major competitor to larger and more expensive loudspeaker designs. A manufacturer of its own drive units, Elac's CL 82 Mk II employs an alloy sandwiched cone 18cm mid/bass driver and an alloy tweeter. Finished in a natural wood veneer, the speakers come with a ten year guarantee.

To compliment the CL 82 MkII model, Elac has also introduced the CL 102 Mk II floorstander (see next month's speakers Mega Test) and the CM-80/4 centre channel speaker – the combination of the three models ideally suited to multi-channel applications.

The CL 82 MkII and CL 102 MkII are available now with the CM-80/4 centre channel to follow shortly. Elac ☎ (01494) 551571



Elac CL 82 MkII.

NEWS IN BRIEF

ECOSSE has introduced an extensive range of A/V Reference Cables for the home cinema market. Designed with specific applications in mind, the range utilises monocrystal copper/OFC cable with gold plated phono, S-video and Scart termination possibilities. Prices range from £1750 to £40.

☎ (01563) 550827

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

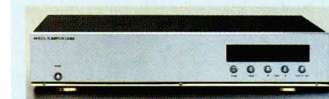
believes that there's plenty of life left in the dear old valve, and judging by the recent spate of valve-based componentry hitting the market we're pleased to agree. The company is producing a new line of vacuum tubes throughout 2000, the first of which will be the EL34EH – pictured right.

Website: www.ehx.com



SONY MUSIC VIDEO has stepped up the launch of DVD-Video music titles (see p.100) with a number of big launches through November and December. Charlotte Church, Ricky Martin, James Taylor, George Michael, Pink Floyd, Mariah Carey and Celine Dion have now all 'graced' the format.

☎ (0207) 221 2404



MUSICAL FIDELITY'S AS series has been joined by an FM tuner (above) featuring RDS, 20 presets and remote control. The manufacturer claims to have paid particular attention to component layout and the reduction of interference between analogue and digital control circuits. Price is £599, and a full system remote is also on the way.

☎ (0208) 900 2866

SONUS SYSTEMS is a new name in the hi-fi and A/V furniture arena. The company's extensive range includes four and five-shelf hi-fi supports, speakers stands, A/V supports and CD storage units. All products are available in a number of different finishes.

☎ (0800) 092 5046

BRISTOL SOUND AND VISION is one of the UK's most established hi-fi shows. This year's event is due to take place from Friday 18 to Sunday 20 February at the Marriot Hotel, Lower Castle Street, Bristol, and a host of top companies are due to exhibit. Tickets are £6 for adults and £3 for students and concessions.

☎ (01865) 760844

Website: www.bristolshow.co.uk

SONICLINK has introduced a new Mains Power Distribution System. An eight-way socket housing, the system is claimed to offer superior technical performance with its use of S-Gold mains cable. Suitable for domestic applications, it costs £225 and is likely to prove invaluable for home cinema applications.

☎ (07000) SonicLink/(01332) 361390

TECHNICS has launched its first ever active subwoofer. The SB-AS500

NEWS IN BRIEF

features twin downward-firing drivers and offers a claimed 100 Watts output. For convenience, the SB-A500 automatically detects the presence of an audio signal and switches itself on. It's available now from your nearest Technics dealer and costs £229.99.

☎ (0990) 357357



VIVANCO has unveiled two new headphone models. First is the SR222 S, a £30 model featuring the company's new 'Air Space' design which is said to give greater comfort over prolonged listening sessions. Next up, the £70 FMH7780 cordless headphones feature 863 MHz operational frequency and an LCD display on the transmitter. Both models are finished in silver and are available now.

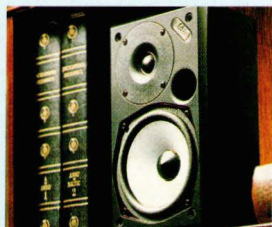
☎ (01442) 403020

NOW HEAR THIS (NHT) has introduced two new subwoofers. The SubOne features a 25cm long-throw driver, a 250 Watt amp and an external controller for all user selectable functions. The SubTwo features a dual 25cm long-throw driver and a 500 Watt amp, also with an external controller. Prices are £500 and £800 respectively.

☎ (0161) 702 5000

SONY MUSIC UK has launched the first on-line MiniDisc music store. The site allows users to buy on-line from 700 MiniDisc titles in stock.

www.minidisc.com



ACOUSTIC ENERGY has announced the birth of the baby Aegis Compact loudspeaker (above). Featuring a 13cm alloy mid/bass driver and 1.9cm soft dome tweeter, this two-way mini monitor is capable of handling a claimed 100 Watts output. Available singly, the Aegis Compacts cost £54.95 each and are available finished in white or black.

☎ (01285) 654432

CETECH AV has launched a vibration control platform. Developed from principles used in F1 racing, it combines a honeycomb filling sandwiched between carbon fibre sheets. Said to offer greater resonance control, improved treble definition and bass agility, it costs £199.

☎ (0115) 944 7555

DVD-Audio plagued by delays



Tokyo-based Matsushita Corporation has postponed the launch of its first DVD-Audio players, previously scheduled to appear in Japan before the end of 1999. The electronics giant, parent company of Technics and Panasonic, was expected to be the first to put players into production, but the launch has now been thrown into confusion.

The latest setback is due to the CSS copy protection system, the specification for which has been a constant source of delay. Music companies have refused to support the format until they're satisfied their copyright can't be infringed – but now, a Norwegian teenager has severely dented the format's progress by exposing the CSS1 copy protection system on DVD-V (DVD-A also features CSS2) and posting it on the Web. It appears he didn't hack CSS, but cracked the code from music playing codec software that inadvertently left CSS exposed. Warner Music has now jumped ship until improvements have been made, and others are following suit.



DVD-Audio: you may not see it in the flesh for quite a while yet.

As *Hi-Fi Choice* went to press, there seemed little light at the end of the tunnel. Pioneer, the other half of the DVD-Audio vanguard, was due to make a statement on the matter, the details of which you can read about in our February issue. But at the time of writing, a delay of six months or more seems likely, which could be very good news indeed for Sony's SACD.

This hiatus is the last of a string of problems to hit DVD-Audio, and potentially the most serious. Matsushita was originally intending to launch last Autumn, and Pioneer expected machines in the UK around Christmas time, but chipsets have been delayed, not least by the application of Meridian's Lossless Packing compression system (MLP). Earlier, record companies had demanded manufacturers remove digital outputs from the back of players to prevent digital copying. We await further news with baited breath...

Panasonic/Technics ☎ (01344) 862444

Pioneer ☎ (01753) 789789

Mission's statement



Mission has released details of a radical new floorstander – the 782. It's the first product to emerge from the firm's 78 Series, which is to replace the 75 range of speakers in 2000.

Among the 782's features is a new ceramic cone material called Keraform, created from a matrix of china clay particles and resin in a fibre substrate that is said to approach the ideal cone material. It's light-weight enough for high efficiency and dynamics, sufficiently rigid for an accurate piston motion and free from break-up for a high level of transparency. The 782 uses Keraform for its midrange driver, and it should make for a clean, smooth and punchy sound.

The cabinet is equally worthy of note, its slim-line appearance indebted to a sideways-firing 17cm bass driver. This is housed in its own reflex-tuned enclosure using reinforcement from the floor instead of walls. A profiled front baffle aids the silk dome tweeter's off-axis performance, while a mix of damping material and inner surface curves reduces resonance inside the cabinet. Mission has also used a proprietary construction method, Transverse Folded Cabinet Technology, to produce an exceptionally stable enclosure. The Mission 782 costs £700. See next month's *HFC* for a full review.

Mission ☎ (01480) 451777



Mission 782.

QED's MusiQ multi-room controller.



Multi-room made easy

In the world of hi-fi, multi-room is hot property. More and more people are switching on to the idea of music piped to several rooms from a single system, with independent control of source and volume from each room. But unless you're willing to start afresh, perhaps with a costly custom-installed system, such aspirations are difficult to achieve. Or at least they were, because QED believes it has a simple and effective solution.

The MusiQ multi-room controller simply plugs into your existing hi-fi and distributes sound from two sources of your choice to two additional rooms – a bedroom and the kitchen, for instance – through discrete cabling. The system can be controlled from the chosen rooms via remote control handsets, and the company claims the unit's on-board amplifiers (20 Watts per channel each) and switching circuitry ensure that sound quality isn't compromised.

The MusiQ is available in various specifications, and the user can add further units to extend the number of rooms covered. Prices start at £850.

QED ☎ (01276) 452211



PAUL MESSENGER

Is the 'second coming' of surround sound actually deserving of all this excitement?

When I first joined the specialist hi-fi press in the late 1970s, the hot news was something called quadraphony – aka surround sound. At least four separate software/hardware alliances were trying to establish four different and largely incompatible formats, which was the main reason why the whole scenario fell flat on its face, although other factors also played their part.

Twenty something years later, with very different circumstances and formats, we may be witnessing a 'second coming'. *Choice* staff have spent the past couple of months getting to grips with this 'new surround sound' malarkey and, while my own experiences (elsewhere in this issue) have had their positive side, they also served as a reminder of some of the problems encountered first time around.

So while we in the media 'talk up' the prospects for a surround sound future, it's as well to remember the lessons of hi-fi history.

The first thing to stress is that two-channel stereophony isn't going to disappear. Not overnight; not in ten years time; indeed, not *never*. Stereo might have ruled for the past

thirtysomething years, but mono still has its place in the greater scheme of things – it's still ideal for talk radio or talking-head TV, for example. Happily, stereo and mono are more or less compatible (although purists can argue that two-speaker mono lacks the focus precision of single-speaker reproduction).

If mono still has its role today, it's totally illogical to suppose that multi-channel will usurp stereo. Even if our pre-recorded discs (whatever the format) go multi-channel in the short or medium term, the broadcasters have so far shown no interest whatsoever in moving beyond stereo.

In the future we hi-fi enthusiasts will be able to make choices about the priorities of our systems. The bottom line is budgetary. Ignoring source components, if multi-channel's the main priority, the money has to be spread more or less evenly around the five (or more) channels. Those more interested in stereo reproduction, however, will have the option to devote a greater proportion of their budget to the main left and right loudspeakers and power amps, improving the stereo performance at the

expense of the multi-channel matching and coherence. It isn't quite that simple in practice, because of the key role of the processor and preamplifier on the control side of things, and the various different ways in which a system may be configured (but I'd need another column to explore *that* properly).

Having tried plenty of the options over the past decade, I don't feel any urgent need to move into multi-channel – for some of the same reasons that those 1970s consumers rejected it. Today's digital technologies undoubtedly solve many of the problems that dogged those original analogue attempts, and the completely separate multi-channel formats are a considerable improvement over the phase-based encode/decode approach used to create surround sound from stereo carriers (such as Dolby Surround and Pro-Logic).

However, it shouldn't be forgotten that movie rather than music programming has driven this whole surround sound revival. Surround sound undoubtedly enhances the movie experience, but its value with the overwhelming majority of studio-recorded music is much less convincing. Live recordings, and particularly those where the acoustic surroundings are an essential part of the music (such as sacred, choral and organ works) can undoubtedly benefit from discrete multi-channel, as can deliberately crafted ambient/techno material. But mixing mainstream recordings into multi-channel surround sound has a worrying tendency to emphasise the artificial nature of the studio environment. The motivation to get into multi-channel may therefore depend on how much it suits your music, and whether you like watching movies at home. (I prefer the cinema myself, because the pictures are so much better!)

Another 1970s headache was fitting surround sound into small, British lounges – and then finding a seating position a reasonable distance from each loudspeaker. When I visited Abbey Road and heard 5.1 master tapes through five identical B&W Nautilus 801 speakers, about twenty of us were milling around the studio rather aimlessly. While it sounded pleasant enough, the surround bit wasn't making a lot of sense. There was just one unoccupied swivel chair in the room, over at the desk, so I plucked up the courage to sit down, and was astonished by how the whole surround soundstage snapped into coherent focus. Which is very nice in its way, but does reduce the listening zone to a solitary 'hot spot', and make for a rather less sociable experience than regular stereo. (This is more critical with music than movies, because you have to make your own pictures.)

Once the formats and software get themselves sorted, I'm sure that multi-channel music will eventually become part of the overall scheme of things. But it's not going to happen overnight – and it's certainly not going to make stereo redundant (*so there – Ed*).

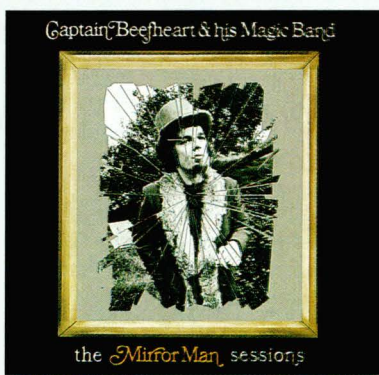
“While we in the media ‘talk up’ the prospects for a surround sound future, it’s as well to remember the lessons of a hi-fi history littered with the likes of quadraphony.”



Illustration by Brett Ryder

PREVIOUSLY UNHEARD

Phil Strongman digs out rare and classic tracks appearing on CD or virgin vinyl for the first time. Turn on, tune in, bliss out....



CAPTAIN BEEFHEART The Mirror Man Sessions

It's years since I demanded some Cap'n Beefheart in a suburban record shop, only to be told "we don't stock that brass band military stuff". The Good Captain's profile has risen in the interim, but this live in the studio album still sings with a bluesy disregard for convention. A shifting, shuffling 1967 classic that now comes with some strong out-takes.

Simply Vinyl LP/Buddha CD
Music ★★★★★ Sonic ★★★★★

TOMMY SMITH BlueSmith

This really is the sax's whiskers as the jazz jockey soulfully soars through a dazzling set of 3D sounding originals. Cut last year with bass genius James Genus, guitar czar John Scofield and drum king Clarence Penn, it is, quite simply, one of the best jazz albums for aeons. Saxman Smith has finally proved himself a world-beater – when given the right support (a bit like Linn turntables, really).

Linn CD
Music ★★★★★ Sonic ★★★★★

CANNONBALL ADDERLEY Ultimate

Another slice of sax, this time some alto selected by Joe Zawinul from the

Cannonball's hot heyday circa 1955-'59. Sweet, smooth and swinging – these modern jazzers really have something, y'know? Verve CD

Music ★★★★★ Sonic ★★★★★

KING TUBBY CONNECTION Sound of Channel One

At last, a crucial slab of 180g dub vinyl, and a limited edition to boot. Six reggae tings – Delroy Wilson, Badoo – line up with Tubby's seriously spaced-out dub versions. Magic that'll give your woofers a workout. Motion Records LP

Music ★★★★★ Sonic ★★★★★

VARIOUS Verve Elite Edition

Gems from Louis Armstrong, Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans and others whose best takes had been lost in the archives. A real eye-opener – only Verve executives have all the originals.

Verve CD
Music ★★★★★ Sonic ★★★★★

IKE TURNER REVIEW I Smell Trouble

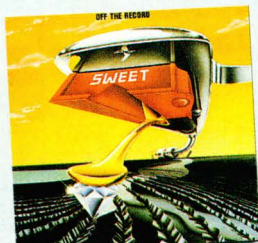
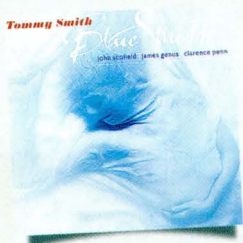
In 1959 rock pioneer Ike Turner married Tina and this pounding, tough-sounding album was their first musical offspring. Edgy and brassy, this set's lyrics have young Tina prematurely singing the wife-beating blues. Recorded for Dansettes but it still cuts through.

ABM CD
Music ★★★★★ Sonic ★★★★★

SWEET Originals/Give Us A Wink/Off The Record

Originals is the *Blockbuster* hits CD, perfect for '70s parties, while the glittery *GUAW* and *OTR* are entities in themselves. Glam trash of the highest order, well recorded by Phil Wainman.

BMG-RCA CDs
Music ★★★★★ Sonic ★★★★★



Myriad MDP 500 preamp/processor.

Multiple Myriad

British hi-fi brand Myriad is set to deepen its involvement in the world of multi-channel with the launch of a second processor and a three-channel power amp.

The MDP 500 is a £1,500 digital preamp/processor incorporating Dolby Digital, dts and Pro-Logic decoding, together with 'Natural', 'Jazz Club', 'Concert' and 'Stadium' DSP modes. MPEG-2 decoding is available as an option, and socketry includes a 'future-proofing' 7.1 channel analogue input to hook up a DVD-Audio decoder when the format finally arrives.

Myriad claims it has stuck to its purist audio engineering principles by using high quality digital processing technology to maintain the integrity of the audio signal. An additional 'clean path' analogue input is provided, by-passing the digital processing circuitry for traditional two-channel hi-fi applications.

Meanwhile, the MA 360 three-channel power amp has been developed from the recently introduced two-channel MA 240, and is designed to match said amp in a multi-channel set-up. It delivers 120 Watts per channel into eight Ohms and costs £1,300. Myriad ☎ (01705) 265508

Thule space race

Thule Audio chose the Hammersmith Hi-Fi Show to launch its new Space home cinema range. The initial line-up features three models: a processor, power amplifier and integrated amplifier.

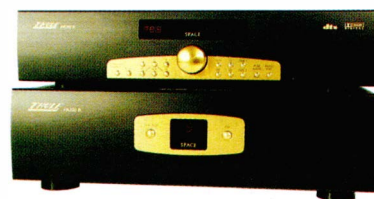
First is the PR250B, a £1,700, Dolby Digital and dts processor which the company claims is upgradable to future audio formats. The processor can accept inputs from DAB tuners, digital TV, DVD players, LaserDisc and satellite, as well as having a direct 'Pure Audio' input, and includes a variety of outputs for all your A/V needs.

The PA250B is the powerhouse to complement the PR250B, a £1,700, five-channel power amplifier offering a claimed 100 Watts per channel in five-channel mode and 250 Watts into two channels.

For those with a DVD player featuring an on-board Dolby Digital decoder, Thule Audio is offering the IA250B, a £1,800, five-channel integrated amplifier which also produces a claimed 100 Watts into five channels and 250 Watts into two channels.

All three products are available from your nearest stockist now.


Glaive ☎ (01622) 664070



Thule Audio PR250B/PA250B.




New NAD preamp

 NAD has unveiled its latest amp newcomer – the C 160 preamplifier. Set for launch at £430, the C 160 is billed as an all-new design combining the very best of the brand's earlier models with discrete 'Class A' amplifier modules. For your money you'll get four line inputs plus two tape loops, one with

monitor facility, switchable tone controls and a full remote control. Vinyl enthusiasts are also well catered for with a switchable MM/MC phono stage. The C 160 offers two line outputs, one of which is adjustable to allow for precise level matching for bi-amping purposes. *Lenbrook UK ☎ (07000) 028346*

KEF's concerted effort

 KEF has lifted the lid on its new 'mid-price' loudspeaker line-up, and the Concerto 1 is first to emerge. It's a slim floorstanding model featuring a 25mm silk dome tweeter coupled to a long-throw mid/bass driver with a 13cm doped paper cone. The cabinet measures 18x85x25cm (WxHxD) and is finished in black or cherry veneer, hand selected and mirror matched. There's a bass reflex port to the rear, with bi-wireable gold-plated cable terminals and 'heavy' internal bracing to cut sonic coloration. Price is £600 per pair and they're available now.

KEF Audio (UK) ☎ (01622) 672261

KEF Concerto 1.



Head Sennheisers

 Sennheiser has a new top-of-the-range headphone: the HD 590 'Prestige', priced at £160. It's an open-back design featuring a new generation Duofol transducer, Neodym-Iron magnets and lightweight 18mm aluminium voice coils. The result, claims Sennheiser, is a spacious "out of the head" sound and a neutral overall balance.

Also new from Sennheiser is the HD 270, a closed-back design at £80 aimed at DJs and general studio use. Its maker claims "low distortion at high volumes", with the kind of rugged build quality demanded by professional users. In general, closed-back headphones tend to sound less natural than open-back models, but often deliver more punchy bass and provide greater isolation between the listener and his or her environment.

Sennheiser Helpline ☎ (01494) 551571

Multi-channel music give-away

Calling all bloggers! We've got 50 dts 5.1 music demo discs to give away, courtesy of Vivante. This eight-track CD normally costs £7.95 and features a variety of music recorded in dts surround sound, including tracks from the Lyle Lovett and Holst discs reviewed on p.101.

To play it, you need a CD or DVD player with a digital output, multi-channel amplification with dts decoding and the requisite five speakers (or six if you're using a subwoofer).

To stand a chance of winning one, all you have to do is write to the following address: dts Give-away, Hi-Fi Choice, Dennis Publishing, 19 Bolsover Street, London W1P 7HJ. The first 50 entries to arrive will receive the disc completely gratis!

For the record, Vivante is the UK's premier mail order supplier of audiophile quality music recordings, including 24-bit/96kHz CDs and all multi-channel formats. It's also the official UK distributor for dts music software.

☎ (0208) 977 6600 for details, or e-mail sales@vivante.co.uk.



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COMPETITION

SURROUNDED BY INDIGOS

Answer our simple questions and win a superb Indigo/REL speaker package.

Thinking of going down the multi-channel music or home cinema route? Look no further than this month's prize giveaway to get you started on the right track.

Hi-Fi Choice has secured a spanking speaker package – worth £1,730 – combining Indigo loudspeakers with an REL subwoofer.

Indigo is a new loudspeaker brand, established this year by Ken Docherty, ex of Tannoy, while REL is already well established in the A/V market place.

The speaker package comprises: a pair of Indigo Threes for front stereo – a £500 model employing a 17cm main driver; a pair of Indigo Ones for surround effects – a £330 compact model employing a 13cm main driver; and an Indigo Two centre channel – a £200 model employing two 13cm main drivers. All models are magnetically shielded and employ 25mm titanium dome tweeters. REL's Strata III subwoofer (£700) employs a 25cm downward firing driver and complements the Indigos sonically and aesthetically.

To win this superb prize and enhance your listening experience, grab yourself a pen and put your entry form in the post to us today.

Package comprises:
 One pair of Indigo Ones
 One Indigo Two
 One pair of Indigo Threes
 One REL Strata III subwoofer.



HOW TO ENTER

Answer the questions below by circling the correct answers, then fill in your name, address and daytime telephone number in the spaces given.

The Questions

In which year did the Indigo brand first appear?

- a) 1989
- b) 1999
- c) 2001

From what material are Indigo's tweeters manufactured?

- a) Aluminium
- b) Titanium
- c) Paper

Post this entry form to:

Hi-Fi Choice Competition (CHFC 0001A)
 Bradley Pavilions, Bradley Stoke North, Bristol BS12 0BQ
 All entries must arrive by First Post, Thursday 3 February 2000.
 Please remember to tell us whether you are over 18 years of age.

Name _____
 Job Title _____
 Company Name _____
 Address (inc. postcode) _____

Day-time Telephone Number

- Please tick here if you are under 18.
- Please tick here if you do not wish to receive further information on other products or services.

Please tick one only of the following:

- Are you a current subscriber? OR
- Are you a regular reader? OR
- Are you an occasional reader?

COMPETITION RULES

- 1) The Closing Date for the Indigo/REL Competition is First Post, Thursday 3 February 2000.
- 2) Winners of the Indigo/REL Competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the Closing Date given in 1) above.
- 3) All winners will be notified by post.
- 4) The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.
- 5) The Indigo/REL Competition is not open to employees of Dennis Publishing Ltd, Indigo, REL nor their suppliers, agents or associates.
- 6) We regret this competition is open to UK residents only.
- 7) No cash alternatives will be offered.
- 8) We reserve the right to substitute alternative prizes with equal value to these shown, in the unlikely event of stock being temporarily unavailable.
- 9) By entering the competition, you agree to be bound by the rules.
- 10) All entries must be on this official entry coupon. If you do not wish to cut your magazine, you may send a photocopy of the page instead. Please note: only one entry form per household.

CHFC 0001A

If you don't wish to cut up your copy of Hi-Fi Choice, please photocopy this coupon.

THE SECOND Coming

Jason Kennedy finally gets his hands on SACD in the shape of the gorgeous SCD-777ES, Sony's second and most affordable player yet. **Paul Miller** finds out how it measures up.



Operationally this shows its first-generation standing with some of the slowest TOC reading and playback starting I've encountered; this is even the case when you have told it what type of disc to expect (CD or SACD), but it probably wants to make sure anyhow.

Suffice to say it's not a player for the impatient. When playing CD there are five filter options to choose from and the manual suggests different types of music they might suit – there was no mention of 'jungle' in the list, however.

The only tweaking option with SACD is between custom and standard output filters via a rear mounted switch that's usually blanked to standard. The difference is in roll-off, the

Super Audio CD received something of a boost the day before I sat down to gather my thoughts about its latest incarnation. Because of an error made by a software company, someone was able to crack the CSS digital copy protection system on DVD-Video. This had the effect of freezing Warner Brothers in its DVD-Audio tracks and, being the biggest player in that game,

this has added another delay to the introduction of SACD's main competitor (see full story in *News*, p6). Sony must be rather pleased to get what could well be another six months' head start in the high definition digital game.

This new ES player will certainly help Sony in the process. The SCD-777ES is a very attractive and meaty machine for the money; if it had a Pioneer

"Timbre is beautifully resolved, Coltrane's saxophone emboldened by considerable richness of tone on *Kind of Blue*."

badge on it would cost about three grand and if it had a Krell logo you could quadruple that figure. Whoever makes it, 25kg of finely finished disc player should not cost £1,700, and one is forced to surmise that Sony is foregoing profitability for the sake of long-term format success. Even if you didn't intend to play SACDs this is a bargain as a CD player – I'd be surprised if there are any better players below three grand.

The differences between this and its £2,500 SCD-1 stablemate (HFC 194) don't seem to be that significant on physical grounds: the SCD-777ES omits balanced outputs and has four relatively plain feet as opposed to five fancy ones, and weighs one-and-a-half kilos less, presumably on account of chassis variations. Otherwise, two of the three main PCBs look identical and the luxury control buttons are the same. Paul Miller's report shows that noise is a little higher, but from a physical standpoint there doesn't appear to be £800 in it.

custom version giving a much gentler slope than the standard filter, which as the lab report details reduces ultrasonic output in order not to freak out some amplifiers.

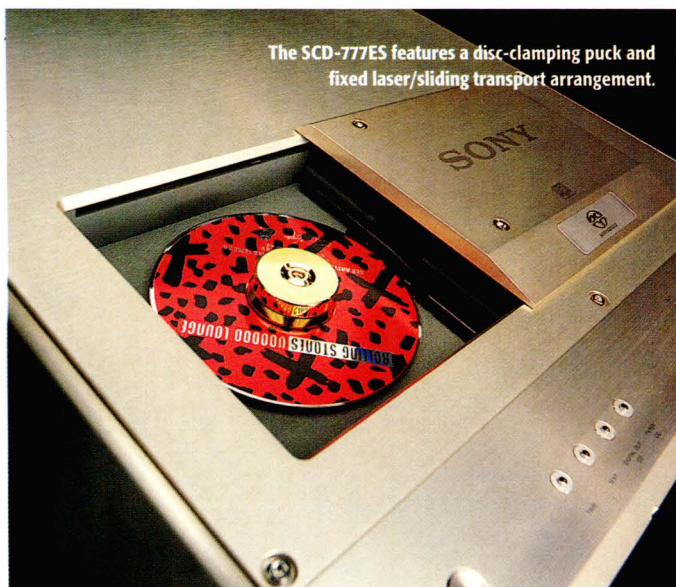
I compared the two settings through some normal bandwidth speakers and came to the conclusion that custom gave a more natural and slightly more three dimensional result when using SA software. Speakers with greater HF extension would probably enhance that effect. In fact, if my experience at various Sony demonstrations is anything to go by, speaker bandwidth is an extremely important factor in proving the case for the medium. Your average tweeter is unlikely to provide output at 30kHz, so the main benefit of a medium with a 100kHz theoretical bandwidth is a far more gentle roll-off than the insurmountable wall we hit at 20kHz with CD.

SOUND QUALITY

Sony provided a number of SACD discs to try with this



The display alters depending on whether CDs or SACDs are played, the latter offering album and track title display.



player, most of them of the single layer SA-only variety, and at the moment this is the only source of software for the medium. Most of the discs were from Sony Music's Columbia vaults, Weather Report, Herbie Hancock and even Return to Forever among them. But there were also a couple of new recordings such as *Walkin' on Eggs* by Nighthawks at the Diner (a Dutch, Tom Waits-type deal) and a promo disc with string quartet and cello pieces by a variety of contemporary composers. A limited selection of software is sufficient to give one an idea of the format's potential, but it's not likely to lend itself to the re-discovery of favourite recordings that new machines for an existing format can offer. A factor which can temper one's response to the medium.

Most of the listening was done with DNM Start pre- and Michell Alecto power amplification feeding Living Voice Avatar OBX-R speakers via Electrofluidics Monolith cable, interconnection courtesy of DNM. An evening was also spent in the presence of the highly entertaining Townshend Sir Galahad speakers and an integrated Credo amp, the big line sources revealing the unit's potential when it came to wide band resolution.

I would have to say that SACD does not offer a night-and-day upgrade over CD – perhaps it was foolish of me to expect it to do so, but after all the hype and some pretty impressive demonstrations, expectations were a bit on the high side. It's clear why Sony wants to introduce

the medium solely in the so-called 'high end': unless you have high-end ancillaries and sensibilities, its purpose is not going to be so apparent. In SCD-777ES form at least, what SACD brings to the party is a refinement and broadening of what we have with CD.

It's capable of considerable presence and energy, or dynamics as some might say; it's also extremely natural. A whole layer of digital style distortion has been removed: the insidious and nowadays extremely well disguised edge that CD adds to the picture but which nonetheless is not apparent with vinyl or live music.

Live acoustic music is both softer and harder than most facsimiles achieve simultaneously – SACD has the potential to deliver that range. Perceived distortion is vanishingly low, the medium having a lighter touch than either of the current alternatives, allowing darker backgrounds and creating more precise acoustic space. Timbre is beautifully resolved, Coltrane's saxophone emboldened by considerable

richness of tone on *Kind of Blue*. Imaging is significantly better than usual, showing tremendous depth and an expansive yet focused sense of space.

The SCD-777ES is also a very fine CD player, showing improvements over my Eikos in the areas mentioned above to no subtle degree. I was quite shocked by how much presence it could extract from Tori Amos' voice on the *Under the Pink* disc. The three SA recordings that I also had copies of on vinyl managed to trounce their analogue cousins by virtue of an illusively low noise floor, but it has to be said that in the case of the Weather Report, at least, there seemed to be a variation in balance.

But in all cases noise was the black discs' achilles heel. Even what sounded like tape hiss has been eliminated from the SA *Kind of Blue*, yet without affecting the atmosphere. I imagine that the rhythm and timing

brigade might not take to SACD straight away – it doesn't emphasise leading edges the way some record players do, but it resolves them clearly enough and once there's a bit of Prodigy and Rage Against The Machine available, things might well change.

CONCLUSION

My first domestic acquaintance with SACD has been one of gradual appreciation rather than a blowing away, and these are usually the format 'relationships' that last. I'd say the opposite was the case with CD when it first appeared: we were blown away but soon tired of it.

The SCD-777ES is fantastic value as a CD player alone, so the ability to play this intriguing new format is like the icing on the cake. I recommend you consider taking advantage of Sony's mighty marketing budget by auditioning one of these golden beasts straight away.

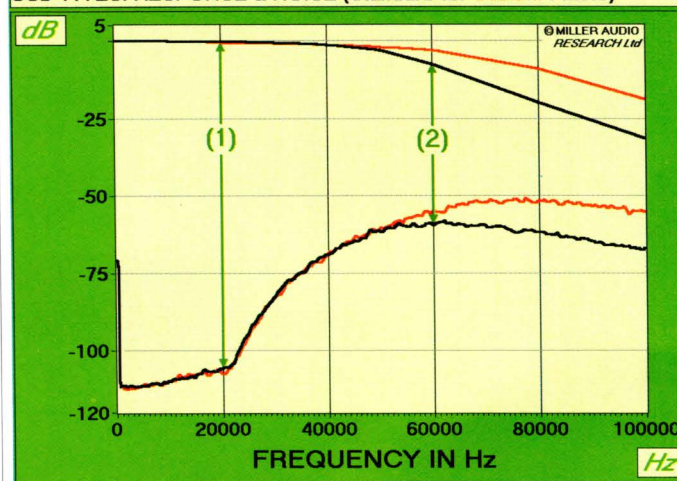
THE LAB REPORT

The principle advantage of Sony's SACD player over conventional CD players lies in its retention of musical information above 20kHz. Otherwise, its performance in terms of noise and distortion is not, in practice, significantly different. Distortion at 1kHz/peak output is -112dB (or 0.00025%), which is just a few dB better than Meridian's latest CD players – the current 'record-holders', according to my database. At higher frequencies the picture is complicated by the sharp increase in ultrasonic requantisation noise left over from the ADCs used at the point of recording. At 10kHz, for example, a strong second harmonic lifts distortion to -94dB (0.002%) while third, fourth and higher harmonics are concealed beneath the noise. Either way, 0.002% is hardly 'high' by any stretch of the imagination and ranks as a pretty spectacular result.

Currently, it's this noise that characterises the SACD medium. The plot (signal above, noise below) clearly shows how the wide dynamic range achieved up to 20kHz (1) is diminished (2) by requantisation noise at ultrasonic frequencies. Some of this noise evidently 'leaks' into the audio range, because the 107dB A-wtd S/N ratio is not far removed from today's CD players. But that's to miss the real advantages of SACD. Here we can see the effect of the two output filter settings, the 'Standard' filter (black traces) providing an additional 12.5dB cut at 100kHz in both noise and response compared with the gentler 'Custom' filter (red traces). Some amplifiers will produce less distortion with a reduced input of ultrasonic energy (Standard Filter), but those of a more rugged design should benefit from the more faithful reproduction of the Custom Filter setting.

PMI

SCD-777ES: RESPONSE & NOISE (Standard vs. Custom Filters)



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £1,700.00

A huge slab of an SACD player with considerable abilities when it comes to resolution, distortion reduction and naturalness, not to mention impressive CD playing abilities.

■ ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

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Storage Solutions by Sony

DAVID VIVIAN

On-board or off-board, which is the best way to jump? Our Man in Converterland takes a look at a little black DAC.



It boasts enough separate toroidal transformers to sink a battleship, but, more importantly, it's black.

transport and DAC can be synchronised, increased jitter is an almost inevitable by-product of the union. Then there's the whole thorny question of how to connect the two pieces together.

Buying a fancy digital interconnect won't necessarily help, because although it might have a perfect 75 Ohm impedance (essential for optimum transmission) there's no guarantee the S/PDIF (RCA phono socket) digital output driver of the CD player or transport will. It should – at the standard 1V peak-to-peak output level – but it's not uncommon to see peak outputs as high 2.5V or as low as 400mV which can lead to overload at one extreme or an inability to lock at the other. Dodgy impedance matching is even worse, leading to signal reflections along the cable and further data errors. Toslink optical connections tend to be more consistent but often sound worse than an average coaxial link, while the XLR Balanced route (110 Ohms) should be best – but only if impedance matching is spot on.

All of which may explain why, when I connected GT Audio's new £350 Star-DAC –

It's probably significant that I can remember my first add-on DAC – the aptly named Arcam Black Box – but not the CD player that I connected it to. Clearly the DAC was cool, or I wouldn't have bought it (did it really cost £350?), but I think the frisson of excitement at being able to 'tweak' something as seemingly rigid and uncompromising as a CD player is what I remember most vividly.

Plugging this thing in was the digital equivalent of fitting a better cartridge to your tonearm. As a hi-fi buff who'd been sucked in by the 'perfect sound forever' CD hype, then bemused and disappointed by the far from perfect reality, the Black Box represented a kind of empowerment. I didn't have to bin my CD player for a newer model to get a better sound, just buy the 'important bit' – the digital to analogue conversion – in a separate box. Black.

Of course, things were much simpler then. Most of the less expensive all-in-one players (I hesitate to use the word 'cheap' – only now do we have truly cheap CD spinners) sounded none too nice and outboard DACs seemed to help quite a lot. Better results still could be achieved by separating the two parts of a CD player completely with one box for the transport mechanism, the other for the DAC.

And if that DAC was designed to accommodate future converter chip and filter advances, so much the better. CD replay standards made giant strides because of these initiatives and some people continue to believe it's the only way to extract maximum performance from what remain annoyingly expensive silver discs.

Something remarkable has happened in the meantime, though. Many low priced CD players (not all of them, but we are talking dozens) have become very good indeed. Good enough for most hi-fi purchasers to

“What did it sound like? In most cases, great. But better? Dunno. Its character was completely different with each CD player.”



not even know (or care) what an off-board DAC is. Better, in some cases, than the really expensive players of a few years ago.

And certain mid-to-upper sector players – say, £800 to £1,000 – have become so good that, and this is purely a personal opinion, you'd have to be nuts to spend more, either on a 'high-end' standalone machine or a profligate concoction of transport, DACs and power supplies – unless, arguably, you had a number of additional digital sources you wanted to run through the same DAC. I recently checked out a well regarded and exquisitely made £4,000 CD player for another magazine. It sounded sweet. But the Musical Fidelity X-Ray (£800) and AVI S2000 MC Reference 24 (£999) I also had to hand sounded rather better.

I suppose the point is a well designed standalone CD player should get most things right these days without costing the earth. Adding another manufacturer's box of tricks to handle the conversion might well offer potential sonic benefits (newer converters, maybe more of them and separate regulated power supplies look like sure-fire winners) but there are a host of variables that might conceivably make things worse. First, unless the clocks of the

surely the Black Box for the new millennium – to a selection of CD players (five ranging from a £500 Arcam Alpha 8SE to a £1,600 Audio Note CD-3), the results

were considerably less clear cut than my Black Box experiments of a dozen years ago.

Not unreasonably, GTA says the Star-DAC has been designed to enable owners of older and modern CD players to bring their machines up to the latest digital replay standards. It boasts separate 24-bit Burr-Brown D to A converters for each channel, separate toroidal transformers for the digital and analogue sections, six separately regulated power supplies for the digital sections and four for the separate and discreet analogue output stages. Oh, and it's black.

What did it sound like? In most cases, great. But better? Dunno. Its character was completely different with each player; there seemed to be no underlying 'Star-DACness'. It made a difference, certainly, adding a little muscle to the X-Ray but at the expense of some spaciousness. On balance, I preferred the standard player. Likewise with the AVI – the S-DAC made it sound more luxurious, but too soft.

With the already fine-sounding Alpha 8SE, though, something remarkable happened. The Star-DAC effected a total and stunning transformation. As an £850 combo, it was comfortably the match of any of the single players and some way ahead of the best if you like a sound with plenty of drive and vitality.

How come? Could it be that Arcam CD players have well engineered S/PDIF output stages that measure exactly as they should? A strong contender, I'd say. So, the StarDAC: a great product for the money, but it all depends on what you connect it to.

CAPTURE

The Essence

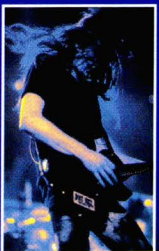
...the essence of a live performance, the passion... the power... the excitement. You just can't beat it!



But you can come close, that's why you own a hi-fi system. That's also why you need to use the very best cables you can afford, because only then, can you be sure that your system is being allowed to work to it's full potential.



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*A summary of this research "The Genesis Report" is available on request.

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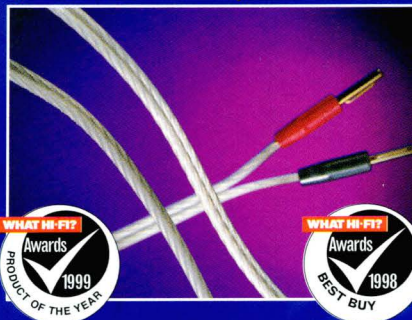
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Qunex 2 Price from £27.00/pair



"Qunex 2 was one of the best-liked cables in the test. Qunex 2 fully deserves a Best Buy."

"Great price, great cable, well made. Nifty name, neat plugs. Five stars. Next..."

LETTERS

Hi-Fi Choice's very own 'points of view' page, where you, the reader, can express your opinions!

LETTER OF THE MONTH

INTERNET SHOPPING FEAR

Like a great many people, I have been swept away by the Internet revolution. I use my PC almost every day to seek information about hi-fi and visit chat sites to discuss tweaks. I have even succumbed to the ultimate sin of visiting my local retailer, listening to the kit and then buying it from a cheaper Internet store.

Upon visiting my local hi-fi dealer recently we talked about the increasing pressure retailers face and the difficulties of trying to keep up with the cheaper Internet sites.

I have subsequently been converted from a 'buy on price' shopper to supporting my local dealer and have purchased a pair of Tannoy Revolution R2 speakers (right) from him. I could have purchased them for less from an Internet site, but without the dealer's service, knowledge and expertise.

I think it's up to us all to support our local businesses and am concerned by the number of hi-fi magazines promoting Internet sites for cheaper deals yet also advocate listening before buying. I do not think the two are mutually compatible.

Mr S Payne, Hertfordshire

The Editor replies... Internet stores have their place and can offer substantial savings on components due to their lack of overheads and support services. For long term satisfaction, however, HFC recommends buying from a reputable retailer (preferably one that is BADA-approved) offering demonstration facilities and after-sales service.



the light scatter out of the edge. Having been somewhat cynical about such tweaks in the past, I have now green-penned my whole CD collection.

Mr J R Coleman, Wales

COLOSSAL CABLES

For some time now I've wondered about the value of hi-tech interconnects. Does a cable costing £80 perform better, or at least differently, than one costing half that?

I was slightly dissatisfied with my hi-fi: the sound was good but the treble seemed spiky and shrill with certain recordings. I had considered changing my speakers, a pair of KEF Q35s, but recalled that when I auditioned them they sounded so much better than anything else I'd listened to. Could a change of interconnect between CD player and amp be the answer? I decided to give it a try with the van den Hul D102 Mk III interconnect. I kept the receipt and packaging just in case it didn't work out - half expecting to take it back to the shop for a refund the next day. However, I was astonished by the difference to the sound, and almost couldn't believe it was my kit I was listening to. I was instantly convinced of the cable's credibility. The sound is smoother and more open, definition is clearer with improved imaging and the spiky treble is no more.

I can honestly say this is by far the best hi-fi investment I have ever made, allowing me to hear the kit as it should sound for the first time. Take it from me: cables do sound different from one another.

E Nutton, West Sussex

**van den Hul
D102 MkIII.**



MODEL CONFUSION

In the November issue you managed to get hold of a Sony CDP-XB930E without a headphone socket. As far as I can gather all models in the UK come supplied with a headphone socket and are known as model number CDP-XB930. I would like to know if this model is to the same specification as the one reviewed?

M Storr, Yorkshire

The Editor replies... The UK version is in fact the reviewed CDP-XB930E, which does not have a headphone socket. Sony tells us the CDP-XB930 model you mention is also available in the UK from dealers which import product from Europe. Our advice is to go for the reviewed and readily available UK model.

VINYL WORDS II

I was very surprised to read the comments made by a reader in the letter entitled 'Vinyl Words' (HFC 194).

I too have invested in digital sources, and am very pleased with the benefit each component brings to my system.

Like a lot of people at the time, I abandoned analogue sources for the convenience and quality of digital sources. Now, thanks to magazines like *Hi-Fi Choice* bringing notable advances in analogue sources to our attention, I have added a turntable and cassette deck to my system.

Rather than consider that I have wasted money on digital sources, I believe each component complements the other, bringing

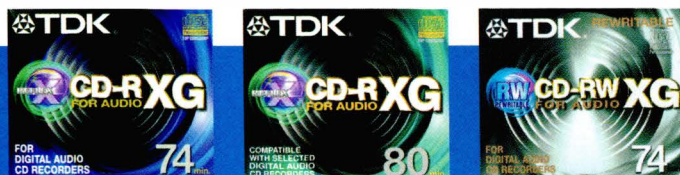
more flexibility to my system, and is justified in its own right.

Nicholas Priddle, Plymouth

HINTS & TIPS

In the November issue Jimmy Hughes mentioned using twin and earth mains cable as a cheap way for bi-wiring speakers. On this advice, I visited my local hardware store to purchase some 2.5mm single-core cable and bi-wired my recently purchased Tannoy R1 speakers. I was instantly blown away by the difference in every aspect - and it cost me just £5 for the six metres I needed.

Another theory I have tried out for myself is the green felt pen around the edge of a CD. I tested this by shining a laser pointer onto a CD and could clearly see



Letters page sponsored by

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TDK's audio CD-R range

Krell's CAST of Angels

Academy Advancing High
Performance Audio & Video
Golden Note Awards '98
Krell KPS 25s — Audio
digital source design
Krell FPB 650M — Solid-state
electronics design



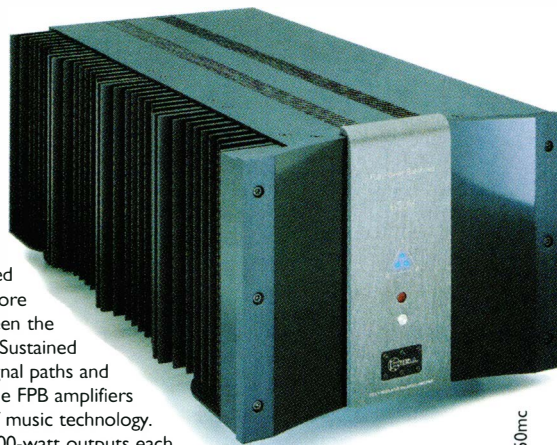
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FROM THE EXPERTS

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FPB 650mc

FPB 200c) uses output devices manufactured exclusively for Krell by Motorola. These amps are musical, fast and incredibly strong with an unprecedented level of speed, current drive and musical accuracy. Fred Kaplan, reviewing the FPB-300 in *Fi* magazine (Feb 1999) wrote of "an uncanny blend of grace and power". FPB monoblocks in 600, 350 and 250-watt configurations (**FPB 600mc**, **FPB 350mc** and **FPB 250mc**) are available in handed pairs. Of the mighty FPB650m monoblocks Martin Colloms wrote, "(they) define the present art of power amplification". If you think the 7500 watt into 1 ohm delivery of an FPB650m is impressive consider the 400 lb plus weight and 16,000 Volt Amperes of power that defines the **Krell Master Reference Amplifier** — the largest most powerful amplifier ever designed for use by audiophiles. Its 'six digit' price a pair reflects an unprecedented engineering achievement.

Current Audio Signal Transmission (CAST) is simply a better way to connect Krell components. CAST is featured on all FPB amps and top-of-the-range Krell components and means the characteristics of interconnects simply do not matter. CAST works hand-in-hand with Krell Current Mode to eliminate the effects of interconnect impedance and cable length. CAST means easier installation and more precise sound.

Natural partner for the FPB range is Krell's **KRC-HR High Resolution Remote Controlled Preamplifier** offering uncompromised audiophile sound with ease of operation. Digital logic circuits operate gold-contact relays for positive switching with absolute signal integrity. Power supply and gain stages are refinements of classic Krell Class A complimentary circuits with extraordinary levels of transparency and resolution.

The **Krell Playback System KPS 25sc** is the new reference standard integrated transport/digital processor/analogue preamp that beats the performance of separates. Its integrated fully balanced Class A preamp is among the finest Krell has ever produced. Small wonder that the KPS 25s has been receiving rave reviews like Robert Harley's in *Fi* magazine (Sep 1998) — "a masterpiece of aesthetic design, functionality and musical performance. To see, touch, and hear the KPS 25s is to want one. Don't say I didn't warn you." Home Cinema audio has to date been dominated by relatively inexpensive, mass-market systems. Audiophiles have not been impressed. So Krell has determined to bring the best audio and video together in one seamless experience — **HEAT** or **High End Audio Theater**. Supporting Krell's outstanding **KAV-S Home Cinema Director** (Dolby Pro-Logic, THX, DTS, and AC-3) are Krell AV amplifiers — a range of 100 watt per channel multi-channel amplifiers (the **KAV-500/3, /4** and **/5**), the 2, 3 and 4-channel amplifiers can be extended with an optional add-on channel (the **KAV-500 Rail**). The **KAV-300i** — Krell's first integrated amplifier — an integrated two-channel 150 watt design has been cleaning up awards around the world. This fully discrete, wide-bandwidth, low-feedback design features full Class A dual mono output stage. Its supplied remote control gives access to the basic functions of Krell CD players. For a more powerful integrated consider the new **KAV-500i** while Krell now offers the ultimate convenience of an audiophile receiver — the **KAV-300r** — with Theater

Throughput for easy Home Cinema integration. Matching CD players are available. The **KAV-300cd**, featuring HDCD, 2 x 20 bit Burr-Brown DACs and Class A direct coupled output stages with both balanced and single ended outputs, is now joined by the **KAV-250cd**.

The **KAV-250a** stand-alone power amplifier offers 250 watt at £3145; a matching preamplifier — designated **KAV-250p** is available at the fantastic price of £1999 — with one balanced input, one tape loop and three single ended inputs one of which can be configured as a Theater Throughput.

Joining the KAV team is an affordable and versatile two-channel, bridgeable 150-watt amplifier — the **KAV-150a**.

To discover where Krell components can work for you — contact **Absolute Sounds**.



KPS-25sc



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SUPER TEST

DVD PLAYERS

Alvin Gold dons his smart new set of 'surround ears' and listens to the latest DVD players.

THE CAST LIST

Denon DVD-2500	£500.00
JVC XV-D701	£500.00
Nakamichi DVD-10	£799.99
Panasonic DVD-A360	£580.00
Philips DVD750	£385.00
Pioneer DV-626D	£450.00
Sony DVP-S7700	£800.00
Teac DV-1000	£399.95
Toshiba SD9000	£800.00
Yamaha DVD-S795	£529.00

If you believe the hype, DVD has already come of age. It has come, seen and conquered all, and for many it has already taken the place of compact disc because it is a superset of Red Book CD. Buy a DVD player and you have a CD player, a video player and a multi-channel audio player rolled into one.

Last but not least, DVD has a very real high-resolution audio capacity, and there are a number of recordings available which exploit the full 24-bit/96kHz capability that was included, almost as an afterthought, into the DVD-Video specification. It is only a two-channel capability, and it only hints at the what will soon be possible, but 24/96 is an exciting development, offering the first real increase in audio resolution since the introduction of CD itself.

This test is mainly designed to explore the audio capabilities –

HINTS & TIPS

Decide first what you intend to use a DVD player for, and choose your model accordingly. Forget integral Dolby Digital decoders if you already have an amplifier or processor capable of doing that job, because there is clear evidence that most integral processors are less than state of the art. Similarly, ensure that your choice will deliver 96kHz from its digital outputs if you intend playing such discs with an external D/A converter. Use electrical digital in preference to the optical alternative, and choose the best cable you can afford for this: you will hear the difference. Finally, use a solid, stable support platform for these sometimes rather flimsy players.



with a sideways look at the video capabilities for completeness – of an up-to-date group of DVD players, and follows a similar project undertaken in these pages eight issues ago. The main idea is to determine whether they can be taken seriously as the next great step in music reproduction, and whether they fulfil their early promise to displace conventional compact disc players.

You may recall that for the most part, the DVD players we looked at last time around were disappointing in their secondary CD-playing role, but this area at least has seen some real improvements.

Another change from the recent past is the rapidly increasing number of players that include internal Dolby Digital processors, a feature primarily aimed at those whose Dolby Pro-Logic amplifiers have six-channel line inputs.

The problem for all of the players tested here is that the future is just around the corner. SACD is already here, albeit in tiny numbers, at high prices and with only a subset of the final specification, but this will change rapidly with new players due shortly. The countdown to DVD-Audio is already under way, although there are uncertainties, for example

about how long it will take before MLP (Meridian Lossless Packing), a mandatory part of the specification, will take to appear in finalised silicon form. But there is no reason to doubt that combination DVD-Audio and Video players, perhaps capable of playing SACD as well, will quickly follow.

GLOSSARY

DVD (AKA DVD-VIDEO): Digital Versatile Disc is capable of storing a feature film and various alternative soundtracks, subtitles etc. A high resolution 24-bit/96kHz PCM option gives the potential of better than CD sound in two-channel form.

DOLBY DIGITAL (DD): A codec that compresses 5.1 channels of sound into a very limited bandwidth. The front-running standard for DVD multi-channel sound. Formally AC-3.

PCM SOUND: Used for CD (16-bit/44.1kHz) and an option for two-channel use for DVD (up to 24 bits and 96kHz), potentially offering better sound quality than compact disc.

DVD-A: Dedicated audio variant of DVD-Video, offering high resolution PCM multi-channel audio with pictures. Launching in 2000.

DTS: Competing alternative to DD, integrated into the DVD standard.

HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

There are several modes of use for any DVD player, and our tests were accordingly split into several parts. Players on test were preconditioned by being run in over a period, and warmed up before each listening session. One of the tests involved direct comparisons in stereo between the test player and a quality dedicated CD player, the Krell KAV-250cd, using an appropriate quality stereo system.

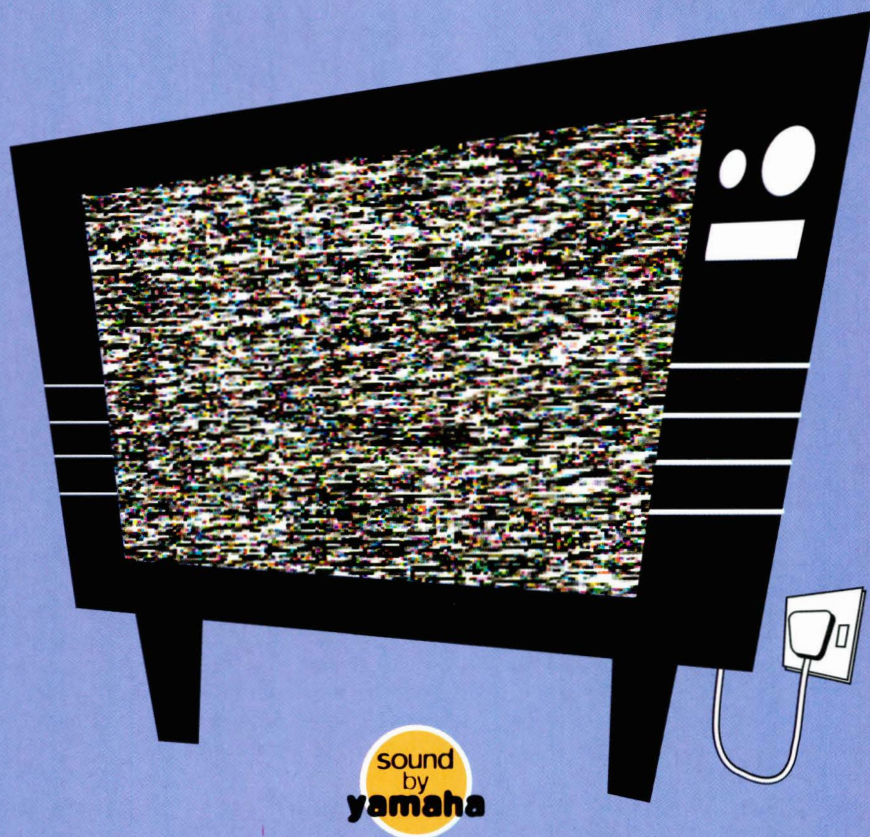
Performance with a number of 24-bit/96kHz stereo recordings was assessed using the same system, both played direct, and also using an outboard D/A converter, namely the Chord DSC1500E which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Finally, the players were used in a multi-channel system with a Yamaha DSP-A1 amplifier and a multi-channel speaker system, and connected to a TV to access the video menus and to check their video performance. Other equipment used included a Krell integrated amplifier and loudspeakers from B&W.

All published measurements were taken by Paul Miller on the QC Suite v3.1 high-speed functional testing station.

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DENON DVD-2500



Although not as feature-laden as some, the DVD-2500 lacks only features that will be of little interest to audiophiles, such as on-board Dolby Digital and dts decoders, while retaining some that are not altogether common elsewhere, such as the ability to stream a 24-bit/96kHz signal for off-player processing. The video DAC is a ten-bit device, and video can be output in (in ascending order of desirability) composite, S-Video and RGB form.

Audio is processed by a 24-bit/96kHz Delta Sigma device, but the usual health warning applies concerning the ability of this or any other current D/A to operate at anything near 24-bit resolution. In a nutshell, it won't.

The DVD-2500 is sourced from Panasonic, and has various identifiable Panasonic attributes, including much of the firmware, and the same familiar on-screen menu structure, which can only be praised for its clarity. The handset is essentially a more brightly coloured version of the one that ships with the Yamaha DVD-S795, but with an extra key to call up the VSS (Virtual Surround Sound) feature which gives a kind of 'wraparound' effect from a single pair of speakers. Kind of.

The Denon is well endowed with

"The Denon was very satisfactory with Dolby Digital and dts music recordings – especially the Telarc dts discs."

features designed to match the player to various types of glass and projection display devices, and particular types of programme material and source discs. For example, there are settings designed to make the most of DVDs, and for reducing the visibility of picture noise and pixillation with Video CDs. In common with other Panasonic-type players, there is also an override for the centre speaker level intended to raise the dialogue above other distractions, and enhance intelligibility. Note that CD-R and CD-RWs can't be used on this player.

SOUND QUALITY

Using its own internal DAC and output circuits, and playing compact discs in stereo, the Denon clearly belongs in the same area as the Panasonic and the Yamaha in offering a quite atmospheric sound that becomes a little cluttered when loud, and that lacks the richness and complexity of tonal colour of a good dedicated CD player. Treble quality was sharp and occasionally penetrating, with a

matching thinness of tone and texture at the other end of the audio frequency band which was confirmed by channelling the digital output through an external DAC. That provided a much clearer and more lively sound, and one with a much more organic sense of musical movement. The Denon could sound rather stiff by comparison, an observation repeated time after time in these tests.

Much the same kind of difference was encountered with 24/96 material using first the internal D/A converter, and then an external one receiving full 24/96 data from the Denon's digital output. Without the benefit of the same source material in 16-bit and 24-bit form, it's difficult to make comparisons, but certainly there was no obvious indication that high resolution recordings sounded much if any better than 'Red Book' CD ones when reproduced by the DVD player's own output stage. Using the same external DAC (from Chord), there was a clear improvement of much the same kind that had been experienced from compact disc – and perhaps (just perhaps) of an even greater order.

The Denon was very satisfactory with Dolby Digital and dts music recordings – especially the Telarc dts discs, which offer what must be the

best surround sound music sound quality this side of discrete high resolution audio, with an electrifying sense of image scale and architecture. But common to both, the data-reduced CODECs, dts and Dolby Digital alike, is a certain granularity and opacity that is sensed rather than heard, and which seems to 'breathe' with the music.

CONCLUSION

The long and the short of it is that this is an alternative version of the Panasonic and Yamaha players reviewed elsewhere in this group, but without the internal decoders, and with a lower price to match. If Denon can maintain the price, it represents a reasonable buy, especially given its excellent picture quality, but it is outshone as a CD player by some of the alternatives, and really only comes into its own playing 24/96 material through an external D/A. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £500.00

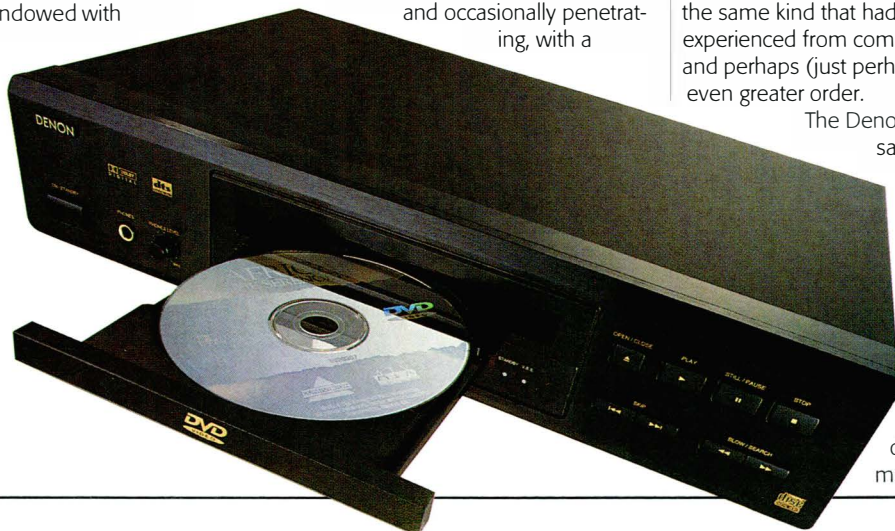
■ Not great as a CD player, but works well with an outboard DAC with 24/96 material, and has excellent picture quality.

■ **TWO YEAR GUARANTEE**

✉ Hayden Labs, Hayden House, Chiltern Hill, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 9UG
☎ (01753) 888447

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-V, CD, Video CD
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz Delta Sigma
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/96kHz
- Output sockets: 2 x Scart, 2 pairs 2-channel audio, electrical & optical S/PDIF, 2 x composite video, 1 x Y/C video, headphone socket
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 43.4x9.9x26.6mm
- Weight: 3.3kg



Au naturel

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JVC XV-D701



This mid-market player is one of an increasing number to include a Dolby Digital decoder, which in this case can also deal with MPEG2 DVDs (if you can find any). The JVC recognises dts discs and will drive an outboard dts decoder correctly from its digital outputs.

Interface-wise, this model is not as fully equipped as some. You get a single Scart socket, switchable between composite and S-Video, a dedicated Y/C S-Video output and a composite output, plus the usual optical and electrical digital outputs, but the six-channel output that is used to drive a six-channel input shares duties with the standard stereo/Dolby Surround encoded output. This is potentially restricting, for example when the internal Dolby Digital decoder is in use with a multi-channel amp, and a second audio output is required to drive a dedicated stereo system, or a system in a second room. The other omission is component RGB video.

JVC's XV-D701 looks a little different to most. It is, frankly, rather chintzy, with lots of lights, a rich field of buttons on the player itself

"JVC's XV-D701 looks a little different to most. It is, frankly, rather chintzy, with lots of lights and a rich field of buttons."

and on the remote control, which is coded to also control TVs and satellite receivers from a number of popular brands. There are lots of friendly and not so friendly front panel and screen graphics, including a choice of screen savers. A 'digest' feature shows a series of thumbnail views of the beginning of each chapter, allowing rapid navigation, which joins more commonplace features like the well executed picture zoom, and a range of picture adjustments.

The sound side is taken care of by a 24/96kHz D/A converter, but the digital output won't run at the full clock rate, and the maximum output is limited to 48kHz, which gives a frequency response little greater than 'Red Book' CD. 3D-Phonic – a proprietary and slightly more sophisticated than usual two-speaker surround sound algorithm – is included, and so is CD Text, making this one of the few DVD players so equipped.

SOUND QUALITY

Although the JVC presents itself rather differently to most DVD players, in fact it is a fairly representative performer whose picture quality is at or a little above the expected standard for a mid-priced player, with sound quality that, while serviceable in many contexts, is well below otherwise comparable CD player standards.

In this respect the XV-D701 is a stereotypical DVD player. The notes from the compact disc listening sessions describe the JVC string quality as 'scrawny', and talked of a 'rough edge' to percussion although, paradoxically, voices taken from operatic and other recordings were handled surprisingly well. The Corrs *Only When I Sleep* (from *Unplugged*) summed up the JVC's qualities with a ravishing vocal line, but a congested, woolly sound throughout the denser sections.

The player is on firmer ground as a source of digits for externally generated Dolby Digital and dts sound, although again the very best dts music

recordings available during this test (such as the finale from *Mahler 2* on Telarc) did not open out quite as much as had been experienced from one or two other players. The Sony, in

particular, had an unmatched ability to strip out the recorded acoustic and separate it from the direct sound of the music, and it is this trait as much as anything else that can make it such a thoroughly compelling listening experience. The JVC's on-board Dolby Digital decoder, however, was surprisingly strong.

The on-board converter did a pretty good job with the 24/96 material, although on the whole the player remained consistent with the tone of previous comments. Bolder, more varied sound quality and a more architectural solidity was delivered from the outboard Chord D/A converter.

CONCLUSION

The JVC scores as a high-tech video player, with some neat navigational features such as 'digest' (see above) and CD Text, but there is no component video output, and the bottom line is that it is a less obviously attractive to the audiophile. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE **£500.00**

Not a bad player, but the XV-D701 is not an obvious choice for the 'sound quality-first' user.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

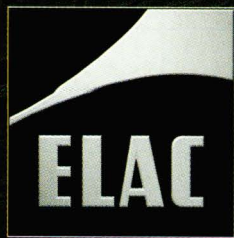
JVC, JVC Business Park, Priestley Way, London NW2 7BA
(0208) 450 3282

SPECIFICATIONS

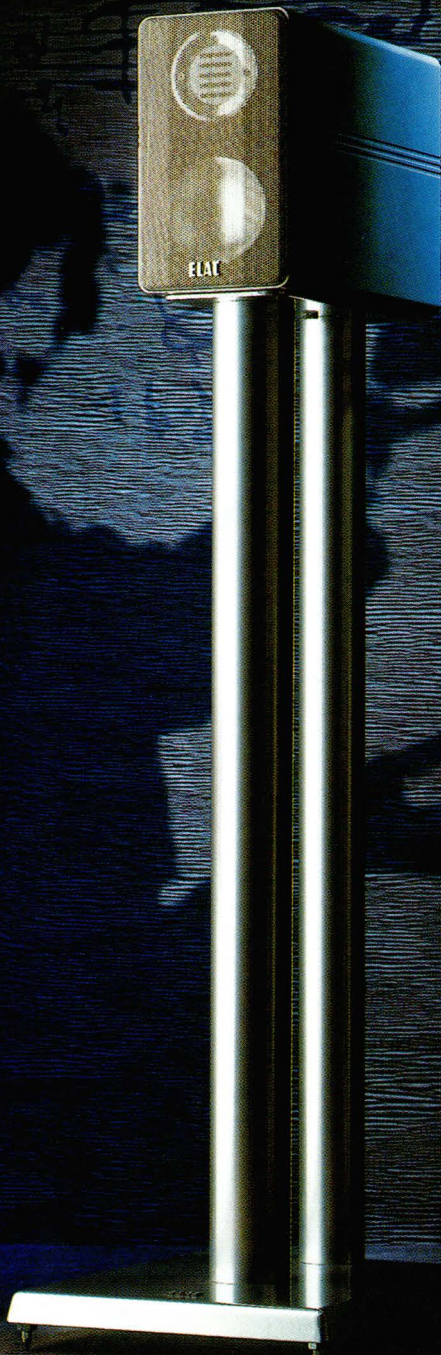
- Compatible with: DVD-V, CD, Video CD
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/48kHz
- Output sockets: 1 x Scart, S-Video, composite, electrical & optical digital S/PDIF, 6 channel/2 channel (shared) audio out.
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 435x112x335mm
- Weight: 4.5kg



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[C U R A H I G H Q U A L I T Y
L O U D S P E A K E R S Y S T E M S]

NAKAMICHI DVD-10



The DVD-10 is Nakamichi's first DVD player to go on sale in the UK, and it has a comparatively straightforward set of features. On the face of it, the asking price looks fairly steep. In the past the pricing has reflected the low compromise nature of the engineering and exclusivity of the brand name, but it isn't clear that either point's valid here. The DVD-10 is a lightweight (3.4kg) and there are some unexpected short-cuts, such as in output provision.

Features include an integral Dolby Digital decoder, which delivers analogue audio to AV amplifiers with 5.1 channel inputs, which are typically Dolby Pro Logic models of recent design such as Nakamichi's own AV-7. Note that the DVD-10 isn't capable of decoding dts recordings (although dts discs are recognised, and a digital output is available from such discs). As dts recordings become available this will be seen as increasingly inconsistent. When did you last hear of a home cinema amp with dts but without Dolby Digital? Dolby Virtual Surround is also available as a 'belt-and-braces' provision for DD replay by those with only two loudspeakers, along with intro scan and bookmarking features.

"The DVD-10 proved to be a good source of Dolby Digital, through its own processor and, with dts, from its digital output."

The back panel is rather sparse. There's a single Scart and an optical digital S/PDIF output for PCM and dts bitstream digital outputs, a six-channel output for which the two front channels can be enabled through the menu system – you can access one set or the other, not both – an S-Video output, composite and RGB. Surprisingly, there's no electrical digital output, which usually delivers better sound quality than the optical interface, and the latter is limited to a 48kHz output. Videophiles are better catered for, as the DVD-10 does include component video.

SOUND QUALITY

Although the Nakamichi is palpably superior to early DVD players – there is a lot more coherently presented musical detail than used to make it through in the early days – it is barely comparable in audio performance to a budget CD player. Indeed, it is well below the standard of some £300

models we have tested in these pages. In common with more than one of the other players, the Nakamichi sounded curiously thin and sharp, almost whistly through the upper midband, while the bass lacked the propulsive quality and substance that a good CD player can bring to the party.

Much the same applied when playing DVD 24/96 discs using the on-board D/A converter and, as an example, the recording from Dave's True Story called *Sex without Bodies* was much as the title suggests: curiously but unmistakably disembodied, almost colourless. The external Chord processor added some much needed colour and vibrancy to the sound, but it was operating at a disadvantage thanks to the downsampled digital output.

The DVD-10 did prove to be a good source of Dolby Digital, both through its own processor (supported, by the way, by an excellent on-screen set-up routine) and, with dts, from its digital output. On the whole, more elaborately specified players such as the Sony DVD-S7700 were able to provide a

digital signal that helped the host system sound a little better focused and bolder, but the musical shortfall was nothing like as obvious as was the case with compact discs.

CONCLUSION

Nakamichi has only recently made a return to the British and European markets (it dropped out when the CE electrical regulations came into force, although it never disappeared from other markets in the US and Far East).

In many ways Nakamichi is a reformed brand, with a heavy concentration on B&O territory lifestyle products, but leavened with a smattering of authentic high fidelity and high end AV components, not the least of which is the subject of this test. The trouble is that it the DVD-10 comes across as rather half-baked, lacking the thorough and refined engineering of old style Nakamichi, and sounding a little unbalanced on test. **AG**



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £799.99

Not really the thoroughbred it appears to be, the DVD-10 tends to sound detailed but thin and strident

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

BBG, Unit 3 Barratt Way, Tudor Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 5QS

(0208) 863 9117

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/48kHz
- Output sockets: 1 x Scart, 1 x S-Video, 1x composite video, 1 x optical digital S/PDIF, component video
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (HxWxD): 430x88x310mm
- Weight: 3.4kg

PANASONIC DVD-A360E

PANASONIC DVD-A360E

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The bright, attractively presented DVD-A360 is an industry first in that it includes a processor capable of decoding Dolby Digital 5.1 and dts, which allows replay through a 'dumb' 5.1 amplifier/speaker array or a multi-channel Pro Logic amplifier with a six-channel input. While dts hasn't been licensed for DVD in this country, this is not the case with other Area Code 2 countries such as Japan, and a number of Code 1 dts discs ostensibly made for the US will play on Code 2 players like this one.

Rear panel furniture is perfectly standard of its type. The digital outputs are capable of outputs up to 24-bits/96kHz, a strong point. The D/A converter itself is said to be 24-bit/96kHz capable, but this means it will read discs with 24-bit data, not that it will resolve data to that level of accuracy.

The video DAC is a ten-bit component, and the player includes a range of adjustments, including Digital Cinema Mode which employs a combination of brightness control and picture noise cancelling circuitry to make the most of different types of display (CRT, LCD or CRT projector) and type of software (DVD films, Video CD, animation and so on).

This is all backed by a vast

"Using the outboard Chord converter overcame the player's sloth, providing a clean, sharp and articulate result."

array of disc-handling features, including a rather nifty widget that plays a few seconds from each already viewed chapter. How cool is that?

The remote control unit is an unexciting looking but well designed number with a joystick for navigation purposes. The speaker set-up, which includes a graphic routine for setting speaker sizes and delays, necessary for the on-board Dolby Digital and dts processors, is attractive as well as operationally intuitive.

SOUND QUALITY

One of the test discs – a classical recording of Dyson on compact disc – was incorrectly identified by the DVD-A360 as a dts CD, which switched to play mode some seconds into the disc, and then spun too quickly, with no audio or digital output. This problem aside – which was not repeated with any other disc, or by other Panasonic-manufactured models in this test – the player behaved faultlessly within its limitations.

One of those limitations

concerns VSS (Virtual Surround Sound), a feature aimed at those who don't (or won't) own a full surround sound system, and which does what it says – as long as you take the cynic's view that 'virtual' is a synonym for 'not'. In no way should this be considered as more than a convenience feature which occasionally sounds interesting, but whose inconsistent performance means that it never really involves.

