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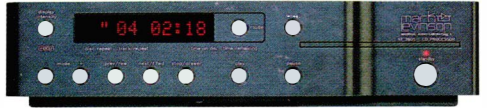
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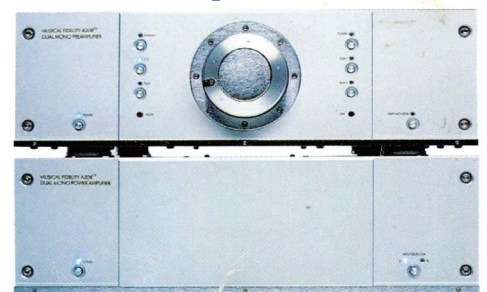
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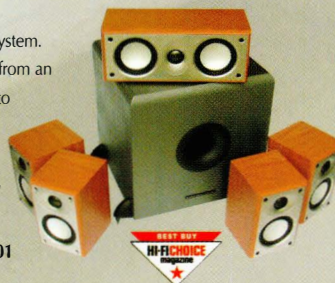
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A former editor of *Hi-Fi Choice*, Paul has been writing about his beloved hi-fi hobby for some 26 years. In that time he has become one of the world's most respected sonic scribes and probably the UK's foremost loudspeaker reviewer. He also writes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



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



ALAN SIRCOM

After a stint selling hi-fi, Alan began his journalistic career at *Hi-Fi Choice* ten years ago. He finished up as Associate Editor of our sister title *Home Entertainment* before turning freelance, so you too can benefit from his extensive knowledge of both two-channel hi-fi and serious AV gear.

Three things that rock my world. One, a cool, crisp beer on a sultry summer's day. Two, a bacon sandwich and a lusty cup of coffee the morning after. Three, coming home, slipping some music on the hi-fi and just drifting, drifting...

Music makes me laugh, it makes me cry. It cools my brain when I'm stressed and peaks my high when the adrenaline flows. I love the music for the music's sake, but it's my hi-fi that makes it an experience, something real, something that absorbs me. Never underestimate the emotive power of high fidelity sound.

On page 43 we begin our homage to the products that made all this possible: *Hi-Fi That Rocked The World*, a rundown of the greatest ever kit from 25 to 1. This is the gear that has shaped the hi-fi we listen to today, so let us give thanks!

As usual, this issue is also packed with exclusive reviews of the latest high performance kit, tried and tested by the most experienced reviewers in the business – just look at the lovely stuff featured in our regular *Incoming* and *Statements* sections for evidence. Our aim is to show you the hi-fi that in years to come will rock *your* world. So enjoy, until next time.



Tim Bower **editor**

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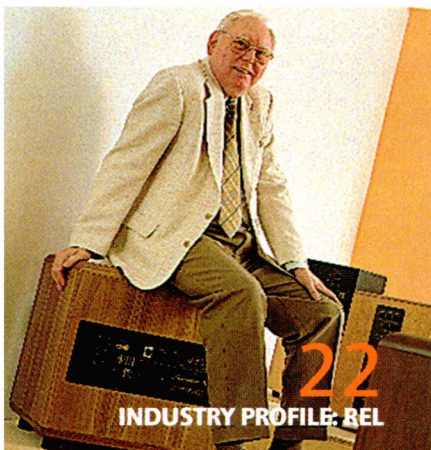


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CD dream machine

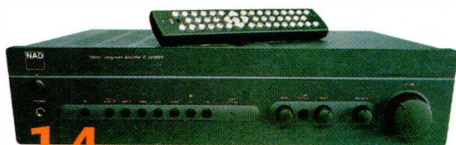
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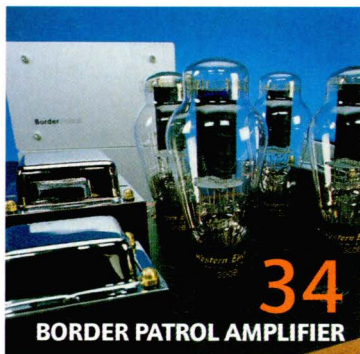


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STAR RATINGS

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

AWARD BADGES



Best Buy

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



Recommended

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

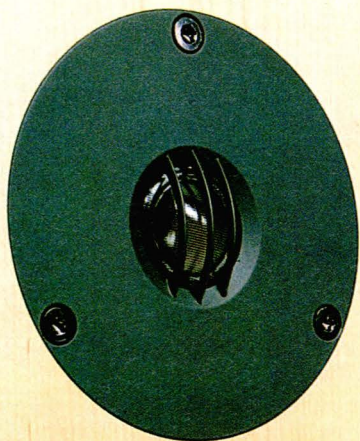
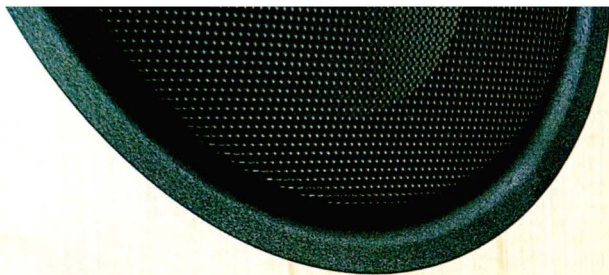


Editor's Choice

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

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





THE COMPONENTS



Linn Ikemi CD player £1,950

With a transport mechanism similar to the one found in the mighty Sondek CD12, this is a player with a 24-bit/96kHz DAC and a very refined yet highly informative sound. A good player that's truly great in an all-Linn system.



Linn Kolektor preamp £495 Linn LK140 power amp £750

The beautifully made Kolektor is extremely expressive and includes settings that can remember each input's tone levels. It's a perfect foil for the very well protected and extremely durable LK140.



Linn Ninka speakers £945

Don't even think about the Ninka without the optional £165 base stand, which snaps the speaker into focus. The two-way, three-driver Ninka has a 90dB efficiency and is easy to drive, but demands good amplification.



Linn Sizmik subwoofer £1,000

Small subwoofer with a 254mm bass driver and a built-in 500 watt power amplifier with no accent; it plays hi-fi and home cinema equally well.

LINN IKEMI | KOLEKTOR | LK140 | NINKA | SIZMIK

SYSTEM ADDICT

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

Beaconsfield in Bedfordshire is fast becoming the home of the well-heeled and exclusive with discerning taste. So, it's fitting that the principal hi-fi store in town is equally exclusive and has discerning taste for the well-heeled.

Unlike most hi-fi stores, Martin Kleiser of Beaconsfield only stocks four, distinctly up-market brands; B&W, Linn, Naim and TAG McLaren. Add in a few top-notch video products and the odd Crestron and you have the complete M-K portfolio.

As is often the case, we walked in with a plan to spend around £2,000 on a hi-fi system, and walked out with one costing £5,140 (excluding cables, tables and installation). This was all done through a step-by-step demonstration and at each point in the process, the jumps in performance were noticeable. It began humbly, with a Linn Klassik CD/amp connected to a pair of floorstanding Linn Ninka speakers with their optional stands. Although this was musically communicative, it wallowed in the bass somewhat. The level of musical information went up dramatically by swapping the Klassik for a £999 Linn Genki CD player, a £495 Kolektor preamplifier and a £750 LK140 power amplifier. This took the price to £3,189 and made the sound far more controlled, more expansive and generally more musical.

Replacing the Genki CD with the £1,950 Ikemi CD made sense, too. The sound was more subtle, more lithe and real. A piece of lute music sounded like a single lute player; on the Genki, by comparison, it sounded like a pair of banjo players. The Genki system was already very good, but the Ikemi pushed it over the edge into a real-world music sound. This would represent the best of stereo for most people; it could cope with a dynamic orchestral Beethoven symphony and subtle Bach piano partita. It played jazz, rock, classical, even spoken word without grace or favour, just musical enjoyment.

But there was still more ahead. The last piece of the jigsaw was the introduction


VERDICT
SOUND
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★☆
BUILD
★★★★★
VALUE
★★★★☆
£5,140

CONCLUSION

Linn's floorstanding full-range loudspeakers, allied to a top-notch CD, pre-amplifier and power amplifier, should be more than good enough to make a very fine, very musical sound. So why add a subwoofer? Because, carefully tuned, it makes stereo sound much, much better. Linn's obsession with the letter 'K' notwithstanding, this is unkindly good kit.

of a £1,000 Linn Sizmik subwoofer. Although subwoofers have a bad rap-sheet in hi-fi circles, they are not just for home cinema. Very carefully tuned, the Sizmik added a palpable sense of space and solidity to the already well-crafted sound. Yes, of course the Sizmik added more bass when needed, but even recordings without much bass – such as Dire Straits and that Harpo Marx of Europop, Andreas Volestrangler – were more spacious and just a bit more musical. This was the big surprise; especially when the LK140 was switched off and you could hear just how little sound was coming from the subwoofer. Few subs would have the ability to keep time with the music, and this makes the Sizmik a standout among trouser-flappers.

One of the most interesting parts of the M-K process is purposefully asking the prospective customer to bring in a recording they are disappointed with and then playing it on the best gear. Because the Linn system focuses on the tune within the music played, it appears to make a disappointing recording less unattractive. It even allowed more than a few bars of the often unlistenable free jazz icon Albert Ayler to be played. It also has the ability to remove the room from the equation; M-K's demonstration room is extremely live (a bit like many modern open-plan living spaces), yet the Linn equipment always got to the meat of the music.

Correctly demonstrated, Linn kit makes a very strong case for itself and Martin-Kleiser does a very good job of demonstrating Linn kit. There is a pocket of Beaconsfield that will be forever Linnified. Bedfordshire should line up for a demo. 



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audiofile



Marantz DV-8300

GREAT UNIVERSAL

MARANTZ'S UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER IS HERE (ALMOST)

▶ Top of Marantz's list of new multi-format disc players is the £1,500 DV-8300, a universal machine promising to be only the second UK model compatible with both DVD-Audio and SACD high resolution music formats (Pioneer's DV-747A was the first, reviewed in *HFC* 226). Slated for a September launch, it joins the recently introduced SA-12S1 and DV-12S1, two

high end players compatible with SACD and DVD-Audio respectively, and already exclusively reviewed in *Hi-Fi Choice*. An impressive list of features includes 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs, a 12bit/108MHz video DAC and connections for virtually every kind of audio or video hook-up.

But Marantz isn't about to forget the continuing importance of dedicated CD players

for the ardent music fan. It's also launching a new upmarket single-disc CD player along with a five-disc autochanger – the CC4300. The MkIII version of the CD-17 will be available from October and is expected to cost around £800, sporting cosmetic changes and a number of serious tweaks under the hood.

☎ Marantz 01753 680868



ONKY-TONK NEWS

NEW RANGE OF ONKYO RECEIVERS

▶ Onkyo's new range of AV receivers includes a replacement for the TX-DS696 – a *Choice* favourite and former Group Test winner (*HFC* 229). The three model range includes the TX-SR500E, 600E and 700E, with prices starting at £400. The entry-level TX-SR500E is the first model to arrive in the shops and is a

five-channel design featuring a 24-bit/96kHz DAC, nine DSP modes as well as Dolby Digital and Pro Logic II decoding. The top-end TX-SR700E replaces the TX-DS696 and boasts a 5.1 channel input for DVD-A and SACD sources, as well as decoding for Dolby Digital EX and DTS-ES formats.

☎ Jamo UK 01788 573100

PMC'S LATE ARRIVAL

NEW STANDMOUNT FROM STUDIO PROS



▶ The long awaited DB1 loudspeaker from PMC is finally here after ten months of extended R&D and listening tests. PMC claims it's the world's smallest speaker to incorporate transmission line bass loading. Housed within the 29x16x23cm cabinet is a 25mm aluminium tweeter and a 125mm mid/bass unit, derived from those used in the well regarded FB1 floorstander. It's available in a choice of four veneers at £555 per pair, or in plain 'studio black' at £500. Expect a review next month.

☎ PMC 0870 444 1044

PMC DB1

Soundbites

NAIM AUDIO, the two-channel stalwart, has taken another step into the multichannel arena with the launch of the Naim aXENT centre channel speaker. Priced at £2,750, the aXENT uses four 130mm Naim mid/ bass drivers all housed in separate enclosures. A wide-dispersion Scan-Speak tweeter delivers treble, with all the drivers housed in a braced and heavily damped cabinet.
☎ 01722 332266

KEF has a new satellite speaker called the Q8, a two-way design that uses KEF's 165mm Uni-Q driver. The £200 speaker has a 90dB sensitivity and is compact enough to be wall-mounted using the supplied brackets. Also new from KEF is the Q9c centre speaker, the latest member of the current Q Series. The Q9c features KEF's own metal-dome tweeter together with the Uni-Q 'pod' and is available in four finishes for £250.
☎ 01622 672261



SONY has launched a new range of portable audio products aimed at sports and outdoor users. The S2 range includes a MiniDisc, CD and cassette Walkman, as well as headphones and CD Radio Casette products. With distinctive white and orange branding the S2 range claims to be designed to withstand extreme conditions, so Kylie CDs should still play OK.
☎ 08705 111999

MUSIC industry moguls are being taken to court in the US in the latest saga involving the protest against anti-copy CDs. Two fans have taken legal proceedings against the five major labels in an attempt to get copy-protected CDs banned or clearly labelled. More on this story next month.
www.bbc.co.uk

RABOS RANGE REVEALED

INFINITY BRINGS RABOS TO THE MASSES

Infinity brings RABOS technology to a wider audience this month with the launch of the Intermezzo series of loudspeakers. The new range uses Infinity's room-friendly acoustic technology first introduced in the Flagship Prelude MTS system (reviewed in *HFC* 228), enabling the user to overcome room-induced resonance by using in-built equalisation adjustments for level, bandwidth and frequency. The Intermezzo range consists of standmount and floorstanding models, with matching centre speaker and subwoofer that all use Infinity's CMMD drivers made from a ceramic sandwich with an aluminium core. Each model is supplied with the RABOS kit, comprising test CD, sound level meter and step-by-step instructions on set-up. Prices start at £950 for the 3.5c centre – expect a review of the £1,600 Intermezzo 2.6 standmount in October's *HFC*.
☎ Harman Consumer UK 020 8731 4670



Intermezzo 2.6



Arcam T61

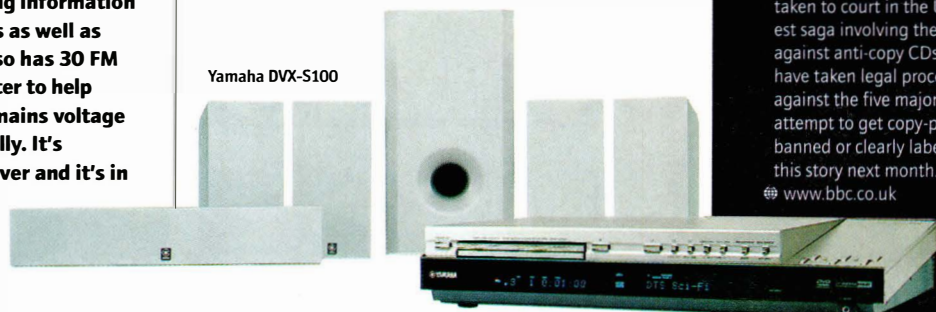
ARCAM ON AIR ANALOGUE TUNER JOINS DIVA

Arcam has added a new AM/ FM tuner to its 15-strong DiVA range priced at just £250. The T61 promises high fidelity FM performance and boasts greater sensitivity than any previous Arcam model. This is the first RDS design from Arcam and also features RadioText – a scrolling information service offering news updates as well as track information. The T61 also has 30 FM presets, a signal strength meter to help aerial set-up and switchable mains voltage so it can be used internationally. It's available in both black and silver and it's in the shops now.
☎ Arcam 01223 203203

TAKEAWAY DVD-A ONE-BOX DVD-A/V PACKAGE

Yamaha's new DVX-S100 system is a one-box DVD-Audio compatible AV solution incorporating a DVD-A/V player/receiver and a svelte 5.1 channel speaker system. The receiver boasts on-board Dolby Digital and DTS decoding and employs 24-bit/192 kHz audio and 54MHz Video DACs. Yamaha claims the DVX-S100 sports the world's most sophisticated Cinema DSP, with 21 surround sound programmes which it says are better than the sound in many theatres. The package is priced at £600 and is available now.
☎ Yamaha Electronics 01923 233166

Yamaha DVX-S100



X-TUBE™

AIRCORE™ TECHNOLOGY SPEAKER CABLE



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

X-TUBE by QED, NATURALLY.

QED



QED Audio Products Ltd.

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

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

TEN CHANNEL TAG

TAG MCLAREN'S TEN CHANNEL AMP

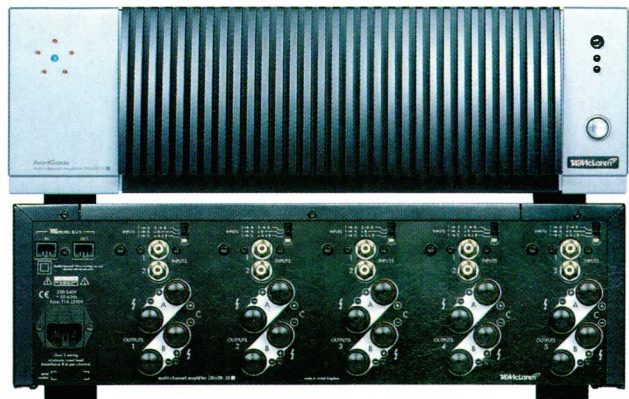
Five channels not enough for you? How about 10? TAG McLaren's latest power amp supplies up to 10 channels of amplification in a single box, thanks to a newly developed 2x80 watt amp module that may be added to the 120 watt mono modules in the brand's existing five-channel amp - the 100x5R. The new 10-channel version is called the 100x5R:10 and enables users to obtain full 7.1 surround sound as well

as giving the option to bi-amp or bridge unused channels and provide the flexibility to cope with any future formats that may emerge.

The full ten-channel version costs £4,720, and the new modules may be added to existing 100x5Rs to upgrade as required. In true *Spinal Tap* tradition, surely it's only a matter of time before someone produces an amp that goes up to 11?

TAG McLaren 01480 415600

TAG McLaren 100x5R:10



Soundbites

DENON has a new version of its flagship multichannel amp. The £3,000, 29kg AVC-A1SR boasts a huge complement of features, with every decoding format to date on board. It is also claimed to be the first commercial product with a 24-bit/192kHz digital link (from the DVD-A1 DVD-A/V player reviewed last month), enabling full-bandwidth multichannel audio to be transferred in the digital domain. Denon will have to duke that one out with Meridian... the AVC-A1SR is reviewed next month.
 01234 741 200

LINN Klout owners can take advantage of a special promotion from Linn running until 30 September. The offer gives Klout owners a guaranteed trade-in value against the purchase of a Klimax Twin amplifier. Owners are encouraged to try the Klout against a Klimax - given the option we'd go for a Klimax any day!
 0141 307 7777

Hi-Fi diary

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

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

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



WATTS UP WILSON'S NEW PUPPY

US loudspeaker designer David Wilson has unveiled the latest version of the esteemed WATT loudspeaker. The new WATT/Puppy System 7 is a descendent of the original WATT, launched in 1986. It boasts many improvements including a new cabinet material that is said to reduce coloration and a new woofer claimed to improve bass extension and transient speed. Further modifications include an improved crossover network and subtle cosmetic changes. Available in a range of colours, it retails for an eye-watering £22,490.
 Absolute Sounds
 020 8971 3909

M-S GOES MULTIROOM

MORDAUNT-SHORT ANNOUNCES OPUS SYSTEM

Mordaunt-Short is no longer just a speaker manufacturer - it is moving into multiroom with its new Opus system. Opus is designed to be a low-cost four zone system featuring an AV amp-sized master control unit, linking to one of three remote room amps and five different styles of in-wall speakers, all driven from standard light switch-sized control panels. The entry-level Opus AMP20 room amp takes its power from the master unit. The four main zones can be extended up

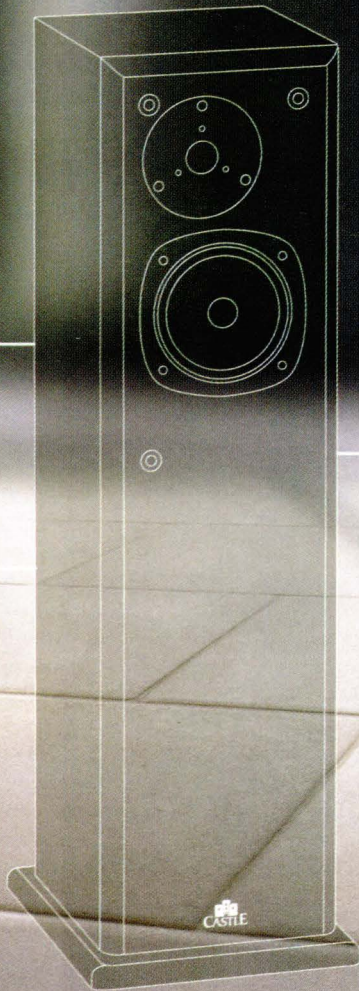
to 24 zones and 24 sub-zones if required and video switching is expected to follow soon. Prices start at around £3,500 for three rooms. The forthcoming Marantz DH9300 hard disc recorder is also designed to interface specifically with the Mordaunt-Short master unit.

Mordaunt-Short is also launching revised speakers in the 900 series. The £200 MS902 standmount and £300 MS904 floorstander now sport larger 165mm aluminium continuous profile cone bass units

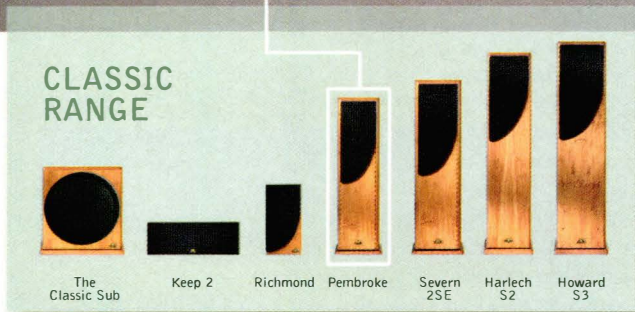


along with their 25mm aluminium dome tweeters, have a suggested sensitivity of 89dB and a nominal impedance between 4-8 ohms and claim to reach down to 55Hz and 50Hz respectively.
 Mordaunt-Short 020 7940 2240

See, hear and feel the Castle difference



Pembroke: Yew veneer



With a selection of 7 models and 9 beautiful real wood finishes, there's a lot of choices to make. But when you realise there's a Castle loudspeaker to suit most rooms and high fidelity aspirations, including AV applications, you'll come to appreciate the Castle difference. Go create the best looking sound around.



Castle Acoustics Limited, Park Mill, Shortbank Road, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 2TT, England.
Tel. +44 (0)1756 795333 Fax. +44 (0)1756 795335 Email: sales@castleacoustics.co.uk www.castle.uk.com



MEMOREX MULTI-BURNER

PC toting AV fetishists will have a field day with Memorex's new DVD recorder for the PC. Along with writing to DVD+RW and +R, the new burner is an 8x speed DVD-ROM, 32x speed CD-ROM, 10x CD-RW and 12x CD-R drive.

One of the first units to record and rewrite DVD+

media, the Memorex will retail for £400 and comes with a full version of Roxio's VideoPack 5 multimedia authoring software.

Memorex DVD+R and +RW blank media each hold 4.7Gb of data and retail at £35 and £40 for a pack of five.

www.memorexlive.com

HI-RES STONES

ABKCO Records in the US is to release 22 early Rolling Stones albums on SACD over the coming months, the first large scale offering from a major artist in a high resolution digital disc format. Titles including *Let It Bleed* and *Beggar's Banquet* as well as compilations such as *Hot Rocks* and *Singles Collection: The London Years*, will be issued on stereo SACD. Rather than go for the expense and often less than convincing results that stereo originals tend to produce when remixed into surround, ABKCO has opted for the format that most audiophiles will be familiar with. Maybe they'll include mono versions of the really early stuff for maximum authenticity, but don't hold your breath!

This release should do a lot to bring the format to the general public's attention, and should help the cause of high resolution audio in general.



'SILENT' MOVIES

Two of the latest DVD blockbusters are not producing a Dolby Digital 5.1 surround track with certain home cinema amplifiers. *Pearl Harbour* and *Jurassic Park III* cause the Cirrus Logic chipsets to mute the DD surround sound.

Amplifiers affected include models from Kenwood, Denon and Onkyo, the latter being worst hit with most of its amps affected. Denon's AVR-1602/1802 and Kenwood's KRFX-9050D are likewise problematic. Onkyo and Denon are currently working with

Dolby to find a solution, one option mooted being a black box to place between DVD player and amp! Kenwood is telling owners of the KRFX-9050D to take it back to their dealers who'll fit a replacement chip.

This clash appears to have been caused by new encoding technology that incorporates flags relating to DD EX surround information. Dolby has asked content providers not to include these flags on new titles so this glitch should not reoccur.

PLAY DO'

Dolby's efforts on the gaming front have born fruit with a variety of applications at this year's E3 (games industry) show.

Dolby Pro Logic II surround sound has been incorporated into new Nintendo GameCube titles. Dolby Headphone processing was in action at the SEGA booth and the Dolby Pro Logic II Interactive Content Encoder has been incorporated into Criterion's *RenderWare Audio* on the PlayStation 2. So put a guard on your home cinema - if your kids get hold of it, you'll never get it back!

RECYCLE

Brussels bureaucrats have come up with a new scheme to make buying hi-fi more expensive. The proposed EU Directive on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment which is due to be implemented in two to three year's time, covers plans for the collection and disposal of electrical and electronic waste. The cost of this process will either be paid for by manufacturer or consumers but the amount involved is still not clear. Ultimately it will relate to the actual cost of recycling the individual component so the more recycling-friendly the material, the lower the cost. In Germany and Holland this levy is displayed as a visible fee on the price of the product, so the customer knows what the price increase is for.

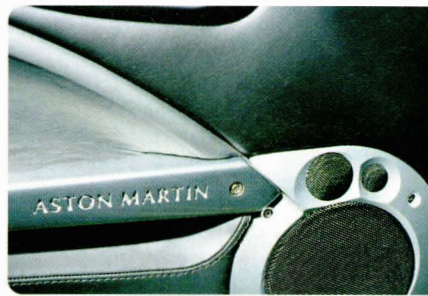
DIY DVD-A

Discwelder Steel is basic DVD-Audio mastering software for the PC that allows users to create high resolution discs. The software can be used with any linear PCM format supported in the DVD-A specification, including non-encoded surround with up to six channels (at 24-bit/48kHz) and/or 24/192 stereo. Combined surround and stereo tracks can only be burned in WAV or AIFF formats. You need a separate DVD-R burner to make the actual discs but these will play in any DVD-A player that supports the format, which as far as we know is all of them. Made by Minnetonka, the Audio Software Discwelder Steel costs £333.

www.minnetonkaaudio.com

FASTER LINN

Linn is reaping the first fruits of its brand partnership with luxury car specialist Aston Martin. At the recent Home Entertainment show in New York, Linn demonstrated an Aston Martin Vanquish fitted with a Linn 12.1 amp and loud-speaker system, a package that will be offered to Vanquish customers later this year. We gather that 12.1 is the amount of speaker drive units plus a sub rather than a giant leap forward in discrete surround technology.



Incoming

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



NAD C320BEE stereo amp £220 EXCLUSIVE

While the C320BEE is the great, great, great grandchild of NAD's original big success story (the 3020, see box), it is also a refinement of the C320 it replaces.

Changes include an increase in power from 40 to 50 watts per channel, improved tone control accuracy and the use of a better quality volume control. NAD favourites such as soft clipping, for smoother sound at high levels, and tone defeat are joined by features to aid multiroom use such as infrared in and outs for room-to-room remote control and a 12 volt trigger output that can be used to switch on other components as the amp itself is switched on. The new remote is a nice ergonomic design, though the fact that it operates other NAD amps means that not all buttons are relevant. But if you have a NAD CD player, say, it's handy to run source and amp from the same stick.

In practice, this latest progeny is a very competent and entertaining device

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ System remote handset also controls NAD tuners and CD players
- ▶ 50 watts per channel continuous power
- ▶ 12V trigger and external remote control sockets
- ▶ Defeatable tone controls
- ▶ Soft clipping
- ▶ 5 line inputs, 2 tape loops
- ▶ Preamp output and power amp input
- ▶ Headphone socket

that should prove equal to the task of driving the majority of budget loudspeakers. We used Cyrus CL50s, which while not exactly a budget design, offer a similar load to the breed at the same time as revealing a bit more about the performance of the amp driving them. The only tonal aberration the combo produces is a slight emphasis on the upper bass, an effect that's been used with other budget amps with good results. There's no shortage of bass depth – in fact, the NAD outperformed a more powerful design in this respect. It's just that you get a slightly fuller sound for your money.