Playing compact discs isn't the Panasonic's forté. The treble has a very slightly muted quality, but more important than this is that it sounds dull and woolly. There will be those who hear the Panasonic as smooth and integrated, and inviting for this reason, but the loss of clarity and precision often made the DVD-A360 sound uninteresting and curiously predictable – even plodding.

Much the same applies to the integral Dolby and dts converters, both of which were satisfactory but rather congested, although the *Mahler 2* excerpt on the Telarc dts sampler conveyed a certain magic, with real tension and presence. Better results were obtainable

using the outboard processor in a Yamaha DSP-A1, and a Meridian 561 was better still.

Both are out of the Panasonic's price class, although the Yamaha is probably a popular partner for Panasonic class players.

Predictably, the best results from the Panasonic were obtained with 24/96 material using the outboard Chord converter, which overcame the player's sloth, providing a clean, sharp and articulate result, and a hint of what is to come from the new high resolution media – although in stereo only, of course.

CONCLUSION

A promising player on picture quality grounds, where it beat most comers, especially from its RGB output, and also unusually well equipped, the DVD-A360 is currently unique in its ability to process dts on board, and is one of the few models capable of delivering a 24/96 datastream from its digital output.

The performance of the Panasonic's integral Dolby Digital and dts decoders are modest, however, and as a CD player it is simply not in the running. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE **£580.00**

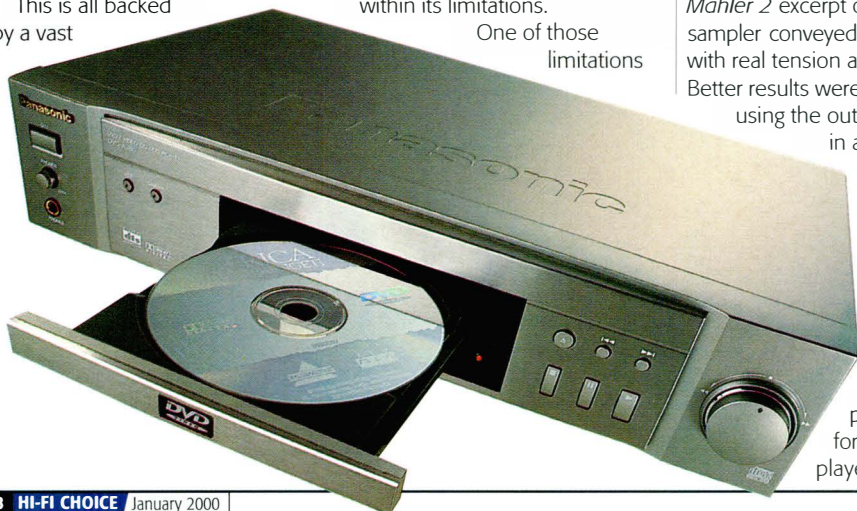
Excellent picture quality, good features and a 24/96 output count in its favour, but CD replay in particular is poor.

■ ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Panasonic UK, Panasonic House, Willoughby Road, Bracknell, Berks RG12 8FP
☎ (0990) 357357

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz Delta Sigma
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/96kHz
- Output sockets: 2 x Scart, 2-channel & 6 channel audio, electrical & optical S/PDIF, 2 x composite video, 1 x Y/C video, headphone socket
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 430x94x268mm
- Weight: 3.3kg





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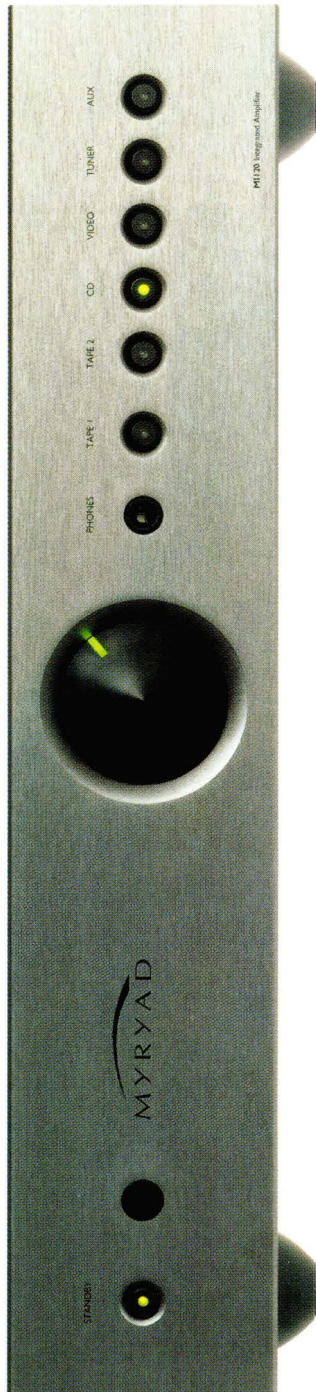
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PHILIPS DVD750



The DVD750 is a 'bread and butter' model with the usual plethora of play and memory facilities, but in other respects it is quite basically equipped. There are just a few surprising additions, such as a second laser, providing replay compatibility with CD-R and CD-RW discs. Many people use such discs for music storage, making this is a very welcome feature.

The player can recognise dts as well as Dolby Digital recordings, and delivers a digital output suitable for the Dolby Digital or dts decoder in your home cinema processor or amplifier. Although the audio D/A is nominally 24-bit/96kHz, the digital outputs are limited to 48kHz, and 96kHz discs are downsampled to suit.

Beyond this, the player has all the usual widgets, such as the ability to generate surround sound of sorts from two speakers (proving that five into two does go, or so the manufacturers would have you believe), parental control (supported by the rather startling ability to recognise and lock out up to 80 discs), slow and fast scan, programming and zoom. The player will also recognise the last five discs and resume play from where it left off. The Philips lacks the rich

"Overall it's a very decent sounding player that settles down well with most material, and was the clear 'beer budget' leader."

support for tweaking picture quality to suit different source material and display devices found elsewhere, although a ten-bit video processor is employed. There are two Scart sockets, composite and S-Video outputs, but the Scarts do not stretch to S-Video or RGB.

The '750 looks – not to put too fine a point on it – cheap. The plasticky overall finish and curved plastic moulding over the too-bright display ensure that, and the lightweight, clunky and flimsy loader add to the impression. But the remote control, the main point of access for the user, is excellent. It's small, and its narrowed waist means it fits the hand, while clever control differentiation by colour and the limited number of control buttons makes it a pleasure to use. The on-screen displays, however, represent a triumph of style over function.

SOUND QUALITY

With unresponsive, or at best slow responding controls, a gruesomely,

grindingly noisy loader, and mechanical noise at other times too, the Philips looks set fair to fall over at the first step, and with its acres of shiny plastic, this is certainly not the DVD player to impress your friends. Which just shows how appearances can deceive. Picture quality is notably stable, with good colour and reasonable definition which will come as a revelation to those who set their standards by VHS.

But it's sound quality we're most interested in at *HFC*, and here the Philips springs a real surprise, not just with a jitter result that's just about state of the art for a single box player (which means better than is currently achievable from two-box players), but with a standard of sound reproduction which, although not up to Sony DVP-S7700 standards, remains as dynamic and responsive to subtle dynamic shadings as a CD player.

The player can sound slightly raucous when extended, and with complex choral material the Philips becomes slightly untidy and lacking in subtlety and cleanliness. But overall it's a very decent sounding player that

settles down well with most material, and the DVD750 was the clear leader at the 'beer budget' end of the price band.

The Classics Records recordings, 24/96 material, fared slightly less satisfactorily through the internal D-to-A converters, which lent a slightly congested, metallic air to the proceedings. However, they scrubbed up nicely through the outboard D/A converter.

CONCLUSION

The Philips DVD750 looks cheap and its disc handling is rather crude, which doesn't inspire confidence, but including CD-R and CD-RW compatibility at this price is a masterstroke.

It performs surprisingly well, with a level of audio resolution and soundstaging from compact disc in particular that makes it a credible crossover hi-fi-home cinema component as well as being an affordable one. Best Buy. **AG**



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £385.00

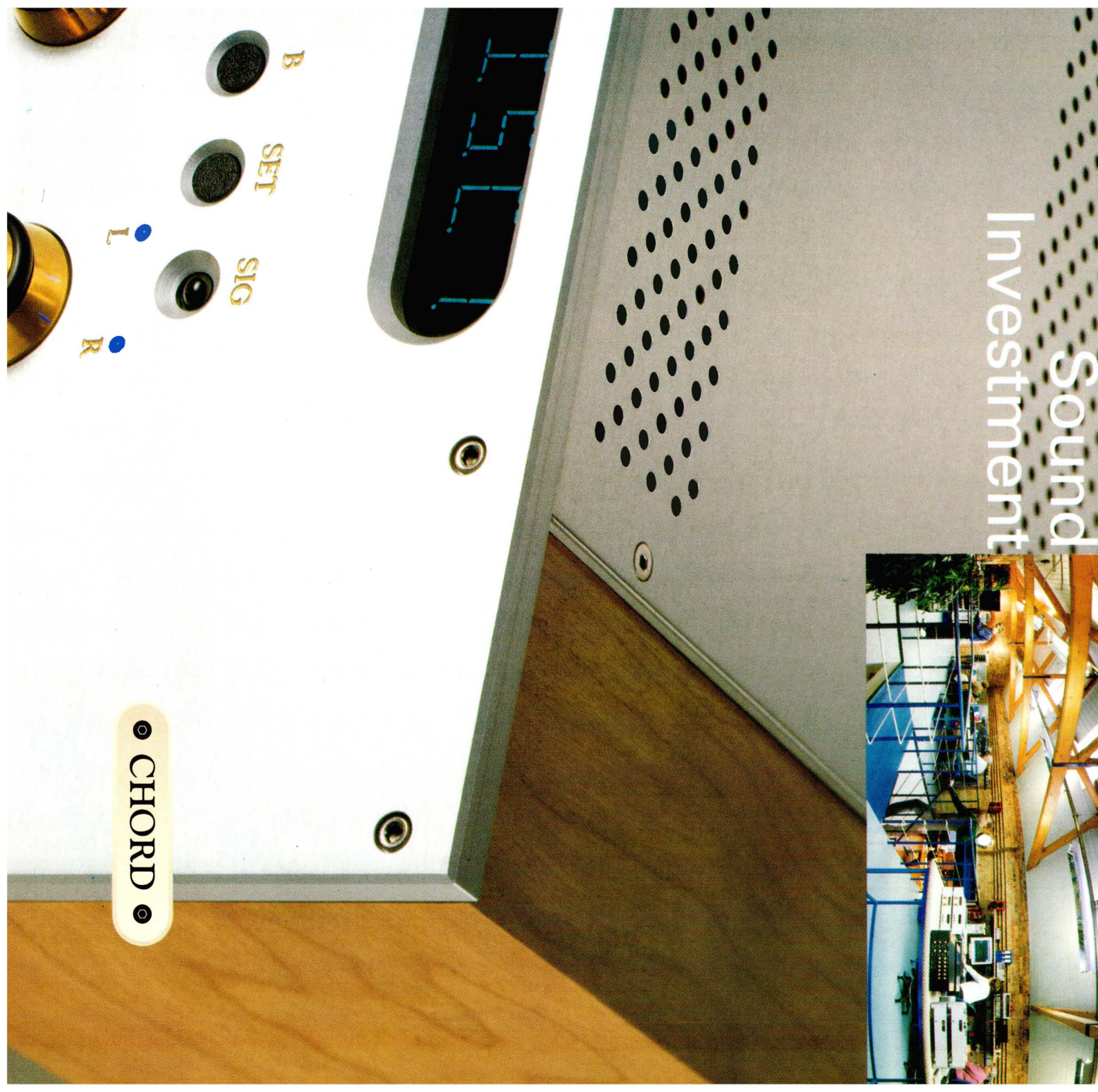
It may not look much, but the DVD750 is endlessly surprising, and one of the surprises is that it sounds much better than it looks.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

Philips Centre, 420-430 London Road, Croydon, Surrey CR9 3QR
(0208) 689 4444

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD, CD-R, CD-RW
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/48kHz
- Output sockets: 2 x Scart, 2-channel audio, electrical & optical S/PDIF, 1 x composite video, 1 x Y/C video, headphone socket
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 435x88x315mm
- Weight: 4kg



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PIONEER DV-626D



Pioneer was quick to realise that optical digital media are the future, and the company is staking its claim to a place in the sun with a high power R&D effort and some very aggressively pitched products, of which the DV-626D is a good example.

This is the first Pioneer DVD to include a surround sound decoder, and it can cope with dts as well as Dolby Digital. The DV-626D also continues the house tradition of enabling its digital outputs to deliver 24-bit/96kHz data without downsampling. Another neat trick up the Pioneer's sleeve is that it has two individually optimised laser diodes to enable it to cope with CD-R and CD-RW discs as well as CDs and DVDs. There are other players with every one of these features, but it is believed that none available in this country has all three. The Panasonic DVD-A360, for example, just pipped Pioneer to the post with its dts decoder and a 96kHz output, but it does not read recordable discs.

Other features include a ten-bit video DAC, a powerful suite of picture adjustment features, and two algorithms which have been designed to create a credible surround sound

"It lacks the raw edge and ill-disciplined bass of some of its closest competitors, and excels in clarity and soundstaging."

from two speakers, one optimised for Dolby Surround and the other for Dolby Digital sources via Virtual Dolby Surround. Although there is only a single Scart output, flexibility is not lacking. There are video outputs in composite, S-Video and RGB flavours, and there are dual two-channel sets of analogue audio outputs in addition to the six channel output from the surround sound processor.

The on-screen menu system uses some gruesomely blocky graphics, but it's all conveniently accessible under a single set-up button which invokes a series of menus, with a simple but effective guided set-up – not a help feature as the literature suggests – for those who don't feel confident about this aspect of DVD players.

SOUND QUALITY

As a CD player, the Pioneer passes muster, partly because it sounds very respectable, but also because it meets

compact disc half-way by being very reasonably priced. In absolute terms, the Pioneer could be criticised for lacking warmth and grace, as well as for its slightly mechanical quality.

It's certainly lacking the free-running, organic music making ability of the test Krell player, although admittedly that's a more costly and specialised CD-spinner than the Pioneer (*and some – Ed*).

Nevertheless, this DVD player lacks the raw edge and ill-disciplined bass of some of its closest competitors, but it excels in the areas of clarity and soundstaging. This is a player that can focus a razor-sharp central image between the stereo speakers, and place the performers between and around them in a coherent and stable way.

The DV-626D was nothing like as effective at generating its own Dolby Digital soundfield. It sounded stable, but slightly undernourished – not 'physical' enough, if you like, when compared with the test Meridian processor. It's only fair to point out, however, that

in the context of more modestly specified home cinema systems the Pioneer's inability to stretch the last 10 per cent or so probably won't matter much, if it is even noticed.

With 24/96 DD material we're back on strong ground, especially (as usual) when reproduced through the Chord player, which thrived on the Pioneer's 96kHz output and low jitter levels.

CONCLUSION

Make no mistake: this is no Pioneer DV-717, a sample of which was available for part of the test period, and which was clearly capable of fuller, better resolved sound from compact disc than this less expensive player.

However, the DV-626D comes closer than it has any right to on cost grounds, and although it is rather plasticky in construction, it lacks for nothing in terms of features. A Best Buy. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £450.00

■ A classic Best Buy, this player crams it all in, keeps the price in check, and doesn't neglect the issues that affect sound quality.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Pioneer, Pioneer House, Hollybush Hill, Stoke Poges, Slough, Berkshire SL2 4QP
☎ (01753) 789789

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD, CD-R, CD-RW
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/96kHz
- Output sockets: 1 x Scart, 2 x composite & 1 x S-Video, 2 prs 2-channel & 6-channel analogue out, electrical and optical digital S/PDIF.
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 420x104x288mm
- Weight: 3kg





Product of the Year
(AV processors/Amps/Receivers)
Receiver STR-DB930



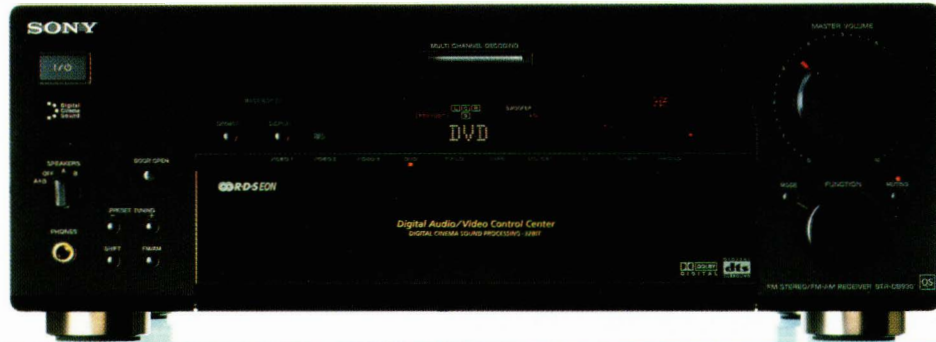
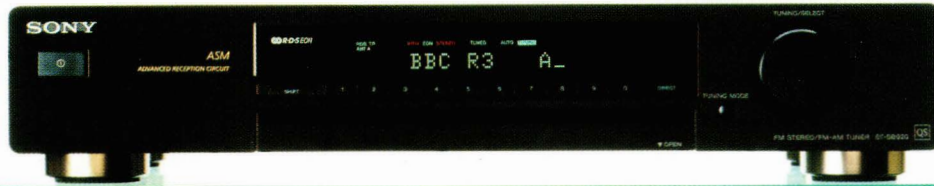
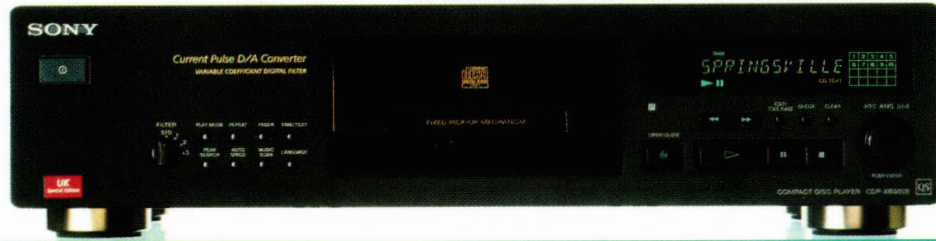
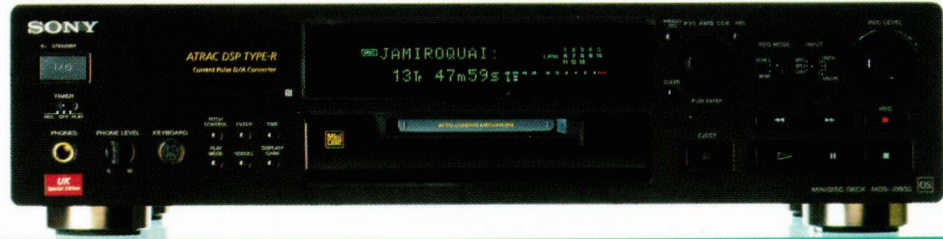
Product of the Year
(Recorder)
MD Player MD-SJB930



Best Buy
(£201-£300)
CD Player CDP-XB930



Best Buy
(£151-£200)
Tuner STS-B920



Tuned specifically for the British ear. (Sounds incredible, doesn't it?)

A hi-fi tuned for British ears? Are you hearing things? Well, only what you're meant to hear. Our sound specialists understand how demanding the British ear can be. And, being the perfectionists that we are, we felt obliged to tune our QS separates to suit that ear. Even going to the extent of tilting the circuit board within each component by 2 degrees. But this attention to detail doesn't only let your ears pick up the finer nuances of sound. It also helped us pick up a raft of awards from What Hi-Fi? magazine. Awards won: Best Buy (£201-£300); CD Player CDP-XB930E. Best Buy (£151-£200); Tuner ST-SB920. Product of the Year (Recorder); MD Player MDS-JB930. Product (AV Processors/Amps/Receivers); Receiver STR-DB930.

SONY

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www.sony.co.uk

SONY DVP-S7700



The DVP-S7700 is a high grade DVD player that understands Dolby Digital, MPEG-2 and dts, all of which are delivered from the electrical or optical digital outputs. One of the two Scart sockets can provide RGB component video, and true component video is available from an array of three phono sockets, along with S-Video and composite video to boot.

The DVP-S7700 is superbly built. The articulated mechanism which covers the loading drawer is a *tour de force*, and must be contributory in reducing acoustic feedback. The case itself is solid and heavy, with a low resonance BMC (Bulk Mounded Compound) base and tray, anti-resonance feet and a copper plated chassis and fixing screws. The loader and transport are tilted (an idea borrowed from the upmarket Pioneer cassette decks of old, although Sony's rationale is subtly different), with a DSP-driven servo that optimises performance for each disc following an assessment which takes less than a second.

The on-screen menus aren't pretty, but they look clean and are efficient enough, with a logical set of controls so that set-up can be accomplished in

"Despite a rather lean, dry overall balance, this was one of the very few DVD players to pass muster as a CD player."

seconds without fumbling or recourse to the book. Day-to-day operation is aided by a well equipped remote control, which includes a jog wheel to control the powerful slow motion and disc search features, and there's an excellent dot matrix display – although as Sony was an early promoter of the idea, I was surprised to note that CD Text has been omitted.

More surprising still, though, was to find that the Sony does not allow its digital outputs to operate at the full 24-bit/96kHz clock rate. Instead it is downsampled to 48kHz, which immediately places the Sony at a competitive disadvantage with the (admittedly small) number of discs that conform to this standard, when using a separate D/A converter.

SOUND QUALITY

By any standards this is an impressive piece of work. Discs are handled smoothly, and everything about the Sony screams quality. As a CD

player, this was one of the very few to pass muster, and despite a rather lean, dry overall balance with the switchable coefficient digital filter set to its 'sharp' position, the Sony could easily be mistaken for a respectable CD player – not an £800 CD player, perhaps, but that would have been unreasonable given the extent of the Sony's talents in other directions.

Compared with the Krell reference, the Sony sounded slightly dulled and lacking in transparency, but it was by no means shamed, and the Sony was also notable for its easy precision and stable, sharply presented, well focused imagery. There was none of the greyness and spread that afflicted some, and the state of the art jitter result is almost certainly a powerful contributory factor.

The alternative setting of the digital filter sounded a little blurred by comparison, and was clearly less satisfactory.

Intriguingly, the Sony was clearly a better source of Dolby Digital and dts sound than usual, with more stable wraparound imagery and better separation of primary sound and acoustic

when using the Meridian processor. The DVP-S7700 also made a strong fist of reproducing 24/96 Classic Records DAD titles using its own internal

DAC, but the external Chord DAC still sounded more powerful and wider ranging, with a much more solidly anchored bass and a richer variety of tonal colours – and this despite being limited to working with a 48kHz input.

CONCLUSION

The DVP-S7700 is a costly player even taking build quality into account, but it really does deliver a standard of picture and sound quality that is out of the ordinary, and only seriously rivalled here – although not beaten – by the Toshiba SD9000. Its easy, confident and highly articulate sound quality is an excellent demonstration that CD and DVD can mix in a single box without sound quality coming off a poor second. Recommended.

AC

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £800.00

The high cost is amply justified by the sharp precision of the sound, not forgetting state of the art video performance, but it's a pity that 24/96 is not available from the digital output.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

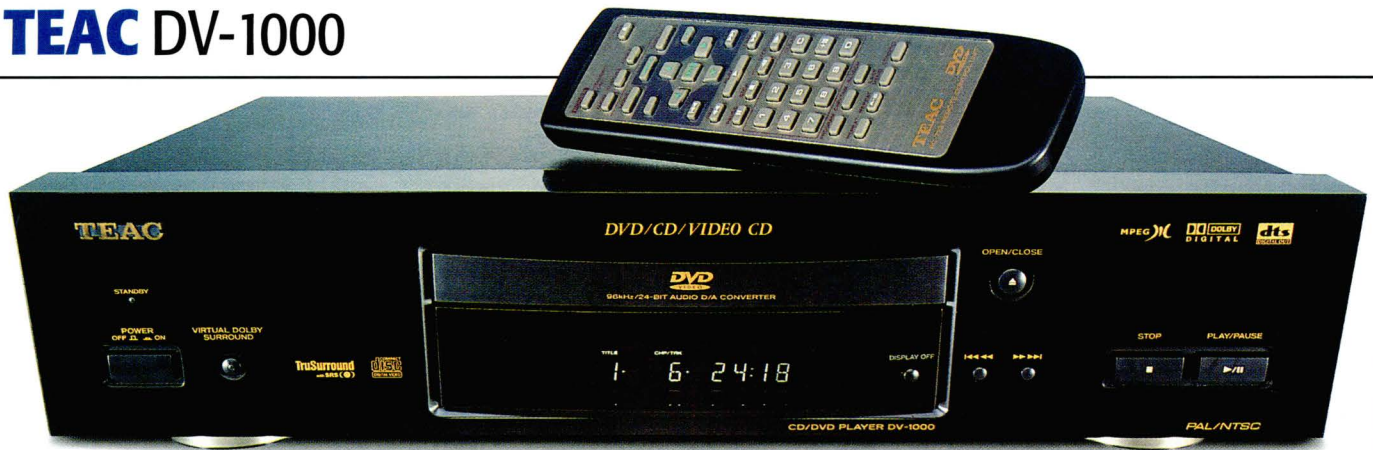
☒ Sony UK, The Heights, Brooklands, Weybridge, Surrey KT13 0XW
☎ (0990) 111999

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD, CD-R
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/48kHz
- Output sockets: 2 Scart, component video sockets (phonos), S-Video & composite video, digital optical and electrical S/PDIF, 2-channel analogue audio, headphones
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 430x111x335mm
- Weight: 7kg



TEAC DV-1000



TEAC DV-1000

Visit Our Website: www.hifichoice.co.uk

The Teac does not have its own surround sound processor, but it does recognise dts and (for what it's worth) MPEG audio discs in addition to Dolby Digital ones. It has a rather plasticky feel, and the low 3kg weight shows that the power supplies and casework aren't exactly heroically endowed; nonetheless, it comes with a smart, well designed remote control.

The Teac is no 'bare-bones' product, though. The audio stage, for example, is driven by a 24-bit/96kHz D/A converter, and the digital outputs can be run at the full 96kHz clock rate, which means a 44kHz audio bandwidth using either the internal or an appropriate external D/A converter from 24/96 music DVDs.

All the usual DVD software is included, ranging from parental control, subtitles and language choice and picture aspect ratio (such as wide, wide squeezed anamorphically into a 4:3 display, letterbox and pan-and-scan). In addition, the Teac has a picture mode control, with cinema and animation settings in addition to the standard setting.

On the audio side, Audio DRC (Dynamic Range Control) offers adjustable compression

"Sonically, the Teac is something of a curate's egg, although at no time in the tests did it sound unpleasant."

for late night and low volume DVD replay, while Virtual Dolby Surround is available for those who can't or won't accommodate more than two loudspeakers. There are also features designed to support , karaoke discs; but you'll be relieved to know we won't be going into those here.

Finally, the DV-1000 includes a condition memory that recognises individual discs, and stores a number of settings (including language and angle set-up and parental permission level) and applies them until the settings are 'unlearned'.

The various set-up screens – main (initial) set-up, output set-up, the title menu screen and the running disc menus – are called up in a consistent manner, and are readily navigated using the main control cluster on the infra-red remote control. Plenty of information concerning the current disc is available, including the one that everybody seems to find endlessly intriguing for some reason: the instantaneous data rate readout.

SOUND QUALITY

Sonically, the Teac is something of a curate's egg, although at no time in the tests did it sound unpleasant or uncomfortable. What did come across when playing CDs was its lean, sharp mid and treble, and a rather blowsy, ill defined bass and lower mid. This led to some inconsistencies, such as a very clean performance with some chamber recordings but a mushy presentation when faced with complex choral material.

Most of the rest of the story flows from this. The 24-bit/96kHz recordings used for this test are not, frankly, among the finest sounding discs in my collection, despite their ostensibly high resolution (roll on DVD-A/SACD!) but they can be made to sound surprisingly realistic given half a chance. In this case the chance came thanks to the outboard Chord D/A converter which cooked up an almost flinchingly real Muddy Waters (Classic Records DAD 1020). Sadly the Teac couldn't reproduce the same sense of occasion under its own steam, and playback was in

more closely in keeping with 'Red Book' performance.

In every other respect, the Teac is a very serviceable player. Picture quality is not quite in Sony or Toshiba territory, but it can still eat S-VHS for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and compares well with other comparably priced players, give or take a little very fine detail resolution. Similarly, the Teac worked perfectly well as a source of Dolby Digital and dts using the outboard Meridian AV processor.

CONCLUSION

Here is the DVD player for those who want just a DVD player, without the plethora of gadgets that are used to dress up the medium.

It clearly has mainstream appeal, but it was outgunned by the comparably priced players (in particular the Philips DVD750) in the listening tests, although the Teac scores with its better equipped digital output. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£399.95

■ The best feature of the DV-1000 is the price; the worst is that it lacks star quality where the competition decrees that star quality is precisely what is required.

■ **ONE YEAR GUARANTEE**
✉ Teac, 5 Marlin House, The Croxley Centre, Watford, Herts WD1 8YA
☎ (01923) 819630

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/96kHz
- Output sockets: 1 x Scart, 1 x S-Video, 1 x composite, 1 x electrical & 1 x optical digital S/PDIF, 2 pairs 2-channel audio analogue out
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (WxHxD): 435x104x287mm
- Weight: 3kg



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TOSHIBA SD9000

TOSHIBA SD9000

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The solid build and high weight of the range-topping SD9000 (at 7kg, it weighs twice as much as many), and the lack of a Scart socket combine to suggest that this model was originally intended for sale in the Far East, or possibly the USA, rather than Europe. But it's our gain.

The casework is of thick section dual-layer steel with an alloy extruded front panel, a solid and well damped resin-impregnated, metal plate-reinforced, low-resonance base, and the unit is dressed in what is usually described as a champagne finish. We'll drink to that.

The one real curiosity in a player clearly aimed at the videophile is that it has an onboard Dolby Digital/MPEG-2 audio processor. The loss of Scart socketry is a minor inconvenience, but the assortment of sockets available should give slightly better performance than its Scart-based counterparts, and the list does include true component video (R, R-Y, B-Y) for NTSC output (although only those with high-end video projectors are likely to be able to make use of this facility).

The player looks clean and open, but the display is

“Used as a CD player, the Toshiba sounded smooth and accomplished, with a subjectively wide dynamic range.”

small and rather mean looking, and some of the on-screen displays lack the sexiness of some of their counterparts in other players, despite being unusually informative. The huge grey remote control hides secondary features behind a sliding cover, but the main navigation matrix and a separate jog wheel are always on show, and very efficiently backlit. The on-screen set-up routine, however, works counter-intuitively.

Most of the stops have been pulled out in the cause of best possible picture and sound quality, including a new video anti-aliasing filter said to be capable of 540 lines horizontal resolution (DVD is normally limited to about 500 lines), a ten-bit video A/D and sophisticated proprietary video noise reduction; even a 'smart' pause mode which selects field or frame pause to hide movement.

The Toshiba is equipped with an Analogue Devices 24-bit/96kHz Delta Sigma DAC but, surprisingly, the unit will not output a

96kHz datastream, which limits its performance with 24-bit/96kHz source material.

SOUND QUALITY

The SD9000 lives up to its billing with superb picture quality which is easily good enough to show the crudeness of some special effects, much as a magnifying glass shows up fine detail that would otherwise pass unnoticed. Colour is rich and vibrant, registration perfect and most will need a telly transplant to even begin to approach the SD9000's limits.

Happily, sound quality is also very strong, if not quite in the same league. Used as a CD player, the Toshiba sounded smooth and accomplished, with a subjectively wide dynamic range. The overall balance was a little bright (despite a frequency response measurably on a downwards trajectory at 20kHz), and presentation was slightly lacking in weight and depth, although central image focus was excellent, and sound-staging coherent and solidly presented. The whole effect was comparable to respectable CD

player – a considerable advance on any early generation player, and most of the opposition even now.

As a multi-channel engine, the Toshiba was also impressive, acting as an excellent, stable and refined source for the Meridian outboard processor, and

a surprisingly good one using its own processor, which was not in Meridian territory, but was clearly superior to the other players with on-board decoders. It was scarcely less impressive when coupled to the Chord D/A converter to play both CD and 24/96 DVD, but the Toshiba's internal A/D was not in the same league, and there was a substantial gap between the two, the Toshiba sounding thinner and slightly bleached of tonal colour.

CONCLUSION

The problem with this player is that it's in stiff competition with an equally remarkable design from Sony, the DVP-S7700, which is more or less its equal on picture quality grounds (the Toshiba is probably technically the more proficient of the two, but arguably less watchable at times), but it's sound quality is just short of being truly special.

AG



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £800.00

■ A state of the art DVD player from the video point of view that sounds almost, but not quite as good as it looks.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Toshiba UK, Toshiba House, Frimley Road, Camberley, Surrey GU16 5JJ
☎ (01276) 62222

SPECIFICATIONS

- Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD
- D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz
- Digital output: up to 24-bit/48kHz
- Output sockets: Composite, S-Video & NTSC component video, Electrical & optical S/PDIF, 2-channel audio, 6-channel audio from Dolby
- Digital decoder
- Includes: remote control
- Dimensions (HxWxD): 430x98x300mm
- Weight: 7kg

YAMAHA DVD-S795



The DVD-S795 is Yamaha's first player with an integral surround sound processor capable of decoding Dolby Digital and MPEG audio, but although dts recordings on compact disc and DVD are recognised, the on-board decoder doesn't decode dts, simply routing the digital data through the digital outputs for external processing (in common with most of the other players in this group).

The player is based on the same mechanism and electronics as the Panasonic DVD-A360, but there are significant differences, dts handling being one of them. Note that CD-R discs can't be used and, according to Yamaha, may even be damaged, although CD-RW discs are supported.

Socketry includes two Scarts, one of which has S-Video and RGB options that can be selected through the on-screen menu system, along with two composite and one S-Video connector. Audio is available from a pair of phono sockets for two-channel replay and a set of six, fed by the internal decoder, to feed an external AV amplifier six-channel input, plus digital S/PDIF outputs in the usual electrical and optical flavours.

A headphone socket and volume control are fitted. The two digital outputs are capable of streaming 24-bit/

"Leaving other cases to one side, the Yamaha sounded a little better focused and sharper, if lightweight in balance perhaps."

96kHz data from appropriate recordings, which an outboard Chord DAC was happy to deal with using some of the handful of 24/96 Classics Recordings discs that were available.

The remote control lacks the thumb operated joystick feature of the equivalent Panasonic, but its quartet of direction keys surrounding a central selector makes light work of ploughing through the menu structure, which is clear and understandable.

The Yamaha also includes most of the picture enhancing features offered by the Panasonic DVD-A360, such as the ability to select widescreen 16:9 and 4:3 pan-and-scan display modes, settings appropriate for different types of display (direct view and various types of projector), and overall picture settings such as contrast, colour and brightness. Video processing is ten bit.

SOUND QUALITY

One key difference between the Yamaha and the Panasonic referred to above becomes obvious when performing

what should have been the prosaic task of playing compact discs, at which the Yamaha is by no means one of the better models in the group. Even some of the least expensive players in the group are capable of showing the Yamaha a clean set of heels.

However, this model is a significant improvement on the Panasonic, perhaps reflecting its somewhat lower jitter – although linking cause to effect in this way is unsafe when there are so many other variables, especially since in absolute terms the Yamaha's jitter remains extremely high.

Leaving other cases to one side, the Yamaha sounded a little better focused and sharper, if lightweight in balance perhaps, and a touch more lively and transparent too. However, the weasel words 'touch' and 'perhaps' reflect a relatively subtle level of difference that when examined closely often seemed to melt away.

The Yamaha was on firmer ground with the handful of 24/96 recordings using an external processor. The theoretical bandwidth extends out to 44kHz, with musical results that were significantly more open and transparent than from players whose digital output was limited to 48kHz, corresponding to a 22kHz audio bandwidth.

How much of the difference is due to the high resolution of the source material is not knowable, but the superior quality of the

outboard processor is clearly an important part of the answer.

The Dolby Digital engine, however, seems effectively identical to the Panasonic version within observable limits, and this still means it is below the standard achieved by a good external converter. But as usual, the differences meant less with the intrinsically synthetic quality of many film soundtracks than with Dolby Digital music recordings.

CONCLUSION

Although assessing picture quality lies outside the remit of this test, the Yamaha was noticeably superior to some of the others, being crisp, and with vibrant colour, and with enough adjustment on tap to make the most of whatever TV or projector is being used.

Musically it's a lightweight, but it sounds sharpish and essentially clear with compact disc, and better still with 24/96 material. **AG**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £529.00

Medium-ranking player is stronger on picture quality than sound quality, though it shines with 234/96 material when using an outboard processor.

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

Yamaha, 200 Rickmansworth Rd, Watford, Herts WD1 7JS

(01923) 233166

SPECIFICATIONS

■ Compatible with: DVD-Video, CD, Video CD, CD-RW

■ D/A processor: 24-bit/96kHz

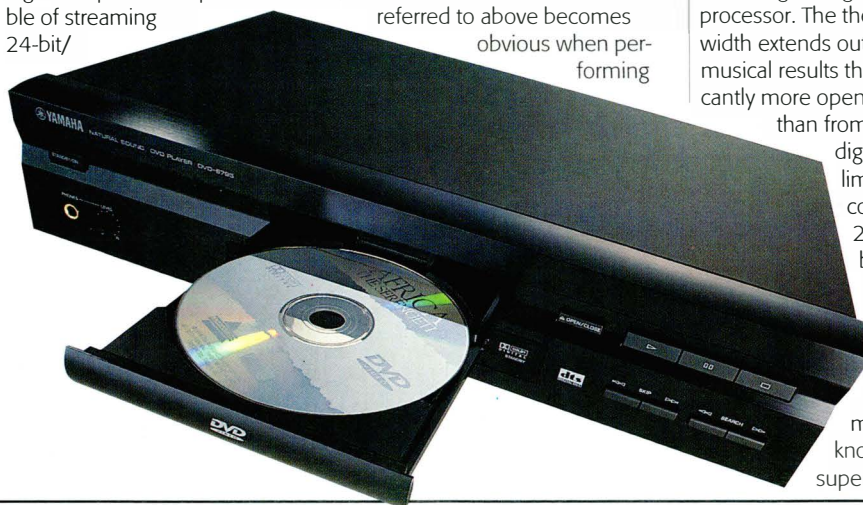
■ Digital output: up to 24-bit/96kHz

■ Output sockets: 2 x Scart, 2-channel & 6 channel audio, electrical & optical S/PDIF, 2 x composite video, 1 x Y/C video, headphone socket.

■ Includes: remote control

■ Dimensions (WxHxD): 435x100x26mm

■ Weight: 3.6kg





CONCLUSIONS

DVD PLAYERS

With the players in our test costing between £400 and £800, the obvious question is: what does the extra money buy? In particular, does the extra expenditure required for, say, the Toshiba or the Sony invoke the law of diminishing returns?

Related to this, how good are these players – do they make sense as replacements for CD players? And what benefits are there to be derived from the ability to play stereo 24-bit/96kHz recordings, or multi-channel recordings encoded with Dolby Digital or dts? Remember, we're talking primarily about audio benefits here, since this is *Hi-Fi Choice's* particular perspective.

Despite the excitement when the first 24/96 recordings appeared, the number of titles available in the UK has remained tiny and of mixed merit. Unless DVD-A and SACD fail, the expectation is high resolution will be the province of these new media, which will quickly become absorbed into a new, wider DVD arena that combines DVD-A and DVD-V technologies – maybe with SACD-compatibility built in.

At best, DVD-Video players (the breed this group test is concerned with) provide broad hints of what is to come. There is something truly exciting about multi-channel audio when done well, but there's no denying the qualitative losses, the granularity and the lack of real resolution that are imposed by data reduced codecs like Dolby Digital and dts.

What is encouraging is to find real signs of progress from the

best of the group when pressed into service as compact disc players. The spread of performance standards has widened a lot, but the best stand competition with good budget CD players at worst, and this combined with the ability to play video discs with close to broadcast-standard picture quality makes a powerful case for the better models in the group.

The conclusion must be that DVD makes a lot of sense when viewed primarily as a video standard, but that despite evolving performance standards, as a quality source of pre-recorded music the writing for present-day DVD is on the wall.

“There is something truly exciting about multi-channel audio when done well, but there’s no denying the qualitative losses.”

BEST BUYS & RECOMMENDED



BEST BUY: PIONEER DV-626D

Although not the best sounding model tested, the Pioneer is more than routinely musical, and it is also superbly equipped and priced to kill the competition.



BEST BUY: PHILIPS DVD750

CD-R/RW compatibility adds interest to an unimpressively turned-out player that sounds crisp and lively, if a little raucous when stretched.



RECOMMENDED: SONY DVP-S7700

This player loses out on Best Buy status because its digital output is restricted to 48kHz, but it remains a superb machine from almost every other viewpoint.

DVD PLAYER COMPARISON TABLE

MAKE	DENON	JVC	NAKAMICHI	PANASONIC	PHILIPS
MODEL	DVD-2500	XV-D701	DVD-10	DVD-A360	DVD-750 <small>HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY</small>
PRICE	£500.00	£500.00	£799.99	£580.00	£385.00
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
GUARANTEE	2 yrs	1 yr	2 yrs	1 yr	1 yr
BUILT-IN DOLBY DIGITAL DECODER?	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
A-WTD S/N RATIO	103.5dB	102.0dB	102.8dB	104.5dB	101.7dB
RESPONSE (20HZ-20KHZ)	+0.0/-0.25dB	+0.05/-0.11dB	+0.08/-0.35dB	+0.0/-0.42dB	+0.0/-0.51dB
DISTORTION (20HZ-20KHZ)	0.0013-0.01%	0.0004-0.0009%	0.0013-0.0055%	0.0007-0.015%	0.001-0.02%
DIGITAL JITTER	2475psec	410psec	170psec	6525psec	220psec

DVD PLAYER COMPARISON TABLE

MAKE	PIONEER	SONY	TEAC	TOSHIBA	YAMAHA
MODEL	DV-626D <small>HI-FI CHOICE BEST BUY</small>	DVP-S7700 <small>HI-FI CHOICE RECOMMENDED</small>	DV-1000	SD-9000	DVD-S795
PRICE	£450.00	£800.00	£399.95	£800.00	£529.00
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
GUARANTEE	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr	1 yr	2 yrs
BUILT-IN DOLBY DIGITAL DECODER?	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
A-WTD S/N RATIO	101.9dB	100.5dB	99.5dB	104.2dB	102.9dB
RESPONSE (20HZ-20KHZ)	+0.0/-0.18dB	+0.0/-0.12dB	+0.0/-3.80dB	+0.05/-0.35dB	+0.0/-0.20dB
DISTORTION (20HZ-20KHZ)	0.0015-0.013%	0.001-0.01%	0.0015-0.01%	0.001-0.01%	0.001-0.012%
DIGITAL JITTER	150psec	160psec	825psec	180psec	1600psec

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lose control
make sense
shock
shell
confusion

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HELP!

It's a new millennium and a new *Help!* regime. All hail, Peter Guthrie, hi-fi guru...

HEAD MUSIC

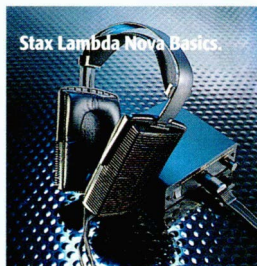


I have a Meridian 506 CD player and my amp has a headphone output. I'd like to buy a pair of open back headphones for about £200-£300. I listen to all sorts of music and would like the headphones to have good bass performance. I've been looking at Sennheiser, Sony and Grado, but I think I would prefer Sennheiser. I also wondered whether cordless headphones were improving in quality to the point where they are anything like as good as wired headphones at a similar price.

Karim, via e-mail

Have a listen to a few pairs and look for comfort as much as sound quality, remember you'll be wearing them for a while, so they have to be comfortable for listening to be a pleasure. The manufacturers you've suggested all make good headphones, Sennheiser's HD-600 (£250) is an excellent open-backed headphone and Sony's MDR-CD1700 (£200) are super closed-back 'phones. If you can afford it, though, Stax Lambda Nova Basics (£449) would suit the 506 wonderfully and give a supremely refined, articulate and lucid sound.

Regarding wireless headphones, the sound is unfortunately not close to their wired equivalents, particularly when you start going up the range as you are. Wireless connections either lack reliability (infra red) or interfere with other equipment or suffer interference from other sources (radio). You never know, one day we might have a good sounding wireless headphone - it would certainly make headphone listening more comfortable!



Stax Lambda Nova Basics



KEEP IT GREEN WITH HI-FI CHOICE!

The reader whose letter is our Query of the Month will receive one of these stylish, lovingly crafted and, dare we say it, groovy green clothing items courtesy of - well, us.

SYSTEM ENVY



I live on the Baltic island of Gotland, where there are no serious hi-fi dealers. I recently listened to a friend's Rega CD, Naim Nait and AE109 system and was struck by the vibrant, dynamic, spacious sound.

My current system is a Linn LP12 with Ekos tonearm and K9 cartridge, Naim CD3 (one of the first built), NAC72 preamp, NAP140 power amp and Hi-Cap, with Linn Keilidh speakers on the special plinths (again, among the first made). All my equipment is connected by Naim cables. The system sits in a Grange cabinet, with the LP12 on a fixed shelf and the CD3 on an isolation platform. My system sounds almost as if the music is trapped within the speakers, although, to be fair, most of the problems are when playing CDs rather than vinyl.

I can't help wondering where I went wrong and, importantly, what I need to do to get the same pleasure from my listening as my friend does. The problem is, there's no chance of home demos and it's unlikely I'll find a dealer with a system similar to my own (unless I take it with me). What would you suggest?

John Bridger, Sweden

Your system isn't that much different from your friend's in terms of sonic characteristics. The Naim combination is one of the most dynamic available and works very well with Keilidhs. You may find upgrading speaker cables will provide some dynamics, but your problem most likely lies elsewhere. Make sure the speakers are 25cm or so from the wall. It would be worth upgrading the tweeters on the Keilidhs (they have been improved significantly by Linn in recent years), ensuring the speakers are on spikes, and upgrading to a new equipment support such as a Mana 5-tier (£600).

More dramatically, you could try a change of CD player as it sounds as if that is the source of many of the problems (or the LP12 would sound equally as bad). It may be the player needs servicing or repairing, so take it into a Naim dealer (who should stock the 72/140 Hi-Cap combination) and see if they can find a fault. The system should produce a sound almost as dynamic as they come. You should also consider upgrading the cartridge on the LP12 as the K9 isn't doing justice to the deck and arm. You may also want to consider the Lingo power supply for the LP12 as it adds a great deal of space and depth to the LP12 sound.

CAN'T GET NO...



I am from Malaysia and subscribed to your wonderful magazine when I was a student in the UK. I have some queries regarding my hi-fi system: the sound is not right - or, more accurately, we humans are never satisfied with what we have and want better - I am a prime example.

I have an Arcam Alpha 10 amplifier, Arcam Alpha 8 CD player, B&W CDM1SE speakers, Nordost The Wind interconnects, Nordost Super Flatline cable and Apollo AZ60 stands. Overall the sound is all right, though there is no 'oomph' in the bass. Detail and clarity are excellent, but the system simply doesn't excite with some fast, punchy tracks. The bass seems to lack real depth and drive. I suspect that the culprit is the Arcam amplifier

with regard to the lack of excitement and Nordost speaker cables for the lack of bass.

Do you have any recommendations? I am currently thinking of changing speaker cable to Audioquest Indigo and the stands to Partington A4 or Kudos S50 - will this help restore excitement and strong bass to the system? I am also thinking of buying a good equipment support, such as a Mana Acoustics 5-tier rack.

Michael Teh, Singapore

You have a combination that isn't generally geared towards excitement

or strong bass. The Alpha 10 amplifier is certainly not the problem and nor are the Nordost cables, but the Alpha 8 and CDM1SEs are relaxed and warm sounding and won't be generating the level of excitement you desire.

I don't want to suggest that you purchase a CD player at a similar price point. The best solution is usually to upgrade if you're unhappy (after all, we tweakers are rarely satisfied), with Naim's CD3.5 (£1,050) sounding ideal for your requirements. The pace, rhythm and dynamics of the player should really transform your system.

The other weak link in your system is the loudspeakers. CDM1SEs are excellent speakers, but better suited to vocals or classical music than fast dance or rock music.

A much better choice would be either Dynaudio Audience 50s (£577) or, biting the bullet again, upgrading to something like Linn Keilidhs (£750) - the Alpha 10, Naim CD3.5 and Keilidh combination work fantastically well together - or even a Dynaudio Contour 1.3 (£1,198) if you want to keep to the standmounters.

Any of the above speakers will give you a far more dynamic sound and provide that deep bass you long for.



CARTRIDGE CHOICE

HELP Back in 1995, after five years of reliable use, my Dual Golden One turntable with an Ortofon X3-MC cartridge started having strange problems with speed, which were unresolvable by the local Dual repair shop.

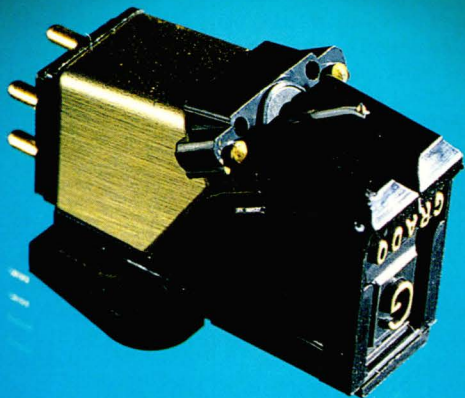
I bought a Technics SL1210 Mk2 at the time, but that proved to be physically incompatible with the Ortofon cartridge. I took it to a Technics service centre, where they fitted a cartridge of their choice (a cheap Audio Technica), but unfortunately it sounds cheap will dulled highs and smeared sound on percussion, not to mention crushingly heavy tracking at 3g.

Phil Cohen, USA

It is basically a case of choosing a cartridge to fit your tastes and as comparing cartridges in shops isn't exactly encouraged, you'll have to do a bit of research. Look in the *HFC Directory* and make a shortlist, then get hold of reviews from either our Website, Factsback service or back issue people (see the details on p145) to narrow the choice still further.

It has to be said that none of them will have been tested on a deck like yours, but the overall picture should be the same. If you want a lively sound try a Goldring 1022GX (£99) or a Linn K9 (£125), but if you are after a more relaxed groove check out the Grado Prestige Gold (£149) or any of the Denons.

Grado Prestige Gold.



REWRITING THE RULES

HELP I have a NAD C320 amp and Denon DCD-735 CD player and a computer with a CD-RW drive. I know that I can make audio CD-R discs with the drive and play them, but would a CD-RW disc damage the CD player? It would be good for me if I could use the CD-RW to test different mixes and effects without destroying a CD-R.

Edmond Zeisel, Israel

While the CD player won't actually incur any damage by playing a CD-RW, there is no guarantee that it will work. CD-R and CD-RW are physically different and, as a result,

not all hi-fi CD players are able to play CD-RW discs. There's no harm trying it out and you should be able to test mixes on your PC if it doesn't work. Most reasonable sound cards nowadays have line outputs, so if your hi-fi is anywhere near your computer, you can connect the two – just run a cable from the line out on your sound card to an unused line input on your amp.

If you have no way of playing the sounds, sample them with Sound Recorder and you can then play them back. Another great way of playing them back is to download the Shockwave remote from

www.shockwave.com.

Philips CDR-880.



STARTING POINT

HELP I am looking to purchase a new turntable with a total budget of around £1,500. There are so many turntable, tonearm and cartridge combinations that I'm not sure where to start. I've read favourable comments about the Michell Gyro SE, any other suggestions?

Edwin Elder, Essex

Firstly, make sure you listen to a number of combinations with a reputable dealer – and don't worry about asking them to fit different cartridges either, that's what they're there for.

Michell's Gyro SE is a superb deck with a very balanced sound that will let you pick a tonearm and cartridge that suit your budget. If you're going for a Gyro SE, make sure that you buy the QC power

supply (£399). With this, a Rega RB300 (£174) and an Ortofon MC-10 Supreme (£300) the whole package works out at £1,648. Other packages to consider would be the Wilson benesch Circle (£795) with the Full Circle package coming in at £1,995 it is somewhat



over budget, but by picking slightly cheaper components to begin with, you can always build up to it and Rega RB300 and Sumiko Blue Point Special (£250) or Ortofon MC-10 Supreme (£300) would make a great sounding starting point. Have fun!

ABOUT TURNS

HELP I've read your reviews on turntables, but I can't decide which to buy. I'm interested in the Michell Gyro 'SE', Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck or Wilson benesch Circle. Which do you suggest? I currently use a Roksan Radius with a Rega RB300 arm and Denon DL-160 cartridge.

Roger Andersson, Sweden

As you've obviously read, all three turntables you mention are top-notch models. You really should try to audition them all, as there really isn't one that's head and shoulders above the others. More than anything, it's a matter of taste.

Certainly, the Michell (£775) woos many with its stunning appearance and highly accomplished sound, and we're sure you wouldn't regret buying one – but do try to get hold of a QC power supply to go with it. The Spacedeck (£750) is perhaps a little less clinical in its delivery and demands to be heard, while the Circle (£750) is as precise as they come for the money. The latter might just edge it, particularly if you listen to a lot of jazz or classical music, and you can afford a matching Wilson benesch arm and cartridge (the Full Circle combo costs £1,995). If you're more into rock we'd go for the Spacedeck, while the Gyro 'SE' is a good all-rounder.



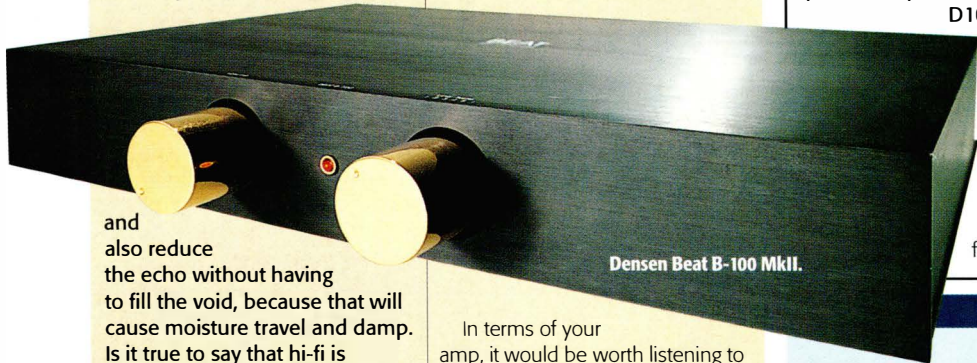
ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT



I have recently sold an Audiolab 8000A amp, which I think was the weak link in my Marantz CD-17 KI Signature and Mission 752F system. I also have QED 4X4 bi-wiring the Missions, but I think that that is not the problem.

I want to listen to music at higher volumes, but don't want the clinical sound I got from the Audiolab. My room is 4x5m with very minimalist decoration and there's an 18-inch void under the floor, which is creating a large bass reservoir. I want something that will deaden the resulting boom

worse still, a bright and boomy sound. You have two options to try to get rid of the boominess, but going for both would be advisable sonically. The first option is cheap and painless and involves simply placing your speakers on concrete plinths (paving slabs work perfectly well). This will greatly reduce bass travel into the floor and should cure the boominess to a degree. The better solution would be fill the void with rock wool attic insulation, but you will need a lot of it. As long as you have a damp proof course, you won't have problems with moisture travel or damp as rock wool is breathable.



Densen Beat B-100 MkII.

and also reduce the echo without having to fill the void, because that will cause moisture travel and damp. Is it true to say that hi-fi is designed with a carpeted, wall-papered, soft sofa type of environment in mind? Please suggest something that will help. *Phil Morgan, Huddersfield*

You have a real problem room! Yes, hi-fi is designed, or at least works best, in carpeted rooms with soft furnishings (wallpaper makes little difference) and without them you tend to get reflections and,

In terms of your amp, it would be worth listening to several combinations, but try to get home demos so that you can find out what suits your room best. A Densen Beat B-100 MkII (£650) would solve your problems with clinical sound, although you should also try having a listen to a Roksan Caspian (£695); both are very lively and musical amps, are capable of driving the 752Fs and will give you very tight, controlled bass (as long as the floor is sorted).

SUITABLE POWER



I currently have a Marantz CD-63 MkII KI Signature, Rega Planar 2 turntable with an Ortofon MC20 MkII cartridge, Avance Labs speakers and Cable Talk cables.

I need an amp for the system, but I don't really have the chance to audition before purchase. I am tempted by the Arcam Alpha 7 and Marantz PM66 KI Signature; which one do you think will suit my system best? *Zoltan Kovacs, Hungary*

The quick and easy answer for you is that neither actually have a moving coil phono stage. If you like the sound of either of those amps in particular – and if you can afford the Marantz, then a better alternative will be the Alpha 8R – then try adding a phono stage to the equation. This is an external box that plugs into your amplifier, giving you a moving coil input.

Why not try out Musical Fidelity's X-LP (£130) or Creek's OBH-9 (£160)? Both are excellent phono stages that will add a whole new dimension to your vinyl's sound.



Marantz PM66 KI Sig.

TWO FOR ONE



I have Mission 751 loudspeakers and a Marantz CD-48 CD Player and I want to buy a new amplifier to go with them. My budget is limited to about 800 DEM (£300). Also, my friend has the same problem, but with 1800 DEM to spend on a partner for Tannoy D100's and a Marantz CD-63 KI Signature. *Vladimir, Macedonia*

Let's tackle your problem first: £300 is a

good amount to spend for a partner to your Marantz CD player, but the Mission 751s can prove difficult to drive for small amplifiers, so something like the NAD C340 would be a sensible option.

Your friend, meanwhile, has an excellent pairing and could do a lot worse than auditioning a Talk Electronics Storm 2 (£650) as a starting point. From the sound of the rest of the system, we would also suggest having a good listen to a Musical Fidelity XA-1 (£479). The Talk Electronics will add an element of smoothness to the lively Marantz and Tannoy combination, but the Musical Fidelity will really give the system the power to deliver.

NOT INVOLVED



I recently bought a Marantz PM-66SE KI Signature amp to go with my Acoustic Energy AE109 speakers, Marantz CD-63 MkII and old Thorens TD160 MkI turntable (customised with Linn springs, glass mat, felt mat and quality cables/plugs) with a Goldring 1022 cartridge.

I bought the amp because I thought it would work well with the CD player and it reputedly has a good phono stage, but I soon found that my CD player was way below vinyl quality and left me wanting to improve it. While initially the sound improved significantly with firmer bass, a more airy sound and better sound staging, it wasn't long before I realised that it really wasn't involving any more. I then reverted to my old Cambridge P25, which brought the music back to life, particularly on vinyl, if losing some detail.

Was the Marantz a bad choice for my speakers? Could you recommend another amplifier at around £500? My musical tastes are mainly classical (opera, orchestral, and chamber), with some jazz and rock, and I have as many records as CDs. *Chris O'Hagan, Derby*

The lack of involvement is most likely coming from the amp, as it does improve significantly when you revert to your old Cambridge, although you might also benefit from a CD player upgrade. If you're after an amp that's as good for phono as it is for CD, try listening to a Linn Majik (£800 with phono stage), as it has a very open and airy sound that works very well with classical and jazz, and has a superb phono stage. It's well above your budget, but has a sound that will



Linn Majik.

really grow on you long-term, rather than the instant thrills that the Marantz offers, the Linn will carry on giving you enjoyment even after you get used to it. If you find the Linn to lack the dynamics you seek, try listening to a Roksan Caspian (£695) or a Naim Nait 3 (£575, again available with a superb phono stage). You should also think about upgrading your cartridge to something like an Ortofon MC-15 Super II (£130) or Grado Prestige Gold (£149).

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A PRECISE MATCH

 I've just combed through your latest issue with much interest and noticed your 'query of the month' from JP McLoone about his recent purchase of the Pioneer PDS-505 Precision CD player and A-300R Precision amplifier combination. I also managed to purchase the kit for the same dramatic price of £400, but now need some speakers to go with the pair. I'd like to keep the budget down to £200-300, but may be tempted to go up to £400. Keep up the good work.

Mark van Koevering, Wales

The Pioneer Precision combination is fantastic value for money at the



price you've paid. The neutrality of both components means you can choose a pair of speakers to complement your tastes. Your chosen speakers will be the real source of colour for the system, so think carefully about your musical and hi-fi tastes before buying.

Try to visit a reputable dealer to audition the combinations before buying. At the lower end of your scale, try and listen to Heybrook Heylettes (£200), Castle Isis (£250) and JBL LX2 (£250), each will give you a very different sound, but all are excellent speakers. Going slightly higher up, you could try Rega Jura (£450) or Dynaudio Audience 40s (£400).

PROPER FLOORSTANDERS?

 I finally decided to move up to the separates world and recently purchased a Sony TA-FB920R amp and Sony CDP-XB920 CD player. At the time I couldn't really afford speakers so I kept the old ones from my midi system, but I'm now ready to complete my system with floorstanders.

Given the emphasised bass of the Sony components, I thought I would try mixing components with a weaker-bass speaker such as the KEF Q35, but I mostly listen to rock and recently saw them referred to as potentially disappointing in that area.

I've auditioned the KEFs and felt they were a bit feeble, but it could be because they were hooked up to a weak amp. I was also considering Mission 773es, 703s or Acoustic Energy Aegis Threes. What would you advise, bearing in mind that I have a large room (9x8m), with a 30cm pillar in


the middle? I am in Portugal, so it's virtually impossible to try gear at home.

Joao Da Camara Borges, via e-mail
KEF Q35s are excellent and very versatile speakers that produce a fair amount of bass if correctly positioned close to a wall. They are front ported speakers and therefore can go almost right up against the surface. The Q35s aren't the deepest of speakers, and can sound somewhat light unless the married components are suitably brutal.

The KEFs are superb for unusual rooms, as their UniQ drivers seem to manage fine imagery no matter how strange the room configuration is – good news, bearing in mind your room's pillar.

With the size of your room, you may want a speaker that has more weight to it and the Mission 773e would be well worth listening to. Other speakers to audition would be the Dali 606 (£400) or Dynaudio Audience 40 (£400), the Dynaudio is a stand mount, but matches very well with the Sony equipment giving a well pronounced, but not too heavy bass and a sweet, detailed treble.

**PACIFIC BASS**

 I'd like your recommendations on speakers. I'm interested in Martin

Logan Aerius i hybrid speakers,

but don't know if they'll fit in with my existing equipment. I have a Krell 300i integrated amp, Krell 250CD CD player used as a transport and a Krell Stealth DAC. I also have a Sota Comet turntable with a Grado Prestige Gold cartridge, going through an Electrocompaniet ECP-1 phono pre-amp. My speakers are Mission 753Fs bi-wired with MIT Terminator 2 cables. My main gripe with the system is its lack of bass weight. Price isn't a problem, as long as it doesn't exceed the standard of my current equipment.

Kenneth Yap, Philippines


The Martin Logan/Krell combination is renowned for its transparency and lucid sound, but the loudspeakers are not exactly designed to kick beats. They are unlikely to produce deeper or more powerful bass than the already very meaty Missions.

A better solution to your current problems might be simply to invest in a stand-alone subwoofer to give you that bass weight and extension you require.

Why not audition the likes of the REL Stadium II (£998) or Miller & Kreisel V125 (£800)? They will be able to give you far more bass than the Martin Logans.

If you also want a better sound, try to have a listen to Dynaudio's Contour 1.8s (£1,894) and B&W Nautilus 804s (£2,500), because the bass depth and weight is fantastic with both speakers.

**ISOLATED EXPAT**

 As a musically isolated British expatriate in Kenya, I have become an avid reader of your magazine in the hope of staying in contact.

I have recently purchased a Marantz CD-63 MkII KI Signature CD player and Marantz PM-66SE KI Signature amplifier. I would like to buy a pair of loudspeakers to go with the combination, and like the sound of Mission 753Fs.

Firstly, is the amplifier capable of driving the 753s, or should I consider something like Mission 774s instead? It must be obvious that I really have my heart set on the 753s.

John Scher, Kenya

The answer you don't want to hear is unfortunately the right one. While the PM66-KI S is a superb amp, Mission 753Fs are not easy to drive, and only the best and most powerful amps can really start to get the best from them.

A better choice would be to choose the 752Fs which are far easier to drive, yet still produce a similar sound. Other speakers to consider would be Linn's Keilidh (£750) speakers, Dali 606s (£400) or Dynaudio Audience 50s (£577). All the speakers suggested have a good, tight bass, but are easily drivable by your amplifier.



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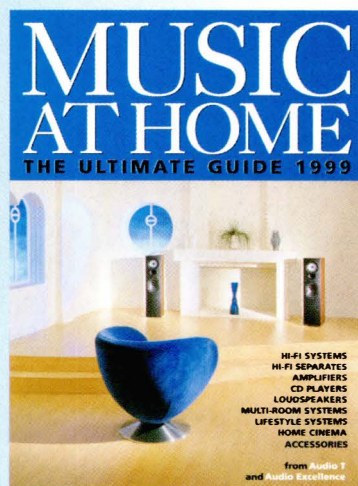
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YAMAHA

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

*Subject to status. Written details on request

A REAL SOLUTION



 I need some advice on a couple of issues, as I get very conflicting views from every dealer I visit! My current system consists of a Krell KAV-300cd CD player and KAV-250p/a pre/power combination. It's my speakers that present the problem. My room is approximately 4x3m with 3m high ceilings, and the speakers have to be pushed right into the corners firing down the length of the room. I have been unable to identify speakers which will work well in this position. I'm currently using a pair of Rogers Studio 1a speakers that I picked up for £150, which are OK, but I need a real solution that will let me enjoy music the way I want to.

When I originally bought the Krells, it was my plan to buy a pair of Martin Logan SL3s, then add a Krell KAV-250a three-channel power amp and the Martin Logan centre and surround electrostatics, but due to my return from Hong Kong (where equipment is significantly cheaper) and the size of my new room, this isn't possible.

So far I've been recommended the floorstanding Sonus Faber models and Wilson Audio Orator, but I need something suitable for AV applications as I would like to buy a DVD player and build a high-end AV system. Can you also recommend a DVD player? Krell is being tight-lipped

about its plans for a DVD player (one friend from the States claims that Krell's going to bring out one that costs "a substantial amount" – I see a re-mortgage approaching), although the company does have a processor.

Ideally, I would like to stick to Krell, but the Theta DVD and Casa Nova combo have been suggested. I realise that I need a bigger room, and that's my goal in two or three years, but don't want to wait until I've moved.

Roger Bacon, London

Of the speakers suggested to you, the Wilson Audio will most likely work best in the combination of situations you find yourself, although they won't perform at their best up against the side wall. Make sure you angle the speakers towards the centre of the room and allow a minimum of six inches behind them.

We haven't heard about a Krell DVD player as yet, keep your eyes peeled on our News section! The Theta combination suggested to you does work very well and should use your existing components effectively. You should also consider the Meridian 800 series, the DVD is superb and the processor one of the very best available.

You may also find that the Meridian digital active speakers would also fit your requirements as building blocks for a superb high-end AV system.

SHRILL STEREO



I have a system that comprises Yamaha RXV-592 receiver, Rogers LS55 and Bose AM5 speakers, old Teac AS-100 amp, Infinity Video 1 centre, Paradigm PDR-10 subwoofer, Harman Kardon ADP303 processor and Pioneer CLD-370 laser disc player. The sound is somewhat shrill in two-channel stereo, so I wonder if it is advisable to add a CD player or change something else to get better sound? I have about £300 to spend.

Kavish Jagwani, via e-mail

The best solution would be to add a CD player to your current kit.

Laser Disc players are really designed for video and don't pick up the subtitles for hi-fi listening (and yes, they do have a tendency towards brightness).

Try listening to a Denon DCD-635 (£180) CD player at the lower end, or a Sony CDP-XB920 (£300) at the higher end. Both players will give you significant improvements over your laser disc player, and with the Sony, the alternative filters mean that you can tune the sound to your tastes. You may also find that in the long term, a hi-fi amp would power the two channels better still, with the Yamaha then used as the further three channels for surround purposes.



PICTURES AND SOUND



I've recently purchased a big Sony home cinema system and would like some recommendations for cables to hook it all together. I have gone for a Sony KV-32DS60 digital widescreen TV, Sony DVP-S725D DVD player, Sony STR-DB930 AV receiver and Mission Cinema 7 speakers. I need cables for the whole system.

Kenneth Clayton, London

"It's probably best going for a single brand of cables at the moment, as you can guarantee reliable performance from day one and later experiment with other cables to improve the sound."

You will need two digital interconnects (one for DVD to TV and one DVD to receiver, depending on how you set the system up – you may have TV going out from the receiver), and speaker cable from the receiver to the speakers. It is probably best going for a single brand at the moment, as you can guarantee reliable performance from day

one and later experiment with other cables to improve the sound. A good solution for home cinema cabling is the QED range: use Qudos Silver

(£5/metre) for the main two speakers and centre, Qudos Micro (£1.25/metre) for the satellite speakers, and Digiflex (£20) as the digital cables. You could also try Kimber's range, which although slightly more expensive does lend itself very well to home cinema with 4PR (£5/metre) for the speakers and Opti-Link (£50) for the digital connections.



DECODER DILEMMA



I am interested in a Kenwood KR-V9090 home cinema amplifier, but have a quick question about it: it has inputs (line inputs) for a Dolby Digital/DTS/MPEG 2 decoder. Does this mean that a DVD connected to this input will be decoded into Dolby Digital?

Julian Taylor, e-mail

No. It means that you can connect a Dolby Digital/dts/MPEG 2 decoder to the amplifier.

Your Kenwood amp currently plays five channel surround sound, but not Dolby Digital or other digital sources. A decoder will simply interpret the digital source signal into information that your Kenwood amp can understand.



Five Stars

Paul Messenger explains why you should visit an independent

Why use a specialist hi-fi dealer? The short answer is because he knows one hell of a lot more about hi-fi than you do. And if you've gone to the trouble of picking up a specialist magazine on the subject, you're obviously interested in something rather more than a mini system from the nearest electrical superstore.

You've probably bought this magazine for one of two reasons. You're looking for advice (presumably unbiased and good) on choosing and using your hi-fi system, and/or you're checking out the ads to decide where to go and buy it.

The independent specialist dealer doesn't know everything, and he doesn't know much about you, but if music's an important part of your life, he's the only guy around who's able (and hopefully willing) to help you choose the equipment which will give you the best long term satisfaction.

Power of the Press

Dealers sometimes moan to me about the power of the press, and the disproportionate influence of its 'Best Buy' and multi-star ratings. Well, I've been in the press for twentysomething years, and still feel more ignorant than powerful.

The more I mess around with hi-fi gear, the more I become aware of our lack of real understanding of the subtleties involved, and the more I appreciate the importance of the dealer's skills and experience, in bringing together components so that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

We hacks get paid to write words, often about components in isolation, because individual product reviews are still the staple diet of the press. They can sometimes provide a useful guide to the way a product performs, but only under the particular circumstances in which the review was conducted.

The hi-fi reviewer attempts, with varying degrees of success, to evaluate a particular component, and find something interesting (and

hopefully positive) to say about it. That's about the end of it, and it's on to the next product.

The magazine prints the review, and that very process magically confers a measure of authority. Experienced hi-fi enthusiasts, who read reviews over a period of years and try out various products themselves, soon start to realise the limitations of that approach. Some reviews are better than others, but none can get to grips with the real heart of the problem - whether a given product will improve your musical satisfaction, in your system and your room.

The Role of the Dealer

The dealer's role is very different, and potentially much more valuable. He has the chance to talk one-on-one. If he's good at his job, he'll use that opportunity to find out what you as an individual are looking (or listening) for.

His motivation is very different too. Sure he wants to make a sale. That's the lifeblood of any shop. But he also knows that if something he sells really does deliver long term satisfaction, there's a very good chance you'll come back again to see if he can repeat the trick some time in the future.

If you go into a shop and demand a particular CD player, on the basis that it got seven stars (out of five) in last month's magazines, the shop will probably simply take the line of least resistance and sell it to you. (Or switch-sell you to a similar price alternative, if he's fresh out of stock of that particular flavour-of-the-month.)

If you go in and say you're looking for a CD player, and want his advice on what to choose, things are liable to become more interesting. The



for Value

specialist dealer if you are searching for real hi-fi satisfaction

onus is now on the dealer to show what he can do. His first task is to ask the right questions to try and get some idea of what you might be after.