The C320BEE seems to suit a variety of musical styles well, a bit of Schuman piano being rendered with colour, tempo and attack while the somewhat less profound *Purple Pills* by D12 loses none of its impact, lyrics and beat, sounding just about as whacked out as it needs to. This is an energetic little amp, perhaps a little overly so for some

tastes, but along with likely sources and speakers this is no bad thing.

It certainly works well with both heavy rock like Tool and heavy-ish, choral works like the Guadeamus *Sacred Feast* SACD, a disc with which the amp can show off its skills in the imaging department to good effect.

Since the original NAD 3020 the rest of the hi-fi world has taken up the challenge and built a number of great budget amps, yet at this price it's hard to imagine anything giving this new NAD a hard time. Like its ancestor, this is a great starting point if you want to know what real hi-fi is all about.

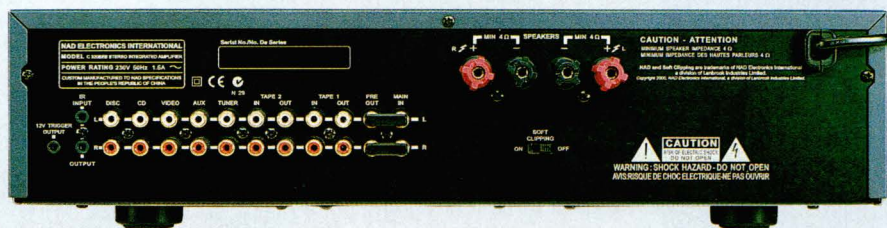
☎ Lenbrook UK 01908 319360

🌐 www.lenbrook.co.uk

NADstory

NAD made its name with a budget amp that put the genre on the hi-fi map. The 3020 was launched in 1978 and carved itself something of a legendary status over the following years – its high rating in our *Hi-Fi That Rocked The World* feature on page 43 being a testament to its legacy. Its success launched a myriad imitators and spawned a succession of NAD integrations whose lineage continues to this day with the C320BEE. This suffix is the initials of the man who designed the original 3020 – Bjorn Erik Edvardsen, who is still with the company heading up Advanced Developments, and created this latest incarnation. They might as well call him Mr NAD!

“At this price the new NAD is a great starting point if you want to know what real hi-fi is all about.”



★★★★☆

Cabasse Caprera speakers £790 EXCLUSIVE

➤ Cabasse may not have a huge presence in the UK but the French company's heritage dates back 50-odd years. French tastes are arguably not dissimilar to ours and many of the French brands that we've heard err on the forgiving side, with this model being no exception.

The Caprera forms part of the MT352 range of speakers, characterised by its two distinctive white cones made from an aeronautics-derived material called Doucell. These cones are sited in a 'd'appolito' configuration, with two mid/bass drivers straddling the tweeter, putting crucial treble output at ear-level. The floorstanding cabinet sits on a thick plinth into which spikes may be fitted and despite the near £800 per pair price tag, it's finished in rather nondescript-looking vinyl. Only single wiring is accommodated and the reflex port is front facing, flush to the rather odd, leather-look, plastic covered baffle. Finish gripes aside, it's fair to assume

that money saved has gone into producing the Doucell drivers at the Cabasse factory in Brest.

With a stream of Yes flooding from the cones, the Caprera immediately flaunts its 92dB sensitivity, giving welcome loudness at lower levels. The sound is clean and laid back, with a warmth that characterises an easy-going balance – a weighty sound that loves to play loud without ever losing its cool. It may not wow everyone with its finish and relaxed sonics, but musically there are no nasty surprises.

📞 Audio Reference
01252 702705
🌐 www.audio-reference.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 8 ohm impedance
- ▶ 20.8kg weight
- ▶ Lifetime guarantee
- ▶ Dimensions 22x98x38cm
- ▶ Two-way reflex-loaded loudspeakers
- ▶ 92dB sensitivity
- ▶ Choice of finishes



★★★★☆

JVC XV-FA92SL DVD-Audio/Video player £400

➤ You have to admire the JVC XV-FA92SL. This is a seven-disc DVD player in a case – and at a price – not much larger than a mass-market single-disc DVD player of two years ago. The carousel transport means changing discs happens at majestic speeds, but it's faster and less clunky than the glacial speed CD autochangers of old.

Everything is designed for ease of use, although more video connections would be useful. Remarkably, the remote control has hardly any more buttons than a standard JVC handset. This is thanks to the on-screen menu

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Seven-disc DVD-Audio/Video player
- ▶ Supports Video CD, CD-R/RW and CD
- ▶ MP3 replay
- ▶ Built-in Dolby Digital and DTS decoder
- ▶ PAL/NTSC
- ▶ S-Video outputs
- ▶ Scart socket
- ▶ Optical and electrical digital outputs
- ▶ Multichannel audio outputs

system, which makes disc and set-up navigation a doddle.

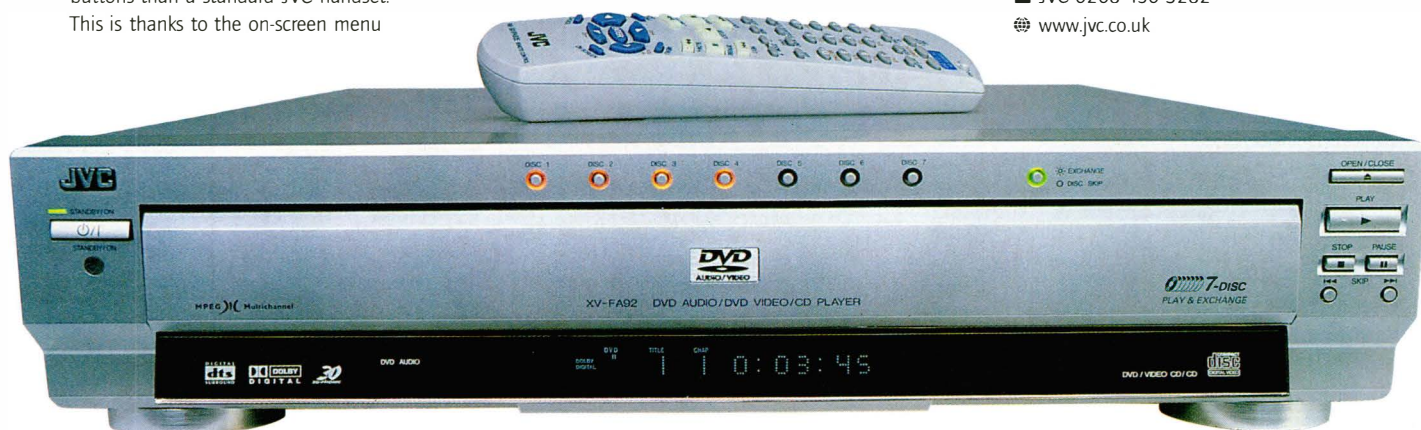
SACD aside, the JVC has everything as standard. Dolby Digital, DTS and MLP-embedded DVD-Audio can be played through the 5.1 analogue outputs, stereo MP3 and CD audio are covered and the two digital audio outputs can output anything barring high resolution DVD-Audio.

CD audio through the FA92 is lacklustre; even up-front music like The Strokes sounds bland. It fares better on

DVD-Audio and Video – while the video performance tends to the cartoon-like, the sound has good coherence from channel to channel and is perfectly fine with syrupy DVD mixes like *Moulin Rouge*. But it's not good enough to really distinguish DVD-A discs from the DVD-Video variety: *Toy Matinee* didn't have the magical space heard through the best DVD-A players.

Hardly an audiophile's dream then, but a seven disc changer with DVD-A playback is still impressive at £400.

📞 JVC 0208 450 3282
🌐 www.jvc.co.uk



★★★★☆

Yamaha RX-V530RDS AV receiver £370 **EXCLUSIVE**

➤ No AV amp or receiver brand can survive out Dolby Pro-Logic II and ColorStream (component) video inputs today. The Yamaha RX-V530RDS is a prime example. This 5x 65-watt not-quite-entry level model comes with both. If it didn't, it simply wouldn't sell, even though ColorStream isn't common on European TV sets.

This is a basic model by today's standards. It has a six-channel input for DVD-Audio or SACD, but no six-channel outputs. Likewise, it has a coaxial digital input (for CD) and a single

toslink output, but the main DVD link is optical only. There are only a handful of inputs and outputs, but it has enough to cover the audio and AV bases. Strangely, just one of the video inputs lacks an S-Video input.

That distinctive warm, rich and dark Yamaha sound is in full effect on the '530. It's pleasant enough, but doesn't delve into the hidden detail on a music disc, be it a CD or one of the newer formats. It's very much a surround sound product; the smooth balance from channel to channel that makes it

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ AV receiver
- ▶ 5.1 channel sound
- ▶ Claimed power 5x 65W RMS
- ▶ Dolby Digital, DTS, Dolby Pro-Logic II
- ▶ Proprietary Cinema DSP processing
- ▶ Silent Cinema surround headphones
- ▶ RDS tuner
- ▶ Preset remote control
- ▶ ColorStream component video inputs and outputs

so attractive with even brightly lit soundtracks like *Terminator 2* sounds blunted on two-channel discs. It's especially noticeable with strong vocals; PJ Harvey's anger sounds less determined, turning rage-rock into peevish-rock.

Yamaha has a good, basic AV amp in the RX-V530. It will work well with the occasional CD and is OK for those looking for a budget introduction to multichannel music. Stereo fans will need to keep looking though.

☎ Yamaha 01923 233166
 🌐 www.yamaha-audio.co.uk



★★★★☆

Exposure 2010 FM/MW radio tuner £499 **EXCLUSIVE**

➤ Exposure's new tuner completes the stylish 2010 line-up that also comprises CD player and stereo amp, both of which have been very well received at Choice Towers. DAB-shy music lovers aren't exactly spoilt for choice with new tuners at present, so the opportunity to buy a good-looking FM tuner with such clean lines should arouse delight among analogue lovers.

The 2010 has a cool, blue LED display that reveals frequency information when scanning the airwaves and the

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ FM/MW analogue tuner
- ▶ RDS option
- ▶ 20 presets
- ▶ Automatically displays station name
- ▶ Stereo/mono mode
- ▶ Titanium or black finish
- ▶ Optional 2010 system remote control (€60)

station name when located. Internally, Burr-Brown op-amps are used in the audio output stage and all the electronics are housed in aluminium casework with a thick, brushed aluminium faceplate finished to a good standard. There are minimal connections at the rear, with one pair of audio outputs and aerial connections for AM and FM wires. Twenty presets make it easy to find your favourite stations and storing them requires a simple button-push.

With high-quality orchestral output from Radio 3, the 2010 delivers music with drama and detail intact, and certainly proved a more satisfying listen than a comparable DAB tuner we were listening to at test time. Its likeable balance, bordering on the lean side, means Wogan fans won't be overpowered by those lush, chesty, Irish tones. Sometimes it seems to lack dynamics, sounding a little flat even with stations with limited compression, but it's always musical and easy on the ear.

Overall, this is a good choice for existing Exposure users or radio fans with one eye on style, the other on substance. But if you want remote control you'll have to pay an extra €60 for Exposure's system handset.

☎ 01273 423877
 🌐 www.exposurehifi.com





★★★★★

Tannoy ST50 **EXCLUSIVE** SuperTweeter £600

➤ The advent of SACD and DVD-Audio, with their increased sample rates and expanded frequency range has led to a dilemma for many of us: how to take advantage of this greater resolution and supposed quality increase without sacrificing the hardware (and the hard-earned it took to buy it) that we already own.

Enter Tannoy – a white knight to the rescue. Or, rather, a black aluminium one with 25mm titanium dome. The British loudspeaker company has launched a new, more affordable ‘SuperTweeter’ that acts as a ‘plug-in’ upgrade for your existing speakers,

SUPERTWEETERS

The ‘super tweeter’ concept isn’t that new, but the advent of wide bandwidth SACD and DVD-Audio brought it to the fore. Until then, a frequency response of 54kHz or more was ostensibly redundant – there simply wasn’t the digital software around to take advantage of it. The ST50 uses an extremely stiff titanium dome tweeter so that there’s no sound break-up at these incredibly high levels. A Neodymium magnet is used within each unit to reduce eddy current losses within the voice coil – this also increases the theoretical maximum frequencies attained.

extending the frequency response of your system up to an impressive 54kHz – well beyond the normal limits of human hearing. The ST50 sits at the lower end of a product range that also includes the ST100 and the ST200, though at £600 per pair it’s hardly an impulse buy. Sitting on top of your existing stereo pair of speakers, they phase in at anywhere between 14 and 18kHz – as dictated by you via a slotted turn-knob on top of each SuperTweeter.

Set-up is remarkably straightforward – using a pair of cables supplied by Tannoy, you link a pair of SuperTweeters to your existing speakers’ binding posts. You then set the sensitivity to match your speakers (again via a slotted turn-knob) and you’re off. A good, hard run-in is necessary – 20 hours or so is recommended by Tannoy – though after that you’re in a position to experience extended resolution sound and a host of sonic improvements to boot.

The effect that the SuperTweeter has is, to be frank, a very strange one. As well as adding increased airiness and breadth to the high frequencies, it also manages to drop the bass floor and tighten up the midrange too. Lord knows how, but by letting the SuperTweeters handle the upper limits of your hi-fi reproduction, it’s almost as

KEY FEATURES

- Frequency response: to 54kHz, usable output (-18dB) to 100kHz
- Driver type: 25mm titanium dome with neodymium magnet
- Dimensions: 150mm diameter
- Weight: 0.75kg each
- Frequency cross-over: 14, 16 or 18kHz
- Recommended amp power: up to 200W
- Rated sensitivity: 93dB
- Nominal impedance: 8 ohms



if your speakers find the energy and control to make the rest of the sonic equation sound sharper and more focussed. Not brash, or bright, or wearing, but more even and controlled. They need to be matched – with some speakers and some music types a touch of brightness does creep in. But as a relatively affordable upgrade for good speakers that you simply don’t want to exchange, the benefits the ST50 can bring to your system’s sound should not be ignored.

☎ Tannoy 01236 420199
🌐 www.tannoy.com

Instant upgrades

We examine some 'miracle' cures for your system's woes



Tommy Larsen CD-Lift £8

It's an executive toy, it's a fashion accessory for the iMac generation – it's a doofer for handling CDs without fingerprints. Unnecessary? Perhaps not: studies have shown a distinct increase in error rates off a CD due to careless removal from its jewel case, and this gadget definitely bends the disc less than one might by pulling it from its case unaided. Avoiding fingerprints is good news too, even on the label side of a disc. On the other hand, using the CD-LIFT to pick up a disc from a CD player tray risks straining the tray because of the force (not much, but enough) required to depress the suction button in the middle of the device. But it's a great stocking-filler for the audiophile who has everything, a nice little audio ornament and serves a practical purpose: go on, treat yourself!

Activ Distribution 01256 889880

www.audiofilecandy.com



Thor TFT optical interconnect £25 (1.5m)

The audiophile digital connection of choice typically remains electrical rather than optical, but one doesn't always have the choice. This optical lead comes with a pair of miniplug adapters, allowing it to be used with portable components that have an optical output from the same hole as the headphone socket. It also features some particularly nice metal-bodied plugs, and quotes low signal loss which help keep jitter low. Actually, there is an issue with metal plugs: yes, they look and feel good and might survive if you stand on them, but their weight tends to make them hang at an angle in the socket, which can have an effect on signal attenuation. Be that as it may, this lead sounded as good as any optical lead we could find and seems robustly made. At this price it seems excellent value.

Philex 08457 573479

www.philex.com

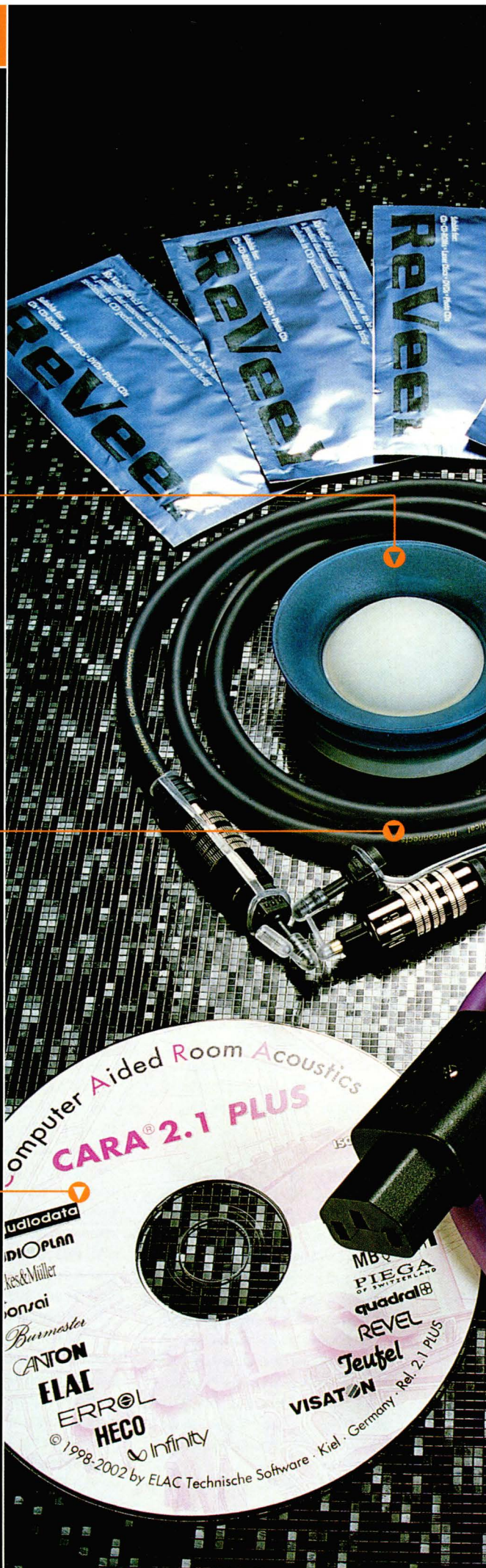


ELAC 'CARA' (Computer-Aided Room Acoustics) £30 (training disc £13)

For thirty notes you might not expect much software. Wrong! This is a fantastically complex bit of computer-aided design which will allow you to specify in the greatest detail your listening room and the loudspeakers that reside within it, and then model the results of the whole lot. The idea is to help you optimise speaker position. With a stereo system, given how long it takes to learn how to use this software and then input the relevant data, trial and error might in many cases be quicker. With surround sound systems however, the power of the PC (and you'll need a lot – think minutes rather than seconds for processing even on the fastest machines) can help. Even so, acoustic modelling is a notoriously tricky art... Considering what it does, this is amazing value, but only the most dedicated and computer-fixated audiophile will want to explore its fullest potential.

Reflex Labs 020 7079 2047

www.reflexlabs.com





Revel CD cleaner £13 for 20

▶ Cleaning fingerprints and dust off old CDs seems sensible enough, but what of Revel's claims to improve brand new CDs? Allegedly, mould release agents and other contaminants affect the surface of new discs, causing an increase in jitter on most players (ideally CD players would cope perfectly but it ain't necessarily so). Having several boxes of identical brand new CDs on hand, we took a few samples and cleaned half of them. The cleaned ones looked very slightly shinier under a light and sounded just a touch more detailed on both a recent Rotel and a more mature Marantz, though differences were certainly not night and day. However, given the modest cost of these moist wipes, and the fact that they will in practice clean more than the claimed five discs each – and your glasses! – they seem well worth a try. Best use a microfibre cloth rather than kitchen paper (which can be scratchy) for drying.

☎ Russ Andrews Accessories 01539 825500

🌐 www.russandrews.com



Isotek Isoplug mains noise suppressor £25

▶ Isotek's range includes monstrously large mains treatment units that can output several kVA. This diminutive device, however, is unusual in that it is designed to be sited away from the actual hi-fi system. Place it as close as possible, Isotek suggests, to any device that may generate mains noise and it will 'swallow' the noise and prevent it from travelling round the ring main to your sensitive audio kit. Inside the box is a collection of noise filtering devices connected so as to ensure that minimal noise exists between live, neutral and earth wires. Plug an Isoplug into the next socket to your fridge, washing machine, TV, electronically dimmed lights and so on and it can have a beneficial effect not only in preventing audible clicks but in removing background 'hash' which clouds detail. Short of getting inside your household appliances and applying the filtering right at source (not recommended for safety reasons) this is probably the most effective low-cost way of dealing with the problem – recommended.

☎ Activ Distribution, 01256 889880

🌐 www.isoteksystems.com



Ecosse Reference 'Big Purple Power Chord' mains cable £60.00 (0.8m)

▶ Compared with many specialist mains cables, this one is much more practical and less inclined to follow its own path. It achieves its flexibility by using finely stranded conductors (enough of them to pass plenty of current safely – Ecosse rates it for amps up to 200 watts per channel) and PVC insulation. Those materials are used in £2 IEC cables, but Ecosse adds value by employing oxygen-free copper and high quality connectors on the ends. There are some apparent sonic differences between this cable and mass-produced stuff, but not very obvious ones. Perhaps the perceived noise floor drops just the tiniest amount, allowing a little more detail through, but nothing comes close to jaw-dropping. As is so often the case with mains wire, it isn't immediately obvious whether it is a real improvement or the mere existence of some kind of 'difference' that stands out. As a system upgrade it is worth a try, but it's debatable whether its effect on audio performance is worth the £60 outlay.

☎ Ecosse Reference Cables 0141 353 0509

🌐 www.ecossecables.co.uk



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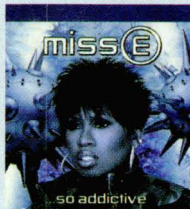
ChoiceCuts



Our favourite musical morsels, old and new

Reviews by Tim Bower, Jim Findlay, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Paul Messenger

NEW MUSIC FORMATS



MISSY ELLIOTT

Miss E... So Addictive
DVD-Audio multichannel
Elektra

Music: The album that features last year's hit *Get Ur Freak On* is now available on DVD-A and really makes the most of the format. Musically it covers the bases from soul to funk with some rap thrown in for good measure – the lyrics are sassy, the message straightforward, and the music exceptional. The stuff behind the voices is down to Elliott's partner Timbaland, a man whose beats define a genre in themselves. Always interesting and rarely obvious they are dynamic, lively and totally fresh. The hit is good but tracks like *Lick Shots* and *Slap!Slap!Slap!* are a lot better. Unfortunately, this American import has been heavily censored and all the borderline lyrics have been reversed (I isht you not) or completely omitted. **★★★★☆**

Sound: This is currently my reference surround disc, the only one around that uses multichannel imaginatively. It also sounds absolutely gorgeous – significantly better than the CD with lovely growling bass synth and some great shape-shifting effects. **★★★★☆ JK**



FAURÉ, DEBUSSY & RAVEL PIANO TRIOS

The Florestan Trio
SACD stereo
Hyperion SACDA67114

Music: This disc is one of the earliest SACD releases, and it remains one of the best. Although relatively new, the Florestan is already one of the leading chamber trios, and its reputation can only be enhanced by the meticulous yet lively performances of these three French piano trios. The Debussy is a juvenile work – 'salon music' in the words of the disc notes – but the other two are substantial pieces, the Ravel in particular being a subtle and engaging work of real sophistication. **★★★★☆**

Sound: Recorded at the Henry Wood Hall, and engineered by Tony Faulkner, this stereo recording is remarkably lifelike and three dimensional, the SACD layer adding substance and refinement to an already very good basic CD sound. **★★★★☆ AG**



MOFRO

Blackwater
DVD-Audio stereo
Hi-Res

Music: Hi-Res is a small American label that's remastering a range of two-channel classics as well as newer productions on DVD-Audio. MOFRO is a contemporary white five piece from Florida with a penchant for funky grooves and great keyboard sounds. The music gets jazzy in places and is reminiscent of Sly Stone in others – if you can imagine the Red Hot Chili Peppers jamming with The Band in a swamp then you've some imagination, but that's as close a description as you'll get! There's humour and nostalgia, even humility on show here and it's finely honed, seventies-influenced stuff. **★★★★☆**

Sound: Remastered from a 44.1kHz/24-bit original, this is rich, deep and warm with some lovely instrumental tone and heavy bass. The sound has shape and colour and is never short on weight. But this is more about feel than fidelity and if you like your groove deep you should check this out. **★★★★☆ JK**

CD/VINYL



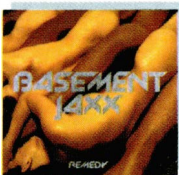
ANTON WEBERN

Passacaglia, Symphony, Five Pieces
Ulster Orchestra, Takuo Yuasa (cond)

Naxos 8.554841

Music: Adjectives like austere and compressed are often used for Webern, who was one third of the Second Viennese school, with Schoenberg and Berg. Webern was not exactly prolific, and this disc presents an excellent overview of his output, which can be hard work at first, but which soon becomes oddly compelling. The music, much of it using an eclectic mixture of classical, serial and atonal techniques, is sparse in the extreme, the predominantly short pieces having a rapt, almost jewel-like intensity. **★★★★☆**

Sound: The orchestra sounds ripe and clear, with a strong sense of space and depth complementing a performance that is everything you could wish for. At just a fiver, this is a real bargain. **★★★★☆ AG**



BASEMENT JAXX

Remedy

XL

Music: Though not the latest from Basement Jaxx, Remedy has the edge over *Toots*, and is a fine mix of housey dance tracks, put together with imagination, skill and style.

It's a lightweight affair musically (though not sonically). It doesn't take itself too seriously and is crammed with good humour and wit, mixing up a winningly eclectic pot-pourri of samples and influences from all sorts of sources and genres. **★★★★☆**

Sound: It also has some of the best bass around – very handy for assessing subwoofers. Apparently, one of Basement Jaxx used to work in leading London hi-fi retailer The Cornflake Shop, which maybe helps explain why it sounds so good. **★★★★☆ PM**



MÚM

Finally We Are No One

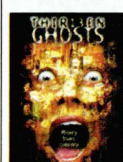
Fat Cat

Music: I think I've just drifted in love. I couldn't help it – it was the music. A strangely beautiful brew, an other-worldly concoction of synth digitalia and warm organic sounds, a thing that flows like liquid electronica and drips through the mind with playful intent. Think Björk in ambient mode, but purer, more innocent, less mannered. Other kindred spirits might include Boards of Canada and Röyksopp, but comparisons are vague at best. This is music with a spirit of its own, spacious and atmospheric, kooky and charming. And made by twins from Iceland. What's not to love? **★★★★☆**

Sound: Pretty simple stuff and all the better for it. Gorgeous electronic sounds, clever use of space and reverb effects, subtly mixed with real instruments like accordions and cellos, and whispered female vocals. **★★★★☆ TB**

CINEMA SELECTION

THIRTEEN GHOSTS



Columbia

Film: This remake of a 1960 horror flick does little with the plot but makes up for it with a superb display of technical showboating.

The premise is that recently deceased rich nutter Cyrus Kriticos bequeaths a house that doubles as a ghost-powered time machine to his Joe-Public relatives who've recently lost their mum. Thing is, the spirits lined up to fuel it are all a bit narky. The family go to the house and... well, have a guess. **★★★☆☆**

Sound & Vision: Despite the inadequacies of plot, script and cast, the production values are stunning. The picture is absolutely razor sharp, with the awesome, CGI-heavy effects coming across splendidly. The sound is also masterfully mixed, with all sorts of things creeping up behind and around you. A potentially poor film is saved by superb production values. **★★★☆☆ JF**

The world according to REL

INTERVIEW: David Vivian

REL supremo Richard Lord is evangelical about bass, so much so that his company is a shrine to the philosophy of tightly controlled low end – especially the bits you can't hear...

Bass. Touchy subject. I once asked Ross Walker of Quad why his company's electrostatic speakers didn't produce more of it. "If people want more bass," he said, "they can kick a cardboard box in time to the music."



Ross sounded like a man who was scared of bass. A man who had seen attempts to augment the low frequencies of the ESL and rated them less good than cardboard and shoe leather. He was right. No bass is better than boom and thump.

Good bass, on the other hand, is hi-fi's greatest hit. You know when you're in the presence of the real stuff. It ripples through your soul. That's because the really important bit is the bit you can't hear.

I know this because Richard Lord told me. This man has got the reproduction of deep bass so down (in every sense of the word) that just as many serious music lovers as sensation-seeking home cinema buffs beat a path to his door. Richard made his first subwoofer in his garden shed 12 years ago. Today he owns REL, probably the most respected maker of 'sub-bass systems' on the planet.

"I don't like the word 'subwoofer' because it's got connotations of 'boom', says Richard, with a passion that's startling even for a native of Bridgend in South Wales where getting things off your chest comes naturally. "I hate it. I hate boomy bass. It's got to be clean, tight, controlled, involving, emotional, tactile."

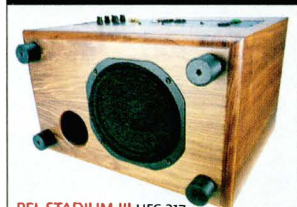
And deep. Deeper than distant thunder. Deeper than Darius's voice. Deep even to the point of inaudibility.

"There is an argument as to

whether you should have genuinely deep bass," muses the lord of the sonic underworld. "But from my point of view, there is no argument. The Studio III (REL's largest subwoofer - see page 24) goes down to nine hertz in-room.

It's obvious because in music there is no bandwidth limitation. We impose it out of necessity, for practical reasons. My philosophy is to build a sub that truly does work below audibility, putting in those missing frequencies."

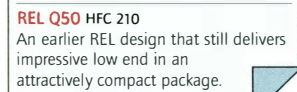
Past Glories



REL STADIUM III HFC 217
Bulky, but nice, the Stadium III is very much aimed at hi-fi rather than home cinema buffs with its superior low end filtering.



REL STORM III HFC 225
Very well specified and excellent value sub with strong detail and, need we say it, deeeep bass.



REL Q50 HFC 210
An earlier REL design that still delivers impressive low end in an attractively compact package.

HOW LOW NEED YOU GO?

My assumption that if you haven't got a big listening room you're wasting your time is quickly corrected by Richard.

"Obviously a large room is better. But, surprisingly, you can pressure drive even the smallest room. Strangely, the larger the REL you put in that small room, the better the control. You can put a Studio III in a very small room (I've done it – say, 12 by ten feet) and it will work perfectly. You can feel the bass – because it's pressure driving the room. After all, you can get deep bass in a car, or with headphones."

So where does low midrange end and real bass start?

"Just above 40 hertz," fires back Richard, without having to think about it. "Everyone's got their own opinion here but most speakers go down to 40 hertz. Some will go down a bit lower but, generally speaking,



Industry Profile

“Anyone who’s listened to a perfectly set up REL sub will know the score. The midrange opens up and the soundstage deepens. There’s a greater sense of clarity, detail and presence.”

REL’s business starts at 40.”

Then dives, dives, dives.

“The first thing that sets a REL apart from every other sub on the market to my knowledge,” Richard explains, “is that our filtering goes well below audibility in its range of adjustment. For example, the typical sub will go from maybe 40 hertz to 150 hertz. But ours have a much more limited range. The Q-series extends up to 106 hertz. The ST range goes from 22 up to 96 hertz. Some might ask why it doesn’t go higher. There’s no need. There isn’t a pair of speakers on the market that won’t go down below 96 hertz unless you’re talking of cheap plastic satellites. Very rarely to you need to go above 30-33 hertz. If you go much higher either you’ve got the wrong speakers or the wrong pair of ears.”

BRILLIANT CORNERS

My second misconception is that the corner of a room is just about the worst place you could put a sub. According to Richard, it’s the best.

“If you were talking about a normal pair of speakers, the corner would be the worst place. You’d bring it out from the corner to avoid energising the room. However, we’re talking about a sub bass system that works below the room’s eigentones (the resonant modes of the room). And because RELs have this active bass controller that allows them to be set well below even the largest room’s eigentones, there

isn’t a problem. By putting it in the corner, you pressure drive the room most effectively. In fact, it’s quite critical, the positioning. A few inches wrong and you lose something.”

Get it right, though, and something almost magical happens. Anyone who’s listened to a perfectly set up REL sub will know the score. The midrange opens up and the soundstage deepens. There’s a greater sense of clarity, detail and presence.

“The sense of acoustic depth, the holographic imaging, space appears around instruments,” adds Richard. “It’s uncanny.

“Until you’ve experienced it, it’s like trying to describe a colour to a blind person. It’s impossible, you have to experience it. But once experienced, it’s addictive. You never want to go back.”

You can contact REL on:

☎ 01656 768 777

🌐 www.rel.net

Turn over for a review of REL’s new high end Studio III sub-bass system.

Future RELs

THE QUAKE

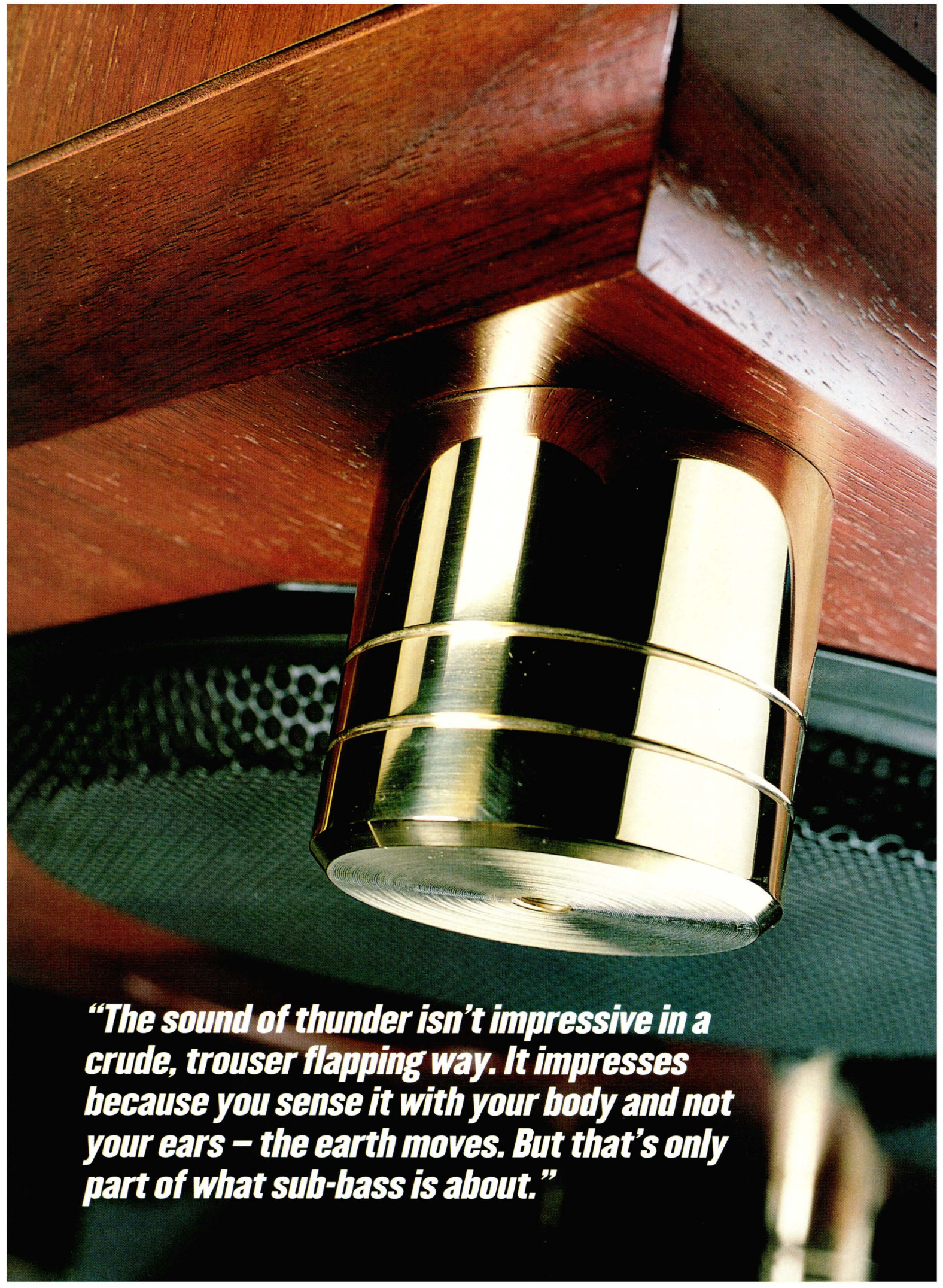
The next REL launches in August. It’s smaller and cheaper than anything the company has done before. The ten-inch cube will cost £350 and go down to a genuine 16Hz. Lord says: “It’s not as loud as the others of course, but it is a genuine REL. As far as audiophiles are concerned, I would recommend two.”

DIGI-SUB

REL is also working closely with a leading mathematics department of a British university to develop a high end sub with true digital equalisation. The prototypes are said to be “yielding wonderful results”. This state of the art REL may be on the market as early as January 2003.



All of REL’s subwoofers are built to last and each is individually finished in the company’s factory in Bridgend, South Wales.



“The sound of thunder isn’t impressive in a crude, trouser flapping way. It impresses because you sense it with your body and not your ears – the earth moves. But that’s only part of what sub-bass is about.”

EXCLUSIVE

What lies beneath

REL's biggest sub-bass system has been upgraded to MkIII status, but does anyone really need this much low end?

REL only makes subwoofers, or sub-bass systems as main man Richard Lord prefers to call them. So the company's biggest sub is the best this dedicated specialist can do, as far as a man who's religious about bass thinks you can go in the quest for high fidelity rumble. Yet it only costs £4,500, which, while a lot for a sub, is somewhat less than several other brands are prepared to charge and few if any of them are sub purists. So what's the deal?

At 100kg, the Studio III is the heaviest piece of kit I've had the dubious honour of lugging up the stairs. In fact, I didn't lug it all up the stairs. I took out both 250mm Volt drive units and removed the meaty brass feet before getting someone to help me lug it up the stairs, and that was tough enough. Being a not insubstantial lump (WxHxD - 61.8x56x52cm) that's made of 30mm MDF, even the

carcass and amp weigh more than too much to be comfortably manoeuvred. But if you want to move air at low frequencies there is no substitute for volume and solidity. Sure you can get low bass out of smaller enclosures but you can't get clean, controlled low bass, and that's what the Studio is all about.

On one side of this lavishly veneered sub is a panel with connection sockets for high and low level inputs - via interconnect and speaker cable - for the purpose of connecting the .1 LFE output of a multichannel processor/amp or the speaker output of any amplifier. So why have two connections? Basically the RCA phono input is for cinema and the high level speaker connection for music. But the latter is recommended for best results as the sub receives the same signal as your loudspeakers and is therefore better able to integrate with them. It's possible to have both high and low level inputs connected simultaneously so that music and home cinema can coexist happily in the same systems. The fact that the low level signal is more likely to arrive at the sub first - it doesn't have to go through the process of power amplification - is counteracted by phase delay circuitry in the sub, which is rather clever and means that you won't miss any extra oomph that is on the .1 LFE track only.



VERDICT

REL Studio III subwoofer
£4,500

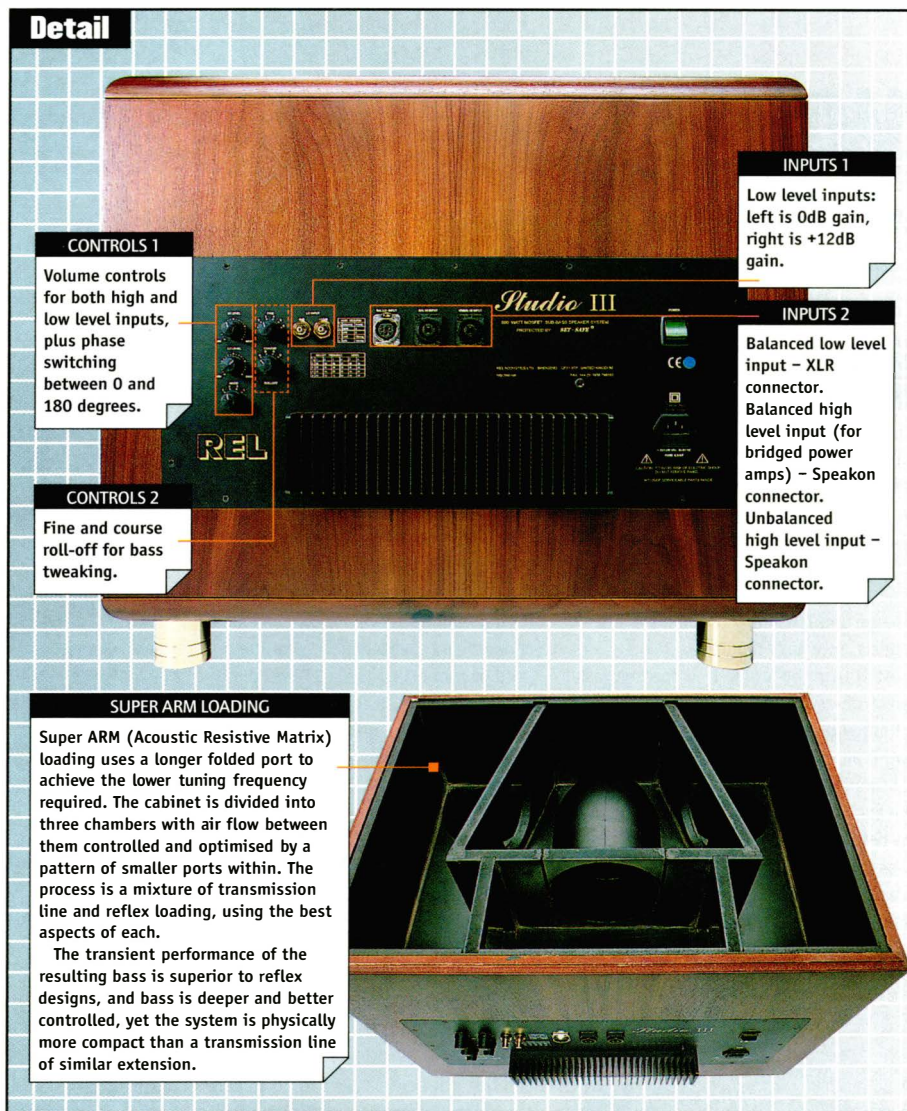
- ▲ Bass extension down to 12Hz, controls that allow smooth integration with any loudspeaker and a transformation of the sound that's subtle yet hard to live without.
- ▼ Lack of spade terminals on supplied connector cable, badly mastered recordings.
- ⊙ A stonking addition to any system however big the speakers. Sub-bass is not just for bass-heads. It means space, relaxation and resolution as well.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Two 250mm long-throw Volt drive units
- ▶ 500-watt, DC-coupled MOSFET amplifier
- ▶ Separate volume controls for high and low level inputs
- ▶ High resolution filter controls
- ▶ Balanced and unbalanced inputs
- ▶ Mode switch to control phase and low level filter bypass
- ▶ Real wood veneered finish
- ▶ Bass extension down to 12Hz



Take a good look at the business end of REL's Studio III - once you've fitted it, you'll probably never see it again.



The first thing on the menu is a substantial increase in space. It's like the room and the system have opened up, and the music now inhabits a three dimensional acoustic that's considerably more realistic and palpable.

Another unexpected effect is a reduction in forwardness in the sound, as if the sub is balancing out the higher frequencies but at the same time letting more detail through. This factor is quite uncanny – on the one hand it's easy to accept that the Studio can produce bass detail but with roll-off set under 30Hz there's no way that it's delivering higher frequency information. It somehow lets the midband relax and resolve more all at once. Abdullah Ibrahim's *Ishmael* has uncanny presence and realism when assisted by the REL – not only do the double bass notes have more body but the voice seems more palpable too.

There are occasions when mega bass extension has its drawbacks. Classical recordings often feature the rumbling of traffic down there and some studio creations go overboard with the bass sounds. For instance, Funki Porcini's *Fast Asleep* has some rather ugly bass rumblings that it's hard to believe were audible at the mastering stage. Clearly more record producers need this sort of bass resolution at their command. Luckily there's always the off switch if unwanted grumbles do come along.

This is certainly a remarkable device. It enhances listening pleasure in so many unexpected ways that it's going to be tedious playing music without it. And lest we forget, it does bass too! There's a lot of gorgeous deep bass out there – check out Austrian remix meisters Kruder & Dorfmeister's *Speechless* and *Mugwump Jizzum* on The K&D Sessions disc. The first has superb low bass guitar notes and the latter some of the most scrumptious bass squelches in recorded music. In fact, most of your music has some of the deep stuff waiting to be heard, low end that even the biggest speakers have difficulty reproducing. If the quality is high enough you can never have too much bass. **Ⓢ**

REL Acoustics Ltd 01656 768 777
www.rel.net

ALSO CONSIDER

- RUARK CL300 £2,000**
Controlled, detailed and dynamic, a delight with music and movies alike.
- M&K MX700 £1,595**
Could have more features but does an excellent and dynamic job with movies and music.
- REL STADIUM III £1,500**
The Studio's less costly sibling offers the same filtering facilities and has considerable skills in the nether regions.

Any sub needs to achieve good integration with the loudspeakers. RELs are designed to work with full range speakers and roll-off can be set as low as 22Hz or as high as 95Hz. Setting this level is not as hard as you might imagine – use music with a lot of low frequency content and adjust upwards until you hear the overlap, then turn the sub down a notch. In terms of system balance there should-

SETTING UP

According to REL the reason for the relatively low popularity of subs with music fans is that they require considerable care in positioning and set up. To combat this it has produced a guide to getting a sub properly integrated. This is a relatively straightforward process that kicks off with setting phase, moves on to setting roll-off so that there is no overlap between sub and speakers and then covers placement. Once that's sorted you can find the right volume level – the step that you might be inclined to go for first if you didn't know better.

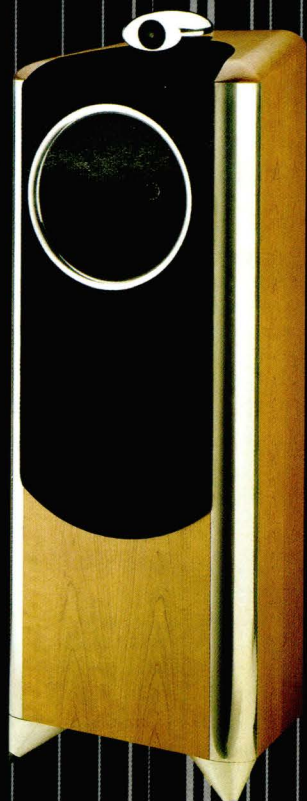
n't be an obvious difference; you're not looking for more bass but rather deeper bass, the sonic effects of which are not what you might expect.

PERFORMANCE

What's most surprising about a sub-bass system of this calibre is how subtle it is. The tendency is to sit back and wait for the wall of boombastic bass, but this isn't what real bass is about. Think about the sound of thunder: it's not impressive in a crude, trouser flapping way, its more impressive because you largely sense it with your body and not your ears – the earth moves. This is what sub bass is partly about, underpinning your speakers so bass notes carry on down to their natural roll-off, without any of that flapping box effect of smaller speakers struggling to produce low frequencies beyond their reach. That's a little disappointing at first, until you notice what's happening and then things get much more interesting.

TANNOY®

Dimension



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EXCLUSIVE

Full throttle

After NuVista, everyone wondered if Musical Fidelity could still improve the sound of its amps. The Choke Regulated A308 pre/power proves it can

Musical Fidelity has never been shy when it comes to making bold statements, but the claim associated with the A308CR pre/power amplifier combo is one of the boldest. The company believes its dual mono amp designs are "among the best in the world, regardless of price".

Certainly the style is as bold as the claim. The huge central volume knob of the preamp, together with the big bolts and heavy casing of both products is not wussy hideaway hi-fi. This spells 'audiophile' in inch-high copperplate block capitals, for those who have to make no concessions to 'domestic management'.

Both preamp and power amplifier are dual mono designs, each with extensive choke regulation to keep the power supply exceptionally smooth. The two models are basic; the A308CR preamp has an MM/MC phono stage, four line inputs and a tape loop, while the matching power amplifier delivers 250 watts into eight ohms through two sets of speaker terminals. A tape monitor circuit and remote control top off the preamp, while the only unique – and very useful – extra on the power amp is input switching between phono sockets. This means you can use the same amp for stereo and home cinema purposes, without having to route the hi-fi through a sonically poor AV processor.

The A308CR preamplifier is fully buffered at the input and output with extremely high overload potential to eliminate potential distortion problems with high-output CD players. Moreover,

VERDICT

Musical Fidelity A308CR preamplifier/power amplifier
Price £3,898

▲ One of the least sonically deleterious amplifiers in production. Normally such power with sound this good costs a king's ransom.

▼ Some may find the style OTT. No balanced operation. Needs top sources, cables and speakers. Too cheap for label junkies!

◎ **CONCLUSION**
Big and bold, the A308CR combination has no sound of its own; one of the best amps you can buy.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Completely dual mono preamp and power amp
- ▶ Built-in MM/MC phono stage
- ▶ Four line inputs. One tape loop
- ▶ High overload capability on all inputs
- ▶ Remote control
- ▶ 250 watts per channel into eight ohms
- ▶ Choke regulated power supplies in both pre and power amp



There's no 'Morecombe and Wise' syndrome with the A308CR – both components are capable of pulling their weight and delivering an equally strong performance.

in essence you get a separate preamp and power amp inside the power amp. The driver stage and unity gain power amp stage have completely separate power supplies (even down to separate transformers), allowing the driver circuit to work entirely independently of the power stage. This also has an advantage in ultra high frequency response, with claimed lower distortion at 100kHz than most amps have at 8kHz.

PERFORMANCE

This is one of the least 'sounding' amplifier combinations you can get today. You hear more of the sound of the source, speaker, even cables than you do from the amplifier. There have been other amplifiers that have attempted to get this neutral, but to date those that have succeeded are either extremely expensive or too low powered to be partnered with real-world loudspeakers.

This strikes a perfect balance, with more than enough power on tap to give

it loads of grip over the bottom end of most speaker systems. It also has a treble and midrange that are completely free from grain or constriction. But none of these are evident, until you switch back

TECHNOLOGY: CHOKE REGULATION

This is an age-old way of making an amplifier sound good, dating back to the days of classic valve hi-fi, but only Musical Fidelity makes a big thing of choke regulation in solid state electronics. Originally used as an add-on to the company's P180 power amplifier, choke regulation is a feature of the CD, preamp and power amp in the A308 range and was one of the design innovations in NuVista equipment. Essentially, a choke is a coil that creates an inductance which helps to smooth out ripples in the power supply and also acts to rid the mains of nasty high frequency noise. In contrast, many other high-tech hi-fi manufacturers are moving toward switch-mode power supplies; the antithesis of choke regulation.





"This is one of the least 'sounding' amplifier combinations you can get today. You hear more of the sound of the source, speaker, even cables than you do from the amplifier."



from the A308CR. At that point, the majority of other amplifier combos sound 'bunged up' like they have hay fever. It really doesn't matter what kind of music you play through this combo: everything from the subtle tones of Eminem to the thrashy sounds of olde English madrigals are given the same non-treatment. Nothing phases the A308CR; even full-on Mahler or balls-out Led Zep can be played at insane listening levels with reserves on tap. You need a good CD player though; the matching £2,000 A308CR CD is the obvious choice. Even the built-in MM/MC phono stage is above average. It may not be up to Tom Evans' The Groove levels of insight and detail, but it is extremely accurate, honest and spacious. It has the sound-

stage to cope with classic Decca Gilbert & Sullivan recordings and the dynamic range for classic Casals Bach Cello Suites. So, are there no limitations? In rare instances where the preamp is dozens of metres from the power amp, true balanced operation would be useful. Also, the near-total absence of any amplifier tonality may prove hard to swallow. But the biggest reason for many buying something costing more than the A308CR is 'label pride'. Those stuck on spending over the odds on buying the latest designer label will always stump up extra cash for extra cachet, even when there is little or no reason to. There is no such thing as the perfect amplifier, but the Musical Fidelity A308CR pre/power amp combination gets closer

than most. And, at £1,499 for the pre-amp and £2,399 for the power amp, it represents fantastic value for money and lives up to the hype. ☉
 ☎ 0208 900 2866
 🌐 www.musical-fidelity.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

AUDIO NOTE M2 PHONO/P2SE £3,198
 Low powered, low volume single-ended valve design with a wonderfully involving, warm and natural sound.

BRYSTON BP20/3B-ST £2,850
 A powerful Canadian pre/power amplifier that breaks no ground but offers an excellent general purpose design.

ELECTROCOMPANIE EC4.7/120DMB £3,448
 Big Norwegian pre/power combination with plenty of dynamic range and a very wide, transparent sound.

display
intensity



HDCD

disc repeat track repeat

mode

prev/rew

next/f.fwd

stop/c

“The 390S eschews euphonic coloration and goes for minimum intrusion and maximum real detail.”



EXCLUSIVE

Precision performer

New Mark Levinson CD players are rare beasts, but they're generally worth waiting for. This one is no exception

Mark Levinson the brand is part of the burgeoning Harman empire, yet the no-holds-barred approach to design and build it uses marks ML out as a very individual company. The nearest manufacturer on these shores would probably have to be a mixture of TAG McLaren and SME, brands which take build quality and attention to detail rather seriously.

The No390S is Mark Levinson's most expensive one-box 'CD processor' to date and is based on the original chassis of the No39, albeit with a complete redesign of that player's digital to analogue convertor (DAC) and analogue output stage. The excuse, if one is necessary for an American corporation, for calling this a processor rather than a player is that you can input digital signals from other digital sources with 44.1 or 48kHz sampling rates. Which in effect means other CD players or transports, DAB radio, digital satellite audio and so on, but not the higher 96kHz sampling rate of DVD for instance, and inevitably not the DSD stream of SACD.

The 390S has two digital inputs, one optical and one electrical, and uses the popular connectors for both. An unusual aspect is the inclusion of an analogue volume control, so it can be hooked directly to a power amp and used as a digital preamp so long as you don't want to play analogue sources. Unlike players with digital volume control there is no compromise of sound quality at lower levels. The 'robust' buffered output stage is designed to drive any combination of amplifier and cable you care to use, though there may be a limit to how long a cable will happily push signal down.

VERDICT

**Mark Levinson
No390S
CD player
£6,495**

▲ Flexible and comprehensively featured. Superb build and high resolution sound.

▼ No separate drawer open button. Inability to decode two-channel 24/96 via the onboard DAC.

◎ Phenomenal build quality combined with a very high resolution, neutral sound quality that allows your CDs to sound their best.

KEY FEATURES

▶ Analogue volume and balance controls

▶ RCA phono and EIAJ Toslink digital inputs

▶ RCA phono and XLR balanced digital outputs

▶ Four layer Arlon circuit board

▶ Fully balanced design

▶ Dual differential 24-bit DACs

Your relationship with the player will be mainly via the stylish remote control. This compact aluminium briquette has rubber ribbing on its underside to aid grip on those hot summer nights. Its buttons are clearly but rather subtly marked so its easy to press mode when you want stop for instance, and there's no standalone 'open' button on either remote or player, so you need to press stop fairly often.

The mode button gains access to the various 'special functions', including balance control, degree of muting, the way the player interacts with other Levinson products and the naming of the digital inputs. The latter is limited to a selection of options rather than being something you can compose to taste.

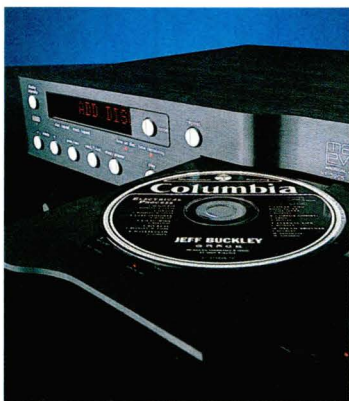
The player itself is a 23kg lump of considerable quality – the curved front fascia and sexy slim drawer will be enough for many. But combine that with a large scale LED display that you can always read day or night, and throw in the lovely matt silver anodised buttons and you have audio perversion on a stick. Well, in a box... you get the idea.