Asking the questions is the easy bit. The real skill comes in using the information to come up with a shortlist of likely contenders, and then conducting a demonstration so that you have a real chance to play a central role in the decision making process.

Putting together a successful hi-fi system might not be as difficult as it was twenty or thirty years ago, but it's just as easy to make a mess of things. Put the 'wrong' combination of components together and it'll still sound a lot better than any cute little mini system package. It might even

"If music is an essential ingredient in your daily diet, you owe it to yourself to become a member of the discriminating minority."

rate a five star review. But it won't match the potential of a carefully balanced and properly installed system, and it certainly won't cater for your own particular preferences and personality.

We British are notoriously indiscriminating consumers, at a mass market level at least. The majority of the population don't even bother to drive a car they're thinking of buying, never mind take the trouble to listen to hi-fi equipment.

The majority will therefore end up with hyperstore mediocrity, and hi-fi that's about as tasty as supermarket bread. But if music is an essential ingredient in your daily diet, you owe it to yourself to become a member of the discriminating minority.

You know full well that your music collection is as individual as your wardrobe, and just as precious too, so it's worth taking the time and trouble to search out the dealer and equipment

that will make that collection come alive, and give you a new buzz every time you play your favourite discs.

The independent specialist may not beat the chain store on price, but he continues to thrive in a hostile environment because real hi-fi is so much more than a matter of price. The people who work in these shops are themselves enthusiasts, often with many years of experience in meeting customer's needs, and the very necessary expertise to ensure that the whole thing is properly set up to deliver the best results.

The better the hi-fi, the more important it is to get the fine details right at the installation end of things, but even the least expensive equipment can be made to sound a whole lot better if good care is taken over the fine details - the support furniture, the cabling, the positioning of speakers and so on.

Without expert assistance even high class hi-fi can give mediocre results. With it you'll stand a very good chance of ending up with something rather more than a consumer durable - something which will be a source of considerable pleasure and genuine emotional satisfaction for decades to come.

I agreed to write this signed piece, irrespective of the specific sponsors, because I believe the independent specialist dealer plays a vital role in giving customers long term hi-fi satisfaction. The views and opinions expressed here are my own and not necessarily those of Hi-fi Choice.

Paul Messenger

The specialist Dealers listed here are professional and enthusiastic.

Give your nearest a ring for a demonstration.

STAR QUALITIES

value for money ★★★★★★
 service ★★★★★★
 facilities ★★★★★★
 verdict ★★★★★★

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
 190a New North Road
 0171 226 5500

SW11 ORANGES & LEMONS
 61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea
 0171 924 2040

W4 MARTIN-KLEISER Ltd
 109 Chiswick High Road
 0181 400 5555

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
 40 High Street
 01233 624441

Chelmsford RAYLEIGH HI-FI
 216 Moulsham Street
 01245 265245

East Grinstead
AUDIO DESIGNS
 26 High Street
 01342 314569

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY
 9 High Street Hampton Wick
 0181 943 3530

Lakeside Retail Park
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
 Dansk International Furniture
 World
 01708 680551

Rayleigh, Essex
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
 44a High Street
 01268 779762

Southend-on-Sea
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
 132/4 London Road
 01702 435255

Uxbridge UXBRIDGE AUDIC
 278 High Street,
 01895 465444

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE
 3 Church Lane
 01295 272158

Birmingham SOUND ACADEM
 152a High Street, Bloxwich
 01922 493499

Leicester CYMBIOSIS
 6 Hotel Street
 0116 262 3754

Northampton LISTEN INN
 32 Gold Street, 01604 637871

Shrewsbury
CREATIVE AUDIO
 9 Dogpole 01743 241924

NORTH

Cheadle (Stockport)
AUDIO COUNSEL
 14 Stockport Road
 0161 428 7887

Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL
 12/14 Shaw Road
 0161 633 2602

Sheffield MOORGATE
ACOUSTICS
 184 Fitzwilliam St
 0114 275 6048

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh
RUSS ANDREWS HI-FI
 34 Northumberland Street
 0131 557 1672

Glasgow STEREO STEREO
 260 St. Vincent Street
 0141 248 4079

A STRIKING Chord

Alvin Gold gets to grips with a British digital processor that looks likely to challenge the US dominated high end hierarchy.



You may know Chord as a high-end domestic and studio supplier with a strong export presence, and a particular expertise in big, switch mode power amplifiers. They make no less than three D/A converters too, this being the top dog and a digital pre-amp into the bargain. And a funky device it is – a symphony of angles, pillars, curves, rails and recesses, none where you would expect to find them, a sculpture in immaculately crafted fabricated aluminium.

The DSC1500E is a D/A converter suitable for use with any digital source clocked at up to 96kHz, which means a frequency response up to 44kHz or so, and with a resolution of up to 24 bits, with the usual caveat that this does not refer to musical resolution (even assuming an appropriately obliging source), but the ability to read 24-bit data.

During the coming year, Chord has pledged to introduce add-in modules which will increase the maximum clock rate to a DVD-Audio friendly 192kHz, and the programmable logic devices used are said to be ready for a 384kHz sampling

frequency and for Direct Stream Digital (DSD) the system behind SACD, which will be processed by a third D/A, a Pulse Array device (see Paul Miller's *Lab Report*).

The Chord's best current party trick is that it has two entirely separate D/A converters, sandwiched between common input receivers and output filtering, buffering and

amplification. One is an AKM Delta Sigma device, and the other, from Analogue Devices, is a hybrid multi-bit processor.

But why two converters? Couldn't Chord make up its mind? "We're covering our backs," I was told. The story goes that the original version, known as the DSC1500, was built around a Crystal CS4390 Delta Sigma D/A, a 24-bit, 48kHz part for which Chord was promised a pin-compatible upgrade to 96kHz, which the company was going to offer to its customers.

In the event, no such upgrade was ever made available

by Crystal, and therefore the decision was made to take a two-pronged approach to its successor by including DACs from two different sources with different architectures.

This helps to free Chord from having to rely upon a single source, but offering the customer the choice of multi-bit and Delta Sigma operation, each with its own distinct personality, is an attractive feature from the user viewpoint. Original model DSC1500s can

"With the better DVD players the Chord was very impressive, consistently making a nonsense of any of them used unaided."

be rebuilt to the current E spec if required.

If this is an exercise in indecisiveness, then Sony would have to be criticised in the same terms for including switchable digital filters, and Rotel and Linn would have to accept blame for providing switchable dither as well.

The most interesting part of the DSC1500E is around the back, which sports a rare array of socketry – all of very good quality, by the way: even the TosLINK connectors are mechanically more positive than usual. There are two Toslink and one electrical

S/PDIF input using a BNC connector, for which phono adaptors are readily available, although a correctly terminated cable is preferable for impedance matching reasons. There are also two Neutrik AES/EBU input sockets and an ST/AT&T low dispersion optical glass interface that works over long distances.

Digital outputs are available in optical and electrical S/PDIF and AES/EBU form, and analogue outputs are available from phono and XLR (balanced) sockets with a claimed 100 Ohms source impedance.

There is also a sync output which allows a transport to be slaved to the DAC's internal clock to improve sound quality by reducing correlated jitter – a complex argument that has nothing to do with clock accuracy *per se*. Finally, a computer interface is available for the purposes of reprogramming.

Control over the converter is exercised using the front panel buttons or a remote control that adds such facilities as the ability to dim or douse the outside and otherwise irritatingly bright vacuum fluorescent display panel.

It also has a switch to select either of the two D/A converters, and a volume control that operates in the analogue domain, rather than digitally, to avoid the loss of resolution that is virtually inevitable, if not at full output then at least at lower levels. This underpins



The Chord's back panel is equipped for every digital eventuality including a sync link.

the company's claim that the DSC1500E is a full digital pre-amplifier; however, the push-button volume control is quite prone to 'running away with itself', which could have been resolved, for example by reducing gearing. There is no independent digital tape output, which is only OK if you're content to record the input you're listening to.

TESTING TIME

There were problems with an early sample of the DSC1500E we received, which on brief acquaintance sounded dull and flat under some operating conditions. A problem with the input trigger circuit was identified, resolved and another sample despatched to us which worked correctly. The residual

jitter (measured by Paul using a non-clock linked Theta transport) was close to being state of the art for a separate converter/transport at about 200psec, although a single integrated player can give yet lower jitter results.

An Arcam Delta 170.3 transport, specially modified by Chord to accept the optical clock link connector, was borrowed for the test, which also used a TAG McLaren CDT20R transport and a Krell KAV-250CD CD player playing through its electrical S/PDIF.

The Chord was also used with a number of DVD players from this month's group test playing 24-bit/96kHz material to give a taste, limited by the nature and paucity of appropriate recordings, of what the

Chord sounds like when stretched. A Meridian 561 AV processor saw service as an alternative D/A converter.

The Chord invests more of its own character into its music making than I had expected. Perhaps it is simply showing up the shortcomings of other equipment. In any case, two qualities ran through all the tests, and were apparent in every comparison.

One was the Chord's large-scale, solid sound. The lowest octave seemed fuller and more developed, more capable of revealing the structural design of music and the environment it was recorded in. Music sounded very physical through the Chord. Second, this processor has an uncommonly organic quality compared with anything else I was able to use. It is a very progressive, almost liquid feeling as one note blends seamlessly into the next - much more reminiscent of the experience of live, acoustic music making than the usual manufactured simulacrum.

Even so, there was something curiously matter-of-fact about the Chord which contrasts with my experience (albeit a stage removed on this occasion) of high-end D/A converters, but perhaps that is because the Chord signally does not glamorise or attempt to recast the music in its own image.

This is a complex product with a number of operating modes. But I found myself ultimately unconvinced by the Chord's ability to perform as a preamp (driving a Parasound power amp and big AVI loudspeakers, among others).

As a preamplifier it lacked a degree of the passion and sharply honed discipline I had experienced recently with a (much more costly) Krell DAC in the upper part of its digital volume control range.

There were clear indications that the Chord sounded better with its volume control set at full output, which left me

wondering whether there would be any further improvement if the volume control stage was removed from the circuit altogether.

With the better DVD players from the group the Chord was very impressive indeed, consistently making a nonsense of any of them used unaided, in every case sounding richer, fuller, better focused and much more dynamic - this last being a real surprise.

Finally, there is the issue of the comparison of the two DACs, which are both excellent, but which have discernibly different qualities. The AKM offers measurably the more accurate response up to 10kHz, lower distortion and a higher output (just), but I quickly formed a distinct preference for the Analogue Devices chip, which recovered subtle recorded acoustic information rather more effectively.

CONCLUSION

It's virtually certain that I have yet to hear the best from this complex product, if only because the old Arcam transport is certainly not in the same league as the Chord, even with the added clock link. For this we may have to await the matching transport, scheduled for mid-2001.

The AKM chip sounded a little silkier and more refined, but almost as though it was applied as a gloss, while the Analogue Devices DAC seemed to be slightly but unmistakably more in touch with the music. It has a rawer quality, more emphatic, sometimes more strident, but one more capable of that electric thrill of recognition that comes when the equipment comes close to the core of the music.

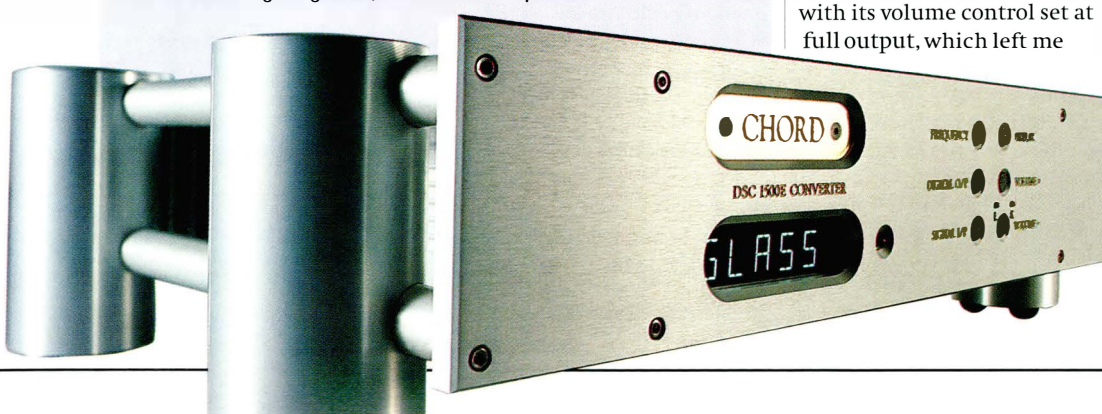
THE LAB REPORT

Chord's DCS-1500 is evolving into a uniquely flexible processor. During the period of our test, its digital interface circuitry was revised to ensure a consistent performance with different CD transports, for example, with jitter settling out at a few hundred psec.

Soon to be released is an 'advanced format module', a £1,600 internal addition that renders the DSC-1500 compatible with forthcoming two-channel DVD-A and Sony's DSD digital formats. Currently, its S/PDIF and AES/EBU digital inputs are captured by a Crystal interface receiver (this is compatible with current 96kHz DVD digital outputs) with sync-locking available for compatible transports (this includes DPA's Deltran series and Arcam's older D170.2).

There's a choice of hybrid AD1853 and bitstream AKM4393 DACs, although the analogue volume control (with logarithmic steps from -70 to +25) and output filter stages are common to both. In each instance, the '0' position on the scale yields an output of about 1.9V, although the response of the bitstream DAC is some -0.7dB down at 20kHz - the extreme HF end of the audio range - while the hybrid DAC is flatter. Both show an inaudible mid-treble lift of +0.1dB and both offer a 'real life' S/N just above the 16-bit level at 100dB.

Distortion is fractionally lower through bass and midrange frequencies via the bitstream DAC (0.001% compared with 0.002%), but there's nothing to choose at HF. An interesting design then, with tremendous potential. **PMI**



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£4,835.00

Credible high-end converter which can be used as a digital preamplifier, with switchable processors and the ability to grow as digital sources evolve.

FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

Chord Electronics, The Pumphouse, Farleigh Bridge, Farleigh Lane, East Farleigh, Kent ME16 9NB
 (01622) 721444



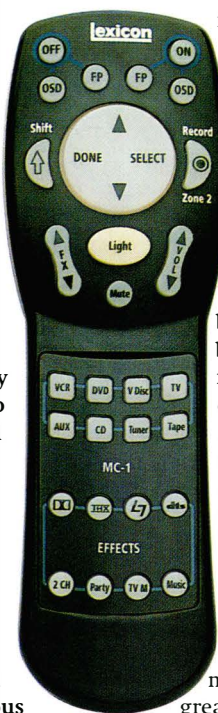
TOTAL Control

Paul Messenger suits up and explores the mystical world of the high-end digital processor.

Lexicon is at the serious high end of AV sound processors. The company started out making digital effects units for recording studios in the era when simple echo effects gave way to more sophisticated reverb, and went on to dominate that very specialised pro-audio niche. It's but a small step to make the transition from creating the effects that go onto the recordings, and adding those effects 'live' during replay; the arrival of cinema surround sound presented a marvellous opportunity to make use of all the proprietary knowledge that had been accumulated in keeping ahead of the pro-audio competition, and apply it to the domestic A/V scene.

Even by pro-audio standards, Lexicon gear has always been expensive, so the £5,500 price tag attached to this MC-1 – the brand's top model – comes as no real surprise. About eight years ago, in one of the very first issues of our sister title *Home Entertainment*, I reviewed the Lexicon CP-3, and this MC-1 is very much its successor in spirit, even if the execution has moved on.

I still have the grey hairs from that original review, and can all too clearly recall the amount of aggravation



involved in getting to grips with what was actually a computer masquerading as an A/V processor. Those memories came flooding back when it was first mooted that I should review the current Lexicon, my first reaction being to keep several barge poles between myself and the unit in question. "Oh it's much easier to use now," I was assured, so I let natural curiosity take precedence over better judgement.

In fact, the MC-1 is an awesome device, with an astonishing range of capabilities, many of which make a great deal of sense. It is significantly easier to use than its predecessor, and over the past few years I've become (marginally) more adept at dealing with computers, and learnt quite a lot more about surround sound systems. We were all rather groping in the dark back in 1992/3, and the manifest complexities of the CP-3 weren't easy to appreciate.

The MC-1 is no less complicated than its forbear, and to my mind still rather over-eggs the pudding in places, but at least the user interface is now rather tidier, and the logic behind the logic has become more transparent. It also has considerable built-in future readiness too, which is an invaluable feature in these changing times.

DIGITAL CONTROL

Forget the term 'A/V processor'. That usually refers to inexpensive add-ons which you couple up to an existing stereo hi-fi system to add the extra multi-channel A/V dimension when working with an A/V source. Lexicon calls the MC-1 a 'Digital Controller', and it operates as a fully fledged preamplifier that can form the heart of your stereo/multi-channel hi-fi/surround sound system.

It has the inputs to handle up to eight line level analogue or digital sound sources, and can deal with each according to its needs for two or more channel

reproduction. It will switch and route up to eight video signals alongside their audio, and also has three expansion ports to handle 24-bit/96kHz PCM.

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"The MC-1 works exclusively in the digital domain. If you feed it digits direct, it knows what to do."

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The MC-1 works exclusively in the digital domain. If you feed it digits direct, it knows what to do, whether you're supplying two-channel, CD-style PCM code, or dts or Dolby Digital multi-channel code. If you feed it analogue, built-in A-to-D converters will digitise the signal so that the rest of the processor can get on and do its thing. Once all the processing is done, D-to-A converters turn the signals back to analogue prior to the line outputs that feed the power amps and subsequent loudspeakers.

reproduction. It will switch and route up to eight video signals alongside their audio, and also has three expansion ports to handle 24-bit/96kHz PCM.

SET-UP AND OPERATION

This is an extraordinarily flexible device, as is the way with computers. The trouble is, the more flexible you make something, the more complicated it becomes to set up.

Help was at hand, however, in the person of CSE's Adrian Blundell, whose dexterity with the handset was a wonder to behold – I had to keep asking him to slow down so my brain could catch up! Even though the default factory settings seem very well chosen, I still



wouldn't want the chore of trying to set up the MC-1 on my own – but then, I wouldn't expect to have to if I'd bought it from a dealer for five and a half grand. I certainly wouldn't advocate getting something like this via mail order, whatever the cost saving, because you need those set-up skills.

The process had actually seemed quite straightforward when Adrian was doing it, but two days later I'd completely lost the plot and had to return to the manual.

Still, as long as you don't suffer from phobias about blue-screen set-up menus or 60-page manuals, it must be dead easy. And while I'm certain that there were still a few (dozen) bits I never did quite get to grips with in the two weeks

available, that proved to be no real practical hindrance.

The handset looks a friendly affair, although two 'shift-keys' mean it's actually three handsets in one (so keep that manual handy). One mild irritation in 'normal' mode is that the buttons which come easiest to hand are mostly about system set-up, whereas the key operational ones which select the inputs and effect modes are tucked away at the bottom.

That apart, and once the inputs and outputs had been properly configured, day-to-day operation proved entirely straightforward. One other snag surfaced early on, however, when the internal cooling fan started up. This operates most of the time, and can be quite intrusive if you're sitting

nearby and listening at a low, late night level – it's certainly noisier than my lap-top PC, and probably about comparable with a laserdisc player.

SOUND QUALITY

I'm not sure that 'sound quality' as we normally understand the phrase really applies to surround processors. As far as music reproduction is concerned, their main purpose seems to be to modify the various source signals in order to create a satisfyingly enveloping experience. Traditional concepts of 'fidelity' and 'transparency' are therefore not really the issue here; rather the MC-1 does a thoroughly impressive job of creating a convincing and essentially seamless 'wraparound' soundfield.

We're still awaiting the launches of DVD-Audio and multi-channel SACD in order to have true high resolution discrete multi-channel programming, so the full potential of multi-channel hi-fi music is difficult to establish.

The matter is further complicated while recording engineers work out what best to do with all the extra channels, but it's not difficult to hear the clear advantage discrete multi-channel has over multi-channel sources in the far greater image stability and precision and a freedom from 'phasey' effects. The Lexicon handled dts and Dolby Digital material with a relaxing confidence and stability, although the top end might have sounded a little sweeter and more delicate.

The MC-1 is less impressive operating as a straight stereo preamplifier with 'audiophile'

quality analogue stereo signals – but then, I don't know a digital processor which is. Timing is suspect, and the sound is a little dark and ponderous, with muted leading edge detail.

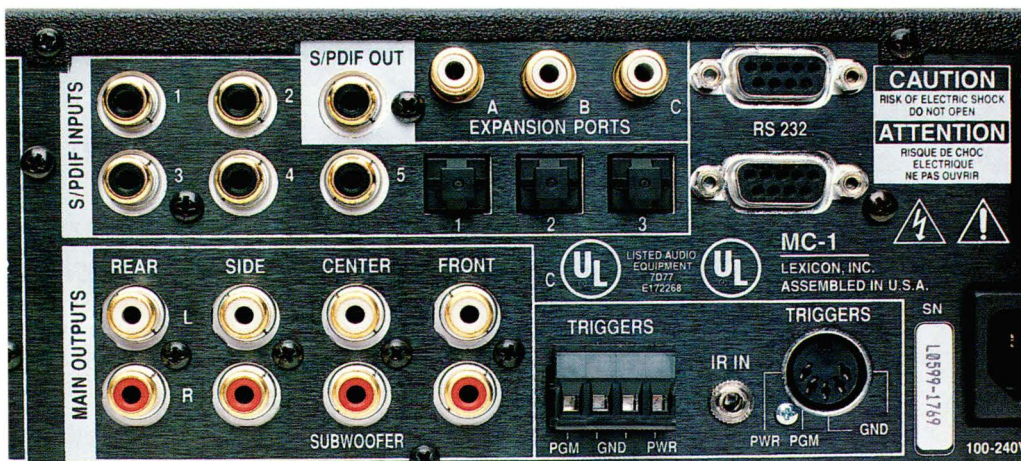
But again, that's not really the point. Things become all together more interesting when you start exploring what MC-1 processing can do for your regular stereo sources. It has sixteen different operational effect modes to choose from, and a more than ample eight of these are actually labelled on the handset, giving easy access to plenty of alternatives.

These pre-set modes (which may be further customised to taste) offer a very good selection to cater for the various A and AV sources, and can throw up all sorts of interesting surprises in dragging 'hidden' surround effects out of your existing stereo software. Check out *The Sunshine Underground*, on *The Chemical Brothers' Surrender* album, and you'll find all sorts of interesting noises flying around your head. This certainly adds a worthwhile extra dimension beyond two-channel stereo, and represents a powerful extra reason to investigate what a high quality surround sound processor might do for your system.

CONCLUSIONS

Those who subscribe to purist 'straight line' philosophies of hi-fi sound should certainly look elsewhere: the MC-1 is not for them. It sits firmly at the mega versatile end of the hi-fi equipment spectrum, and is a tour de force in what digital sound processing can achieve. Anyone seriously into surround and with an urge to check out its full potential should have a wonderfully interactive relationship with this machine.

The Lexicon is nothing if not flexible: note the expansion, RS232 and multi-zone trigger ports on its densely packed rear fascia.



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£5,500.00

Anyone with an urge to check out the full potential of surround sound should have a wonderfully interactive relationship with this machine

■ **TWO YEAR GUARANTEE**

✉ CSE, Unit 9 Centre Park Holdings, The Airfield, Tockwith, York YO26 7QF
☎ (01423) 359054

THE ART Of Discretion

Tim Bown get to grips with Meridian's Compact Theatre System. It's great for movies, but can it play music?



Want to know the worst thing about building a multi-channel system? All those damned cables. It's not so bad for some 'home cinema' buyers, those taking their first steps into a surround sound universe – there are plenty of affordable, pre-packaged systems available that cut wirey fuss to a minimum. But if your aspirations are more exalted, reaching up towards the realms of high-end, multi-channel performance, you've got to put up with box after box after box... processors, power amps, speakers hither and thither, all connected via a seething tangle of wires.

It's an apocalyptic vision for any two-channel aficionado used to the minimum of fuss, but does it have to be this way? Not if you ask Meridian. This ambitious Cambridgeshire firm does precious little to

court publicity, yet its research has led to it taking a lofty position among the world's digital elite. Its most recent and highly laudable contribution to multi-channel audio has been Meridian Lossless Packing (MLP), the 'lossless' compression technology adopted for DVD-Audio.

Interior designers should also be thankful. The company works hard to create complete systems that are visually discreet, combining maximum performance with the minimum number of boxes, and that's where the Compact Theatre System really comes into its own.

THE MERIDIAN LINE

With this system it's easy. You get everything you need for genuine high-end, multi-channel sound (barring a DVD player), all in seven relatively discreet boxes. At its heart lies

Meridian's MSR remote (a control freak's wet dream). The system supports all three current digital multi-channel formats – Dolby Digital (DD), dts and MPEG Surround – together with MLP, ready for DVD-Audio. Dolby Pro-Logic is included for VHS videos and surround-encoded TV programmes, alongside an enhanced version called THX Cinema and another named TV Logic, which is designed to optimise sound from non-surround encoded broadcasts.

And it doesn't stop there. A number of proprietary processing modes are supplied with various user-definable parameters, including four settings specifically designed to deliver surround from two-channel music sources – all this and plain old stereo too!

But with such a glut of sophisticated processing on-board, you might think the 561 could hardly perform on pure hi-fi terms. Actually, it does a surprisingly fine job. It's designed to be used as one would a regular stereo-only

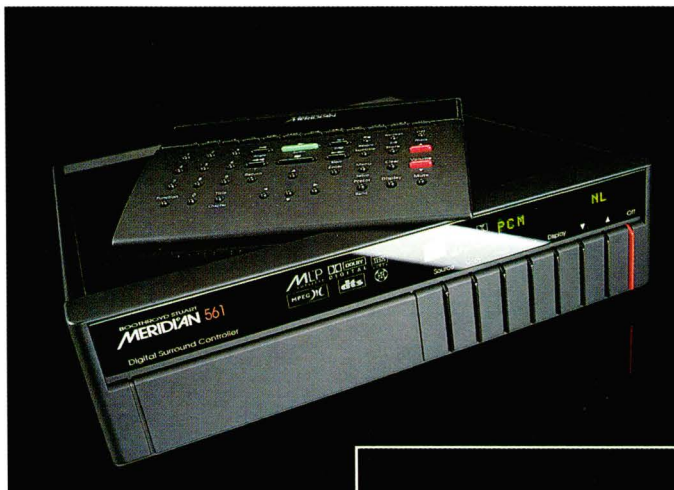


"Just plug in your source components and away you go; no mess, no fuss, just exceptionally good multi-channel sound."

Meridian's well-regarded 561 digital processor, which was launched several years ago, with subsequent versions incorporating new processing technology as it became available.

With this set-up you get the full monty: a 561 loaded with processing for every eventual-ity, priced at £2,850 including

preamp, supplying seven line-level analogue inputs and six digital inputs – five electrical and one optical. The downside is that any analogue signal needs to be converted internally into digital, then back to analogue before being output to the speakers. Yet, despite such barriers to absolute signal



The 561 processor supports all the current surround modes and MLP to boot.

purity, the result still sounds remarkably intact.

GETTING ACTIVE

For many potential buyers, however, the really clever bit lies not with the processor but with the speakers. The package supplies four M33 speakers for front and rear (£1,495 per pair), hefty yet neatly-proportioned boxes sporting twin 100mm carbon fibre mid/bass cones and a 25mm soft dome tweeter. A fifth M33 is provided for the centre (£775), complete with a clever plinth to angle up or down for positioning.

You also get an active subwoofer, the M1500 (£895), which incorporates a front-firing 250mm doped paper cone and a cabinet topped with glass to match the processor.

But where are the power amps? Inside the speakers of course. The subwoofer isn't the only active part of this system; each M33 has amplification built-in, delivering 85 Watts to the woofer and 55 Watts to the tweeter, the advantages of which are three-fold.

First, and most obviously, it cuts down the number of boxes and ensures the system looks as elegant as it sounds. Second, the active speaker approach can benefit performance because the crossover is powered and takes effect before the signal reaches the power amps. Its influence in thus minimised, which can facilitate a clearer, more dynamic sound. There's also the benefit of separate power amps tailored to each drive unit, but without the clutter this usually entails.

The third advantage is in setting it up – surely no other



high-end multi-channel system is as simple to hook together. No cables are required between power amps and speakers, so all you need are five lengthy RCA-terminated interconnects stretching from the processor to each M33 (and one for the subwoofer). Five are supplied, made for Meridian by cable expert van den Hul.

MOVIE STAR

If this set-up were an actor, it'd be Sean Connery. Its sound is handsome and debonair, oozing the kind of confidence only the world's best secret agent can afford. Its voice drips with honey, its seductive charm hard to resist, yet when the need arises there's absolutely no hesitation. It shoots to kill.

When it comes to watching a movie, few multi-channel hi-fi systems are so adept at combining velvet glove with iron fist. At this kind of price you could obtain a more visceral sort of sound, the type that knocks you back with its bass punch and pins you down with incisive treble. But have you tried living with that kind of gear?

The Meridian package takes a much smoother approach, yet supplies the kind of precision and separation between front, centre and rear channels few

systems can match. And when it's time for that explosive climax, you could hardly wish to be more shaken and stirred.

I watched four films during the course of this review – *Saving Private Ryan* and *Armageddon* (rented from the local video store on VHS), followed by my own video copy of *LA Confidential*, then *Yellow Submarine* and *Boogie Nights* on DVD. What impressed me most was how little the system drew attention to itself. I sat through each movie from beginning to

end, my involvement maximised by the sound around me, but never distracted from the essential plot. That, in itself, is praise indeed.

Here's a highlight by way of illustration: ...*Private Ryan's* opening 20-minute salvo would be an intense experience even through a portable telly, but with this system in action it snatched my breath like a swift blow to the stomach. I dared not blink as the sound of canon-fire punched through the room and the beaches of Normandy turned rusty-red; yet, as the film moved on, the transition from battlefield to countryside was as effortless and articulate as I've heard.

FACE THE MUSIC

Here's the tricky part. Can the Compact Theatre System succeed where the majority of processor/amp/speaker packages fail, by delivering the hi-fi goods with two-channel music, as well as 'doing' home cinema? Well, it has a great stab at it, but the eventual answer is not really, not quite.

This judgement needs some context. Musicality isn't a priority for the majority of 'home cinema' systems; even expensive THX-certified set-ups are designed with a different set of

goals, none of them musically motivated. Consequently, many systems sound hard and ill-defined when you put a CD through them, but the Meridian is different. Its maker has a fine musical heritage, and this system places as great an emphasis on musical performance as it does on the cinematic experience.

It sounds smooth and coherent alongside most of the multi-channel competition, eminently listenable across a broad range of music (although our £8,500 multi-brand contender, put together for our music reviews, is considerably more expressive – see p100).

The real crunch comes if you compare the Meridian's musical performance with a well chosen two-channel amp/speaker set-up – one costing, say, between £2,000 and £4,000. This set-up sounds rather flat in comparison, lacking the dynamics, soundstage depth and sense of 'air' delivered by the best 'conventional' hi-fi systems. Use of those proprietary music surround modes can expand and focus the soundstage effectively, particularly with electronic music: a play of Larry Heard's ice-cool tech-house disc *Genesis* sounded enticingly clean and spacious. But ultimately, a top notch two-channel system delivers more of the music.

CONCLUSION

The Compact Theatre System is that rare thing: a single package able to 'do' both hi-fi and home cinema jobs with considerable aplomb. It's not the best multi-channel solution I've heard, but it's certainly the neatest that delivers this level of performance.

This is high-end sound for music and movies, delivered in a simple, elegant package.

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£7,510.00

It's not the ultimate package for music and movies, but no high-end multi-channel system is more visually discreet – a great combination of clever design and sumptuous sound.

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

Meridian Audio (01480) 52144

POLE Position

Paul Miller puts the TAG combo through its paces and finds that it can really motor.



When McLaren first roared onto the market, mopping up Audiolab *en route*, its first hi-fi separates – including the 60i and 60iRV amplifiers and CDT20R CD player – were little more than spiced-up versions of Audiolab's existing stable. This initial expediency gave the F1 champion sufficient breathing space to unleash its engineering talent and provide us, a year or two later, with some genuinely revolutionary kit, which now includes the £2,000 AV32R digital processor and its partners, the £1,500 CDT20R CD transport and forthcoming DVD32R DVD player.

Since I first reviewed the AV32R in our sister magazine *Home Entertainment* (issue 70), it has been almost universally received as a first rate product. Its ability to automatically decode Dolby Digital, Pro-Logic, THX Cinema, DTS and MPEG-2 surround formats suggests a product of daunting complexity, but its elegant appearance demonstrates otherwise. A few

key functions are represented on its solid alloy fascia and others are shifted onto a comprehensive system remote control while the bulk of its set-up and menu items are accessed via an on-screen display.

Its various digital inputs can be programmatically linked to different sources (CD, DVD etc.) and defaulted to either surround or two-channel stereo modes. These inputs will accept 24-bit data at the high 96kHz sample rate available from some audio tracks on current DVD media, ensuring that the AV32R will also be perfectly suited for life as a top notch digital preamp. Albeit in need of an update when SACD and DVD-A make the multi-channel grade. It's in its stereo guise, together with the CDT20R transport, that we'll be concerning ourselves with here.

Multimedia enthusiasts will be familiar with the Analogue Devices SHARC DSP chip now beating at the heart of many new AV amps. McLaren has pushed the boat out further by opting for the ADSP-21065L

offer over the last generation of Audiolab/McLaren kit is evident from the 3D plot, which you can compare with those from HFC 184.

Digital images (1) are reduced to a minimum by its oversampling filters, distortion is vanishingly low and ultrasonic noise (2), which can upset some amplifiers, is expertly controlled. These DACs and associated digital circuitry used for centre and surround channels are also 'neutralised' in Direct Mode.

Do bear in mind, however, that if the AV32R is set to 'Direct+Sub' mode then its DSP Bass Management processing will remain active. In either setting, it's possible to utilise the AV32R's 'TAGtronic Sync Link' which returns a DC feed to the CDT20R transport, synchronising its output clock to the master reference within the AV32R. This sort of technology is already used by a handful of two-box CD player combinations (albeit in incompatible

"The effortless, see-through sound of the AV32R lets the music through with the minimum clutter."

version which runs at a heady 60MHz, as opposed to the 44MHz 21061L processor or, slower still, the 24-bit Motorola part. By contrast, the 21065L is a true 32-bit device with more than enough headroom to handle incoming 24-bit data.

McLaren has customised much of the DSP's software in addition to the operational software that controls the fancy on-screen menus, for example. The microcontroller that performs all this house-keeping is served by a flash memory chip that, in turn, can be updated with new code via McLaren's so-called TAGtronic serial BUS.

Used in 'Direct Mode' with the CDT20R, the on-board DSP is 'neutralised' and passes directly to stereo AKM D/A converters. The advantage these new 24-bit converters

forms) in an effort to suppress the jitter otherwise aggravated across the digital link (the S/PDIF interface).

Over the past few months, I've used the AV32R with a variety of different CD transports and DVD players, making good use of its primary role as 'digital conduit' in a modern, integrated AV system. During this time, the AV32R has continually proved its mettle, offering an unflappably relaxed sound that has the capacity to seem 'natural' regardless of the music or, indeed, the movie effects that are thrown its way.

It is perhaps a measure of the regard in which I hold this processor that I'd best describe it as 'characterless', so smooth, so transparent and exquisitely detailed is its performance. Partner the AV32R with a



TAG McLaren's CDT20R/AV32R combination reveals the potential behind the brand.

transport that typically sounds rough or bright and, lo, your system will sound uncouth. Similarly, feed the AV32R's analogue outputs into a boomy-sounding power amp and your system will waffle.

I don't hold with the view that a good bit of kit will transform a duff recording or correct the mistakes of partnering equipment. Where this seems to be the case, you're simply trading one coloration

for another, subjectively preferable, form of distortion – more palatable, but no more accurate. The AV32R, in contrast, never gets in the way. It routes, manipulates and decodes *without* leaving dirty great digital fingerprints over the music.

It's worth mentioning all this because it puts the CDT20R/AV32R combo into some sort of context. Fully sync'd up with McLaren's own 75 Ohm F3-10 digital interconnects, this two-

box player enjoys the sort of low, low jitter count (sub-160psec) traditionally associated with the best one-box players.

Once again, the effortless, see-through sound of the AV32R lets the music through with the minimum clutter and undue colour. The partnering CDT20R, however, does bring a slight dryness to the party; a faintly controlling influence that has individual vocalists and performers

neatly pigeon-holed into the soundstage. A little too neatly, to my mind.

Take Ocean Colour Scene's *The Waves* as an example. Sure enough, the opening organ track paints a very deep and distant acoustic, underpinned by the rumble of a low pipe resonance while the percussion and vocals stand clearly stage-front, etched in relief. A technical masterpiece, free of compression and artifice, albeit achieved at the expense of some of this track's familiar rawness and passion. Maybe I'm just being picky. After all, most of us would rather hear what's really going on than not at all.

The combination makes light work of potential grunge like Leftfield's *Phat Planet*, dissecting the various synth lines without ever succumbing to that incessant bass line or, indeed, losing sight of the track's youthful beat. However much subjective 'control' seems to be exercised by the CDT20R, the music itself still flows. There's no hint of precision for precision's sake, just an influence best described as 'sobering' or 'mature'.

Old favourites like Shawn Colvin's *One Cool Remove* continue to sound fabulous, her voice standing clear of Mary Chapin Carpenter's harmonies. Few CD players will isolate the

characteristic colour of these two vocalists with the skill of the McLaren duo, a resolution achieved without picking apart the threads that hold the music as a whole together. The shimmer of percussion, the inflection of vocals and the rich vibration of strings all clearly and cleanly depicted while preserving the interplay, the musical ebb and flow that exists between them.

CONCLUSION

It's a tricky line to tread, but the CDT20R/AV32R combination can evidently tippy-toe through the most challenging musical performances without ever losing its composure.

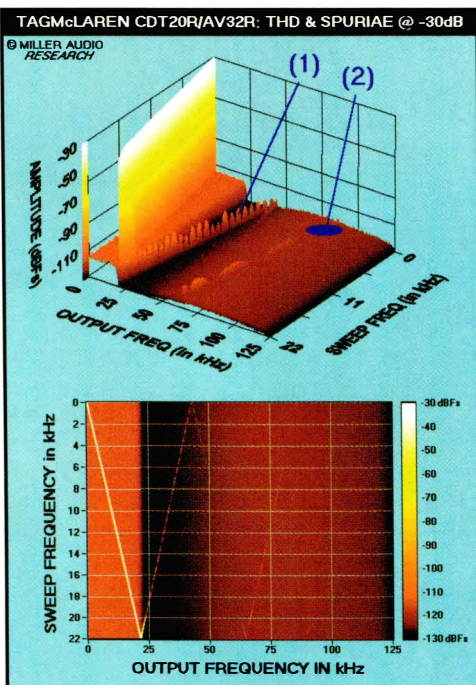
VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE AV32R	£2,000.00
PRICE CDT20R	£1,499.95

The first 'genuine' products from McLaren (rather than inherited from Audiolab) demonstrate the true engineering capabilities of the F1 champions.

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ TAG McLaren, Ermine Business Estate, Huntingdon, Cambs PE18 6XY
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One of Life's affordable luxuries . . .



Hi-Fi Choice

(December '96)

Cable Talk Studio 2
Sound *****

THE VERDICT

▲ Tonally, dynamically and rhythmically a truly first-class cable

▼ Very little to criticise.

Price: £65 (1m pair)

Home Entertainment

(August '98)

Cable Talk Studio 2
Verdict *****

▲ . . . handles music & video sound with equal aplomb . . .

▼ . . . the cable is excellent & can be used almost anywhere.



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Interconnects & Speakers Cables

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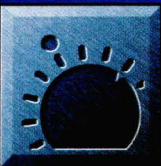
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SUPER TEST

MULTI-CHANNEL AMPS

Paul Miller allows nine hot new multi-channel amplifiers to bend his well practiced ear.

THE CAST LIST

Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P	£2,499.80
Denon AVR-3300	£800.00
Marantz SR5000	£499.90
NAD T770	£999.95
Nakamichi AV-10	£999.99
Pioneer VSX-908RDS	£1,000.00
Roksan Caspian DSP/5-channel amplifier	£2,290.00
Rotel RSP-985/RB-985mkII	£2,225.00
Sony TA-E9000ES/TA-N9000ES	£2,300.00

Is multi-channel audio a neat technological solution looking for a problem, or will it herald a real advance in listening pleasure, if not realism? After all, a good two-channel system already provides a tangible acoustic image, ambience and full-range extension without requiring extra channels by way of 'filling-in'.

One of our listeners regularly sets up surround sound demonstrations for the trade and public alike. Faced with an often less-than-convincing multi-channel performance, he remarked that in practice its shortcomings are camouflaged by "winding up the level and using speakers with a brighter



top end and wider dispersion". In other words, the system is engineered to accommodate the shortcomings of a medium that, at present, appears to be sitting uneasily on the fence between high-quality stereo and multi-channel movie soundtracks.

At this point, it's important to remember that the current and very limited sources of multi-channel audio are not truly *linear* digital formats like CD and the DVD-Audio and SACD technologies yet to come. Currently, and for the purposes of our test, we are limited to dts (Digital Theatre Sound) and Dolby Digital-encoded audio, which utilise data reduction/compression schemes of around 4:1 and 10:1 respectively, not unlike those used by the MP3 format (see *Oasis*, HFC 196).

Multi-channel amplifiers – the subject of our test – have also evolved. It wasn't so long ago that a multi-channel AV amp was first conceived as a two-channel design with three additional channels tacked on as an afterthought.

Typically, the centre channel power amp stage would be a copy of the front left and right, but an integrated IC power pack would be shoe-horned in to service the surrounds. This was in the days of Dolby Pro-Logic where, to a degree, the limited bandwidth and 'activity' of two mono rear effects channels were rather less demanding. DD and dts with their five, equal-bandwidth front, centre and surround channels are a very different proposition. Here the ability to deliver the same power at the same quality through all five

channels is vital if the surround sound is not to sag and collapse at one corner of the room.

To this end, all these amplifiers represent a real step forward from the earliest incarnations of the breed. No nasty little IC power packs here, but on the whole a mix of five sympathetic power amps in each box. All offer on-board DD and dts decoders (except the NAD) and all are fitted with 5.1-channel analogue inputs (except the Nakamichi) to service future DVD-A and SACD formats via add-on decoders.

It's audio, Jim, but not as we know it...



HINTS & TIPS

In order to maximise the performance of a multi-channel amp, apply the same techniques you would to a two-channel model. It will need running in, which may take a week, and ideally you should let it warm up for an hour or so prior to serious listening. You should place it on a dedicated hi-fi support, perhaps with additional isolation under the amp, and if you're using a separate processor/amp combination you should make sure each unit is located on a separate shelf. Never stack a processor on top of a power amp – it may prevent proper heat dissipation. By all means experiment with any effects modes an amp may offer, but remember that less convoluted processing usually means better sound. If you want to use a DVD player with a Pro-Logic only amp, buy one with six-channel inputs and make sure the DVD player has Dolby Digital decoding on board. An amp with both DD and dts onboard is the best bet for the future.

HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

We opted for a series of true blind listening tests, conducted at precisely matched levels (over all five channels) over several days. Each amplifier (or pre/power combination) was thoroughly stewed in the Lab before auditioning, though the Lab Tests were only run *after* our listening days, where its various DSP options were explored. All published measurements were taken on the QC Suite v3.1 high-speed functional testing station.

Two-channel linear PCM (CD) material included Cassandra Wilson's *Travelling Miles* (Blue Note 7243-8-54123-2-5); Me'shell NdegéOcello's *Bitter* (Maverick 9362-47439-2). Dolby Digital material included Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* (Denon DVD-02014) and Beethoven's *Egmont Overture* (Denon DEG-02001) with dts material from the dts 1999 5.1 *Demo CD* (DTS-CD99012) and Steely Dan's *Gaucho* (7102151014, from Vivante).

The listening system included matched pairs of Audio Note J (front) and K (centre and surround) loudspeakers with an REL Stentor II subwoofer. The digital source was provided by Pioneer's excellent DV-717 DVD player.

Hearty thanks go to our 'golden eared' panel: Roger Batchelor (Denon), Kevin Edwards (Talk Electronics), Mark Hockey (Kenwood), Steve P (QED) and Andy Whittle (BBG/Nakamichi). Without their perceptive comments and insight, this group test would have been all the poorer.

GLOSSARY

DD OR DOLBY DIGITAL (AC3): A compressed (10:1) digital audio format that typically contains 5 or more entirely discrete channels.

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

DSP OR DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSOR (ING): Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of incoming digital audio, 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 that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

POWER OUTPUT: The maximum output, in Watts into an 8 Ohm speaker load, when just two and all 5 main amplifier channels are driven.

ARCAM Alpha 10 DAVE

Described by Arcam as a "Modular Integrated Amplifier", the Alpha 10 has evolved since we first reviewed it back in *HFC* 181. The original amplifier design has been refined (the trend of distortion versus frequency certainly has a more even look about it), and two add-on modules have been made available.

One is called MARK (Multi-Area Remote Kontrol), which provides extra inputs and outputs for signal routing plus volume control over four independent zones (this includes four remote bus connections). For the purposes of this test, we are specifically interested in the DAVE (Digital Audio/Video Entertainment) module, which provides DPL, DD and dts decoding in an £850 upgrade. This brings the Alpha 10 integrated amp up to £1,650, and endows it with a host of new audio, video and digital inputs. Additional centre, surround and subwoofer outputs are included to feed a three-channel Alpha 10 power amp, whose 3x110W output supplements the 2x125W possible from the integrated model.

The DAVE Module includes a 'software solution' provided by Sample Rate Systems (in common with Rotel), leaving Arcam to optimise its power supplies and interface circuitry. The engine room includes three fan-cooled Motorola DSPs: one for DD, one for dts and the third for all the remaining housekeeping (speaker configuration, time delay and bass management).

Setting up the Alpha 10 is best achieved via its on-screen menu, although it's not impossible – merely tricky – to achieve the same result via the 10's scrolling, line-by-line fluorescent display.

◉ The combo makes a strong case for switching from two to five-channels.



"With its freedom from the 'pea-soup surround' effect, the Alpha 10 encourages a subtly detailed and genuinely open sound."

The comprehensive remote, incidentally, is similar to that currently used by Rotel and TAG McLaren for their outboard AV processors.

SOUND QUALITY

Perhaps not surprisingly, given its heritage, the Alpha 10 did well as a conventional two-channel amp. "Plenty of life and body," suggested one listener, in response to the decently wide and deep soundstage projected before us. Ironically, Cassandra Wilson's strong vocal projection, the powerful *thrum* of strings and positive location of instruments provided the sort of big, wide open sound that our listeners had previously associated with the best amps in multi-channel mode. Our CDs simply appeared so much more alive, vibrant and believable.

Importantly, there was a fundamental *lack* of processing to the sound, less of the sat-on effect and more contrast between the 'light and dark' of a musical performance. This very positive impression carried through to our

multi-channel session. Lyle Lovett's voice sounded a little leaner than it had with the Sony, one listener remarking: "He's taken his slippers off and put trainers on." This sharper, more upbeat rendition was deemed to be more accurate, or at least more realistic, as we were now increasingly conscious of how the instruments were being played – the brush of percussion and strumming of the guitars, for example.

The Alpha 10s gave us the impression of more going on without sounding untidy, especially through the bass, which proved firmer without loss of resonant colour. Diana Krall's vocals sounded equally sprightly, her jazz club now clear of DSP-related smog and allowing us to visualise the performers in what was clearly a very intimate acoustic session.

Although the channels were precisely matched, there was evidently less 'digital rubbish' emanating from the rear channels. What appeared via the Arcam was now cleaner, better separated and in obvious sympathy with the sound from the front.

Even the chatting of the audience was more obvious before Beethoven's *Egmont Symphony* got underway – a trivial point perhaps, but it exemplifies the Arcam's ability to drag out the subtlest musical and ambient details. The opening

strings now possessed a realistic menace, while the trumpets were clearly differentiated from the trombones – once again, more detail revealed in a fresh and realistic light. In respect of light and shade, in orchestral positioning, dynamic contrast and sheer diversity of musical colour, the Arcam proved streets ahead of the other amplifiers in this test.

CONCLUSION

With its freedom from the 'pea-soup surround' effect that exists with all the other amps in this test to some degree, the Alpha 10 encourages a subtly detailed and genuinely open sound with width, depth and height extending beyond the walls of the room.

Here is a combination that makes a strong case for switching from two to five-channel audio, even with data-compressed formats like DD/dts. Sure enough, the Alpha 10s are the costliest duet in our survey, but they make a cracking pair and come heartily Recommended. **PMI**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £2,499.80

■ An ordinary-sized amplifier packed with such a diversity of digital electronics has no right sounding this good. But, against all the engineering odds, it most certainly does.

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ A&R Cambridge, Pembroke Avenue, Waterbeach, Cambridge CB5 9PB

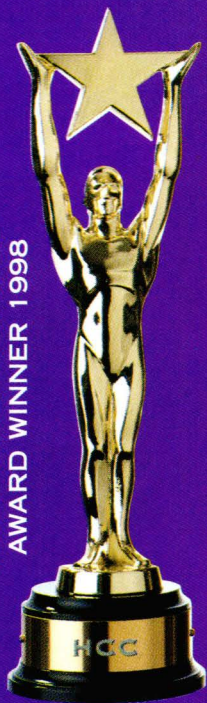
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SPECIFICATIONS

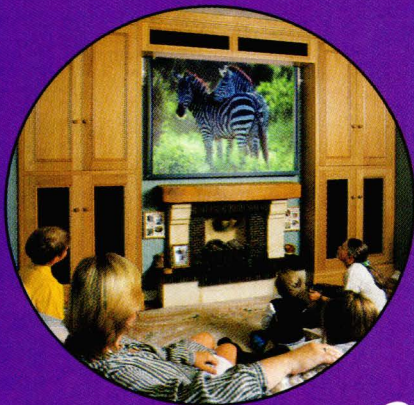
- Analogue inputs: 5 line, 2 tape, preamp
- Digital inputs: 2 coaxial, 2 optical
- Surround modes: DPL, DD, dts



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DENON AVR-3300

Denon has had success both in the budget hi-fi market with amps like the PMA-350 and at the extremes of AV with its AVC-A1D, but will this rub off on an 'intermediate' AV receiver pitched at £800? The company has included the same SHARC processor used in its costly AVC-A1D for decoding both DD and dts digital inputs, but the MPEG option has been ignored. More importantly, Denon's specified six channels' worth of Burr-Brown's 24-bit DACs, a high-quality digital volume control and, with an eye to the future, a 7.1-channel analogue input. This adds L and R effects channels to the front, centre, surround and subwoofer inputs.

The amplifier itself still only includes five individual power amp stages which are each rated at 105W into eight Ohms. However, Denon's literature avoids mentioning whether this is with all five channels being driven *simultaneously*. In reality, the AVR-3300 will deliver 2x145W but sags considerably to just 5x75W in true multi-channel mode as its power supply runs out of puff. As a result, the AVR-3300 is actually less capable of grappling with a quintet of loudspeakers than its cousins in this test. Incidentally, this isn't the first Denon to wilt under pressure: the AVR-1700 does the same thing.

Otherwise, the AVR-3300 poses no operational difficulty. It's necessary to resort to the (learning) remote handset and on-screen menu to initially set the speaker configuration (large or small), bass output mode and delay time (listening position) in addition to features like Cinema EQ, LFE level and Dynamic Range Compression. After which, it's possible to trim the respective front, centre and



"The Denon built on an impressive two-channel stereo presentation to give a very balanced pool of sound in DD and dts."

surround levels via the 3300's on-board display. Do note, however, that the AVR-3300 features 'dialogue normalisation' which matches the level from different sources such as DVD and DTV. This facility is only active with DD, *not* dts encoded software.

SOUND QUALITY

Likened to a mix of Pioneer's "fruitiness" with Nakamichi's detailing, the AVR-3300 also possessed a classiness that was Denon's own. The slide guitar solo from Lyle Lovett's *She Makes Me Feel Good* (a dts encoding) sounded that much more spontaneous, weighty and detailed, contributing to a very upbeat and fun sound that was both enjoyable and convincingly natural. Indeed, comments to the effect that this amplifier lacked a sense of 'processing' or 'compression' were repeated throughout its audition.

Diana Krall's track conjured up the feeling of a nightclub, a dark but tangible atmosphere punctuated by articulate vocals and an unhurried piano that flowed, unforced but without plodding.

This was a genuinely freer sound than that achieved by any of the other, integrated amplifiers, a sound that was very clean and even-handed, free of strain but not lazy.

Me'shell NdegéOcello (CD) sounded like "another track altogether", her image carved out of acoustic granite centre stage, while the drummer occupied a space deep into the soundstage. This was one recording we could walk into, the sort of transparent and deep sound that has more in common with a good hi-fi system than the "genetically modified and generally over-processed fodder" experience earlier in the session.

Steely Dan (dts) sounded especially crisp and dry. There was still the loss of top-end air and sparkle, but the bass line sounded very positive, free of bloom and false colour, while Fagen's voice enjoyed the same security and articulation heard with both Lyle Lovett and Diane Krall. And all with the advantage of percussion that occasionally panned around the room to amusing effect.

Taking care to account for the AVR-3300's change in volume level through its dialogue normalisation facility, our DD-encoded software succeeded in sounding as bold as the dts material. With the *Carmina Burana* disc, Denon's amp sounded impressively robust, its

musical pauses bringing a hushed silence from the panel as an air of expectancy descended on the room. Quite whether the AVR-3300 will handle five channels worth of explosive AV effects with equal confidence is another matter, however.

CONCLUSION

Because of its ambiguous blurb, I'd put money on seeing the Denon AVR-3300 rated at 5x105W in one or other hi-fi/AV magazine, when 5x75W is closer to the mark. But then, that's why you read *Hi-Fi Choice*, isn't it? Aided by the relatively high sensitivity of our test speakers, the AVR-3300 still emerged as the best integrated performer of the bunch, building on an impressive two-channel stereo presentation to give a very balanced pool of sound in both DD and dts multi-channel modes. Ironically, its reduced ability to drive all five speakers may actually prove more of a drawback when used in its 'home cinema' guise. **PMI**

Amuse your kids with the Millennial version of pin the tail on the donkey...



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£800.00

Not as powerful as Denon would have us believe, but nonetheless capable of a very impressive and genuinely high fidelity multi-channel sound. Best suited to easy-load, high sensitivity speakers.

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

Hayden Labs, Hayden House, Chiltern Hill, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks SL9 9UG
 ☎ (01753) 888447

SPECIFICATIONS

- Analogue inputs: 4 line, 3 tape, 71 ch
- Digital inputs: 1 coaxial, 3 optical
- Surround modes: DPL, DD, dts, Rock/Jazz/Movie/Game effects

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Part **3** SACD Software



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Alan Phillips, VP New Technologies, Sony Music Europe



Super Audio CD takes music listening to new levels



Last autumn saw a new generation of HiFi systems entering the stores. Developed by Sony and Philips, Super Audio CD (SACD) provides a completely new listening experience for music lovers. Not surprisingly, Sony Music Entertainment is the first of the big record companies to support the new hardware introduction through the launch of SACD software. Sony Music's support for SACD is global. The company has been retailing SACD software ever since the format's introduction in Japan last spring.

Alan Phillips, VP New Technologies at Sony Music Europe talks about the impact of this revolutionary audio carrier.

From a record company's perspective, what's the benefit of SACD?

We're in the business of selling high quality music. Our interest is the production of the highest quality software and we have been closely involved with the evolution of SACD. SACD answers the needs of the music industry. We solidly support this new carrier since, with SACD, we can finally deliver to the consumer a faithful reproduction of the musician's original performance. If you're serious about sound quality, you will love SACD.

SACD is Sony's technology. Do you intend to completely migrate to SACD?

No. A core philosophy of SACD is its completely integrated support of CD. We will of course continue to produce CDs, safe in the knowledge that they will play on all SACD players.

What attracts your artists to SACD?

SACD is quite extraordinary in the way that it makes the listener feel as if the music is being played in the same room where he or she is listening. It's like being in the studio or concert hall. It gives a sense, not just of clarity and depth, but of space as well. Not just musicians, but also producers and sound engineers will go to any length to achieve the best sound quality. For them, recording in Direct Stream Digital (DSD) is a huge benefit.

How do mastering engineers feel about SACD?

DSD is a revolutionary 1-bit recording format used to produce SACDs and our engineers love it. As a mastering tool, it enables them to be less concerned with mastering for the medium and concentrate on the music itself.

Is it only new recordings that we can hear on SACD?

No. DSD is a great archiving medium since it benefits from all the aspects of digital and it allows us to get as much information as possible from our analogue masters before they age too much. We are re-mastering many of our analogue masterpieces on DSD for eventual release on SACD. The quality is breathtaking – like hearing a new recording.

What sort of music is suited to SACD?

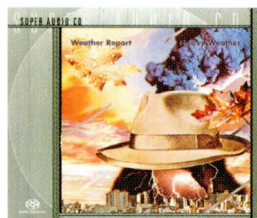
SACD is suited to all music genres. Whether you're into Jazz, Fusion, Classical, Rock or Pop music, you will experience the extra dimension SACD gives to the music.

Can the average person afford SACD?

At this early stage it has to be said that SACD is at the high end of the market, but so was CD in 1983. I'm sure, as with all inno-

Indulge yourself with an SACD from the ever-expanding collection of SACD music options brought to you by Sony Music Entertainment Europe. Here is just a sample of the SACDs on offer ...

Weather Report



Heavy Weather

Bruno Walter



Mozart: Symphony No. 38 "Prague" & No. 40

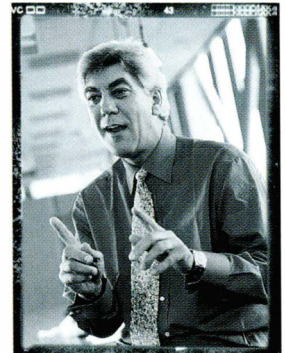
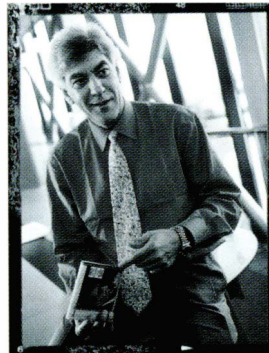
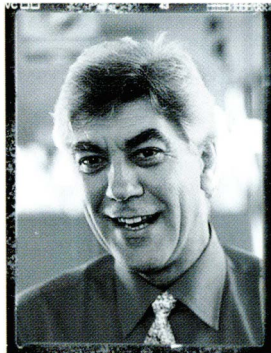
PSP

Pit Signal Processing



Using the newly developed Pit Signal Processing (PSP) technology, each SACD has an invisible watermark that protects consumers and artists against illegal copying. In addition, a visible watermark in the form of a text or image can also be imprinted on the disc. This ensures that you will always have original versions for the best sound possible.

variations, there will be a 'trickle down' effect in the future. A great thing about Sony SACD players is that they're also excellent CD players. You can continue to play your whole CD library as you build your SACD collection. This is a very important feature. Software providers can choose between several disc variations including single layer, dual layer and hybrid. The hybrid disc comprises two layers. It can be played on ordinary CD players to hear the CD quality layer and SACD players to enjoy the high definition DSD recording.



What about multichannel sound?

Multichannel is built in to the SACD specification and it will be a key feature of future SACD releases. However, there is still a lot to learn about multichannel recording, post-production and playback. We will bring it to market as soon as we have it completely right.

How secure is SACD?

Good point, piracy is a huge issue to the music industry. All SACD software incorporates an invisible watermark embedded in the disc. The SACD player uses the watermark to authenticate the disc and rejects all those discs that don't contain it. As far as we know, it is impossible to copy this invisible watermark.

Apart from the music, is there room for anything else on the SACD?

Sure, the SACD is a high capacity disc. There is room for additional material – perhaps text, graphics or even video to accompany each track. At the moment though we are most concerned with promoting the superb sound quality of SACD.

How can SACD compete with Internet-based audio carriers?

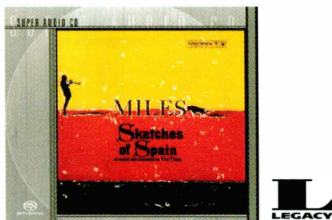
The Internet poses many challenges and opportunities to the music industry but in this respect the answer is clear. Although I hate to say 'never', you will never achieve anything like the sound quality possible with SACD through the Internet. Quality is very important in the music industry. After all, artists and record companies spend an enormous amount of time in state of the art recording studios. We all care that the crea-

tivity and talent that goes into the recording process can be enjoyed exactly as it was intended to be heard.

So, do you see the format gaining widespread industry acceptance?

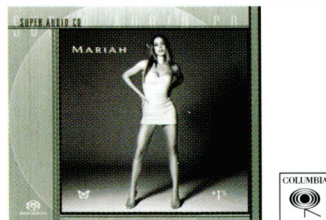
There is no reason why the music industry should not benefit from SACD. Just like CD, it's a completely open system. The final judge will be the consumer and once they have experienced the sound quality I'm confident they will want to buy SACD. Quite simply, SACD will become the reference point for audio quality.

Miles Davis



Sketches Of Spain

Mariah Carey



#1's

Glenn Gould



Bach: Inventions And Sinfonias
BWV772-801

SACD – superior audio technology developed out of experience

Direct Stream Digital DSD audio technology

2.8224 MHz sampled 1-bit audio for 100kHz frequency range, more than 120dB dynamic range within the audible (frequency) range and a pure waveform very closely resembling the analogue original.

DSD
Direct Stream Digital

SACD provides backwards and forwards compatibility with CD

SACD offers three disc variations, including a hybrid disc which can be played by SACD players and standard "Red Book" CD players.

Sony's top London studio fits DSD Mastering & Editing

DSD Mastering and Editing at Whitfield Street Studios is hailed for its high standard and ease of use.

SACD ensures complete copyright protection

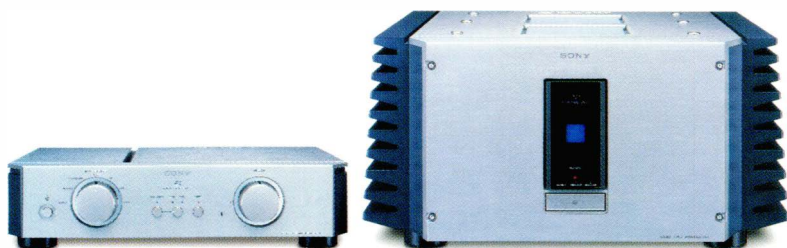
Mandatory invisible watermarking; optional visible watermarking; and optional encryption protects copyright holders against unauthorised copying and piracy.

Many record companies produce SACDs

Since the launch, many leading record companies, including key audiophile labels and multinationals have started producing SACDs.

Sony launches new state-of-the-art amplifiers and wide-range loudspeakers to optimise SACD playback

SACD launched in Japan on 21 May, in Europe on 27 August and in North America on 31 August



TA-E1/TA-N1

Sony's pre- and power amplifier, designed to unlock the full potential of Super Audio CD.

Part 1: SACD Format

Part 2: SACD Key Technologies

Preview Part 4: SACD Systems



- Interview with Jeffrey van Ede, General Manager, Marketing at Sony HiFi Europe.
- Reactions from consumers and retail to the new high density audio format.
- The consumer's incentive for evolution from CD to Super Audio CD.
- The unique SACD benefits of outstanding sound quality, versatility and compatibility.

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MARANTZ SR5000

This may be the 'budget' model in our survey, but the decisions made by Marantz's engineers in trimming its AV receiver to a £500 price point have worked in favour of multi-channel audio. Video switching is kept to a minimum and there's no TV-based on-screen menu to worry about, so the multi-channel music enthusiast can simply dial-up DD or dts decoding from the SR5000's front panel or via its accompanying 'learning' remote.

Trimming the centre and surround delay, the front, centre, surround and sub levels plus the centre mode (none, small or large) is quickly accomplished. The front and surround speaker modes are defaulted to what would be termed 'large' with more feature-packed amps, although even here Marantz has engineered some added 'colour' into both upper bass and mid treble response regions.

The rotary encoder used for its volume control is a little stiff and requires a seemingly endless number of revolutions to wind up the wick. Otherwise, the SR5000 is a doddle to use and there's even the benefit of RDS/Radio Text with its AM/FM tuner section.

Under the bonnet, the various video, analogue and digital audio inputs are accommodated on separate PCBs while the five power amplifiers are strung in a line along a common heatsink. This is an excellent example of modern, cost-efficient production engineering. Meanwhile, the DD/dts decoding is handled by one of Yamaha's YSS912 LSIs, while the

Marantz has engineered some added 'colour' into upper bass and mid treble.



"The SR5000 is a fun-sounding amplifier, but you wouldn't necessarily take it home to meet your mum."

engine room easily meets Marantz's 5x70W specification with a full 5x105W into eight Ohms, increasing to 2x135W in plain vanilla stereo mode. Otherwise, noise is a little high and distortion picks up to about 0.1 per cent through upper mid and treble – but, for the price, this looks to be a very well-judged package.

SOUND QUALITY

With shades of Marantz's upbeat CD6000OSE ringing in my mind (see HFC 195), our blind panel was unanimous in its view of this partnering amplifier with its big, bold and confident sound. Sure enough, it's a little 'dirtier' than the Denon and Nakamichi, but it has a moodier, darker personality that portrays the rawness and natural roughness of a performance to good effect.

Both the Cassandra Wilson and Me'shell NdegéOcello CDs sounded somewhat 'sleazier', their voices possessing a live edge that was glossed over in other performances. It was suggested that this encourages a more immediate and bouncier sound that's "miked

up for a live performance through a PA rather than inside a studio".

The multi-channel dts mixes did sound a little cleaner. Lyle Lovett's *She Makes Me Feel Good* was rather less grubby than its two-channel cousin, the guitar strings plucked with equal aplomb regardless of which front, centre or rear speaker he happened to have stumbled across on his acoustic walkabout. Steely Dan's *Gaucho* also delivered a very punchy performance, the driving bass line sounding as dry and positive as it had with the Denon while avoiding the pervasive 'bloom' that had afflicted the Pioneer.

Once again, however, we were aware of an acoustic 'cut-and-paste' effect, the front channels being augmented by an injection of extra percussion, strings and backing vocals from the rear channels. We couldn't help but wonder whether a good stereo recording might sound just as ambient without the need for a rear-channel band-aid, but the Marantz's handling of these multi-channel effects was still very entertaining and not unmusical.

The explosive timpani that populate the DD-encoding of *Carmina Burana* played right into the hands of the Marantz with its full-on sound, a combination of gruffness, dramatic presence and sheer "welly" that blew out the acoustic cobwebs. Again, the SR5000's musical flair prompted the suggestion it was

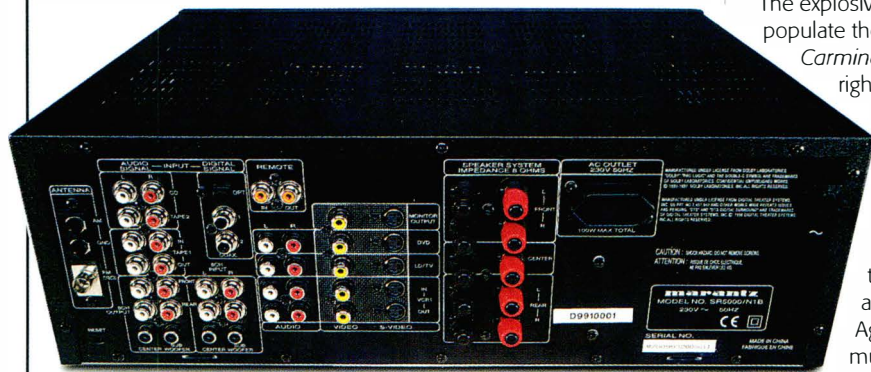
"clearly up for a good time", although I wasn't sure that references to *Birds Of A Feather's* Dorian were entirely appropriate. This is a fun-sounding amplifier, but you wouldn't necessarily take it home to meet your mum.

CONCLUSION

By daubing its music across the room with the broad strokes of a palette knife, the SR5000 succeeds in sounding loud and entertainingly busy, albeit with what was described as "a uniform grubbiness". Frankly, the amplifier seems to want to party all the time and this, with hindsight, will prove more convincing with some musical styles than others. Just make sure you watch out for quick and seemingly dramatic demonstrations before handing over your wad of beer vouchers.

But even with this in mind, it's difficult to see how the SR5000, with its onboard decoding and 5.1 channel analogue inputs to accommodate future outboard decoders, can be anything other than an unqualified success. **PMI**

VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£499.90
<p>Something of a rough diamond, the SR5000 remains a powerful and entertaining package, complete with all essential multi-channel facilities.</p> <p>TWO YEARS GUARANTEE</p> <p>Marantz, Kingsbridge House, Padbury Oaks, 575-583 Bath Road, Longford, Middlesex UB7 0EH (01753) 680868</p>	
SPECIFICATIONS	
<p>Analogue inputs: 5 line, 2 tape, 5.1 ch</p> <p>Digital inputs: 2 coaxial, 1 optical</p> <p>Surround modes: DPL, DD, dts, Theatre/Hall/Stadium/Church effects</p>	



NAD T770

Having made its reputation with little grey-coloured amplifiers, NAD has bent to the multi-channel wind and is now offering a couple of large, grey-coloured AV receivers. Top dog is the T770, a rugged performer that's rated at 5x70W but capable of sustaining 2x110W in stereo mode and a full 5x90W with multi-channel sources. DPL and DD surround modes are indicated on its main display, along with NAD's proprietary EARS (Enhanced Ambience Recovery System), which replaces conventional DSP malarkey such as 'Hall', 'Church' and 'Stadium' effects. However, dts is conspicuous by its absence. And just in case you can't see the display, you should hear the fan kick in once the amp is running in five-channel mode...

NAD's soft-clipping circuit prevents the T770 from violently hitting the end stops at high power while what it describes as an ISC (Impedance Sensing Circuit) power supply replaces a traditional eight and four Ohms speaker selection switch. However, the T770 is no fit-and-forget amplifier. Various functions, including access to the tuner preset bank, speaker size selection and distance (delay time) can only be set via NAD's on-screen TV menu while speaker level calibration, multi-source and choice of digital input remains accessible from the T770's onboard display.

Which brings me to another issue. Early versions of the T770 were equipped with AC3/RF decoding via what, in later samples, was to become a third S/PDIF digital input. Similarly, early T770s used Crystal DACs which were replaced by Burr-Brown's PCM1718 (an 18-bit, two-channel DAC). Stock of the 'original' T770

❖ Fans of fans can get their kicks by cranking the NAD to five-channel mode.



"The freedom from a constricting pea-soup of processing was refreshing, even though any sense of vibrancy was disappointing."

is still in the warehouse and so, I presume, on sale. So if backwards compatibility with your LaserDisc player is important, look out for an 'AC3/RF' logo on the amp's third digital input. New user manuals are also edited along these lines.

Under the bonnet, Motorola's trusty 56009 processor handles all Dolby decoding, while a 56004 provides the bass management and EARS surround. Incidentally, NAD's volume control looks like a rotary encoder (the display even tracks the output in steps from -58dB through to +20dB) but actually controls a set of 'analogue' chip attenuators. Perhaps as a result, the amplifier's noise is rather lower than anticipated.

SOUND QUALITY

That this amplifier can be "less than tactful in its delivery" was evident with both stereo and DD-encoded material. With the former, NAD's receiver marked a return to a rather heavy, overblown bass and up-front vocal presentation, though its clear stereo imaging did attract some positive comment. Otherwise, even the laid-back Me'shell

NdegéOcello was brought out of her shell, prompting one listener to observe: "Even when it's quiet, it's loud". With disappointment etched on the faces of the panel, we moved swiftly on to the DD-encoding of Beethoven's *Egmont Symphony*. This disc opens with the orchestra tuning up and the audience settling, but even here there was not quite the open acoustic possible, the applause seemed muted and the silence that followed was just too 'dead'.

In contrast with the uncouth demeanour of the stereo auditioning, the DD presentation was rather lacking in character, demonstrating neither roughness nor textural subtlety. However, this wasn't the worst presentation by a long chalk – its freedom from a constricting pea-soup of processing was refreshing, even though any sense of vibrancy or occasion was still disappointingly weak. This was largely due to an oddly narrow acoustic, for despite its sound being squirted from all corners of the room, there was a strong front-to-back presence with little weight or activity to the sides. "Rather like stereo," it was suggested, "with some rear-wall reinforcement and little depth to boot."