PERFORMANCE

Right from the moment you press play it's clear that this is a remarkable CD

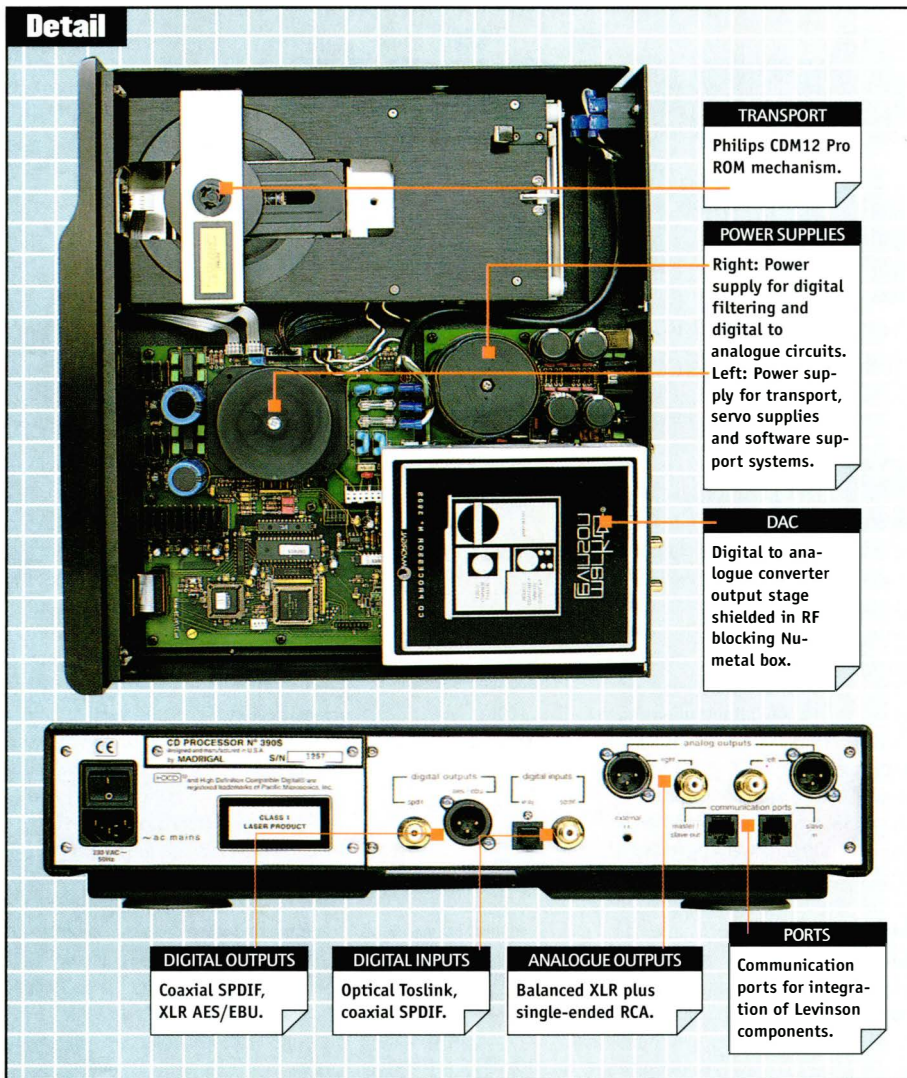
TECHNOLOGY: THE PROBLEM WITH JITTER

Ever since Trichord introduced its aftermarket clock in the mid-nineties the significance of jitter with digital components has gained in importance. Jitter is a form of distortion in the timing of the digital signal as it is read from the disc and is passed on to filtering and conversion. Levinson uses a closed loop jitter reduction system which separates the recovery of digital data from the task of maintaining a jitter-free output. This is achieved by placing a very high precision master clock away from the laser mechanism, where many players have it, and in a relatively low noise area where it can function at its best, in this case adjacent to the processor and digital outputs. Lying in the final stage of the transport section it thus remains as jitter-free as possible.



More than a mere player, the No390S is a 'CD processor' – other digital sources can make use of its superior D-to-A conversion and analogue volume control.





“Right from the moment you press play it’s clear that this is a remarkable CD player.”

player. This might depend on what you’re used to but unless it’s something in the premier league the contrast is likely to be dramatic. The sheer transparency and the resolution it provides is not in the least bit subtle, or rather the subtleties that appear off familiar discs are surprising in their distinction. An oft-played Ali Farka Toure track started to literally breathe on the 390S – that doesn’t mean you can actually hear him breathing, but that there is a subliminal pulse to the music that wasn’t there before. This is alongside oodles of extra detail that describes the instruments and voices in the recording with genuine vivacity. These timbral qualities were probably assisted on their way by the Border Patrol valve amp initially used during the review period but later



comparisons through solid state amps revealed the same character, an unusual quality in any digital component.

There is a confidence and assurance about this player’s sound that’s hard to pinpoint. Each disc reveals more about the recording on it, so it’s that character that you hear more of but at the same

time there’s a calmness to the overall sound that suggests the bare minimum of distortion being added to the end result. There are great sounding CD players that achieve this result by adding a bit of euphonic coloration here and there, thereby spicing up the sound and giving the impression of presenting hidden detail. The 390S eschews that approach and goes for minimum intrusion and maximum *real* detail. A good example of this can be heard in the high bells on Shostakovich’s *Jazz Suite No7* (Concertgebouw/Chailly), which usually ring out in true bell-like if rather shiny fashion. On this player you hear the different sizes of bell being played, their character becoming apparent with the reduction in distortion.

Imaging performance is not as deep as some of the competition, rather the sound is brought forward so that it sits both in front of and behind the loudspeakers. It’s impossible to tell whether this is the most accurate result but the degree of low level resolution would suggest that the listener has more clues to build the hologram with.

Having got such impressive results with DVD-Audio from a relatively real-world Pioneer DV-939A, we wondered if the 390S could compete by playing a plain CD of the same music. The result was largely in the Levinson’s favour, its focus and precision outweighing the smoother, softer sound of DVD-A on the Pioneer. The latter is more relaxed but deep bass is too podgy next to the bone crunch afforded by the ‘cruder’ medium.

The No390S is clearly a top-notch CD player, one of the very best I’ve had the pleasure of using. I plan to go on using it until the last possible moment, just so I can find out exactly what’s on all my favourite discs.

Path Premier 01844 219000

www.marklevinson.com

ALSO CONSIDER

WADIA 86 £7,995

Wadia’s range topper is a highly dynamic and engaging player with a digital volume control and gripping sound.

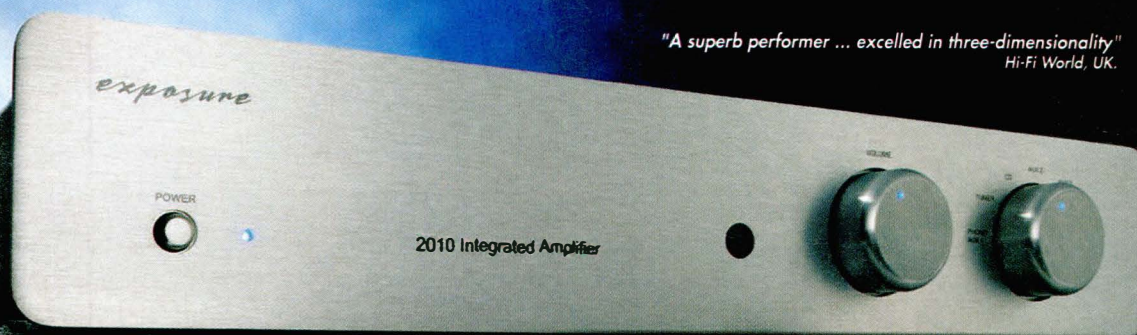
NAIM CDSII/XPS £5,625

Combination of excellent timing and high resolution makes this a must-hear even if you don’t use Naim amplification.

SIMAUDIO MOON ECLIPSE £5,500

Canadian player with a dynamic yet subtle sound that brings instruments and voices alike to life in a way that few digital sources can match.

Acquire your first exposure



"A superb performer ... excelled in three-dimensionality"
Hi-Fi World, UK.

2010 Integrated Amplifier

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

★★★★★ HiFi Choice, UK.

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Acquire your first taste of Exposure with the 2010 series. Engineered to reflect the leading performance of its heritage, yet priced with a heart for today's up-and-coming audiophiles. Here's what the critics have to say:

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

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



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2010 Power Amplifier



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Less is more

EXCLUSIVE Valve power specialist Border Patrol has unleashed a beast of an amplifier. If you want to know just how far 20 watts will go you're in the right place

Border Patrol is not the sort of company to rush into hasty new product launches. In its ten year history it has put two valve powered components into production – the original Border Patrol single ended (SE) power amplifier and the BP choke input filter power supply.

Realising that a nine-watt, single-ended amp is not perhaps for everyone, BP has branched out into the world of push-pull valve technology and produced the subtly named P20. This uses a pair of legendary 300B triode output valves per channel and delivers a block rockin' 20 watts. Compared to transistor amps this may not sound impressive, but anyone who's heard a decent tube amp knows that with a reasonably efficient pair of speakers (90dB or more) 20 watts go a long way. In fact it's the first few watts that are most important with any amp, so it's the quality rather than absolute quantity that counts. In this instance there are two substantial standalone BP power supplies – a three-choke input filter, valve rectified supply for each channel. This thing is dual mono all the way back to the twin mains plugs!

So why on earth do these watts cost over £300 per pair (this is a stereo amp)? Basically it comes down to quality of components, build and design, plus of course the fact that this amp is a bit like

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TRIODE

Output valves come in a greater variety than their transistor cousins and the triode was the very first audio amplification device. It was used extensively in audio electronics up until the late fifties when the more linear and powerful pentode came along, and the triode ceased to be used as an output tube. But they were not forgotten – in the late eighties Audio Note and a few other small companies started making triode amps again because of their phenomenal transparency and dynamics. The 300B gained legendary status partly because only original fifties stock was available, but when Western Electric finally noticed that second-hand examples were being traded for hundreds of dollars it decided to get back into the triode game and recreated the definitive 300B. A tube that combines muscle and finesse like few others.

VERDICT

Border Patrol P20 power amplifier
£6,750

Phenomenal transparency, fluidity and tonal resolution combine with real grunt and dynamics.

Needs two mains sockets, won't drive inefficient speakers to the max.

CONCLUSION
Superb triode amplifier with bags of power and genuine resolution, one of the best musical appreciation devices available.

KEY FEATURES

All-triode, push-pull, zero negative feedback circuit

Interstage phase splitter driver transformers

Fully hard-wired

Twin external PSUs containing three independent valve rectified choke input filter power supplies

Dual mono construction

Hard wood chassis

Optional volume control



The P20 power amplifier, with exposed valves, transformers and optional volume control, sits atop its twin power supplies.

extraordinary. The treble in particular was transformed from being rather too obvious to sparkling and the bass took on a tunefulness that had me jumping around. Good valve amps do a number of things that their transistor counterparts can only dream about. These include dynamics – the ability to open up music that usually sounds compressed, and timbral resolution – pinpointing the tonal shading of an instrument or voice. Where valves usually concede to transistors is in absolute power, bass solidity and high frequency phase linearity.

The reason why the BP P20 has such humungous power supplies is so that it can deliver as much bass muscle as a pair of 300Bs is able to muster, and this pair can kick arse (as opposed to ass, which is a donkey-like pack animal as we're sure you're aware). While the bass on offer is not quite as thunderous as you'll get from 200 transistor watts it has a precision and fluidity that few tranny designs can imitate. And its got grunt, a point proved by Missy Elliott's funky up beats on *All N My Grill*, which reveals a rare architectural quality.

Moving up the scale to the midband is

a Morgan car; hand built to order, though fortunately the waiting list is weeks rather than years. The design is no compromise from the ground up, the power supplies each weigh more than most £1,000 amps and deliver the stiffest power in the valve universe. The amp uses Western Electric 300Bs, a set of which usually costs £1,200 alone, though alternatives are available and this amp with Tesla tubes costs £1,000 less. This example also features a Danish Audio Connect stepped attenuator or volume control (£250 extra), so single source users can use it without a preamp.

PERFORMANCE

The effect of the BP P20 on a pair of JBL Ti2K speakers (HFC 230) was quite




always a pleasant experience with good tubes and this combination does not disappoint. It is positively holographic, the expression and presence of instruments and voices quite startling and totally engaging. The *EST Plays Monk* CD can be a less than complete experience but when you get to hear the instruments and interplay this clearly, everything falls into place – you hear what Monk was saying and you appreciate EST's interpretation to the full. The tone colour delivery is second to none,

and I found myself playing all the acoustic music I had just to hear what various instruments and voices really sound like. The saxophone on Bugge Wesseltoft's *Yellow Is The Colour*, the drums on Abdullah Ibrahim's *Ekaya* and Fontella Bass' voice on The Cinematic Orchestra's *Everyday*. It all comes across with such vivacity and realism that it's hard to get anything else done.

Of course it doesn't end with acoustic sound sources, electric ones have plenty to offer as well, even heavy rock material like Tool

“Good valve amps do a number of things that their transistor counterparts can only dream about, such as their ability to handle dynamics and timbral resolution.”

and the raucous Jon Spencer Blues Explosion make their mark in no uncertain terms.

In the right company this amp delivers transparency, fluidity of timing and grunt like few others out there. It won't crunch bones, nor will it drive insensitive speakers but if it's the musical essence you're after it's a tough act to follow. 

☎ Border Patrol 01273 276716

🌐 www.borderpatrol.net

ALSO CONSIDER

AUDIO RESEARCH VT100 MKIII £5,999

Powerful, load tolerant design with a neutral balance and a clean, vibrant delivery that's palpable and highly detailed.

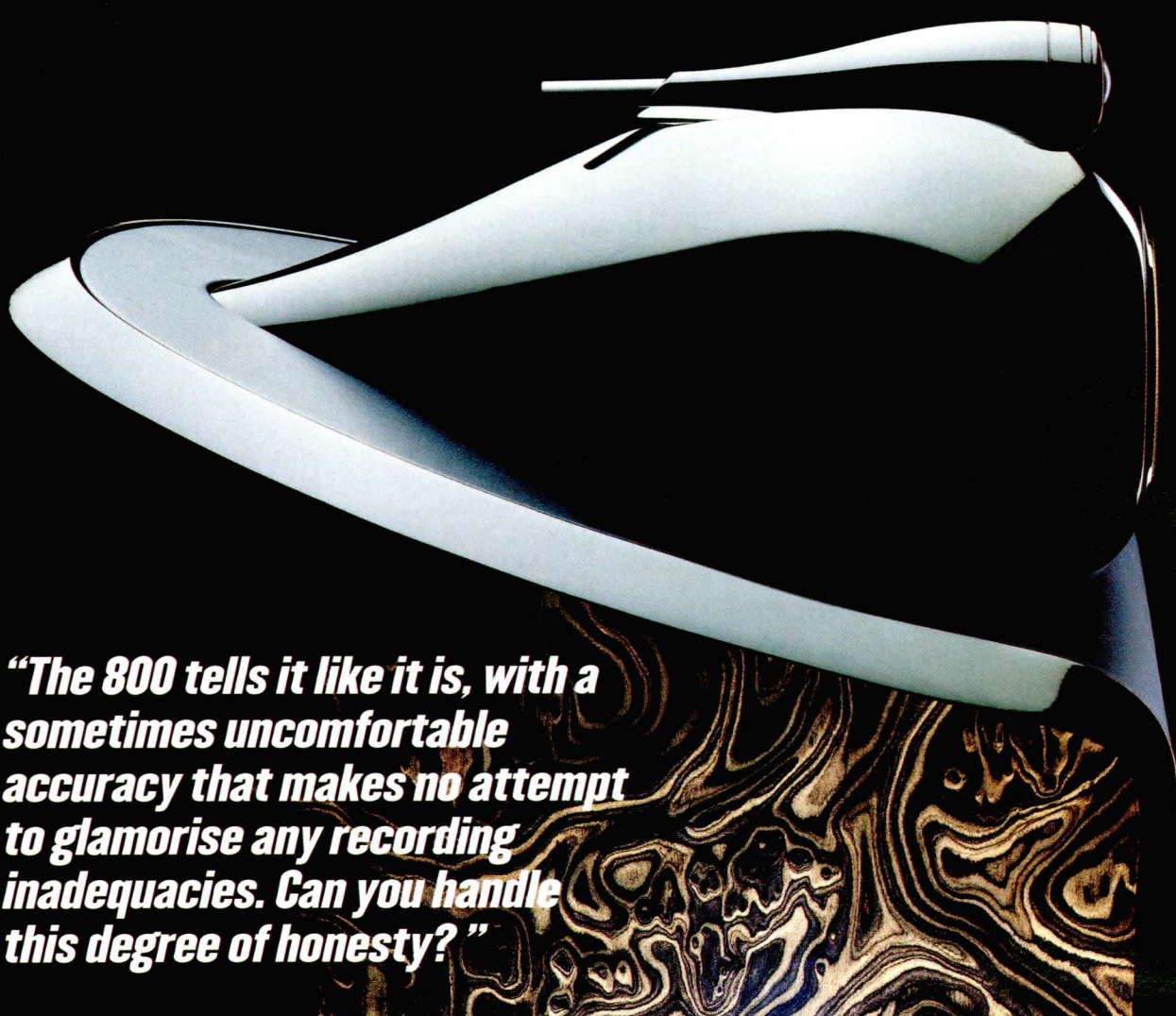
CANARY 301 £5,400

Another 300B stereo design with a big, generous sound but no shortage of energy and grip.

ART AUDIO DIAVOLO £4,500

A single ended 13-watt design with a lush, rich sound that suits female vocals down the to the ground but could have more grunt.





“The 800 tells it like it is, with a sometimes uncomfortable accuracy that makes no attempt to glamorise any recording inadequacies. Can you handle this degree of honesty?”



Big daddy

B&W's new 'flagship' model takes Nautilus performance to the next level



VERDICT

B&W Nautilus 800
loudspeaker
£11,000

▲ Lounge-friendly for such a big speaker, with wonderful speed, dynamic range and stereo precision.

▼ Incredibly heavy (125kg) and difficult to move. Could have a bit more mid-bass 'punch'.

⊙ Unequivocally challenges for world domination. Dynamically superior to the Nautilus 801 and probably the most revealing speaker we know of.

KEY FEATURES

▶ Three separate enclosures, each 'scaled' to its drive unit(s)

▶ Tube-loaded, top-mounted tweeter, silver-plated pole

▶ Teardrop-shaped Marlan midrange enclosure

▶ Surroundless midrange Kevlar driver

▶ Twin ten-inch bass drivers with massive magnets

▶ Curved, Matrix-reinforced bass enclosure

▶ External, plinth-mounted crossover network

B&W originally launched its high end range of Nautilus speakers back in 1998. Stuffed with major innovations, these models were an immediate world-wide success and actually became the company's top range, selling even more (by value) than the popular 'budget' 600-series.

For many – customers and trade alike – these were very much the apotheosis of high end loudspeakers. But B&W wasn't resting on its laurels and three years later supplemented the original models with new and even 'higher end' Nautilus and Signature 800 models, launched in summer 2001 and now finally available for review a year later.

The two models, Nautilus and Signature, are effectively identical in sonic performance, the considerable price difference down to the fact that the £11,000 Nautilus comes clothed in a regular real wood veneer, whereas the £16,000 Signature spends extra days in the cabinet shop having luxurious 'tiger's eye' or 'bird's eye' veneer and lacquer applied to its exterior.

The top two models of the original Nautilus range are the 801 (HFC 186) and 802 (HFC 183), both of which feature a large separate teardrop-shaped 'head' unit that houses the midrange driver (and supports a much smaller external tweeter). The 801 mounts this 'head' on top of a bass 'commode' fitted with a single 15-inch bass driver; the 802's bass enclosure is a much slimmer affair, housing two eight-inch drivers. The new 800 uses the same 'head' but splits the difference by equipping the bass enclosures with a pair of ten-inches. Without wishing to anthropomorphise unduly, the 801 looks a bit tubby and overweight, the 802 rather top-heavy, while this new 800, in true Goldilocks tradition, looks just right in its proportions, and not too large either.

One could fill several more pages than are available to do full justice to the engineering sophistication of this massive three-way, and the fact that it weighs 125kg is evidence of the sheer amount of engineering content here. But let's start from the bottom and work up.

The charcoal-silver metal plinth might be a little too large from an aesthetic standpoint, but away from the vibrations and magnetic fields created by the drive units, it's the best place for a heavily over-engineered crossover network. This is stuffed with components specially sourced for this 'flagship' model, and a major area of improvement over 801/802. Twin WBT terminals permit bi-wiring/amping, but why not triplets for a three-way?

The leather-topped, wood veneered bass enclosure, 'FlowPort'-loaded through

its base, is mostly curved, to spread out any internal standing waves, and heavily reinforced every which way by B&W's proprietary 'Matrix' honeycomb lattice. Each of the two paper/Kevlar cone ten-inch drivers has the same basic motor (magnet and metalwork) as the 15-incher used in the 801, giving exceptional grip and power handling.

On top of this sits the high-gloss 'teardrop' Marlan midrange enclosure, mechanically decoupled from the bass section and accommodating the 'free edge' surround midrange driver, with



The 800 is available in two versions – Nautilus and Signature. Shown here is the £16,000 Signature complete with 'tiger's eye' veneer.

140mm Kevlar cone and skeletal frame. The tweeter too has a 'free edge' surround, and a 25mm aluminium dome, and sits in its own Nautilus 'tube' on top of the midrange section, and again gel-gasket-decoupled.

Both these drivers have been updated for the new 800 model. The midrange – a long-gap/short-coil device – has a thicker top plate to improve linearity, creating a 10mm gap (up from 6mm) with a 3.3mm coil. The central 'bullet' is now alloy and the tweeter has a silver-coated pole-piece to minimise non-linearities, using an aluminium voice-coil former to extend the bandwidth beyond 30kHz.

PERFORMANCE

Immediately prior to the arrival of the Nautilus 800s, I'd spent a couple of weeks with Meridian's 800/861 multi-channel system, which involved the regular use of a DSP 5000 active centre-front speaker with music sources. This had made me very aware of the superior central focus that seems to come as a matter of course when using a centre channel, compared to regular two-channel stereo.

Except, maybe, when your stereo speakers are as good as these Nautilus 800s. The first thing I noticed after connecting them up was how remarkably good this speaker was at creating a pin-sharp, tightly focused central image – with no need for a centre speaker!

The second impression was that this speaker didn't sound particularly 'bassy'.



“There is some lack of punch and thump here, to be sure, as predicted in the in-room measurements. But that is, if anything, a relief.”

IN-ROOM MEASUREMENTS

Measurement indicates a high 92-93dB sensitivity rating – better, indeed, than B&W's claim for 91dB. This alone should make the Nautilus 800 reasonably easy to drive, even though the impedance is low through the upper bass (3 ohms, 90-200Hz), and the demands for amplifier current are consequently quite high.

Far-field in-room measurements show prodigious bass extension, registering -2dB at 20Hz in-room ref the midband datum. A major mode in our listening room boosts the 30Hz output to +7dB, but more worrying is a significant 10dB suckout centred on 65Hz. The midrange is beautifully flat and smooth, from 85Hz up to 1.5kHz, while above that there's some lack of output – around 3dB – through the presence zone, 2-5kHz.

The latter phenomenon is a characteristic of B&W's larger Kevlar drivers when measured under far-field conditions, where the microphone picks up a mixture of direct and room-reflected sound. It seems that although the direct sound balance from the speaker is essentially flat, the room-reflected contribution relies substantially on the off-axis radiation. Although theory predicts that the midrange unit's off-axis output should be well maintained, in practice it weakens significantly towards the top of its working range.

This was a mistake, but perhaps an understandable one. The 800 does in fact have ample bass, but it's so free from resonant overhang, it sounds much cleaner and therefore lighter than one might expect.

There is some lack of punch and thump here, to be sure, as predicted in the in-room measurements. But that is, if anything, a relief. Over-exuberant and resonant mid-bass is all too common, and one of the curses of today's commercial speakers. Finding a speaker free from such an effect is both an education and a relief. And while I wouldn't compare the 800's bass to the quality of full range horns, it's up there with the best direct radiator bass we've heard (including state-of-the-art in-car subwoofers).

The 800 is a huge amount of fun and an improvement on the 801 – in itself a real achievement. We always had slight reservations about the older model, which tended to sound a little heavy and rather too laid back under our listening conditions. Such criticisms simply don't apply to the 800, which sounds altogether livelier and faster than the previous range-topper.

Due to their sheer bulk and weight, putting the very best speakers into a serious comparative context is difficult. B&W helped out by organising a comparative dem between 800, 801 and 802 at the company's Steyning labs. Sure enough, the superiority of the 800 was very obvious, showing a significantly superior dynamic range and an obvious and substantial reduction in 'timesmear' compared to the earlier Nautili.

One thing the 800 does not do however is paint a romantic view of the music. It tells it like it is, with a sometimes uncomfortable accuracy that makes no attempt to glamourise any recording inadequacies. Can you handle this degree of honesty?

☎ 01903 221500

🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

ALSO CONSIDER

B&W NAUTILUS 801 £8,500

Loads of bass and a very classy contender with great soundstaging, if a touch laid back.

JMLAB MEZZO UTOPIA £7,799

A class act with limited deep bass but magnificent top-to-bottom coherence and precise focus.

NEAT ULTIMATUM £8,500

Smooth, deep, and even, this tall, imposing contender has just about the best bass around.

TANNOY DIMENSION TD12 £6,500

Big, good value Art Deco contender, its 12-inch dual-concentric driver gives magnificent authority and neutrality.



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EXCLUSIVE

State of the ART

Another new name, another new CD player.

This German top-loader has unique touches, but is it a work of ART?

Audionet is one of those well-respected German hi-fi electronics companies that are almost unheard of here. But the ART V2 CD player, distributed in the UK by Wilson Benesch, is going to change all that. A year from now, Audionet could be the high end name on every hi-fi buff's lips.

The ART V2 is a top-loading player (the name stands for 'Aligned Resonance Transport'), complete with a manually operated, dampened aluminium drawer and a magnetic puck. The player is silent in use and will only operate when the drawer is closed.

It is fantastically well made, and at 18kg it is one of the heaviest CD players you will ever encounter. The front panel is half-inch-thick silver (or black) alloy, with just four silver touch buttons and a display panel. The rest of the casing is made of acoustically low-resonance MDF, all charcoal-coloured and powder coated, while the whole steel chassis rests on a slab of granite. Inside, the transport sits on a solid billet of aluminium which is decoupled from the chassis by a strappy suspension.

The ART V2 features a 24-bit/96kHz delta-sigma digital to analogue converter. Before this DAC, however, comes Audionet's proprietary 'intelligent sampling' circuit board made entirely of surface-mounted devices. This DAC not only upsamples the CD signal, but also includes digital filtering and signal

VERDICT

Audionet ART V2 CD player
£2,300

▲ Built like a tank, sounds like a dream. A unique and natural sounding player with bass to die for.

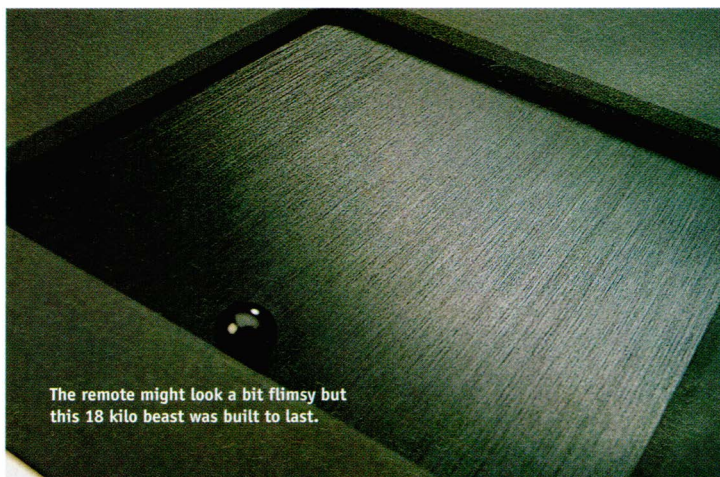
▼ Only trivial stuff, like it's a top-loader and some people don't like 'em. And it's heavy for a CD player.

◎ CONCLUSION

Perhaps some day, all CD players will be built as well and sound as fantastic as this. An ARTful choice!

KEY FEATURES

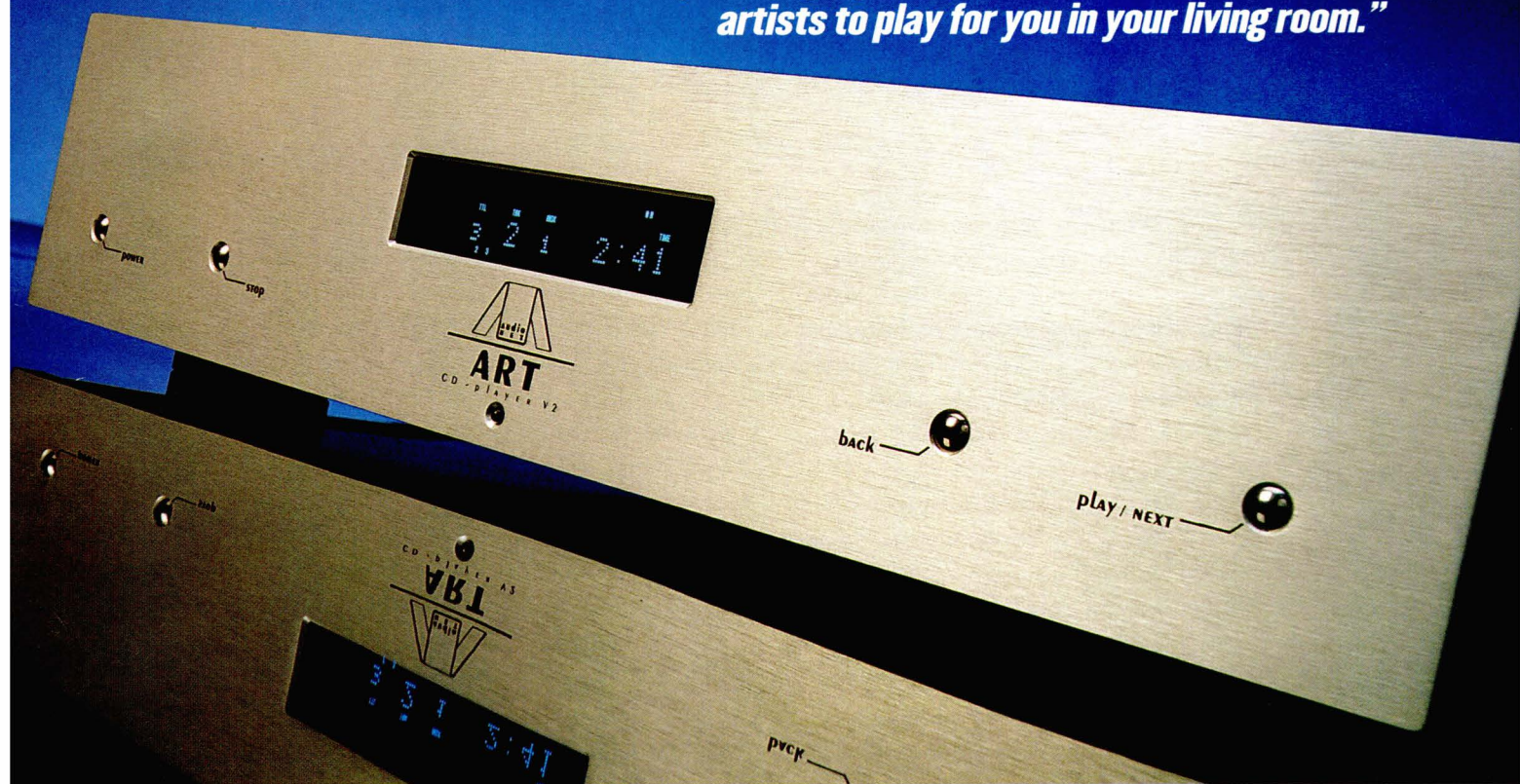
- ▶ Top-loading integrated CD player
- ▶ Low-resonance MDF case with thick alloy front panel
- ▶ Upsampling DAC with special switchable filter options
- ▶ Defeatable digital outputs
- ▶ AES/EBU digital output



The remote might look a bit flimsy but this 18 kilo beast was built to last.



“It even has that special time machine quality found in the very finest players: it can summon up long-dead artists to play for you in your living room.”



processing, and is said to be designed to eliminate clock jitter in the process. The signal processing even has two settings – ‘Lagrange’ and ‘Audionet’ – which can be switched from the back panel. The output stage sports MOSFET solid-state devices running in Class A.

Transport and D/A converter are completely separated at the mains. The two sections are each fed by a separate 50VA toroidal transformer, the converter’s transformer having separate windings for digital and analogue circuitry.

A nice flourish is the ability to switch off the digital outputs for those who don’t connect the player to a digital to analogue converter. Its choice of a BNC and balanced AES/EBU digital outputs,

as well as the standard phono digital output, shows this to be a seriously no-nonsense player.


PERFORMANCE

Fantastic build does not guarantee fantastic sound. But here the two go hand in hand. It even has that special time machine quality found in the very finest players: it can summon up long-dead artists to play for you in your living room.

Of course it has all the usual array of fine detail, good soundstaging and accurate tonality we have come to demand from every upmarket CD player. But it has much more. There’s a naturalness to the sound that means you play more discs at a single sitting; this naturalness comes from a slightly dark, refined tonal balance, cavernous bass and good, well-controlled dynamic range. This will make you reach deeper into the record collection – old jazz recordings like Ellington’s *Money Jungle* and *The Atomic Count Basie* are played alongside the usual PJ Harvey and The Strokes. Even rubbish recordings – Ray Barretto’s *Acid* for example – shows what the ART V2 is capable of. It gets past the nasty, brutish and short nature of the 1968 recording and just turns it into over half an hour of classic Latin/soul fusion dance beat.

Playing with the switches at the back of the player has great potential. Switching off the digital output gives

mild but noticeable improvements to the sound – the instruments very slightly more space and air, a bit like an extra degree of silence has been added to the mix. But the filter options make a bigger difference. Expressed in electronics terms, the Lagrange filter is more suited to Naim-style equipment (it’s more upbeat and rhythmically oriented) while the Audionet setting has a softer, more extended sound making it a perfect foil for valve amps. Go play.

What’s not to like about the Audionet ART V2? It is built to last forever, looks great, sounds great and does all you want from a CD. To get better either involves a life of perpetual tweekery or spending a small fortune. Even those few players that come close at a similar price (such as the Musical Fidelity A308^{CR}) lack the filter flexibility of the ART V2. 

 Wilson Benesch 0114 285 2656

 www.audionet.de

AUDIO WHO?

Audionet may be new to the UK, but the company has a commanding place in the German hi-fi high end. The company produces a range of source and amplifier products, ranging in price from £1,300 for the EPS optional power supply for its £1,500 PAM phono stage, up to £6,300 for its reference PRE G2 preamp and a further £7,500 for its AMP II MAX monoblock power amps.

Audionet’s next big project is to design the in-car electronics for the next generation of BMW. And that’s why are we so confident that Audionet will become a household hi-fi name soon.

ALSO CONSIDER

MUSICAL FIDELITY A308CR £2,000

Essentially a good CD in a classy case and armed with a great power supply.

MERIDIAN 588 £2,100

A beguiling and highly neutral sounding player that hides its considerable light under a minimalist bushel.

SONY SCD-XA777ES £2,300

Combining high quality multichannel SACD with good CD replay, this sets the standard for future-format players.

The only difference between men and boys is the size of their feet and the price of their toys

Sooner or later you'll want to hear McIntosh sound systems. Sooner's better.

For more than fifty years McIntosh has produced world beating bi-fi equipment. Currently that includes state-of-the-art valve combinations, technologically advanced solid state amplifiers (some boasting megawatt power output) highly specified CD/DVD players and hugely expressive loudspeakers.

Now McIntosh has applied the same meticulous design and production processes to introduce easy-to-use multi-channel equipment that demonstrates comparable sonic subtleties and similar unbridled power characteristics to that of their two-channel masterpieces.

There's a very compelling 'retro' feel to all McIntosh equipment which has a tangible authenticity. Materials and controls

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

McIntosh is very highly specified, demonstrably convincing sound equipment that stands head and shoulders above mainstream audio and home-cinema systems. An impressive range of products is available to meet the widely different requirements of serious music lovers and film enthusiasts.

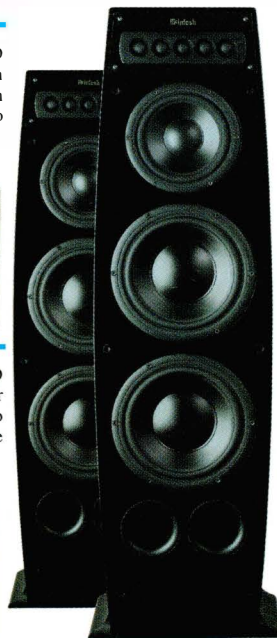
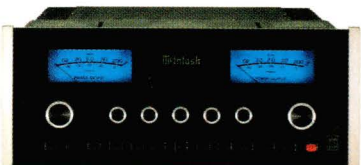
As the London McIntosh Centre, we hold the largest stock of McIntosh equipment in Europe. So, whatever your preference, two or multi-channel, please call into KJ West One for a very special experience.

You know that sooner or later ...

McIntosh C2200 Pre-amp
Fully balanced from input to output, a configuration that essentially cancels all distortion. Even unbalanced signals are processed and converted to balanced. Includes MM/MC phono section.



McIntosh MA6900 Integrated Amp
Critically acclaimed 200 wpc integrated amplifier provides truly natural music reproduction with no dynamic limitations. The MA6900 is the equal of the world's best pre/power combinations. Wt: 74.5lbs



McIntosh LS360 Loudspeakers
Majestic soundstaging, musical sensitivity and passion combined with effortless delivery distinguish the LS360's from the 'academic' presentation typical of many 'monitor' speakers. Supplied as a stereo pair or left/right in the multi-channel Academy IV System. Available in a wide selection of veneers and finishes. Size: 125.1(h) x 34.3(w) x 44.1(d) cms
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McIntosh MHT100 A/V Controller
Multi-channel Controller/Processor/Amplifier for serious home cinema installations. Powerful DSP engine for decoding Dolby Digital[®], Pro-Logic and DTS soundtracks. Easy to use, one time "Set and Forget" operating procedure. Zone A: (Theatre) 6 x 100 watts (4ohms)
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HI-FI THAT



ROCKED



THE WORLD

Imagine a world without hi-fi. A world where your music sounds flat and lifeless, without the emotive charge to grip your senses and immerse you in your heroes' vision. A dull world indeed... But praise be – hi-fi is real. Since the dawning of the 'golden age' through the fifties, sixties and seventies, sonics have become progressively more super thanks to the endeavours of a select band of pioneers. These guardians of the hi-fi faith have laboured long and hard to bring their dreams to life, so we can hear the light.

This is Hi-Fi Choice's homage to those sonic saints, those hi-fi heroes of yore and their creations, a rundown of the 25 greatest hi-fi products ever made, as voted for by HFC's crack team of reviewers. It's the gear that made the biggest splash, raised the bar and moved the goalposts, challenging established thinking and influencing a host of products that followed in their wake. But this is just our view. If you've got other ideas, send us your alternative list – we'd love to hear it.

24

Mark Levinson ML-2 dual-mono power amplifier

Launched 1977

Original price
£2,462 (per pair)

Mark Levinson's ML-2 power amplifiers put US high-end high fidelity into a higher gear. The 65lb monoblock ML-2 delivered only 25 watts per channel, but those watts were in pure Class A. Of course, this meant the ML-2 had a healthy 300 watts to dissipate, making those huge spiky heatsinks blisteringly hot. Worse still, the output devices were on the outside of the case as they had a habit of blowing up with alarming regularity. But ML-2s are still remembered fondly as one of the least coloured, finest sounding amplifiers of a generation.



25

Living Voice Air Partner loudspeaker

Launched 1992

Original price
£14,500

When low powered amps like the Audio Note Ongaku began to gain popularity, this created a demand for high sensitivity loudspeakers, a demand more than answered by one of the most stunning designs of the nineties. Using horn technology borrowed from the professional arena Living Voice these substantial speakers were built to recreate the live musical event in the home. And boy did they deliver: you haven't heard musical energy until you hear a horn like this. The Air Partners could do dynamics, timing and realism like nothing else and if you liked to listen at concert hall levels they didn't disappoint.



23

Van Den Hul Grasshopper phono cartridge

Launched 1982

Original price
£2,800

The first European cartridge to challenge the Japanese dominance of the high end market in the late eighties. An open, body-less design, it incorporated the finest materials and craftsmanship and the sonic result was and still is nothing short of staggering. It was one of the first cartridges to eschew a covering body on the premise that such things just add undesirable resonance. Now available in a variety of wiring and magnet materials in MkIV form, the Grasshopper continues to blow the competition into the weeds in the finest vinyl systems.

22

Nakamichi 1000ZXL cassette deck

Launched 1979

Original price
£1,695

To some, cassette never was real hi-fi, but one only had to use a 1000ZXL to realise it could be. This fabulously well-equipped and complex machine managed to wring more bass, treble, signal-to-noise and detail out of cassette than anyone had expected to find. Not only that, it looked a million dollars (especially in the gold-plated – honest – Limited Edition) and was manually adjustable for everything, making it the tweaker's ultimate toy.



21

Pink Triangle turntable

Launched 1980

Original price
£298

PT's sales were always dwarfed by arch-rival Linn, but this historically significant product was the first with a plastic platter for sound (rather than



cosmetic) reasons and was the first turntable with properly designed suspension that could bounce straight without 'yaw'. Accused of 'slowing under load' – never proven, incidentally – and plagued by quality control problems, it offered an alternative to Thorens/AR/Linn construction and its legacy lives on.

20

Audio Note Ongaku amplifier

Launched 1988

Original price
£30,000

The Ongaku put the single ended triode (SET) valve amp back on the hi-fi map after half a century of obscurity. This outrageously expensive, alarmingly heavy valve amp was, and still is, built in Japan by Hiroyasu Kondo, a man dedicated to building the best amplifiers with no holds barred. It was a glorious sounding, beautifully built tube amp that produced 27 watts per channel. In fact, it was so good it started a revival of interest in not only SETs but all manner of valve amplification and high efficiency speakers with which to use them.



“Wadia’s 16 established itself as one of the most dynamic and convincing CD players of the nineties.”

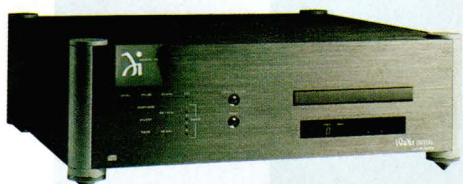
19

Wadia 16 CD player

Launched 1997

Original price £7,000

Wadia established itself as a prime mover on the digital audio scene with its Digimaster 2000 D/A converter in the late eighties but it wasn't until one-box designs like the Wadia 8 and then the Wadia 16 that the audio world began to really appreciate how good high end CD replay could be. Incorporating Digimaster filter technology, a TEAC transport mechanism and one of the most substantial chassis ever used for hi-fi, the 16 established itself as one of the most dynamic and convincing CD players of the nineties.



18

Cambridge Audio P40 amplifier

Launched 1971

Original price £75

This was the amp that kick-started the ‘amplifiers sound different’ crusade in the seventies. It eventually became the inspiration for the A&R Cambridge (Arcam) A60, which ditched some of the more radical design ideas, including the startling good looks, in favour of a design that didn't break down or blow up every time the fuse was replaced. On a good day though, the P40 was true magic. Specifically, this was the amplifier that showed the world that Quad, which was then the industry yardstick, had feet of clay.



“This was the amp that kick-started the ‘amplifiers sound different’ crusade in the seventies.”



17

Sennheiser HD414 open back headphones

Launched 1968

Original price £11.75

The HD414 was the first lightweight, open back headphone, with easily replaceable parts, bright yellow earpads and a stunningly crisp, open sound. Sennheiser was principally a microphone producer, and the HD414 capsules were designed as microphone capsules. The story, perhaps apocryphal, is that an engineer tested a capsule by holding it to his ear and feeding a signal through it. So impressed was he by the sound that he jury-rigged a pair with a makeshift headband, and the '414 was born.

16

Cambridge Audio CD1 CD player

Launched 1983

Original price £1,500

The world's first two-box CD player was a radical attempt to tackle the limitations of early CD replay hardware. At its heart were three selected Philips DACs per channel, which delivered a genuine 20-bit resolution. It also featured an effective suspension system tuned to 1Hz, which meant a much improved bass and fewer data errors, and a bank of six user-selectable anti-aliasing filters, some addressing the group delay problems that still plague brick wall filters today.

15

Krell KSA-100 stereo power amplifier

Launched 1980

Original price £1,800

Krell's first product, the uncompromising KSA-100, effectively invented the high end, high power, Class A power amp. It was fan cooled, had a balanced



internal topology, was massively over specified and fabulously built. It was almost mandatory in systems with electrically difficult or insensitive speakers, and it became a natural partner for speakers from Magneplanar, DCM, and later, Apogee.

14

Supex 900 phono cartridge

Launched 1974

Original price £100

To be fair, Ortofon never stopped making low-output moving-coil cartridges, but it took the inspirational marketing of Linn Products, as importer of Japanese maker Supex, to put this invariably expensive and inconvenient approach firmly back on the UK audiophile map.

Prior to the Supex 900, higher output moving-magnet devices ruled the roost. They were half the price, were easier to amplify, and offered superior trackability. But packaged with an exceptional turntable (LP12), tonearm (Grace 707) and amplifier (Naim), the Supex simply sounded superior, and paved the way for other moving-coil types.

THE SCOTTISH HI-FI+HOME CINEMA SHOW

The Date : Saturday 19th – Sunday 20th October 2002

The Venue: The Thistle Hotel, Cambridge Street, Glasgow G2 3HN

Why you should be there...

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

Show activities

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

Advance Tickets

£4 available by e-mail, fax or letter to: CCL Chesterfield Communications Ltd, Events House,
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Free tickets before 30/6/02

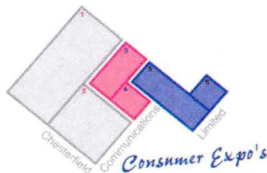
Discounted Tickets £3 before 31/07/02

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

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

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

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



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hi-fi+

HI-FI CHOICE

smarthouse

12

Wharfedale Diamond bookshelf loudspeaker

Launched 1982

Original price £69

It is hard to believe, but most 'bookshelf' speakers used to be about half a metre tall. Wharfedale's 1982 product launch was reasonably uneventful, except for a small, seemingly insignificant two-way speaker called the Diamond. No one expected it to change the world, but the press, the dealers and the public proved Wharfedale correct. Tiny, simple and efficient, it sounded stunning. Soon, the Diamond was the best seller and every speaker maker produced a Diamond-sized mini-bookshelf. The Diamond has changed beyond recognition today, but it is still in the Wharfedale catalogue.



10

10

Townshend Elite Rock turntable

Launched 1982

Original price £299

Max Townshend started building cartridges in the seventies but couldn't find a turntable to do them justice until he came across the Rock, a drastic rethink of record player design created by the Cranfield Institute of Research. The most striking thing about the design is the silicone fluid filled trough that swings across the record and damps cartridge vibration by means of a paddle attached to the end of the tonearm. The effect was bass reproduction like never before and a complete elimination of high frequency distortion caused by vinyl resonance.



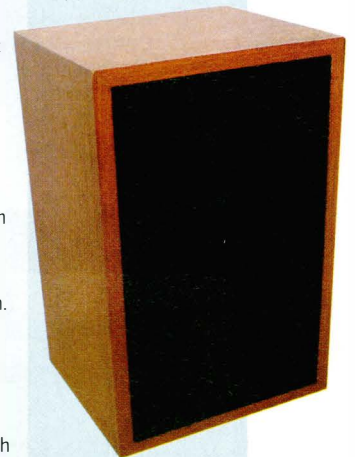
09

Meridian MCD Pro CD player

Launched 1983

Original price £750

This was the CD player that proved you could get audiophile-grade performance out of polycarbonate discs. It was also the CD player that put Meridian at the pinnacle of digital audio engineering, a position that a decade and a half later meant Meridian was central to the design of DVD-Audio's specification. The MCD Pro was built on a standard Philips CD100 chassis, but was heavily modified with special attention paid to the power supplies. It broke the mould for CD and set the tone for every 'hot-rod' player ever since.



08

Rogers LS3/5A loudspeaker

Launched 1974

Original price £104

It's a bit of a cheek calling this a 'Rogers' loudspeaker because it was designed by the BBC and made under licence by several firms over the years, most recently Spondor. Intended as a small speaker for close-range monitoring use with both speech and music, it was quite implausibly informative. True low frequency response was never great but subjectively, bass sounded amazing and thanks to the fabulous crossover integration and treble sweetness the sound was always clear and natural. It's still a reference for any bookshelf speaker to aspire to.

13

Dual CS 505-1 semi-automatic turntable

Launched 1981

Original price £137

If you were a wannabe audiophile in the eighties, a Dual CS 505 was the standard-issue turntable, especially when partnered with the Audio-Technica AT-95E MM cartridge. A belt-driven design with a spindly tonearm with automatic cueing, the CS 505 was the last great budget turntable ever designed; after the Dual, CD took the lion's share of manufacturers' development budgets. Although the semi-automatic arm ultimately limits performance compared to simpler, more expensive designs like the Rega Planar, the German turntable (in its CS 505-4 guise) was made until earlier this year.

11

Connoisseur BD1 kit belt drive turntable chassis

Launched 1970

Original price £12

Most of those getting into hi-fi for the first time in the seventies bought a Pioneer PL12D or some similar idler drive player, but Connoisseur provided a better way. The BD1 was a first class, almost Rega-esque belt drive kit turntable. Build your own plinth, add an SME 3009 arm (its favoured partner) or Connoisseur's own, and you had genuine class for less than £50 all in, if you could excuse the player's propensity for sometimes starting in reverse when the kick-start power switch had worn down.

13





06

Pioneer A400 integrated amplifier

Launched 1989

Original price £230

For most of the eighties it was generally accepted that all amplifiers from all major Japanese manufacturers sounded dreadful. That may not in fact have been literally true but it was a common preconception and there were some grounds for it. Pioneer had certainly made some turkeys on the amp front, but came up smelling strongly of roses with the astoundingly successful A400 and its closely related but less powerful brother, the A300.

A modestly specified amplifier (about 50 watts, no tone controls, no gadgets), it sounded beautifully lively, detailed, sweet and open, and left quite a few small specialist manufacturers of competing products badly bewildered. There was no particularly hi-tech secret to it, just good design based on 'golden-eared' listener feedback in both Japan and the UK. Internal components were generally 'bog-standard' and many a tweeker had a field day replacing a few, but even in stock form it blew most of the competition away. It took quite a while for the other big names to catch up, but nowadays of course there are plenty of fine-sounding Far Eastern amps.

05

Spendor BC1 loudspeaker

Launched 1969

Original price £52 each

The hi-fi speaker market was a very different place when Spendor's BC1 appeared in the late sixties. Drive units and enclosures often came from different manufacturers, and the idea of speaker 'systems' was only just coming in.

The BC1 (the initials refer to the Bextrene plastic cone of the main driver, and the Celestion HF1300 tweeter) was innovative in a number of ways. An early example of the use of plastics to achieve greater consistency in cone materials, it was also the first speaker design from the BBC's Research Department to achieve real commercial success outside the professional broadcast sector.

As such it set a standard for voice-monitoring accuracy which became a reference standard for the rest of the British speaker industry, in a very real sense proving that it was possible for a regular box speaker to achieve a similar standard to the Quad Electrostatic from a decade earlier. Ironically, the BC1 remains a redoubtable sonic performer today, especially on modern high quality speaker stands. But a smallish speaker of thirty years ago looks quite large by today's standards.



07

Philips CD100/ Marantz CD63 CD player

Launched 1983

Original price £300

In 1983 just launching a CD player was pretty novel, but these two (essentially the same beast with different trim, from Philips and its subsidiary-as-was) had a feature that no other manufacturer cottoned on to for some time: oversampling. That alone, which allowed reconstruction filters with much better amplitude and phase response, not to mention lower distortion than most others, ensured that this player maintained a significant sound quality advantage over most comers for several

years. Small wonder Meridian based the first audiophile deck on it.

By today's standard the sound is not so wonderful, a bit thick and congested, but it was streets ahead of some of its Japanese contemporaries which sounded simply vile – harsh and screechy, and shorn of detail and dimension. It's an irony that Philips took some bad press for offering only '14-bit' resolution: the oversampling addressed that restriction and now it's almost universal practice to use low-bit technology with oversampling, but most journalists completely failed to understand for an embarrassingly long time.

07





03

NAD 3020 integrated amplifier

Launched 1979

Original price £80

There are things no budget amplifier is supposed to do. Like sounding better than products costing ten times as much, driving difficult high-end hi-fi speakers or being so musical that people use extremely expensive turntables to show its potential. The original NAD 3020 did all this and more.

On the surface, it had nothing going for it. It was from a small, unknown manufacturer, the amp was ugly looking and delivered an anaemic 28 watts per channel, at a time when every big name manufacturer was making sleek products that could deliver hundreds of watts. No one seemed to care that the pursuit of power was often at the expense of sound quality.

Then the 3020 hit the streets. The dark, warm sound was a paragon of natural sounding musicality. So what if it was a bit blurry round the edges and didn't have pin-point imagery? It always sounded and performed bigger than it had any right to. Every other amplifier manufacturer had to rethink its plans after the NAD 3020 and we are still reaping the rewards today.



02

Quad ELS electrostatic loudspeaker

Launched 1956

Original price £40 each

For many years Quad was the gold standard in high fidelity. Their products were traditionally designed on sound, conventional engineering principles – no tweaky nonsense about the sound of different wires or capacitors here. But the Quad ELS was a genuinely radical full range electrostatic loudspeaker, the first of its type. Designed by company founder Peter Walker, it was the first practical full range electrostatic loudspeaker, a three-way design using lightweight polymer

diaphragms to provide speed and precision unknown in the world of conventional loudspeakers.

But 'practical' and 'full range' are relative terms. It was practical to the extent that you had to be prepared to live with a pair of central heating radiator wannabes taking up prime living room real estate, not forgetting its legendary fussiness about power amps, and it was full bandwidth only if you were prepared for a rather lean, dry bass, which somehow seemed to match the sometimes metallic sounding midband rather well. It was limited in maximum output too, and overall its qualities chimed best with classical music. On the right day however, it could weave a magic spell that some still believe is matchless, even by its successors. An authentic classic.



04

Naim NAC12/ NAP250 pre/ power amplifier

Launched 1974

Original price £120

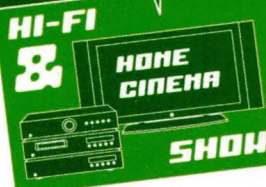
The hi-fi establishment laughed when this amp first appeared. It was seriously expensive and didn't even have tone controls. In those days all amps allegedly sounded the same, so what was the point of this combo?

Improving source components slowly but surely convinced the industry: a) that amplifiers did sound different; and b) that tone controls were a bad thing. The seventies ugly duckling then became the darling of the eighties. By 1990 no self-respecting amp had tone controls, and leaving them out had become a prerequisite for generating sales.

Naim Audio can take much of the credit for introducing minimalism and turning people on to the idea of amplifier sound quality, but the NAC12/NAP250 combo incorporated other innovations too. Outboard preamp power supplies, star-earthing, modular interchangeable MM/MC phono stages and 'passive' phono EQ have all subsequently found imitators elsewhere.



THE
N. IRELAND
STORMONT HOTEL 2/3 NOV



The Date : Saturday 2nd – Sunday 3rd November 2002
The Venue: The Stormont Hotel, Northern Ireland

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- A historic venue for Hi-Fi shows - The Stormont Hotel
- This year sponsored by Hi-fi Plus, Hi-fi Choice and Smarthouse
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Free tickets before 31/07/02

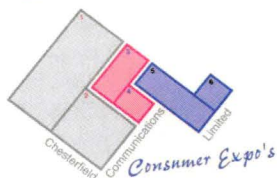
Discounted Tickets £3 before 31/08/02

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01

Linn Sondek LP12 turntable

Launched 1972

Original price £80

A great sounding turntable, no question. But Linn's Sondek LP12 was (and is) much more than that. In the early 1970s, specialist British hi-fi manufacture was knocked sideways by crass government economic policies. Numerous famous names of the era (Rogers, Armstrong, Lustraphone etc) went into liquidation, and even the survivors suffered considerable damage, leaving the doors of the UK hi-fi market wide open for the large and aggressive Japanese multinationals to walk in.

In a very real sense Linn (along with other seventies start-ups like Naim, Rega, Meridian and Arcam), stimulated the subsequent renaissance in British hi-fi manufacture – a revival that's still going strong today. And the key component



in this process was unquestionably Linn's Sondek LP12 turntable.

This is a superb sounding component in its own right, but it's also an icon which changed the way the industry perceived hi-fi. Prior to the Sondek, people bought inexpensive source components and amplifiers, in the belief that there was little to choose between the alternatives, and devoted the lion's share of the budget to the loudspeakers.

Linn heretically preached the opposite approach, claiming that the turntable was the most important component of all, and that there was no point in spending large sums on speakers to reproduce source signals of inadequate quality. The company placed

heavy emphasis on demonstration and dealer training, and through the seventies managed to convince much of the trade of the validity of its approach.

No less important, Linn's success in demonstrating the superiority of its Sondek also punctured the myth of Japanese hi-fi superiority. One of Japan Inc's major innovations of the era was the direct drive turntable, but when Linn persuaded people actually to listen to turntables playing music, rather than placing faith in quoted rumble, wow and flutter specs, the penny dropped that these sexy looking direct driver turntables were far less good at the subtle art of reproducing music than a

well set-up 'old-fashioned' belt drive device.

Although its engineering was invariably impeccable, one can fairly point out that Linn's innovations had at least as much to do with skillful marketing, through the putting together of synergistic components, and the painstaking development of an essentially simple component. Over the years the basic LP12 has evolved through a series of performance enhancing updates – Nirvana, Valhalla, Lingo and Cirkus – and a succession of improving ancillaries – Ittok and Ekos tonearms, Asak, Troika and Arkiv cartridges – all of which have helped keep the LP12 in the vanguard of high quality vinyl replay.