Carmina Burana marked a return to the gung-ho presentation heard with our stereo CDs, but while we liked the attack of cymbals, we were unable to separate the timpani and piano during the opening crescendo. Sadly, the subsequent rise and fall of orchestra and chorus was

unimpressive, unable to build any tangible atmosphere as instruments collided with one another in confusion. The acoustic 'thickness' suffered by both the Pioneer and Sony amplifiers, however, was gratifyingly absent.

CONCLUSION

For what will be perceived as a minimalist AV receiver at a not insignificant price, the T770 must rely more than most on its sonic prowess to overcome omissions such as dts decoding. In this regard, the amplifier failed to live up to expectations, proving unable – or unwilling – to ride the dynamic turbulence of multi-channel music. Without the benefit of comparative experience, the T770 could sound superficially impressive. In reality, it's big and forward but hardly musically cohesive or satisfying. Perhaps the forthcoming T760, which does include dts decoding, will prove a more successful brew. Watch this space.

PMI



VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆

BUILD ★★☆☆☆

VALUE ★★☆☆☆

PRICE £999.95

❖ NAD's Lego-brick styling remains an acquired taste, although the amplifier(s) are more than able to tough it out with a wide range of speakers. Sadly, the T770's performance lacks both transparency and subtlety, while the omission of dts decoding will be a drawback for some at this price point.

TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ The Audio Club, 15 Faraday Road, Aylesbury, Bucks HP19 3RY
☎ (01296) 482017

SPECIFICATIONS

- Analogue inputs: 5 line, 4 tape, 5.1 ch
- Digital inputs: 2 Coaxial, 1 Optical
- Surround modes: DD, DPL, EARS effects

NAKAMICHI AV-10

The most powerful integrated AV receiver in our survey hails from a company still best known for the superb engineering of its cassette decks, back in the days before MD took its toll on tape. For a number of years since then, Nakamichi has been broadening its product base, although its hi-fi separates were absent from our shores until recently. The AV-10 is the company's top-of-the-range receiver, with (Crystal-based) DPL, DD and dts decoding accessible via any one of four digital inputs.

Samples rates up to 48kHz are accepted at a maximum 24-bit word length, although the final Crystal CS4329 DACs are 20-bit rather than notional 24-bit devices. Either way, the final 79dB A-wtd S/N ratio is somewhat lower than expected, even if its source is 'analogue' as opposed to 'digital'.

The unit comes complete with a learning remote control, already equipped to handle other Nakamichi separates. Gratifyingly, from the point of view of the multi-channel purist, the AV-10 does not feature a baffling on-screen menu and, therefore, does not require the services of a TV before it's properly set up. Instead, adjustment of front, centre and surround speaker size (mode), delay time and output level (cal) is all registered, via remote, on the AV-10's attractive, orange display.

The bulk of the AV-10 is occupied by its two independent power supplies, which are divided between its front/surround and centre channel amplifiers. In practice, it easily achieves its 5x100W specification by delivering a full

❖ The AV-10 does not feature an on-screen menu, so set-up is TV-free.



“Subjectively, there is some loss of top-end air and extension, but multi-channel music still possesses engaging subtlety.”

5x140W in multi-channel mode and a throbbing 2x185W with two-channel stereo. So far so good; and the AM/FM tuner section also offers 30 presets and a gaggle of RDS utilities.

Sadly, Nakamichi has made a potentially fatal omission. The AV-10, you see, is equipped with line-level outputs for its front, centre, surround and sub channels, but is bereft of equivalent inputs to service future multi-channel formats such as DVD-A and SACD...

SOUND QUALITY

First time around, and auditioned after the Pioneer, the Nakamichi proved more immediate-sounding, detailed and involving as a two-channel stereo amplifier. Its naturally spacious sound was capable of filling the room with an ambient stereo performance. “This sounds like multi-channel and it's only two!” exclaimed one listener. The snare drum and cymbals dropped back into a deep soundstage, for example, allowing Me'shell NdegéOcello's vocals to soar stage-front, achieving the sort

of articulate and communicative performance we know to be possible with a decent, conventional two-channel system.

This extra detailing and transparency carried through to our multi-channel auditioning where Lyle Lovett's fresh and colourful vocals successfully escaped the five loudspeakers. The accompanying piano sounded very 'big' – almost as if we were *inside* its frame – but the effect was still surprisingly subtle and not some crude artifice. Steely Dan's *Gaucho* also sounded bold and fresh, the unmistakable drawl unaffected by the slight sibilance that afflicted the rear-channel harmonies. Percussion, too, was a little imprecise and grainy, but overall far preferable to the thicker and heavier sound of the Pioneer.

The brooding presence of *Carmina Burana*, by contrast, was still localised at the front of the room, despite this being a DD encoding. Another DD recording, Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*, begins with a convincing acoustic overview of the orchestra tuning up and the audience settling into their seats, all of which was

portrayed well enough by the Nakamichi. On this occasion, the music possessed a realistic weight, which added to the ambience rather than a general heaviness and allowed a better sensation of space and scale to develop.

This, in turn, was reflected in a good sense of drama as the strings built together with woodwind to a genuinely musical climax, rather than one relying on special effects. A broad 'thumbs-up' from the panel, then.

CONCLUSION

The Nakamichi AV-10 is tricky to sum up. Its exterior is attractive and neatly organised, but inside its production engineering is an object lesson in untidiness. Subjectively, there is some loss of top-end air and extension, a loss of bite that might otherwise contribute to a sense of airiness or atmosphere, but multi-channel music still possesses a great deal of subtlety that's clearly very engaging indeed.

For this alone, the AV-10 might warrant Recommendation. If only its lack of 5.1-channel inputs did not thwart any chance of future-proofing with an external multi-channel decoder, if and when such boxes are available. As a result, the AV-10 is a £1,000, one-shot, one-time deal.

PMI



VERDICT	
SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£999.99
<p>■ A very powerful AV receiver that's easy to install and set up but capable of a surprisingly civilised and subtle performance. But remains a costly option.</p> <p>■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE</p> <p>☒ BBG Distribution, Unit 3, Barratt Way, Tudor Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 5QS</p> <p>☎ (0208) 863 9117</p>	
SPECIFICATIONS	
<p>■ Analogue inputs: 4 line, 3 tape</p> <p>■ Digital inputs: 2 coaxial, 2 optical</p> <p>■ Surround modes: DPL, DD, dts, Natural & Hall effects</p>	

PIONEER VSX-908RDS

Directly replacing the VSA-E06 amplifier, the VSX-908RDS AV receiver ranks as Pioneer's most comprehensively equipped unit to date. Its substantial carcass provides a home for an AC3/RF decoder and four digital inputs that are specified up to 24-bit/96kHz, making the '908 fully compatible with the non-downsampled digital outputs of its own hi-tech DVD players. In fact, Pioneer's DV-717 was used as the reference deck for this entire test.

Motorola-based DSP takes over the reins for decoding of DD, dts and MPEG-encoded sources, while home cinema fans are treated to the bells and whistles experience of THX Ultra (the original and fullest THX spec). With DSP on tap additional features are offered, including a Midnight Listening Mode which draws loud and quiet sounds closer together, a Digital Noise Reduction facility plus a number of fancy effects modes. The motorised, digital volume control also operates over an exceptionally wide 92dB range, although the amp's 'real life' S/N ratio is a little weaker at just 80dB (re. 1W/eight Ohms).

The heart of the machine is its amplifiers and here Pioneer, like Denon, could do with clarifying its true capabilities. The specification sheet clearly states "110Wx5" while the blurb, quite correctly, espouses the benefits of matched amplification. In practice, however, the VSX-908RDS will deliver 2x110W in stereo mode, but falls to a lower 5x80W in multi-channel mode. Tut, tut. This is also the only amplifier in our test that is *not* equipped with decent 4mm-style

Look, Ma – absolutely no 4mm-style speaker cable binding posts.



"The lack of differentiation between strings reminded us that this amp was still not particularly transparent or insightful."

speaker cable binding posts, due to absurd EC regulations.

Otherwise, and in common with most feature-packed AV receivers, the VSX-908RDS can only be properly set up via its on-screen menu system where the speaker configuration, placement (delay) and effects are optimised and associated with specific inputs. Multi-operation macros may also be programmed in via remote, while in day-to-day use it's possible to directly trim the front-centre-surround balance by looking at the 908's on-board fluorescent display. So the VSX-908RDS would appear to offer something for every type of enthusiast.

SOUND QUALITY

Well, perhaps not every enthusiast, because in both two and multi-channel modes this receiver was described as "fruity, very relaxed and arguably a little soft and syrupy". Me'shell NdegéOcello was neither strained nor aggressive, the big and relaxed sound free of any annoying top-end grittiness. "But then, there's not much top to speak of at all," remarked one

panellist. Typically, central performers sound a little larger than life, and the overall balance is lively enough when not pushed.

Lyle Lovett's dts-encoded *She Makes Me Feel Good* certainly brightened the mood of the panel. On this occasion, we really felt in among the performers – a fun experience that drew our collective attention away from the usual two-channel anomalies like tonal balance and imaging.

The artificial scattering of strings and backing vocals from front to rear was rather like listening through high quality headphones. It really covers up a multitude of sins until, sadly, the music 'busies up' and its sound quickly becomes compressed and confused. *Carmina Burana*, a DD encoding, sounded a trifle distant. "Sounds not unlike mono," quipped one listener – all rather surprising considering a five-channel amplifier should have a head start in the ambience department.

Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No2* and the *Egmont Overture*, both DD encodings, were more successful at immersing us in a pool of sound – the coughs and occasional clatters of the audience behind our heads

were particularly amusing. Yet, although this proved a big and meaty sound, the lack of differentiation between strings and the thickness of the woodwind reminded us that this amp was still not particularly transparent or insightful. In such instances,

the surround sound can be less than 'three dimensional' simply because it is inherently less transparent and detailed.

CONCLUSION

In the strictest terms, the relaxed sound of Pioneer's VSX-908RDS lacks the biting clarity, the walk-through soundstaging and, ironically, the believable ambience possible from a good stereo amplifier, though its syrupy outlook is not unenjoyable.

Somehow, although we knew elements of its performance were compromised – dynamics and extension particularly – the overall wash of sound was still suitably fluid. Nevertheless, a little more raw energy and gutsy determination and a little less DSP frippery would have suited our listening panel just fine.

The VSX-908RDS is clearly aimed at the home cinema buff, not the up-and-coming multi-channel audiophile!

PMi



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£1,000.00

A supremely flexible heavyweight AV receiver whose sound is also just a little too stodgy and lacking in crispness. Best suited to eight Ohm speakers of moderate to high sensitivity.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

Pioneer High Fidelity, Pioneer House, Hollybush Hill, Stoke Poges, Slough, Bucks SL2 4QP
(01753) 789789

SPECIFICATIONS

- Analogue inputs: 4 line, 4 tape, 5.1 ch
- Digital inputs: 2 coaxial, 2 optical
- Surround modes: AC3/RF, DPL, DD, dts, MPEG, 6 effects modes

ROKSAN Caspian DSP/5-channel

Weighing in at more than I care to think about, Roksan's unimaginatively titled 'five-channel' power amplifier is still the closest thing we have to an audiophile amp in this group test. Beneath the soft-textured steel bonnet are five identical power amplifier cards, each with its own rectifier and reservoir capacitors, bipolar power transistors and heatsinking, and each tapping into a huge 1,000VA toroidal transformer. And it's this monstrous coil of copper that lends the 'five channel' much of its prodigious bulk. Fortunately, it also does a pretty good job of sustaining each of these power amp cards while driving five speakers simultaneously – a fact of multi-channel life that's evidently not taken quite so seriously by all manufacturers.

Roksan rates the beast at 5x85W, but it's really capable of 5x130W and more besides into lower four Ohm loads. This is why you simply can't rely on manufacturers' specifications when building a system: on paper, the Denon AVR-3300 might seem to offer 5x105W, and so best the Roksan 5-channel. In practice, of course, the situation is reversed...

The partnering Caspian DSP preamp is very straightforward to set up. A DIP-switch on the rear panel allows you to select or deselect both surround and centre speakers (which are always band-limited to a 'small' configuration) while also activating the subwoofer channel.

These hard settings are directly linked to the bass management section of the Zoran-based DSP used inside the Caspian. If you can fork out £1,295, it will buy you DPL and DD decoding and – just too late for review – dts decoding, now that all of the appropriate paperwork has been signed, sealed and delivered.

Ⓞ The beast is rated at 5x85W, but it's capable of 5x130W and more besides.



“The Roksan has a genuinely classy sound, a clean dark and deep presentation that allows climaxes to grow and soar.”

SOUND QUALITY

This amplifier has a very even-handed balance, although its (two-channel) soundstaging was described by our panel as “convex – forward in the centre and gradually falling away at the sides”. It's rather like watching a TV whose image is less well focused towards the edges in a progressive rather than abrupt manner. Otherwise, its deadpan presentation was likened to Rotel's, although the Roksan's bass is somewhat more taut.

Lyle Lovett (CD) sounded evenly paced rather than raw or immediate, a more relaxed presentation that was arguably better suited to Cassandra Wilson's *Travelling Miles*. In this instance, her voice enjoyed a 'front seat' presentation, all the while ably supported by bass and guitar.

In absolute terms, our panel put the Roksan's meatiness second to the transparency and definition of the Arcam, but were keen to point out that it's smooth and self-effacing for long-term, stress-free listening.

Switching to Dolby Digital brought the best from the DSP decoder and also demonstrated the true capacity of those additional power amp channels. Beethoven's *Egmont Overture* represented a great step forward, “like listening through a huge pair of headphones”. A great deal of 'real' musical and ambient detail was audible from the surrounds (rather than what was often perceived as digital hash), while the front was bonded with a strong but taut bass and a delightfully vivid string section.

Only the brass section was criticised for being a little withdrawn; otherwise, this weightier presentation was preferred for its improved resolution of lower strings – cellos and double bass were now separable – building into a deep and powerful ambience.

The quiet choral introduction to *Carmina Burana* lacked the sinister atmosphere achieved by the Arcam, but the rumble of the lower registers was distinctly superior, the bass drum underpinning the piano chord now clear for all to hear. And as the chorus rises to full strength, the Caspian rises alongside, building a weighty, massive sound – free of boominess – that reflects the changes in dynamics and tempo with swift efficiency. Along with the Arcam, the richer-sounding Roksan has a genuinely classy sound, free of greyness, a clean, dark and deep presentation that allows orchestral

climaxes to grow and soar without any obvious compression. The sound just gets bigger, bolder and indomitably confident.

CONCLUSION

This is a powerful-sounding combination capable of driving big systems with great confidence. The Roksan duet might defer to the Arcam Alpha 10 in its rendition of the subtlest detail, but it outperforms all with its controlled and directed weight. The so-called 'five-channel' amplifier represents particularly good value, offering oodles of power almost regardless of your choice in speakers – all for under a grand. And now the dts licensing has been signed and delivered, the matching Caspian preamp also offers the requisite features for the committed audiophile. Highly Recommended. **PMI**

VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£2,290.00

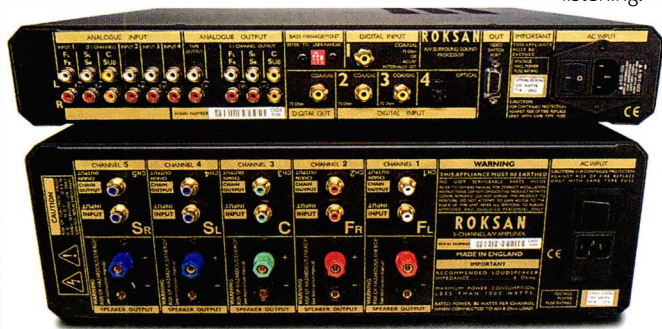
Ⓞ A potent combination offering the bare essentials of DD and dts decoding. Look elsewhere for frills, look here for no-nonsense sound quality.

■ TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

✉ Roksan, 6 Northfield Industrial Estate, Beresford Avenue, Alperton, Middlesex HA0 19W
☎ (0208) 900 6802

SPECIFICATIONS

- Analogue inputs: 4 line, 1 tape, 5.1 ch
- Digital inputs: 3 coaxial, 1 optical
- Surround modes: DPL, DD, dts



- AAVIK RACKS
- ACOUSTIC ENERGY
- ACOUSTIC PRECISION
- AIWA
- AKAI
- ALCHEMIST
- ALPHASON
- APOLLO
- ARCAM
- ATACAMA
- ATC
- AUDIOLAB
- AUDIOQUEST
- AVI
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- B & W
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- LAT
- LEXICON
- LINN
- LINN KNEKT
- LOEWE
- LUTRON LIGHTING
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- & MANY MORE

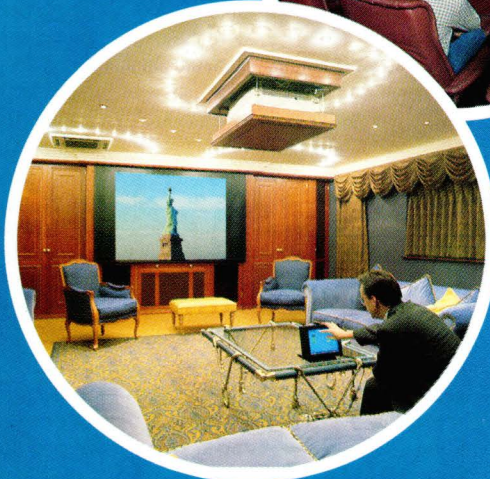
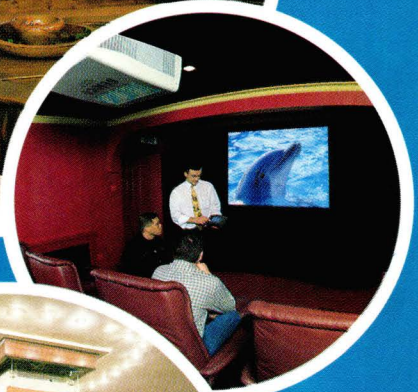
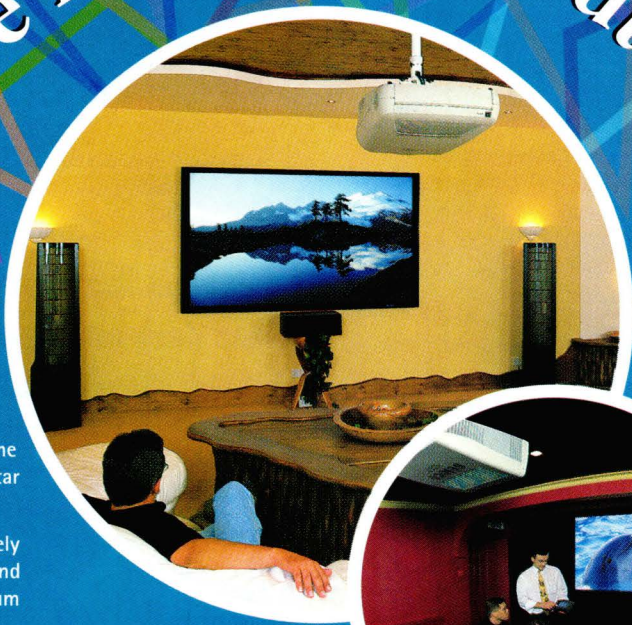


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ROTEL RSP-985/RB-985 MkII

At first glance, Rotel's £1,600 RSP-985 processor looks, well, a little unadventurous. It's dominated by a large, rotary volume control and flanked by push-button input/tape out selectors with a row of LEDs to denote the dts, DD or Pro-Logic surround mode. But look again and cast your eyes in the direction of that button-fest of a remote control (more than 50 buttons – count 'em!) that not only manhandles the volume knob from the far reaches of the room but also provides access to the comprehensive software that lies within. The RSP-985 is one surround preamp you just can't use without a TV...

Step-by-step set-up menus are provided for the speaker configuration and interchannel delay, the digital input status (including volume offset), the subwoofer configuration (including the mix level for DD and dts software) in addition to setting the balance between all 5.1 channels. There's even the inclusion of THX Ultra to enhance dts, DD and DPL movies. A simpler one-line display appears on your TV when primary functions such as volume and input selection are addressed, but the bleak front panel of the RSP-985 is really no assistance at all. Lose that RR-939 remote, and you're dead in the water.

Still, as an aid to reducing cable spaghetti, the RSP-985 processor does include two 25-pin D-Type sockets to accommodate multiple analogue inputs and outputs such as 5.1-channel audio, for example. This is complemented by another D-Type socket on the rear of the RB-985 MkII power amplifier that, naturally, also includes standard phono inputs. Unusually, this amp has been designed from the outset to drive five channels, a boast proven by the relatively small drop

◉ The RB-985 MkII has been designed from the outset to drive five channels.



"The excellent detail of strings, percussion and backing earned the Rotels the accolade of 'a safe pair of hands'."

in output from 2x160W to 5x130W in multi-channel mode. Like Roksan's five-channel offering, the RB-985 MkII has the capacity to grapple with virtually any choice of loudspeakers.

Back to the RSP-985, and it's worth noting its DSP heart is sourced from Sample Rate Systems of Finland, as is Arcam's DAVE module. But that doesn't mean they will sound the same...

SOUND QUALITY

Unaware of the make or magnitude of any of these amplifiers, our listeners ranked the Rotels ahead of the foggier-sounding Sony combo, but still thought it a little less transparent or insightful than Arcam's Alpha 10s. This is really only evident with uncompressed two-channel CD, where its slightly lumpy-sounding bass can bring an unevenness to the music as a whole. Plucked string bass, for example, was often difficult to isolate from the mix. Nevertheless, Cassandra Wilson was projected in a more positive and

forward fashion than usual, and preferred for it, while the top-end percussion sounded as light and sharply detailed as with the Arcam.

Any 'mugginess' is evidently dependent on the music at hand. Light and fresh-sounding recordings are better suited to the Rotel with its close-up but rarely invasive sound, which is clear and detailed but 'acoustically damped', lacking a full and spacious ambience. Increasing the volume level did not make its projection any more immediate or the presentation any more spontaneous – it simply confirmed our suspicions this was a slightly "soft-sounding amplifier".

The definition of both Lyle Lovett's and Diana Krall's vocals (dts) was also very slightly 'soft' but the virtuosity of the individual performers, the excellent detail of strings, percussion and backing earned the Rotels the accolade of "a safe pair of hands". This is all in marked contrast with the up-and-at-'em approach of the Marantz, for example, and the more taut articulation of the Arcam.

But there is also a hint of compression on the part of the Rotel processor. The choral section from *Carmina Burana* (DD) tended to run into itself very slightly, still developing a grand acoustic even though the tension was diluted by the reticence of the brass. The busier and more complex the

piece, the less distinct it became. "Someone's shut the door and turned the volume up behind," remarked one listener.

CONCLUSION

The panel applauded the seamless, unflagging quality of this combo and were content to Recommend it, while recognising a slight shortfall in vitality and range of tonal colour. Indeed, Rotel's own integrated amps and CD players prove the company can hit the musical jackpot on a regular basis, but this combination has been conceived for a slightly different market.

Movie magic rather than multi-channel audio will be its hunting ground, but even there the RB-985 MkII will undoubtedly make its mark. **PMI**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE £2,225.00

Rotel's hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive duet. Its silky-smooth, unflagging sound will tame many an AV system.

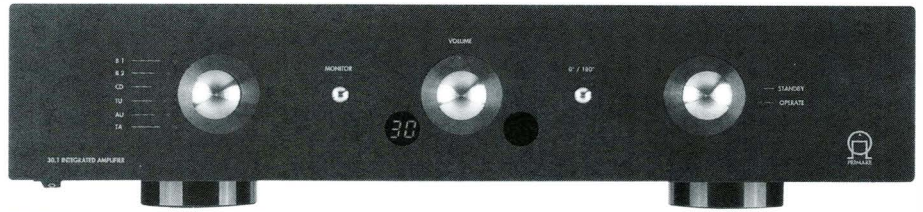
TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

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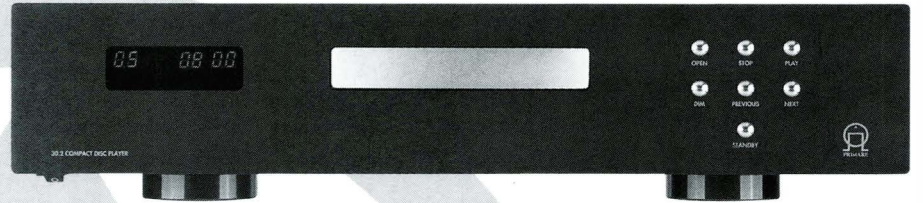
SPECIFICATIONS

- Analogue inputs: 3 line, 4 tape, 1 channel (DB25 connector)
- Digital inputs: 4 coaxial, 1 optical
- Surround modes: DPL, DD, dts

A 30.1 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

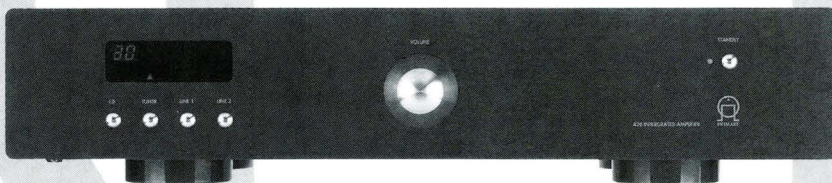


D 30.2 COMPACT DISC PLAYER

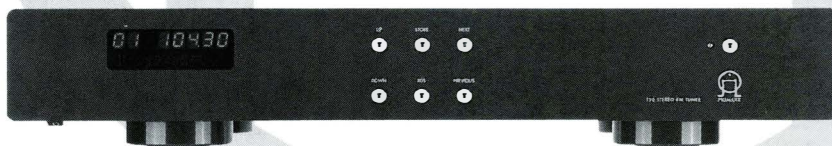


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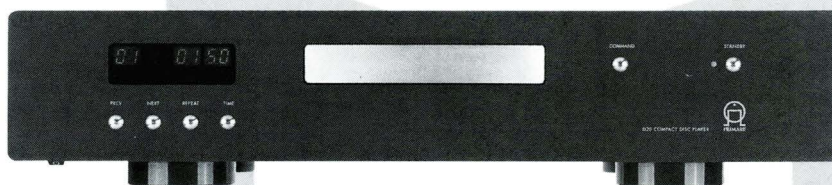
A 20 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



T 20 STEREO FM TUNER



D 20 COMPACT DISC PLAYER



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Email: cse_uk@compuserve.com

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The Sound of Music. 01892 547003

B&B Hifi, Bracknell. 01344 424556

B&B Hifi, Reading. 0118 958 3730.

EAST ANGLIA

The Audio File, Cambridge. 01223 368305
Sounds Perfection, Helston. 01326 221372
Spectral Sound, Chippenham. 01249 654357
Audio Excellence, Bristol. 0117 926 4975

MIDLANDS

Midland Audio Exchange, Kidderminster. 01562 822236
Music Matters, Solihull. 0121 742 0254
Sevenoaks Hifi, Worcester. 01905 612929

NORTH EAST

Acoustica, Chester. 01244 344227
Hifi Showrooms, Congleton. 01260 280017
Practical Hifi, Preston. 01772 883958
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A Fanthorpe Ltd. 01482 223096
Gilson Audio, Middlesborough. 01642 248793
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SCOTLAND

Glasgow Audio, Glasgow. 0141 332 4707
Holburn Hifi, Aberdeen. 01224 585713
The Music Hall, Edinburgh. 0131 555 3963
Loud and Clear, Edinburgh. 0131 226 6500

IRELAND

The Hifi Shop, Belfast. 01232 327604
Lyric Hifi, Belfast. 01232 381296

Wales

Audio Excellence, Swansea. 01792 474608



SONY TA-E9000ES/TA-N9000ES

It'll not try to convince you that £2,000 is anything less than a lot of dosh, but Sony's gold-coloured breeze blocks, squeezed tight with advanced digital technology, give the impression of costing a lot more. Bells and whistles are the order of the day here, with Sony's feature-packed TA-E9000ES AV preamp being joined by the equally fabulous RM-TP501E 'remote commander'. This palmset, with its backlit LC touchscreen, is sufficiently complex to deserve a 25-page manual in its own right. Here its ability to access every conceivable speaker mode (distance, height, position and roll-off frequency), delay, equalisation setting, trim, balance and surround mode is explored in exquisite detail.

A popular SHARC processor lies at the preamp's heart, providing DPL, DD, dts and MPEG decoding and leaving a clutch of Sony's own CXD2562/CXA8042 current pulse DAC combinations to feed the requisite front, centre, surround and subwoofer outputs. I also counted no fewer than 27 effects modes available to manipulate the perceived ambience of both two- and multi-channel sources.

Incidentally, the coaxial digital inputs will accept 96kHz data-streams at a 24-bit wordlength, giving the TA-E9000ES full access to non-downsampled digital outputs from, for example, Pioneer's latest DVD players. However, Sony has omitted to include a bank of 5.1-channel analogue inputs to service future outboard decoders.

The partnering TA-N9000ES five-channel power amplifier

Hooking this up could be a long haul – don't forget your Kendall mint cake.



"The midrange has the capacity to sound very natural and its sense of scale is often impressive, but fine detail is still suspect."

includes settings for 'warm-up' and very high power two-channel bridged operation. Ordinarily, it'll sustain 5x110W with the speaker selection switch set to eight Ohms. In the four Ohms position, this falls to 5x70W. Despite giving the impression of harbouring five identical amplifiers, its two front amps suffer just 0.002 per cent distortion at HF (re 1W/8 Ohms), increasing to 0.015 per cent via the centre channel and 0.06 per cent via the surrounds when driven in five-channel mode.

SOUND QUALITY

For this test, I engaged Sony's 'Auto Format Decoding' facility, which applies a neutral decode of DD and dts inputs and bypasses all previously set effects modes (rather like a tone defeat switch for modern DSP). But the 9000-series still sounded suspiciously 'processed' in two-channel mode.

Cassandra Wilson was joined by a "drunk drummer" – such was the softness and persistence of the bass, a sponginess that drew some rather unfortunate comparisons with Pioneer's AV receiver.

Reducing the subwoofer level below that of the 'test norm' brought about a more coherent and open sound with a better sense of depth, space and transparency. However, there was still the feeling of dynamic restriction and lack of focus, likened by one panellist to a "low-resolution digital photograph with the contrast turned up".

Interestingly, the dts multi-channel recordings were better received, a sense of ease, depth and atmosphere now accompanying both Lyle Lovett and Diane Krall's vocals. Piano tone was also more realistic, the notes hanging in a very ambient acoustic – no fireworks or special effects here, just a very relaxing pool of sound.

However, it was impossible to ignore a fundamental lack of transparency and fine detailing. Once again, it's as if the 9000s were relying on the ambient reinforcement of their rear channels to augment the limited projection and depth of the front, pleasant and undemanding though they seemed. By this technique, the Sony struck up a tremendous atmosphere right from the outset of Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*, providing an impression of "being there" although, it was suggested, "in no certain row or seat".

Even so, with the likes of *Carmina Burana* the Sony evidently struggled to keep up with the pace of events, buckling under the impact of the kettle drums and horns. Immediately the level drops, the atmosphere opens up quite dramatically, revealing the quiet tension of the choral section, punctuated by strong notes from the piano. "Once again, we could really imagine being in the concert hall," remarked one listener, "although there's still an opaqueness about the sound."

CONCLUSION

This amplifier scored far more impressively in multi-channel mode than in two-channel stereo, the latter sounding overblown unless the sub was taken out altogether. Its midrange has the capacity to sound very natural and its sense of scale is often impressive, but its resolution of fine detail is still suspect. Clearly, it's impossible to knock the Sony on the count of features and versatility, but this test is concerned with multi-channel music quality, not smoke and mirrors with DSP.

As a result, though, the 9000-series may undoubtedly power the heart of a top-flight home cinema system, its sound quality still fails to achieve the very high standards typically associated with Sony's hi-fi separates. **PMI**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★☆☆☆

PRICE £2,300.00

Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile, the 9000 series appears to represent fabulous material value but fails to cut the sonic mustard.

ONE YEAR GUARANTEE

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(0990) 111999

SPECIFICATIONS

■ Analogue inputs: 5 line, 5 tape, 7 channels (TA-N9000)

■ Digital inputs: Coaxial (RF), 3 coaxial, 5 optical

■ Surround modes: AC3/RF, DPL, DD, dts, MPEG, 27 effects modes

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MULTI-CHANNEL AMPS CONCLUSIONS

Some multi-channel amplifiers seem to rely on the ambient addition of rear channels to augment the limited projection and depth of their front and centre channel output. On occasion we couldn't help but wonder if a decent two-channel stereo amplifier might have afforded a better sense of 'three dimensionality' in the first place.

Meanwhile, an amplifier that lacks a sense of cohesiveness and integration with two channels has the capacity to become damnably irritating in five-channel mode. The surround effect is present, but the listener is easy confused by the disparate sounds colliding – rather than meshing – from every corner of the room.

Once again, it did seem that many of these multi-channel (pre)amps can't escape a fundamental lack of transparency and fine detail. Of course, this may be a limitation of the compressed DD/dts formats themselves, or a heavy-handedness on the part of the DSP decode process. In any case, many of the early recordings are something of a novelty, more a bonanza of special effects than an attempt to incite a genuinely realistic, live soundfield.

Vocalists, for example, do not skip from front to rear in 'real life'. If they do with a multi-channel set-up, it is at the whim of the recording engineer. The idea is to fill the room with ambient music, with vocalists and instruments

appearing from every corner of the room. Groups like Pink Floyd, Fat Boy Slim and (DJ) performers like Carl Cox will have a field day with the medium because they will make use of the ability to bounce effects from one corner to the other. Other styles, relying on a strong and enveloping ambience, like Brian Eno or The Orb, for example, will also have fun with multi-channel audio. It opens the door to a new musical experience, but it's an entirely different experience to two channel stereo and not necessarily any closer to the real thing.

It's only when you hear a genuinely transparent and detailed multi-channel performance that seems to faithfully track the

music's dynamics, that the finger of suspicion moves away from the software (the format) and towards the hardware (the amplifiers). In this regard, it was Arcam's very sympathetic-sounding Alpha 10 that restored our waning confidence in the potential of the DD and dts formats. After all, if this one amplifier could really deliver the promise of wraparound high fidelity, then the future of these compressed formats need not look – or sound – so bleak as the doom merchants might have us believe. Nevertheless, for the audiophile, the advent of truly linear multi-channel audio in the guise of DVD-A or SACD can't come quickly enough...

THE BEST IN THE TEST



ARCAM Alpha 10 DAVE
An ordinarily-sized amplifier packed with such a diversity of digital electronics has no right to sound this good. But, against all engineering odds, it most certainly does.



DENON AVR-3300
Not as powerful as Denon would have us believe, but still capable of very impressive and genuine high fidelity quality sound. Best suited to easy-load, high sensitivity speakers.



MARANTZ SR5000
Something of a rough diamond, the SR5000 remains a powerful and entertaining package, complete with all essential multi-channel facilities. It even features a tuner section.



ROKSAN Caspian DSP/Five-channel amp
A potent combination offering the bare essentials of DD and dts decoding. Look elsewhere for frills, but look here for no-nonsense quality.



ROTEL RSP-985/RB-985 MkII
The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive duet. Its smooth, unfatiguing sound will tame many an AV system.

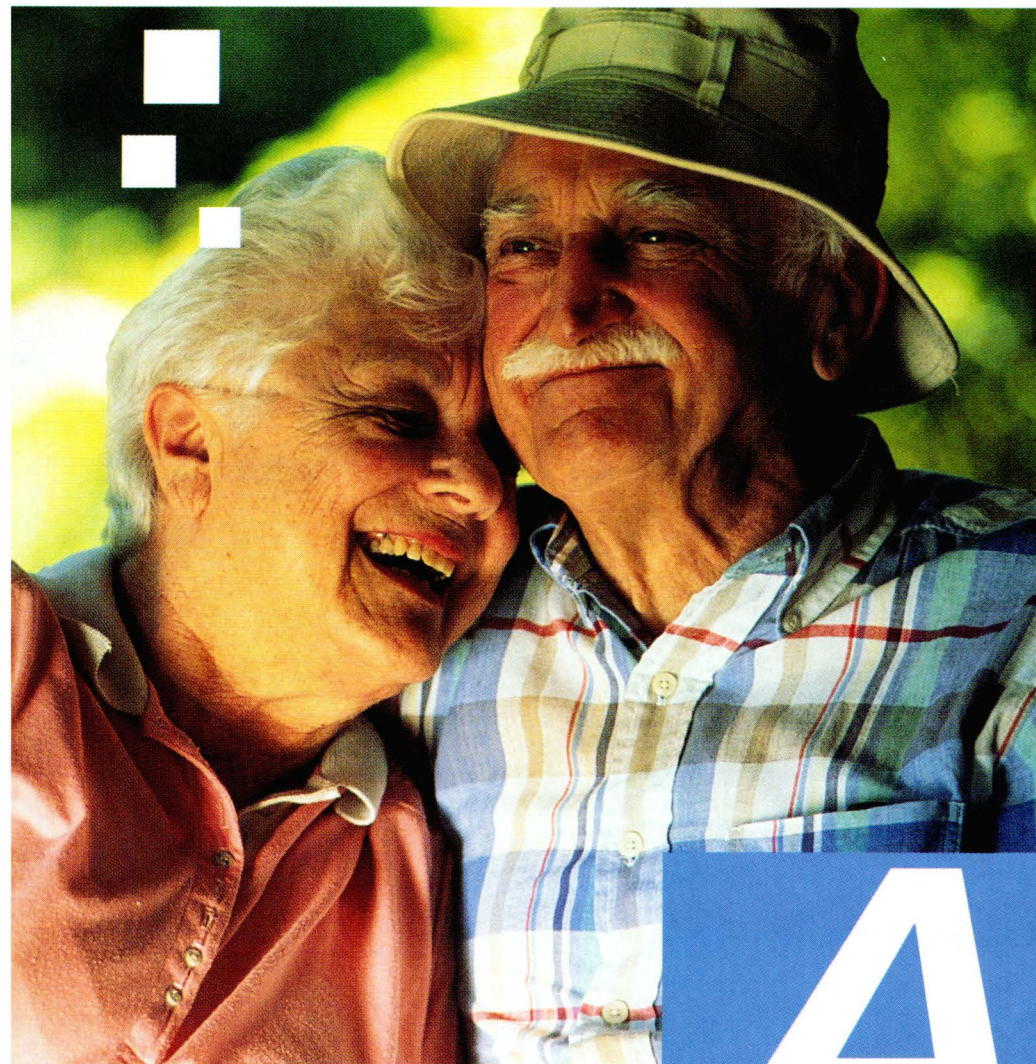
AMPLIFIER COMPARISON TABLE

MAKE	ARCAM	DENON	MARANTZ	NAD	NAKAMICHI
MODEL	A PHA 10 DAVE	AVR-3300	SR5000	T770	AV-10
PRICE	£2,499.80	£800.00	£499.90	£999.95	£999.99
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
GUARANTEE	2 yrs	1 yr	2 yrs	2 yrs	2 yrs
RATED 2/5 CHANNEL POWER OUTPUT	110W/110W	105W/105W	NS/70W	70W/70W	120W/100W
ACTUAL 2/5 CHANNEL POWER OUTPUT	125W/110W	145W/75W	135W/105W	110W/90W	185W/140W
RATED DISTORTION	<0.2%	<0.05%	<0.09%	NS	<0.1%
ACTUAL DISTORTION	<0.15%	<0.03%	<0.12%	<0.04%	<0.1%

AMPLIFIER COMPARISON TABLE

MAKE	PIONEER	ROKSAN	ROTEL	SONY
MODEL	VSX-908 RDS	CASP AN DSP/5-CH	RSP-985/RB-985 II	TA-E9000ES/TA-N9000ES
PRICE	£1,000.00	£2,290.00	£2,225.00	£2,300.00
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
GUARANTEE	1 yr	2 yrs	2 yrs	1 yr
RATED 2/5 CHANNEL POWER OUTPUT	110W/110W	145W/80W	110W/110W	140W/140W
ACTUAL 2/5 CHANNEL POWER OUTPUT	110W/80W	140W/130W	160W/130W	140W/110W
RATED DISTORTION	NS	<0.03%	<0.03%	<0.013%
ACTUAL DISTORTION	<0.04%	<0.015%	<0.02%	<0.06%

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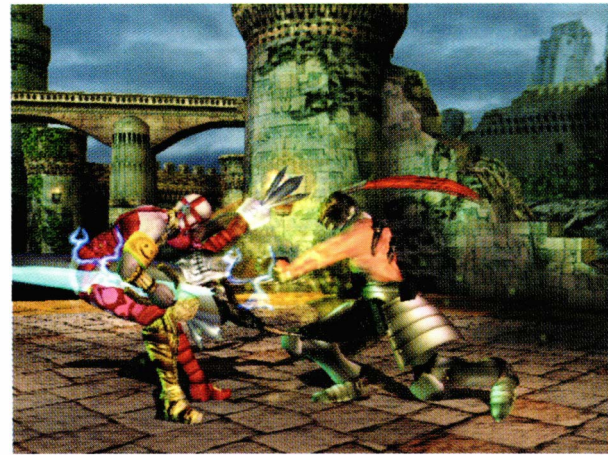
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SUPER TEST

SPEAKERS

Paul Messenger unplugs the phone and immerses himself in eight surround speaker systems.

THE CAST LIST

Acoustic Energy Aegis: 2 x Aegis 3 (L/R), 1 x Centre (C), 2 x Aegis 1 (S)	£600.00
B&W: 5 x LCR6 (L/R/C/S), 1 x SW1000 (Sub)	£2,244.00
Castle: 2 x Harlech (L/R), 1 x Keep (C), 2 x Richmond (S)	£1,399.70
Definitive Technology: 2 x BP2004 (L/R), 1 x CLR2002 (C), 2 x BP2X (S)	£2,890.00
Dynaudio: 4 x LR120 (L/R/S), 1 x C120 (C)	£2,195.00
Mission: 2 x 733 (L/R), 1 x 77C (C), 2 x 77DS (S), 1 x 7AS2 (Sub)	£1,196.00
Polk: 2 x RTE 1000 (L/R), 1 x CS 1000 (C), 2 x f/x 1000 (S)	£3,299.97
Tannoy: 2 x Saturn S6 (L/R), 1 x Saturn S6C, 2 x Saturn S6LCR	£1,100.00

Hi-Fi Choice's first group test of surround sound speaker systems is a signal that music enthusiasts (as well as movie buffs) now have the option of enjoying their passion in full multi-channel surround sound, as well as two-channel stereo.

It's still very early days – there aren't that many music recordings out there yet, and those that are available use data-reduced '5.1' discrete digital formats developed for the cinema, such as dts and Dolby Digital (DD). And there is also the prospect of high resolution multi-channel – if and when the proposed DVD-Audio and/or SACD formats get their acts together, that is.

We have, of course, been down this route before – with the delights of quadraphony in the mid-1970s. It didn't happen then, so why should it work now?

At least the programme source side of things seems far better sorted this time around, although some of the original problems remain – for the most part the physical ones, such as finding room for speakers, running cable around the room, and organising things so that you're sitting in the right zone. For those reasons alone I'm sure traditional two-channel stereo will continue to thrive.

But domestic surround sound systems are already well established, through the movie sound systems that film buffs have been installing for years. The equipment

therefore already exists at competitive prices, and those who use their systems for both music and movies naturally relish the prospect of enjoying their music in full surround sound.

Since this is a hi-fi magazine, we're ignoring the movie side and concentrating on the music. We're also attaching just as much importance to establishing how well these speaker systems perform with regular, unadorned two-channel stereo material, although naturally those with surround sound processors have the option of adding simulated

The recording industry is also still getting to grips with multi-channel music and wondering how best to use the extra channels.

To be fair to all concerned, our tests must be carried out under conditions which are as close to optimum as possible (see *How the tests were done*, below). In

the real world, practical considerations play an inevitable part, such as placing the centre-front speaker on its 'side' to avoid blocking a TV screen. There's also a dichotomy between speaker systems intended mainly for reproducing Dolby Pro-Logic decoded stereo sources (where the surround channel is monophonic, and should be reproduced as diffusely as possible) and those intended for discrete 5.1 surround sound, where directional cues are active all the way around.



surround to stereo recordings.

All you need for stereo is a matched pair of speakers appropriately placed. Surround sound is more complex, with various alternative approaches seeking to reconcile purist principles with the practicalities of domestic harmony.

HINTS & TIPS

HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM YOUR SURROUND SPEAKER PACKAGE

Fitting a surround sound speaker system into a typical British room is not easy. Take great care to plan the speaker locations in advance. Although in an ideal world it's probably best to use five identical full-range speakers all round, in practice domestic constraints may impose some compromises. Wall-mounted surround speakers can give decent results, but should ideally use similar drivers to the front speakers and should, if anything, have slightly more restrained voicing. Do make sure you use matching lengths of matching speaker cable and, if you're using standmount speakers, matching stands too.

HOW THE TESTS WERE DONE

Although some of the stereo tests were carried out using our regular Naim and Linn equipment, to handle the surround sound dimension we assembled a new system comprising: Sony DVP-S525D DVD player, Lexicon MC-1 Digital Controller and two Chord SPM 3000C 4 x 300W amplifiers. Connecting cables came from The Chord Company – Rumour speaker cable and Chameleon interconnects – while Neat Acoustics supplied the three extra Kudos S100 speaker stands needed for a matching set of five.

Various specialist discrete 5.1 surround sound music releases were assembled, with help from Vivante and dts UK. Key examples included: Bonnie Raitt's *Road Tested* (DTS 1010); Lyle Lovett's *Joshua Judges Ruth* (71021-54430-2); *Indoscrub* by Mickey Hart and Planet Drum (Rykodisc RDVD 5-1059); and an *Images for Orchestra* collection of Debussy's music (71021-51039-2-1). The live Bonnie Raitt recording is particularly notable for its relatively natural recording acoustic, avoiding the gimmicky over-enthusiasm for surround effects that plague so many releases.

GLOSSARY

SENSITIVITY – The relative loudness of a loudspeaker for a specific input signal voltage. This can only be approximate due to the substantial variations in frequency balance shown by all loudspeakers.

IMPEDANCE – The load the speaker presents to the amplifier varies dramatically according to the frequency, the minimum values being most likely to stress out the amplifier.

BALANCE – The frequency or tonal balance of a loudspeaker is never truly flat and neutral, the variations (due as much to the room as the loudspeaker) doing much to define the character of the sound.

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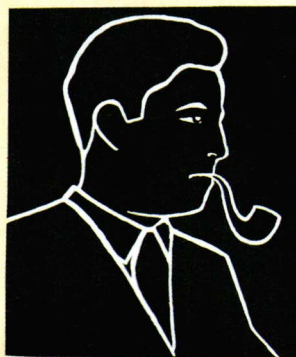
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ACOUSTIC ENERGY Aegis

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
Aegis Three	L/R	£349.95/pr
Aegis Centre	C	£139.95
Aegis One	S	£149.95/pr

Acoustic Energy has been one of the more successful brands in Britain during the past few years, thanks in no small part to its 'budget' range of Aegis models. Take a selection of these: a pair of floorstanding Aegis Threes for the main front left and right channels, plus a pair of the compact standmounted Aegis Ones for reproducing the surround channels – then add one Aegis Centre for the middle of the

front soundstage and you have a complete five-channel surround sound package. Given the size of the Threes, it should be possible to do without additional sub-woofery, at any rate when replaying music (although movie fans tend to like some extra thump).

The really good news about the Aegis package is that it's seriously inexpensive. The normal prices (give or take a few pence) are £350 for a pair of Aegis Threes, £150 for a pair of Aegis Ones, and £140 for the Aegis Centre. Buy the whole lot in one go and it's yours for £600, saving a further £40.

Of the three models involved, *Choice* has previously tested only

smaller metal cone device to handle the midband and crossover region. The speaker comes mass-loaded, and is supplied with a small plinth and chunky 8mm spikes. The Aegis Centre follows convention, using two small metal-cone drivers either side of a slightly offset tweeter.

I wouldn't go as far as to call it a *pretty* speaker system, but maybe I've just seen too much black vinyl woodprint over the years. Still, the baffle edging is neatly handled, and the standard of fit and finish all looks and feels fine. The room measurements for the Threes in particular are impressive, showing unusual smoothness for such a low-cost design, and an unusually even and extended bass to boot. The Centre, however, has a slightly more recessed presence and a significantly stronger treble.

SOUND QUALITY

Smooth and even-handed to a fault, this package can hold its head up alongside significantly more expensive systems. However, it does also have a slightly sluggish and leaden quality, and appears rather lacking in the sort of dynamic punch and drive delivered by some of its more expensive competitors. The bottom end seems well enough rooted, but a little stolid and 'earthbound'.

The extra brightness in the centre front does occasionally attract attention, and detracts a little from the front soundstage coherence, but the restrained balance elsewhere seems to work very well, and – more importantly – should be well suited to the sort of budget electronics likely to be used with such a speaker package.

CONCLUSION

With good ancillary equipment it isn't too difficult to hear the difference between a £600 and a £1,200

surround sound speaker package, and this is, in the final analysis, a beer-budget system.

However, it's also a remarkably good example of the type, which in overall smoothness and coherence can hold its head up alongside much more pretentious equipment, so a Best Buy rating is clearly appropriate. **PMe**

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

PRICE **£600.00**

☞ **Sonically a trifle stodgy, the Aegis is nevertheless great value for money, and doesn't give much away to systems at twice the price.**

■ FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

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“Smooth and even-handed to a fault, this package can hold its head up alongside significantly more expensive systems.”

the Aegis One, which we Recommended in *HFC* 187 and, from what I remember, its smooth and gently laid-back balance should be rather well suited to handling the surround channels.

The Aegis Three is an impressive looking package, especially in view of its price. It's a 'two-and-a-half-way' design, both cone drivers in individually port-loaded chambers covering the bass end. The larger, lower plastic-cone driver rolls off early, leaving the



CASTLE



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B&W LCR6/ASW1000

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
LCR6	L/R/C/S	£350.00
ASW1000	Sub	£500.00

B&W is closely involved in the studio monitoring side of multi-channel 5.1 music recording, as I discovered when visiting Abbey Road. In the famous studio five enormous Nautilus 801 full-range speakers set an agenda for surround sound music reproduction, which is reflected in this domestic package at around one tenth of the price.

B&W has adopted the most technically logical – if not the most lounge-friendly – approach to five-channel surround sound, simply by supplying five identical loudspeakers. The standmounting LCR6 looks just like a ‘stretched’ version of the 602 S2, with two

main drivers mounted above and below B&W’s familiar metal dome tweeter. In fact, the loudspeaker is configured as a ‘two-and-a-half-way’, with one of the drivers only operating through the bass region.

In build, finish (black woodprint vinyl) and appearance, the LCR6 looks very much a part of the 600-series, in every respect except one – the price. At £350 each, even my dodgy maths can work out that the LCR6 costs about £700 a pair, which seems rather out of kilter with the £300 per pair 602 S2 and the £550 floorstanding, three-way 603 S2.

Of course, it’s true that there are some extra manufacturing costs involved in adding the shielding for the various magnets in this AV-oriented model, but the point stands nonetheless.

It’s extremely big, exceedingly heavy, entirely ugly and quite possibly unnecessary – who said this reviewing lark was fun?

It’s obvious that using five identical speakers will give pretty consistent voicing all-round, and the LCR6 can be used horizontally without significantly altering the perceived balance. (B&W suggests that the top of the horizontal unit should preferably line up with the tops of the vertical main left and right channel speakers.)

I suppose movie fans will welcome the additional bass provided by the subwoofer – which is an impressive example of the type, performance-wise – but for music programmes the room balance provided by five LCR6s needs little if any extra bass, and actually shows rather good in-room extension down to 20Hz. The balance is fundamentally flat with a slightly ‘warm’ and ‘laid-back’ overall character, although treble output is also a little detached and obvious.

SOUND QUALITY

Stereophonically, this is a stonking loudspeaker. Stick a couple on two high-class stands, and you’re talking close to £1,000 the pair, but the results more than justify the expenditure. The LCR6s take on a real mantle of authority, telling it like it is with the sort of dynamic grip and drive that’s rare at any price. Perhaps they could sound smoother and a bit more forward

through the broad midband and, while treble is clean and clear, it does tend to draw a little too much attention to itself.

When operating in five-channel mode, this can be more obvious from the nearby surround speakers, but many processors will provide some roll-off control here. I’ve yet to find 5.1 software which has the dynamic grip and focus of the best stereo material, but the fine delicacy and dynamic range of this speaker all helped to build up a convincingly seamless soundfield, successfully recreating the live acoustic on the Bonnie Raitt dts disc.

CONCLUSION

In short, the subwoofer is only really needed for largish rooms and where movie replay is a primary application. Although the 5x LCR6 combo isn’t the cheapest or most lounge-friendly package around, its sparkling performance adds up to a redoubtable stereo/surround speaker system that fully deserves enthusiastic Recommendation.

PMe

“Movie fans will welcome the additional bass provided by the subwoofer, but for music little if any extra bass is needed.”

One might reasonably assume that five of these quite generously proportioned, port-loaded boxes, each with two 120mm Kevlar cone bass drive units, should perhaps deliver sufficient bass output for a fair-sized listening room. And that did pretty much prove to be the case, although B&W still saw fit to dispatch to us humungous ASW1000.



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£2,250.00

■ A high-performance stereo/surround system with great dynamic drive and coherence and a real sense of authority.

■ LCR6: FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

■ ASW1000: TWO YEAR GUARANTEE

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CASTLE Harlech, Keep, Richmond

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
Harlech	L/R	£899.90/pr
Keep	C	£249.90
Richmond	S	£249.90/pr

Castle makes high-class hi-fi speakers, notable at least in part for the excellent real wood veneer finishes, which are available in no fewer than nine different varieties (about half of them at a modest extra cost). That alone would be enough to single this brand out from the vinyl hordes assembled here, but there's another minor detail to consider – Castle emphasises that it doesn't make "home cinema packages" either.

However, it has taken the one crucial step which enables it to take part in this group test, by producing a specific centre-front speaker codenamed Keep, which can be used alongside two pairs of regular stereo hi-fi speakers to make up the necessary five channels (whether you actually want real wood veneer near a charcoal grey TV set is more debatable).

For the rest of the system, Castle has elected to supply a pair of the redoubtable, longstanding and highly successful Harlechs (HFC 160) for the main front left and right channels, plus a pair of the brand new, exceedingly small and as yet untried Richmonds for the two surround channels.

"Since no subwoofer is included, the presumed theory is that the Harlechs will have enough bass for the whole system."

Since no subwoofer is included, the presumed theory is that the £900 floorstanding Harlechs will have enough bass for the system as a whole, which might be a touch optimistic given the modest 100mm plastic cones used by their twin main drivers.

The £250 Keep shares the same driver line-up as the Harlech, packaged in a small, slightly asymmetric 'horizontal' enclosure, simple port-loading replacing the Harlech's quarter-wave columns. The £250 Richmond is a replacement for the Isis, with woven

carbon fibre cone in a small, 'bookshelf miniature' enclosure.

The Keep has the same drivers as the Harlech, but its voicing is rather different. It has ample bass output to 50Hz in a room, but is brighter overall, tending to emphasise the treble, 5-10KHz, where the Harlech is smoother and more conventionally restrained. The smaller Richmond has a rather more limited bass, and is suited to close-to-wall mounting. Its restrained treble is also well suited to surround use, but a tendency to 'peak up' at around 2.5KHz might well prove obtrusive.

SOUND QUALITY

The Harlech is a firmly established two-channel stereo star, its second upward-facing main driver undoubtedly contributing to the attractive spaciousness of the sound a pair generates. Even though the interaction of its bass alignment and the room acoustics might be a trifle suspect, that quarter-wave loading gives a liveliness and control that keeps the bass unusually clean, if not particularly even.

However, I was less impressed by this system in surround sound mode. The Keep's extra brightness does tend to draw a little too much attention to the centre of the soundstage, and voices seemed a trifle pinched and 'cuppy' too. The forwardness of the Richmonds also had a tendency to make me look over my shoulder at times – surround sound

speakers should ideally be as discreet sonically as they are visually.

The system delivered just about enough bass weight for regular music programming, but it's far from generous – I rather suspect that those using their systems for movie as well as music reproduction will want to add some subwoofery.

CONCLUSION

Although my affection for the Harlechs as stereo loudspeakers continues, the full surround monty using Keep and Richmonds lacks the tonal balance consistency to stand out from the pack, and could perhaps do with a little more bass weight. It's pretty good value at £1,400 considering the high-class wood veneerwork, and retains the essential musicality for which Castle is renowned. However, it doesn't quite hit the surround sound spot hard enough for formal Recommendation. **PMe**



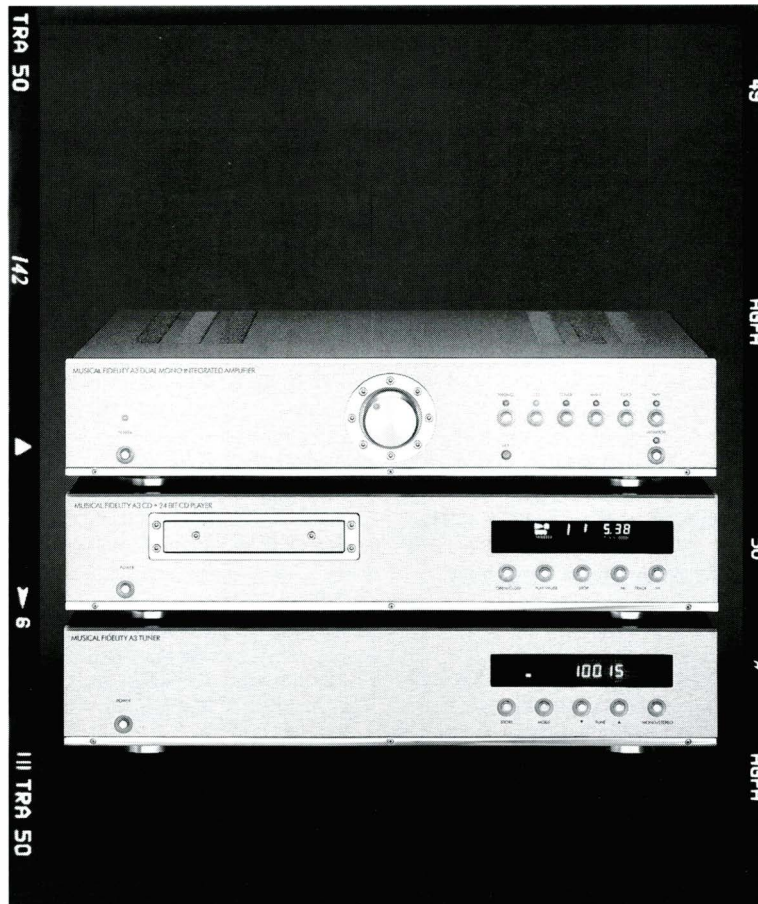
VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£1,399.70

Good-looking combination works fine in stereo but could show greater voicing consistency for the centre-front and surround channels, and a bit more bass to boot.

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DEFINITIVE TECHNOLOGY 2004 pack

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
BP2004	L/R	£1,700.00/pr
CLR2002	C	£595.00
BP2X	S	£595.00/pr

One of two US-sourced surround sound speaker systems included in this group test, this 2004 package is certainly among the most elegant and visually discreet of the systems assembled here. However, it is also one of the most expensive, carrying a price tag close to £3,000 – and that's going to take a bit of justifying.

There's no real wood finish on offer either, although the 'black stocking' approach with shiny, plastic, black end-caps looks

elegant enough in its demure and self-effacing way, aided by the very slim baffles used for all three front loudspeakers.

What does perhaps go some way towards justifying the price is the fact that each of the tall, slim main left and right BP2004 speakers (£1,700/pair) contains a built-in, amplified subwoofer. This 'power tower' approach is very much the American way at the moment (see also Polk review, p95, and the upmarket Snells reviewed in *HFC* 194).

It does seem to make some sense to turn the bottom section of a floorstanding speaker into a powered subwoofer, and it should make life that much easier for the system's amplification too, by

match the front ones cosmetically, but instead are kept as small as possible, shaped like a truncated 'V' and intended for hang-on-the-wall mounting.

It all looks very promising on the surface, but the room measurements told a rather different story. The problem lies in those built-in subwoofers, which appear to operate on the coupled-cavity principle and simply don't cover a wide enough bandwidth.

They're hugely energetic across the 40-80Hz octave, to the totally unnecessary point where they could dominate the midband by about 20dB, yet if they're balanced to match the midband (as they should be for music), there's a gaping hole at 100-150Hz and nothing much of consequence below 30Hz either.

In other respects, the system has a notably flat and open balance, which means it's brighter than most. There's also some peakiness around 5KHz, which will add a bit of 'zing'.

but the whole thing hangs together with fine coherence and a real sense of presence.

Until the bass comes in, that is. Leland Sklar plays a lovely walking bass on Lyle Lovett's *Joshua Judges Ruth* – only here he keeps walking right out of the room! It's there one moment and almost disappears the next and, although the timing seems pretty good, tonal discrimination is on the whole weak.

CONCLUSION

Hampered by inadequate subwoofery at its highish price, this particular Definitive system does not make the Recommended grade. However, the passive side of the package is actually rather impressive, suggesting that the company's fine reputation in the AV field is not misplaced – and whetting my appetite to try an alternative combination. **PMe**

"Throughout the midband it's open and lively, in both stereo and surround modes, with an impressively wide dynamic range."

taking over the low bass duties and its heavy (though relatively slow) current demands. The BP part of the speakers' name stands for 'bi-polar', an omni-directional variation which places matching two-way drivers on the front and back of the enclosure.

The £595 CLR2002 centre-front speaker makes a good cosmetic match for the floorstanders on either side, and is larger and heavier than most of the breed, although the slim front disguises the fact very well indeed. The two £595/pair BP2X surround speakers (more bi-polarity here!) don't make any real attempt to

SOUND QUALITY

The bass problems mentioned above were obvious enough in the listening comparisons, which is rather a shame, because in other respects I really enjoyed the music this system made.

Throughout the midband it's open and lively, in both stereo and surround modes, with fine voicing and an expressively wide dynamic range – although I dare say the balance might be a little unforgiving with cheaper electronics. The treble might be a touch on the sweeter side, too,



VERDICT

SOUND ★★★★★

BUILD ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

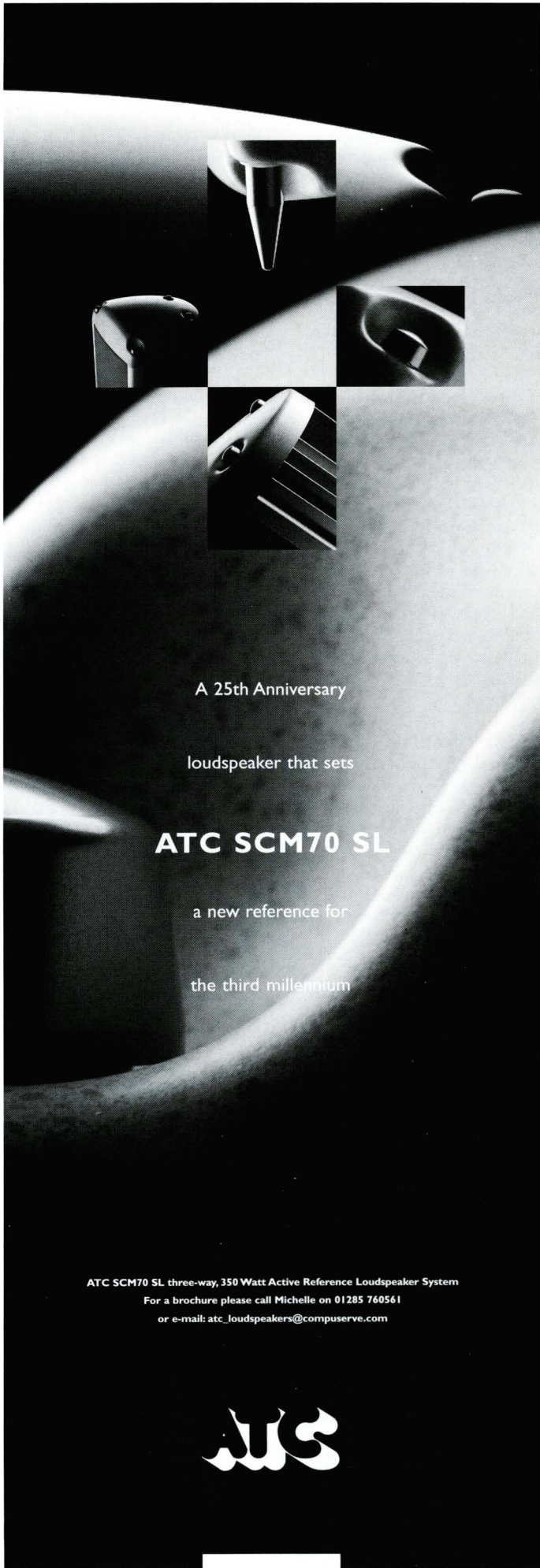
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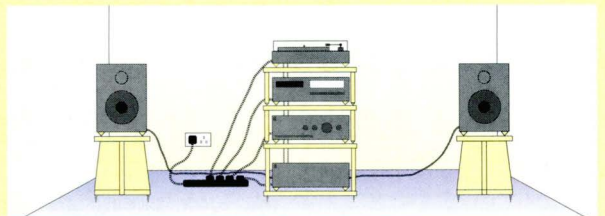
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DYNAUDIO LR120/C120

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
LR120	L/R/S	£439.00
C120	C	£439.00

Danish brand Dynaudio is well respected throughout the professional and hi-fi sound sectors, particularly for its unusual main drivers and for a general 'no compromise' approach to the art of sound reproduction. It's no surprise to find, therefore, that the company has taken the purist approach to a surround sound speaker system, providing five visually identical standmount speakers, one for each channel.

The bad news is that they cost £439 each, which is £778 per pair – or a substantial £2,195 for the full five-speaker package.

Four of these are designated LR120, while the fifth is code-named C120. The only apparent difference is in the placing of the badges on baffle and grille and the orientation of the input terminals, so that this 'centre-front' model looks right when placed horizontally (so as not to block the TV).

To all intents and purposes the two models are identical and should have nearly identical voicing, even though the box orientation will affect the sound distribution patterns.

A slim front panel is an important asset in a modern loud-speaker, especially for the

centre-front model, and these Dynaudios certainly oblige, keeping the width down to minimal 165mm. However, they do look almost too slim when positioned vertically on 24inch stands, and the width also places constraints on the size of the main drivers.

To make up for the small 9.5cm plastic cone/dome diaphragms, the main drivers are used in pairs, and naturally come from Dynaudio's own highly regarded and unique range, notable for their large diameter voice coils and high power handling.

These are genuine two-way designs, operating both main drivers in parallel up to the crossover point, and therefore having the tricky task of integrating a line with a point-source.

This perhaps explains a balance which is smoother than most but also a little heavy through the bass region, downtilting steadily into a

dip at 2KHz, then recovering by about 3dB through the treble. The large ports are tuned to 47Hz, so the front speakers at least are best kept clear of walls.

SOUND QUALITY

After its very successful recent run in our stereo group tests, I had high expectations of this Dynaudio package, anticipating that it could well set the standard for the group as a whole. I decided to bring it early into the listening room, to help establish the ground rules. But while this is a thoroughly respectable and capable loud-speaker system, it didn't quite live up to my – admittedly high – expectations.

It's certainly impressively neutral and even-handed, delivering a seamless and coherent surround soundfield, with decent dynamic range and transparency, and great image precision.

However, the bottom end doesn't dig as deep as some of the competition and can get a bit thick and heavy on the wrong material, adding a touch of chestiness to male voices, for example.

The midband and presence sound just a little too laid back and shut in, and consequently dynamics sound rather flat and unexciting. These are not easy speakers to criticise or even dislike – but they're not easy to fall in love with either.

CONCLUSION

This is a high-quality surround sound speaker system in many ways, but it's also a relatively expensive one. Subjectively speaking, it doesn't hit the spot quite as effectively as most of Dynaudio's regular stereo loud-speakers, sounding a bit too laid back and undemonstrative for its own good.

PMe

"It's certainly impressively neutral and even-handed, delivering a seamless and coherent surround soundfield."

VERDICT

SOUND ★★☆☆☆

BUILD ★★☆☆☆

VALUE ★★☆☆☆

PRICE £2,195.00

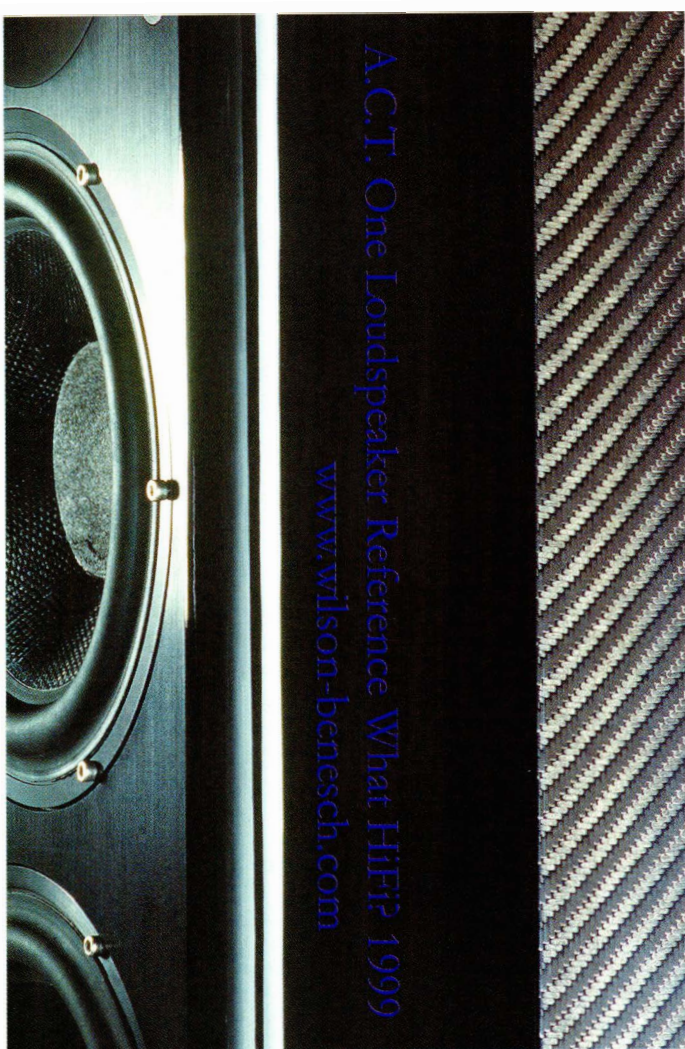
Stylish slimline system has fine evenness and surround coherence, but also a rather heavy, laid-back balance

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MISSION Cinema 7 pack + 7AS2

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
773	L/R	£399.00/pr
77C	C	£199.00
77DS	S	£199.00/pr
7AS2	Sub	£399.00

Mission's surround sound speaker package is actually christened Cinema 7, so there's no doubting what sort of customer it's aimed at, though at least one of the four distinct elements in this £1,200 package has already been tested and Recommended as a hi-fi speaker in HFC 193.

The £400 per pair 733 is a very slim and elegant floorstanding design, finished in real wood, which takes responsibility for the main left/right front channels in this system. Similar in style, finish

and drive units is the £200 77C, a much smaller unit which operates the centre-front channel horizontally, and actually utilises a THX-style triple tweeter array.

The £200 per pair 77DS surround speakers, however, are very different indeed, and clearly designed to be as discreet as possible once installed – a perfectly laudable goal if it can be accomplished without serious sonic compromise. They're shaped more like wall lights than traditional loudspeakers, the largest flat surface intended for fixing to a wall, while the shallow V-shaped front has two main drivers and two tweeters, one pair positioned on each side of the V.

None of these speakers is likely to produce much in the way of serious bass (even the 773s

codenamed 7AS2, which is about as ugly as the rest of the system is pretty – a rare instance of a product escaping the attentions of Mission's style police.

From simple inspection, it seems unlikely that the surround sound speakers (77DS) will match the acoustic properties of those occupying the front soundstage, but in fact the differences aren't as great as you might expect. There's no bass to speak of (that's the sub's job here) and the treble is slightly more suppressed (which is probably a good thing), but the midband tonal balance is surprisingly similar, and impressively even-handed, too.

The problem I've encountered with the vast majority of commercial subwoofers lies in their enthusiasm to supply loads of midbass, and reluctance to offer genuine low (sub-40Hz) bass.