“Linn heretically preached that the turntable was the most important component of all, and that there was no point in spending large sums on speakers to reproduce inadequate source signals.”

MAIN REVIEWS – Alvin Gold | LAB REPORTS – Paul Miller

CD PLAYERS

Despite the rumours, the dedicated CD player is very much alive. And kicking!

Yes they're still here, and still coming, not with the profusion that was once the case, but certainly more than some had predicted by now. The plan was that one or other take on high resolution multichannel audio should have taken centre stage, but it hasn't happened yet. Perhaps it never will. Soon you may find it difficult to buy a Sony CD player that doesn't also play SACDs, and there is a significant number of excellent SACDs around, though not enough to build a worthwhile collection. But DVD-Audio is looking increasingly like a dead duck, perhaps fatally wounded by the likes of

Verance (creator of the eponymous copy protection technology), a damaging lack of belief in the format within the industry itself, and a critical lack of interest in the opinion-forming audiophile community.

So CD continues, by a huge margin, to be the most important carrier of music. Its position even shows signs of improving, with better high-speed D/A converters and improved digital filters even in budget players, and a wider appreciation (thanks in part to *HFC's* own Paul Miller) of the importance of jitter in the sound quality equation.

Though prices of CD players are generally being driven downwards, the average price in this test is just below £500 – still a lot to pay compared to the rash of DVD-Video players (which also play compact discs) now available in your friendly neighbourhood supermarket. The one thing that helps make sense of an increasingly senseless world is that, as always, you get what you pay for. Cheap DVD-Video players tend to be deficient in video quality and also invariably sound rather shoddy when playing CDs, as the designs are optimised for the video role, leaving the audio dependent on the video clocks, internally generated radio frequency noise and indifferent quality power supplies and other components. Dedicated CD players offer something different, something better, namely the promise of music making that involves, engages and excites. Music that sounds like music. ☺

ON TEST



ARCAM CD62
£350



EXPOSURE 2010
£600



MARANTZ CD6000 KI SIGNATURE
£500



NAD C 5411
£330



PRIMARE D20
£799



ROTEL RCD-02
£379

EQUIPMENT USED

B&W Nautilus 800 speakers
Mission m51 speakers
Classé CP-65 preamp and 2x CAM350 monoblock power amps
Exposure 2010 integrated amp
Omega SACD-1 SACD player
Primare D30.2 CD player
Nordost Valhalla speaker cables
Nordost Valhalla interconnects
TAG McLaren interconnects

MUSIC USED

Linda Ronstadt *Prisoner In Disguise*
Garbage *Garbage*
Marc Cohn *Marc Cohn*
Edie Brickell *Picture Perfect Morning*
CBSO/Rattle *Mahler Symphony No6*
Eels *Electro-shock Blues*
János Ferencsik *Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra Kodály's Háry János suite*
Royal Orchestra, Stockholm *Mozart Clarinet Concerto*
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ARCAM DIVA CD62T £350

01223 203200 www.arcam.co.uk

Entry-level Arcam's 'broad brush' approach delivers punch and power but loses out on detail

The CD62T traces its roots back to the CD75E, by way of the CD72, one of the first DivAs, but it is a simplified model designed to give Arcam a presence in the strategically important £350 area. It looks similar to the CD72, but closer examination shows that the fascia is a plastic moulding, albeit a quality one, where the CD72 boasts a classy alloy extrusion. The Sony CD-R/RW compatible mechanism is the same, however, and so is the Burr-Brown PCM1716 24/96 Delta Sigma DAC, but there is no provision for a Ring DAC upgrade which transforms the CD72 to full CD92 status.

One result of this is that a simpler power supply can be specified, and there are equivalent simplifications to the output circuitry, which is AC coupled – the CD72 uses a DC servo, which eliminates capacitor coupling. The remote control has also been simplified, though it's still one of the better presented and most comprehensive in the group, with a basic set of amp control function keys. CD Text has been retained too, and in a nod to the custom install market, an increasingly important factor in the USA (if less so over here) there's an input for an external infra-red remote control sensor.

VERDICT

SOUND
★★★★☆

FEATURES
★★★★☆

BUILD
★★★★☆

VALUE
★★★★☆

A solid sounding and well presented player at a tempting price, but its performance is not without flaws.

CHECKLIST

- OPTICAL DIG OUT ✓
- ELECTRICAL DIG OUT ✓
- CD-RW PLAYBACK ✓
- CD TEXT ✓
- CALENDAR DISPLAY ✓

PERFORMANCE

The Arcam is an attractive, likeable and proficient player, but no match for the best in this group test. Although it is dynamically convincing, and a bold and solid performer, there is some lack of tonal and dynamic subtlety, and everything seems to happen in a single depth plane. There are few overt sonic problems – weak bass say, or glassy treble – but there are signs of compression in the player's range of tonal colours, which lacks the richness and variety of the very best below £500.

Although slightly simplified tonally, the Arcam had a solid, punchy way with Garbage and Marc Cohn, but is sometimes a little lacking in very fine detail and subtlety, leading to the conclusion that this is a player best adapted to painting the broader strokes than the fine detail. *Let Me Touch You For A While* from Allison Krauss and Union Station provided the evidence: a vocal sound that was almost caricatured, and painting that lacked finesse when

“Although dynamically convincing, there is some lack of subtlety, and everything seems to happen in a single depth plane.”

compared with players like the similarly-priced NAD and Rotel models in this group. Its positive yet rounded character will probably be beneficial in many lower cost systems, but character is not always a sobriquet that works with hi-fi components, which in an ideal world should be a neutral, open and uncoloured window to the source.

Arcam suggests this model is a natural partner for its A65 Plus amp, and it will be at home in many low to mid-price systems. But given stiff competition it falls short of prevailing standards at the price. ☹

LAB REPORT

▶ The CD62 uses the same CD-Text compatible Sony mechanism and PCM1726 DAC as the CD72 but with a simpler, AC-coupled analogue output stage (the CD72's output benefits from a DC-servo).

▶ At 1,250psec, the CD62 suffers far more jitter than the CD72. This is all hum-induced, known to bring a fuller, warmer but softer-sounding bass.

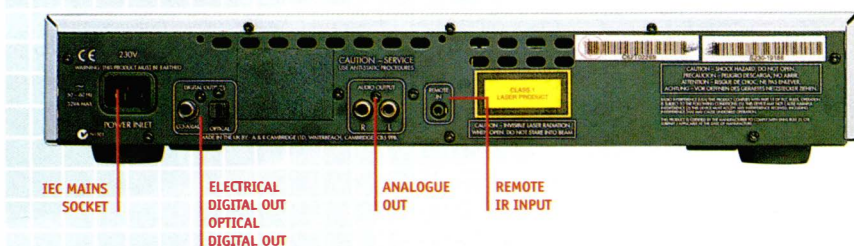
▶ The left channel of this sample was typically worse than the right, with higher jitter and a poorer 100dB A-wtd S/N ratio (103.6dB on the right channel). Ultrasonic noise is also higher than expected.

▶ The 2.3V output level is above average while distortion, at 0.0015% through the bass and midrange, increases acceptably to 0.007% at very high frequencies.

▶ Revised analogue stage introduces a gentle treble roll-off that's -0.2dB at 12kHz and a full -0.5dB down at 20kHz. Combined with the high bass jitter, this accounts for the CD62's sound.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Filling a gap in the market with a 'stripped down' CD72 has not been achieved without compromise.

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS





EXPOSURE 2010 £600 ☎ 01273 423877 🌐 www.exposurehifi.com

An extremely comfortable ride from the veteran high rollers

Many years ago there was a time when Exposure's name was spoken in hushed terms alongside that of Naim, when their gear (this was before compact disc) had the kind of sound quality that many would sell their grannies for. Unfortunately its build quality had many of their fans pulling their hair out. For a while the brand fell out of favour, but under new and revitalised management, Exposure has staged an impressive turnaround – the new products are as smartly turned out and as well built as the early models were not.

The 2010 CD player, previously reviewed in *HFC* 226, is a case in point. The so-called titanium (actually aluminium) or black casework is immaculate, and the moving bits have an excellent operational feel. Technology is based on a Sony CD-R/RW mechanism and Burr-Brown 24-bit/96kHz Delta Sigma DAC, which is now par for the course, and is matched to well endowed power supplies (built around a toroidal transformer and high power reservoir capacitor bank) and audio circuits of the kind that have been an Exposure hallmark since the year dot. The only disappointing feature is the poorly laid out and desperately old fashioned looking remote control,

whose sole saving grace is that it will also operate the matching Exposure 2010 amplifier.

PERFORMANCE

The 2010's character is one that exudes qualities like smoothness and grace, and it is an easy player to settle in with and enjoy over time. There is little that could be described as hard, harsh or grainy – its well rounded quality makes it a safe pair of hands with a wide variety of music types, and in a range of systems, not generally something that could have been claimed for Exposure components in the past.

The sins, such as they are, are of omission. The player doesn't quite rise to the heights of the best in its class. It is tonally near neutral, yet it lacks the expressive range and resolving power needed to make the most of the better discs used in this test. As an example, the Brahms chamber recording sounded slightly woolly, the clarinet's upper registers failing to cut through the mix,

“The 2010's character exudes qualities like smoothness and grace, and it is an easy player to settle in with and enjoy over time.”

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Easy on the ear and the eye, the 2010 is a fine mid-market machine. But competition is tough and some great lower priced players are emerging...

CHECKLIST

- OPTICAL DIG OUT ✓
- ELECTRICAL DIG OUT ✓
- CD-RW PLAYBACK ✓
- CD TEXT ✓
- CALENDAR DISPLAY ✓

though the warmth was near palpable, and the recording venue's acoustic was well resolved. Similarly, it was hard to hear through the subtle layering in the bleak orchestral expanses of the *Mahler* Six. The result? An orchestral sound that lacks the complexity that helps mark the music out as special, though it remains an impressive sounding disc by normal standards even here. The Best Buy ranking achieved in our last group is scaled down in the light of the very strong showing by some lower cost models in this group, but it is still warmly Recommended. ☺

LAB REPORT

▶ Uses the same CD-Text compatible transport from Sony and 24-bit PCM1716 DAC, from Burr-Brown, as the Arcam CD62, but generally with more success.

▶ Jitter is substantially lower at 175psec while the A-wtd S/N ratio is symmetrical at 103dB on both left and right channels. This figure is pretty typical of the DAC itself, as is the 0.0015% midband distortion, and is not compromised by Exposure's own analogue stage.

▶ The 79dB rejection of stopband images is typical of the DAC's integral oversampling filter whose noise-shaping technology still releases a moderate level of ultrasonic noise. Some slight compatibility issues with different amplifiers are still possible.

▶ Exposure has not attempted to give its 2010 player a superficial advantage by increasing the output beyond 2V, so beware of unmatched A/B listening comparisons!

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** The combination of Sony's BD25 transport with the PCM1716 DAC is repeated in many specialist CD players, but Exposure's 2010 remains the most successful.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



ANALOGUE
OUT

OPTICAL
DIGITAL
OUT

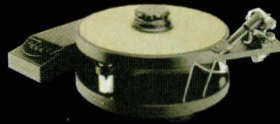
ELECTRICAL
DIGITAL
OUT (BNC)

IEC MAINS
SOCKET

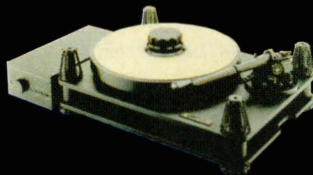
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LIVING VOICE



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Wadia 860x - ex dem - boxed.

£4950 £7950

Analogue

Nottingham Analogue 'The Foot' - 12" carbon fibre tonearm - it's new and it's long.

£700 £1100

Helius Cyalene - beefcake tonearm, Victoria sponge sound.

£500 £1350

Loudspeakers

Living Voice Auditorium - walnut.

£900 £1500

Cadence DS - rosewood - give away.

£600 £1750

Klipsh LaScala - black - zippy horn.

£1750 £3500

Quad ELS63 - untidy bargain.

£390 £3000

Amplifiers

Border Patrol 300B SE - with new Western Electric valves -

£4000 £4500

light oak - the best SE available - New - excess stock.

Art Audio VPS - valve line pre-amp.

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Art Audio Diavolo - with 320B valves - chrome + gold -

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line integrated - juicy.

Art Audio Concerto - 40w line integrated - black + chrome.

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Art Audio Concerto - 40w power amp.

£1350 £2250

Joule Electra - 2 box phono pre-amp.

£800 £2000

Linn Classic - CD, amp, tuner, thing.

£500 £1000

Cary '2A3' - 7 watt power amp. 1992

£850 -

Cary 5500 - line pre-amp. 1992

£550 -

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MARANTZ CD6000 KI SIGNATURE £500

01753 680868 www.marantz.com

KI-modified CD6000 conjures up some real musical magic

Top of the CD6000 variants, the KI (Ken Ishiwata) Signature boasts a dual differential mode Delta Sigma D/A converter, an established means of improving noise levels and low level linearity at the cost of an extra converter and a few other components. As with all Marantz's better players, the output stage is built around its proprietary HDAM (Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Module), a discrete high slew rate buffer amplifier which replaces the usual shoddy op-amp (operational amplifier) on a chip. There are also a number of the usual KI-inspired passive component substitutions.

An impressively designed remote control allows about 30dB of adjustment over the analogue output, though the player defaults to full throttle. To retain resolution, this volume control should not be considered as a substitute for a conventional preamp – it's one of those tasks that should be done properly or not at all. It's more gainfully employed adjusting the level to the headphone socket.

Other features include CD Text and the player can cope with CD-R/RW discs. But the most immediately arresting features of this player are the first class build quality of its copper

plated and damped metalwork, and the beautifully discreet dot matrix display.

PERFORMANCE

Classy stuff then, and this is fully reflected in its musical performance, which is indisputably the best in group. The CD6000 KI Signature has a perceptibly rich, but very forceful sound. The *Mahler Six* reproduced with a strong sense of solidity and architecture, with tremendous conviction and an electrifying sense of grip through the shattering hammer blows, but it showed quite a different set of strengths in the *Brahms Clarinet Quintet*, which came across with tremendous definition, a pungent tonality and a naturally open yet well defined sense of space. It's a polished, even seductive sound that plays to the strengths of recordings rather than emphasising their weaknesses.

Without any suggestion of tonal brightness, the CD6000 has an unusually lucid and richly varied tonality. Subtle variations of tonal colour among

"Subtle variations of tonal colour aren't glossed over, and the result is a sound that is interestingly varied and true to life."

instruments remain obvious. This is the kind of fine detail that other players often gloss over, and the result is a sound that is interestingly varied and true to life. Kodály's *Háry János* suite, with its opulent instrumentation, demonstrates how dynamic contrasts are expressed naturally and fluidly, and the treble is informative without having an identifiable character of its own. But the player knows how to shake the rafters, with the Garbage recording for example, and the drum pattern that opens Linda Ronstadt's *Roll Um Easy* from the *Prisoner In Disguise* album. **C**

VERDICT
SOUND
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★★
BUILD
★★★★★
VALUE
★★★★★
An affordable high-end machine, this very impressive player has it all: brawn, finesse and class.
CHECKLIST
OPTICAL DIG OUT ✓
ELECTRICAL DIG OUT ✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK ✓
CD TEXT ✓
CALENDAR DISPLAY ✓

LAB REPORT

▶ Marantz's HDAM op-amps are used in both analogue filter and output buffer stages, yielding both a low output impedance and very low 0.0009% distortion. The A-wtd S/N of 103.1dB is also substantially better than the 96dB achieved by the lower cost CD6000 OSE.

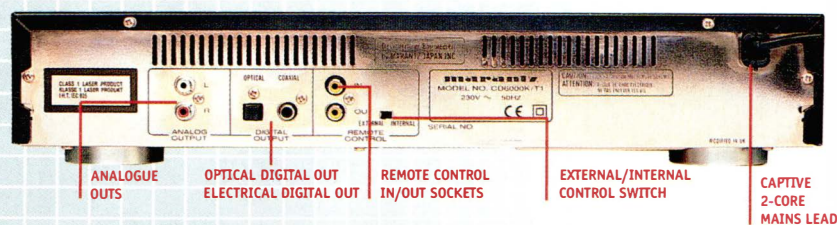
▶ The NPC SM5872 DAC rejects digital image distortions by just 54dB while its low-level linearity drifts by -0.7dB at -90dBFS, though ultrasonic noise is better controlled than with Arcam's CD62, for example.

▶ Jitter is reduced from 350psec (CD6000 OSE) to 260psec of primarily hum and power supply-derived jitter which is not sufficient either to compromise bass resolution or affect the sharpness of stereo imagery.

▶ Stereo separation remains a remarkable >120dB across the audio range while both normal and pre-emphasised CDs enjoy a flat response (+0.1/-0.3dB).

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** The 'fully stacked' version of a series first introduced in 1999 and arguably the most proficient.

DETAIL - CONNECTIONS





The Date : Saturday 16th – Sunday 17th November 2002

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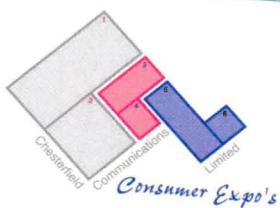
Discounted Tickets £5.50 before 31/08/02

The show also features a new trade and entrance hall and defined area for home entertainments.

The show will open from 10am – 6pm on Saturday 16th and 10am – 5pm on Sunday 17th.

Admission on the door will be just £7.50 (the same as '01)

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



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Website: www.chestergroup.org



NAD C541i £330 01223 203200 www.nadelectronics.com

A great value player from a classic budget stable

This new NAD special edition model is a tidy, if blandly designed player. The remote is little bigger than palm size, and is well laid out, though more use of colour would have been an improvement.

But bland or not, the C541i is quite adventurous under the skin, with a specification that would do justice to players at much higher price levels. With separate taps on its toroidal transformer for analogue and digital duties, and a sprinkling of audiophile quality passive components (like Nichicon Muse caps), the NAD also features a fully buffered digital output and a low impedance analogue output (below 300 ohms) which offers a degree of immunity from cable capacitance effects. The output op-amps are from Burr-Brown, the DAC is a 24-bit/96kHz Delta Sigma part from the same source and an HDCD digital filter is specified, which is an unusual refinement at the price. The CD-R/RW compliant mechanism is extremely quick, making the player feel more responsive than most.

It has a number of features aimed at the custom install market, including standby switching from the remote control, an external IR input for hidden installations along with NAD Link system control sockets, and the ability to

be switched by 12V trigger signal. The firmware is designed to be integrated with Crestron and other controllers.

PERFORMANCE

With more hours play under its belt than when it was first tested in *HFC's* July issue (in the *Incoming* section), the NAD has thrown off some of its obvious richness and smoothness in favour of a balance that is at once dynamic, colourful and assured. There is a strong sense of detail, with a very slight roughness or texturing of high frequency information. The bass is full but has a dry quality, though the adjective that springs first to mind is transparent, followed by tuneful.

It is an excellent all-rounder and despite some minor cosmetic blemishes to the sound, its performance is highly impressive at the price. The clean, open textures and smooth, expressive demeanour worked well with the Brahms *Clarinet Quintet*, and the Garbage album had tremendous drive

"It is an excellent all-rounder and despite some minor cosmetic blemishes, its performance is highly impressive at the price."

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD




VALUE




A dynamic, tonally varied and confident sounding player with class-leading detail resolution. At the price a Best Buy badge is richly deserved.


CHECKLIST


OPTICAL DIG OUT	✓
ELECTRICAL DIG OUT	✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK	✓
CD TEXT	×
CALENDAR DISPLAY	×


and poise. It didn't always convince though. The rocky terrains of the *Mahler Six* sounded slightly reined in during the crescendo, and in particular in the hammer blow motif, whose reticence almost suggested an element of gain riding, leaving the impression that the power supplies were sometimes not quite coping with the demand. At such moments – few though they were – the NAD reverted to type, and did sound a little lazy, warm and blurred. But this was so infrequent, and so mild, that it was on the limit of observation where it was noticeable at all. 


LAB REPORT


 The C541i is derived from the C541 and C540, but only the C541i, with its Sony mechanism, can read CD, CDR and CD-R/RW discs.

 Burr-Brown's PCM1732 DAC replaces the PCM1716 used before, providing HDCD-compatibility with an excellent 101dB rejection of digital images.

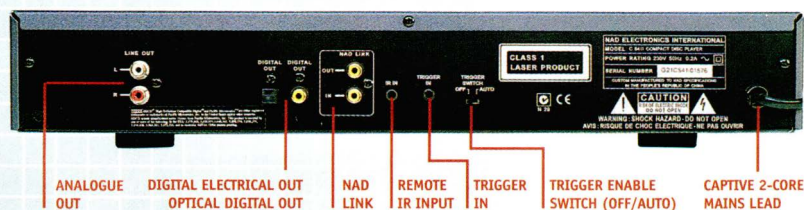
 Noise is not so impressive, but with a 99dB S/N ratio, just keeps its nose ahead of CD's 16-bit standard.

 NAD's proprietary analogue filter successfully quells any ultrasonic noise but also causes an increase in conventional harmonic distortion from 0.0015% (midrange) to 0.03% (high treble).

 Jitter amounts to just 190psec – a very clean result and one that contrasts with the high +223ppm clock error which, though insufficient to cause an audible change in musical pitch, does indicate below-average clock selection on NAD's part.

 **LAB CONCLUSION:** The disc-handling of the 540-series has been steadily improved while the technical performance of its DAC and analogue stages is not significantly different.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



KJ West One - Where 'budget' does not mean compromise!

As hi-fi enthusiasts you all know how easy it is to fall for something that creates an impact during a demonstration but then proves to be tiresome over the longer term.

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Individually, each of the components we're recommending here features tried, tested, even revered technologies that have influenced (sometimes for decades) the high-end of audio reproduction, but it's as a truly compatible combination we've 'lived' with for some time now, that we've come to appreciate the manner in which it can reassert itself in our affections even after an occasional 'affair' with some awesomely convincing (and often hugely expensive) systems.

To arrange your personal demonstration of totally satisfying music reproduction at a realistic price, please phone to make an appointment at any branch of KJ West One.



Copland CDA822 CD Player

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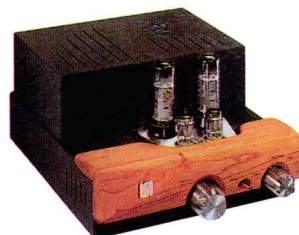
The new CDA822 incorporates a 24bit, high resolution, dual differential DAC with increased oversampling of 96kHz - similar to systems used in some of the most influential components we've heard. 'Upsampling' reveals the transparency of recordings and reduces compression effects - so much so, once you've heard reproduction like this, ordinary digital congestion becomes obvious and intolerable!

Deliver this unfettered clarity through a single ended Class A, integrated amplifier and you'll soon realise that the term 'budget' becomes irrelevant. This is music reproduction of a purity that defies categorisation.

Unison SR2K Integrated Amplifier

£1295

There's something undeniably satisfying about valves, even the limited intervention of a tiny tube in a hybrid amp can bring an emotional benefit to music reproduction. Better still, with the remarkable value of this beautiful Class A integrated amplifier from Unison, we're able to enjoy one of high-end audio's most elegant configurations, one with which the speed and sonority of this technology becomes immediately apparent, especially through efficient, full range loudspeakers.



Triangle Celius 202EX Loudspeakers

£1095

Since we first commented on these seductive speakers they've received several very favourable reviews. Satisfyingly full range, and with 92dB sensitivity, they maximise the potential of our chosen components, combining to provide effortless dynamics in a natural, free flow of music, intimate in details like voice and solo instrumentals, yet majestic with powerful works of all types.

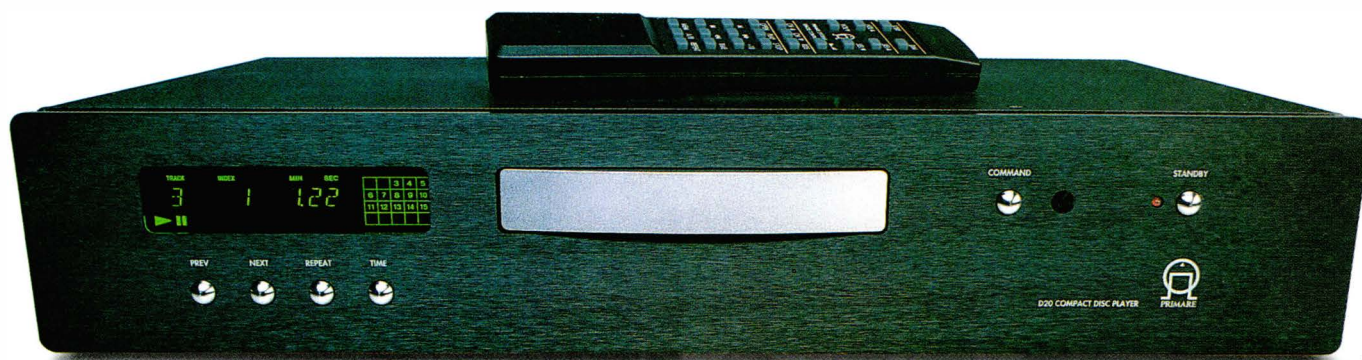
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PRIMARE D20 MKII £799

01423 359054 www.datateam.hu/pages/primare

EXCLUSIVE Solid performer on paper fails to move the head or heart

Primare's entry-level CD player is no budget wannabe, but £700's worth of disc-spinning machine, immaculately presented and quite expensively constructed. The case is made from unusually thick 2mm powder-coated steel, providing a stable platform for the player, which is freed to use a tightly controlled servo of a kind that might come to grief in a more lightly constructed player. Like other Primare models, the front panel is fitted on a stand-off, which corresponds to an enclosed screened section which houses the electrically noisy display electronics. The digital clockwork downstream of the CD-R/RW compatible Sony mechanism includes a 24-bit/96kHz AKM Delta Sigma DAC, but driven at a nice and easy 20 bits which in principal is more than enough to cope with the 16-bit data off a disc.

The player has a very simple control set centred around a single multi-function button, which manages to perform a number of context-related functions, and it has a clean looking display with a calendar-type track readout. There is no optical digital output, though an electrical one is provided, and the stick-type remote control includes some basic system control functionality.

PERFORMANCE

The margin of performance between a CD player that stirs the soul, and one that doesn't, can be narrow indeed, and this one just fails to set the musical landscape on fire. It's not altogether easy to say why. The player sounds clean and open, with good spatial imagery; the bass is deep and pure, dynamics are well resolved and the treble is decorous if not overtly detailed, but at least there is none of the grain or edge that afflicts many players.

And that perhaps is the real problem here. Everything below about 500Hz or so is handled well – almost too well as it tends to overwhelm what happens higher up the frequency band. As a result, tonality is rather heavy-handed, even dull. There is little adrenaline in the music, and the whole effect is of coolness and detachment.

The recording of the Brahms *Clarinet Quintet* led by Antony Michaelson of Musical Fidelity fame has a wonderfully resonant clarinet tone, but little bite

“Everything below 500Hz or so is handled well – almost too well as it tends to overwhelm what happens higher up the frequency band.”

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Viable in a system that otherwise sounds bright and close, but the D20 is generally a little too underdemonstrative to convince.

CHECKLIST

OPTICAL DIG OUT	✗
ELECTRICAL DIG OUT	✓
CD-RW PLAYBACK	✓
CD TEXT	✗
CALENDAR DISPLAY	✓

through this player. At the opposite end of the musical spectrum, the propulsive rock 'n' roll of Marc Cohn's *Silver Thunderbird* fell flat, spatially and dynamically. Full bore orchestral material generally works a little better, with a strong inner detail and space, but with an oddly distant presentation. With music of this type, a powerfully dynamic quality gives the D20 a helping hand, but does little to help with most mainstream material, which often sounds compressed. ☹

LAB REPORT

▶ Last tested over 3 years ago in HFC 188, the Primare D20 has witnessed many worthwhile running production changes, realised in its improved 107dB S/N ratio and low 170psec jitter.

▶ The player's maximum output level has dropped from 1.97V to 1.84V, so beware of unmatched comparisons with players boasting 2V+ outputs.

▶ Its rejection of stopband images remains below average at 68dB because the D20 still uses the same oversampling technology, but pre-emphasised CDs are now properly recognised so all discs enjoy a flat response (+0.0/-0.25dB, 20-20k).

▶ Distortion is exceptionally low at 0.0006% through the bass and midrange, increasing to a mere 0.007% at the very highest audible frequencies.

▶ Experience shows in the PCB layout, with interchannel crosstalk held below -100dB at all frequencies. The low 100ohm output impedance also ensures a reasonable insensitivity to your choice of interconnect and amplifier.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Three years ago, we suggested the D20 had plenty of unrealised potential. Primare's tweaking has made this closer to reality.

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



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ROTEL RCD-02 £379 ☎ 01903 750750 🌐 www.rotel.com

A strong all-rounder from a new range for 2002

In the house of Rotel, continuity is prized over innovation for its own sake, and completely new ranges are something of a rarity. But the 02 series is just that, and coincidentally comes at the same time as a change in UK distribution which will see the brand restricted mainly to more specialist dealerships.

The 02 series includes three amplifiers and a tuner as well as the subject of this test (see last month's *Incoming*), a slimline CD player available in silver or black. The controls and display are all on the right-hand side of the player, leaving the left side looking underpopulated, but the mechanism is quick at loading discs and finding tracks, and the large, clear display is excellent, though it would have been better had it been partnered with a display dim feature.

The player uses an 18-bit Delta Sigma DAC from Burr-Brown, and jitter reduction has been a major design priority. It is HDCD compatible, a useful bonus when dealing with the still limited number of encoded discs, and is also equipped for the dawning age of custom install, with a trigger input, and one for an external IR remote sender. It is compatible with CD-R/RW discs, but not CD Text.

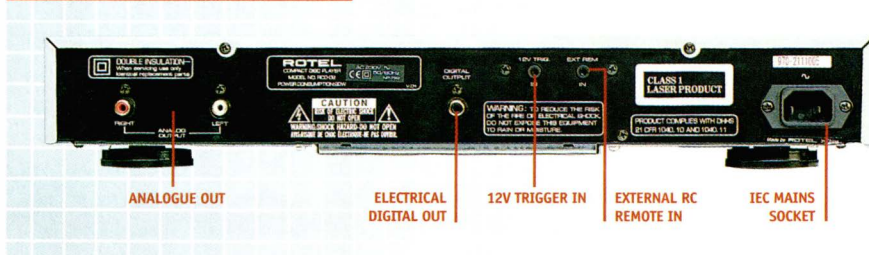
PERFORMANCE

The Rotel's main strengths are its impressive fine detail resolving power, its firm and stable way of projecting an image, and its strong, on the ball timing. This is a player that paints a very precise, clean and articulate picture. At least with straightforward, not too densely packed recordings, you will be left in no doubt about how many instruments are playing and where they are positioned, but there may be some ambiguity about more subtle matters of musical intonation, and tonally the Rotel is a tad on the lean, lightweight side of neutral.

The Rotel's Waterloo came with more complex, difficult material, for example the famous *Viennese Musical Clock* movement from Kodály's *Háry János* suite, which sounded messy and confused at times. The Rotel's strong analysis made it easy enough to hear through the mix, but the music did not escape without the occasional hint of edginess and grain, and similar observations were

“This is a player that paints a very precise, clean and articulate picture, but tonally it's a tad on the lean, lightweight side of neutral.”

DETAIL – CONNECTIONS



VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Sharp, precise and articulate sounding player only suffers slightly with very difficult recordings.

CHECKLIST

- OPTICAL DIG OUT ✗
- ELECTRICAL DIG OUT ✓
- CD-RW PLAYBACK ✓
- CD TEXT ✗
- CALENDAR DISPLAY ✓

made with some other recordings, for example the *Mahler Six*.

But most discs did not suffer in this way. Marc Cohn's album is a full-blooded affair, and the Rotel's ability to cut through the musical undergrowth results in a clean, propulsive and compelling performance. The Brahms chamber test piece sounded a little lightweight, but its concise, open feel was extremely enjoyable on test, and the Eels *Electro-shock Blues* album was no less so, with good bass definition and precise articulation helping drive the music along. It's well priced too. 📍

LAB REPORT

▶ Rotel's new budget CD player uses the same PCM1732 HDCD-compatible DAC as the NAD, but with a gentler analogue filter. As a result, there's more ultrasonic noise (which infers some unpredictability with different amplifiers) but lower 0.02% high frequency distortion.

▶ The S/N ratio matches NAD's player at just 99.4dB, but there's not a trace of interference from the power supply on either noise or jitter spectra, the latter comprising just 180psec of data-induced jitter courtesy of the DAC substrate.

▶ The RCD-02 has a steeper response cut than others in this test at -0.75dB/20kHz but this also confers a superior 110dB rejection of digital images.

▶ Low-level resolution is very good indeed, with errors of just -0.2dB at -90dBFS.

▶ Distortion is low, but not exceptionally so, at 0.002% through the midrange (increasing by a factor of 10x at 20kHz) but this is largely down to the choice of DAC rather than Rotel's own engineering.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Compatibility with CD-RW remains moot, but the RCD-02 is otherwise a cut above Rotel's previous budget CD players.

CD PLAYERS CONCLUSIONS

Alvin Gold is tickled pink (sort of) by the quality of the latest crop of dedicated CD players

It's not often that most of the models in a group test receive a gong, so this CD player group is perhaps an indication of the high standards now prevalent in this part of the market. The exceptions are the Primare D20 and the Arcam CD62. Now revised to MkII status, the Primare is a fine player but not balanced quite as well as some of the others, while costing more than the rest.

The Arcam CD62, a newcomer, bears a debt stretching back to an old favourite, the CD7SE, a player that helped further bolster Arcam's reputation. Although built down to a price, it is extremely well turned out, but at its heart it is a touch soft centred and it lacks subtlety and fine detail. It has its strengths but fails to fully cut the sonic



mustard in a stiff competitive environment, and is also notably inferior to the CD72 – next model up in the Arcam range.

The CD62 certainly has a fight on its hands with competition from the NAD C541i and Rotel RCD-02. NAD has had an uneven record with compact disc players in the past, but the C541i is technically quite sophisticated and the investment is repaid with a sound that combines strength and assurance

with a delicate touch. At the price it certainly deserves its Best Buy status. The Rotel RCD-02, also Recommended, trades points with the NAD and only loses out marginally on value for money grounds. Both players are must-auditions in the sub-£500 ballpark.

The Exposure 2010 is a clean player with an engaging, well rounded sound that repeats the good showing it made on its first appearance on these pages, though in the context of this more recent group its star doesn't shine quite so brightly. The very best performer of the bunch is the Marantz CD6000 KI Signature, a fluid yet solid and detailed sounding player which suppresses the edginess and granularity that can afflict compact disc. An obvious Best Buy.

TRY THEM WITH THESE

AMPLIFIERS

ARCAM DIVA A85 £750

Expressive, highly detailed and dynamic integrated marks a new high point for Arcam, and the benefits extend to an unusually sophisticated control system.

ROTEL RA-02 £350

Budget Rotel newcomer is a real muscle amp, and is not lacking elsewhere if you can excuse the stiff switches.

NAD C370 £450

Marginally lacking in refinement, the C370 is awesomely powerful at the price and will work in big rooms at high volume levels.

LOUDSPEAKERS

MISSION M51 £300

It's no beauty, but this heavy stand-mount compact is a surprisingly muscular sounding speaker, but does not sacrifice imaging or finesse.

B&W 603 S3 £600

A number of Nautilus-inspired enhancements are incorporated into the S3 version of the 602, which is a refined and affordable floorstander.

JMLAB COBALT 816 £860

Excellent mid-market floorstanding speaker has a superbly expressive midrange and is well integrated throughout the band.



CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE

	Arcam CD62	Exposure 2010	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	NAD C451i	Primare D20	Rotel RCD-02
MAKE	Arcam	Exposure	Marantz	NAD	Primare	Rotel
MODEL	CD62	2010	CD6000 KI Sig	C451i	D20	RCD-02
PRICE	£350	£600	£500	£330	£799	£379
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
CONCLUSIONS	Bold tonality and strong dynamics serve it well, but it sounds leaden compared to the parent CD72.	Engaging and easy to listen to – a return to form for this famous marque. One to audition.	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also very well built.	Confident sounding player has the occasional rough edge but is great value for money.	Cool sounding player fails to engage as one would hope at the price, though neither does it offend.	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel holds up well. Check it out.

LAB REPORT

DISTORTION LEVEL	GOOD	AVERAGE	EXCELLENT	BELOW PAR	GOOD	BELOW PAR
JITTER LEVEL	BELOW PAR	GOOD	AVERAGE	GOOD	GOOD	GOOD
DYNAMIC RANGE	BELOW PAR	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	BELOW PAR	GOOD	BELOW PAR
DIGITAL FILTERING	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	BELOW PAR	EXCELLENT	BELOW PAR	EXCELLENT
OVERALL RATING	50%	65%	70%	70%	75%	75%

HINTS AND TIPS

There are many ways of improving disc performance, but some, stick-on disc labels for example, involve a cost overhead per disc and don't always deliver the goods. However, the following tips can be relied on, not just with CD players but with other components too.

⊕ Use the best possible support, ideally a dedicated shelf on a purpose-made equipment support, but it could be as simple and inexpensive as an Ikea Lack coffee table (£10-£14, depending on finish).

⊕ If it must be stacked with other equipment, ensure that the player is at the bottom of the pile, and that the amplifier is on top, in part for heat dissipation reasons, and also because the heavy amplifier will help damp the lightweight CD player.

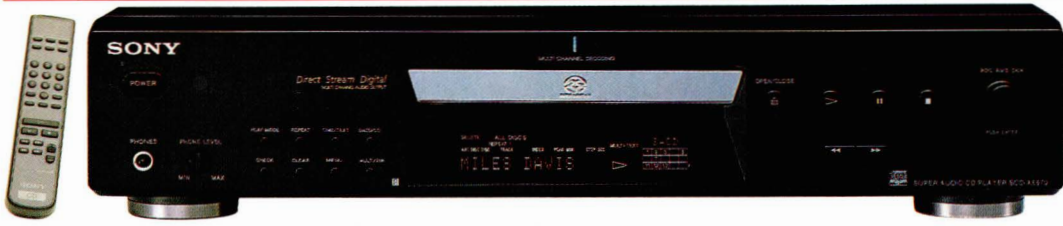
⊕ One very old trick that has not outgrown its usefulness is to place a brick (or some similar heavy non-ferrous object) on top of the player to reduce microphony.



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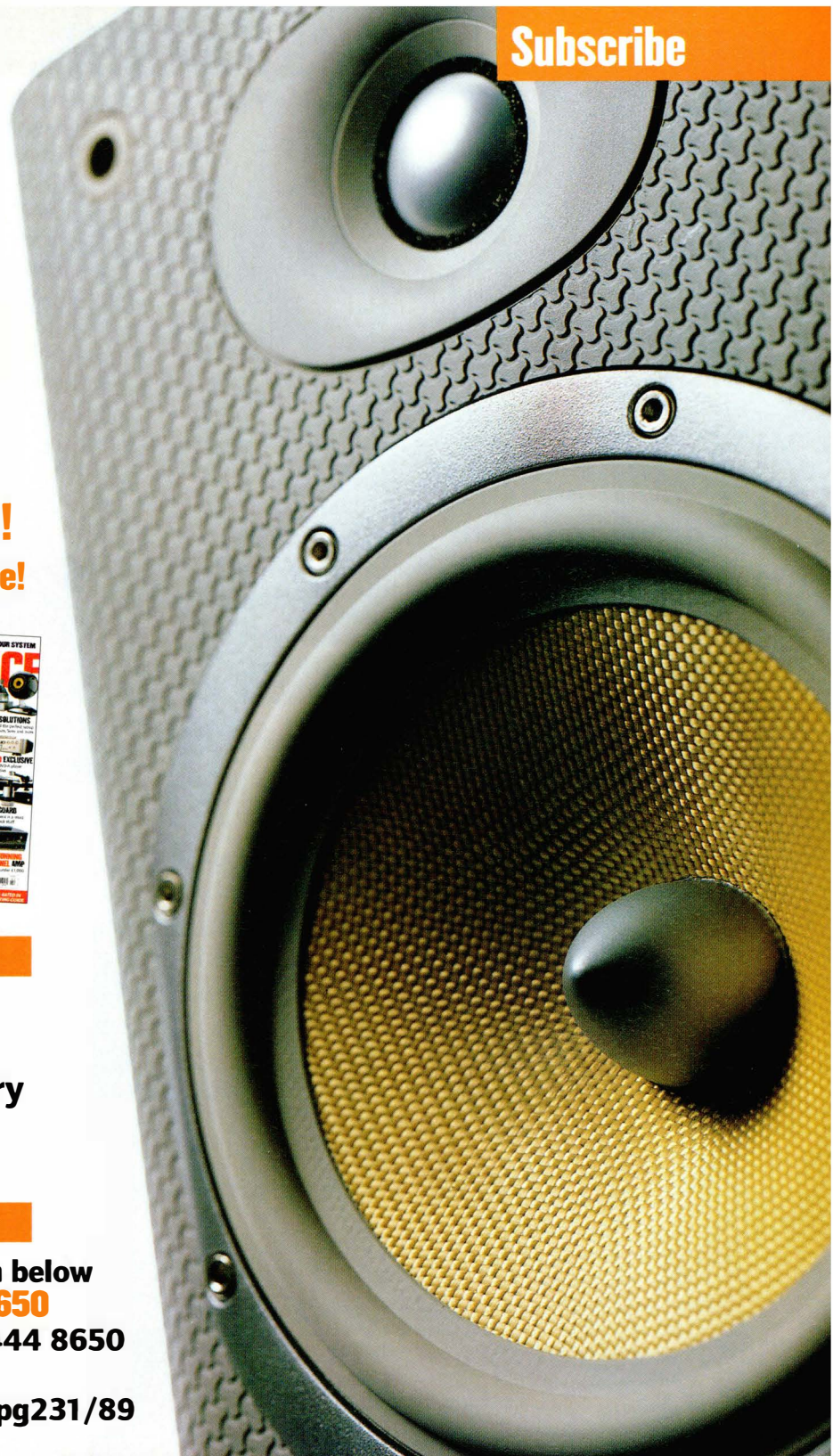


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REVIEWS & LAB REPORTS – Paul Messenger

STEREO SPEAKERS

Looking for speakers up to £1,000? Here are some prime contenders...

This group of £500-£1,000 per pair loudspeakers comes in just two short months after our upmarket £1,000-£2,000 group. The contrast is particularly interesting because some brands – specifically Dynaudio, Ruark and Tannoy – have models from the same range in both groups, a situation which helps put this less expensive group into context.

As you'd expect, the speakers tend to be smaller, with fewer drive units. Dynaudio's little Audience 62 won't shake the architecture like its big 82 brother, but not everyone wants to entertain the neighbourhood with Basement Jaxx. The 62 won't delve as deep or go as loud, but it still offers a very classy sound quality, and has the double bonus of being half the price and half the size.

These things aren't always so predictable. Although it shares many of the same idiosyncrasies, Tannoy's Eyriss 2 came through these latest listening tests much more strongly than the slightly disappointing Eyriss 3 did a couple of months back. In contrast, this issue's Ruark Prelude 2 uses one less main driver than the Prologue 2, and suffers in consequence, with a balance that's just a

EQUIPMENT USED

Naim CDS II CD player
 Rega Jupiter CD player
 Linn LP12 turntable
 Rega RB1000 tonearm
 Linn Arkiv B, Dynavector
 XV-1 cartridges
 Magnum Dynalab
 MD 102 tuner
 Naim NAC52 preamp
 Naim NAP500 power amp
 Naim NACA5 speaker cables
 Kudos S100 speaker stands

DISCS USED

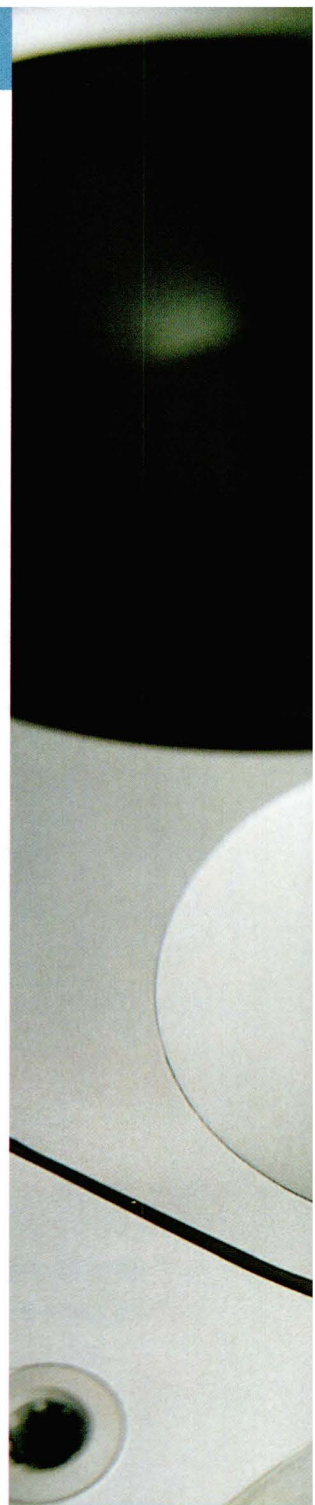
Massive Attack *Blue Lines*
 Christy Moore *Live At The Point*
 Ry Cooder & VM Bhatt *A Meeting By The River*
 Grainger/LWO/Wick *By Plane From Paris*
 Tom Waits *Rain Dogs*
 Grateful Dead *Reckoning*
 Cambridge Singers/Rutter
There Is Sweet Music
 Basement Jaxx *Remedy*
 BBC Radios 3 & 4

little too cold and thin for comfort.

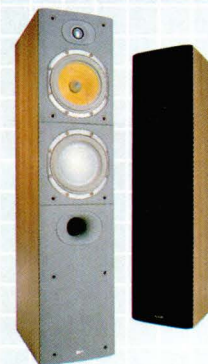
By and large though, it must be said that the actual performance compromises involved in this less expensive group aren't enormous. Reduced size or number of drivers might knock a couple of dB off the sensitivity, and/or half an octave off the bass extension, so the headroom and slam may be a little less. But the drive units will often be the same or very similar, so the actual quality will be only slightly affected.

This group did create a certain amount of frustration, of the 'you can't have it all' variety. At the lower end of the price ladder, Mission's m53 is a magnificent example of the industrial designer's art, and the speaker has a very substantial enclosure covered in company real wood veneer (of sorts), at a very reasonable £550. On purely visual grounds, it has B&W's £600 603 S3 on toast. Until you switch them on, that is, when the boot is on the other foot, and the B&W really shows its pedigree.

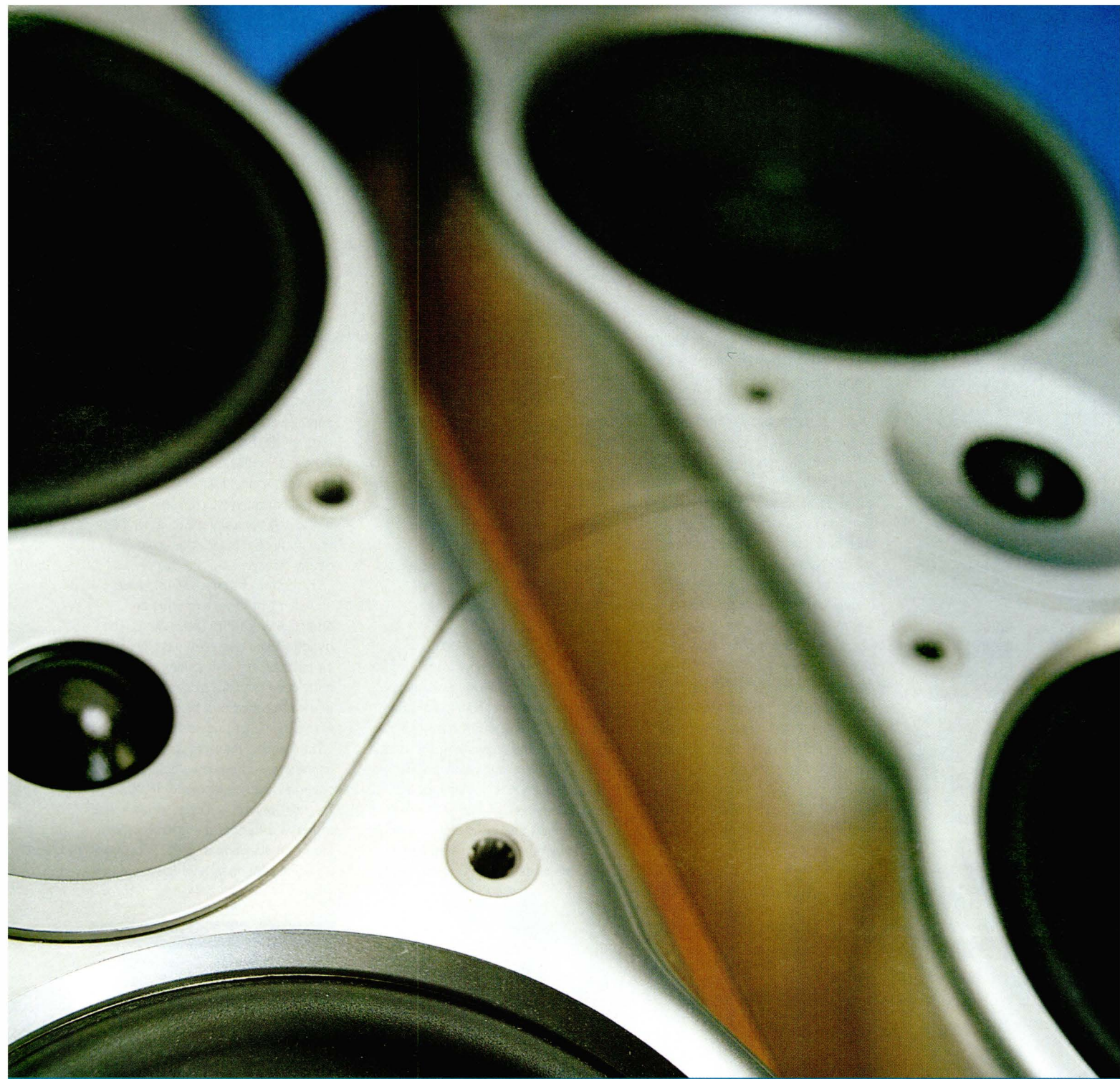
Likewise, it would be great to be able to combine the delicious top end of Elac's JET ribbon tweeter with the superior bass tuning practice which Dynaudio achieves. ☺



ON TEST



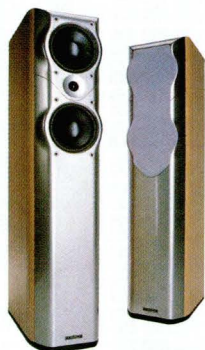
B&W 603 S3
£600



DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 62
£729



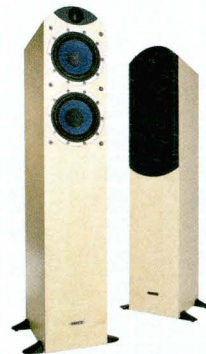
ELAC JET 205
£649



MISSION M53
£550



RUARK PRELUDE 2
£900



TANNOY EYRIS 2
£1,000

B&W DM603 S3 £600

01903 221500 www.bwspeakers.com

Impressively dynamic and engaging performer from the world's biggest hi-fi speaker specialist

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



An excellent all-rounder, surprisingly smooth in view of its modest price, and an obvious improvement over the 602.5 S3. Bass and mid are exceptional, though the top end might be more refined.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✓
CLOSE TO WALL	✗
WIDTH	20cm
HEIGHT	91cm
DEPTH	29cm
BI-WIRABLE	✓

The biggest hi-fi speaker specialist world-wide, B&W is unusual among today's leading British brands in concentrating on UK manufacture, and has just opened a huge new factory at its Worthing base to prove the point.

The company's 'budget' 600-series ranges have now been running for over a decade, though with regular major revisions every three years or so, as each new line refines, evolves and builds on its predecessors. A major departure with these Series 3s is the hugely successful Sorrento styling, as a 'lighten up' alternative to previously ubiquitous black. It has a pale vinyl woodprint alongside a mostly light grey front panel, with textured mouldings from top to bottom, cunningly colour co-ordinated to the cast alloy driver frames and synthetic rubber surrounds, the yellow and silver diaphragms providing an attractive contrast.

This 603 S3 costs £600 per pair, up around eight per cent over its predecessor. It is slightly slimmer too (using 6.5-inch rather than seven inch

drivers), and is a 'two-and-a-half-way' design, with a metal cone bass-only driver augmenting a Kevlar bass/mid driver through the lower registers, up to a metal dome tweeter which is rear-loaded by a Nautilus-style tube. Both cone drivers have separate port-loaded enclosures, and foam bungs are included to improve bass alignment flexibility. The Series 3 detail improvements include extra tweeter high frequency extension, stiffer voice-coil formers for the cone drivers, more open driver 'baskets' and improved crossover capacitors.

PERFORMANCE

There's a lovely freedom from boxiness here, which is quite unusual among inexpensive floorstanders, indicating that considerable effort has gone into controlling and eliminating the audible effects of panel and cavity resonances. In consequence, stereo images are particularly precise and well formed, maintaining fine focus even when well away from the listening axis, and showing no tendencies whatsoever to

cluster around the individual speakers.

The tonal balance seems very well judged, essentially neutral and reasonably smooth, with just a touch of sensible restraint. The dynamic range is impressively wide too, especially through the broad and notably expressive midband, so the end result is an exceptionally discreet and well controlled sound which simply gets out of the way, sonically speaking, and lets the music and its messages come clearly through.

The bottom end has weight, poise and plenty of drive, imparting an attractive warmth to proceedings. The bungs allow a degree of bass flexibility: on balance, free space siting with both ports open seemed the best option under our conditions, though it's always worth experimenting *in situ*.

The top end, however, is rather less impressive, cutting down both the sweetness and transparency indices. The relative level is nicely judged, but it sounds a trifle coarse and draws a little too much attention to itself. But overall it's a fine performance for the money. **C**



LAB REPORT

▶ B&W's quoted sensitivity of 90dB seems a tad optimistic. *HFC's* far-field traces suggest that 88dB is more representative of real-world conditions, though that's still a very respectable figure.

▶ The impedance dips to 4 ohms twice through the power-sapping low frequencies, at 40Hz and 200Hz. It dips even lower, to around 3 ohms at 15kHz, fortunately where there's little program power to upset amps.

▶ Far-field balance is good – not entirely flat or smooth but more so than most through the broad midband, with just a slight dip centred on 3kHz. The bass output is generous even with the speakers clear of walls, and blocking one or other of the ports improved the overall balance – try blocking both for close-to-wall siting.

▶ Pair matching is adequate, though it does leave room for improvement, especially through the treble region.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** The 603 S3 has a fine balance, with a smoother midband than many rivals, plus decent sensitivity, though the amplifier load is demanding.

DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 62 **£729**

01732 451938 www.dynaudio.com

Beefy floorstander with the lightness of touch of a high quality standmount

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



This pricey little floorstander might only have a vinyl surface covering, but it's a class act sonically – lightweight but clean and dextrous, more in the manner of a standmount than a floorstander.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✓
CLOSE TO WALL	✗
WIDTH	20cm
HEIGHT	86cm
DEPTH	26cm
BI-WIRABLE	✗

Dynaudio designs and builds its speakers in Denmark, and is best known for its classy drive units. The Audience series is the company's 'budget' range of complete speakers, though this 62's £729 asking price is hardly what's normally regarded as a 'budget' price for a compact two-way vinyl-covered floorstander.

The vinyl finish is not unattractive, and does help keep the price within reasonable bounds, since Dynaudio stresses its unwillingness to compromise the quality of either its in-house drive units, or the engineering integrity of the enclosures.

Certainly the box feels reassuringly solid, and comes with an unusually thick (28mm) front baffle. The whole thing sits on a neat and chunky little plinth, which is equipped with substantial 8mm spikes, but makes no attempt to extend the stability footprint.

In a very real sense, the 62 is a floor-standing variation on the standmount Audience 52 theme. The specs certainly suggest that the driver line-up is

essentially the same, while the box volume is just two litres larger (12 rather than 10), and the resonant frequency 2Hz lower (45Hz rather than 47Hz). Obviously, opting for the 62 avoids the need for separate stands – but for the extra £150 you can buy some pretty classy ones.

The main driver is a notably tasty device, using an over-size (75mm) aluminium voice coil to drive a combination cone/dome plastic diaphragm some 115mm in diameter. A solid cast frame ensures fine overall mechanical integrity. Dynaudio makes its own in-house tweeter with 28mm fabric dome diaphragm. The company doesn't believe in bi-wiring, so just a single pair of terminals is fitted. Foam bungs are provided for blocking the front ports – useful if you're placing them close to a wall.

PERFORMANCE

As you might expect, given its close physical similarity to the standmount Audience models, the 62 shares a

similarly classy sound quality. It has the same thoroughly expressive and communicative midband with a notably wide dynamic range.

Happily, Dynaudio seems to have done a fine job of engineering this floorstanding enclosure, since there's no evidence of the heavy 'thickened' effects often encountered with speakers of this format, and male voices are commendably free from 'chesty' effects.