Perversely, the 7AS2 is just the opposite: loads of output at 20-40Hz, but not really enough, even on its highest roll-off setting, to take over midbass as well as low bass duties from the 773s.

SOUND QUALITY

A pair of 733s operating in stereo provide a

sound a bit lightweight for floorstanders), so the whole package is then underpinned by a £400 active (powered) subwoofer,

sound which is pleasantly open and beautifully voiced, if a little lightweight and bright in character. Add the 7AS2 subwoofer into the equation and you get a very different animal, with bags of really deep grunt and some lack of warmth and richness through the lower midband.

The top end is a trifle elevated too, so there's something of the 'loudness contour' about the overall effect, which might not be entirely natural but is by no means unpleasant.

Surround sound music had a similar overall character, giving a marvellous impression of scale. Midband dynamics did seem a trifle constrained, but the voicing is delightfully natural and musical, and the sheer spaciousness and freedom from boxiness seemed fair compensation for the slightly wayward balance.

CONCLUSION

This Mission package does have its idiosyncracies, especially in its slightly 'boom 'n' tizz' balance, but it also has considerable charm and an easy musicality that is difficult to resist. It's good looking (apart from the subwoofer) and should fit unobtrusively into the living room (again, apart from the subwoofer). In short, well worth a Recommended flag at £1,200. **PMe**

"The sheer spaciousness and freedom from boxiness seemed fair compensation for the slightly wayward balance."



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£1,196.00

Visually very attractive and discreet, the broad midband is a little laid-back but sounds unusually spacious and free from boxiness.

FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

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LIVING VOICE



Auditorium Avatar OBX-R Hi-Fi Choice Editor's Choice Dec 1999

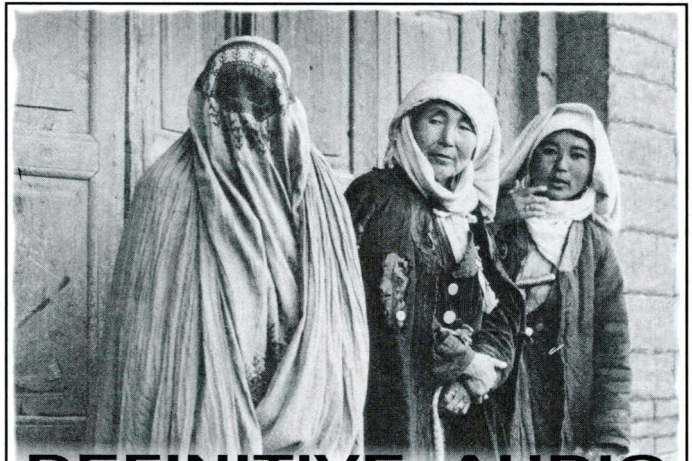
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POLK RTE 1000, CS 1000, f/x 1000

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
RTE 1000	L/R	£1,299.99/pr
CS 1000	C	£999.99
f/x 1000	S	£999.99/pr

Polk is one of America's most successful speaker brands, perhaps because its ranges are particularly well tailored to the US scene. One must give the company full credit for the gusto and enthusiasm with which it has tackled surround sound issues, but it's hard not to come to the conclusion that this particular £3,300 '1000' package is designed primarily to handle the sort of excess beloved of moviemakers, and might just be a

teensy bit over-engineered for music-making in the typical UK environment.

It's the dialogue speaker that gives it away. It's not quite the biggest I've seen (check out Polk's ten grand Signature Reference Theater system, which I reviewed four years ago for our sister magazine, *Home Entertainment*.) But this £999, 26kg CS1000 is still a pretty monstrous affair, and certainly not something you could slip into a video rack or perch on top of the TV. It even (overkill upon overkill?) has a built-in amplified subwoofer – although in fairness, in most 5-channel modes the centre front channel is doing the lion's share of the work.

"Perhaps it's the generous headroom on offer here, but this Polk system does drag you into the music swiftly and easily."

The £1,300/pair RTE 1000s, used for main front left and right channels, also have built in bass amplification, driving a coupled-cavity internal bass driver. They're large but quite attractive 'power towers', using similar mid and treble driver modules to those used by the dialogue and surround speakers. Spikes are thumbwheel adjusted, but have no lock-nut provision. Even the £999 f/x 1000 surround speakers are large and

massive relatively speaking, and are triangular plan affairs with two baffles and a flat back, intended for wall mounting. A switch (hidden beneath one of the grilles) allows the connections to be changed between monopole (aka bi-polar) and di-pole operation.

The room measurements confirm the similarities of the drivers, despite the various different configurations, so there's some consistency and a generally common character, most notably a brighter-than-average treble, especially around 4-5kHz. The port-loaded bass of the centre speaker integrated very well, though the speaker itself has significantly less presence energy than the RTE. The latter's coupled-cavity bass was satisfactory enough – a massive over-boost is clearly encouraged, but keep the level control around '20-to' for decent results. The f/x also has quite respectable bass, but is a little strong from 150-300Hz.

SOUND QUALITY

Perhaps it's the generous headroom on offer here, but this Polk system does drag you into the music swiftly and easily, with its matter-of-fact capability of handling dynamic contrasts with ease and aplomb. Stereophonically

the RTEs image beautifully, but the top end can become a little too insistent, especially as you're constantly tempted to turn up the volume. The bass end hangs on in pretty well, but doesn't always give notes their proper shape.

The voicing difference between centre-front and RTEs is evident enough when switching between stereo and surround modes, but didn't cause any other obvious problems. However, the f/x surround speakers (generally marginally preferred in 'bi-polar' mode) did seem a little obvious and distracting at times, perhaps due to their extra 'warmth' – I resorted to backing them off by a couple of dB below the 'measured' level balance.

CONCLUSION

This might be the most expensive package in our group test, but you do somehow feel you're getting your money's worth, in the sheer

bulk and weight of its constituent parts. Said bulk might well be seen as a disadvantage by some, but it does ensure the system has more than ample dynamic headroom, with a big, generous sound.

In the final analysis, this system does a decent enough job with music programmes, but is probably more appropriate where movie reproduction takes equal or greater priority. **PMe**



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£3,299.97

Bulky, massive system with monster centre-front has bags of dynamic headroom for movie reproduction and does a decent job with music, too.

FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

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TANNOY Saturn S6, S6C, S6LCR

THE PACKAGE

Model	Type	Price
Saturn S6	L/R	£500.00/pr
Saturn S6C	C	£200.00
Saturn S6LCR	S	£400.00/pr

Probably the most successful hi-fi speaker brand in Britain, Tannoy's budget Mercury series has dominated the sales charts over the past couple of years. Now the company has introduced a new Saturn range of mid-price speakers. These have been developed with more than half an eye on the home cinema sector, and take on board elements of the company's extensive pro-audio activities too.

Although the enclosures are economically vinyl finished, it has been done in a rather attractive fashion, as the cherry/champagne variation supplied for review proved (black ash/charcoal is the

other option). The star attraction is undoubtedly the classy cast-frame, dual-concentric main driver which is used throughout.

This driver has a 12cm main cone, and is widely used in studio monitors, but its associated crossovers here are used to provide a "less analytical presentation" than the studio versions.

The total package here comes to a few pence less than £1,100, which seems very good value in the test group context. It consists of two Saturn S6 floorstanders for the main left/right channels (£500/pair), plus three standmount models (£200 each), codenamed either S6LCR or S6C depending on the orientation of terminals and badges.

Such an arrangement keeps the speaker count down to five, as the two floorstanders with their extra bass drivers should provide ample

than some of the competition, so any installation will be a little more obtusive. But the use of a geometrically identical main driver throughout has to offer benefits in soundfield coherence.

The in-room measurements show a fine overall balance in both stereo and surround sound modes, slightly restrained in overall character above 2KHz, with good sensitivity and more than ample bass extension. If anything, output is a tad lean through the mid-bass region, so there's little danger of boominess and the main speakers can actually be positioned fairly close to a wall.

One minor complaint is that those same 'two-and-a-half-way' floorstanding speakers are a rather demanding amplifier load, holding at or below eight Ohms through much of the bass region, whereas the smaller standmount stays above six Ohms throughout.

SOUND QUALITY

The Saturn S6 represents the latest in an evolutionary line that descends from such redoubtable performers as the DC2000, and the good news is that it retains the impressive drive and essential enthusiasm of the breed.

Stereophonically, this system works very well indeed, with fine tautness, some dynamic tension and very well controlled box colorations, although the treble could do with being just a little sweeter.

Surround sound operation was equally impressive, placing this fairly inexpensive

Tannoy package right up among the leaders. The surround soundfield has a tension, coherence and stability which makes it seem almost tangible – the effect can be quite creepy at times – and none of the individual loudspeakers broke the spell by drawing unnecessary attention to itself.

There is, perhaps, a slight lack of warmth and richness on some material, but somehow that seems to be a fair exchange for the refreshing freedom from boominess.

CONCLUSION

This five-speaker surround sound system makes a whole lot of sense for £1,100. The use of matching high-class, decent sized main drivers all round seems the very sensible recipe for sonic success, even if that does make the individual boxes a little bulkier than some rivals.

Plenty of serious welly and deep bass extension at this price? It all adds up to a comfortable Best Buy.

PMe

"This system works very well indeed, with fine tautness, some dynamic tension and very well controlled box colorations."

bass for the whole system, and obviate the need for a subwoofer. All have ported enclosures and are supplied with foam bungs to block these if preferred. The port on the floorstander is tuned very low, to around 25Hz, and our room measurement tests suggested these should be blocked, but those on the smaller S6s (tuned to 40Hz) were best left open.

The relatively large main driver means that these are chunky loudspeakers with wider front panels



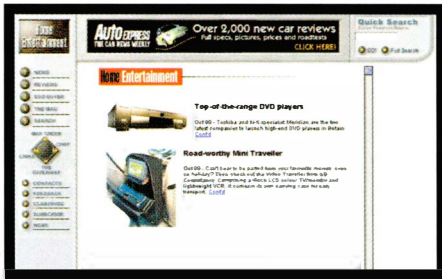
VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£1,100.00

Works very well in both stereo and surround sound modes, with great soundfield homogeneity and plenty of guts and drive.

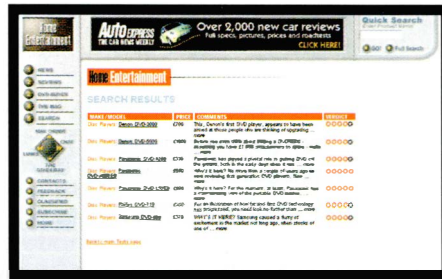
FIVE YEAR GUARANTEE

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SPEAKERS

CONCLUSIONS

Let's start with the big picture. Does this 5-channel surround sound thing work with music? Up to a point, yes, but there's no one-line answer – not yet, anyway. Certainly the 5-channel surround sound bit works very effectively, but that doesn't necessarily mean it's the future of domestic music reproduction.

It might well turn out that way, of course. The simple fact that many people want both to watch movies and to listen to music in the same room and with the same sound system will steadily increase the number of surround sound systems out there, and that in turn should encourage the creation of appropriate software.

But do we really want surround sound music? Only time will tell. Surround can be highly effective in increasing one's immersion in the whole musical experience, no question, but getting the best out of its potential makes its own demands. For starters, the 'listening sweet spot' is relatively small, and really has to be somewhere in the middle third of the room.

And there are still real question marks over the recordings themselves. Some musical experiences benefit from the surround treatment. Choral and organ music spring to mind, but any recording based on live performance can benefit. The same can hardly be said of studio recordings, which is

perhaps why the engineers often opt for novelty instead – and I for one am not particularly impressed when a pedal steel guitar suddenly starts up somewhere behind my right ear 'ole.

Given the way the recordings are mixed, it makes sense to replay multi-channel music through five identical speakers, like B&W and Dynaudio do here, while Tannoy's dual-concentric driver arguably offers an even more elegant technical solution, although with a bulky frame.

The other brands tend to go rather further in the interests of domestic practicality, so the 'voicing' of centre and surround speakers may well differ from the

main left/right front ('stereo') channels. Our tests suggest that the balance of centre and surround speakers should err on the side of caution, to avoid drawing attention to themselves.

In practice, the centre-front speaker poses a big difficulty in that a TV set wants to fill the same space, and makes an appalling speaker stand. Speakers don't sound good too close to the floor either, so the surround sound-oriented audiophile might do well to consider the option of avoiding the centre-front channel altogether, instead sharing its signal, stereo-style, between the main left and right speakers.

THE BEST IN THE TEST



**HI FI CHOICE
BEST BUY**

BEST BUY

ACOUSTIC ENERGY Aegis
Sonically a trifle stodgy, it's nevertheless great value for money, and doesn't give much away to systems at twice the price.



**HI FI CHOICE
BEST BUY**

BEST BUY

TANNOY Saturn S6 system
Works very well in both stereo and surround sound modes, with great sound-field homogeneity and plenty of guts and drive.



**HI FI CHOICE
RECOMMENDED**

RECOMMENDED

MISSION Cinema 7 system
Visually very attractive and discreet, broad midband is a little laid back but sounds unusually spacious and free from boxiness.



**HI FI CHOICE
RECOMMENDED**

RECOMMENDED

B&W LCR6/SW1000 system
A high performance stereo/surround sound system with great dynamic drive and coherence, and a real sense of authority.

SURROUND SPEAKERS COMPARISON TABLE

MAKE	ACOUSTIC ENERGY	B&W	CASTLE	DEFINITIVE TECHNOLOGY
MODEL	AEGIS PACKAGE	PACKAGE	PACKAGE	2004 PACKAGE
PRICE	£600.00	£2,244.00	£1,399.70	£2,890.00
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
GUARANTEE	5 yrs	2-5 yrs	5 yrs	5 yrs
SIZE WxHxD	Aegis 3: 19x90x25cm Centre: 46x17x20cm Aegis 1: 19x36x24cm	LCR6: 20.5x55x32cm SW1000: 54x47x50cm	Harlech: 20x96x33cm Keep: 17x33x20cm Richmond: 48x17x27-29cm	BP2004: 19x104x31cm BP2X: 23x37x15cm CLR2002: 55.5x175x31cm
WEIGHT	17kg/7kg/6kg	13kg/30kg	22kg/10kg/2.5kg	22kg/5kg/12kg

SURROUND SPEAKERS COMPARISON TABLE

MAKE	DYNAUDIO	MISSION	POLK	TANNOY
MODEL	PACKAGE	CINEMA 7 PACKAGE	PACKAGE	SATURN PACKAGE
PRICE	£2,195.00	£1,196.00	£3,299.97	£1,100.00
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
GUARANTEE	5 yrs	5 yrs	5 yrs	5 yrs
SIZE WxHxD	LR120: 16.5x57x31cm C120: 57x16.5x31cm	773: 17.5x87x28cm 77C: 42x17x21cm 77DS: 34x26x12cm 7AS2: 56x30x31cm	RT 1000p: 20x110x35cm CS1000p: 87x22x35cm F/X1000: 10-29x51x24cm	S6: 21x89x29cm S6C: 38x21x29cm S6LCR: 21x38x29cm
WEIGHT	11kg/11kg	10kg/5.5kg/3.5kg/21kg	25kg/26kg/11kg	16kg/10kg/10kg

SURROUNDED BY MUSIC

All the hottest multi-channel music on DVD and CD, reviewed and rated by **Tim Bownen**.

The concept of multi-channel music is far from new, but it's never been a serious proposition for music buyers – until now. The success of DVD-Video has brought digital surround sound to the masses, allowing consumers to play both music and movie software on the same machine, while news of DVD-Audio and SACD has placed multi-channel music firmly on the hi-fi agenda.

These new formats offer the prospect of truly high definition music in surround, and while we await the first such software to emerge the way is already paved by an increasing collection of multi-channel discs on DVD-V and CD.

Multi-channel DVD-V music discs (the same standard used for movies) may not sound as good as their forthcoming DVD-Audio counterparts are expected to, but some are remarkable nonetheless. Many are straight transfers from VHS

music videos, but the number of DVD-specific releases are increasing, and these incorporate various 'extras' that only DVD can support.

Dolby Digital (DD, formerly AC3) is the most common multi-channel audio system applied, but note that it doesn't always mean surround – look for "5.1" on the back of the case. A few of the imported DVD-Video titles also use dts, a less compressed multi-channel

"Live material lends itself well to multi-channel – it wraps you in crowd ambience, almost like being on-stage with the artist."

MULTI-CHANNEL MUSIC DVD-VIDEOS

'Feature' or 'album' length titles, combining music with images – often live footage. Some also provide extra features like biographies and multiple camera angles. Prices are typically £15-£25, similar to buying a movie on DVD.



THE BEATLES
Yellow Submarine
MGM/Warner Home Video (Dolby Digital 5.1; original mono)
CONTENT: The classic trippy animation from Liverpool's popular beat combo, spruced up and unleashed once more for the DVD generation. The film lacks

the impact it would've had in the '60s, and now seems rather disjointed, but those ageless songs still win the day. Pepperland hasn't looked this fresh in ages.

SOUND: Lacks the punch and precision of modern-day soundtracks, although the transition to DD has been artfully executed. It'll involve you like never before... Blue Meanies! They're behind you!

EXTRAS: The original theatrical trailer, a 'making of' documentary, storyboard sequences, interviews, behind the scenes photos, optional commentary and a fascinating set of original line drawings, all accessed via beautifully presented menus. Fab™.



THE CORRS
Live at the Royal Albert Hall
Atlantic/Warner Music Vision (Dolby Digital 5.1; linear PCM stereo)
CONTENT: Ireland's biggest cultural export since *Riverdance*

play their little hearts out. You may question the stadium-style music's depth, but you've got to admire the polish.

SOUND: A touch mushy in the bass, but warm to the ear and generally crisp and clear. One of the better quality live music DVDs available.

★★★★★

EXTRAS: You can display the song lyrics as they play, and that's it. Oh dear.



MICHAEL JACKSON
HiStory on Film Volume II
SMV (Dolby Digital; linear PCM stereo)
CONTENT: Either you love the self-proclaimed King of Pop, or you loath him. Suffice to say

this disc includes several genre-defining music video

moments, including *Beat It* and the full-length *Thriller*.

SOUND: The DD mix is unimaginative – rear speakers simply give an ambient backing effect – but at least it's relatively unobtrusive. As you'd expect, the stereo track sounds less compressed.

EXTRAS: Song subtitles and that's yer lot. Disappointing, given Jackson's taste for new technology.



KING CRIMSON
de ja VROOOM
Discipline Global Mobile (Dolby Digital 5.1, dts, stereo)
CONTENT: Robert Fripp's outfit, often hailed as

"the first prog-rock band", delivers an impressive statement of what this technology can achieve.

Musically it's dark and heavy '70s rock with a '90s sound, but it's the mix of sound and extra features that make it one of the best equipped music DVDs currently available.

SOUND: Clever steering of sounds ensures the rear speakers are employed for more than simple ambience, getting close to a feeling of being on-stage as you watch the live footage. The dts mix is particularly good.

EXTRAS: A host of goodies, including: a menu-driven band history, including writing and pictures from Fripp; multiple camera angle options, with variable sound mixes depending on which instrument you're focusing on; and the ability to create your 'perfect line-up' for the track *21st Century Schizoid Man* – choose a rhythm section, vocal track and soloist from any King Crimson era. And there's more, but the menu system is infuriating – it tries too hard to surprise the user.



GUSTAV MAHLER
Symphony No. 1
Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester/Michael Schonwandt
Denon (Dolby Digital 5.1; linear PCM stereo)
CONTENT: Mahler's melodious first symphony,

made all the more evocative by this disc's

multi-channel mix. Anyone who presupposes that Dolby Digital technology doesn't belong in the world of classical music should listen.

SOUND: Denon's recording expertise and considerable experience with multi-channel music pay dividends. The 5.1 mix is subtle and absorbing, although the linear PCM stereo track beats it for separation and dynamics.

EXTRAS: On-screen biographies for orchestra and conductor and photographs of Mahler that switch from movement to movement (there's no film footage).



METALLICA
Cunning Stunts
PolyGram Video (Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo)
CONTENT: The kings of

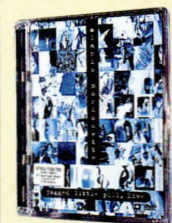
'80s/'90s metal try their damndest to melt your speakers' cones – all five of them! Live footage is as lavish as the two-disc

packaging, making it essential for any DVD owner with metal in their bones.

SOUND: Production is polished and the use of Dolby Digital swells the sound field quite impressively, but I'm not convinced about the merits of multi-channel metal – it doesn't seem to suit the genre. The stereo mix has less novelty value but is probably better overall, although it still sounds rather compressed and 'rumbly' in the bass.

EXTRAS: A photo gallery containing hundreds of stills, 'behind the scenes' footage, interviews and movable camera angles on three songs.

★★★★★



ALANIS MORISSETTE
Jagged Little Pill, Live
Warner Music Vision (Dolby Digital 5.1; linear PCM stereo)
CONTENT: Highly competent live material from the whingeing

Canuck's massively successful world tour is interspersed with dodgy video footage, off-stage antics and media clips.

SOUND: Nice concert ambience from the 5.1 mix adds to the live feel, but it's rather coarse and muddled. The inclusion of a linear PCM stereo track on the disc's flipside is a plus.

★★★★★

EXTRAS: You get lyric subtitle options in a variety of languages, but nowt else.

OASIS
...There and Then
SMV (Dolby Digital 5.1; linear PCM stereo)

CONTENT: 'Live' footage from Oasis' über-gigs at

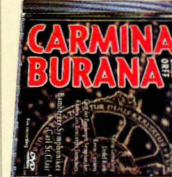


London's Earl's Court and Manchester City's Maine Road ground. It's all fairly basic stuff, but if you're one of the many who like Oasis then this captures the band at the peak of their form.

SOUND: Some might say that Oasis is the

group of '90s; but one thing they're not renowned for is their sound quality. This is pretty much as rough as Oasis on CD with all the additional trappings of live concert sound – it's not terribly 'toppy', but bass is all over the shop. Still, it's energy that really counts here, and the use of multi-channel audio swells the sound field to powerful proportions.

EXTRAS: What extras? ★★★★★

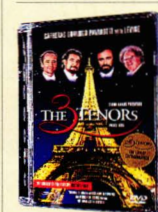


CARL ORFF
Carmina Burana
Bamberger Symphoniker/Carl St.Clair (Dolby Digital 5.1; linear PCM stereo)
CONTENT: This is one of the most

popular 20th century classical pieces, a gripping slice of orchestral theatrics and choral drama. It opens in the most powerful way possible – the compelling choral theme used in *The Omen* films – and captivates right to the end.

SOUND: The 5.1 mix is a little thin-sounding, but centre and rear speakers are deftly used. It's effective in giving an impression of wraparound concert hall acoustics, even if the linear PCM stereo track is better defined.

EXTRAS: Just on-screen backdrops in a variety of colours, and no 'extras'.



THE 3 TENORS
PARIS 1998
Decca/Polygram (Dolby Digital 5.1; linear PCM stereo)
CONTENT: Carreras,

Domingo and Pavarotti strut their stuff, their honeyed voices flowing forth at the foot of a

floodlit Eiffel Tower. The concert visuals are rather garish, truth be told, but this 'operatic tenors' greatest hits' is impeccably performed.

SOUND: The 5.1 mix is dynamically flat, though notably crisper than The 3 Tenors' 1994 concert, available separately. The stereo track is an improvement in dynamic terms.

EXTRAS: Interviews and on-screen fact sheets.

audio system more appropriate for music, and great as long as your amp/processor can decode it. Also worth looking for is a 'linear PCM stereo' track in addition to any surround mix, this is CD quality and tends to sound more dynamic than Dolby Digital stereo or 5.1, although not of course, encoded in surround.

Multi-channel music CDs have been around longer than DVDs and, though their profile has been low there are many dts-encoded discs that are very good indeed. Titles tend to be quite specialist and vary in musical quality – of course, it's

horses for courses – but they're arguably more interesting than the current crop of DVD-Video music discs, most of which feature mega-selling artists from the larger record companies.

However, the growth of the DVD-Video single could help to stir things up. It provides a platform for artists to experiment with multi-channel on just one or two tracks, perhaps even writing and recording in surround rather than simply translating to multi-channel after the event.

It's obvious that live material lends itself particularly well to multi-channel treatment – it

wraps you in crowd ambience and creates an impression closer to being on-stage with the artist. Perhaps more surprising is how well it suits classical music, increasing the feeling of orchestral scale and concert hall ambience by surrounding you with sound.

Denon's classical music label has been recording music with multi-channel microphone setups for years, readying itself for the arrival of suitable multi-channel formats and ensuring proper application of surround sound from the recording phase onwards. For Denon, surround sound is much more

than just an afterthought – it's the future of recorded music.

As a music lover and a hi-fi devotee, one might have reservations about the wisdom of adding multi-channel processing to hardware and distracting visual elements (in the case of DVD) to software. But the fact is it's here, and its profile will increase massively over the next few years.

If artists, music labels and hi-fi manufacturers apply the technology with imagination and sensitivity, it might just be the biggest thing to happen to music since the advent of stereo. The future starts here.

MULTI-CHANNEL DVD-VIDEO SINGLES

DVD-Video releases with a shorter running time, just like CD singles. Most include two or three tracks, or a single track with several mixes, and some offer extra features like on-screen biographies. Prices are typically less than £10.



CARL COX
Phuture 2000
Edel/Worldwide
Ultimatum Records
(Dolby Digital 5.1 and stereo)
CONTENT: Top DJ Carl Cox released this recent slab of hard-trance on DVD in addition to the usual CD and vinyl formats. Included are a remix by Hybrid, which incorporates the track's video, and a video-less 'Surround Sound Mix'.
SOUND: The 5.1 mix is basic but effective. Dolby Digital surround really suits electronic music – it

creates space and gives a pretty 'clubby' kind of ambience. Pass the Evian... **EXTRAS:** On-screen biography – not bad for a single. *********

MICKEY HART – PLANET DRUM
Indoscrub
Rykodisc (Dolby Digital 5.1; dts; 24-bit/96kHz stereo)
CONTENT: DVD-V single from the Grateful Dead drummer and a must for anyone interested in seeing/hearing the technical possibilities of this format. Musically it's a bit bland – two tracks in a percussive Peter Gabriel/Talking Heads/Art of

Noise kind of style – but sound quality and general application are superb, and the accompanying videos are pretty fine too!
SOUND: The all-enveloping dts surround mix is stunning, and the 24-bit stereo mix is excellent in hi-fi terms – dynamic, solid and spacious.

EXTRAS: A pretentious interview and an Internet link for those with DVD-ROM. *********



HOW THE TEST WAS DONE

To play DVD-Video discs you need a Dolby Digital processor and five channels of power, either via an integrated home cinema amp or a separate processor and power amp(s). You also need a DVD player, of course, and five speakers (with the option of a subwoofer) plus a TV. To play dts discs, your processor will need a dts decoder; dts CDs can be played on any CD player with a digital output.

The best approach for a musical multi-channel experience is to invest in a good processor and couple it to power amps and matched speakers from respected hi-fi manufacturers. The set-up we used to review this software is one of the most musical multi-channel systems we've heard: Pioneer's DV-717 DVD player hooked up to TAG McLaren's excellent AV32R processor, with five Musical Fidelity X-A200 mono power amps and a Dynaudio speaker package: two Contour 1.8s with a Contour Center at the front, and a pair of 1.3 MkIIs at the rear. Speaker stands were from Partington and equipment supports from Apollo, with a number of Townshend Seismic Sinks for additional isolation.

All software is rated on the basis of sound quality and extra features (where relevant), rather than on musical content.

All the dts CDs reviewed in this article are available from Vivante ☎ (0208) 977 6600. DVD-Videos are available from larger music stores. If you're interested in giving music in surround sound a tryout, see the News section for details of a free dts sampler.

dts COMPACT DISCS


CDs encoded with dts are playable on a compatible DVD player or a CD player with a digital output. A dts decoder is also required. There is no visual element, but they offer some of the best multi-channel sounds around. Expect to pay £22.



EAGLES
Hell Freezes Over
Geffen (dts)
CONTENT: A hi-fi demo 'classic', heard seeping from hotel rooms at hi-fi shows the world over. If you're an Eagles fan you've probably already got the CD version – in terms of sound quality it's among the best live recordings ever, and this dts multi-channel version adds an extra dimension.
SOUND: Even if the Eagles bore you rigid, you can't knock the quality of sound. It's clean, clear and beautifully proportioned between front, centre and rear speakers. The stereo version is perhaps better defined and stronger dynamically, but this format really makes you feel part of the performance. *********



GUSTAV HOLST
The Planets
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra/Voel Levi Telarc (dts)
CONTENT: Holst's The Planets in dts surround is a moth-watering prospect – imagine the snarly, brassy dramatics of *Mars, the Bringer of War* wrapped around you as you cower in the centre of the sound field.
SOUND: Unfortunately, it doesn't quite live up to expectations. Sound quality is a little flat and lacking in expression, though tonally it's easy on the ear and dts implementation is smooth. Good, but not great. *********



BONNIE RAITT
Road Tested
Capitol (dts)
CONTENT: Live album from one of America's most admired 'adult contemporary' artists, originally released in 1995. For Raitt fans it's a superb set, neatly capturing the live energy of artist and band. Highlights include a cover of Talking Heads' *Burning Down the House*.
SOUND: It's a little mushy in the bass, but the expertly-executed transfer to dts surround creates a magical feeling of 'being there'. It's possibly the best surround-sound translation of a live recording to date. *********



GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL
Water Garden
Liad (dts)
CONTENT: This most stately of classical pieces has received the dts surround sound treatment – strings, harpsichord and all.
SOUND: Very pleasant indeed, although perhaps a little lacking in dynamic expression and high frequency detail. Sound from the rear speakers is beautifully subtle, adding to the recording's ambience without intruding. *********



LYLE LOVETT
Joshua Judges Ruth
MCA (dts)
CONTENT: 1992 album from one of New Country's sharpest wits. A highly polished album, but probably not his most musically satisfying. It's superbly produced and translates brilliantly into surround sound.
SOUND: It's always been a clean and dynamic recording, but the translation into dts 5.1 adds a new dimension. It piles on the atmosphere, and the interplay between instruments and voices is stunning throughout. *********



STING
Ten Summoner's Tales
A&M (dts)
CONTENT: 1993 album from the Tantric sexpert, given a new lease of life with a translation into dts multi-channel sound. Now you can be surrounded by Sting, without actually touching...
SOUND: Lacks the intimate depth of the Lyle Lovett disc, and sounds a little soft next to the standard CD version, but it's percussively tight and the use of rear speakers has been sympathetically applied. *********

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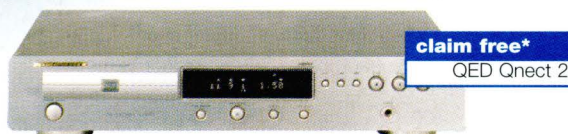
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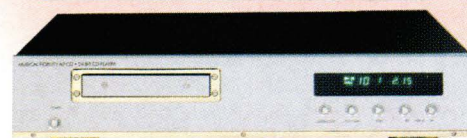
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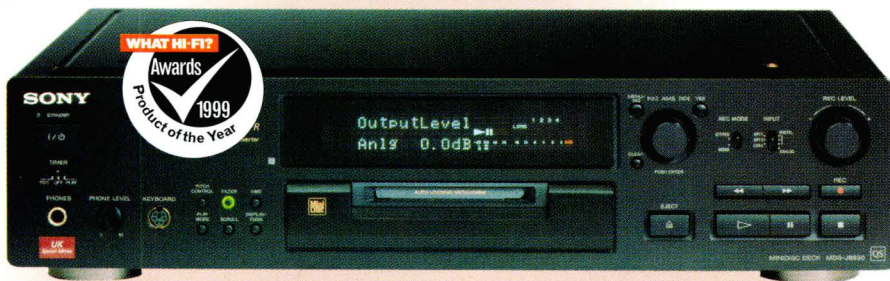
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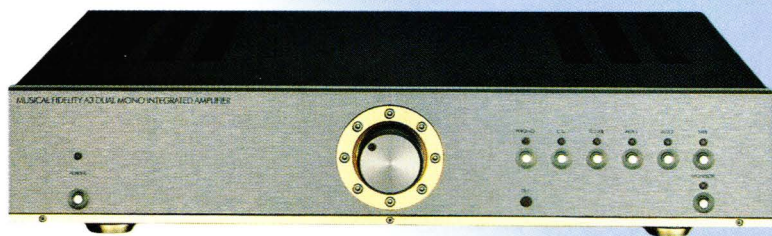
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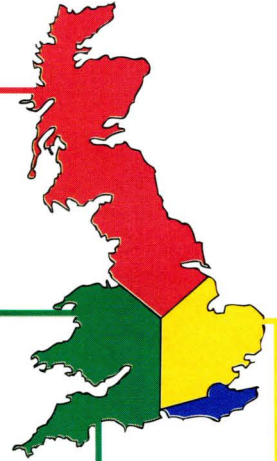
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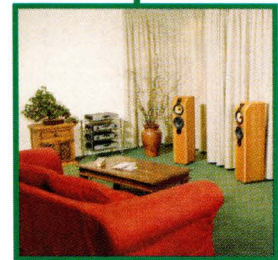
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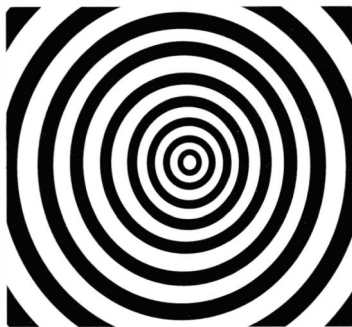
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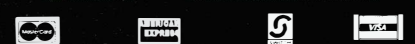
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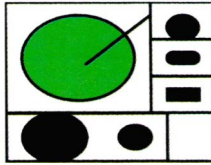
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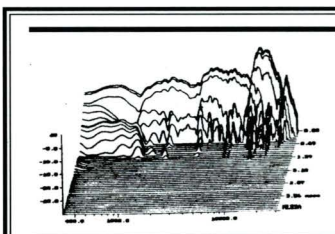
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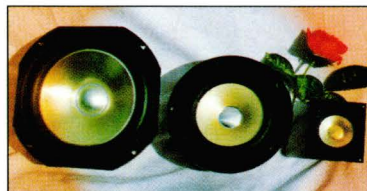
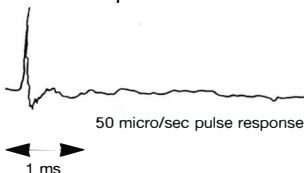
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Bandor

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Tel: 01494 714058 Fax: 01494 714058

Website design and maintenance by Adrian J Jordan.
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S3TL	Paper IPL 6.5", 1" Seas treb	903x230x350	£186.00	£9.00
S3TLM	Metal IPL 6.5", 1" Seas treb	903x230x350	£233.00	£9.00
S3TLM RIB	Metal IPL 6.5", A&R Ribbon	903x230x350	£389.25	£9.00
S4TL	Audax 8" bass, Morel 1" treb	960x320x400	£215.00	£10.00
S5TL	Audax 10", 5" HDA mid, 1" treb	1080x320x400	£383.00	£11.00
S5TL GOLD	Audax 10", 5" HDA mid. Gold treb	1080x320x400	£565.56	£11.00

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**When replying to an advert in the
Dealer Guide or Dealer Directory
remember to mention you saw it in
Hi-Fi Choice**

HOW TO USE THE BUYERS' GUIDE

Best Buys, Recommendations & Editor's Choices

- B BEST BUYS:** Awarded to group-tested products which display an unbeatable blend of performance and value for money.
- R RECOMMENDED:** Top performers in group tests: perhaps not the cheapest but possibly more sophisticated than Best Buys.
- E EDITOR'S CHOICE:** More expensive components which exhibit outstanding engineering, industrial design and sound quality.

Our Three Step Guide to Buying Hi-Fi

The *Hi-Fi Choice Price Guide and Directory* are extremely simple to use, but contain all the information you need to select and buy the perfect hi-fi system. Here's how it works.

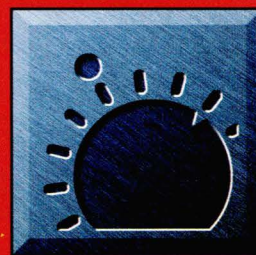
STEP 1 DISCOVER which products fall within your budget by using our Price Guide, which starts on this page. The product listing is updated using manufacturers' data every other month, and aims to include every hi-fi component currently available in the UK. (But please fax us on 0171-917 5512 with any omissions!) It is an alphabetical listing divided into different types of hi-fi component, and also into price bands.

STEP 2 PRODUCTS whose names are printed in **RED** are those we have reviewed, which you can read about in the Directory (starts after the Price Guide). Here you will learn which items have been singled out for our famous Best Buy, Recommended or Editor's Choice awards, denoting products of exceptional quality and value. The Directory is sorted by product type and listed alphabetically, and the beginning of each section provides essential information about each kind of hi-fi component.

STEP 3 FIND your nearest hi-fi store in our Dealer Directory (at the end of the Directory) to book a demonstration of the hi-fi equipment you want to hear. Remember to take your own LPs or CDs!

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AMPLIFIERS INTEGRATED

KEY

⑤ - Number of line-level inputs.
 20W - Rated RMS output power per channel into nominal load of 8 Ohms.

UP TO £250

Arcam Alpha One	⑤	35W	230
Ariston AX910	④	30W	60
Cambridge A1 Mk III	④	30W	100
Cambridge A1 Mk3 SE	④	30W	120
Cambridge A100	⑤	40W	140
Cambridge A300	⑤	40W	150
Cambridge A3i	④	60W	200
Cambridge A500RC	⑤	75W	200
Denon PMA-250SE	⑤	30W	140
Denon PMA-350SE	⑤	50W	180
Denon PMA-535R	⑤	50W	230
Denon PMA-100M	⑤	80W	240
Goodmans Delta 900A	⑤	100W	130
H/K HK630	④	40W	200
H/K HK3270	⑤	65W	250
JVC AX-A372BK	⑤	40W	200
JVC AX-R5BK	⑤	45W	200
Kenwood KA-1080	④	60W	140
Kenwood KA-3080R	④	70W	170
Kenwood KAF-3101R	④	70W	180
Marantz PM-48	⑤	50W	150
Marantz PM-57	⑤	50W	200
Marantz SR-47	④	40W	200
Marantz PM6010 OSE	⑤	65W	230
Marantz PM-66SE	⑤	50W	230
Musical Fidelity E1	⑥	30W	199
NAD 310	⑥	20W	100
NAD C320	⑥	40W	200
NAD 312	⑥	25W	200
Pioneer A-105	⑤	30W	130
Pioneer A-204R	⑥	25W	160
Pioneer A-300R	⑥	50W	200
Pioneer A-305R	⑥	50W	200
Pioneer A-407R	⑥	45W	230
Pioneer A-405R	⑥	45W	250
Rotel RA921	⑤	20W	100
Rotel RA931	④	35W	150
Rotel RA971 Mk II	⑥	70W	250
Sansui AUX-410R	⑥	50W	150
Sansui AUX-510R	⑥	70W	230
Sherwood AX 4050R	⑤	50W	150
Sherwood AX-7030R	⑤	95W	230
Sony TA-FE230	⑤	40W	100
Sony TA-FE330R	⑤	60W	130
Sony TA-FB730R	⑥	40W	200
Teac AE-2000	⑥	50W	180
Teac A-R600	⑦	90W	200
Technics SU-V300	⑥	25W	130
Technics SU-V500	⑥	30W	160
Technics SU-A600 Mk3	⑥	37W	200
Technics SU-V620	⑥	70W	230
Technics SU-A707	⑥	70W	250
Technics SU-A700 Mk3	⑥	45W	250
Yamaha AX-392	⑥	60W	170
Yamaha AX-9	⑤	50W	200
Yamaha AX-492	⑤	85W	220

£251 TO £500

Arcam Alpha 7R	⑥	40W	300
Arcam Alpha 8R	⑥	50W	380
Arcam Alpha 9	⑥	70W	500
Audio Analogue Puccini	⑤	40W	475
Audiogram MB1	④	40W	493
Creek 4330	④	40W	279
Creek 4330R	⑤	40W	355
Creek 5250	⑥	50W	450
Cymbol CA1	⑥	40W	499
Denon PMA-735R	⑤	65W	300
Denon PMA-1500R	⑤	70W	500
Edmund Audio ES110	⑥	85W	400
EMF Audio Sequel	⑤	50W	450
H/K HK650	⑥	60W	330
Kenwood KA-5090R	⑤	65W	300
Magnum IA120	⑥	65W	265
Magnum IA170	⑥	96W	330
Magnum IA170SE	⑥	90W	430
Marantz PM-68	⑥	90W	300
Marantz PM-66 KI Sig.	⑤	50W	400
Monrio Asty	⑤	55W	400

Musical Fidelity E11	⑥	60W	300
Musical Fidelity X-A1	⑥	50W	480
Musical Fidelity A2	⑥	25W	500
Mynyad T-40	⑥	50W	400
NAD 314	⑥	35W	260
NAD C340	⑥	50W	270
NAD 317	⑥	80W	470
Onkyo A9210	⑥	40W	260
Onkyo A921	⑦	50W	350
Onkyo A922	⑦	70W	400
Pioneer A-607R	⑥	60W	300
Pioneer A-400X	⑤	50W	300
Pioneer A-605R	⑤	80W	400
Pioneer A-300R Precision	⑤	35W	400
Rega Big Brio	④	35W	298
Rega Luna	⑥	40W	375
Rega Mira	⑥	60W	450
Roksan Kandy	⑥	35W	499
Shearne 2.5	⑥	65W	300
Sony TA-FB920R	⑥	70W	400
Sony TA-FA30ES	⑥	40W	500
Sony TA-F3000ES	⑥	50W	500
Talk Electronics Storm 1	⑥	50W	280
Teac AH-500	⑥	80W	300
Technics SU-A808	⑥	100W	400
Technics SU-A909	⑥	60W	449
Thule Audio Spirit IA60	⑤	55W	350
Token K50	⑤	100W	280
Yamaha AX-592	⑤	100W	280

£501 TO £700

Alchemist Kraken APD6A	⑤	55W	600
Alchemist Nemesis	⑥	80W	700
Audio Analogue Puccini SE	⑤	40W	635
Audio Note Kanji Line SE	⑨	9W	699
Audio Note First integrated	⑥	40W	699
Audiogram MB2	⑤	60W	599
CR Dev CR324se	⑤	150W	569
CR Dev Kalypto	⑤	15W	599
CR Dev CR325	⑥	175W	699
Creek 5250SE	⑥	60W	665
Cyrus IIIi	⑥	50W	598
Cyrus 7	⑥	130W	700
Densen Beat B-100 MkII	⑤	60W	650
Gamma Gemini	⑥	12W	699
H/K HK690	⑥	100W	530
Hi Q Sound MCI	④	30W	565
LFD Integrated 0	⑤	50W	549
Linn Majik (Line)	⑥	33W	650
Lynnwood Opal	⑥	80W	685
Magnum IA200	⑦	100W	599
Magnum Class A	⑥	85W	690
Musical Fidelity A220	⑤	50W	700
Mynyad MI 120	⑥	60W	700
Naim Nait 3	⑥	30W	590
Primare A20 Mk II	④	70W	600
Rose Scon	⑥	65W	615
Shearne Phase 2	⑤	50W	689
Sugden Audition T	④	65W	549
Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	⑥	65W	550
Talk Electronics Storm 2	⑥	50W	650
Teac AB-X7R	⑤	50W	700
Thule Audio Spirit IA100	⑤	100W	600
Thule Audio Spirit IA60B	⑤	60W	699
YBA Complete Integré	⑥	50W	699

£701 TO £1,000

Alchemist Nexus	⑤	799	
Alchemist Forseti Integrated	⑥	100W	1,000
Arcam Alpha 10	⑦	100W	800
Aria S2	④	12W	1,000
Audio Note Oto Line PP	⑥	12W	950
AVI S2000MI	⑤	100W	999
Copland CSA8	⑥	60W	899
Creo IMP702	⑤	70W	850
Creo IMP703	⑥	70W	1,000
Electrocompaniet ECI-2	④	50W	995
Exposure XX Super	⑤	60W	800
Exposure XV Super	④	60W	900
Exposure RCXX	⑥	60W	1,000
LFD 0 LE Integrated	⑤	60W	799
Linn Majik (Phono)	⑤	33W	800
Magnum Class A SE	⑥	80W	795
Marantz PM-17	⑥	60W	900
Meridian 551	⑥	55W	795
Musical Fidelity A3	⑥	85W	849
Musical Fidelity X-A100R	⑥	75W	999
Naim Nait 3 R	⑤	30W	780
Opera Aida	⑤	60W	795
Pioneer A-07	⑤	80W	999
Plinius 2100i	⑥	70W	795
Roksan Caspian	⑥	50W	799
Shearne Phase 2 Reference	⑤	50W	900
Sonneteer Alabaster	④	25W	799
Sugden Audition C	⑥	60W	799
TAG McLaren 60i	⑥	60W	800
TAG McLaren 60RV	⑥	60W	999
Thule Audio Spirit IA150B	⑤	150W	999

£1,001 TO £2,000

Aria Simply Four P	⑥	24W	1,595
Aria Simply Four T	⑥	11W	1,650
ATC SIA2-150	④	150W	1,984
Audio Note Soro Line PP	⑥	20W	1,200

Audio Note Oto Line SE	ⓐ	12W	1,200
Audio Note Oto Phono SE	ⓐ	12W	1,500
Audio Note Soro Line SE	ⓐ	18W	1,699
Audio Valve Assistant-S 20	ⓐ	20W	1,250
BB Audio BB 30-60	ⓐ	30W	1,495
Beam-Echo SA-50	ⓐ	50W	1,950
Bow Technologies Wazoo	ⓐ	50W	1,795
Bryston B-60	ⓐ	60W	1,281
Copland CSA14	ⓐ	60W	1,199
Copland CSA28	ⓐ	60W	1,249
Copland CTA402	ⓐ	35W	1,698
CR Dev Romulus V3	ⓐ	35W	1,198
CR Dev Athena	ⓐ	38W	1,499
CR Dev Remus V3	ⓐ	60W	1,989
Credo LIM 702	ⓐ		1,191
Credo LIM 703	ⓐ		1,249
Densen DM-10	ⓐ	75W	1,375
EAR 859	ⓐ	13W	1,999
EAR 834	ⓐ	40W	1,999
Golden Tube Audio SI-50 MkII	ⓐ	50W	1,100
Graaf Venticinque	ⓐ	20W	1,790
Jadis Orchestra	ⓐ		1,345
LFD Integrated 1	ⓐ	65W	1,099
Marantz PM-17 KI Sig	ⓐ	60W	1,300
Meracus Intrare	ⓐ	60W	1,095
NAD S300	ⓐ	100W	1,900
Papworth MH-200	ⓐ	200W	1,200
Papworth MVH-200	ⓐ	200W	1,200
Plinius B150	ⓐ		1,895
Praecisa Sonoro	ⓐ	100W	1,800
Pmnaire A30.1	ⓐ	100W	1,500
Restek Fantasy 2	ⓐ	100W	1,499
Sonic Frontiers Anthem Integrated	ⓐ	25W	1,299
T+A R1200R	ⓐ	90W	1,750
Thule Audio Space IA250B	ⓐ	250W	1,799
Woodside ISA230 Line	ⓐ	30W	1,099
Woodside ISA230 Disc	ⓐ	30W	1,249
YBA a Integre Line	ⓐ	50W	1,095
YBA a Integre DT Line	ⓐ	50W	1,395

OVER £2,000

Adyton Opera	ⓐ	50W	2,595
AMP Flux System 2	ⓐ	50W	3,000
Aria Simply 845	ⓐ	24W	3,195
Art Audio Integra	ⓐ	25W	2,400
Audio Note Meishu Line	ⓐ	9W	2,750
Audio Note Ongaku	ⓐ	26W	56,000
Audio Research CA50	ⓐ		3,399
Belcanto SE140	ⓐ	40W	4,450
Belcanto Orfeo 30S1	ⓐ	35W	5,450
Cary CAD-300SEI	ⓐ	15W	3,395
Conrad-Johnson CAV-50	ⓐ	50W	2,495
EAR V20	ⓐ	24W	2,495
Electrocompaniet ECI-1	ⓐ	100W	2,195
Gamma Rhythm	ⓐ	18W	2,499
Gamma Rhythm Ref	ⓐ	20W	3,499
Gamma Moment	ⓐ	40W	19,999
Jadis DA30	ⓐ	30W	2,690
Jadis DA60	ⓐ	60W	4,483
Krell KAV300i	ⓐ	150W	2,495
Krell KAV300r	ⓐ		3,333
Krell KAV500i	ⓐ	250W	5,000
McIntosh MA6400E	ⓐ	100W	3,999
McIntosh MA6800E	ⓐ	150W	5,999
Meracus Onesta	ⓐ	75W	2,595
Musical Fidelity A1001	ⓐ	200W	2,500
Pioneer A-09	ⓐ	45W	4,000
Rowland Concentra	ⓐ	100W	5,500
Sonus Faber Musica	ⓐ		2,295
T+A R1500R	ⓐ	135W	2,015
Tube Tech Unity Sig. Int.	ⓐ	30W	2,300
Tube Tech Synergy PPS	ⓐ	150W	6,900
Wavac MD811	ⓐ	15W	2,995
Wavac MD300B-ST	ⓐ	10W	5,575
Wavac MD300B WE	ⓐ	10W	6,750

AMPLIFIERS PREAMPS

KEY
 ⓐ (etc) - Number of line-level inputs.
Ph - Phono input fitted as standard
 (may be an option on some other models).

UP TO £500

Arcam Alpha 9C	ⓐ		400
Aria Simply Phono	ⓐ	Ph	500
Audio Analogue Bellini	ⓐ	Ph	495
Audio Note M Zero	ⓐ		299
Beam-Echo PP-21	ⓐ	Ph	499
Bryston BP1	ⓐ	Ph	438
CR Dev Themis	ⓐ	Ph	349
Creek OBH-9	ⓐ		160
Creek P43/R	ⓐ		350
Creek P52	ⓐ		499
Crimson CS610C	ⓐ	Ph	450
Cyrus aEQ	ⓐ	Ph	498
Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	ⓐ		350
DPA Enl'ment phono	ⓐ	Ph	275
EAR 834P	ⓐ	Ph	349
EAR 834L	ⓐ	Ph	449
EAR 834P/MC	ⓐ	Ph	499
Electrocompaniet ECP-1	ⓐ	Ph	495
Henley HMC50	ⓐ		150

Henley HMC100			350
Hi Q Sound LCP2			149
LFD Mistral Linestage	ⓐ		449
LFD LSO Linestage	ⓐ		499
Lumley PP70	ⓐ		345
Lumley PP1	ⓐ		345
Magnum MP120	ⓐ		330
Magnum MP660	ⓐ		500
Magnum MP330	ⓐ		500
Monrio ADN-N	ⓐ	Ph	295
Monrio Asty L	ⓐ		500
Moth 30 Passive	ⓐ		149
Moth 30 Phono	ⓐ	Ph	249
Moth 30 Line stage	ⓐ		349
Musical Fidelity X10-D	ⓐ		120
Musical Fidelity X-LP	ⓐ	Ph	130
Musical Fidelity X-PRE	ⓐ		200
Musical Fidelity E20	ⓐ		400
NAD PP-1	ⓐ	Ph	40
NAD 114	ⓐ	Ph	270
NAD 116	ⓐ	Ph	430
Naim Prefix	ⓐ		360
Naim NAC92	ⓐ		485
NVA P50	ⓐ		350
Parasound P/HP-100	ⓐ	Ph	130
Parasound P/HP-850	ⓐ	Ph	400
Plinius Jarrah	ⓐ	Ph	450
QED Discsaver DS-1	ⓐ	Ph	35
Rega EOS	ⓐ	Ph	398
Rega Cursa	ⓐ	Ph	450
Roksan Artaxerxes 10	ⓐ	Ph	395
Rose RV-23	ⓐ	Ph	450
Rotel RQ970BX	ⓐ	Ph	130
Rotel RC971	ⓐ		150
Rotel RC972	ⓐ		225
Sunfire Phono	ⓐ	Ph	430
Talk Electronics Hurricane 1	ⓐ		500
Technics SU-C1010	ⓐ	Ph	300
Thule Audio Spirit PR100	ⓐ		400
Trilogy 905	ⓐ		375
Trilogy 904	ⓐ	Ph	375
Trilogy 900	ⓐ	Ph	499

£501 TO £2,000

Adyton Chorus	ⓐ		1,995
Alchemist Kraken Pre	ⓐ		549
Alchemist Forseti Pre	ⓐ		999
Alchemist Signature Pre	ⓐ		1,499
Aria Feather One	ⓐ		795
Aria Mystery Two	ⓐ		1,750
Aria Mystery One	ⓐ		1,750
Art Audio Vinyl One MM	ⓐ	Ph	916
Art Audio VPS Line	ⓐ		963
Art Audio Vinyl One MM/MC	ⓐ	Ph	1,307
Art Audio VPS Phono	ⓐ	Ph	1,460
Art Audio Conductor Phono MC	ⓐ	Ph	2,000
Audio Note M1 Line	ⓐ		550
Audio Note M1 RIAA	ⓐ	Ph	550
Audio Note M2 Line	ⓐ		999
Audio Note Discovery	ⓐ		999
Audio Note M2RIAA	ⓐ	Ph	1,099
Audio Prism Mantissa	ⓐ		1,995
Audio Research LS8	ⓐ		1,449
Audio Research PH3	ⓐ	Ph	1,490
Audio Research LS9	ⓐ		1,949
Audio Synthesis Pro Passion	ⓐ		595
Audio Synthesis Passion	ⓐ		695
Audio Synthesis Passion 85	ⓐ		1,295
Audio Synthesis Passion 8M	ⓐ		1,695
Audio Valve Eclipse	ⓐ		1,650
AVI S2000MP	ⓐ		949
AVI S2000MP+P	ⓐ	Ph	1,199
Beam-Echo SP-21	ⓐ	Ph	1,116
Bryston BP20	ⓐ		1,126
Bryston BP-25	ⓐ		1,326
Bryston BP-25P	ⓐ	Ph	1,592
Canary Audio CA-606	ⓐ		1,295
Canary Audio CA-601	ⓐ		1,595
Cary SLP-50 Mk II	ⓐ		1,195
Cary PH-301	ⓐ	Ph	1,695
Chord Phono	ⓐ	Ph	1,898
Chord CPA 1800	ⓐ		1,905
Concordant Exhilarant	ⓐ		900
Concordant Exquisite	ⓐ		1,950
Conrad-Johnson PV-10AL	ⓐ		995
Conrad-Johnson PV-10AL	ⓐ	Ph	1,295
Conrad-Johnson PV-12AL	ⓐ		1,990
Conrad-Johnson EF-1	ⓐ	Ph	1,990
Conrad-Johnson PF-2	ⓐ	Ph	1,990
Copland CSA303	ⓐ	Ph	1,099
Copland CTA301 MkII	ⓐ	Ph	1,249
CR Dev Carmenta	ⓐ		659
CR Dev Argento	ⓐ	Ph	699
Credo CMP004	ⓐ		1,246
Credo CMP005	ⓐ		1,876
Cyrus aCA7	ⓐ		798
Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	ⓐ	Ph	826
Densen Beat B-200	ⓐ	Ph	1,000
Densen DM-20	ⓐ		1,200
DNM 3 Start	ⓐ	Ph	1,000
DNM 3A Start	ⓐ	Ph	1,650
DPA Enlightenment pre	ⓐ		795
Dynavector L200	ⓐ		995
Dynavector P100	ⓐ	Ph	1,495
Dynavector L100	ⓐ		1,995
ECA Vista S	ⓐ		760
ECA Vista HD	ⓐ		880

ECA Prisma		Ph	880
Electrocompaniet EC-4.5			1,195
Electrocompaniet EC-4.6	ⓐ		1,750
Exposure XIII	ⓐ		800
Exposure XIX	ⓐ		800
Exposure XVII	ⓐ	Ph	850
Exposure RC XXI	ⓐ		1,000
Gate PR101P	ⓐ		1,195
Golden Tube Audio SEP-2	ⓐ		990
Golden Tube Audio SEP-3	ⓐ		1,995
Graaf WFB Two	ⓐ	Ph	1,350
Graaf WFB One	ⓐ	Ph	1,750
Henley HMC200	ⓐ		600
Hi Q Sound MCB2	ⓐ	Ph	545
Hi Q Sound MCL2	ⓐ		645
Jadis DPL2	ⓐ		1,590
Krell KAV250p	ⓐ		1,999
LFD MC1 PhonoStage	ⓐ	Ph	949
LFD LS1 Linestage	ⓐ		999
LFD MC2 PhonoStage	ⓐ	Ph	1,499
LFD LS2 Linestage	ⓐ		1,599
LFD LSB Linestage	ⓐ		1,999
Linn Wakonda	ⓐ		750
Linn Linto	ⓐ		850
Linn Kairi	ⓐ		1,400
Lumley LV1.5	ⓐ		895
Lumley LV1	ⓐ		1,150
Lumley PV1.5	ⓐ	Ph	1,700
Lumley PV1	ⓐ		1,700
Matisse Atom	ⓐ		1,000
McIntosh C712	ⓐ	Ph	1,999
Meracus Ingredi	ⓐ		925
Meridian 501	ⓐ		695
Meridian 502	ⓐ		765
Meridian 562V	ⓐ		995
Meridian 502	ⓐ		1,295
Michell Delphini	ⓐ	Ph	895
Michell Orca	ⓐ		1,650
Muse Model 3	ⓐ		1,990
Musical Fidelity F25	ⓐ	Ph	1,500
Myrrad MP100	ⓐ		600
NAD 118	ⓐ		1,000
Naim NAC92R	ⓐ		650
Naim NAC72	ⓐ		745
Naim NAC102	ⓐ		1,080
Quad 99 Pre	ⓐ	Ph	800
Rega Hal	ⓐ	Ph	998
Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	ⓐ	Ph	1,150
Roksan ROK-L2.5	ⓐ		1,250
Rose RV-235	ⓐ	Ph	525
Rotel RC995	ⓐ		525
Shearpe Phase 6 Pre	ⓐ		999
Shearpe Phase 1 Pre Ref	ⓐ		1,499
Sieml MC20	ⓐ	Ph	650
Sieml MM20	ⓐ	Ph	650
Sieml TU10	ⓐ		1,599
Sieml TR20	ⓐ		1,599
Sonic Frontiers Anthem Pre 1P	ⓐ	Ph	899
Sonic Frontiers Phono 1	ⓐ	Ph	1,999
Sonographe SC26	ⓐ		995
Sugden Audition Pre	ⓐ		549
Sugden Masterclass Pre	ⓐ		1,995
Sumo Athena II Line	ⓐ		767
Sumo Athena IIB/II LS	ⓐ		987
Sumo Athena III	ⓐ		987
Sumo Artemis uP	ⓐ		1,595
Sunfire The Classic	ⓐ		1,630
T+A P1200R	ⓐ		965
TAG McLaren PA10	ⓐ	Ph	849
TAG McLaren PPA20	ⓐ	Ph	1,499
TAG McLaren PA20R	ⓐ		1,499
Talk Electronics Hurricane 2	ⓐ		650
Talk Electronics Hurricane 3	ⓐ		900
Talk Electronics Hurricane 4	ⓐ		1,550
Talk Electronics Hurricane 5	ⓐ		1,900
Thorens TTP-2000F	ⓐ	Ph	699
Thule Audio Spirit PR150B	ⓐ		699
Trilogy 901	ⓐ		750
Trilogy 906	ⓐ	Ph	995
Trilogy 902	ⓐ		1,595
Tron Retro	ⓐ		1,500
Tube Tech Seer Line	ⓐ		935
Tube Tech Mac Phono	ⓐ	Ph	1,150
Tube Tech Prophet	ⓐ		1,970
van den Hul Pre-amp	ⓐ		1,800
Wilson benches Stage One	ⓐ	Ph	995
Woodside SC27 Line	ⓐ		949
Woodside SC26 Line	ⓐ		1,557
XTC PRE-1	ⓐ		1,350
YBA 3a Line	ⓐ		995
YBA 2a Line	ⓐ		1,450

OVER £2,000

Adyton Temper	ⓐ		2,495
Adyton Modus	ⓐ		2,695
Art Audio VPS Dual Mono Line	ⓐ		2,350
ATC SCA2	ⓐ		2,599
Atma-Sphere MP-3	ⓐ	Ph	3,795
Atma-Sphere MP-1	ⓐ	Ph	7,600
Audio Note M3Line	ⓐ		2,650
Audio Prism Avanti	ⓐ		7,995
Audio Research LS15	ⓐ		3,399
Audio			

Musical Fidelity E30	100W	500
Musical Fidelity X-A50	50W	500
Myryad T-60	50W	300
Myryad MA 120	60W	500
NAD 912	30W	200
NAD 214	80W	370
NAD 216THX	125W	470
Naim NAP90/3	30W	460
Parasound HCA-750A	75W	450
Quad 99 Stereo Power	85W	500
Rega Maia	85W	450
Rotel RB971	70W	200
Rotel RB981	130W	300
Rotel RB991	200W	500
Shearpe 3.5	35W	489
Talk Electronics Tornado 1	50W	450
Technics SE-A1010	100W	350

ES01 TO £2,000

Alchemist Franken Pwr	55W	549
Alchemist Forseti Pwr	150W	1,399
Alchemist Signature Power	100W	1,999
Arcam Alpha 10P	100W	600
Aria Power 35	35W	1,500
Art Audio Quartet	15W	1,753
Art Audio Concerto	25W	1,960
Audio Analogue Donizetti	60W	595
Audio Note The P	40W	550
Audio Note P Zero	8W	599
Audio Note P1	12W	750
Audio Note P1SE	12W	999
Audio Note P2	20W	1,000
Audio Note P2SE	18W	1,499
Audio Note Conqueror	8W	1,599
Audio Prism Antares	35W	1,695
Audio Research D130	130W	1,890
Audio Research VT60	35W	1,999
Audio Valve RKV	0.1W	595
Audio Valve PPP25	25W	1,095
Audio Valve PPP45	45W	1,395
AVI S2000MM	150W	1,399
Beauhorn Obligato	7W	1,175
Bryston 2B-LP	75W	750
Bryston 3B-ST PRO	150W	1,160
Bryston 3B-ST	150W	1,160
Bryston THX3B	150W	1,262
Bryston 4B-ST PRO	300W	1,756
Bryston 7B-ST	500W	1,815
Bryston 7B-ST PRO	500W	1,815
Bryston THX4B	300W	1,850
Bryston THX7B	500W	1,886
Canary Audio CA-706	40W	1,695
Canary Audio CA-708	50W	1,950
Chord SPM 400	100W	1,425
Chord SPM 600	130W	1,850
Conrad-Johnson MV-55	50W	1,995
Copland CSA515	150W	1,299
Copland CTA505	67W	1,899
CR Dev Amphion	12W	1,949
Credo PMP 804	1,876	
Creek AS2SE	100W	599
Crimson CS630C	100W	800
Cyrus aP47	150W	1,900
Densen B-300	100W	800
Densen DM-30	100W	1,200
DNM PA Start	45W	1,000
DNM PA1 Start	45W	1,650
DPA Enlightenment pwr	100W	995
Dynavector HX75	75W	1,995
ECA Lectern 5	50W	880
ECA Lectern HD	50W	1,480
Electrocompaniet AW60FTT	60W	1,095
Exposure XVIII Super	75W	900
Exposure XVIII Mono	60W	1,800
Golden Tube Audio SE-40	40W	1,100
Golden Tube Audio SE-300B MkII	8W	1,790
Graaf Venticione P	25W	1,425
Hi Q Sound MCM	70W	715
Jadis DA5	40W	1,749
Krell KAV150a	150W	1,990
Lexicon 212	120W	1,850
LFD PA1 Powerstage	60W	999
LFD PA2 Powerstage	75W	1,599
LFD PA2M Powerstage	90W	1,999
Linn LK100	50W	650
Linn LK240	120W	750
Linn AV5105	100W	1,200
Lynwood Ruby	120W	985
Magnum MF330	150W	685
Magnum MF660	125W	825
Magnum AS00SE	200W	1,485
Magnum AS05E	200W	1,595
McIntosh MC7100	100W	1,999
Meracur Ciere	60W	1,095
Mendian 555	60W	750
Meridian 556	100W	895
Mendian 557	200W	1,400
Meridian 505	160W	1,590
Mitchell Alecto Stereo	50W	1,150
Mitchell Alecto Mono	100W	1,950
Monrio Asty P	100W	950
Moth Stereo 60	60W	599
Moth 30 Mono/100	100W	879
Muse Model 100	100W	1,490
Musical Fidelity X-A200	200W	1,000
Myryad MA240	120W	1,000

NAD 218THX	200W	850
Naim NAP140	45W	770
Naim NAP180	60W	1,090
Naim NAP135	75W	1,705
Naim NAP250	70W	1,705
NVA A60	43W	560
Papworth TVA50	50W	1,425
Parasound HCA-1000A	125W	600
Parasound HCA-1500A	205W	1,000
Quad 909	140W	900
Quad 99 Monoblock	150W	1,300
Rega Exon	125W	796
Roksan Caspian Power	70W	595
Roksan ROK-S1.5	100W	1,495
Rose RP-190 (Dual Mode)	75W	550
Shearpe Phase 3	50W	639
Shearpe Phase 3 Reference	50W	749
Shearpe Phase 5 Mono	100W	1,598
Sonic Frontiers Anthem Amp 1	140W	1,299
Sonographe SA250	125W	1,195
Sonographe SA400	220W	1,695
Sugden Audition Power	549	
Sugden A21a Power	25W	649
Sumo Polars III	164W	950
Sumo Model Five	60W	1,975
Sumo Andromeda III	240W	1,975
T+A A1210	90W	875
T+A PA1220R	100W	1,445
T+A A1500	140W	1,535
T+A PA1500R	135W	1,665
TAG McLaren 60P	60W	849
TAG McLaren 100P	100W	1,099
Talk Electronics Tornado 2	65W	600
Talk Electronics Tornado 3	75W	750
Talk Electronics Tornado 4	110W	1,100
Thorens TTA-2000	30W	599
Thule Audio Spirit PA100	100W	600
Thule Audio Spirit PA150B	150W	699
Thule Audio Space PA250B	250W	1,699
Trilogy 948	50W	1,895
Trilogy 948T	22W	1,895
Tube Tech Syrinx	45W	1,150
Tube Tech Unisis Sig. Pwr	30W	1,900
Woodside SA240	40W	1,199
Woodside MA100	100W	1,733
Woodside STA50	50W	1,880
XTC POW-2	150W	1,600
YBA 3a DT Stereo	45W	1,455

OVER £2,000

Adyton Cordis 1.6	120W	3,495
Adyton Cordis 3B	280W	12,995
Aria Smart 845	24W	3,500
Aria Smart 300B	24W	4,250
Art Audio Symphony	7W	2,500
Art Audio Tempo	30W	2,714
Art Audio Maestro	60W	3,884
Art Audio Diavolo	13W	4,000
Art Audio Jota	18W	6,000
Art Audio Ellesse	100W	8,500
Art Audio Chiara	25W	10,000
ATC SPA2-200PRO	200W	2,056
ATC SPA2-150	200W	2,699
Atma-Sphere S-30 Mk II	30W	2,450
Atma-Sphere M-60 Mk II	60W	4,195
Atma-Sphere MA-1 Mk II	150W	7,995
Audio Note P3	9W	2,150
Audio Note Quest	9W	2,750
Audio Note Yubi	18W	3,850
Audio Note Conquest	18W	4,450
Audio Note Tomei	30W	8,500
Audio Note Neiro	7W	11,360
Audio Note Ankoru	60W	14,500
Audio Prism Debut Mk II	35W	2,495
Audio Prism Mana	100W	12,995
Audio Research VT50	50W	2,950
Audio Research 100.2	100W	3,395
Audio Research VT100 MkII	100W	4,950
Audio Research VT200	200W	8,790
Audio Synthesis Desire Decade	200W	2,495
Audio Valve Avalon	60W	2,195
Audio Valve Challenger 115	115W	2,995
Audio Valve Challenger 140	140W	3,495
Audio Valve Challenger 300	300W	7,995
Audio Valve Baldr 200 Plus	149W	8,995
Audiolabor 500	230W	5,998
Beam-Echo DL7-35	30W	3,525
Belcanto SET40	40W	3,450
Belcanto Orfeo 30S	35W	4,750
Belcanto SET80	80W	6,750
Border Patrol 300B SE	9W	3,995
Border Patrol 300B SE (WE)	10W	4,495
Boulder 102AE	100W	2,800
Boulder 102M	100W	3,100
Boulder 500AE	150W	4,995
Boulder 500M	150W	5,500
Boulder 2060	600W	25,000
Boulder 2050	999W	43,500
Bryston THX8B	150W	2,385
Canary Audio CA-304	40W	2,695
Canary Audio CA-301	22W	2,995
Canary Audio CA-303	24W	5,495
Cary CAD-572SE	20W	2,250
Cary CAD-2A3 SE	5W	3,150
Cary CAD-300SE	12W	4,495
Cary CAD-805C	50W	7,995
Chord SPM 1000B	200W	2,920

Chord SPM 1200B	250W	3,790
Chord SPM 1200C	350W	4,210
Chord SPM 1400B mono	350W	8,420
Chord SPM 5000	415W	14,570
Conrad-Johnson MF2250	130W	2,295
Conrad-Johnson MF-2500	250W	3,495
Conrad-Johnson Premier 11A	70W	3,500
Conrad-Johnson Premier 12	140W	6,900
Conrad-Johnson Premier 8KS	150W	17,000
Conrad-Johnson Premier 8A	275W	17,000
CAT JL1	100W	17,550
CR Dev Artemis	4,995	
Credo LPO 804	2,456	
Credo PMP 155	2,676	
Credo LPO 455	4,975	
Credo LPO 155	6,983	
DNM PA3	50W	2,500
DNM PAS5	23W	3,750
Dynavector HX1.2	130W	3,995
EAR 861	32W	3,599
EAR 509 Mk II	100W	3,999
EAR 519	100W	4,699
EAR 549	200W	6,499
Electrocompaniet AW120DMB	120W	2,695
Electrocompaniet AW250R	250W	3,995
Electrocompaniet AW180MB	180W	4,595
Exposure IV	90W	2,199
Exposure XVI	125W	4,000
Gamma Aeon	20W	4,999
Gamma Space Ref	18W	7,999
Gamma Aeon Ref	70W	49,999
Gate TR201A	22W	3,335
Golden Tube Audio SE-100	100W	2,495
Graaf 5050	50W	2,100
Graaf GM20	60W	2,850
Graaf GM100	100W	4,250
Graaf GM200	200W	7,500
Jadis DA8	80W	2,990
Jadis DA7	100W	4,790
Jadis JA30	30W	5,180
Jadis SE300B	10W	7,980
Jadis JA80	60W	9,580
Jadis JA100	100W	10,298
Jadis JA200	160W	13,980
Jadis JA500	400W	19,990
Krell KAV250a	250W	3,145
Krell KAV500/2	100W	3,195
Krell FPB200	200W	5,998
Krell FPB250m	250W	8,994
Krell FPB300	300W	9,500
Krell FPB600	600W	12,900
Krell FPB350m	350W	15,994
Krell FPB650m	650W	23,800
Lexicon 225	250W	2,500
Lexicon 501	500W	5,000
Linn Klout	80W	2,400
Linn Klimax 500	500W	11,200
Lumley M125	120W	3,750
Lumley M250	250W	7,500
Magnum Class A mono	180W	2,450
Magnum A200SE	275W	3,750
Mana Stealth	300W	4,500
Madrigal 334	125W	5,495
Madrigal 335	250W	7,495
Madrigal 336	350W	8,995
Madrigal 33H	150W	19,395
Matisse Ref Monoblocks	180W	8,000
McIntosh MC150	150W	3,499
McIntosh MC300	300W	3,999
McIntosh MC500	500W	8,999
McIntosh MC1000	999W	14,999
Meracur Tentare	75W	2,245
Meracur Cantare	-W	8,995
Muse Model 160 Ser. II	160W	2,290
Muse Model 150	125W	2,690
Muse Model 175 Ser. II	175W	3,490
Muse Model 300 Ser. II	300W	3,990
Musical Fidelity F16	200W	2,500
Musical Fidelity F19	300W	4,000
Papworth M100	100W	2,645
Papworth M200	200W	3,825
Plinius SA50/3	2,750	
Plinius SA100/3	3,450	
Plinius SA250/3	5,850	
Roksan ROK-M1.5	160W	2,250
Rowland Model 2	75W	4,999
Rowland Model 6	150W	10,999
Rowland Model 8T	250W	12,499
Rowland Model 9T	350W	27,999
Shearpe Phase 1 Pwr Ref	100W	2,399
Sieml TA20	50W	2,350
Sonic Frontiers Power 1	55W	2,499
Sonic Frontiers Power 2	110W	4,999
Sonic Frontiers Power 3	220W	8,999
Sony TA-N1	200W	4,500
Sugden Masterclass Power	75W	2,995
Sumo Model Ten/M	240W	4,200
Sunfire Load Invariant	300W	2,280
Sunfire Signature	600W	2,600
T+A A3000	190W	2,850
TACT Millennium II	150W	7,000
TAG McLaren 125M	2,399	
Talk Electronics Tornado 5	200W	2,100
Trilogy 958T	45W	3,395
Trilogy 958	100W	3,395
Tron Type PX25	5W	6,150
Tron Type KR300B	18W	6,400

Tron Type WE300B	8W	6,550
Tron Type PX25 Mono	5W	9,500
Tron Type WE300B Mono	8W	9,700
Tron Type KR 300B Mono	18W	9,700
Tube Tech Genesis Sig.	100W	4,700
Tube Tech Synergy DMA	150W	6,400
van den Hul Power amp	65W	2,500
Wavac MD572	50W	6,250
Wavac EC300B	10W	16,500
Wavac EC838	35W	21,750
Wavac HE 4304	15W	24,750
Wavac HE 833	100W	27,500
Wavac HE 805	45W	27,500
XTC POW-1	200W	2,500
YBA 2a HC Stereo	70W	2,350
YBA 3a Mono	45W	2,425
YBA 2a HCDT Stereo	70W	3,050
YBA 1a HC Stereo	85W	4,400
YBA 2a HCDT Mono	70W	5,000
YBA 1a HC Mono	85W	6,650
YBA Sig. Stereo	100W	6,995
YBA Passion Mono	250W	8,775
YBA Sig. Mono	100W	9,995
YBA Sig. HC Mono	100W	16,650



CABLES Analogue Interconnects

KEY

- ⊗ - Stranded construction.
- ⊙ - Solid

Audioquest Crystal +	●	25.00
Audioquest Forest +	●	75.00
Audioquest Argent +	●	125.00
Audioquest Clear 3	●	200.00
Cable Talk Theatre 2	⊕	1.50
Cable Talk The Flat One	⊕	2.00
Cable Talk Talk 3.1	⊕	2.25
Cable Talk Talk 4.1	⊕	4.25
Cable Talk Talk 3.1 Biwire	⊕	4.50
Cable Talk Concert 2.1	⊕	8.00
Cable Talk Talk 4.1 Biwire	⊕	8.50
Cable Talk Symphony 3	⊕	12.50
Cable Talk Concert 2.1 Biwire	⊕	14.00
Cardas Audio 300B-Microtwin SC	⊕	35.00
Cardas Audio Quadlink-Five SC	⊕	59.00
Cardas Audio Cross SC	⊕	99.00
Cardas Audio Hexlink-Five SC	⊕	109.00
Cardas Audio Hexlink Golden5 SC	⊕	175.00
Cardas Audio Golden Cross SC	⊕	789.00
ChordCo Carnival	⊕	3.00
ChordCo Myth	●	6.00
ChordCo Legend	⊕	15.00
ChordCo Odyssey	⊕	17.00
DNM-Reson LSC	●	6.95
DNM-Reson LSCB	●	13.95
Ecosse Ref FS2.16	⊕	1.75
Ecosse Ref CS2.2	⊕	2.50
Ecosse Ref CS2.3	⊕	3.75
Ecosse Ref CS2.15	●	5.75
Ecosse Ref MS2.2	⊕	15.00
Ecosse Ref MS2.3	⊕	20.00
Ecosse Ref MS2.15	⊕	30.00
Ecosse Ref US2	●	450.00
Gale XL 105	⊕	1.00
Gale XL189	⊕	1.00
Gale XL1315	⊕	2.00
Gale XL160-2	⊕	2.50
Gale XL1315-2	⊕	3.99
Gamma Wonder Line	⊕	99.00
Goertz M1	●	16.00
Goertz M2	●	32.00
Goertz Big Boy	●	64.00
GT Audio Speaker	⊕	50.00
Harmonix Harmonic-Strings	⊕	30.00
Harmonix HS-101T-1	⊕	56.00
Harmonix HS-101SC	⊕	88.00
Ixos 607	⊕	2.00
Ixos 6004	⊕	3.00
Ixos 6003	⊕	3.00
Ixos 605	⊕	3.00
Ixos Gamma 6006	⊕	5.00
Kimber 4PR	⊕	5.00
Kimber 4VS	⊕	9.00
Kimber 4TC	⊕	19.60
Kimber 8TC	⊕	32.70
Kimber 4AG	⊕	394.00
Kimber 8AG	⊕	656.00
LAT International SS 800	⊕	16.00
LAT International BWIRE	⊕	23.00
LAT International SS 1000	⊕	36.00
Lieder Pad	⊕	133.00
Lieder Bel Canto	⊕	188.00
Lieder Spoor	⊕	253.00
Lieder Straat	⊕	465.00
Lieder Weg	⊕	663.00
Linn K20	⊕	4.00
Linn K400	⊕	10.00
Linn K600	⊕	15.00
Lumley Silver 12/2	⊕	35.00
Lumley Silver 14/4	⊕	40.00
Monster XP Clear	⊕	2.20
Monster XP Navajo	⊕	2.40
Monster Superflat Mini	⊕	2.75
Monster XP HP	⊕	3.70
Monster Original	⊕	4.40
Monster New Monster	⊕	5.50
Naim NAC AS	⊕	5.70
Nordost Octava	●	3.00
Nordost 4-Flat	●	9.95
Nordost Solar Wind Bi-wire	⊕	27.95
Nordost Blue Heaven Spkr	⊕	58.95
Nordost Red Dawn	⊕	110.00
Nordost SPM	⊕	325.00
Ortofon SPK100	⊕	3.00
Ortofon SPK200	⊕	5.00
Ortofon SPK300	⊕	8.00
Precious Metals SL32	⊕	7.50
Precious Metals SL102	⊕	10.00
Precious Metals SL34	⊕	15.00
Precious Metals SL104	⊕	20.00
Precious Metals SL106	⊕	30.00

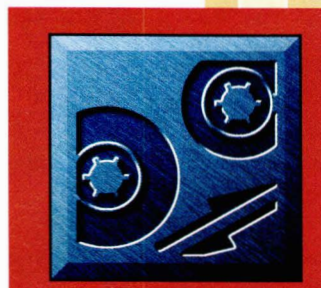
Precious Metals SL108	⊕	40.00
Puresonic OFC 7892	⊕	1.20
Puresonic OFC 7844	⊕	1.65
Puresonic OFC 7845	⊕	1.95
Puresonic OFC 7891	⊕	2.85
Puresonic OFC 7816	⊕	3.75
Puresonic OFC 7832	⊕	3.75
Puresonic OFC 7812	⊕	3.75
Puresonic OFC 7825	⊕	6.95
Puresonic PSOC 7801	⊕	9.50
Puresonic PSOC 7802	⊕	18.00
Puresonic PSOC 7803	⊕	27.00
QED Qudos Micro	⊕	1.25
QED Qudos micro 4 core	⊕	2.00
QED Qudos 4 core	⊕	4.00
QED Qudos Bi-Wire	⊕	4.50
QED Qudos Silver	⊕	5.00
QED Profile 4x4	⊕	9.00
QED Profile Silver 12	⊕	15.00
Rega Speaker	⊕	1.58
Rega SC42	⊕	19.98
Roksan ROK-Speaker	⊕	6.00
Shinpy Red Devil	⊕	30.00
Shinpy Red Star 2	⊕	39.00
Shinpy Black Star 2	⊕	62.00
Shinpy Pulsar 2	⊕	104.00
Shinpy Quasar 2	⊕	208.00
Siltech LS2-45	⊕	109.00
Siltech FT-12 MkI	⊕	240.00
Siltech LS4-120	⊕	549.00
Silver Sounds 12 Gauge	⊕	15.00
Silver Sounds 10 Gauge	⊕	35.00
Silver Sounds 8 Gauge	⊕	75.00
Silver Tone Silver-Sonic	⊕	10.00
Silver Tone Silver-Sonic HC	⊕	15.00
Silver Tone Silver-Voice	⊕	55.00
Silver Tone Silver-Voice Ultra	⊕	85.00
SonicLink AST50	⊕	1.95
SonicLink AST60	⊕	2.50
SonicLink AST75	⊕	2.95
SonicLink AST200	⊕	5.95
SonicLink AST200x2	⊕	9.95
SonicLink S300	⊕	18.00
SonicLink S130x2	⊕	20.00
SonicLink S300x2	⊕	40.00
SonicLink S900	⊕	60.00
SonicLink S600x2	⊕	80.00
SonicLink Black Rhodium 4	⊕	1,000.00
Straight Wire Rhythm	⊕	6.00
Straight Wire Quartet	⊕	8.00
Supra Classic 2.5	⊕	2.49
Supra Linc 2.5 Flex	⊕	3.49
Supra Classic 4.0	⊕	3.95
Supra Classic 6	⊕	4.95
Supra Ply 2.0	⊕	4.95
Supra Linc 4.0 Flex	⊕	4.95
Supra Ply 3.4	⊕	6.95
Supra Quattro 4x4	⊕	8.95
Tara Klara	⊕	2.95
Tara Prism 2+2	⊕	7.95
Tara Prism Nexa	⊕	9.95
Tara Prism Bi-Wire	⊕	18.00
Tara RSC Prime 500	●	43.00
Tara RSC Prime 1000	●	73.00
Tara RSC Ref Gery2	●	118.00
Tara RSC Prime 1800	●	150.00
Tara RSC Digital 75	●	230.00
Tara RSC Air 2	●	291.00
Tara RSC Air 1	●	466.00
Tara ISM The Two	●	708.00
Tara ISM The One	●	941.00
Tech + Link SPC 79	⊕	1.20
Transparent Cable Musichord	⊕	11.00
Transparent Cable The Wave	⊕	23.00
Transparent Cable Music Wave	⊕	25.00
Vampire Wire SC-384	⊕	11.00
Vampire Wire SC-554	⊕	15.00
Vampire Wire ST-I	●	30.00
Vampire Wire SC-1108	●	30.00
Vampire Wire ST-II	●	48.00
Vampire Wire ST-III	●	73.00
van den Hul Skyline HB	⊕	3.99
van den Hul Snowline	⊕	5.49
van den Hul Skytrack HB	⊕	5.99
van den Hul Clearwater	⊕	7.99
van den Hul Snowtrack	⊕	10.99
van den Hul Royal Jade	⊕	10.99
van den Hul CS122 HB	⊕	13.49
van den Hul Cleartrack	⊕	14.99
van den Hul D352 HB	⊕	21.00
van den Hul Teatrack HB	⊕	23.99
van den Hul SC512	⊕	36.00
van den Hul Magnum HB	⊕	40.00
van den Hul The Wind HB	⊕	44.00
van den Hul Revolution HB	⊕	80.00
van den Hul Revelation HB	⊕	120.00
van den Hul The Third	⊕	1,000.00
XLO CDA 16/2	⊕	4.45
XLO CDA ER-14 THX	⊕	5.81
XLO CDA 16/4	⊕	8.60
XLO CDA ER-11 THX	⊕	11.62
XLO Pro 600	⊕	16.60
XLO CDA ER-12 THX	⊕	23.24
XLO Pro 1200	⊕	33.20
XLO Ultra 6	⊕	41.50
XLO Ultra 12	⊕	83.00
XLO Ref 2	⊕	216.00

XLO Sig 5.1	⊕	398.00
XLO Limited Ed'n	⊕	1,660.00
CARTRIDGES		
KEY		
MM - Moving-magnet type.		
MC - Moving-coil type.		
UP TO £100		
Audio Note IO1	MM	99
Audio Technica AT-91	MM	15
Audio Technica AT-95E	MM	20
Audio Technica AT-110E	MM	28
Audio Technica AT450E	MM	70
Audio Technica AT440ML	MM	90
Benz-Micro MC20EII	MM	70
Denon DL110	MM	70
Denon DL160	MM	90
Denon DL103	MM	100
Goldring Elan	MM	19
Goldring Elektra	MM	29
Goldring 1006	MM	59
Goldring 1012GX	MM	79
Goldring 1022GX	MM	99
Grado ZTE+1	MM	27
Grado ZFE+1	MM	37
Grado ZFE+1	MM	48
Grado Prestige Black	MM	49
Grado Prestige Green	MM	59
Grado Prestige Blue	MM	69
Grado ZF1+	MM	85
Grado Prestige Red	MM	99
N'ham Tracer I	MM	98
Ortofon OM 3E	MM	16
Ortofon OM 5E	MM	20
Ortofon OM 10	MM	30
Ortofon 510	MM	40
Ortofon OM DJ	MM	50
Ortofon OM 20	MM	70
Ortofon 520	MM	70
Ortofon MC1 Turbo	MM	75
Ortofon Concorde DJ	MM	80
Ortofon OM 30	MM	90
Ortofon 530	MM	100
Pickering TE-15	MM	20
Pickering VE-15	MM	25
Pickering T-E	MM	25
Pickering V15-DJ	MM	28
Pickering TL-E	MM	35
Pickering TL-2E	MM	45
Pickering XV15-625E	MM	50
Pickering XV15-150-DJ	MM	50
Pickering TL-2-S	MM	55
Pickering XV15-7575	MM	60
Pickering XV15-625DJ	MM	60
Pickering XV15-1800S	MM	70
Pickering TL3S	MM	80
Pickering XEV-3001E	MM	95
Pickering XLZ-3500	MM	100
Pickering TL-4-S	MM	100
Rega Bias	MM	39
Rega RB78	MM	59
Rega Super Bias	MM	59
Rega Elys	MM	85
Shure M70BX	MM	21
Shure M92E	MM	22
Shure SC35C	MM	29
Shure M447X	MM	35
Shure M44GX	MM	35
Stanton 500AL II	MM	35
Stanton 500EL	MM	44
Stanton 680AL/X	MM	59
Stanton 680EL/X	MM	74
Sumiko Oyster	MM	30
Sumiko Black Pearl	MM	50
Sumiko Pearl	MM	70
Sumiko Blue Point	MM	100
OVER £100		
Allaerts MC1 Eco	MC	850
Allaerts MC1 B	MC	1,250
Allaerts MC1 B MkII	MC	2,200
Allaerts MC2 Finish	MC	2,995
Audio Note IO2	MM	139
Audio Note Soara	MC	795
Audio Note IO1V	MC	1,095

Audio Note IO1LD	MC	4,500
Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	MC	330
Audio Technica AT-33PTG	MC	489
Benz-Micro The Glider	MC	600
Benz-Micro Reference	MC	1,100
Benz-Micro Reference Ruby	MC	1,500
Benz-Micro Ruby Open Air	MC	1,600
Clearaudio Alpha Mk 2	MM	135
Clearaudio Beta Mk 2	MM	190
Clearaudio Beta-S Mk 2	MM	250
Clearaudio Virtuoso	MM	295
Clearaudio Sigma	MC	590
Clearaudio Gamma-S	MC	810
Clearaudio Victory	MC	960
Clearaudio Signature	MC	1,540
Clearaudio Accurate	MC	2,515
Clearaudio Insider	MC	5,165
Clearaudio Insider Ref.	MC	6,810
Denon DL304	MC	200
Dynavector 10X4II	MC	189
Dynavector DV20XH	MC	299
Dynavector DV-20XL	MC	299
Dynavector DV20XL	MC	299
Dynavector 17D2	MC	450
Dynavector XX-1L	MC	998
Dynavector XX-1	MC	998
Dynavector Te-Katora	MC	1,698
Goldring Erica LX	MC	110
Goldring Erica	MC	110
Goldring 1042	MM	120
Goldring Elite	MC	220
Goldring Excel VX	MC	525
Grado Prestige Silver	MM	119
Grado Prestige Gold	MM	149
Grado Signature Junior	MM	150
Grado Signature 8M2	MM	250
Grado Signature MCZ	MM	375
Grado Signature TLZ	MM	650
Grado Signature XTZ	MM	975
Grado Reference	MM	995
Koetsu Red T	MC	1,359
Koetsu Red K Sig	MC	1,899
Koetsu Urushi	MC	1,999
Koetsu Signature	MC	2,999
Koetsu Gold PR	MC	5,498
Linn K9	MM	125
Linn Klyde	MC	500
Linn Arkiv	MC	1,000
London Decca Maroon	MM	299
London Decca Gold	MM	359
London Decca Maroon Dp	MM	379
London Decca S Gold	MM	439
London Decca Gold Dp	MM	439
London Decca S Gold Dp	MM	519
London Decca Jubilee	MM	999
Lyra Lydian Beta	MM	599
Lyra Clavis Da Capo	MC	995
Lyra Pamassus DCT	MC	1,895
N'ham Tracer II	MM	310
N'ham Tracer III	MM	410
N'ham Tracer IV	MM	660
Ortofon MC15 Super II	MM	140
Ortofon 540	MM	140
Ortofon MC3 Turbo	MC	150
Ortofon MC25E	MC	200
Ortofon MC25FL	MC	250
Ortofon MC10 Supreme	MC	300
Ortofon MC20 Supreme	MC	450
Ortofon MC30 Supreme	MC	550
Ortofon MC200II	MC	800
Ortofon MC Rohmann	MC	1,000
Ortofon MC300 II	MC	1,200
Ortofon MC Jubilee	MC	1,250
Ortofon MC750	MC	2,000
Pickering TL3003	MM	145
Pickering XLZ-4500	MM	150
Pickering TL-4004	MM	175
Pickering XSV-5000U	MM	200
Pickering XLZ-7500	MM	200
Pickering TLZ-7500-S	MM	200
Rega Super Elys	MM	150
Rega Exact	MM	248
Reson Mica	MM	185
Reson Recca	MM	250
Reson Aciore	MC	299
Reson Etile	MC	455
Reson Lexe	MC	1,300
Roksan Corus Black	MM	150
Roksan Shiraz	MC	990
Shure V15XMR	MM	295
Stanton 890AL/X	MM	120
Sumiko Blue Point Special	MC	250
Transfiguration Espirit	MC	950
Transfiguration Spirit	MC	950
Transfiguration Temper Supreme	MC	2,250
van den Hul DDT-II	MC	600
van den Hul MC-10	MC	750
van den Hul MC-One	MC	900
van den Hul MC-ONE Super	MC	1,050
van den Hul MC-20	MC	1,200
van den Hul The Frog Low o/p	MC	1,500
van		

van den Hul Grasshopper III GLA
 van den Hul Grasshopper IIICMN
 van den Hul Grasshopper IIICHN
 van den Hul Grasshopper IVGLA
 van den Hul Black Beauty
 Wilson Benesch Matrix
 Wilson Benesch Analog
 Wilson Benesch Carbon

MC 2,800
 MC 2,800
 MC 2,900
 MC 3,000
 MC 3,000
 MC 786
 MC 1,572
 MC 1,573



CASSETTE DECKS

KEY

↔ - Autoreverse - no need to remove and turn around the tape.
3-H - 3 heads, i.e. separate record and replay heads.

UP TO £200

Ariston WX-510	70
Denon DRM-550	160
Denon DRM-585	200
Goodmans Delta 801	130
H/K DC520	200
JVC TD-X372BK	170
JVC TD-R472BK	200
Kenwood KX-W4080	160
Kenwood KX-3080	160
Kenwood KX-W6080	200
Kenwood KX-5080S	200
Marantz SD-455	170
Marantz SD-57	199
Onkyo K 185	150
Pioneer CT-5250	150
Pioneer CT-W205R	160
Pioneer CT-W505R	180
Pioneer CT-5450S	200
Pioneer CT-W606DR	130
Sony TC-WE435	200
Sony TC-KE230	130
Sony TC-WE635	180
Sony TC-KB820S	150
Sony TC-WE835	200
Teac W-416	100
Teac V-615	130
Teac RH-300	160
Teac W-790R	170
Teac V-1050	200
Teac RH-500	180
Technics RS-BX501	170
Technics RS-TR373	150
Technics RS-TR474	200
Technics RS-A26	200
Yamaha KX-393	130
Yamaha KX-W321	170
Yamaha KX-493	180

OVER £200

Denon I DRM-650S	230
Denon DRM-740	310
Denon DRS-810	270
H/K TD420	250
JVC TD-V662BK	270
JVC TD-W718BK	300
NAD 613	230
NAD 614	270
NAD 616	300
Nakamichi DR-10	800
Onkyo TA 6210	230
Onkyo TARW 211	270
Onkyo TARW 311	320
Onkyo TA 6310	350
Onkyo KR 609	370
Onkyo KW 606	370
Onkyo TARW 411	370
Onkyo K 611	460
Pioneer CT-S550S	250
Pioneer CT-W806DR	300
Pioneer CT-S550S Precision	340
Pioneer CT-S830S	500
Pioneer CT-95	1,000
Rotel RC960BX	2,500
Sony TC-KA6ES	600
T+A CC1200R	1,180
Teac W-860R	230
Teac W-6000R	450
Teac V-6030S	550
Teac V-8030S	670
Technics RS-AZ7	250
Technics RS-TR575	280
Yamaha KX-580SE	250



CD PLAYERS

KEY

⇒ - Multiplayer: can be loaded with more than one disc.
 Ⓜ - Electrical (coaxial) digital output.
 Many players also include an optical (Toslink) output.

UP TO £250

Ariston CDX700	50
Ariston CDX710	70
Ariston CDX720	80
Cambridge CD5	100
Cambridge D100	120
Cambridge CD4	150
Cambridge CD4SE	200
Denon DCD-435	130
Denon DCD-635	180
Denon DCD-735	230
Eclipse CD101a	40
H/K HD720	200
H/K FL8550	200
JVC XL-V120BK	110
JVC XL-V130BK	120
JVC XL-V230BK	140
JVC XL-F116BK	180
JVC XL-F216BK	200
JVC XL-Z574BK	250
Kenwood DP-1080	110
Kenwood DP-2080	130
Kenwood DP-R3090	140
Kenwood DP-R4090	160
Kenwood DP-3080	170
Kenwood DPF-3010	180
Kenwood DP-R6090	200
Kenwood DP-4090	250
Marantz CD-38	130
Marantz CC-38	200
Marantz CD-48	200
Marantz CD-57	230
Marantz CD-67II	250
NAD 522	170
NAD 510	200
NAD 524	250
NAD 523	250
NAD 512	250
Pioneer PD-106	130
Pioneer PD-206	150
Pioneer PD-S507	190
Pioneer PD-F606	200
Pioneer PD-M603	200
Pioneer PD-F706	250
Rotel RCD-930AX	180
Sansui CD220	120
Sherwood CD-4030R	180
Sherwood CDC680	180
Sherwood CDC6050R	180
Sony CDP-XE220	90
Sony CDP-XE330	100
Sony CDP-M305	120
Sony CDP-XE530	130
Sony CDP-CE335	160
Sony CDP-XB720E	200
Sony CDP-CX57	250
Synergy CDJ1210	120
Teac CDP-1120	100
Teac CD-P1820	130
Teac CD-P1440	200
Teac CD-P3450SE	200
Teac PD-D2400	200
Teac PD-H500i	240
Technics SL-PG390A	100
Technics SL-PG490A	100
Technics SL-PG590A	120
Technics SL-PD6	140
Technics SL-PD8	160
Technics SL-PS670D	200
Technics SL-PS770D	250
Yamaha CDX-393 II	130
Yamaha CDC-575	180
Yamaha CDX-493	180
Yamaha CDX-9	200
Yamaha CDX-593	230
Yamaha CDC-675	230

£251 TO £500

Arcam Alpha MCD	330
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Arcam Alpha 7 SE	350
Arcam Alpha 8	450
Arcam Alpha 8SE	500
Cambridge CD6	300
Cyrus dAD1.5	399
Denon DCD-835	280
Denon DCM-260	300
Denon DCD-1550AR	350
H/K HD740	300
H/K FL8550	300
H/K HD760	500
JVC XL-Z674BK	300
Kenwood DP-R7080	300
Kenwood DP-9090	300
Kenwood DP-5090	300
Kenwood DP-7090	400
Marantz CD-67SE MKII	300
Marantz CD6000 OSE	300
Marantz CC-870	400
Marantz CD-63IIKI	400
Musical Fidelity E60	300
Musical Fidelity A2 CD	500
Musical Fidelity E624	500
Myryad T-10	400
NAD 513	290
NAD 515	350
NAD 514	370
NAD 517	400
Nakamichi MB10	399
Onkyo DX 7210	260
Onkyo C721	290
Onkyo DXC 320	380
Onkyo DX 7510	400
Onkyo CM 716	450
Parasound C/DP-1000	499
Pioneer PD-S707	300
Pioneer PD-F805	300
Pioneer PD-S705	300
Pioneer PD-F906	350
Pioneer PD-S904	400
Pioneer PD-S505 Precision	460
Roksan Kandy	475
Rotel RCD-951	300
Rotel RCD-971	350
Sony CDP-XB930E	300
Sony CDP-CX350	350
Sony CDP-XA20ES	450
Sony CDP-X3000ES	500
Sony CDP-CX260	500
Synergy CDJ2010	300
Technics SL-MC7	300
Yamaha CDX-993	400

£501 TO £1,000

Acurus ACD11	899
Alchemist Nexus	600
Arcam Alpha 9	800
Audio Analogue Paganini	750
Audio Note CD1	599
Audio Note AN-CD2	999
Audiomeca Obsession	999
AVI S2000MC 24 Ref	999
Creek CD43	599
Cyrus dAD3	598
Cyrus dAD3Q	898
Denon DCD-1650AR	700
DPA Renaissance int CD	950
Helios Model 3	700
Helios Model 2	950
Linn Mimik	875
Linn Genki	995
Magnum CD2020	595
Marantz CD-17	800
Monrio Asty PL	675
Monrio Privilege	995
Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799
Musical Fidelity A3 CD	799
Myryad T-20	600
Myryad MC100	800
Pioneer PDS-06	550
Primare D20	700
Quad 99	600
Roksan Caspian	895
Rotel RCD991	750
Sony CDP-XA555ES	1,000
Sugden Audition	649
Talk Electronics Thunder 2	700
Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000
Teac VRDS-8	600
Teac VRDS-9	700
Teac VRDS-25X	1,000
Thule Audio Spirit CD100	600
Thule Audio Spirit CD150B	699
Trichord Genesis	569
Trichord Digital Jukebox 25	619
Trichord Digital Jukebox 50	669
Trichord Digital J'box 100	719
Trichord Revelation	819
YBA Complete	649
YBA Special	695

OVER £1,000

Acoustic Precision Eikos	1,850
Advantage CD15	3,995
Alchemist Kraken CD	1,249

Alchemist Forseti Int.	1,249
Alchemist Forseti	1,995
Audio Research CD2	3,399
Audiolabor 531	7,500
Audiomeca Keops	1,500
Audiomeca Talisman	2,150
Audiomeca Talisman SE	2,300
Balanced VK-D5	3,995
Cany CD-301	2,350
Classe CDP-3	1,395
Conrad-Johnson DF-2	1,695
Conrad-Johnson DV-2b	2,495
Copland CDA-266	1,999
Copland CDA277	1,649
Copland CDA289	1,898
Copland CDA288	1,999
Cymbal CDP12	1,299
Exposure CD Player	1,050
Helios Model 1	1,250
Helios Stargate	2,250
Jadis Orchestra	1,345
Krell KAV250cd	2,490
Krell KAV300cd	3,599
Krell KP252S	19,995
Linn Ikemi	1,950
Linn Sondek CD12	12,000
Marantz CD-17KIS	1,100
Marantz CD-7	3,500
Madrigal 39	4,995
Mclntosh MCD7009	3,699
Meracius Tanto	1,395
Meracius Imago Player	4,495
Meridian 506	1,100
Meridian 508	1,995
Myryad MCD500	1,500
NAD S500	1,100
Naim CD3.5	1,050
Naim CDX	2,200
Naim NACDSII/XPS	5,625
Oracle CD Player	9,499
Pink Triangle Numeral	1,049
Pink Triangle Litaural	2,200
Primare D302	1,500
Proceed CDP	3,395
Resolution CD50	2,995
Roksan Attezza-DP3P	1,495
Sheame Phase 7	1,499
Sherwood CD1	1,100
Sonic Frontiers Anthem CD1	1,699
Sonic Frontiers SFCD-1	3,799
Sony SCD-1	2,700
T+A CD1210R	1,185
T+A CD1220R	1,540
TAG McLaren CD20R	1,250
Theta Digital Miles SE	2,390
Tube Tech Fusion	1,100
Tube Tech Fulkrum	2,800
Wadia 860	7,450
XTC CDP-1	1,350
YBA Integre a	1,095
YBA CD3a	1,850
YBA CD2a	2,950
YBA CD1a	3,895



CD TRANSPORTS

KEY

Ⓜ - Electrical (coaxial) digital output.
 Many players also include an optical (Toslink) output.

Alchemist Forseti Drive	1,100
Altis CDT III	4,995
Audio Note CDT Zero	399
Audio Synthesis Transcend Decade	3,295
Audiomeca Damnation	999
Audiomeca Damnation SE	1,100
Audiomeca Talisman	1,850
Audiomeca Talisman SE	1,999
Audiomeca Talisman DOB	2,250
Conrad-Johnson DR-1	1,795
DPA Enlightenment Drv	775
Jadis JD3	1,999
Jadis JDI	9,190
Linn Kank	1,850
Madrigal 37	3,995
Madrigal 31.5	9,295
Meracius Imago	3,995
Monrio Bitmatch	950

Muse Model 5	1,800
Muse Model 8	3,500
Oracle CD Drive	7,399
Pink Triangle Cardinal II	909
Resolution VT960	3,500
Roksan Attezza-DP3	1,295
Sonic Frontiers Transport 3	5,999
T+A CM1200R	875
TAG McLaren CDT20R	1,499
Teac VRDS-T1	550
Teac P-30	2,500
Theta Digital Pearl	1,349
Theta Digital Jade	2,650
Thorens TCD-2000	999
Trichord Digital Turntable	719
Wadia 8	3,195
Wadia 20	4,370



DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTERS (DACs)

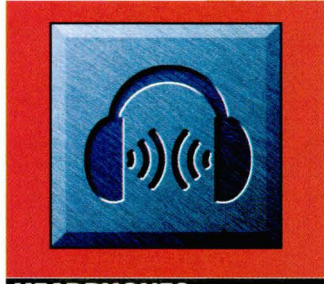
KEY
4 - Number of digital inputs.

Alchemist TS-D-1	300
Alchemist Forseti DAC	1,100
Altis Reference	4,995
Audio Note DAC Zero	369
Audio Note DAC1	675
Audio Note DAC2	1,099
Audio Note DAC3	1,750
Audio Research DAC5	2,335
Audio Research DAC3 MkII	3,999
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade	2,795
Audiomeca Elixir	799
Audiomeca Ambrosia	1,850
Boulder 2020	21,000
Chord DSC900	1,850
Chord DSC1100	2,765
Chord DSC1500	4,800
Conrad-Johnson D/A-3	1,195
Conrad-Johnson D/A-2b	1,990
dCS Elgar	8,500
DPA Little Bit 3	325
DPA Renaissance DAC	595
DPA Enlightenment DAC	850
DPA SX128	2,000
DPA SX256	4,000
DPA SX512	8,000
Harmonix Reimyo DAP-77	2,790
Jadis JS2	2,499
Jadis JS1	6,990
LFD DAC2	1,950
LFD DAC3	3,000
Linn Numenk	1,500
Madrigal 360	4,395
Madrigal 360S	6,895
Madrigal 30.6	16,495
Meracus Auriga	1,295
Meracus Flagrare	2,495
Meridian 566	1,095
Monrio 18B2	795
Muse Model 2	2,190
Muse Model 2 Plus	2,500
Muse Model 2/96	3,000
Musical Fidelity X-ACT	200
Musical Fidelity X-24K	300
Musical Fidelity X-DAC	300
Onkyo DX 7310	330
Resolution D92	1,500
Roksan Attezza-Da2	595
Sonic Frontiers Processor 3	5,999
Sumo Theorem II	945
Sumo Theorem IIB	1,155
TAG McLaren DAC20	1,249
Teac D-T1	500
Theta Digital Chroma 396 Std	799
Theta Digital Pro Geny	1,099
Theta Digital Pro Prime IIa	1,699
Theta Digital Pro Basic IIIa	2,990
Theta Digital Casablanca LS	6,158
Thorens TDA-2000	700
Trichord Pulsar Ser One	1,395
Wadia 12	1,530
Wadia 15	3,790
Wadia 64.4	4,750
Wadia 16	7,395
Wadia 7	9,995
Wadia 9	12,790
Woodside DVAC-18	1,499

DIGITAL RECORDERS

KEY
MD - MiniDisc
DAT - Digital Audio Tape
P - Portable

Denon DMD-1000	MD	500
Kenwood DMF-9020	MD	499
Kenwood DM-7090	MD	500
Kenwood DM-9090	MD	550
Marantz CM635	MD	500
Marantz DR700	MD	600
Onkyo MD-121	MD	450
Onkyo MD 122	MD	700
Philips CDR770		1
Philips CDR775		1
Philips CDR570		1
Philips CDR951		1
Pioneer MJ-D707	MD	199
Pioneer PDR-555RW		480
Pioneer PDR-04		700
Pioneer D-05	DAT	900
Pioneer PDR-05	DAT	1,000
Pioneer D-C88	DAT	2,000
Sharp MD-R1 MkII	MD	180
Sharp MD-R3H	MD	300
Sharp MD-R2	MD	300
Sharp MD-MS200H	MD	350
Sharp MDXV300H	MD	1,000
Sony MZ-R55	MD	1
Sony MDS-540	MD	1
Sony MZ-R57	MD	1
Sony MZ-R5T	MD	1
Sony MDS-JE530	MD	200
Sony MDS-JB950	MD	300
Sony MDS-JA20ES	MD	500
Sony MDS-JAS55ES	MD	650
Teac MDH300	MD	300
Teac MD-H500i	MD	350
Teac MD-8	MD	600
Teac MD-5	MD	600
Teac MD-10	MD	900
Traxdata Traxaudio 900	MD	399
Yamaha MDX-595	MD	230
Yamaha MDX-793	MD	300
Yamaha MDX-9	MD	300



HEADPHONES

KEY
'D' - Dynamic type, compatible with virtually all normal headphone outputs.
'E' - Electrostatic type; generally includes a separate power supply.
O - Open-back construction.
C - Closed-back construction.
UP TO £40

AKG Rox	D	30
Aural Envelope DX200	D	20
Aural Envelope DX220	D	30
Beyer DT111	D	15
Beyer DT211	D	31
Beyer DT211TV	D	35
Hama SL273	D	20
Hama SL275	D	25
JVC HA-CD88	D	18
JVC HA-D525	D	20
JVC HA-F65	D	20
JVC HA-D626	D	25
Kenwood KPM-310	D	18
Kenwood KPM-410	D	25
Maxell HP-2000	D	20

Pioneer SE-A40	D	20
Pioneer SE-A20V	D	23
Pioneer SE-M250	D	25
Pioneer SE-M350	D	30
Sennheiser HD56	D	18
Sennheiser HD433	D	20
Sennheiser HD400	D	25
Sennheiser HD470	D	35
Sennheiser HD60TV	D	40
Sony MDR-250V	D	18
Sony MDR-A34L	D	18
Sony MDR-ED228LP	D	18
Sony MDR-G52LP	D	20
Sony MDR-E848LP/MP	D	20
Sony MDR-ED238ML	D	22
Sony MDR-G56V	D	25
Sony MDR-G62LP	D	25
Sony MDR-G59G	D	30
Sony MDR-G72LP	D	30
Sony MDR-V300	D	30
Sony MDR-IF130K	D	30
Sony MDR-EX70LP	D	35
Sony MDR-ED268LP	D	35
Stanton ST Pro	D	25
Technics RP-HT355	D	20
Technics RP-F200	D	25
Technics RP-F400	D	30
Technics RP-HT550	D	35
Technics RP-F500	D	40
Vivanco SR200	D	20
Vivanco SR150	D	20
Vivanco SR250	D	20
Vivanco IR5700	D	30
Vivanco IR5800	D	40

OVER £41

AKG K301	D	70
AKG K240DF	D	100
AKG K222R	D	100
AKG K401	D	120
AKG K501	D	150
AKG K333R	D	150
AKG K444R	D	180
AKG K290S	D	250
AKG K1000	D	700
Audio Technica ATH910PRO	D	80
Audio Technica ATHD40F5	D	100
Audio Technica ATH-M40	D	120
Audio Technica ATH911	D	120
Beyer DT311	D	50
Beyer DT411	D	63
Beyer DT331	D	65
Beyer DT431	D	81
Beyer DT511	D	106
Beyer DT801	D	125
Beyer DT851	D	140
Beyer DT811	D	145
Beyer DT100	D	160
Beyer DT901	D	160
Beyer DT911	D	170
Denon AH-D210	D	45
Denon AH-D350	D	65
Denon AH-D550	D	80
Denon AH-D650	D	95
Denon AH-D750	D	130
Denon AH-D950	D	150
Grado SR40	D	45
Grado SR60	D	79
Grado SR80	D	100
Grado SR125	D	150
Grado SR225	D	200
Grado SR325	D	300
Grado RS2	D	495
Grado RS1	D	695
Hama SL276	D	50
Hama IR Cordless	D	60
Jecklin Float Model 1	D	79
Jecklin Float Model 2	D	99
Jecklin Float ELS	E	399
JVC HA-D727	D	43
JVC HA-D50	D	45
JVC HA-W60	D	49
JVC HA-D910	D	65
JVC HA-W200RF	D	75
JVC HA-DX1	D	200
JVC HA-DX3	D	250
JVC HA-D1000	D	250
JVC HA-F25	D	699
Koss TD/80	D	50
Koss R/100	D	100
Philips SBC 3396	D	70
Philips SBC HP9000	D	90
Pioneer SE-M550	D	50
Pioneer SE-M750	D	60
Precide Ergo Model 1	D	120
Precide Ergo Model 2	D	140
Sennheiser HD200	D	50
Sennheiser IS 380	D	50
Sennheiser HD490	D	50
Sennheiser HD495	D	60
Sennheiser HD500	D	70
Sennheiser RS400	D	80
Sennheiser HD270	D	80
Sennheiser HD25 SP	D	90
Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	D	90
Sennheiser HD545 Ref	D	100
Sennheiser IS450	D	110

Sennheiser HD265 Linear	D	125
Sennheiser HDC 451-1	D	130
Sennheiser HD250II	D	150
Sennheiser HD590	D	150
Sennheiser HD565 Ova'n	D	160
Sennheiser HD25-13	D	160
Sennheiser HD25	D	160
Sennheiser HD 580 P'cision	D	200
Sennheiser HD600	D	250
Sennheiser IS850	D	859
Sennheiser HE60/HEV70	E	998
Sennheiser Orpheus	E	9,652
Sony MDR-V500DJ	D	50
Sony MDR-RF830RK	D	60
Sony MDR-V700DJ	D	100
Sony MDR-D77	D	130
Sony MDR-F1	D	200
Sony MDR-CD1700	D	200
Sony MDR-DS5000	D	400
Stanton DJ Pro 101/HB	D	65
Stanton DJ Pro 1000	D	95
Stanton DJ Pro 1001	D	150
Stax SR-0001	E	280
Stax SR-Lambda Nova C	E	370
Stax Lambda Nova Basic	E	449
Stax SR-Lambda Nova S	E	450
Stax Omega	E	1,896
Technics RP-F800	D	50
Technics RP-HC100	D	55
Technics RP-DJ1200	D	130
Vivanco SR650	D	45
Vivanco FMH 3000	D	50
Vivanco SR750	D	50
Vivanco SR850	D	50
Vivanco FM7980	D	60
Vivanco SR950	D	80
Vivanco FM8180	D	99
Vivanco SR2000FL	D	100

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Hi-Fi Tables

KEY
4 - Number of shelves.

Avik Furniture A4	4	350
Alphason SM17	1	49
Alphason VSM17	1	85
Alphason GSM17	1	85
Alphason GMV1P	1	110
Alphason R17/17	3	120
Alphason GMH1P	1	150
Alphason VR17/17	3	190
Alphason GR17/17-AS	4	275
Apollo Soprano	4	275
Arctic Air Head 1	1	275
Arctic Air Head TNT	1	725
Arctic Suspense 5	5	1,895
Atacama Europa	4	240
Audiophile Base 01	1	79
Audiophile SAT120	4	280
Audiophile SAT120P	4	560
Audiophile Furniture Base	4	615
Avid Ioschell	5	1,100
BCD Model 1006/8	1	795
BCD Model 1000	3	1,250
Custom Design Aspect 650	4	250
Custom Design Aspect 850	5	280
Custom Design e'lite E5	5	280
Custom Design Aspect 500AV	3	290
Custom Design e'lite XES	5	300
Custom Design e'lite AVE	8	350
Deadrock 701	1	60
Deadrock 702	2	90
Deadrock 805	3	130
Deadrock 705	5	230
Deadrock 704	4	250
Elemental Isotube X1	1	169
Elemental Isotube BS	1	199
Elemental Isotube TS	1	209
Elemental Isotube IS	1	209
Elemental Reference B1	1	329
Elemental Isotube X2	2	379
Elemental Isotube X3	3	489
Elemental Reference BS	1	499
Elemental Reference X1	1	499
Elemental Reference TS	1	549
Elemental Reference IS	1	549
Elemental Reference X2	2	799
Elemental Isotube X4	4	849
Elemental Isotube X4/Ref	4	1,199

Elemental Reference X3	3	1,199
Elemental Isotube X4Rse	4	1,349
Elemental Reference X4	4	1,599
Fi-Rax R4	6	399
Finite Elemente A03 pagode	4	479
Finite Elemente E03 pagode	4	649
Finite Elemente HD03	4	1,995
Frameworks H175	1	139
Frameworks FS1	1	150
Frameworks H500	3	265
Frameworks FT2	2	285
Frameworks FT3	3	350
Frameworks H700	3	355
Frameworks H900	3	389
Impulse Iso-plate	5	190
JPW 3 Tier	3	80
JPW 5 Tier	5	100
Linn K3000	5	85
Mana Sound Frame	5	125
Mana Mini Table	5	150
Mana Power supply table	5	150
Mana Reference flat top	5	150
Mana Sound Shelf	5	175
Mana Sound Stage	5	200
Mana Sound Table	5	235
Mana Ref Shelf	5	325
Mana Reference Table	5	350
Mana 2 Tier Stand	5	375
Mana 3 Tier Stand	5	450
Mana 4 Tier Stand	5	500
Mana 5 Tier Stand	5	600
Mana 6 Tier Stand	5	700
Mana 7 Tier Stand	7	800
Mana 8 Tier Stand	8	900
Mission Stance	5	100
Optimum C4/Pedestal	5	130
Optimum OPT 3406	3	149
Optimum C5/Pedestal	6	150
Optimum OPT 4906	4	199
Optimum OPT 3000	3	200
Optimum OPT 6606	5	249
Optimum OPT 340	3	249
Optimum OPT 5000	5	280
Optimum OPT 490	4	299
Optimum OPT 440	4	299
Optimum OPT 10206	6	299
Optimum AV 300	3	329
Optimum OPT 700	5	349
Optimum OPT 610	5	349
Optimum OPT 660	4	349
Optimum OPT 1020	6	399
Optimum OPT 8000	8	400
Optimum OPT 1190	7	450
Projekt A3	3	145
Projekt A4	4	215
Projekt A5	5	235
Projekt B3	6	280
Projekt A6	6	300
Projekt B3i	8	340
Projekt B4	8	340
Projekt B Multi	7	345
Projekt B3ii	8	345
Projekt C3	9	375
Projekt D3	12	420
Projekt C3i	8	420
Projekt B5	10	425
Projekt C3iii	11	465
Projekt C3ii	10	465
Projekt D3i	12	500
Projekt C4	12	500
Projekt C3iv	10	510
Projekt D3ii	14	545
Projekt C Multi	9	555
Projekt D4	16	560
Quadraspire Q4S mini shelf	1	65
Quadraspire Q4S shelf	1	65
Quadraspire QKS Cabinet shelf	1	80
Quadraspire QAV shelf	1	130
Quadraspire Q4M mini table	4	250
Quadraspire Q4 table	4	250
Quadraspire Q4SP Table	4	320
Quadraspire QAV table	3	350
Quadraspire QAVSP Table	3	400
Quadraspire QK Cabinet	4	450
Reson DOMOPS	1	195
Reson DOMOWS	1	195
Solid Steel Model B	1	141
Solid Steel Model A	1	152
Solid Steel Series 3	4	220
Solid Steel Series 5	4	310
Solid Steel H.3	5	372
Solid Steel H.5	5	517
Sound Org Z022	1	65
Sound Org Z021	2	78
Sound Org Z030	3	100
Sound Org Z060	4	120
Sound Org Z038	5	155
Sound Org Z540	5	140
Sound Org Z560	5	160
Sound Org Z545	4	160
Sound Org Z530	4	170
Soundstyle X300	3	180
Soundstyle X305	3	210
Soundstyle X053	4	210
Soundstyle X050	4	210
Soundstyle X6300	3	215
Soundstyle X100	4	230

Soundstyle X6110	4	230
Soundstyle X058	5	240
Soundstyle X310	3	250
Soundstyle X105	5	250
Soundstyle X6053	4	255
Soundstyle X6100	4	265
Soundstyle X6310	3	275
Soundstyle Radius SR100	4	280
Soundstyle X6058	5	290
Soundstyle X6105	5	300
Soundstyle Finewoods W105	5	320
Standesign Design 4	4	190
Stands Unique Isolation Platform	1	55
Stands Unique Sound Support	4	260
Stands Unique Sound Tower	5	299
Stands Unique Compact Sound Supp	4	329
Stands Unique Sound Support 10	4	329
Stands Unique Sound Twr Cabinet	5	389
Stands Unique Ref Wall Support	1	560
Stands Unique Ultimate Tower	10	720
Stands Unique Ref Floor Support	6	840
Target B5	5	175
Townshend Seismic Sink 1-CD	5	110
Townshend Seismic Sink 1-3D	5	400
Townshend S/Sink Stand 1-4	4	999
Townshend Seismic Sink Stand	4	1,245
Vibraplane Passive	1	1,895
Vibraplane Active	1	3,600
Wilson benches Standard Shelf	1	130
Wilson benches Mono Block	1	265
Wilson benches Kevlar Shelf	1	270
Wilson benches Asside Basic	4	790
Wilson benches Asside	4	920
Wilson benches Triptych	1	990

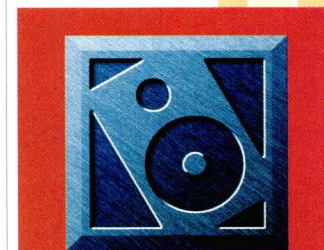


EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS Speaker Stands

KEY
60 – Height of stand in cm.

Acoustic Solutions Platform Eight	180
Aliante Base	425
Aliante Vela	750
Alphason NCI	60 47
Alphason Akros I	60 49
Alphason RS1	120 49
Alphason NCIi	60 84
Alphason HDS	60 85
Alphason Titan S	60 125
Apollo Olympus	60 75
Apollo AZ6	66 80
Atacama BD21	60 55
Atacama BD17	50 55
Atacama BD25	60 60
Atacama SE16	65 65
Atacama SE12	65 65
Atacama SX500	67 67
Atacama F2	70 70
Atacama F1	70 70
Atacama SX600	70 70
Atacama SL200	70 70
Atacama SE24	61 70
Atacama SE20	70 70
Atacama SX700	73 73
Atacama SL300	73 73
Atacama TP600	75 75
Atacama TP500	75 75
Atacama SE615	75 75
Atacama SE515	75 75
Atacama SE415	75 75
Atacama SL400	76 76
Atacama SE1000S	80 80
Atacama R724	60 150
AVF Tower P6144BP	60 35
BCD Model 1010	60 595
Black Box Speaker Stand	100 797
Credo STD 001	284
Custom Design R/S 300	60 75
Custom Design M Range	56 85
Custom Design Ref. stands	60 200
Deadrock 903	60 60
Deadrock 902	47 60
Deadrock 901	39 60
Elemental Reference SB1	8 399
Elemental Isotube SZ	49 499
Elemental Isotube SZse	61 599
Elemental Isotube SCZ	49 699
Elemental Isotube SCZse	49 799
Elemental Reference SZ	52 999
Elemental Reference SZ	52 1,499
Harbeth HL-Stands	21 249

Heybrook Stand-56	63	69
JPW MS2	45	45
JPW MS3	61	55
JPW MS1	46	80
JPW HS1	61	120
JPW HS2	45	120
Mana Sound Base	60	175
Opera WS1/E	60	235
Opera S1	60	295
Opera S2	60	345
Partington A-4	60	119
Pioneer CP-7	50	50
Pioneer CP-8	80	80
Projekt Signature	55	80
Royd Royd	55	99
Russ Andrews Torlyte	61	599
Silverado Silverado 1 Stand	60	350
Solid Steel SL	63	186
Solid Steel SS	63	333
Solid Steel SS801	25	366
Sonus Faber Ironwood	475	475
Sonus Faber Stonewood	497	497
Sound Org Z037	55	55
Sound Org Z027	55	55
Sound Org Z026	55	55
Sound Org Z518	45	65
Sound Org Z524	61	69
Soundstyle X6118	42	100
Stands Unique Speaker support	59	165
Stands Unique Tuned Spkr Support	59	230
Stands Unique Tuned Carbon Fibre	59	299
Stands Unique Vivas CF Spkr Supp	60	349
Target TR60	60	68
Target R1	53	280



LOUDSPEAKERS

KEY
 ↕ – Floorstander; larger models requiring no separate stand.
 ■ – Stand mount; smaller models designed to be raised above the floor.
 ┌─┐ – Wall mount; designed to be sited on or near the wall.
 □ – Box type, including infinite baffle, reflex and transmission line types.
 ▷ – Horn type; mostly large and very efficient.
 ▭ – Panel type, including electrostatic and planar magnetic types.

UP TO £130	
Allison Micro Monitors	95
Allison Mini References	120
Ariston MSX 03	30
Ariston MSX 05	50
Celestion 12i	119
Denon SC-M2	80
Denon SC-E3135E	130
Gale Mini Monitors	70
Gale Gold Monitors	90
Gale 2i	130
Genexa GX300	80
Genexa GX330	80
GLL Arena	90
GLL Imagio IC208	100
Goodmans Active 75	65
Heybrook Prma 2	129
Interaudio XL1000	130
Jamo Studio-80	70
Jamo D-110	100
Jamo SAT-170	110
Jamo Studio-110	110
Jamo Artina	120
Jamo D-115	120
Jamo 28	125
Jamo Cornet 145	130
JBL CM40	90
JBL MX300	90
JBL Control 1X	100
JBL CM42	130
JPW ML110i	90
JPW ML210i	100
JPW ML310i	120
JPW ML410i	130
JVC SX-SC1VBK	60
JVC SP-V50	80
JVC SP-X220TBK	100

JVC SP-X550BK	130
KEF Coda 7	129
Kenwood LS-90UK	130
Mission 701	130
NAD 800	100
Paradigm Micro v2	100
Paradigm Atom v2	120
Pioneer CS-3030	120
Polk AB410	100
Realistic Minimus 26	56
Realistic Minimus Pro-77	100
Sony SS-86E	100
Tangent Monitor 3	60
Tangent Monitor 5	80
Tannoy Mercury M1	120
TDL Nucleus 1	75
TDL Nucleus 2	130
Teac LS-X8 Mk II	80
Technics SB-CS65	100
W'dale Valdis 100	80
W'dale Diamond 7.1	100
W'dale Valdis 200	110
W'dale Modus Micro	110

£131 TO £200

Acoustic Energy Aegis One	150
Acoustic Energy AE100i	200
Allison Model 4A	170
B&W DM302 Ser II	150
B&W DM601 Ser II	199
Bose 201 IV	200
Boston CR6	149
Boston 325	149
Boston Micro 80 Sat	169
Boston Runabout	169
Boston 335	179
Boston 351	189
Boston CR7	199
Boston Runabout II	200
Celestion 15i	199
Cerwin-Vega CT-165	200
Eltax Liberty 3+	149
Genexa GX650	140
Genexa Pro	160
GLL Imagio IC218	140
GLL Imagio IC318	200
Heybrook HB1/2000	150
Heybrook Heylette B	199
Heybrook HB2/2000	200
Interaudio XL2000	200
Jamo Cornet 165	150
Jamo 38	150
Jamo 525	150
Jamo 560	150
Jamo 660	170
Jamo Studio 180	180
Jamo D165	200
Jamo 68	200
Jamo 892	200
JBL CM52	150
JBL MX1000	170
JBL LX20	200
JBL MX1500	200
JM Lab Tantal 505	199
JPW MLS10i	150
JPW ML610i	180
KEF Cresta 2	149
KEF Coda 8	189
KEF Model 60S	199
KEF Q15	200
Kenwood LS-200G	200
Magnat Vector 22	179
Mission 701	160
Mission 771e	200
Mission 702e	200
M-A Monitor 1	200
Mordaunt-Short MS206	200
Paradigm Mini Monitor	200
Pioneer CS-5030	170
Polk M2	180
Polk RT3	200
Polk AB610	200
Royd A7X	155
Sequence 200	199
Sony SS-126EB	150
Sony SS-176E	200
Tangent Monitor 9	150
Tangent Monitor 11	180
Tannoy Mercury M2	140
Tannoy Revolution R1	200
TDL Nucleus 3	200
Technics SB-CS95	150
Technics SB-M20	200
TLC Maestro 70S	159
W'dale Valdis 300	150
W'dale Diamond 7.3	150
W'dale Modus Music Two	200
W'dale Diamond 7.2 Anny	200
W'dale Valdis 400	200
Yamaha NS-45E	200
Yamaha NS-B10	200
Yamaha NS-100	200

£201 TO £300

Arcadyis Baby 1	299
Audio Gem Opal	230

B&W DM602 Ser II	300
Blueroom Minipod	250
Bose 151	220
Bose 301 IV	300
Boston 361	219
Boston CR8	239
Boston 381	259
Boston CR9	279
Boston Voyager	299
Castle Isis	250
Celestion C1	299
Celestion 23T	299
Cerwin-Vega VS-8	250
Cerwin-Vega CT-330	300
Chario Syntar 100	249
Chario Ref 100	299
Chario Hiper 1000	300
Dali 102B	260
Dali 150	300
Elax Linear Response	249
GLL Imagio IC238TL	250
Heybrook Optima	259
Heybrook Heylios	269
Heybrook HB3/2000	300
Interaudio XL3000	230
Interaudio XL4000	260
Jamo Cornet 175	230
Jamo Classic 4	250
Jamo Art	300
Jamo D265	300
JBL CM62	250
JM Lab Tantal 507	299
JPW ML710i	250
JPW ML810i	300
JVC SX-SW10	300
KEF Coda 9	299
KEF Model 70S	299
Linn Kan	295
Mission 750	248
Mission 772	250
Mission 703	300
M-A Monitor 2	250
M-A Silver 3	300
Mus Tec Kestrel SE	300
NAD 802	280
Paradigm Monitor 5	250
Paradigm Monitor 7	300
Pioneer CS-7030	230
Pioneer CS-9030	280
Pioneer S-LC1	300
Polk AB505	220
Polk M3 II	220
Polk RT5	250
Polk RT7	300
Polk M5	300
Promenade SP1	299
Rega Aria	250
Royd The Envoy	249
Royd Minstrel	275
Ruark Epilogue	239
Sequence 300	249
Sony SS-176EB	250
Tannoy Mercury M3	230
TDL Nucleus 4	300

TLC Maestro 130S	289
TLC Voyager 350	289
W'dale Modus Music Four	230
W'dale Valdus 500	300
Yamaha NS10M	300
Yamaha NS-200	300
ZYP A1	229
ZYP A2S	299

£301 TO £500	
Acoustic Energy AE105SE	350
Acoustic Energy AE109	350
Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350
Acoustic Energy AE120	500
Allison Model 2A	420
Arcaydis Baby 2	399
Arcaydis ASC	399
Arcaydis AK1	449
Audiovector C1	399
AVI Neutron	499
AVI NuNeutron	500
B&O Beovox CX50	325
B&O Beovox CX100	425
B&W DM305	350
B&W CDM2SE	400
Bandor Pictures	352
Boston Micro 90 Sat	369
Boston Micro 80 Sys	369
Boston VR20	380
Castle Kendal	400
Castle Inversion 15	425
Castle Eden	500
Celestion 25i	399
Celestion 30i	449
Celestion 35i	499
Cerwin-Vega VS-10	350
Chario Syntar 100T	399
Chario Ref 1000	499
Dali 104B	370
Dali Royal Menuet MkII	400
Dali 606	400
Dali Royal	500
Def Tech Celsius	395
Dynaudio Audience 40	399
Epos ES12	499
GLL Imagio IC248TL	350
GLL Imagio IC258TL	450
GLL Imagio IC348TL	500
Heybrook Heylo	359
Heybrook Ultima	399
Heybrook HB4/2000	500
Jamo Classic 6	330
Jamo Cornet 195	350
Jamo BX-100A	350
Jamo 98	350
Jamo D365	400
Jamo Classic 8	400
Jamo Graphic	400
Jamo 128	450
Jamo BX-150A	450
Jamo Atmosphere	500
JBL LX60	350
JBL Ti 200	400
JM Lab Tantal 515	499

Jordan Watts JHFLG	380
Jordan Watts JH200	420
JPW ML910i	350
JPW ML1010i	450
KEF Q35	349
KEF Q55	499
KEF RDM One	499
Linn Sekrit	395
Magnat Vector 55	349
Magnat Vector 77	449
Mission 751f	348
Mission 775e	400
Mission 704	450
Mission 774	500
Mission 705	500
M-A Monitor 3	350
M-A Silver 5	400
M-A Studio 2SE	500
M-A Monitor 4	500
M-A 700 PMC	500
Mordaunt-Short MS207	400
Mordaunt-Short MS208	500
Mordaunt-Short MS817	500
Mus Tec Harner	400
Mus Tec PM15	475
NAD 804	400
Neat Critique	445
Opera Duetto	395
Opera Prima	495
Origin Live OL-1AS	399
Origin Live Monarch	399
Paradigm Studio/20	350
Paradigm Monitor 9	400
Pioneer S-LC2	450
Polk AB705	330
Polk RT8	400
Polk RT10	500
Polk AB805	500
Prof Monitor Co TB1S	470
Promenade SP2	399
Promenade SP3	499
Rega Alya	350
Rega Jura	450
Rega ELA	498
Royd The Squire	350
Royd Minstrel SE	399
Royd Doublet	485
Ruark Icon	399
Sequence 400	329
Sony SS-X7	400
S Coast Odette	325
Spendor S3/5	499
System 1130	500
Tannoy Revolution R2	350
TDL G20	380
TDL Chiltern CF100	450
TDL G30	500
Technics SB-M300	350
Technics SB-M500	450
TLC Altus 300	366
Triangle Cometes	359
W'dale Modus Music Six	330
W'dale Modus Music Eight	430
W'dale Modus Music 1/6	500
Yamaha NS-300	400

Harbeth BBC L33/5A	699
Harbeth HL-P3ES	799
Heybrook Duet	799
Infinity Kappa 60	595
Infinity Kappa 70	795
Jamo BX-200A	530
Jamo Classic 10	600
JBL LX80	550
JBL Ti 400	550
JBL SVA1500	650
JBL Ti 600	650
JM Lab Cobalt 807	599
JM Lab Tantal 520	599
JM Lab Cobalt 810	799
Jordan Watts JH400	515
KEF L33/5a	649
KEF RDM Two	699
KEF Q65	799
Kelly KT2	700
Linn Tukon Passive	550
Linn Keilidh Passive	750
Magnat Vintage 710	799
Meridian A500	750
M&K S-85	700
Mission 752f	578
Mission 753f	798
M-A Silver 7	600
M-A 702PMC	600
M-A 703PMC	800
Mus Tec Falcon	680
Nam Intro	680
Neat Mystique 2	575
Neat Petite II	745
Opera Seconda	595
Opera Platea	795
Origin Live Resolution	732
Paradigm Studio/60	650
Paradigm Studio/80	750
Polk RT12	600
Polk RT16	799
Polk LSS0	800
ProAc Tablette 2000	649
ProAc Studio 100	749
Prof Monitor Co TB1SM	600
Prof Monitor Co TB1	529
Prof Monitor Co TB1M	576
Prof Monitor Co XB1	640
Promenade SP4	650
Roksan ROKone 1	595
Roksan Ojan 3	795
Royd The Sorcerer	595
Royd Abbot	695
Ruark Templar II	559
Ruark Sceptre	599
Ruark Talisman II	799
Ruark Prologue One	799
Shippy Polarys	595
Silverado Raider	695
Snell K5	795
Soliloquy 5.0	795
Sonus Faber Concertino	599
S Coast Hades	695
S Coast Lancelot	795
Spendor S1	549
System 1150	750
T+A TB 100	700
Tannoy Definition D100	689
TDL Cotswold CF200	650
Titan Logic 1/2B	600
Titan Logic T/2	699
Titan Orbital	790
TLC Classic 2	535
TLC Classic 1	800
Totem Mite	599
Totem Rokk	765
Triangle Zephyr II	599

£501 TO £800	
Acoustic Energy AE505	700
Acoustic Precision Eikos FR1	800
Aliante Stile	580
Aliante Voce	600
Allison Model 3A	525
Arcaydis AK3	599
Arcaydis AS2	699
Arcaydis AK4	699
Audio Gem Emerald	549
Audio Note AN-K/D	620
Audio Note AN-J/B	799
Audiovector M1	759
Audiovector C2	700
AVI Biggatron	599
B&O Beolab 2500	750
B&W 603 S2	550
B&W CDM1 SE	600
Bose 501	600
Bose A'mass AM3	650
Boston VR30	600
Castle Severn 2	600
Celestion A Compact	599
Celestion 45i	599
Celestion C2	699
Cerwin-Vega VS-12	550
Cerwin-Vega VS-15	700
Chario Constellation Lynx	549
Chario Ref 100T	599
Chario Hiper 1000T	699
Cura CA-10	600
Dali 107	600
Dali 350	600
Dali 450	700
Dali 109	800
Def Tech BP6B	750
Diapason Micra II	750
Dynaudio Audience 50	577
Dynaudio Audience 60	729
ELAC CL310i JET	800
Epos ES14	675

£801 TO £1,500	
Acoustic Energy AE509	850
Acoustic Energy AE520	1,000
Acoustic Energy AE2-II	1,245
Acoustic Solutions Eight	1,375
Aliante Moda	1,200
Apertura Prima	1,095
Apertura Nova	1,395
Arcaydis AC1	1,099
Arcaydis AK5	1,399
ATC SCM10	1,000
Audio Note AN-J/D	930
Audio Note AN-K/SPx	1,060
Audio Note AN-E/B	1,299
Audio Note AN-J/SPx	1,415
Audio Physic Step	1,299
Audiovector M1 Super	999
Audiovector M2	1,399
Audiovector M1 Sig	1,449
AVI Positron	899
B&O Beolab 4000	1,100
B&W DM604 Ser II	849
B&W CDM7SE	1,000
B&W N805	1,400
Bandor Trident	846
BKS Audio Hybrid 107	1,500
Bose A'mass AM5	900
Bose 701	1,000
Boston VR40	1,000
Carlsson OA-52.2	1,500



Blue Room Minipod.

Castle Harlech	900	Veritas 7	1,000	Spendor SP100	2,234	Meridian DSP5500	5,950
Celestion A1	899	Veritas 15	1,300	T+A TB 140	1,760	Meridian DSP6000	9,400
Celestion C3	999	Veritas 20	1,400	Tannoy Definition D500	1,999	M-A Studio 50	3,300
Celestion A2	1,499			Tannoy Stirling TW	2,200	M-A Studio 60	5,000
Cerwin-Vega AL-1000	1,100	£1501 TO £3,000		Tannoy Definition D700	2,500	Naim DBL Active	8,050
Cerwin-Vega 1515	1,300	Acoustic Energy AE1 Sig	1,995	TDL Studio Monitor-m	2,750	Neolith NEO 2	3,499
Chario Ref 1000T	999	Acoustic Energy AE2 Sig	2,995	Totem Tabu	2,299	Neolith NEO 3	4,999
Chario Academy 1	1,299	Aliante Zeta	1,850	Totem The Forest	2,675	ProAc Response 3.8	3,990
Cura CA-20	1,199	Aliante Linea	2,060	Veritas 25	1,750	ProAc Future 1	5,875
Dali 850	1,100	Aliante One	2,700	Veritas H1	2,995	ProAc Response 5	9,000
Def Tech BP8B	1,000	Alon I Mk II	1,795	Wilson bench Orator	2,900	ProAc Future 2	10,575
Def Tech BP10B	1,500	Alon II Mk II	2,495	Zingali Overture 2S	1,975	ProAc Response 4	12,000
Diapason Prelude II	875	ALR/Jordan Note 7	2,500			Prof Monitor Co MB1P	5,135
Diapason Kais	1,275	Apertura Agora Signature	2,295	OVER £3,000		Prof Monitor Co BBS-P	8,841
Dynaudio Contour 1.1	879	Apertura Tanagra	2,395	Acoustic Energy AE5	7,995	Prof Monitor Co MB1-A	14,805
Dynaudio Audience 70	1,100	Apertura Tanagra Sig.	2,795	Alon Lotus SE	3,500	Prof Monitor Co BBS A	19,799
Dynaudio Contour 1.3	1,198	ATC SCM20SL	1,750	Alon V Mk II	5,495	Prof Monitor Co MB1/XBD-A	22,266
Dynaudio Audience 80	1,460	ATC SCM20 Tower SL	2,400	Alon Adriana	8,500	Prof Monitor Co BBS/XBD-A	32,606
Electrocompaniet EC-M1	995	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	Alon Circe	12,000	Rehdeko RK125	3,200
Electrocompaniet EC-Qube	1,195	Audio Note AN-E/SPx	2,250	Alon Phalanx	19,000	Rehdeko RK145	4,800
Electrocompaniet EC-Qube SE	1,495	Audio Physic Spark 2	1,749	Apertura Athena	6,995	Rehdeko RK175	8,800
Epos ES15	890	Audio Physic Tempo	1,999	Apertura Atlantia	8,995	Revel Gem	5,295
Epos ES22	1,185	Audio Wk/p Cyclone 34	2,000	ATC SCM20A PRO	3,049	Rockport Merak	13,995
Harbeth HL-K6	1,049	Audiostatic DCI	2,495	ATC SCM20TASL	3,995	Rockport Szygy	15,000
Harbeth HL-Compact 7	1,499	Audiovector M3	1,899	ATC SCM50PSL	4,250	Rockport Procyon	32,500
Harbeth BBC LS5/12A	1,499	Audiovector M3 Sig	2,499	ATC SCM100PSL	4,950	Ruark Solstice	4,000
Impulse Kora	1,250	B&O Beolab 6000	1,550	ATC SCM50ASL	5,775	Ruark Excalibur	7,000
Infinity Overture 1	900	B&O Beolab 8000	2,100	ATC SCM100ASL	6,475	Shahinian Hawk	5,495
Infinity Kappa 80	995	B&O Beolab Penta 3	2,650	ATC SCM70PSL	8,000	Shahinian Diapason	9,495
Infinity Kappa 90	1,295	Bandor Bandora/Mora	2,350	ATC SCM70ASL	10,000	Shinpy Enigma	3,995
Infinity Overture 2	1,500	Bandor Siren	2,800	ATC SCM200ASL	15,595	Shinpy Euphonia	5,995
Jadis Orchestra	999	BKS Audio Hybrid 128	2,549	ATC SCM300ASL	17,731	Shinpy Magnifica Suprema	14,500
Jamo Concert 8	1,365	Bose 901 Vi	1,650	Audio Note AN-JSE Silver	7,900	Shun Mook Bella Voce	6,600
JBL SVA 1600	850	Boston Lynfield 300L	2,000	Audio Note AN-ESE Silver	9,600	Snell XA-75ps	4,500
JBL 4312 MkII-WX	1,000	Castle Inversion 100	1,975	Audio Physic Virgo 2	3,399	Sonus Faber Guarnieri Homage	5,795
JBL SVA 1800	1,000	Celestion A3	2,399	Audio Physic Avanti 2	6,699	Sonus Faber Amati Homage	11,450
JBL SVA 2100	1,250	Celestion Kingston	2,500	Audio Physic Caldera	10,599	Sony SS-M9ED	10,000
JM Lab Cobalt 815	999	Chario Academy 2	1,649	Audio Physic Medea	24,999	Sound-Lab Dynastat	3,790
JM Lab Electra 905	1,199	Chario Academy Mill'm 2	2,100	Audiostatic DCI Plus	3,750	Sound-Lab Aura	6,490
JM Lab Cobalt 820	1,199	Credo SPB 003	1,820	Audiovector 5X	3,999	Sound-Lab Pristine III+	7,990
Jordan Watts JH1+1	1,150	Credo SPB 009	2,453	Audiovector 6X	5,699	Sound-Lab A-3	11,990
KEF Q75	999	Cura CA-30	1,799	Avalon Avatar	5,995	Sound-Lab Ultimate II	13,950
KEF Ref. Model One	1,199	Dali Grand Coupe	2,500	Avalon Arcus	6,995	Sound-Lab A-1	13,990
KEF RDM Three	1,500	Def Tech BP2002	2,400	Avalon Eclipse Classic	8,995	Sound-Lab Ultimate III	18,950
Kelly KT3	1,200	Diapason Adamantes III	1,995	Avalon Radian HC	13,995	Sound-Lab Ultimate I	23,950
Linn Tukan Aktiv	1,050	Dynaudio Contour 1.8	1,894	Avalon Eidolon	20,495	S Coast King Arthur	3,095
Linn Keilidh Aktiv	1,250	Dynaudio Crafft	2,598	Avalon Sentinel	79,995	S Coast Excalibur Ref.	12,400
L Voice Auditorium	1,500	Dynaudio Contour 3.0	2,930	Avantgarde Uno	5,300	Spendor FL10	3,475
Lowther Accolade 2	1,199	ECA Servo A.2	2,450	Avantgarde Duo	7,500	T+A A4D	3,850
Lumley L/M3.5	1,050	ELS Res'ch Vision	2,800	Avantgarde Trio Compact	16,500	T+A A3D	4,550
Magnat Vintage 720	1,199	Epos ES30	2,385	Avantgarde Trio Classic	19,708	T+A A2D	8,400
Magneplanar SMG-C SE	990	Eurostatic Model 1	2,250	AVI Gravitron	4,250	Tannoy Edinburgh TW	3,250
Magneplanar MG-0.6 SE	1,370	Gamma Epoch Ref Five	2,999	B&W Silver Signature	5,500	Tannoy Definition D900	3,999
Meridian Argent 1	995	Harbeth HL-S8	1,999	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	Tannoy GRF Memory TW	4,000
M&K S-125	1,150	Helius Syrius II	2,395	B&W Nautilus	35,000	Tannoy Westminster TW	6,600
Mission 705a	900	Helius Syrius I	2,850	Bandor Bandolone	3,290	Tannoy Canterbury 15 TW	7,720
Mission 754f	1,298	Heybrook Octet	1,799	Beahorn Virtuoso Bronze	3,325	Tannoy Westminster Royal	14,920
M-A Studio 6	900	Hi Q Sound SM108	2,000	Beahorn Virtuoso Gold	3,395	TDL Ref Standard-m	6,000
M-A Silver 9	1,000	Impulse Lali	1,850	Beahorn Virtuoso Reference	3,799	Titan Goliath T/4	4,112
M-A 705PMC	1,150	Infinity Overture 3	1,750	Beahorn Accelerando	6,600	Totem Mani-2	3,100
Mus Tec Condor	1,000	Infinity Kappa 100	1,895	BKS Audio Hybrid 175	3,995	Totem Shaman	9,999
Mus Tec Hawk	1,250	Inner Sound Isis	2,375	Boston Lynfield 500L	4,449	Veritas 45	3,750
Mus Tec Eagle	1,500	Jamo Concert 11	2,250	Carfrae Little Big Horn	6,795	Veritas H2	4,495
Naim Credo	1,090	JM Lab Electra 915	1,899	Carfrae Carfraehorn	18,000	Veritas H3	5,995
Neat Elite	1,195	JM Lab Electra 920	2,399	Chario Academy 3j	5,999	Wilson Audio Cub	5,495
Opera Terza	995	Jordan Watts JH2K	2,400	Credo SPB 012	3,147	Wilson Audio WATT 5	8,390
Opera Callas Gold	1,095	Jordan Watts JH5K	3,000	Credo SDL 001	5,677	Wilson Audio WITT II	10,995
Opera Divina II	1,495	KEF Ref. Model Two	1,599	Dali Grand	4,000	Wilson Audio Maxx	34,995
Orelle Swing	1,200	KEF Ref. Model Three	1,999	Def Tech BP2000	3,600	Wilson bench Actor	3,900
Origin Live Sovereign	1,130	Linn Kaber Passve	2,000	Diapason Adamantes 3.3	3,995	Wilson bench ACT1	6,900
Paradigm Studio/100	950	Linn Kaber Aktiv	2,640	Dynaudio Contour 3	4,815	Wilson bench Act 2	8,900
Polk LS70	1,200	L Voice Aud/m Avatar	2,100	Dynaudio Confidence 3	4,846	Wilson bench The Bishop	20,000
Polk RT20p	1,500	Lowther Fidelio	1,999	Dynaudio Confidence 5	5,924		
ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig	899	Lowther Academy	2,399	Dynaudio Confidence 5	5,924		
ProAc Studio 125	999	Lowther Bel Canto	2,699	Dynaudio Consequence	14,566		
ProAc Response 1 SC	1,199	Lumley L/M2 Mk3	2,995	Dynaudio Evidence	50,909		
Prof Monitor Co LB1	999	Magnat Vintage 760	1,999	Eggleston Rosa	8,500		
Rega XEL	1,040	Magneplanar MG-10 SE	1,650	Electrofluidics Sonolith 2.2xi	5,999		
RMS Revelation S 1	1,299	Magneplanar MG-1.5 SE	1,780	ELS Res'ch Vista	3,900		
Roksan Ojan 3X	995	Magneplanar MG-2.7 SE	2,650	ELS Res'ch Illusion MkII	9,000		
Royd The Albion	985	Martin-Logan Aerius i	2,199	Eurostatic Model 2	3,650		
Ruark Solus	1,200	Meridian M60	2,150	Impulse Ta'us	3,100		
Shahinian Super Elf	875	M-A Studio 20SE	2,500	Inner Sound Eros	3,995		
Shahinian Starter	1,195	Naim SBL Active	1,885	Jadis 2	5,900		
Shahinian Compass	1,495	Naim SBL Passve	2,030	Jadis 1	18,900		
Shinpy Micraphonica	1,099	Neolith NEO 1	2,999	Jamo Oriol	9,000		
Silverado Ryder	1,395	Opera Caruso II	2,495	JM Lab Mini Utopia	4,500		
Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Origin Live Conqueror	1,750	JM Lab Mezzo Utopia	7,300		
Sonus Faber Concerto	945	Polk LS90	1,700	JM Lab Utopia	18,300		
Sonus Faber Concerto CP	999	Posselt Albatross	2,500	JM Lab Grande Utopia	35,000		
Sonus Faber Signum	1,200	ProAc Response 1.5	1,790	Jordan Watts JH10K	7,570		
S Coast Merlin Monitor	849	ProAc Response 2.5	2,700	KEF Ref. Model Four	3,299		
S Coast Classic	1,495	Prof Monitor Co AB1	1,758	Kochel K-300S	10,000		
Spendor SP3/1P	825	Prof Monitor Co IB1S	2,697	Linn Keltik Aktiv	6,000		
Spendor FL6	1,099	Rehdeko RK115	1,700	L Voice Avator OBX	4,000		
Spendor SP2/3	1,187	Ruark Crusader II	1,649	L Voice Air Scout	19,500		
Spendor FL8	1,355	Ruark Equinox	2,000	L Voice Air Partner S	37,200		
T+A TAS 1200E	1,050	Shahinian Arc	1,995	Lowther Delphic	3,099		
T+A TB 120	1,060	Shahinian Obelisk	2,850	Lowther Opus One	4,999		
Tannoy Definition D300	999	Shinpy Euritmica	1,995	Lumley L/M 2 Sig. Mk3	4,500		
TDL Cheviot CF300	850	Shinpy Altair	2,895	Magnat Vintage 770	3,500		
Technics SB-M1000	1,500	Silverado Silverado 1	1,995	Magneplanar MG-3.5SE	3,800		
Titan Enigma T/3	825	Soliloquy 5.3	1,750	Magneplanar MG-20 SE P	10,300		
Titan Sovereign T/4	1,175	Sonus Faber Electa Amator 2	2,849	Magneplanar MG-20 SE A	11,000		
Totem The Arro	959	Sound-Lab Quantum	2,150	Martin-Logan SL3	3,399		
Totem The Staaf	1,249	Sonus Faber Excalibur	2,750	Martin-Logan CLS Ilz	4,555		
Totem Model One	1,249	Spendor SP1/2	1,674	Martin-Logan Re-Quest Z	5,875		
				Meridian DSP5000	3,295		



SUBWOOFERS
 Ⓜ - Active; includes a dedicated power amplifier.
 THX - THX-approved by LucasFilm for use in Home THX installations.

Acoustic Energy AE108S	300
Allison Mini Ref Sub	210
Alon Poseidon	12,000
ATC SCM 0.1/15	3,810
Audio Physic Terra	3,499
B&W ASW1000	500
B&W ASW2000	800
B&W ASW3000	1,000
Boston CR400	300
Boston VR500	450
Boston VR2000	800
Celestion CS135	139

Celestion CSW MkII	329
Celestion S11	349
Celestion A6s	800
Cerwin-Vega HT-10D	200
Cerwin-Vega HT-12D	250
Chario Syntar Bass	299
Chario Hiper Bass	499
Credo SDC 001	3,054
GLL Le Bass	350
Jamo SW303E	200
Jamo SW400E	250
Jamo SW410e	300
Jamo SW505E	300
Jamo Sub One	400
JBL Control Sub 6	200
JBL Control Sub 10	300
JM Lab Tantal SW20	349
JM Lab Cobalt SW27A	599
JM Lab Electra SW33A	899
JM Lab Sub Utopia	2,200
JPW Subwoofer	130
JPW SW40	240
JPW SW60	350
JPW SW-120	500
KEF Model 20B	349
KEF Model 30B	499
KEF Model AV1	2,499
Kenwood SW500	250
Kenwood SW501	349
Linn AV5150	2,850
L. Voice RW24	11,500
Magnat Vector Sub 30P	149
Magnat Vector Sub 30A	299
Meridian M2500	1,595
M&K VX-7MkII	450
M&K V-75 MkII	650
M&K V-125	800
M&K V-125 (THX)	900
M&K MX-70	800
M&K MX-150 (THX)	1,500
M&K MX-700	1,595
M&K MX-200	1,800
M&K MX-350THX	1,995
M&K MX-5000 (THX)	2,499
Mission 75as	548
M-A ASW110	500
M-A ASW210	700
Mus. Tec. PMS 45	500
Mus. Tec. Tercel	700
Muse Model 22	1,890
Muse Model 18	3,790
Neat Gravitas	1,095
Paradigm PDR10	250
Paradigm Servo 15A	800
Polk PSW50	350
Polk PSW150	500
Polk PSW300	750
REL Q50	375
REL Q-100E	495
REL Strata III	600
REL Storm III	800
REL Stadium II	995
REL Stentor II	1,800
REL Studio II	4,000
Revel Sub-15	2,195
Roksan Ojan 3S	795
Ruark Log-Rhythm	750
Sequence FW120	249
Solloquy S10	1,050
Sony SA-W305	130
Sunfire Sub Junior	1,099
Sunfire True Sub	1,499
Sunfire Trus Sub Sig.	1,699
TDL Nucleus SBR	200
Tsunami TS300	300
Tsunami TS200	300
Tsunami TS210	399
Wdale Modus Sub Bass	180
Wilson Audio Puppy 5.1	8,450
Wilson Audio Whow III	10,999
Wilson Audio XS	17,000
Yamaha YST-SW45	140
Yamaha YST-SW90	180
Yamaha YST-SW160	280
Yamaha YST-SW300	350

Air Tangent 10B	#	8,600
Air Tangent Reference	#	14,000
Audio Note AN-ARM 1	⊙	169
Audio Note AN-0s	⊙	795
Audio Note AN-1s	⊙	995
Audiomeca SL5	#	2,500
Clearaudio Souther TQ-1	#	1,670
Clearaudio Master TQ-1	#	3,620
Dynavector 507	⊙	1,995
Graham Mk 2.0 Basic	⊙	1,810
Graham Mk 2.0 Deluxe	⊙	2,650
Heliuss Orion 4 Copper	⊙	549
Heliuss Cyalene 2	⊙	1,495
Kuzma Stogi S	⊙	399
Kuzma Stogi	⊙	750
Kuzma Stogi Ref	⊙	1,250
Linn Akito	⊙	500
Linn Ekos	⊙	1,500
Moth Mk I	⊙	109
Moth MkIII Stainless	⊙	146
Moth Mk III Tungsten	⊙	174
Moth Moth 900	⊙	598
Naim ARO	⊙	1,070
N'ham Interspace Arm	⊙	370
N'ham Space	⊙	450
N'ham Mentor	⊙	800
N'ham Foot	⊙	1,100
N'ham Anna Log Arm	⊙	1,500
Pro-Ject 9	⊙	350
Rega RB250	⊙	109
Rega RB300	⊙	174
Rega RB900	⊙	598
Rockport Series 7000	#	6,000
Roksan Tabriz	⊙	350
Roksan Tabriz Zi	⊙	450
Roksan Artemiz	⊙	895
SME 3009 Ser II Imp	⊙	309
SME 3009 S2 Ser II Imp	⊙	338
SME Series II 3009-R	⊙	514
SME Series II 3010-R	⊙	526
SME Series II 3012-R	⊙	565
SME 309	⊙	689
SME 310	⊙	705
SME 312	⊙	802
SME Series IV	⊙	983
SME Series V	⊙	1,461
Triplanar V1A	⊙	3,500
Triplanar V1B	⊙	3,750
Wilson benesch Act 0.5	⊙	795
Wilson benesch ACT2	⊙	1,350
Zeta AS	⊙	469
Zeta VDH	⊙	549

McIntosh MR7084	P50	2,499
McIntosh MX118	P50	4,999
McIntosh MX130	P50	6,999
Meridian 504	P30	695
Musical Fidelity E50	P20	300
Myryad T-30	P29	400
Myryad MT100	P39	600
NAD 412	P24	190
NAD C440	P30	200
NAD 414RDS	P30	250
NAD 710	P24	270
NAD 712	P24	330
Naim NAT03	P24	615
Naim NAT02	P30	1,130
Naim NAT01	P30	1,780
Onkyo T 4210RDS	P30	180
Onkyo T 409	P30	230
Onkyo T 411RDS	P30	260
Pioneer F-204RDS	P30	140
Pioneer F-504RDS	P40	250
Pioneer F-504RDS Precision	P40	300
Quad 99	P25	700
Quad 77FM	P25	700
Rega Radio	P24	298
Roksan Kandy	P50	375
Roksan Caspian	P50	695
Rotel RT-935AX	P20	160
Rotel RT940AX	P20	200
Sony ST-SE200	P30	100
Sony ST-SE300	P30	100
Sony ST-SE500	P30	140
Sony ST-SB920	P30	180
Sony ST-SA3ES	P30	250
Sony ST-S3000	P30	250
T+A T1200R	P60	790
TAG McLaren T20	P39	1,099
Teac T-R400	P40	100
Teac T-R460	P40	120
Teac T-H500	P30	170
Technics ST-GT350L	P30	130
Technics ST-GT550L	P39	180
Technics ST-GT650L	P39	230
Thorens TRT-2000	P59	499
Thule Audio Spirit TU100	P40	499
Yamaha TX-480L	P40	100
Yamaha TX-10 II	P40	130
Yamaha TX-492RDS	P40	130
Yamaha TX-59 2RDS	P40	180
Yamaha RX-396RDS	P40	250
YBA Complete	P14	490

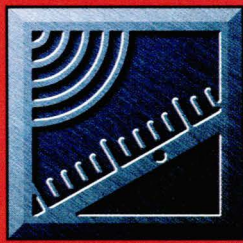
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Thorens TD-180 AT91	⊙	210
Thorens TD-280 IV/UK	⊙	230
Thorens TD166 VI AT95E	⊙	370
Thorens TD-166 W/UK/RB	⊙	400

OVER £500

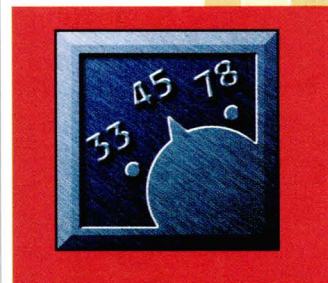
Audio Note AN-TT 2	⊙	995
Audio Note AN-TT 3	⊙	1,995
Audiomeca Romance	⊙	1,895
Audiomeca J1	⊙	3,500
Avid Volvere	⊙	1,399
Avid Acutus	⊙	3,995
Basis 2000	⊙	1,995
Basis 2001	⊙	2,995
Basis Ovation II	⊙	5,400
Basis 2500	⊙	5,495
Basis 2800	⊙	7,495
Basis Debut Gold Std III	⊙	8,200
Basis Debut Gold Vacuum	⊙	10,500
Chantry QT Level 2	⊙	705
Clearaudio Solution	⊙	925
Clearaudio Evolution	⊙	1,095
Clearaudio Revolution	⊙	2,500
Clearaudio Reference	⊙	3,835
Clearaudio Master Ref.	⊙	8,510
DNM-Reson Rota 1	⊙	3,900
DNM-Reson Rota 2	⊙	5,600
Garrard 501	⊙	5,278
Impulse Moskitto	⊙	695
Kuzma Stabi S	⊙	695
Kuzma Stabi	⊙	1,950
Kuzma Stabi Reference	⊙	3,750
Linn LP12 Bask	⊙	1,100
Linn LP12 Lingo	⊙	1,750
Michell Gyro Spider Ed'n	⊙	775
Michell Gyrodeck	⊙	875
Michell Orbe SE	⊙	1,725
Michell Orbe	⊙	1,995
N'ham Spacedeck	⊙	750
N'ham HyperSpacedeck	⊙	1,500
N'ham Mentor	⊙	2,600
N'ham Anna Log	⊙	5,500
Oracle Delphi	⊙	3,370
Oracle Delphi 15th Anniv	⊙	3,800
Pink Triangle Tarantella II	⊙	850
Pro-Ject Perspective	⊙	750
Rega P25	⊙	598
Rega Planar 9	⊙	1,598
Reson RS1M	⊙	695
Reson Rota 1	⊙	3,900
Rockport Capella II	⊙	7,500
Rockport Sirius III	⊙	90,000
Roksan Xenos 10	⊙	1,295
Roksan TMS	⊙	2,750
SME Model 10A	⊙	3,333
SME Model 20/2	⊙	3,403
SME Model 20/2A	⊙	4,863
SME Model 30/2	⊙	10,675
SME Model 30/2A	⊙	12,135
SOTA Comet	⊙	995
SOTA Millenia	⊙	5,795
Stratosphere ST1	⊙	6,500
Technics SL-1200LTD	⊙	700
Thorens TD-146 VI TP50	⊙	550
Thorens TD-2001 TP90	⊙	700
Thorens TD-520 SME	⊙	1,050
Verdier Nouvelle Platine	⊙	2,250
Verdier Platine Verdier	⊙	4,350
Well Tempered Record Player	⊙	1,995
Well Tempered Classic V	⊙	3,500
Well Tempered Reference	⊙	5,500
Wilson benesch Circle	⊙	795
Wilson benesch WB Turntable	⊙	1,775
Wilson benesch Full Circle	⊙	1,995



TUNERS

KEY
 'P20' (etc.) - Number of presets.
RDS - Radio Data System; receives text information on station, programme type etc.

Arcam Alpha 7	P24	230
Arcam Alpha 8	P24	280
Arcam Alpha 10 DRT	P07	800
Ariston TX-510	P20	50
AVI S2000MT	P16	599
AVI S2000MT2	P99	899
Cambridge T500	P64	180
Creek T43	P64	399
Cymbal Digital Radio	P08	899
Cyrus FM7.5	P29	398
Davidson-Roth FM Ref Classic	P40	5,990
Denon TU-260L MkII	P40	150
Denon TU-215RD	P40	150
Denon TU-425RD	P40	200
Denon TU-1500RD	P40	250
Fanfare FT1	P08	1,395
H/K TU930	P30	150
H/K TU950	P30	200
Kenwood KT-2080	P20	130
Kenwood KT-3080	P30	180
Linn Kudos	P50	775
Linn Kremlin	P80	2,600
Magnum Dynalab FT11	⊙	499
Magnum Dynalab FT-101A	⊙	795
Magnum Dynalab Etude	⊙	1,250
Magnum Dynalab MD108	⊙	4,990
Marantz ST-48	P60	120
Marantz ST-17	P60	600



TURNTABLES

KEY
 ⊙ - Arm included.
 ⊙ - Cartridge included.
UP TO £500

Audio Note AN-TT 1	⊙	349
Dual CS435-1	⊙	140
Dual 505-4 UK	⊙	220
Dual CS-750-1	⊙	330
Genexa Lab-710	⊙	60
Genexa Lab-810	⊙	70
Kenwood KD-492F	⊙	100
Michell Mycro	⊙	455
Moth Alamo	⊙	199
Moth Kanoot MkI Arm	⊙	279
Moth Kanoot Mk3 Arm	⊙	329
NAD 533	⊙	220
N'ham Interspace	⊙	500
Pioneer PL-J250-C	⊙	80
Pioneer PL-990	⊙	130
Pro-Ject 0.5/OM10	⊙	170
Pro-Ject 1/510	⊙	200
Pro-Ject 2/510	⊙	250
Pro-Ject Classic/510	⊙	360
Pro-Ject 6/510	⊙	400
Pro-Ject 6.9	⊙	500
Rega Planar 78	⊙	214
Rega Planar 2	⊙	214
Rega Planar 3	⊙	274
Roksan Radius	⊙	470
Sherwood PM8550	⊙	160
Sony PS-LX150H	⊙	90
Sony PS-LX300H	⊙	150
Technics SL-1110D	⊙	120
Technics SL-BD20	⊙	160
Technics SL-BD22	⊙	180
Technics SL-1210MkII	⊙	400
Technics SL-1200MkII	⊙	400



TONEARMS

KEY
 ⊙ - Pivoted.
 # - Parallel tracking.

Air Tangent IC	#	4,600
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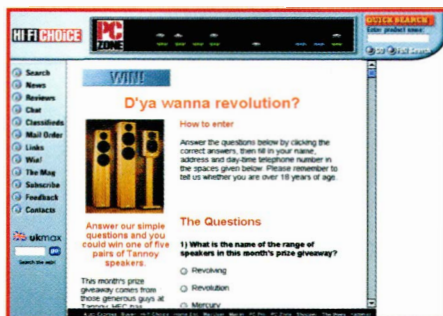
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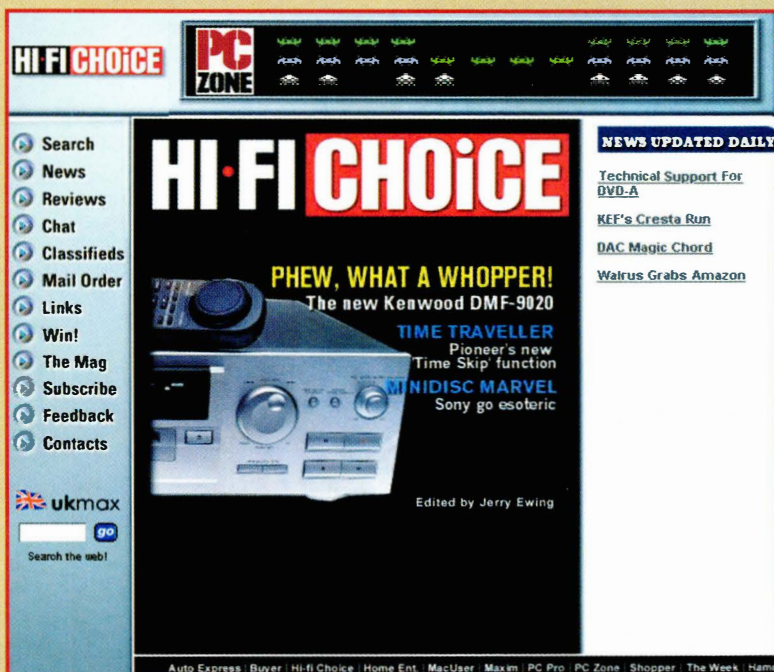
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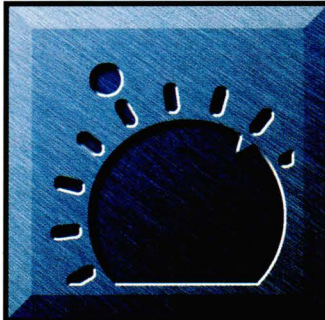


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THE DIRECTORY

THE WORLD'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE HI-FI LISTING. PROBABLY.



Amplifiers

The amplifier is at the heart of any hi-fi system, accepting the outputs from various music sources, increasing the amplitude of their signal and then driving the loudspeakers to produce sound. One-box 'integrated' amps rule the roost at low-to-middle price points, but if you pay more, the low-level and high-level signal processes are separated into preamp and power amp boxes, and even separate 'outboard' power supplies come into play. Another luxury is a separate amp for each stereo channel: such devices are known as monoblocks. Finally, output power and sound quality are not necessarily related. Some of the finest amplifiers outputs only 12 Watts, but will yield loudness aplenty when partnered with high-efficiency loudspeakers.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS: Number of input sockets for line-level (non-vinyl) sources such as CD players, tuners and cassette decks.
MM PHONO INPUT: An input specially designed for moving magnet (high output) phono pickup cartridges.
MC PHONO INPUT: An input for moving coil (low output) phono pickup cartridges.
REMOTE CONTROL: An infra-red handset to adjust volume etc.
HEADPHONE SOCKET: An integral output for headphones.
POWER OUTPUT (Watts): Our measurement of an amp's RMS power output into 8 Ohms.
RECEIVER: An amplifier with built-in radio receiver (tuner).
FACTSBACK REFERENCE: The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the mag.
ISSUE NUMBER: The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R RECOMMENDED** **E EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Amplifiers

SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS
 MM PHONO INPUTS
 MC PHONO INPUTS
 REMOTE CONTROL
 HEADPHONE SOCKET
 POWER OUTPUT (W)
 RECEIVER
 FACTSBACK NO.
 ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	RECEIVER	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alchemist Kraken APD6A	599	Compact, with Darth Vader styling, yet sound quality is meek and mild, despite strong midband dynamics	5	●				55		2150	175
R	AMC 3025a	140	Surprisingly potent and easy on the ear, if not especially analytical – classic bargain-basement material, in fact	4	●	●	●	●	30		2045	171
R	AMC 3050a	170	Tremendous value for money, and a full, big, if rather uninformative sound	4	●	●	●	●	45		1970	167
E	Arcam Alpha One	230	Rather like an Alpha 7 but without the remote control and what appears to be better sound quality still	6					35		2470	186
	Arcam Alpha 7R	300	Decent, if slightly system fussy amplifier that no longer pulls all the right strings	5	●				45			196
E	Arcam Alpha 8R	380	The Alpha 8R sets a high level of resolution and stability, and has some useful features for home cinema users	5	●				50		2634	192
R	Arcam Alpha 9	500	Not quite a match for the Alpha 9/9P combo, the solo integrated is nevertheless colourful and explicitly detailed	7					70		2007	168
R	Arcam Alpha 10	800	Although not the best sounding in its class, the Alpha 10's modular nature demands it be taken seriously	5					100		2318	181
E	ATC SIA2-150	1,984	An impressive sounding integrated amp with a dynamic, open and detailed sound	4					150			192
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12			190
R	Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	●	●			40		2147	175
	Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	●	●			40		2314	181
	Audiogram MB1	493	The only flaws are the amateurish build, a number of technical problems and inconsistent sound quality	4	●				40		2235	178
R	AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5					100		2155	175
	Bryston B60R	1,249	Great build, but the lazy bass and opaque treble bracket an articulate midband. Comes with 20 year guarantee	5					60		2156	175
R	Cambridge Audio A500RC	200	Solid value, decent build and a surfeit of watts make this an attractive proposition, but it can sound slightly loose	6					50		2466	196
R	Copland CSAB	945	Sophisticated yet transparent, this is one of those amplifiers that sounds good even when the gloss has worn off	5					60		2010	168
R	Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	●				60		2542	189
	Copland CTA 402	1,698	An unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	●				35			193
	CR Developments CR324	569	Solid and capable on paper, this is a bit of a blunt instrument when let loose on the music	5					150		2315	181
	Symbol CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40		2236	178
R	Creek 4330	279	Diminutive but dassy amp will drive anything, and can be specified in various configurations	4	●				40		2630	192
R	Cyrus SL	398	Articulate amplifier with build quality to die for, superb, outgoing midband and lean but well-extended bass	6					50			168
	Cyrus III	598	Beautifully presented, but mid-dominated balance was not liked. Upgradeable using PSX PSU unit				●		50		1854	162
R	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best sounding audio brick around	6					60			196
R	Denon PMA-250SE	140	This amp can sound rough when extended, but within its limits it is open, detailed and likeable	5					30		2046	171
R	Denon PMA-350SE	180	Reinvented in the minimalist tradition, this SE model is a control freak, but can sound wonderful	5					50		1856	162
	Denon PMA-535R	230	The kind of amp they made in the 70s, dressed to the nines, and nowhere to go	5	●				50		2627	192
	Denon PMA-725R	350	Warm, bold, up-front presentation, but musically unexciting	5	●	●			97		1802	157
R	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70		2316	181
R	Densen Beat B-100 MkII	650	High 'air guitar' factor, and can punch above its weight, but check it will complement your system	5					60		2151	175
	Densen DM-10	1,375	Big, bold and expressive amplifier, but sometimes rough around the edges, and not as powerful as it appears	6					75		2546	189
	Edmund Audio ES110	400	Honest but unexciting straight line amp from REL associate company	6					85		2635	192
	Exposure XX Super	700	Rather transistorised, unexciting sound. Good coherence and rhythm. Best played loud	6					55		1743	154
	Exposure RCXXV	1,000	Unaccountably rather underwhelming top of the line integrated sounds a little soft and detached	6					60		2543	189
R	Electrocompaniet EC1-2	995	A 50 Watt amplifier which sounds more powerful, and makes 'real-sounding' music	4					50		2158	175
E	Harman/Kardon HK610	180	Lively and friendly sound, but could prove too exciting for the faint hearted	6	●				30		1465	149
R	Harman/Kardon HK630	200	Sharp, clean but sometimes slightly raw-sounding budget amp	4	●				40		2628	192
E	Harman/Kardon HK620	250	Capable and musical amplifier which is one of the nicest at this price. Optional add-in MM/MC board available	6					40		1858	162
	Harman/Kardon HK690	530	Bold, dynamic amplifier with plenty of balls, but not the most sophisticated sound on earth	6	●				100			196
	Hofli Audis Signature	750	A 'no-feedback' circuit giving outstanding resolution, but significant load dependency	4	●				65		2319	181
	JoLida 202	695	Well-built and technically accomplished, affordable valve integrated with subtle refined, if not quite gripping sound	4					40		2011	168
	JVC AX-V4	200	Respectable performance for a Pro-Logic AV amplifier. Lacks resolution and sparkle, though	5	●				63		1805	157
	JVC AX-R5	200	Versatile, and lots of even-handed, articulate detail; but let down by superficiality	5	●				45		1466	149
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●				70		2463	186
	Kenwood KA-5090R	300	Large, well equipped and high tech integrated, but TRAITR output still gives a harsh, unsoft performance	5	●				65		2053	171
	Krell KAV-500I	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5					250			192
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5					23			196
R	Magnum IA120	265	Mirror finish amplifier with bold, colourful delivery, but needs careful system matching to avoid loss of clarity	6					65		2054	171
E	Magnum IA170	330	Gives a realistic sense of instruments playing within a very believable acoustic; preserves colour and dynamics	6					96		1260	142
R	Magnum IA200	599	Sweet, valve-flavoured solid state amplifier which flatters where it doesn't cast light	7					160		1860	162
	Magnum Class A SE	795	A MOSFET amplifier drawing inspiration from the world of valves, this is an erratically refined, detailed amplifier	5	●				80		2159	175

CONTINUED

Amplifiers

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

MM PHONO INPUTS
MC PHONO INPUTS
REMOTE CONTROL
HEADPHONE SOCKET
POWER OUTPUT (W)
RECEIVER
FACTSBACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	5	4	3	2	1	0	50	100	150	200	250	300	350	400	450	500	550	600	650	700	750	800	850	900	950	1000	ISSUE NO.	FACTSBACK NO.	
Marantz PM-48	150	Fine entry-level amplifier has excellent midband resolution and top, with a slightly coarse textured bass	5	●					50																			2464	186		
Marantz PM-57	200	Well equipped but ultimately anodyne amplifier which lacks for nothing but star quality	5	●					50																				2049	171	
Marantz PM-68	300	Rather matter-of-fact delivery, lacks transparency and detail	6	●					90																				2631	192	
Marantz PM-6010SE	229	Good starter amplifier, with characteristic smooth, low key delivery	5	●					50																					196	
R Marantz PM66 KI-Signature	400	It knows how to rock and roll with holographic detail and stereo, but prefers small/medium scale acoustic material	5	●					50																			2003	168		
Marantz PM-17	900	Probably worth it for the WBT terminals and other build features alone, but this model doesn't sing as it should	6	●	●				60																				2323	181	
Marantz PM-17 KI-Signature	1,300	Full feature audiophile amp where the end results don't quite justify the fantastic ingredients	6	●	●				60																				2544	189	
Monrio ASTY	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5	●					55																				2237	178	
Musical Fidelity E1	199	Richly flavoured tone and realistically-scaled imagery distinguish this entry-level Richer Sounds special	6	●					30																				2050	171	
Musical Fidelity E11	299	Well built minimalist amp with a 5 year guarantee, but can sound congested when extended	6	●					60																				2232	178	
R Musical Fidelity X-A1	479	Idiosyncratic visuals just another plus for an amp that is powerful, well built, and serves the music superbly	6	●					50																				2317	181	
Musical Fidelity A3	849	Similar to the XA-100R internally, and a little too relaxed for some	5	●	●				85																					196	
Musical Fidelity X-A100R	999	Sings like a thoroughbred, but better with Mozart than Motörhead	6	●					75																				2545	189	
Myryad T-40	400	The T-40 is a well built and sensible, but needs more dynamics and finesse	6	●					50																				2636	192	
Myryad MI120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6	●					60																				2152	175	
R NAD 310	100	Fleet and sure of foot, it seems likely to set all appendages tapping with its blend of enthusiasm and artfulness	5	●					20																				1468	149	
R NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6	●					40																				2467	186	
R NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●					50																				2632	192	
R NAD 317	470	Build quality aside, the current improved version is a real powerhouse, but smooth and detailed too	6	●					80																					196	
R NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and no shortage of finesse, slightly bass-strong	5	●					100																					189	
R Naim Nait 3	575	Distinctive and highly musical sounding integrated amp. Perhaps too distinctive for some tastes	5	●					30																				1748	154	
R Naim Nait 3R	780	Remote control variant of the basic Nait has a similarly dynamic credible sound but ultimately lacks power	5	●					30																				2536	189	
R Pioneer A-300R	200	Its bright and breezy sound is a natural tonic to those of us worn down by the ongoing stress of life	5	●					50																				1469	149	
R Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	●					45																				2471	186	
R Pioneer A-607R	300	Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	●					60																				2633	192	
R Pioneer A-300R Precision	400	Sophisticated variant of the A-300R. Not an obvious winner, but will slowly ply you with its subtle charms	5	●					35																				1863	162	
R Pioneer A-07	999	Curious blend of high-end attributes and inconsistent, though undeniably detailed sound	5	●					80																				2160	175	
R Præcisa Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5	●					100																					2547	189
R Primare A-20 Mk II	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but ballsier model has lost none of its refinement	5	●					70																				2321	181	
R Primare A30.1	1,499	Superb build and aesthetics, and undemonstrably musical down to its smallest screw	6	●					100																				2548	189	
Rega Elex	398	Minimalist amplifier, derived from Elicit, is a little uninspiring, although at least it is well behaved	4	●					50																				1865	162	
Restek Fantasy II	1499	Muscular, but ultimately rather strident amplifier which needs careful system matching	6	●					100																				2549	186	
R Roksan Caspian	695	Well-built, open and articulate amplifier, which is also consistent from system to system	6	●					70																				2014	168	
Rose Scion	615	Unique two-box integrated gives real subtlety and low level resolution, but the sound lacks scale and weight	5	●	●				65																				2009	168	
Rotel RA-931	150	Rather dry and unforgiving sound from this internally well specified and attractively priced amplifier	4	●					35																				2048	171	
R Rotel RA-971 MkII	225	Improved AR971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6	●					60																					196	
R Sony TA-FB730R	200	Brilliantly sharp and realistic sound is offset by some obvious sonic flaws – and maxi feature set doesn't help	5	●					40																					196	
R Sony TA-F448BE	250	Minimalist interface is matched to carefully considered circuit with satisfactory effect – but keep the volume in check	5	●					55																				2055	171	
R Sony TA-F3000ES	500	Champagne 'shoebbox amp' may lack power reserves, but is quick and articulate. In every sense a knockout	5	●	●				35																				2239	178	
T+A PA-1220R	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7	●					100																					2550	189
Tact Millennium Mk II	7,000	This digital class D amplifier represents a bold declaration on the future expansion of digital audio in the home	n/a						150																					194	
TAG McLaren 60i	800	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000LX replacement	6	●					60																				2540	189	
TAG McLaren 60iRv	999	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6	●					60																					184	
R Talk Electronics Storm 1	500	Good soundstaging and strong detail are provided by this unassuming and not especially powerful model	6	●					50																				1868	162	
R Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6	●					65																					196	
R Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6	●					50																				2154	175	
TEAC A-E2000	180	Has the potential to cause significant damage in the budget amp sector once the wrinkles are ironed out	6	●					50																					195	
Teac A-BX7R	700	Characterful balance mars a meticulously designed amplifier. Includes a balanced input, optional MM/MC stage	5	●					50																				1869	162	
Technics SU-A660 Mk 3	200	Plenty of wellie for the price, but the sound can be a tad coarse and lacking in fine detail	5	●					37																					186	
Technics SU-A700 Mk 3	250	Fully equipped, high-tech amplifier ultimately fails the authenticity test, and can sound messy and inarticulate	5	●					45																				1870	162	
Technics SU-A808	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●					55																					196	
R Technics SU-A800D Mk 2	300	Two-box amplifier looks great, has plenty of gadgets, and makes good, if slightly over-exuberant, music	5	●					55																				2234	178	
R Technics SU-A900D Mk 2	400	Looks like a pre/power amplifier, but in effect it's an integrated, with a rather soft-centred sound to match	5	●					70																					2149	175
R Token Audio K50	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5	●					50																				2472	186	
Yamaha AX-392	170	Standard budget fare, and it's easy to pick holes, but in undemanding surroundings it works creditably	6	●					60																				2629	192	
R Yamaha AX-492	220																														

CONTINUED

Amplifiers

SPECIFICATIONS

MM PHONO INPUTS
MC PHONO INPUTS
REMOTE CONTROL
HEADPHONE INPUTS
POWER OUTPUT (W)
RECEIVER
FACTSBACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT (€) COMMENTS

PREAMPLIFIERS

	Amp Flux System 2	3,000	Three-box affair with a clean, spacious sound and plenty of slam. A touch steely, but undeniably potent	5	●	●	50		187
	Alchemist Kraken APD7A MkII	549	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6					187
F	Arcam Alpha 9C	400	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6		●	●		187
	Audio Note M Zero	299	Neat shoe box-size preamp. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5					191
F	Copland CTA-301MkII	1,249	Sweet sounding, but never gets bogged down in audio treacle	4	●			1630	151
B	Creek P43R	350	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from this fine value preamp	6		●	●		187
F	Crimson CS610	450	Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited	3	●	●			187
	Cyrus aCA7	798	A decent enough unit at the price but not as good as the Cyrus aPA7 power amp it was tested with	5			●	●	190
	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●			191
B	ECA Vista	760	Wind up the volume and blow a breath of fresh music into your system. (Tested with Lectern power amp)	5					1302 145
	Exposure XVII	850	Superbly rhythmic; maybe a bit overpowering in the midband. (Tested in sessions with XVIII Super)	5	●	●			142
E	Levinson 380	3,995	True high end preamplifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability	6			●		195
	LFD Mistral Linestage	449	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					1930 165
	Meridian 501	695	Tight, positive sound, but dispassionate; intense at high levels. (Tested with 555 power amp)	5	●		●		1303 145
	Meridian 502	1,295	Extremely sophisticated analogue controller with tremendous flexibility and a fast and tidy presentation	7			●		162
	Michell Orca	1,650	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound. (Tested with Alecto power amps)	6			●		187
	Moth 30 Active Line Stage	349	Excellent-sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp	4					1931 165
	Muse Model Three	1,990	Natural sounding tranny preamp with useful audiophile features. Works beautifully with 160 power amp	5			●		166
F	Musical Fidelity X-PRE	200	Cleverly configured preamp with many upgrade options, and open, lively and engaging sound	4					2152 175
	Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista	1,295	Fully remote, nuvistor tube equipped, with fine coherence and musicality	5	●		●		182
F	NAD 114	270	Beer-budget preamp which sounds focused, detailed and consistent	6	●	●	●		1932 165
	Naim NAC92R	630	Upgradeable preamp uses proprietary socketry. (Tested with NAP90 power amp)	5			●		1936 165
	NVA P50	350	Passive preamp that's more likely than most to cause treble loss	4					187
B	Quad 77 Pre	850	Sophisticated design with 2-way remote control console; open colourful sound and very flexible	4	●	●	●		1941 165
F	Rega Hal	998	Passive line stages dedicated to Exon power amps	6	●	●	●		1942 165
	Rotel RC-971	150	Low price is offset by rather coarse sound quality with certain types of music. (Tested with RB-971 power amp)	5			●		178
	TAG McLaren PA20R	1,500	Refinement of Audiolab original with clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power. (T/w 125M monoblocks)	6			●	●	184
	Talk Hurricane 2L	649	Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6					1937 165
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●				188
	Thule Spirit PR100	400	High-tech preamp slightly marred by tendency to veil the sound	5			●		187

POWER AMPLIFIERS

	Alch. Kraken APD8A Mk II	549	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	1				55	187
B	Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1				60	1929 165
F	Arcam Alpha 10P	600	Well made and flexible: upgradeable to 3 channels. Good sound lacking the last degree of detail	1				100	187
	Audio Note P Zero	599	Neat shoe box size valve monoblocks, priced per pair. Impart music with life and soul. (Tested with P Zero preamp)	1				8	191
E	Border Patrol 300B SE	3,995	Single ended valve power amp with passion, grace and fire, and plenty of grunt to boot	1				8.5	186
	Cary CAD 2A3SE	1,575	Monoblock valve power amp. Low power but gives delightful speed, coherence and transparency	1				5	196
	Copland CTA-505	2,099	Grown-up amplifier with a refined, yet never over-civilised air	1				67	1630 151
B	Creek A52SE	599	Well designed and built amplifier with plenty of power, detail and refinement	6				100	187
F	Crimson CS630	800	Space-saving slimline monoblocks with both grunt and finesse	1				100	187
	Crimson 620C	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is raised	1				50	181
	Cyrus Power	498	Detail and midband clarity and stand-out qualities. Smooth and refined with most types of music but bass-soft	1				50	183
	Cyrus aPA7	1,896	Low feedback design that's a positive departure from the transistorised norm. (Tested with Cyrus aCA7 pre)	1				150	190
F	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1				100	183
B	ECA Lectern	880	Tested with Vista. Wind up the volume and blow a breath of fresh music into your system	1				50	1302 145
E	Levinson 334	5,495	A mailed fist in a velvet glove; refined, authoritative and transparent	1				125	195
	LFD Mistral Power	449	Infectious upper band vitality, but LF dynamics lacking – likewise 'grip' and transparency	1				60	1930 165
	Meridian 555	750	By providing an open window on the music, this amp is wide open to RF and low level IM distortions	1				60	1303 145
	Michell Alecto Monoblocks	1,950	Hefty beasts offering real power and striking imaging. Not the last word in timing. (Tested with Orca preamp)	1				100	187
	Moth 60 Watt Stereo	599	Miniature power amp lacks control and finesse – not comfortable with difficult speaker loads	1				60	1931 165
B	Moth 30 Series Monoblocks	879	Tested with Active Preamp. Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	1				100	155
F	Musical Fidelity X-A50	500	Cleverly configured and attractively packaged, open, lively and engaging sound. Reviewed with X-PRE	1				50	175
	Myryad MA120	450	Based on MI120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with MI120	1				60	1935 165
F	NAD 214	370	A little lightweight, but detailed, consistent sound quality, and excellent value for money	1				80	1932 165
	Naim NAP90	450	Power amp from a Nait integrated with some improvements	1				30	1936 165
	NVA A60	560	Rather coarse and uninviting sound	1				60	187
	Technics SE-A3000	2,997	Price includes SU-C3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	1			●	100	188
	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean	1				100	187
F	Rega Exon	1,196	Monoblock, priced each, dedicated for Hal preamp. Bold, outgoing, in-command kind of sound	1				125	1942 165
	Roksan Caspian Power	595	Excels musically and in conventional hi-fi terms. A power amp for people with long-term satisfaction in mind	1				70	183
	Rotel RB-971	200	Somewhat better than the accompanying preamp – clean, mean and bridgeable. (Tested with RC-971)	1				70	178
	Rotel RB-980BX	450	Tames enthusiastically recorded material with a laid-back and occasionally smeared sound	1				120	155
E	Sirius D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and timing (balanced only)	1				200	183
	TAG McLaren 125M	2,400	Refined Audiolab replacement monoblocks with clean sound but limited thrill power. (T/w PA20R preamp)	1				145	184
	Talk Tornado 2	600	Good, but slightly retiring sound which lacks the authority to stand out in a crowd	1				65	1937 165

PHONO STAGES

F	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character	0		●			189
	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at dimaxes, which can be rough	0	●	●			189
	Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	350	Quite unusual design in many ways: sound is mostly good but never quite shakes off a 'synthetic' quality	0		●			189
F	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise	0	●	●			189
F	Michell Iso/Lithos	599	With the Lithos power supply upgrade, the Iso is a very capable phono stage with just a hint of bass fullness	0	●	●			189
B	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, in any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage	0	●	●			189
F	Musical Fidelity X-LP	130	A little bass lightness does not seriously mar the performance of this fine value unit	0	●	●			189
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too	0	●				189
F	QED Discsaver DS-1	35	It's cheap, it's cheerful, it's OK – perfectly adequate for use with a phono-less integrated, though not very refined	0	●	●			189
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at dimaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components	0	●	●			189
	TAG McLaren PPA20	1,549	One of the best-equipped phono stages available. Resolution is excellent, but timing is marginally behind the best	0	●	●			187



Cables

Cables are an integral part of a hi-fi system, required to connect source components to amplifiers, and the latter to speakers.

- Analogue Interconnects connect source components and amplifiers, and run between pre and power amps. They are priced for one-metre terminated pairs.
- Digital interconnects connect CD transports to DACs or digital recorders. They come in optical and electrical varieties, the former being made of plastic or glass. The prices shown are for a terminated linear metre.
- Speaker cables are used between the amplifier and speaker. Our prices are per unterminated metre. Termination (plugs and soldering) costs vary.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **SYMMETRICAL:** A twisted pair of conductors.
- **COAXIAL:** A central 'hot' conductor and a shield that carries the negative signal.
- **STRANDED:** Multiple strands with no intervening insulation.
- **SOLID CORE:** Single or multiple, individually insulated strands.
- **COPPER:** Material used for conductor.
- **SILVER:** Material used for conductor.
- **DIG CABLE TYPE:** O - optical digital; E - electrical digital for CD Players, DACs and digital recorders.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback ad on the penultimate page of the mag.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Cables

SPECIFICATIONS

SYMMETRICAL COAXIAL STRANDED SOLID CORE COPPER SILVER DIG CABLE TYPE FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT (E) COMMENTS

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

PRODUCT	(E)	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction					●	●			188
Audio Note AN-A	18	Not especially impressive: warm but well-rounded balance that restricts 'air' but is quite clear			●		●	●			108
Audio Note AN-C	35	Neutral but lacking in subtle texture and unable to distinguish fine detail						●	●	1687	131
R Audio Note AN-S	99	Up-beat and enthusiastic sound with satisfyingly deep and grumbly bass	●					●	●	1687	131
Audio Note AN-V	179	15 individually insulated silver strands make up this very clean and dynamically unchallenged cable			●		●		●	1687	131
Audioquest Turquoise	40	A 'fit and forget' cable that sounds distinctly lazy				●	●	●			160
Audioquest Topaz X2	60	Well made but let down by a pervading sense of muddle and congestion in the sound			●		●	●			188
R CableTalk Advanced 2	35	Slight roughness in loud music barely detracts from a well-balanced performance with good imaging					●	●		2166	176
R Cable Talk Studio 2	65	A first-class performer from tonal, dynamic and rhythmic standpoints			●		●	●			160
Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price				●	●	●		2167	176
R Cambridge Audio Studio Ref	40	Dynamic cable with strong soundstaging and only a slight lack of detail				●	●	●			160
Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments			●		●	●			188
Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces					●	●		2167	176
Chord Chameleon 2	90	Deep bass is fine but despite that the sound can be a bit hard and lacking body and resonance			●		●	●			188
R Connections Midas HD	39	Canary yellow cable with excellent plugs and an open sound. Slight treble glare			●		●	●			160
B DNM TCC75	34	Price for 0.75m.. High resolution cable, but best in short runs due to higher than average series impedance						●	●	1690	131
DPA Slink	41	Slightly bright and zingy with flat soundstaging and hollow bass, though vocals and strings sound convincing			●	●				1690	131
DPA White Slink	75	Bass recedes as the music gets complex; midrange and treble better with quite good detail and imaging					●	●		2168	176
R DPA Black Slink	245	Initially dark and meaty but after running in, it's lucid and transparent. Quad geometry, Gore-Tex dielectric			●		●	●		1691	131
Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)			●		●	●		2168	176
Insert Audio IC100 MKII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness					●	●		2169	176
B Ixos 104	20	Open and detailed presentation, full bass and silky if overly smooth treble					●	●	●	1692	131
Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though			●		●	●		2169	176
R Ixos 103	45	Even-handed and generous sound, bass has a well-rounded, bouncy quality					●	●	●	1692	131
Ixos 102	60	A bit bright and undynamic, this cable is nevertheless a good all-rounder, whose faults are largely subtractive					●	●	●		160
Ixos 101	100	A cable with personality: its veiled and shut in quality bring an earthiness to vocals and rhythm guitar alike					●	●	●	1693	131
B Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble – excellent performance all round					●	●	●		188
R Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed			●		●	●		2170	176
R Moth Ley Line Black	100	Offers a full sound, neutral yet very solid and confident in delivery. Expansive imaging retains music's energy			●		●	●	●		108
Moth Ley Line Grey	200	Detailed, but there's a sense of distance between music and listener: vocals are coarse rather than liquid			●		●	●	●		108
Nordost Black Knight	60	Flat black cable that is distinctive but slightly coloured – but not in a wholly negative manner			●		●	●			160
R Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music			●		●	●			188
R Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable			●		●	●			176
Precious Metals SS35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic					●	●	●		188
R Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness					●	●	●	2171	176
PAD Elementa	145	A fat, heavy and frankly rather lazy-sounding cable; best with music for small forces			●		●	●		2171	176
B QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value					●	●	●	2172	176



OPERA MINI

Opera Mini may be the baby of the range but don't be fooled by the size. Standing a mere ten inches tall, this is a classy loudspeaker, made for people who love their music. And it sounds great virtually anywhere; on a bookshelf, or wall mounted, next to a TV screen, on stands, in fact wherever space allows.

The cabinet is solid hardwood – mahogany or cherry – built by Opera's craftsmen in the traditional manner. Top quality drive units and cabling are fitted, and even the terminals are Opera's own 24kt gold plated connectors, the same used on the most expensive models in the range.

If you're looking for a top class speaker that takes the minimum of space, you'll love the *Opera Mini*. The price will be a pleasant surprise too – at £325 the pair this is a real bargain.

Contact us for full details:

UKD

23 Richings Way, Iver, Bucks, SL0 9DA, England
 Tel: 07000-853443. Tel: 01753-652669. Fax: 01753-654531
 www.ukd.co.uk

CONTINUED

Cables

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS



PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	FACTS/BACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER	
QED Qneet 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid	●				●	●			188	
Reference CS1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at climaxes	●				●	●			188	
Silvertone Ex-Static	35	Pleasantly unfatiguing and competitively priced cable that lacks detail and insight			●		●	●			160	
SonicLink Silver Pink	35	Dynamically sensitive and muddle-free. We're unsure about the flesh-coloured finish though...	●				●	●	●		160	
SonicLink Black	49	Nickel-plated copper with a slight dryness in the bass and a hint of treble roll-off don't compromise integration	●				●	●		2172	176	
SonicLink Lilac	65	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass	●				●	●			188	
Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss			●		●	●		2173	176	
Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable			●		●	●			188	
Supra EFF-ISL	80	Excellent sound in all areas – nothing to criticise	●				●	●	●		188	
Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plumminess offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results			●		●	●			188	
van den Hul The Storm	25	Price for 0.8m. Rich and warm but bass is rolled off: however there's plenty of drive and top end is clean			●		●	●		1701	131	
van den Hul Source HB	50	Price for 0.8m. Hybrid carbon-fibre/copper cable that is a paragon of naturalness			●		●	●			160	
van den Hul PBS	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too – excellent			●		●	●			188	
van den Hul D102 MkIII	70	A cable with everything: good bass, treble, imaging and naturalness			●		●	●		2173	176	
van den Hul The First	210	Using 12,000 carbon fibres, a gentle and subtle sounding cable that conveys oodles of information			●		●	●			1702	131
van den Hul The Second	240	Wonderfully open and relaxing but also intimately detailed, slightly softens percussive dynamics	●				●	●	●		1702	131
XLO Type 150	50	A restrained but useful cable for taming lively CD players, dynamics lack freedom, treble lacks clarity			●		●	●			1703	131
XLO Type 0.1	180	Unusual but highly expressive and detailed with a hint of graininess on powerful vocals					●	●			1703	131
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED LINEAR METRE)												
Audioquest Digital Pro	100	A silver cable with all the drive of Video Z but lacking its clear-cut transparency					●	●		E	108	
Chord Codac	36	A connection with a stranded inner core and a sound that lacks integration					●	●		E	108	
Chord Prodac	50	Price for 0.6m length. Lively detailed treble, drives music along confidently with no hint of fizz			●		●	●		E	1706	131
DPA Opti-link	20	Sound is lacklustre								O	108	
DPA Digi-link	28	Can seem slightly impassive but there's no avoiding its exceptionally detailed sound					●	●	●	E	108	
Ixos 105	25	Extended but soft-edged treble that's mercifully free of fatiguing colorations; plenty of weight, smooth			●		●	●		E	1707	131
Kimber Kable Opti-link	50	Appears to be a bog-standard PMNA fibre, yet sounds a little brighter and livelier than most								O	108	
Moth Leyline Datalink	140	A thin, coaxial version of Leyline Black with a rather hard and unforgiving character. Too expensive			●		●	●		E	108	
QED DigiFlex	20	A top performance, low-loss 75 Ohm coax with a very open, almost liquid quality			●		●	●		E	108	
Siltech HF-6	145	Sounds detailed, very clean and extended, but bass is less well resolved – a treat for high-end systems	●				●	●		E	1709	131
SonicLink Green	60	Spacious, positive and engaging if a bit over-crisp at times – very compelling, however			●		●	●	●	E	1709	131
van den Hul The First	125	Exceptionally natural albeit slightly cautious compared to some. Plenty of subtle information and integration			●		●	●		E	1710	131
LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)												
ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●				●	●			183	
Audio Note AN-D	4.50	Supplied in linear, non-polarised lengths that are twisted into stereo pairs. Sounds rather grippy and forward					●	●			109	
Audio Note AN-B	16.50	Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical					●	●		1711	133	
Audio Note AN-L	29.50	Fruity bass and expressive vocal rendition was appreciated by the panel, which was happy to accept its foibles	●				●	●	●	1712	133	
Audio Note AN-SP	150	A calm and civilised presentation, very quiet in the way it reveals subtle low level detail. Great poise and clarity	●				●	●	●		109	
Audioquest F-14	2.2	Ideal for laying under carpets. F-14 encourages a slightly warm and vibrant sound					●	●	●		109	
Audioquest F-18	3.60	Slightly lumpy bass and lack of midrange detail: can also be a bit dry	●				●	●			192	
Audioquest Type 4	5	Four 18-gauge OFHC copper conductors wound in a Litz-type fashion increases capacitance but restrains 'bite'	●				●	●			109	
Audioquest Type 6	9	A very inflexible cable in which the sonic ends don't quite justify the means	●				●	●			183	
Audioquest Crystal	25	Neutral balance is spoiled by some graininess and smearing	●				●	●			168	
Bandridge LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings					●	●		1800	157	
Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25	Quite well-balanced but tends to lose bass lines in complex music	●				●	●			168	
Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained					●	●		1800	157	
Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass	●				●	●			192	
DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble extension					●	●			168	
Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	●				●	●			192	
DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire					●	●		1716	133	
DPA Black Sixteen	100	Unflappable resolution of musical details. No dampening of dynamics, simply oodles of taut information	●				●	●	●	1717	133	
Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system	●				●	●	●		168	
Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value					●	●	●	1800	157	
Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative			●		●	●		1800	157	
Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	●				●	●			168	
Heybrook Heywire	3.5	This well-meaning facsimile of earlier ribbon cables ends up sounding lumpy and uneven					●	●			109	
Hitachi LC-OFC	7	Very crisp, very clear and very confident. In the right system would be very expensive to better	●				●	●			109	
Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant – though only slightly	●				●	●			192	
Kimber 4PR	90 (5m)	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right					●	●			192	
Kimber 4TC	19.6	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	●				●	●			168	
Kimber 4VS	9	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	●				●	●			183	
Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unobtrusive music – can be dry and edgy	●				●	●			183	
Naim NAC A5	5.5	A 'dinosaur of a cable', this stiff wire rod doesn't belong outside Naim systems, where it works a treat					●	●			109	
Nordost Octava	3	Fair bass but confused treble and some coloration	●				●	●			168	
Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-yr-face', and bass is not always even	●				●	●			192	
Ortofon SPK100	3	Grey-sounding – strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance. A bit bass-shy, too					●	●			133	
Ortofon SPK200	4.99	Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	●				●	●			183	
Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass – if slightly bright at times					●	●	●		133	
Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures	●				●	●			183	
Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound – but too messy and bloated for its own good	●				●	●			183	
Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality	●				●	●		1800	157	
QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel					●	●			157	

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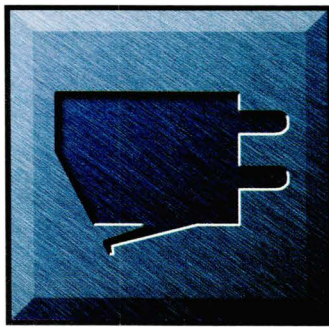
Cables

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

SYMMETRICAL COAXIAL STRANDED SOLID CORE COPPER SILVER DIG CABLE TYPE FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding									168
B QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●				●	●			192
Silver Sounds 12 gauge	15	Basic 'homemade' construction gives fairly neutral sound. Price not outstandingly competitive	●				●	●			168
SonicLink S300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces	●				●	●			168
R SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced					●	●		1800	157
R SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together					●	●		1800	157
Sonic Link AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details	●				●	●			192
Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music	●				●	●			192
B Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience	●				●	●			183
R Supra Ply 3.4	6.95	Clean sound which stays together well at high levels, with full bass – perhaps a touch of treble restriction	●				●	●			183
R Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues – and very minor vices – across the board	●				●	●			183
van den Hul Gold Water	7	Bass becomes shy when there's a lot happening, and detail could be clearer	●				●	●			183
van den Hul The Clearwater	7	Despite its evocative title, the Clearwater turns out to be a disappointingly murky-sounding cable					●	●	●		109
van den Hul CS122	12	Good dynamics can make for exciting sound, but fine detail suffers and the treble is often dry	●				●	●			192
van den Hul The Magnum	38	Touted as vdH's most prestigious twin-lead cable, The Magnum sounds soft and old-fashioned					●	●	●		109
R van den Hul The Wind	40	'The Wind' kicks up a storm with its lush midrange and bone-crunching bass					●	●	●		109
van den Hul Revolution	76	Silver-plated OFC combined with carbon fibre prompts a sombre character with an easy and relaxed treble					●	●	●	1726	133
XLO Pro Type 625	4	Lively but natural and relaxed-sounding – a hint of congestion at frequency extremes					●	●	●	1726	133
XLO Pro 600	16.60	Basically neutral tonality but can become aggressive and two-dimensional	●				●	●			168



Cartridges

Cartridges fall into two groups: high output MM (moving magnet) models, capable of working directly into most phono inputs; and generally more expensive low- and very-low-output MC (moving coil) models. MC cartridges usually have better mechanical integrity, tighter tolerances and give better performance. Many amplifiers are no longer equipped with the necessary phono input for a cartridge, and a separate phono stage is necessary. Phono-input-equipped valve amps need a transformer to cope with MC cartridges. ■ Even basic high-output MM cartridge designs will benefit from a customised amplifier input load. Consult your dealer for further details on this topic.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **MM:** Moving-magnet cartridge with a normal output, suitable for all amplifier phono inputs.
 - **MC:** Moving-coil cartridge with a low output, only suitable for high-sensitivity MC amplifier phono inputs.
 - **REPLACEABLE STYLUS:** Most MM cartridges have a stylus (needle) that can be removed and replaced when worn out.
 - **OUTPUT (mV):** Cartridge output in millivolts.
 - **MASS (g):** The mass of your chosen cartridge
- affects the choice of partnering tonearm. Consult dealers or manufacturers to establish which arms and pickups work well together.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our targeted review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback ad on the penultimate page of the mag.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Cartridges

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

MM MC REPLACEABLE STYLUS OUTPUT (mV) MASS (g) FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
B Audio Technica AT-95E	20	Clear and dynamic, though richly balanced			●	2.8			48
Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	330	A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting			●	0.4	8		192
B Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy			●	0.55	11.5	2142	175
B Denon DL110	70	A fine all-rounder, this high output MC model is likely to perform well			●	1.0	6		48
Denon DL160	90	Although listeners just preferred the 110, its brother here survived lab tests and is still 'thoroughly competent'			●	0.1	6		43
Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life'. Is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail			●	0.1	6		103
B Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price			●				103
R Dynavector DV-20X L	299	Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high quality turntable and arm			●	0.25	8.6		192
Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent			●	0.15	5.3		158
R Dynavector Te-Kaitora	1,698	A real smoothie, but pricey. Worth checking out for its delicate laid-back transparency and low needle-talk			●	0.25	8.5	2142	175
R Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm			●	0.25	12		84
Dynavector XX-1	998	Good, but not immensely competitive at the price, and not helped by comparison with the low output version			●	2.0	12		84
R Goldring Elan	19	A lightweight and frisky-sounding MM apparently based on Nagaoka MM4 body			●	5.0	7		67
R Goldring 1012GX	79	Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency coloration apparent			●	6.5	7		85
R Goldring 1022GX	99	As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved			●	6.5	7		85
R Goldring Eroica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative			●	0.5	8		84
Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though			●	6.5	6		91
Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest			●	0.5	8		103
Goldring Excel VX	525	Good bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end			●	0.45	8	2143	175
B Grado Prestige Gold	149	Rich sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge			●	4	6		158
Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users			●	1.7	6.5	2143	175
B Linn K9	125	Linn improved this model by beefing up the Basik's bodywork and adding a super stylus			●	4.5	5		Col
London Decca Maroon	259	Now manufactured under the London brand name, this Decca cartridge is as iconoclastic as ever			●	5.0	6		67
London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records			●	5.0	6		84
R Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge – smooth, agile and dynamic in character			●	0.5	8		192
R Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed			●	0.3	7		158
B Lyra Clavis Da Capo	995	A stable tracker, and one of the finest cartridges we've heard			●	0.1	7		143
Lyra Parnassus D.C.t	1,895	A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak			●	0.22	10.5	2144	175
B Ortofon 510/P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues – weight, clarity and neutrality			●	3.0	5		85
R Ortofon 520/P	65	Sensitive to load capacitance, but the 520/P has a lively, effervescent sound			●	3.0	5		67

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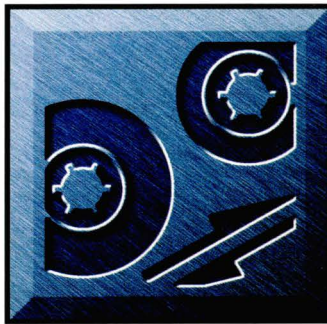
Cartridges

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

REPLACEABLE STYLUS
MM MC
OUTPUT (mV)
MASS (g)
FACTSBACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	MM	MC	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
R Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	The 3 Turbo is bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle – take it as it comes!	●			3.3	4		103
R Ortofon MC15 Super II	130	A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close up	●			0.35	7		103
Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable	●			0.5	11		139
Ortofon MC25FL	250	A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP	●			0.5	11		139
R Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300	A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings	●			0.5	10.7		192
Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525	Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings	●			0.5	10.7		158
R Ortofon Rohmann	1,000	A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound	●			0.25	8.5	2144	175
R Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere – one of the very best	●			0.12	10		84
Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo	●			0.12	10		91
Rega Bias	39	Difficult to mount in some arms due to its shallow body, but the Bias offers a gentle, refined sound	●	●		5	4		67
R Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	●	●	●	5.0	5		67
R Reson Recla	250	If you're after a high quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●	●	●	6.5	6.3		192
R Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	●	●	●	6.5	5		91
R Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300	●		●	2.5	9		192
R van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●		●	5.5	6		103
van den Hul DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy	●			0.35	7.6		158
R van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass	●		●	0.4	6		60
R van den Hul MC-One	900	This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale – worth all the extra money	●		●	0.4	6		60
R van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal	●		●	0.4	6		72
R van den Hul Frog	1,500	Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm	●		●	0.65	7	2145	175
R van den Hul G' hopper III/IIA	2,800	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse	●		●	0.4	6		122
R Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive	●		●	0.58	6		158
R Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573	Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound	●		●	0.45	7	2145	175



Cassette Decks

The compact cassette is still the world's most versatile and ubiquitous music storage medium. Cassette decks hook up to the 'tape loop' inputs and outputs offered by most modern amplifiers. It's worth taking care to choose the best tapes for a specific machine. For example, expensive metal tapes will be a wasted investment for a cheap deck. Many better-specified decks have manual or automatic bias adjustment to get the best from specific samples of tape. Twin decks offer the possibility of copying from tape to tape, playing two cassettes sequentially or recording onto two tapes at once. Autoreverse is a useful feature, but uni-directional mechanisms promise better sound. Dolby S is the ultimate noise reduction system, and three-head decks permit record monitoring off-tape.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **DOLBY B/C:** The first and second Dolby hiss-killers.
- **DOLBY S:** A desirable derivative of Dolby SR professional noise-reduction.
- **DOLBY HX-PRO:** Extends headroom for cassette recording.
- **3-HEAD:** Permits monitoring off-tape while you're recording.
- **TWIN DECK:** Contains two decks for dubbing and continuous play.
- **AUTOREVERSE:** Automatically plays both sides of the cassette.
- **AUTO CALIBRATION:** The deck will automatically set up bias and EQ for any tape.
- **ADJUSTABLE BIAS:** Permits manual optimisation of tape.

● **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the mag.

● **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *HI-FI CHOICE* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Cassette Decks

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY C
DOLBY S
DOLBY HX PRO
3-HEAD
TWIN DECK
AUTO CALIBRATION
ADJUSTABLE BIAS
FACTSBACK NO.
ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER	
R Aiwa AD-F450	120	Basic but well-designed deck. Astonishing value; only the poor metering gives the game away	●							1513	136	
R Aiwa AD-WX727	170	High-class twin for those who want bells, whistles – and music	●							1377	146	
R Denon DRM-550	160	There are some technical limitations, but this remains a fine-sounding deck, and excellent value	●								158	
Denon DRW-580	200	Twin deck: OK for casual use, but will quickly pall with more quality critical applications	●			●	●				171	
R Denon DRS-640	200	Draw-loading deck, with simple facilities and smooth, well-adjusted sound	●							1591	140	
R Denon DRM-650S	230	An improvement on predecessors, it offers a wide-ranging, sound. Dolby S is not the best feature	●	●	●				●	1920	164	
Denon DRM-740	270	Breathed-on DRM-710, with good external treatment, offers good, if somewhat detached sonics	●							1514	136	
Denon DRS-810	310	Draw-loading deck, carefully designed yet lacking in subtlety on audition	●			●	●				127	
Harman/Kardon TD420	250	Minor inconsistencies detract from a well-conceived, minimum features design	●							1592	140	
Harman/Kardon TD450	350	Draw loader with poor tape navigation features; good midband but shallow bass	●							1920	164	
R JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	●								158	
R JVC TD-V662BK	270	Assured, clean and agile-sounding recorder, if not quite the most refined in its class	●							1380	146	
JVC TD-W718	300	Twin deck. Good for creative live recording, but no timer standby. Respectable performance	●							2039	171	
R Kenwood KX-W6080	200	Modestly decent-sounding twin deck, with some transport instability and ragged bass	●		●	●	●			2040	171	
Marantz SD455	170	Works well as a single deck, especially on replay, but dubbing at high/low speed compromises sound	●								184	
NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise	●								158	
NAD 616	300	Twin deck with basic features. No Dolby setting memory, transport is too unstable for audiophile use	●							2041	171	
Nakamichi DR-10	800	An ergonomic oddity, but one of the last of the great cassette decks. Worth considering against MD	●								195	
R Onkyo K-611	460	Cute drawer-loading mini-size component with 3 heads and dual capstan transport	●		●	●	●			1384	146	
R Pioneer CT-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●	●	●	●			1920	164	
Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	●							2042	171	
R Pioneer CT-S830S	500	High-class mechanism, if lacking in battleship externals, and superb sound	●	●	●	●	●			1385	146	
R Sony TC-KE600S	300	Mild setting-up problems notwithstanding, this UK-tweaked design has a smooth, open sound	●	●	●	●	●				158	
Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest 3-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	●								184	
R Technics RS-AZ6	200	For those who can't afford the RS-AZ7; clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin-film head	●								1920	164
R Technics RS-AZ7	270	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in state-of-the-art	●								158	
R Yamaha KX-490	200	Electrifyingly transparent and capable deck whose only flaw is a trace of audible wow and flutter	●		●	●	●				158	
R Yamaha KX-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	●	●	●	●	●			2043	171	



CD/DVD Players

All CD players offer a basic selection of facilities, and some can keep you entertained for hours as you programme in disc names and track orders. All but the excessively inexpensive feature remote control. Most CD players can be upgraded by adding an outboard DAC (see p129). To do this the player needs a digital output of either electrical or optical type. The former is preferable for the ultimate sound. A CD player can be split into two basic components: the disc drive or transport, and a device which converts the disc's digital bitstream into an analogue audio signal. This is called a digital to analogue convertor, or DAC. Although most players are contained within a single box, expensive players are usually two-box affairs. The first new DVD players have not excelled with CD software.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **ELECTRICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT:** For electrical connection to an outboard DAC.
- **AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUTPUT:** Balanced digital output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
- **OPTICAL DIGITAL OUTPUT:** For optical connection to an outboard DAC.
- **ST OPT DIG OUTPUT:** High-speed optical output to be used with similarly equipped DACs.
- **BAL ANALOGUE OUTPUT:** Balanced analogue output for amplifiers equipped with balanced inputs.
- **HEADPHONE SOCKET:** For 'can' users.
- **VARIABLE OUTPUT:** Remotely adjustable output level (usually non-audiophile).
- **MULTI-DISC:** Equipped with a carousel or multi-tray system for continuous play of multiple discs.
- **DAC TYPE:** BS – Philips Bitstream; MB – multibit; Hyb – hybrid of multibit and bitstream technologies; 1bit – single bit types eg MASH, bitstream, PWM, etc; CC – constant calibration.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full information, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the magazine.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *HI-FI CHOICE* in which an original review appeared. Factsback information page.

B BEST BUY

R RECOMMENDED

E EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD/DVD Players

SPECIFICATIONS

AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT OPTICAL DIG OUT ST OPT DIG OUT BAL ANALOGUE OUT HEADPHONE SOCKET VARIABLE OUTPUT MULTI-DISC DAC TYPE FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPTICAL DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DAC TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER	
B Acurus ACD11	899	First-rate if costly player, which combines a delightful transparency with an uncontrived naturalness	●								1bit	1962	166
Acoustic Precision Eikos	1,850	Seriously customised Pioneer with extraordinary resolution and world beating imaging and bass	●								1bit		165
Advantage CD 15	3,995	A CD player of some stature – what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●							20bit		193
Alchemist Kraken	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere	●		●						24/96		190
R Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●								Hyb		169
AMC CD8A	150	Has balanced output, but is otherwise rather grey and unremarkable					●				BS	2071	172
B AMC CD9/DAC8	200	Beer-budget two-box system (player plus DAC) is smooth, attractive and easy on the ear	●								CC	2261	179
Anthem CD1	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●	●							MB	2219	178
B Arcam Alpha 7SE	350	Revamped starter model is a clear improvement on very likeable predecessor	●				●				MB		195
R Arcam Alpha MCD	450	Excellent bass and natural midband, but just a touch of treble dryness, from this very listenable changer	●								MB	2220	178
R Arcam Alpha 8	520	Refined, intricately detailed but a little cautious. Should be broadly compatible with a variety of amps	●								BS	1873	163
R Arcam Alpha 8SE	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	●				●				1bit		176
B Arcam Alpha 9	800	Refined, articulate player which employs new DAC technology to great effect	●								Ring		188
Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●								24bit		191
Audio Research CD 1	3,290	Suspends disbelief with a real yet obviously coloured sound. A rare proposition among CD players	●	●	●	●					BS	1875	163
Audio Note AN-CD1	600	Easy on the ear, and for a valve player, easy on the pocket, but a bit Radio 2-flavoured	●								Hyb		188
Audio Note AN-CD2	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system fussy	●								MB		195
AVI S2000MC2	899	A chip off the old block. This model's in-ye-face balance obstructs an otherwise finely detailed sound	●								MB	2179	176
R AVI S2000MC Reference	1,399	Lean, dry, high resolution player, built to outlast most of us. A fine performer in a sympathetic system	●								MB		169
Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5	3,995	A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	●					●			18bit		194
R Cambridge Audio CD4	150	Basic appearance and sluggish track access/track search belies its up-and-at-'em sound quality	●								Hyb	1268	147
B Cambridge Audio CD4SE	200	Among the best encountered at the price, considerably more refined and convincing than the CD4	●								BS	1877	163
R Cambridge Audio CD6	250	A sharp, articulate player, a real thoroughbred in fact, perhaps too sharp and lively for some systems	●					●			BS		159
R Copland CDA-266	1,199	Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	●								MB	2183	176
Copland CDA 289	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●								20bit		194
Copland CDA-288	2,199	A gentle giant of a player that errs in favour of pastel shades rather than bold daubs of colour	●			●					MB	1880	163
R Symbol CDP12	1,299	Clean, detailed and airy HDCD-equipped player with minimalist trappings	●								Hyb	2184	176
R Cyrus dAD1.5	395	Improved dAD1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	●								Hyb		191
R Cyrus dAD3	598	A relaxed style of delivery that convinces with guile and subtlety rather than orchestral ordnance	●								BS	1887	163
B Cyrus dAD3Q	898	Lucid, transparent and uncontrived sound quality, superb build, and readily upgradeable	●				●				MB	1887	169
R Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor	●				●				DS		191
B Denon DCD-635	180	Modest presentation gives little clue to the thoroughbred electronics ticking away inside	●				●				MB	2075	172
R Denon DCD-625	200	DCD-615 replacement is generously equipped but lacks sophisticated sound of its forebear	●								MB	1269	147
R Denon DCD-835	280	Refined version of Denon's multibit technology is a bit of a star	●			●					MB		184
Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●								MB	2266	179
Denon DCD-1650AR	700	Powerful, authoritative, and well equipped too, but this player sometimes lacks subtlety	●								MB		195
R Denon DCD-3000	1,000	Sings with the temperament of a huge orchestra under the baton of a timid conductor	●			●					MB	1881	163
Exposure CD player	1,049	Slightly weak sounding, but otherwise well optimised, if costly player	●								MB		188
Harman/Kardon HD710	200	A player of integrity, but can sound a bit hard and rough when extended, and is amplifier fussy	●								1bit		159
R Harman/Kardon HD740	300	Powerful but subtle and involving player: welcome back, harman/kardon!	●			●					DS		191
R Harman/Kardon FL8300	300	Generally capable changer with relaxed sound and firm bass. Just a hint of roughness on occasion	●			●					MB	2220	178
Harman/Kardon HD760	500	Sophisticated internally, but mildly disappointing when treading the boards in anger	●								MB		195
Helios Model 3	650	Disappointing entry level model from Helios lacks verve and transparency	●								DS		188
R Helios Model 2	950	This player may not be to everyone's taste, but it is an individual, with some interesting things to say	●								1bit	2180	176
R JVC XL-V184BK	120	Excellent budget player, well presented, a little opaque, but its heart is in the right place	●								1bit	2072	172
R JVC XL-V284BK	140	Featuring a new set of bitstream innards, this flexible player has a refined sound	●			●					1bit	1270	147
JVC XL-Z574	250	Strong resolving power, good midband and dynamics, but slightly raw and thin	●								1bit		159
R JVC XL-Z674BK	300	Even-handed, but glosses over the most intimate moments	●								1bit	1637	151
B Kenwood DP-3080	170	Bold, dynamic and outgoing sound, although somewhat aggressive. Poor build quality and finish	●				●				1bit		159
Kenwood DPF-3010	180	Grey, somewhat mechanical sounding player	●								Hyb		191
B Kenwood DP-4090	250	Focuses a clear, wide aperture lens on the music – and has CD Text too!	●				●				1bit	2076	172
Kenwood DP-5090	300	Disappointing senior brother to the excellent DP-4090, but surface interface is good	●								1bit	2267	179
R Kenwood DP-7090	400	A lively and compelling performer with an even-handed and coherent disposition	●				●				MB	1885	163
Linn Mimik	875	Useful multi-room features matched to strong bass, but poor imagery and transparency	●								Hyb	1762	155
Marantz CD-48	200	Somewhat inconsistent, middle ranking player which hints at better things	●								1bit	2077	172
Marantz CD6000 OSE	300	A genuine evolution on the older CD63/67 series with a very energetic, foot-tapping performance	●								BS		196
R Marantz CD-63 MkII KI Sig	400	It's the quintessential sound of Marantz – warm, open, and smooth almost to a fault	●			●					Hyb		169
R Marantz CD-17	800	Fabulous packaging and an excellent all round performer: smooth, detailed and consistent	●								BS	1763	155
R Marantz CD-17KI Sig	1,100	Minor QC problems aside, this is a superbly turned-out machine, but ultimately a little bland	●								BS	2181	176
R Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●								16bit		194

CONTINUED

CD/DVD Players

SPECIFICATIONS

ISSUE NUMBER
FACTSBACK NO.
DAC TYPE
MULTI-DISC
VARIABLE OUTPUT
HEADPHONE SOCKET
BAL ANALOGUE OUT
ST OPT DIG OUT
OPTICAL DIG OUT
AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT
ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS													
F Meracus Tanto	1,395	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics – but it's not cheap	●											DS	169
F Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●	●										1bit	2182 176
Monrio Privilege	995	Costly and well-engineered, but ultimately rather heavy-handed and dull, if refined player	●											MB	1963 166
Musical Fidelity E60	300	This entry-level player lacks proper stereo localisation and clarity	●		●									BS	1959 166
F Musical Fidelity E624	500	Similar to X-RAY, but both better sounding and cheaper	●	●										MB	188
Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	●	●										MB	184
Musical Fidelity A3 CD	799	Based on the E624 and X-Ray players, this version sounds warm but richly detailed	●	●										BS	196
Myryad T-10	400	Rather ordinary player fails to shine with good music recordings	●											DS	184
Myryad T-20	600	Matter of fact styling and sound quality, a tad bright for some systems	●											DS	195
F Myryad MC100	700	A little extra get-up-and-go wouldn't go amiss, but its sheer maturity and composure ensure listenability	●											BS	1889 163
Myryad MCD500	1,300	Well-built, attractive player, showing much promise, but can be a little heavy-going on audition	●											1bit	2185 176
NAD 522	170	Crude, mechanical sounding player fails to tickle the music buds	●											1bit	2262 179
F NAD 524	250	Clean, clear and essentially musical player in the NAD mould	●											MB	191
F NAD Silverline S500	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear	●	●	●			●						MB	195
F Naim Audio CD3.5	1,000	Forward and explicit sound needs careful system matching	●											Hyb	188
F Naim Audio CD2	2,000	Provides bags of detail with a solid stereo focus but not all the romanticism we know to be possible	●											MB	1890 163
F Naim NACDSII/XPS	5,625	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results	●											MB	188
Onkyo DX-7510	400	Strongly flavoured, assertive sound	●		●									BS	1640 151
F Oreille CD-100EA	649	Excellent imagery, timing and transparency, and readily upgraded or reconfigured	●	●	●									MB	1964 166
Parasound C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●											Hyb	184
F Philips CD-721	130	Surprisingly well-sorted, articulate if slightly glossy and attractively presented sound. Captive signal lead	●											1bit	159
Philips CD751	150	Inconsistent and occasionally opaque and scrawny sounding cheapie	●											1bit	172
Pioneer PD-S507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled	●		●									DS	191
F Pioneer PD-S707	300	Idiosyncratic Legato Link dominated sound, but always subtle and interesting	●	●	●			●						MB	184
Pioneer PD-F906	350	Interesting appearance and concept, but this changer's sound is lacklustre and ergonomics frustrating	●		●									1bit	2223 178
Pioneer PD-S904	400	Too much legato – literally – in sound, but a very smooth performer	●											1bit	1641 151
F Pioneer PDS-06	550	Technologically sophisticated. Pioneer's first multi-bit player for years is polished and capable	●	●	●			●						MB	2176 176
F Pioneer PD-S505 Precision	460	Assured, fluid-sounding player, with great spatial coherence	●											1bit	1965 166
Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	●											BS	188
Revox Exception E426	2,250	Very stylish with a light, agile sound that extends superbly and has fine timing	●					●						BS	182
F Roksan DPSP	1,495	Dramatic and compelling. Classical listeners should be ready to 'air conduct' when auditioning	●											BS	1896 163
F Roksan Caspian	895	Solid, articulate, and fundamentally well-engineered player, but with some subtle low-level limitations	●											Hyb	169
Rotel RCD-951	300	Disappointing chopped down RCD-971 – buy the original	●											MB	191
F Rotel RCD-971	350	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	●	●	●									MB	184
F Rotel RCD-991	750	Confirms Rotel's status as must watch brand: great stuff	●	●	●			●						MB	195
F Sherwood CD-4030R	180	Easy on the ear, smooth-sounding player, with limits set by the slightly soft, compressed quality	●		●				●	●				BS	159
Sherwood CD1	1,100	A very neutral, even handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	●		●									BS	1899 163
F Sony CDP-XE310	140	Excellent value and bright as a button, but can sound OTT in some systems	●											1bit	179
Sony CDP-XE510	180	Souped up CDP-XE500 which tells a rather bland and unengaging story	●		●									1bit	172
F Sony CDP-XB720E	200	Good basic performance and a number of filter settings make this an interesting player for tweaks	●	●	●									Low bit	184
Sony CDP-XA20ES	450	High tech, with a long list of gadgets, oddly configured player that ultimately sounds less than compelling	●	●	●									1bit	2177 176
F Sony CDP-X3000ES	500	Shoebbox format player, looks to die for, switchable digital filters to tweak the already excellent sound	●	●	●									BS	169
F Sony CDP-XB930E	500	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●	●	●									Pulse	195
F Sony SCD-1	2,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but there's not much competition and limited software as yet	●	●	●			●						BS	194
T+A CD1210R	1,185	Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters	●		●									DS	188
Talk Electronics Thunder 2	699	Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradeable in various ways	●											1-bit	191
F Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast, and availability of a complete upgrade path make this a good long term proposition	●											DS	195
F TAG McLaren CD20R	1,249	Dry and unatmospheric, but plenty of presence – recommended with caution	●											BS	188
F Teac CDP-3450SE	200	For once a budget player where gadgets take second place to respectable, budget amp-friendly sonics	●		●			●						1bit	1960 166
Teac CD-5	350	Bright, breezy and upbeat – but short in the trouser department	●		●									BS	1643 151
Teac VRDS-8	600	Superb build quality is matched to good, but not exceptional sound quality	●		●									MB	184
Teac VRDS-9	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills	●		●									1bit	2178 176
Teac VRDS-10SE	850	Superbly built and presented, but rather leaden bass, with an over-prominent mid/top	●		●									BS	169
Teac VRDS-25x	1,000	Excellent, individualistic player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility	●		●			●						MB	195
Technics SL-PG480A	130	Full driving sound, but somewhat uneven in balance with a unsubtle, slightly harsh top end	●											1bit	159
F Technics SL-PS670D	200	Fine, middle ranking player which sounds solid, sometimes even a little stolid	●		●									1bit	2264 179
Technics SL-PS770D	250	High tech and well built technology battleship which smooths the rough edges off the music	●		●									BS	2080 172
F Technics SL-MC410	250	If you fancy a CD player that holds 111 discs, this one's cheap, pretty capable, and easy to use	●											Hyb	2224 178
Thule Spirit CD100	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent	●											DS	188
Trichord Genesis	549	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority	●											Hyb	169
Trichord Revelation	799	Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well	●											1bit	1966 166
Tube Technology Fusion	1,100	Our early test sample was primitive and flawed, but showed signs of greatness	●		●									PA	195
Tube Technology Fulcrum	2,800	An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre	●	●	●									24bit	194
XTC CDP-1	1,250	Bright and sometimes abrasive, but detailed player	●											MB	2186 176
Wadia 830	3,000	Envelope busting dynamics, power and imaging in a rather unexciting box (digital volume control)	●											MB	183
Wadia 860	7,450	Flagship CD player has unique digital volume control, superb neutrality and awesome bass	●	●	●			●						MB	189
Yamaha CDX-493	180	Open and lively, but this player is also messy and lacking resolving power	●		●									Hyb	191
Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	●		●									BS	184
YBA Spécial	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high end parentage. Avoid	●											MB	195
F YBA CD1α	3,895	A remarkably fluid and graceful sound – one of the best we've heard below £5,000	●											18bit	194
TRANSPORTS															
Audio Note CDT Zero	399	Neat shoe box size transport sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with DAC Zero)	●												191
Linn Karik	1,850	Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing	●		●										1323 144
Roksan Atessa ATT-DP3	1,295	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of sounding exciting with the right material	●		●									1bit	1867 162
Teac VRDS-T1	550	Superb quality engineering is mated to tidy and composed sound. (Tested with D-T1)	●												1325 144
Theta Data Basic II	2,397	Uses a Philips CDM9 Pro mechanism and works a treat with more lively DACs	●												1494 130
Thorens TCD2000	999	Lively presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble. (Tested with TDA 2000 DAC)	●		●										1867 162
F Trichord Digital Turntable	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer	●		●										1867 162



Headphones

There are several different ways of making a headphone. The most expensive models employ electrostatically-driven diaphragms within an open-backed earcup. Most mid-price designs feature dynamic, moving-coil-driven diaphragms in open, semi-open or closed-back designs. An open-backed headphone can sound remarkably transparent, but also permits the ingress of external noise. Closed-back designs keep out unwanted sound, but may be less comfortable to wear and more coloured. The latest development is the cordless headphone using either infrared light or, more recently, radio waves. Quality is improving, but has yet to match the best corded designs.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **TYPE:** Operating principle: D - dynamic; E - electrostatic.
- **SUPRA-AURAL:** Where a flat pad presses on the outer ear.
- **CIRCAURAL:** Where the earcup encloses the ear.
- **OPEN BACK:** Offers an open sound but lets in noise.
- **CLOSED BACK:** Keeps out external noise.
- **MASS (g):** Mass in grams
- **IMPEDANCE (Ω):** Load offered to the headphone amplifier. Many headphones offer a significantly higher value than loudspeakers, for example, but this does not mean they will be incompatible with the majority of amplifiers.
- **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR:** Compatible with mini-jacked components, eg personal stereos.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the magazine.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Headphones

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS: **B** BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

TYPE: SUPRA-AURAL CIRCAURAL OPEN BACK CLOSED BACK MASS (g) IMPEDANCE (Ω) 3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	TYPE	CIRCAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight	D					230	100		194
AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt	D					240	600		186
R AKG K1000	700	One of the best dynamics on the market, hooks directly into speaker outputs	D					270	120		99
R Audio Technica ATH910PRO	80	The closed back 910s are an improvement on the 909s, with a nice rhythmic quality rarely found	D					280	40		55
R Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal	D					250	66		194
R Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phone	D					250	60		186
Beyer DT311	50	Uncharacteristically tight, unrefined sound quality from this otherwise well engineered 'phone	D					124	40	1098	133
Beyer DT411	63	A reasonable but not very thrilling headphone that doesn't really offer enough at the price	D					120	250		111
Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass	D					210	40		194
Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100 per cent	D					210	40		186
R Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor	D					200	250	2063	172
R Beyer DT531	135	A good buy for serious, heavy-duty music making	D					245	250		144
E Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads	D				1/2	295	250		186
Beyer DT100	160	Rugged, modular professional design, but bass is woolly and treble lacks detail	D					350	600		157
R Beyer DT911	170	Probably too revealing for many headphone amps: these are very subtle and fine, if expensive cans	D					275	250		111
Denon AH-D550	80	A competent 'phone with integrity, but little panache or charisma. Hard headband causes brain strain	D					200	35	1801	157
Denon AH-D750	130	Loud and gutsy, meaty bass, good with rock and dance. Can sound thick and clumsy	D					250	30	2063	172
Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable	D					120	32	2064	172
R Grado SR60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste	D					200	32		194
Grado SR-80	100	Open and dynamic with pedantically open mid-band. Crude physical design, rough frequency extremes	D					60	8	1801	157
R Grado SR125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality	D					200	32		186
R Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the music	D					200	32	1883	163
E Jacklin Float Model 1	79	While very unusual in appearance, the Floats give remarkable sound quality and openness	D					400	200		55
JVC HA-D50	45	Detailed but with a characteristic mid-band all of their own and a modest amount of lower bass	D					290	56		194
JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design	D					165	I/R		172
JVC HA-D910	65	Broadly acceptable if unexciting design with low level losses and some colorations	D					220	32		121
R JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily heard	D					280	20,000		186
Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome on the head with prolonged wearing	D					250	60		194
Koss R/100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange excitement	D					215	60		186
Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top	D					380	100	1892	163
E Philips SBC 3396	70	Remarkably airy for closed-back designs. Fine tonal balance, punchy delivery. Amazing value for money	D					255	32	2064	172
Philips SBC HP900	90	Sharper, snappier midrange than 3396: initially impressive but blows it on balance and listenability	D					200	32	2065	172
Sennheiser IS 380	55	As close as you'll get to real hi-fi with infra-red phones at this price. Inevitable hiss spoils the illusion	D					192	I/R		172
R Sennheiser HD 455	55	Inoffensive, if nondescript sound; modular, but can become dislodged from head	D					185	60	1801	157
Sennheiser HD 500	70	A disappointing pair that offer good stereo-imaging, but little else	D					210	32		186
Sennheiser HD 475	80	Elegant, uncluttered sound and very comfortable but lean bass saps satisfaction	D					120	60	2065	172
Sennheiser RS 400	80	FM cordless 'phones that are very wearable, but slightly woolly sounding with interference problems	D					160	N/A		186
R Sennheiser HD 570 Symph	90	Comfortable, light-weight 'phones with a detailed and open sound but lacks bass depth on weightier music	D					210	64		194
R Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband	D					255	150	2066	172
E Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable	D					255	150	1801	157
Sennheiser HE 60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with a pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy	E					260	N/A	1898	163
Sony MDR-605LP	50	Funky looking headphones that have a very bold, but tiring sound, with coloured bass	D					145	40		186
Sony MDR-CD770	100	Neutrality and comfort make the Sony easy to live with. Correct-sounding too, yet musically unrewarding	D							1801	157
Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass	D					300	24		194
E Sony MDR-CD1700	200	Astonishingly detailed, uncoloured and free of the usual artefacts from a sealed back headphone	D					325	32	1901	163
Sony MDR-F1	100	Natural, easy-going sound teamed with great looks and comfort. Shame about the lightweight bass	D					300	12	2066	172
Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof	D					230	32	2067	172
E Stax Lambda Nova Basic	449	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence - and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards	E					347	N/A	1902	163
Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM tuner	D					210	FM		172
Vivanco IR5800	50	Consistently musical infra-red design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven	D			1/2		226	I/R		172
R Vivanco SR650	50	Unusually comfortable 'phone with excellent detail resolution but aggressive	D					175		1801	157
E Vivanco SR750	60	Cossetting physical design, attractive sound, though suffers overhang and lacks ultimate dynamics	D					188		1801	157
R Vivanco SR 950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones	D					252	32		194
Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable	D					280	9,000		186
Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss	D					240	9,000		186



Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

As the last link in the hi-fi chain, loudspeakers are at the mercy of incoming signals. Nevertheless, distortions introduced by loudspeakers tend to be the most obvious. Inside the average loudspeaker is a simple electrical circuit (the crossover) which splits the incoming, full-frequency-range signal for the specific drive units to handle: highs to the 'tweeter', lows to the 'woofer'. For any speaker, designers must balance the 'sensitivity' of the loudspeaker (how loud it goes for a given electrical input) against bass extension (how low it goes). Subwoofers augment bass and are either passive (unamplified) or, preferably, active (self-amplified). Our 'bass from' figures are based on measurements in a particular room therefore results will vary in different environments.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **SIZE WxHxD (cm):** Width by height by depth in centimetres.
- **FLOORSTANDER:** Requires no stand support.
- **SENSITIVITY (dB/W):** How much sound results for a given electrical input – the higher the figure, the louder the speaker.
- **IMPEDANCE (Ω):** Impedance, measured in Ohms, indicates how much resistance the speaker presents to an amplifier. As impedance decreases, demands on an amplifier increase.
- **BASS FROM (Hz):** The lowest frequency that a speaker can reproduce effectively.
- **FREE SPACE:** Speakers which should not sit close to walls.
- **CLOSE TO WALL:** Speakers which should sit between 3 and 12cm from the rear wall.
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our facted review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of this issue.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
R Acoustic Energy Aegis One	150	At a new low price, this has a very natural and transparent midband, erring a little on the dull side	19,36,5,24		87	6	40	●		187
R Acoustic Energy AE200	250	Metal-cone miniature has a tendency to shout but is still lots of fun, and well built too	18,5,30,25		87	6	40	●	2199	177
R Acoustic Energy AE109	350	Lots of mass-loaded twin-driver speaker for the money, especially for loud, driving bass	18,90,25	●	88	4	25	●		1904 164
Acoustic Energy AE120	500	Attractive presentation and good sonic headroom, but a heavy, uneven overall balance	18,98,28	●	89	4	25	●		1904 170
R Acoustic Energy AE520	1,000	Could be more neutral, but high-class build is reflected in a high-class sound. Very elegant too	21,98,30	●	91	3	25	●		190
ALR Jordan Note 7	2,500	A beguiling Anglo-German collaboration delivers metal-cone precision with fine dynamic range	25,107,32	●	92	4	25	●		196
ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but light-weight bass	18,38,25,5		80	8	65	●		192
ATC SCM20	1,599	Massively built, invariably informative but the rather forward presentation can be uncomfortable	24,44,31		83	8	28	●		86
R Audio Gem Emerald	540	Pretty compact floorstander with lively if lightweight sound	18,94,21	●	87	6	40	●	1905	164
R Audio Note AN-J/B	799	Light damping and local unevenness add some coloration, but don't spoil the speaker	38,58,25		93	8	25	●		110
R Audio Note AN-E/B	1,299	Coherent, dynamic and transparent, with extended bass and high sensitivity – but ugly!	36,84,28	●	94	8	20	●		106
Audio Physic Tempo	1,999	Tall and unusually-styled floorstander has stunning stereo but suspect bass tuning	22,107,47	●	88	8	28	●	1344	143
R Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little under-developed	19,106,27	●	90	4	20	●		190
R Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too!	20,102,30	●	89	4	22	●		180
R AVI NuNeutron	500	A smooth and subtle though pricey sub-miniature, albeit with the inevitable limitations of the breed	14,27,23		86	4	50	●		190
AVI Positron	899	This 'mini-floorstander' is capable of great precision and delicacy, but in a rather small scale way	17,5,74,24.5	●	85	6	40	●	2130	174
E B&W DM302	150	Highly competent and neutral all rounder; clever Prism enclosure	19,32,22		88	4	45	●	1778	156
R B&W DM305	350	Ridged paper cone gives lively sound, clever box, but a little uneven	22,87,31	●	89	4	40	●	1908	164
B&W CDM2SE	400	Beautifully styled and finished, respectable midband. Lacks definition towards frequency extremes	22,32,25		87	6	40	●		183
R B&W 603 S2	550	Capable of being driven seriously loud, but the cautious balance seems less happy playing at low levels	23,5,87,29	●	91	4	22	●		193
R B&W CDM1SE	600	A great looking stand-mount with one of the best midbands around, and a subtle blend of other qualities	22,37,29		88	5	40	●	2209	177
B&W CDM7	1,000	A combination of serious welly and physical elegance; but a basic lack of midband smoothness	22,97,29	●	90	4	22	●	2131	174
B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A great looking and extremely capable design with excellent timing and real communications skills	24,41,5,34.5		88	8	22	●		191
E B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art, needs real power but gives real sound	39,111,55	●	91	8	34	●		183
R B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	●	91	8	34	●		186
R Blueroom MINIPOD	249	The MINIPOD can show its competitors a thing or two about freedom from boxiness and looks fab	18,34,+17		91	4	50	●		193
R Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-er-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32	●	92	5	28	●		180
Carlsson OA52.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37	●	90	8	20	●		195
R Castle Isis	250	A great miniature at a competitive price. Sound is lightweight but very coherent, with a fine overall balance	17, 35,5,21		87	8	45	●	2019	170
Castle Inversion 15	425	This striking looking stand-mount is a good allrounder, commendably free from boxiness	19-22,42,25		91	4	30	●		193
R Castle Kendal	500	A beautifully finished compact floorstander with a decidedly forward but communicative sound	17,76,20	●	86	6	45	●	2204	177
Castle Severn 2	539	Carbon fibre cone gives lovely, subtle midband but treble is a bit dull and bass a bit thumpy	21,84,25	●	87	8	30	●	2120	174
Castle Avon	730	Lovely box and lovely voices from carbon-fibre composite cone	22,91,28	●	85	8	22	●	1909	164
B Castle Harlech	880	Handsome big-sounding floorstander, great value and dynamic midrange	20,96,33	●	88	8	28	●	1820	160
Castle Inversion 100	1,975	Large semi-omni design with gorgeous Art Deco styling, sounds open but bass alignment is ill-tuned	26,5,111,45	●	91	8	20	●		195
Celestion 12i	119	Not without virtue, but the relentless enthusiasm and mid-band colorations can become wearing	19,31,21		88	6	45	●	2254	179
Celestion 25i	300	Cosmetically flawed, but the bottom end has fine get-up-and-go, and works well with dance tracks	24,86,27	●	89	6	30	●	2200	177
R Celestion A Compact	600	Provided the room isn't too large, and your tastes not too heavy, this is a charming little number	17,24,21		90	3	45	●		193
R Celestion A1	899	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build	24,41,35	●	88	6	25	●	1910	164
R Celestion A2	1,500	Full scale, big sound from ultra-elegant floorstander. Smooth and slightly laid back presentation	24,93,39	●	89	6	22	●		180
Chario Syntar 100	249	Pretty with a pleasantly easygoing balance, but not the most communicative or exciting sound around	18,32,27		87	6	45	●	2020	170
R Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy looking stand mount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28		87	4	45	●		187
R Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid back for its own good	20,36,26		87	3	40	●		190
E Chario Academy Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●		190
B Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32	●	91	4	25	●	2121	174
Dali Royal Menuet MkII	400	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18		87	3	50	●		190
Dynaudio Audience 5	400	Follows the Dynaudio tradition for fine midband transparency, but the overall timbre is a bit thin	20,31,26		85	4	40	●	2205	177
B Dynaudio Audience 40	400	Classy engineering content creates a winning combination of neutrality, dynamic range and involvement	17,28,25		87	4	40	●		190
B Dynaudio Audience 50	577	This stand-mount doesn't look big, but sound quality can match many models at twice the price	20,33,25		86	4	30	●	2122	174
R Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII	1,842	Wonderful voice-band delicacy and loads of deep bass from a very elegant and compact box	21,95,29	●	85	4	20	●	1986	167
Elac CL 310i Jet	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	12,3,20,8,28.2		86	4	42	●		191
Eltax Liberty 3+	150	Bright, bassy, laid back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20,5,38,34		86	4	25	●		187
Eltax Linear Response	249	A curiously dumpy shape, but smooth, laid-back performer is easy on the ears, with fine tonal accuracy	25,35,32		85	4	40	●	2201	177
Epos ES12	499	High quality luxury stand-mount has great midband and stereo imaging	20,38,25		85	8	45	●	1823	160
Epos ES25	1,655	Handsome floorstander with a rather uneven and bass heavy balance	24,90,35	●	88	6	22	●	1346	143
Gale 2i	140	Unspectacular sound and appearance fail to help this solid little miniature stand out from the crowd	22,40,27		88	7	40	●	2021	170
R Heybrook Prima 2	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18		87	6	50	●	2256	179
B Heybrook Heylette B	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19,5,30,22		88	4	45	●		187
B Heybrook Optima	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29	●	94	4	30	●		193
B Heybrook Heylios	389	Great all-round performance in a pretty package at a sharp price	24,36,27		87	6	25	●	1912	164
Heybrook Heylo	439	Good vocal reproduction, but sounds thin and bass seems an afterthought	23,73,19	●	88	8	30	●	1658	152
Heybrook Ultima	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29	●	89	6	45	●	2126	174
Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	●	90	6	25	●		180

CONTINUED

Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE WxHxD (CM) FLOORSTANDER SENSITIVITY (db/W) IMPEDANCE (Ω) BASS FREQ (HZ) FREE SPACE CLOSE TO WALL FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FREQ (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Infinity Delta 60	700	Striking and massive floorstander, lots of speaker for the price, but seems a victim of its own complexity	16-29,115,41	●	90	4	25	●			183
Infinity Reference 1i	150	Although not to our tastes, this is a competent speaker, and decent material value	20,34,20		89	6	50	●		1403	148
Jamo BX100A	350	Offering a cracking output for their size, these rock boxes can be a bit bright but have decent bass	31,5,54,28		91	8	40	●		1758	155
Jamo Classic 8	400	A lot of speaker for the money; good when playing quietly, but boom'n'tizz character sounded crude	22,90,29		90	4	28	●		1659	152
Jamo Cornet 195	350	Loads of bass, should have plenty of yooof-appeal — it looks the business, and is priced attractively	20,5,91,31		90	3	26	●			183
Jamo 477A	500	Very prettily styled, but build and sound quality are disappointing at the price	19,77,28		88	4	40	●		1549	138
Jamo 507A	700	Imaginative styling keeps the front view super slim yet still it packs a punch. Glass top is a nice touch	22,94,37		88	3	40	●		2126	174
B JBL LX2	250	<i>Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with considerable enthusiasm</i>	22,40,27		87	8	40	●		2022	170
JBL T1200	400	Very substantial stand-mount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30		92	5	40	●			193
B JBL L20	700	Pricely, heavy and a bit laid back, but this is a fine rock'n'roller which is dynamic and communicative	26,42,28		86	8	30	●		1550	138
JBL SVA1500	700	A distinctive Pro-style bi-radial horn tweeter, with a fun sound, enlivened by a juicy bass thump	175,51,31		86	8	40	●		2127	174
B JBL L40	1,000	Classic, large, stand-mount three-way is full of vim and vigour, with a superb sense of balance	30,65,31		88	4	23	●		1976	167
R JBL 4312 II	1,000	Crude but startlingly effective dynamics. The original party animal knows just how to rock'n'roll	36,60,30		94	4	25	●			190
R JBL SVA 2100	1,250	Monstrously large and brutish styling, goes very loud as well as deep. Fine focus but some boxiness	37,114,52		91	8	<20	●			180
B JBL L90	1,500	<i>A classic monitor which communicates with gusto and enthusiasm, though it can sound a bit crude</i>	24,94,35		91	6	23	●		1348	143
JBL LX70	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy scratchy treble	26,5,94,30		91	4	33	●			183
JMLab Tantal 507	295	Competent all rounder, this compact stand-mount has a good heart and sweet treble, but sounds a bit small	21,38,27		93	4	40	●			193
B JMLab Tantal 515	495	<i>Lively and open if bright. Sound is entertaining and informative, but presentation is nondescript</i>	20,94,26		92	5	32	●			183
JMLab Spectral 909.1	1,375	Multi-driver array in a large and very substantial enclosure. Good scale but lacks delicacy and sweetness	27,107,35		90	4	20	●			180
JMLab Electra 915	1,795	Fine headroom and bass, and classy engineering too, but also a tricky amp load which lacks delicacy	26,5,106,36		92	4	20	●			195
R JMLab Mezzo Utopia	7,250	<i>Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence</i>	35,115,47		92	4	30	●			186
Jordan Watts JH400	565	Piano-finish hexagon has controversial sound, with uneven balance but delightful mid	28,38,21		86	8	50	●			106
B JPW Mini Monitor	60	<i>Ultra-cheap miniature works well in a limited way</i>	18,27,17,5		86	8	50	●		1781	156
B JPW Gold Monitor	80	<i>More informative than Mini Monitor — but fiercer, too</i>	18,27,17,5		86	8	50	●		1782	156
B JPW MLS10	130	<i>Lots of good-quality speaker for the price, but not an ideal match for cheap budget components</i>	20,34,22		88	5	50	●			169
JPW ML710	230	Good material value but disappointingly uneven bass — check out the 510s instead	20,88,30		88	5	40	●		2202	177
JPW ML910	330	Loads of speaker for the money, plenty of headroom and loudness capability, but sounds dull	23,104,30		91	4	43	●			183
R JPW ML1010	400	A seriously substantial speaker for the price, and an obvious choice for those who like their music loud	22,5,115,40		91	6	25	●		2031	170
JPW Ruby 1	400	Very pretty but pricey luxury metal-cone miniature has good, if slightly edgey balance	19,32,21		87	6	55	●			1572
R JPW Ruby 4	1,000	Twin metal-cone main drivers improve the dynamic performance and bass extension, with little sacrifice	22,94,26		88	8	25	●		2132	174
R KEF Coda 7	129	<i>Lovely open voice reproduction, but bass could be tauter; build tougher</i>	18,30,23		88	6	50	●		1783	156
KEF Cresta 2	149	A good looking/value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24		91	4	40	●			195
R KEF Coda 8	189	<i>Outstandingly well-balanced, bass is deep but a little vague</i>	20,32,5,29		86	6	28	●		1784	156
R KEF Q15	200	<i>Beautifully balanced and voiced stand-mount, but a potentially tricky amplifier load at high frequencies</i>	20,5,31,27		90	2.5	30	●			187
KEF Coda 9	299	Uneven budget 3-way floorstander with poor bass definition	20,86,28		89	6	30	●		1785	156
KEF RDM One	499	Cute and tiny, nice midband but lack of bass warmth and weight	23,30,24		88	6	70	●		1913	164
KEF Q65	799	Dumpy-looking three-way has loads of bass and a laid-back midband; goes loud but lacks poise and impact	23,95,31		92	2.5	25	●			190
KEF RDM Three	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27		90	4	40	●			189
KEF Reference Model 2	1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	23,103,34		89	4	30	●		1987	167
B Keswick Audio Ana II	379	<i>Confident and dynamic sound, if a little crude and shut in</i>	21,42,24		89	8	20	●		1405	148
R Keswick Audio Torino	999	<i>Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother</i>	18-26, 93,28		90	4	20	●		1977	167
R Linn Kan	295	<i>Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut in experience</i>	19,31,19		86	4	45	●			187
R Linn Keiligh Passive	750	<i>Stunning timing and coherence, and awesome bass drive</i>	20,83,28		87	4	22	●		1552	138
R Linn Kaber Passive	2,000	<i>Dry, bright balance emphasises dynamics and transients, but can sound unforgiving</i>	20,90,28		87	4	25	●			118
B Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	<i>Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity</i>	21,5,98,29		91	4	25	●			180
F Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	<i>Discreet but extremely fine design with external x-over and an affinity to valves</i>	21,5,104,27		94	6	45	●			196
Magnat Vector 77	450	Tall, dark and a lot of speaker for the money. Beautiful balance, but lacking in subtlety and transparency	22,115,29		89	5	30	●			183
R Magnat Vintage 720	1,200	<i>Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity</i>	29,113,32		88	4	20	●			180
R Mission 700	130	<i>A lot of speaker for the money. Good bass weight and extension and goes loud with ease</i>	18,34,26		87	8	40	●		2257	179
B Mission 771	170	<i>Beautiful stand-mount miniature has a delightfully well balanced and voiced sound, and real wood finish</i>	17,31,22		86	7	45	●			187
B Mission 750LE	250	<i>Fabulous cosmetics and a great midband carry the day, though size will out and bass is inevitably limited</i>	17,28,27		86	7	45	●		2203	177
B Mission 773e	400	<i>Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all round entertaining sound</i>	17,5,88,26		92	4	30	●			193
R Mission 774	500	<i>Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)</i>	18,95,31		90	4	40	●			183
B Mission 752 Freedom	578	<i>A beautifully judged compromise in the art of combining presentation with a decent sound</i>	20,90,25		89	8	45	●		2123	174
B Mission 753 Freedom	798	<i>Great styling. New, more restrained tweeter reveals fine midband dynamics</i>	21,90,31		89	4	40	●		1914	164
Mission 754 Freedom 5	1,298	Tall but exceptionally elegant floorstander gives fine midband projection; goes loud but limited deep bass	22,111,31		88	4	40	●		1981	167
Monitor Audio Monitor 3	400	An exceptionally discreet floorstander; sonically uneven, but capable of fine results	16,91,21		88	5	30	●		2032	170
R Monitor Audio Monitor 4	500	<i>An oddball balance but an entertaining sound, and a good looking real-wood-box at a realistic price</i>	20,87,24		84	6	23	●		2210	177
B Monitor Audio MA700 PMC	600	<i>Good-looking luxury compact with all-metal diaphragms: lovely midrange, but occasionally edgy</i>	22,35,26		89	8	45	●		1661	152
R Monitor Audio 702PMC	700	<i>A good all-round stand-mount with intimate midband focus</i>	20,40,25		87	8	30	●		2128	174
R Monitor Audio MA703 PMC	800	<i>Lovely but pricey floorstander has up-front, coherent, 'shiny' sound</i>	20,89,27		88	8	50	●		1826	160
Monitor Audio Studio 12	1,000	A real looker, but sound and content are a bit on the small side for the price	17,92,20		90	8	28	●		1349	143
Monitor Audio 705PMC	1,400	Beautifully finished compact floorstander with fine midband coherence, but limited bass and top end	20,94,28		89	4	25	●			180
Mordaunt-Short MS812	100	Quirky styling and a very laid back presence, but great musical integrity and solid value for money	20,5, 42, 25		88	5	44	●			187
Musical Technology Kestrel SE	300	Brighter and drier-sounding than the standard Kestrel (and not the better for it)	20,84,19		84	5	50	●		1915	164
R Musical Technology Harrier	400	<i>Very pretty package, good measured performance and even sound. Sensitivity is low, and dynamics limp</i>	25,80,23		86	8	25	●		1663	152
B Musical Technology PM15	450	<i>A subtle, understated but very involving example of the 'classic' luxury-finish compact standmount</i>	20,41,27		88	5	38	●			183
R Musical Technology Condor	1,000	<i>Lots of clever ideas in a floorstander, which places transparency and smoothness ahead of dynamic drama</i>	25,91,23		85	4	28	●		2134	174
B Musical Technology Falcon	680	<i>Big speaker has a big but also surprisingly smooth and civilised sound. Fine material value too</i>	33,117,30		89	4	22	●			190
B Naim Intro	660	<i>Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth</i>	24,89,27		89	6	30	●		1916	164
R Naim Credo	1,060	<i>Involving sound, but rather forward and cold. Good clarity, but some coloration and a lack of richness</i>	24,89,30		88	8	28	●			180
R Naim SBL Passive	1,970	<i>Lively and punchy — smoother but more upfront than before</i>	27,89,27		88	6	25	●		1352	143
R Neat Critique 2	445	<i>Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing</i>	22,32,24		86	6	50	●			183
B Neat Mystique MK2	575	<i>This elegant package delivers a fine overall sound quality; some might find the top end too insistent</i>	20,86,18		85	6	23	●		2211	177
R Neat Elite	1,195	<i>A highly entertaining all rounder, has a planar tweeter that sounds sweet, if not particularly smooth</i>	20,88,18		88.5	6	25	●			195
Neat Petite II/Gravitas	2,000	Beautifully presented miniature/subwoofer combo with ribbon tweeter gives smooth, laid-back sound	23,105,40		85	6	25	●		1988	167
Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31		90	4	40	●			190

CONTINUED

Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE WxHxD (CM) FLOORSTANDER SENSITIVITY (db/W) IMPEDANCE (Ω) BASS FROM (HZ) FREE SPACE CLOSE TO WALL FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	PRICE	TYPE	SENSITIVITY (db/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER	
Origin Live Conqueror	1,650	Chunky floorstanding three-way has lovely cabinetwork and lively sound, but limited deep bass	24,94,27	●	88	8	30	●	●	1989	167	
Orelle Swing	1,200	A superb example of what an essentially small loudspeaker can do, with bags of brio and enthusiasm	18,101,28	●	87	8	45	●	●		195	
PMC TB1S	430	Pro-audio version of TB1, cheaper because of black paint finish	20,41,30	●	87	6	40	●	●	2207	177	
PMC TB1	482	A classy, laid-back performer that likes going loud and loves the bass guitar	20,40,31	●	87	8	45	●	●	1830	160	
PMC LB1	935	Delightful smoothness and transparency, though bass and treble are both limited	18,53,25	●	89	4	33	●	●		110	
PMC AB1	1,496	Lovely panel-like transparency, slightly shut-in balance, needs a big room	26,79,43	●	89	6	22	●	●		114	
Polk LS50	800	No enthusiast tweaks here, but powerful and beautiful balance	27,83,29	●	89	8	25	●	●	1155	138	
Polk RT16	799	Bass rich, lively and powerful, but suspect top end; big and not very pretty	22,105,39	●	91	4	22	●	●	1831	160	
Polk LS70	1,200	High sensitivity, but balance has too much midbass boom; mid-top is laid back	31,94,37	●	90	8	22	●	●	1084	132	
Proac Response 2.5	2,700	For aspirant high-enders looking for seriously good boxes, this speaker should be first port of call	22,107,25	●	86	8	30	●	●	1457	149	
Proac Studio 125	1,000	Pretty if pricey compact floorstander with a beautifully natural and neutral midband, and some bass thump	20,94,28	●	87	8	28	●	●		192	
QLN Signature	1,000	Attractive pyramidal stand-mount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	●	83	4	25	●	●		167	
Rega KYTE	198	Has splendid timing and coherence, sounds very explicit and informative	19,31,19	●	87	8	50	●	●		114	
Rega EL8	298	KYTE drivers in compact floorstander give more bass but less coherence	17,72,20	●	86	8	25	●	●		122	
Rega Jura	450	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom'n'tizz'	22,5,92,5,26	●	90	5	25	●	●		193	
Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty and smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30,80,20	●	87	8	40	●	●	1578	139	
Rega XEL	1,040	Looks and sounds great: balance bright but even, with delightful coherence and timing	20,82,30	●	89	6	40	●	●	1083	132	
Rehdeko RK 115a	1,700	Single-driver system has limited bandwidth and obvious coloration, but wondrous dynamic coherence	34,42,27	●	95	8	55	●	●	1982	167	
RMS Revelation Series 1	1,299	Innovative metal-box compact with integral port/stand - clean with good timing but very laid-back balance	20,99,24	●	81	8	22	●	●		1983	167
Roksan ROKone	595	Large stand-mount is musically very communicative if a little coloured	21,45,33	●	89	6	30	●	●	1834	160	
Roksan Ojan 3 Black	795	Squat, stylish and black, great bass extension and somewhat uneven balance	28,76,46	●	88	8	20	●	●	1082	132	
Roksan OJ3X Black	995	Innovative low-line, 2-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter; great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	●	84	8	20	●	●	1979	167	
Royd Minstrel	275	Not much wellie or loudness but fine coherence and timing; a bit bright	18,69,12	●	86	8	30	●	●	1167	135	
Royd Doublet	485	Great value compact floorstander: lively and very informative, if a little uneven	18,93,19	●	90	4	28	●	●	1835	160	
Royd The Sorcerer	595	Extremely musical and communicative speaker that's fun to listen to. Aesthetics could be better, though	20,31,18	●	86	8	35	●	●		139	
Royd Abbot	695	Dynamic and fine transient qualities are hampered by a rather coloured mid-forward balance	20,81,30	●	90	8	43	●	●		118	
Ruark Epilogue	269	Beautifully finished miniature with a lively balance and plenty of charm; best suited to smaller rooms	17,29,23	●	87	8	47	●	●		183	
Ruark Sceptre	599	'Traditional' cabinetwork with classy veneer and shiny gilt fixings, hampered by rather wayward sound balance	21,38,31	●	87	8	40	●	●	2129	174	
Ruark Talisman II	749	Less ideologically committed than some, strength lies in fine all-round coherence	23,84,32	●	88	8	30	●	●		118	
Ruark Crusader	1,599	Elegant luxury three-way with wonderfully even-handed, if rather laid-back balance	24,94,31	●	85	6	22	●	●	1990	167	
Ruark Equinox	1,849	The primary strength of this speaker is its ability to vanish behind the music	25,88,34	●	88	6	45	●	●	1227	140	
Ruark Excalibur	7,000	A big handsome speaker with a big, laid-back, but open sound, rocking bass and loads of headroom	30,125,53	●	90	4	30	●	●		186	
Sequence 400	329	Clever hang-on-wall panel is well voiced, though bass isn't too great	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	1917	164	
Shahinian Arc	1,875	Occasionally wonderful, small, floorstanding omni directional design: bright but coherent and revealing	35,69,25	●	88	6	24	●	●		110	
Silverado Raider	695	Beautifully built audiophile compact: neutral if bright, tough work for amps	20,40,25	●	83	3	30	●	●	1918	164	
Snell K5	795	Classy AV-ready stand mount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30	●	87	6	25	●	●		190	
Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active-bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration.	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●		194	
Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	35,5,19,30	●	91	8	45	●	●		196	
Sonus Faber Concertino	599	A beautifully neutral loudspeaker in a beautiful Italian suit of clothes. Classy, if quite pricey	21,52,29	●	87	5	30	●	●		193	
Spendor 2030	599	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid-back sound	18,89,27	●	87	8	30	●	●	1836	160	
System Audio 1130	499	Super-slim, super smooth, involving experience, but not ideal if you like your bass deep and loud	3,100,21	●	89	4	43	●	●		183	
System Audio 1150	749	Pricey but persuasive, sonic subtleties sneak up to confound a dodgy first impression. Super-slim	16,105,26	●	90	4	30	●	●		190	
Tangent Monitor 5	80	An uneven performer best suited to small rooms and generous volume levels	17,5,27,18	●	83	8	55	●	●		169	
Tangent Monitor 9	150	Budget floorstander that motors when the music demands, with a solid bass but occasionally raw treble	19,5,75,5,22,5	●	90	6	45	●	●	1926	165	
Tannoy Mercury M1	120	Sounds much bigger and expensive than it is. Solid, tuneful bass, wide open soundstage, excellent imaging	17,30,20	●	87	8	50	●	●	2259	179	
Tannoy Mercury M2	140	A fine all-rounder with big box and deep bass for the price; could be sweeter and tighter	20,5,38,28	●	87	8	25	●	●		169	
Tannoy R1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered, and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●		187	
Tannoy Mercury M3	230	Good-looking floorstander; very neutral and evenhanded, with fine midband but weak dynamics and drive	20,5,87,28	●	87	7	20	●	●	2025	170	
Tannoy Revolution R2	350	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid back	17,94,24	●	90	4	20	●	●		193	
Tannoy Precision P20	400	A creative and attractive design with time-aligned drivers, but the sound lacks sufficient excitement	21,80,30	●	88	5	25	●	●	2208	177	
Tannoy D300	999	Gorgeous-looking compact floorstander. And a fine all-round performer, too!	16,24,85,23	●	87	6	26	●	●		167	
Tannoy D500	1,999	Plenty of muscle and stereo, but short of poise and delicacy. Hard work for amps	31,93,34	●	91	6	20	●	●	1355	143	
Tannoy Westminster TW	6,600	These awesome horn-loaded speakers are remarkably controlled and impressive	large	●	99	8	38	●	●		C93	
TDL Nucleus 2	130	A very competent miniature. Could be smoother, but no serious flaws, and hence good basic value	20,29,22	●	88	4	45	●	●		187	
TDL Nucleus 4	299	Handsome and very inexpensive floorstander with fine bass alignment but a pronounced lack of presence	20,5,92,31	●	92	6	22	●	●		193	
TDL RTL3SE	450	A touch of boom'n'tizz might be to taste, but this is a lot of box for the money, with floor-shaking bass	20,91,39	●	89	6	22	●	●	2124	174	
TDL CF100 Chiltern	450	Tiny but classy monitor has a laid-back balance, a fine midband and a surprising bass; but needs space	20,29,23	●	85	8	50	●	●		183	
TDL CF200 Cotswold	650	Fine midband tonality and dynamic range, but less happy towards the bandwidth extremes	22,5,78,23	●	86	6	40	●	●	2212	177	
TDL T-Line 3	700	Plenty of bass and treble, but broad midband is rather repressed	20,97,38	●	86	8	20	●	●	1921	164	
Technics SB-M20	200	Well-balanced with natural perspectives and fine midband coherence, but bass is a bit boxy and uneven	20,32,23	●	70	8	50	●	●	1413	148	
Technics SB-M500	450	This model offers a clean, open sound, offset by midbass, heavy balance and low sensitivity	25,78,37	●	85	8	25	●	●	1666	152	
Triangle Cometes	359	Communicative stand-mount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	22,40,29	●	91	4	42	●	●		193	
Triangle Zephyr II	599	Loads of fun. Dramatic dynamics and righteous timing will give any hi-fi system a wake-up call	22,94,29	●	91	4	25	●	●		190	
Totem Model One	1,195	Utterly delightful but exasperatingly expensive luxury miniature sets the benchmark for its size	17,31,23	●	87	4	28	●	●		122	
Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	104	4	50	●	●		191	
Wilson benesch Bishop	20,000	Deep and even bass sets new standards for cleanliness and clarity; lovely open midband too	23,161,561	●	89	4	S20	●	●		189	
Wharfedale Diamond 7.2	140	A good-hearted, lively and up-front performer that's a little lacking in subtlety and smoothness	19,29,5,23	●	88	4	45	●	●		169	
Wharfedale Diamond 7.2 Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24	●	88	4	40	●	●		187	
Wharfedale Valdis 400	200	Very loud with a minimum of amplification, but the sound is thick and uneven, with a heavy upper bass	25,80,26	●	91	8	30	●	●	1414	148	
Wharfedale Valdis 500	300	These rock boxes can move plenty of air, albeit not as subtly as alternatives	25,108,26,5	●	91	4	40	●	●	1758	155	
Wharfedale MFM-3	350	Smooth broad midband gives fine voice rendition; bass could be better	22,89,28	●	87	8	40	●	●	1922	164	
Zingali Overture 2S	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing stand-mount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●		195	

SUBWOOFERS

Acoustic Energy AE108S	299	Lots of loud subwoofer for your money, though ultimately more film than music oriented	50,42,43	●			20	●	●	2247	179
B&W ASW1000	499	(Active) Very competently engineered all round, and goes (unnecessarily) very loud	54,47,48	●			20	●	●	2248	179
B&W AS6	500	(Active) Good material value with a fair amount of low bass from 100W design	45,51,45,5	●			30	●	●	1736	154
Celestion CS135	139	Compact hideaway passive sub lacks deep bass for high sensitivity speakers	52,19,34	●	86	8	45	●	●		128

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Hi-Fi Loudspeakers

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

SIZE WxHxD (CM) FLOORSTANDER SENSITIVITY (db/W) IMPEDANCE (Ω) BASS FROM (Hz) FREE SPACE CLOSE TO WALL FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (db/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Jamo SW600	530	(Active) Has some neat styling touches and remote control, but deep bass is limited	38,41,53	●					30		1736 154
JPW SW60	349	A real heavyweight, sounds clean and transparent, if perhaps a little understated. Usefully flexible	55,47,39						20	●	2249 179
KEF Model 30B	499	(Active) Commendably discreet with good sense of timing but limited extension	38,5,37,43	●					45		1736 154
KEF AV1	2,499	(Active) Works well, looks great, shakes the windows but costs a lot and is bulky	56,43,50	●					45		128
M&K VX-7B	450	(Active) Baby of a big range; this active design delivers deep, plentiful bass but lacks transparency	35,25,37	●					40		1736 154
M&K MX70	900	(Active) Justifies cost and belies its diminutive size, with an agility that makes sense of the toughest material	25,5,46,35						25	●	2250 179
REL Q50	375	(Active) Genuinely deep, clean bass from an attractively compact and cost-effective package	40,41,42						20	●	2251 179



Stands & Supports

Hi-Fi supports are more important than you might imagine – they can have very subtle effects on the sound of your system! There are two kinds of support: those for equipment and those (stands) for loudspeakers. Equipment supports keep vibrations and resonances from affecting electronic components, while speaker stands hold enclosures stock-still and ensure they are at the correct height for your ears. Equipment supports may be rigid affairs fabricated from steel or more exotic materials, or they may have a form of suspension. Speaker stands come in a variety of sizes and styles to suit different models, and vary between open-frame and solid-pillar types. Always check with speaker and electronics manufacturers to see which supports they recommend.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **HEIGHT (cm):** How tall is your support?
- **TOP PLATE SIZE (cm):** Dimensions of top surface on stand or equipment support.
- **FILLABLE:** Some speaker stands can be mass-loaded with sand or lead-shot to improve sound.
- **WELDED:** The better stands and supports are welded together rather than just bolted.
- **NUMBER OF SHELVES:** The number of tiers on an equipment rack or support.
- **SHELF TYPE:** The material from which shelves are made. Wood generally means Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF).
- **FACTSBACK REFERENCE:** The Factsback Reference number permits direct access to our faxed review reprint service. For full info, see the Factsback advert on the penultimate page of the magazine.
- **ISSUE NUMBER:** The issue of *Hi-Fi Choice* in which an original review appeared.

B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stands & Supports

STATUS

SPECIFICATIONS

TOP PLATE SIZE (cm) FILLABLE WELDED NUMBER OF SHELVES SHELF TYPE FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS									
Avik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5 47			4	Wood		193
Alphason GR 17/17-AS	275	Great looks but sound can be bettered for the money	36 60,39			4	Glass		181
Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5 45.5			4	Glass		193
Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67 48.6			4	Wood		193
Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82 43			4	MDF		193
Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiasts equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5 48			5	MDF		193
Elemental Isotube x 4/Ref	1,199	Blockbusting size and build. Super sound quality	92 45,49	●		4	Marb		181
Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90 49		●	4	Glass		193
Fi-Rax R4	399	Lively, exuberant sound, slightly weak bass				5	Glass	1633	151
Frameworks H500/H175	404	Two-shelf stand and isolation platform combo in tubular steel – made a spectacular impression on audition	70 52,34		●	3	Glass	1952	166
Ixos Deadrock 704	250	Looks unassuming but sound is full and inviting				4	Resin		181
Kudos Corinthian	599	True heavyweight that doesn't quite manage knockout sound	91 46,38			4	Wood		181
Mana Acoustics Ref. Table	350	King of its type: angle iron, chipboard and glass combine to make a significant difference to sound quality	56 49,39		●	1	Glass		147
Mana 5 Tier Sound Table	600	Infinately upgradeable. Persuasive and thrilling glass and angle-iron design that adds speed and bandwidth	91 49, 39		●	5	Glass	1633	151
Optimum Int 2000 OPT490	299	25kg stand with shelves between variable-height tubular uprights. Sounds smooth and relaxed with sturdy bass	50 60,40			4	Glass	1953	166
Optimum Int 2000 OPT660	349	Glitzy style isn't reflected in sound, which is wholesome	82 60,52			5	Glass		181
Projekt Furniture A4	215	An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound	56 48			4	Wood		193
Quadraspire Q4	250	Easy to live with, tonally neutral	54 40,49			4	MDF	1633	151
Sound Organisation Z560	160	Welded and bolted members give structural integrity. While performance is not up with the best, it's great value	90 46,36		●	5	Wood	1954	166
Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73 46		●	4	Glass		193
Soundstyle X100	230	Looks lovely, sounds lively but slightly bright	64 49,28		●	4	Glass		181
Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5 49.5		●	4	Glass		193
Soundstyle Select 6105	290	Respectable sonics: structurally solid and smart	78 43,36			5	Glass	1633	151
Soundstyle Finewoods W105	320	Veneered shelves clamped between tubular uprights. Delivers with classical material	82 48,27			4	Wood	1955	166
Stands Unique Sound Tower	289	Wooden uprights combine with glass shelves to provide a fresh, forward sound, but bass could be quicker	81 72,42			5	Glass	1633	151
Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance	88.5 50.8		●	4	Glass		193
Target B5	175	Free of colorations, fine grip and good value	81 49,36		●	5	Wood	1633	151
Townshend Seismic Stand	1,245	It's big, it wobbles and it's pricey. But this is the ultimate equipment support	72 58,45			3	Wood		181
Wilson benesch Asside	590	Sounds even better than it looks. And it looks wonderful	72 37,50			4	Wood		181
SPEAKER STANDS									
Alphason NC I	45	Filled single-column design without threaded spike holes, that's appropriate for non-critical applications	40-60 16,16	●				1373	146
Alphason NCII	85	Tall, slim and elegant, though sound and value are unexceptional	40-60 17,17	●					159
Alphason HDS	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60 15,5,15,5	●					189
Alphason Titan	125	Excels in the midband and allows voices to come across in a detailed and expressive fashion	40-60 16,16	●	●			1373	146
Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60 15,12,5	●					189
Apollo AZ6	80	Fine engineering value, but sound is unexceptional and top-plate small	66 15,13	●	●				159
Atacama BD21	55	Good-looking and good value, but doesn't match the SE24's sound quality	56 15,17	●					159
Atacama R724	150	Atacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price	60 15,17	●	●				189
Atacama SE24	70	Stands out from the budget crowd because of the consistency and overall quality of its performance	61 19,5,17	●	●			1373	146
Black Box Speaker Stand	797	A strange and costly beast. Bass is a touch thick, but performance with synthetic music types is worthy of the price	92-112 40						189
Custom Design R/S 300	70	Combining strong aesthetic and sonic appeal at a popular price point, this is a good stand all-round	40.6-60.9 15,15	●	●				189
Elemental Isotube SZse	599	Stands of distinction, able to free the speaker's sound from its box in a way budget stands simply can't	61 23,27	●	●				189
JPW HS1	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61 19,21	●	●				189
Kudos S50	100	Better sound than the budget stands, particularly in low-frequencies	60 15,21	●					159
Kudos S100	270	The best all-round stand around. Probably...	63 15,21	●					159
Mana Soundframes	125	For use under floorstanders and equipment racks, these make music effortless and natural. Can be stacked	5			●		1373	146
Partington A-4	119	An odd-ball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than almost anything below £150	50-100 19,22	●	●				189

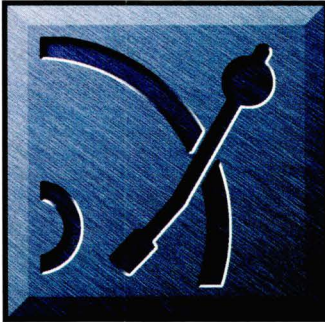
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Stands & Supports

SPECIFICATIONS

TOP PLATE SIZE (cm) FILLABLE WELDED NUMBER OF SHELVES SHELF TYPE FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
B	RMS/Stands Unique Vivus	349	Pricey carbon fibres give ultra-clean sound with exceptional voices	50	N/A					159
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzaz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33,5,24					189
	Sound Organisation Z524	69	A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes	61	16,17					189
B	Stands Unique HP	220	Real wood disguises high-performance tuned technology	59	22,23					159
B	Target R1	280	Truly high-mass four-pillar design with superb weight and speed, giving music delicious attack	53	15,21	●	●		1373	146
B	Target TR60	68	Lively, dynamic midrange and detailed treble from a less-than-audiophile-oriented, twin-column design	60	15,15	●			1373	146



Tonearms

Less expensive turntables are usually supplied with a matching tonearm (and often a 'starter' cartridge, too). However, hard-core vinyl fans should invest in a more expensive separate motor unit with specialist tone-arm – the only way to make the most of vinyl LPs. It is essential to achieve operational synergy between such components, so this is one area of hi-fi where the skills of a knowledgeable dealer are invaluable. The quality of a tonearm's construction and design affect sound quality significantly. There are three basic arm designs listed in the key, and each has strengths, but pivoted designs are the most popular, being usually the most practical and affordable.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **EFFECTIVE MASS:** This relates to cartridge compliance. Generally high mass arms are suitable for low compliance cartridges and vice versa.
- **PARALLEL TRACKING:** An arm which allows the cartridge to track the disc in a linear fashion.
- **PIVOTED:** Arms which allow the cartridge to describe an arc as they traverse the record.
- **UNI-PIVOT:** Pivoted arms with a bearing that allows movement in two planes.
- **EFFECTIVE LENGTH (CM):** Length of the arm from bearing to cartridge mounting.
- **ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT:** Important for accurate cartridge set-up.
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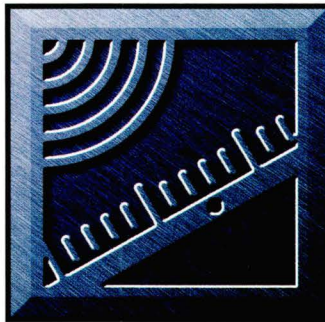
B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Tonearms

SPECIFICATIONS

PARALLEL TRACKING PIVOTED UNI-PIVOT EFFECTIVE MASS EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm) ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE MASS	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ADJUSTABLE HEIGHT	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
B	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well-made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High		●					79
B	Linn Ekos	1,500	Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths	Medium		●		229	●		67
B	Moth/RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low	●			237			60
B	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low	●			237			60
B	Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though	Low	●			240	●		91
B	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low	●			233	●		60
B	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low	●			233	●		60



Tuners

TV has stolen radio's status as the foremost broadcast entertainment medium, but with its Radio Four plays and Radio Three music, the BBC still makes a potent case for audiophile reception equipment. For how much longer, under the cost-conscious Birtist régime, remains to be seen. Another new imponderable is the arrival of digital radio broadcasting, though reception apparatus is currently non-existent outside of the in-car market. These days tuners play second fiddle to hi-fi sources like CD, but in many ways they are a greater engineering challenge than digital equipment, and thus higher price-tags clearly equate to superior performance. High-quality, roof-mounted antennae are essential for audiophile listening, so factor them into your budget.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **WAVEBANDS:** FM – (VHF), M – MW, L – LW.
- **PRESETS:** Number of station frequencies that can be stored.
- **RDS:** (Radio Data System) was originally designed for in-car applications. RDS tuners can identify and display the name of the radio station being received, traffic news and other information about broadcasts.
- **REMOTE CONTROL:** Infra-red control handset supplied.
- **SIGNAL STRENGTH METER:** Indicates strength of signal from aerial – useful for aligning your 'twig' during installation.
- **ROTARY TUNING KNOB:** Experience has shown that this analogue throwback is ergonomically far superior to the button-based approach.
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B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Tuners

SPECIFICATIONS

WAVEBANDS PRESETS RDS SIG. STRENGTH METER ROT. TUNING KNOB FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS	PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
B	AMC T7	130	Performance adequate but price is sharp, especially with remote control. Some hum	FM, M	30			●	1945	166
B	Arcam Alpha 7	230	Indifferent RF performance but a touch of audiophile sound quality with clean, strong signals	FM, M, L	24				1946	166
B	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM, M, L	64			●		193
B	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM, M, L	64			●		193
B	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
B	Denon TU-425RD	200	A fine all-rounder with advanced RDS, good RF performance and decent sound. Remote extra	FM, M	40	●			1947	166
B	Denon TU-1500RD	250	A well-balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension	FM, M	40			●		184
	Magnum Dynalab FT11	499	All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality	FM	3			●		184
B	Harman/Kardon TU950	200	Bulky but effective, delivering fine RF performance and good sound for the price	FM, M, L	30	●			1948	166
B	Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80			●	1254	142
B	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM, M	60	●				184
	Musical Fidelity E50	300	Sounds involving if coloured and with a subjectively larger-than-life presentation	FM	20				1810	157
B	Myriad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29			●		193
	Myriad T-10	530	A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price	FM	20			●		184
	NAD C440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM, M	30	●				193
B	Naim NAT01	1,730	There may be better sounding tuners in the world, but we have yet to hear one	FM					1254	142
	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM, M	40			●	1949	166
B	Pioneer F-504RDS Precision	300	Lots of features, plus a sound that's low on noise and high on communication, adds up to a good value package	FM, M	40			●		184
	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat fascia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50			●		184
	Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM, M, L	30			●		193

CONTINUED

Tuners

SPECIFICATIONS

WAVEBANDS PRESETS RDS REMOTE CONTROL SIG. STRENGTH METER ROT. TUNING METER FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NUMBER

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING METER	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NUMBER
Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM,M	20					1950	166
Sony ST-SA3ES	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	1810	157
R Sony STS-B920S	180	A little hiss and image compression don't detract from the clean performance of this feature-packed tuner	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●		184
Technics ST-GT350L	130	Decent RF performance is offset by sound quality more typical of a mini/midi system	FM,M,L	30			●	●	1254	142
Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	1810	157

Turntables

Specialist turntables are at the heart of high-fidelity sound. CD players may offer ultra-low noise and a flat frequency response, but they can't match the dynamics and superlative rhythmical timing taken for granted by serious turntable users. Less expensive turntables are usually supplied with a matching tonearm (and often a 'starter' cartridge, too). Still better quality is found at higher prices among the separate motor units and tonearms. Because turntables are mechanical devices, designed to retrieve micron-small modulations engraved into vinyl, engineering quality is of paramount importance. This is also the reason why turntables cost as much as they do, and require the finest equipment support systems.

KEY TO SPECIFICATIONS

- **MANUAL:** You do all the work.
- **AUTO:** The record player does all the work.
- **SEMI-AUTO:** You put the needle on, the turntable lifts it off at the end of the record.
- **SPEEDS:** In RPM to correspond with long-playing records or seven/12-inch singles.
- **SUSPENDED SUBCHASSIS:** Sprung suspension to minimise structural interference.
- **EXTERNAL PSU:** Outboard power supply, generally indicative of higher-quality performance.
- **SUPPLIED WITH ARM:** Many turntables do not come with a tonearm fitted, but if this category is checked, the deck is already thus equipped.
- **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE:** If a turntable comes complete with arm and cartridge.
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B BEST BUY **R** RECOMMENDED **E** EDITOR'S CHOICE

Turntables

SPECIFICATIONS

MANUAL AUTO SEMI-AUTO SPEEDS SUSP. SUBCHASSIS EXTERNAL PSU SUPPLIED WITH ARM SUPPLIED WITH CART. FACTSBACK NO. ISSUE NO.

STATUS

PRODUCT	(£)	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP. SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART.	FACTSBACK NO.	ISSUE NO.
E Avid Acutus	4,995	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings, don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!				●					33/45	194
Clearaudio Reference	3,990	Opulent beast tested with Souther TQ-1 arm. Tends to gloss over detail, but can sound bold	●								33/45	1328 144
R DNM Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table			●						33/45	1328 144
R Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph				●					33/45	103
R Kuzma Stabi/PS	1,950	(Tested with Stogi Reference) Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended			●						33/45	91
R Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc still top rank			●						33	103
R Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains			●						33/45	91
R Michell Gyrodec	875	Sweet and natural-sounding player, well matched to Rega RB300 arm			●						33/45	55
E Michell Gyro SE	775	A stunningly desirable combination of looks, solidity and sound make this a tempting turntable			●						33/45	190
B Michell Orbe 'SE'	1,725	A Superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price			●						33/45	192
Moth Kanoor	329	Rather coarse-sounding deck that requires decent isolation and comes with a Rega RB300 arm			●						33/45	1907 164
B Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever			●						33/45	159
R Pink Triangle Tarantella II	850	A turntable that looks unlike any other, with rare ability too. Quirky, but sound is immensely likeable			●						33/45	192
B Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound			●						33/45	1907 164
Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best			●						33/45	192
R Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	850	Don't think of this as a deck with a good arm, but as a scaled-down Oracle Delphi – it's that good			●						33/45	138
B Rega Planar 2	214	A remarkable product at the price, surprisingly articulate and confident			●						33/45	48
R Rega Planar 3	274	Sounds musical in a balanced manner, needs decent isolation and suffers a little pitch instability			●						33/45	1907 164
B Reson RS1	600	Supplied set-up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with mid-band detail			●						33/45	159
R Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight			●						33/45	159
E SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built			●						33/45	195
E SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm			●						33/45/78	186
B Thorens TD166 V/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges			●						33/45	103
Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled			●						33/45	159
R Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limpid quality and lack of artificiality set standards			●						33/45	1180 136
B Wilson benchek The Circle	795	A beautiful turntable with a sumptuous sound, all at a very reasonable price – a clear Best Buy			●						33/45	192

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 HI-FI CHOICE Nov 1998

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1993	114-125	All except Feb and Dec	Very limited
1994	126-137	Jun, Aug, Nov	Very limited
1995	138-149	All sold out	None
1996	150-161	All ex. Jan, Apr, Jul, Sep & Special	Very limited
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1999	186-	None sold out	Good

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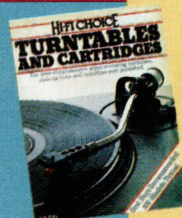
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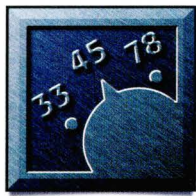
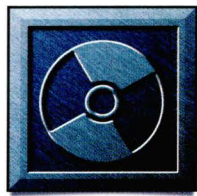
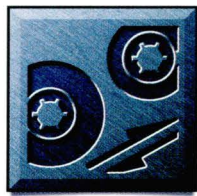
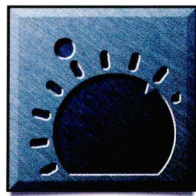
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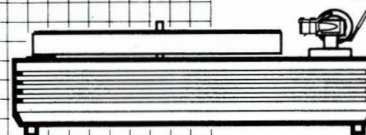
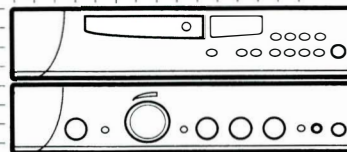
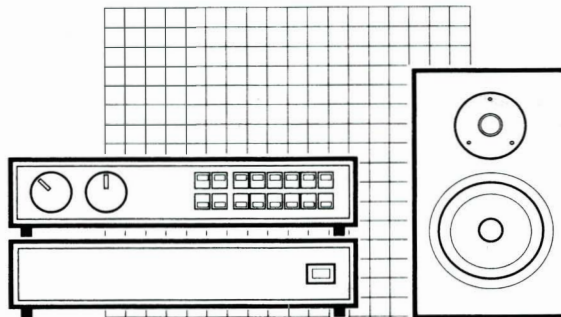
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JIMMY HUGHES

"If your hi-fi set-up ain't broke, why upgrade?" asks Jimmy. He's happy with his sweet-sounding, obsolete components.

How long does it take for a hi-fi component to fully run in? Weeks? Months? Years? It's hard to say exactly. Perhaps not years, but certainly a considerable amount of time. Alas, the changes taking place are largely subjective rather than measurable. So there's no saying precisely when a product is fully run in – the process is complete when the sound stops changing.

One benefit of no longer doing as much product reviewing as I used to is the fact that I can at last keep my hi-fi system more or less intact. I don't have to make changes unless I want to. In the past this wasn't the case. I'd regularly have to pull it apart to

the so-called 'running-in' period. Perhaps I'm in a minority of one here, but I've often listened to a new product and been impressed with the brilliance and vitality of its sound straight from the box. However, after a few days or weeks, the sound loses its brand-new sharpness and immediacy and becomes sweeter and more laid back. An improvement? Not always! It depends on personal taste and the overall balance of your system. Sometimes extra immediacy is very welcome.

Inevitably, when you make changes to your system, the first impression is a very powerful one. Yet it's misleading because it doesn't last. One tries to be objective and

months on, chances are things are working pretty well. Resist the temptation to tweak further and enjoy the music!

The opposite can happen too, of course. When reviewing new products, I've sometimes been disappointed initially, only to have a complete change of heart a few days later. Regardless of changes that may or may not occur to the product itself as it burns in, there are also changes taking place with the listener. Prejudices are powerful yet elusive things – elusive because they're often completely invisible; we know we've got them, yet can't always say what they are! Only by taking time on assessment can these prejudices be relaxed.

In this respect, your regular hi-fi system 'conditions' your expectations of what sounds natural and right. Even if your system has an excessively bright sharp tonal balance, your ears will adjust over time so that the sound seems 'correct'.

Unfortunately, this'll make other more naturally balanced hi-fi systems sound dull and thick by comparison. To get your bearings, you need a true reference:

listen to live acoustic instruments, and compare the tonal balance to that of your hi-fi. You might not like the sound of live instruments at first, but it's sure to grow on you.

As far as my current system's concerned, most of it's so old now that it's gone past



evaluate the latest product sent along for testing: interesting, but frustrating too – just when everything was working nicely, I'd have to introduce new items.

Constant chopping and changing makes it difficult to establish a point of reference. If everything's in a state of flux, where's the yardstick by which judgements can be made? So when my reviewing schedule eased a few years back, I was determined to really get my hi-fi system sorted out. A constantly rotating squad may work for the likes of Manchester United or Chelsea, but hi-fi systems are far more subtle, complex creatures. Continuity rules, OK?

But implicit in all this is the general belief that hi-fi components aren't at their best until they've been used for a while –

Changing gear all the time might be fun, but like well worn slippers there's nothing as good as a system of parts that's fully run-in and a comfort to the ears.

take the long view. But if you buy a new amplifier, connect it up and think 'wow!' after the first track, it's a positive, encouraging experience: you're impressed, excited, and naturally feel that you've made the right choice. But, more importantly, will you still be as impressed a few weeks later when the product's settled down and (perhaps) lost some of its sparkle?

The evaluation of a product or system takes time. By all means be impressed on first acquaintance. But maintain an open mind and monitor how you feel a week or two later. If you're still impressed a few

the run-in/burn-in stage – indeed, some parts are probably approaching burn-out and blow-up! A second-hand EAR 859 integrated valve amp was my last major upgrade, some 18 months ago. Otherwise, things have stayed pretty much the same for the past three or four years. And (terrible thought), with the possible exception of the 859, virtually every active component I use is now obsolete...

Does it matter? I like the sound: it's musically engaging, detailed and dynamic, but natural and pleasing to listen to. And, perhaps because the individual components are a few years old and 'used to one another', the sound has excellent day-to-day consistency – a characteristic which in the past proved rather elusive.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE ...

LOUDSPEAKER MEGA TEST

Messrs Miller and Messenger test a baker's dozen of the latest loudspeakers costing between £500 and £1,500. We've got some gorgeous models to choose from, including the Acoustic Energy 120SE, Indigo Three, Mission 782, B&W Nautilus 805 and Tannoy R3.

HOT STUFF

Those of you who enjoyed the old Sessions section – one-off reviews that come outside the High End remit,




but can't wait for group testing – will be glad to know it's back in the form of an expanded Heat Seekers section, next month including the Cyrus DAD3Q 24 CD player, Pioneer's CD-RW recorder and the NAD C300.

DIGITAL RADIO RETURNS

After several false starts we've finally managed to corral three DAB tuners for a first group test of the breed.

■ All this and more can be found in the February issue, on sale from Thursday 27 January.



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