There's little to criticise here, though ultimately this is a small loudspeaker, with limited deep bass grunt. Some might prefer a little more warmth through the bass region, but others will appreciate the evenness and the lack of exaggeration in its bass delivery.

There's a touch of mid-forwardness here to be sure, but not enough to spoil an attractive transparency, despite some treble 'graininess'. And the whole thing has a delightful lightness of touch – more like a standmount than a floorstander – that seems very fair compensation for the mild lack of weight and scale.



LAB REPORT

▶ Dynaudio quotes a modest sensitivity rating of 86dB, which seems pessimistic. *HFC's* far-field traces suggest 87-88dB might be closer to real-world conditions.

▶ The impedance dips to 4 ohms twice through the power-hungry low frequencies, at 45Hz and 200Hz. Above 600Hz, the load stays comfortably above 6 ohms.

▶ The in-room far-field balance is pretty good. The bass alignment looks very well judged for free-space siting without any need to use the port-blocking bungs – they could be useful if the speakers have to be close to a wall. There's some loss of energy in the octave 250-500Hz, and a little over-strength centred on 1kHz, but for the most part the balance is even and quite smooth throughout.

▶ Pair matching is very good throughout, suggesting fine manufacturing consistency.

🔴 **LAB CONCLUSION:** Sensitivity is unexceptional but bass alignment is very well suited to free space siting, and the balance is even if just a touch 'forward'.

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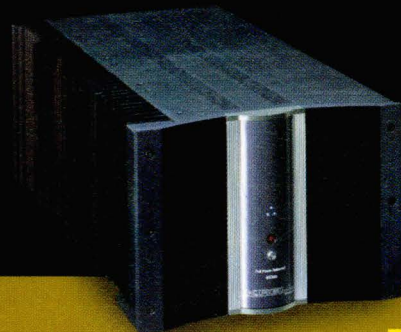
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Upper_Showcase Processor
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Far right_Krell FPB 750MCX Amplifier



ELAC JET 205 **£649** ☎ 0800 652 5002 🌐 www.elac.com

EXCLUSIVE Superb ribbon tweeter delivers tip-top treble

ELAC is an up-market loudspeaker brand that was founded way back in 1926, in Kiel, north Germany. The company manufactures all the drivers used in its loudspeakers, and these unique drive units are the obvious justification for the relatively steep price tags which the speakers carry. One bonus is that ELAC has the confidence to offer a ten year guarantee.

In basic outline terms, this JET 205 is a compact two-way vinyl-covered stand-mount, in spite of which it costs a pretty hefty £649 (in cherry finish – black lacquer costs an extra £50). Much of that must be down to the rather special JET tweeter, since the similar but non-JET-propelled model 203 (with a more conventional in-house tweeter) costs just £399.

By implication therefore the JET tweeters cost around £150 each at retail, which does seem a tad pricey, but at least they're decidedly different from the voice-coil-and-dome norm.

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

A tweeter to die for – sweet, smooth and exceptionally clean and delicate – is the main reason for this stand-mount's hefty price tag. But the overall sound is a little clinical, lacking warmth and body.

CHECKLIST	
FLOORSTANDER	✗
CLOSE TO WALL	✗
WIDTH	20cm
HEIGHT	33cm
DEPTH	29cm
BI-WIRABLE	✓

Lurking beneath the visible slotted metal front is a folded ribbon with ten times the area of the typical 25mm dome. Based on the Heil 'air motion transformer' tradition, considerably refined by ELAC, the tweeters are hand-made, and apparently take forty minutes of skilled German labour to build.

The bass/mid driver is slightly larger than most, with a 180mm diameter cast frame and a 120mm diameter 'dish' diaphragm made from an aluminium/paper 'sandwich', and an extra long-throw of almost 30mm. The rear-ported MDF cabinet is heavily braced and damped, and twin terminals feed the crossover.

PERFORMANCE

Claims for the sonic superiority of technological tweaks ought to be treated with due scepticism, but happily on this occasion any scepticism over the Heil/ribbon approach to tweetry is confounded by the simple observation that the 205 does indeed possess a

remarkably clean, pure, sweet and clear top end. In this respect it's clearly superior to the more conventional dome tweeters of various kinds found in the other models of this group test.

Tweeters are subtle yet vitally important devices which are responsible for contributing the finest of details to the overall sound – notably consonants like 't' and 's'. Through the JET 205, voices simply sound more real and coherent, and the top end is less 'obvious' or 'splashy'.

Treble is marvellous, the midband very good, and the two are beautifully glued together. However, the bottom half of the audio band is less impressive. It packs plenty of 'thump' – indeed a little too much around the 48Hz port resonance – but is also distinctly lacking in warmth and 'body' through the lower midband. This does serve to highlight that superb tweeter and the fine voice coherence, but also results in a rather cold and clinical overall character. 🗣️



UP CLOSE



DRIVERS

Tweeter: JET folded foil ribbon tweeter uses Neodymium magnets and has ten times the surface area of a 25mm dome tweeter
Woofer: 180mm unit has a 120mm aluminium sandwich cone and a high power handling 37mm voice-coil

LAB REPORT

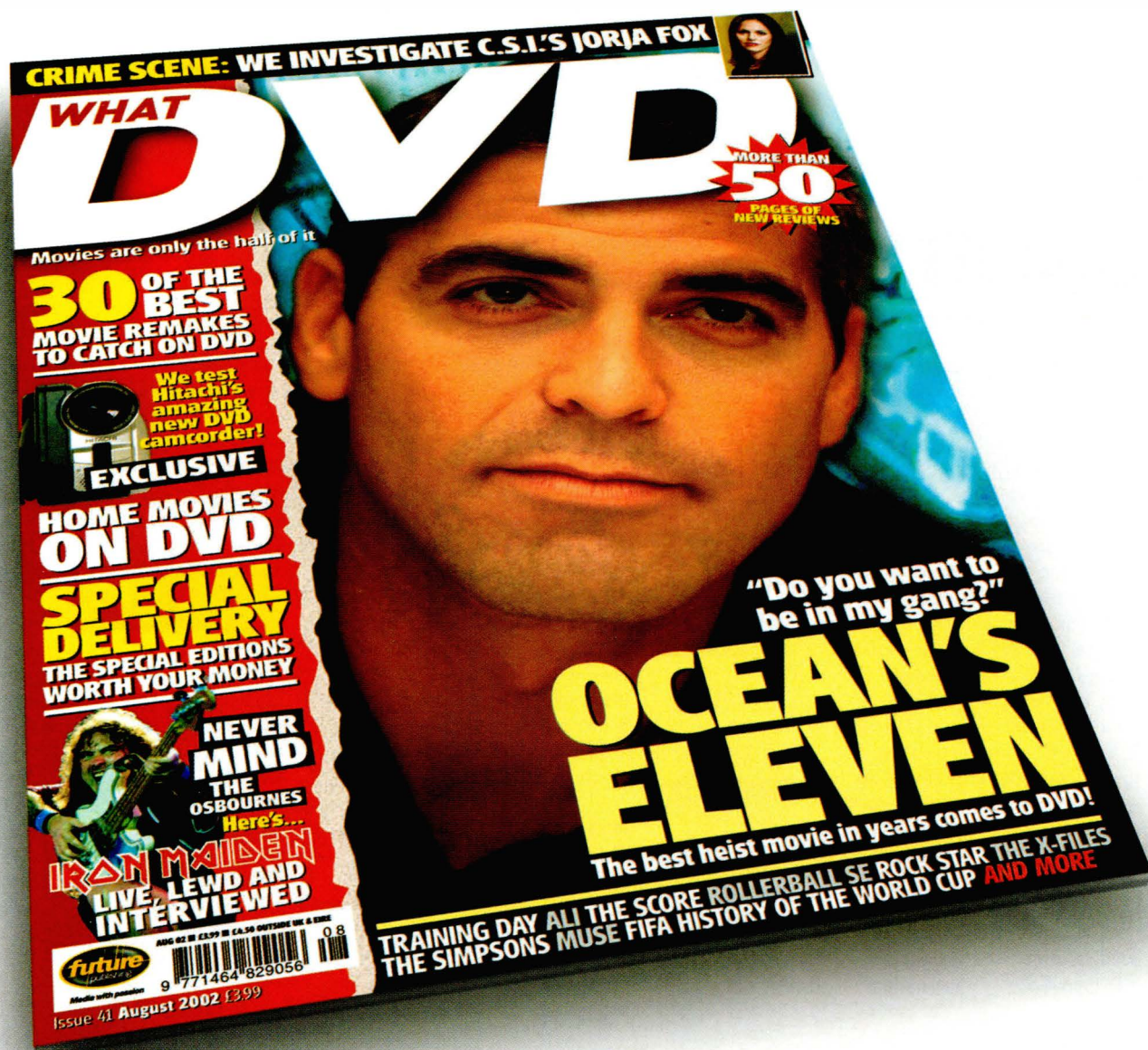
▶ Sensitivity looks closer to 87dB than the 88dB claimed, though that's no crisis.

▶ In-room balance is smooth and even from 700Hz up to the limits of audibility, showing a gently down-tilted characteristic above 3kHz. Things are much less happy below 700Hz: there's plenty of output around the port-tuning frequency of 48Hz, but there's both significant unevenness and a general lack of output that averages around 3dB across the broad lower-mid-band decade 65-650Hz.

▶ The amp load dips to 4 ohms through the low frequency region, recording minima at 48Hz and 190Hz. Elsewhere the load on the amp is very benign, staying comfortably above 8 ohms at all frequencies above 800Hz.

▶ Pair-matching is close, and particularly good at low frequencies.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Balance is notably smooth and even above 700Hz, but less so below, with heavy output from the port around 48Hz.



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VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Magnificent styling and good material value, but its audio flavours don't live up to the visual presentation. A lack of dynamic contrast and literacy makes it difficult to maintain interest and involvement.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✓
CLOSE TO WALL	✗
WIDTH	21cm
HEIGHT	97cm
DEPTH	36cm
BI-WIRABLE	✓

Mission has a knack of pushing the styling and pricing envelopes a little ahead of the competition, and the new m5-series does so handsomely, and on both counts. It's not only both the largest and the heaviest speaker in our test group, it's also the least expensive, selling at £550 per pair, and arguably the most handsome too.

The shiny chrome-style silver-grey plastic '3D' mouldings that take over the front panel, covering up the double-thickness (38mm) front panel and driver mounting hardware, are unquestionably the height of fashion. This latest in surface treatment technology brings a very sexy tactility to a package with an otherwise less than impressive wood veneer around the wrap (which in truth looks more like vinyl). The silver-grey grille also looks exceptionally neat.

It's a two-way design based on the so-called d'Appolito configuration, in which twin bass/mid drivers are placed above and below a solitary tweeter,

with the advantage of providing plenty of cone area while keeping the front panel nice and slim. The rear-ported enclosure is very substantially built and the shape and weight confers good basic stability. It sits on chunky spikes, though the latter are locked by thumb-wheels which are hopelessly inadequate for the task, as they keep working loose.

The magnetically shielded 15cm drivers have 115mm Paramid cones – a homogeneous polymer sandwich cone loaded with aramid fibres. The tweeter has a 25mm fabric dome and is mounted on the moulded front, mechanically isolated from the front baffle by a layer of damping foam. The box has internal bracing, with a lower section that allows optional sand filling. Bi-wire terminals feed a crossover network with polypropylene capacitors.

PERFORMANCE

This looks such a totally impressive package in view of its very reasonable price tag. It seems inevitable that some-

thing's got to give, and that something turns out to be the sound quality. It's by no means poor, but it does show a rather lazy and lacklustre streak that is very reminiscent of the budget 733 model. And like its cheaper stablemate, the comment on the report form reads: "Adequate, but could try harder".

There's not a great deal overtly wrong with this speaker. It sounds pretty well balanced overall, and delivers good stereo imaging with fine focus precision. But its dynamic performance lets it down. Instead of dragging the listener into the music with a rich cornucopia of contrasts and tonal colour, it somehow manages to 'bland out' the music, leading to disinterest rather than involvement on behalf of the listener.

The obvious analogy is with today's supermarket food, which manages to look wonderful, yet also tends to leave the taste buds disappointed with its lack of piquant flavour and subtlety. For us, the £300 m51 standmount (*HFC* 228) is a more tempting overall bet. **Ⓞ**



UP CLOSE

DRIVERS

Woofer: Twin 15cm Paramid cone bass/mid drivers
Tweeter: 25mm 'microfibre' fabric dome treble unit

LAB REPORT

► Comfortably matches up to the claim for an 89dB sensitivity rating, which puts it just ahead of the group by a slender margin.

► Even with the speakers mounted well clear of walls, output is a little strong at around 50Hz, due to the substantial port contribution extending from 30Hz to 70Hz. Blocking the ports might be worth considering if the speakers need to be placed close to a wall.

► Far-field balance looks impressive, with ample bass output down to around 25Hz for a stereo pair in the listening room (20Hz is at -11dB). The upper bass and midband, however, from 70Hz up to 1kHz is rather uneven. Output above 1kHz is impressively flat and smooth, with just a slight suckout at 2.2kHz.

► Pair matching is adequate, not impressive, but without serious discrepancies.

► **LAB CONCLUSION:** Generous sensitivity and plenty of bass, overall balance is good with speakers clear of walls, but midband output could be smoother.

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RUARK PRELUDE II **£900** ☎ 01702 601410 🌐 www.ruark.net

EXCLUSIVE *Bright-sounding speaker is best for late-night listening*

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Lovely real wood compact floorstander comes complete with a proper plinth. Sound is open but relatively bright – good at low level but can sound too thin when winding up the wick.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✓
CLOSE TO WALL	✗
WIDTH	21cm
HEIGHT	88cm
DEPTH	22cm
BI-WIRABLE	✓

Well known for its luxury cabinetwork, Ruark risks getting a reputation for dodgy nomenclature, as it's difficult to avoid confusing this Prelude II with the Prologue II reviewed two months back. The two models have more than just similar names, and in a very real sense this £900 floorstanding two-way Prelude II is the baby brother of the £1,250 Prologue II, using one rather than two main drivers in a slightly smaller and rather simpler enclosure.

You still get the high-class real wood finish with attractively scalloped box edges, this time in a very attractive and well figured light oak veneer. The box has a slight backwards tilt, and the top isn't quite horizontal, which has got to be an aesthetic improvement over the wretchedly rigid rectangularity found elsewhere. And – uniquely in this under-£1,000 group – the speaker is supplied with a proper and substantial shaped MDF plinth which extends the stability footprint, and comes complete

with chunky 8mm floor spikes.

Both the main (bass/mid) driver and the tweeter look very similar to those used in the larger model, the latter again offset. The main driver has a 180mm plastic frame and a 125mm profiled paper cone, while the tweeter has a 27mm soft fabric dome. Twin terminals provide a bi-wire/amp option, feeding a crossover network that uses polypropylene capacitors and air cored inductors, constructed without PCBs, and thence via a high purity 56 strand cable to the drivers. A cocktail of different materials are used for damping and sound absorption inside the cabinets.

PERFORMANCE

There are strong sonic similarities between this Prelude II and the Prologue II tested a couple of months back, which is not too surprising since they share the same drivers. But there's rather more to it than that. The Prologue was noteworthy for its unusually bright and open balance, and

exactly the same is true of this Prelude.

Whether that brightness is considered an advantage or disadvantage must be largely a matter of personal taste. While it's the reviewer's job to identify and point out such idiosyncrasies, it really should be down to the customer to decide whether they qualify as a good or bad thing.

Overall the Prelude II is just a tad on the thin side, and while close-to-wall siting might help under some circumstances, it tends to add thump rather than the extra warmth that's really required here.

More specifically, this speaker seems happiest of all with speech, which is beautifully clear, open and explicit even when reproduced at the lowest of late-night listening levels. Music, however, does tend to emphasise the 'thin' character and some lack of body and weight, especially as the volume is increased, to the point where high level reproduction can all too quickly become tiring. 🗣️

UP CLOSE



DRIVERS

Tweeter: 27mm pre-coated light-weight textile dome ferrofluid cooled and damped
Woofer: 180mm treated NRSC profiled pulped fibre cone, high loss pure rubber surround

LAB REPORT

▶ Ruark quotes a sensitivity of 88dB – 2dB less than for the twin-driver Prologue II – that's pretty accurate (though perhaps a touch optimistic).

▶ Creditably, in view of the decent sensitivity, the impedance stays at or above 7 ohms throughout – a very easy load for the partnering amplifier.

▶ The in-room far-field balance looks impressively flat right through into the treble region – but that in turn means that this speaker is significantly brighter than average.

▶ Unlike the Prologue II, the bass alignment looks better suited to free-space than close-to-wall siting. More significant, however, in view of the subjective findings, is that the Prelude II has less relative output through the upper bass and lower midband.

🔴 **LAB CONCLUSION:** Combines decent sensitivity with an easy-to-drive load. Balance is impressively flat, but that means it's brighter than average. Free space siting is recommended.



A Taste of the High End

We've never been fans of instant coffee. Don't misunderstand us, there's nothing wrong with it, but it just doesn't taste like real coffee.

Now we know its possible to spend quite a bit of money and get something that pretty much tastes like real coffee and we know that some so-called real coffee can taste truly awful. And, yes, you can buy instant coffee in any high street in the country. But once you've tasted the difference ...

At Heatherdale Audio we import freshly roasted beans and we prepare them

ourselves just before we use them. We mix freshly drawn water with the ground beans and filter them through unbleached paper. The result, poured steaming into a pristine white mug is a true work of art with a flavour to die for.

OK, so it may take a little longer to get right than its instant equivalent and it may not be available just anywhere and, cup for cup, it may cost a bit more - but, once you've tasted it, there's no looking back.

"More of an experience than a beverage", as one of our customers recently said.

Heatherdale Audio's new Mark Levinson Audition Suite is now open. Whatever your tastes in music and whatever your budget, we have a system that can liberate your senses and your music collections. Put together some of your favourite music, give Heatherdale Audio a ring and join us for a really good coffee. It's free*.

Heatherdale
audio limited

Tel: 01903 872288 Fax: 01903 872234

Heatherdale Audio, 202 Findon Road, Worthing, BN14 0EJ
heatherdale@hifi-stereo.com www.hifi-stereo.com

* the hi-fi, unfortunately, isn't.

**Mark Levinson Reference • Mark Levinson • Revel • Madrigal • Thiel • Lyra
• Stax • Martin Logan • Exposure • Sonus Faber • Proceed • Koetsu
• Ortofon • Mitchell • Clearaudio • VPI Record Cleaners**

TANNOY EYRIS 2 £1,000

01236 420199 www.tannoy.com

Elegant floorstander's delicacy and spaciousness lends itself well to acoustic music

VERDICT

SOUND



EASE OF DRIVE



BUILD



VALUE



Super-slim, classy and cutely different from the styling norm, this pretty real wood floorstander might have weakish treble, but is very communicative nonetheless, with impressively deep bass extension.

CHECKLIST

FLOORSTANDER	✓
CLOSE TO WALL	✗
WIDTH	21cm
HEIGHT	99cm
DEPTH	32cm
BI-WIRABLE	✓

Splitting the difference between the cute little standmount Eyris 1, reviewed and Recommended in *HFC 227*, and the somewhat larger Eyris 3 which fared rather less well, the Eyris 2 uses the smaller main drivers from the '1, but operates in the floor-standing two-and-a-half-way configuration of the '3.

It looks refreshingly different from the norm, largely because the tweeter assembly is mounted in an elegantly arched top made out of a mixture of shiny cast metal and moulded plastic. The real wood veneered enclosure is very elegantly finished in sycamore or American walnut, and is also solidly engineered with a hefty 30mm front panel and internal bracing.

The twin cone drivers – one operating just as a bass unit, the upper one as a bass/mid driver – have cast alloy baskets and no fewer than ten fixing screws. The frame is a 145mm (six-inch) affair and the 110mm diameter blue paper cones fall roughly halfway

between the two 'standard' sizes.

The special tweeter uses a thin (25 micron) titanium dome to provide a 'WideBand' frequency response extending more than an octave above the normal limits of audibility (Tannoy quotes a 44kHz upper limit). A unique '5-way' terminal block incorporates an extra connection which (using special three or five-way cables) can earth the driver chassis back to the amplifier and avoid the adverse consequences of RF pickup.

Little castings securely accommodate the spikes, bolting in place usefully to extend the footprint laterally and/or lengthwise. The dual chamber coupled reflex enclosure has a volume of 21 litres. Port-blocking bungs are supplied, but will probably only be needed if close-to-wall siting is necessary.

PERFORMANCE

First impressions were a little worrying, as the Eyris 2 has significantly less high frequency energy than average – a quite dramatic contrast with the

company's 'high end' TD12 model (*HFC 225*), which, paradoxically, is distinctly brighter than the norm.

Nevertheless, despite sounding initially dull, this speaker has a fine and memorable overall spaciousness, as well as a delicate and very communicative midband. It's a subtle device, and its subtleties sneak up on one after a little while, once the ear has readjusted to the balance. It has a wide dynamic range, and seems particularly good at coping with small textural variations right across that range.

Speech in particular does sound rather shut in, but music reproduction is better served, with the bonus that you can keep on winding up the volume with little fear that the sound will get aggressive. Its delicacy, even-handedness and fine tonality serves acoustic material particularly well: Radio 3 seemed to beckon much more than usual, and Cooder & Bhatt's *Meeting By The River* disc was a particularly involving experience. 🎧



LAB REPORT

▶ Tannoy quotes a sensitivity of 89dB, but our 88dB is close enough.

▶ Although the port-tuned resonance at 28Hz registers a lowish 4 ohms, elsewhere the impedance barely strays below 6 ohms, and should therefore be an easy enough load for the driving amplifier.

▶ Far-field balance is well ordered and significantly smoother than most through the bass and midrange. Above 1.6kHz, however, output starts to droop, and the relative treble level above 3kHz is some 6dB below the midband datum, which is quite extreme. Like other Eyris models, there's a sharp peak at around 14kHz.

▶ Thanks to a port that's tuned to a low 28Hz, deep bass is very much on the agenda here, 20Hz registering -5dB in-room ref the midband datum. Free space siting is also indicated.

▶ **LAB CONCLUSION:** Impressively deep bass extension is combined with a relatively easy amplifier load and decent sensitivity.

SPEAKER CONCLUSIONS

Paul Messenger finds a consistently high standard among today's sub-£1,000 speakers

This is an impressive group of loudspeakers, which one should expect given their quite substantial price tags, but they also had their fair share of idiosyncrasies and paradoxes. This only emphasises that it's impossible to predict how any particular model will perform, even after having reviewed other models in the same range.

Our group consists of one standmount plus five floorstanders, and ironically it's the standmount which proved to have the least well aligned in-room bass. Normally it's the floorstanders with their much larger enclosures that are prone to deliver over-enthusiastic-verging-on-boomy mid-bass. While a couple (B&W and Mission) have

tendencies in that direction, the standmount Elac proved to be the biggest offender of the bunch. Happily, by way of compensation, it also has a marvellous tweeter! But as a group these speakers show pretty good bass alignment, and, Elac apart, are arguably rather more consistent in this regard than the larger, more upmarket £1,000-£2,000 group reviewed in *HFC 229*.

All are effectively simple two-way designs, but the group then splits in half, with three models having just two drive units, while the other three have either extra bass-only drivers (B&W, Tannoy, in the so-called two-and-a-half-way line-up) or twin main drivers (Mission in the d'Appolito configuration). Such

simplicity is usually a good thing from a sound quality perspective, except perhaps for those who want to play regularly at party levels.

The obvious Best Buy is B&W's £600 603 Series 3, a great improvement over its predecessor, and also over the 602.5 we reviewed in *HFC 227*. Though it's not maybe the prettiest speaker around, it's a fine all-rounder that gives little away sonically to the more expensive models.

Among the Recommendations, the Dynaudio is cute, very compact and hugely competent. The Elac is distinguished by its superior tweeter. And the good-looking Tannoy sounds laid back but beautifully spacious, with great bass and a desire to be driven hard.



SPEAKERS AT A GLANCE

	B&W 603 S3	Dynaudio Audience 62	Elac JET 205	Mission M53	Ruark Prelude 2	Tannoy Eyris 2
MAKE	B&W	Dynaudio	Elac	Mission	Ruark	Tannoy
MODEL	603 S3	Audience 62	JET 205	M53	Prelude 2	Eyris 2
PRICE	£600	£729	£649	£550	£900	£1,000
SOUND	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
EASE OF DRIVE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
CONCLUSIONS	Top all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though treble might be more refined.	Pricy but cute vinyl floorstander is a class act – lightweight, but clean and dextrous.	Sweet, smooth and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but it lacks some warmth and body.	Magnificent styling, but sound lacks involvement due to lack of dynamic contrast.	Lovely real-wood compact floorstander sounds open and bright but can sound too thin when loud.	This super-slim and cutely different looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble.

LAB REPORT

SENSITIVITY	GOOD	AVERAGE	BELOW PAR	GOOD	BELOW PAR	GOOD
EASE OF DRIVE	BELOW PAR	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	GOOD	GOOD	AVERAGE
BASS EXTENSION	GOOD	AVERAGE	BELOW PAR	GOOD	AVERAGE	GOOD
PAIR MATCHING	BELOW PAR	GOOD	GOOD	BELOW PAR	AVERAGE	GOOD
OVERALL RATING	65%	65%	50%	70%	60%	70%

TRY THEM WITH THESE

CD PLAYERS

AUDIO NOTE CDT ZERO/

DAC ZERO 1X £1,300

This intriguing combo, where the DAC avoids digital processing and filtering, gives a very smooth, open sound.

NAIM AUDIO CD5 £1,125

At its best, this smooth, polished performer sounds dynamic, vivid and compelling. Can be upgraded with FLATCAP 2.

EXPOSURE 2010 £599

Smooth, restrained and warm balance from a well tuned out and competitively priced player.

AMPLIFIERS

ARCAM DIVA A85 £750

Radical new circuit topology produces a harder-hitting and more engaging sound than earlier Arcams.

NAIM NAIT 5 £800

Features Naim's characteristically rhythmic and punchy sound and packs more punch than you'd expect from 30 watts.

SUGDEN A21A £899

This 'classic revival' integrated class A transistorised amp may have limited power but supplies exquisite resolving power and presence.

HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Floorstanders need their spikes fitted very carefully. This is a potential weak spot, as the threaded sockets are often poorly fixed.
- ⊕ Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically (with respect to the room walls) is very important. Our reviews include suggestions, but every room is different, so do take time and trouble experimenting. Often, even small changes can have a big effect on the excitation of room modes, and the smoothness of the delivery.
- ⊕ Speakers often take some time to run in. Expect them to improve steadily over the first 100 hours or so.
- ⊕ Don't forget to use decent speaker cable if you want your system to perform at its best.
- ⊕ Standmounts require proper stands to ensure stable, predictable support and get the drive units the same distance off the floor as your ears.
- ⊕ Choice of stand can have a big influence on the sound, if you feel like experimenting.

all good things must come to an end...



The Sevenoaks Sale

Finishes 27.07.02



PRO-JECT

Free
Goldring Exstatic Record Cleaner
worth £12 with all PRO-JECT Turntables

Turntables & Tuners

Arcam DiVA T51 Tuner.....	£229.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner.....	£109.95
Linn LP12/Basik/Akito Turntable.....	£1749.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner.....	£119.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable.....	£1017.95
Project Debut Phono Turntable.....	£144.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours).....	£129.95
Sony ST-D77ES FM/DAB Tuner.....	£499.95
Videologic DRX-601E DAB Tuner.....	£269.95

Debut II Turntable (Black) £114.95

"The original Debut turntable romped away with a Product of the Year Award in 1999, and the MKII version continues the extremely good work. It's a simple affair, that's easy to set up, but don't let the price fool you - it sounds a whole lot more expensive than that. This is a fine turntable, and it clearly reveals the benefits of listening to vinyl, with a rich and detailed soundstage, and a good dynamic response.

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

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★ Awards 2000

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



MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

A3.2 CD Player £999.95
A3.2 Amplifier £979.95



Free
*Interconnect Cable
worth £150
when A3.2 CD &
A3.2 Amplifier
purchased together

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

CD Players

Arcam DiVA CD62T.....	£349.95
Arcam DiVA CD92T.....	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD23T.....	£1149.95
Cyrus CD7Q.....	£1099.95
Denon DCD485.....	£129.95
Linn Genki.....	£994.95
Linn Ikemi.....	£1949.95
Marantz CD4000.....	£99.95
Marantz CD6000Ki Signature.....	£429.95
Meridian 507.....	£1194.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista 3D.....	£2999.95
Roksan Caspian MKII.....	£994.95
Rotel RCD1070.....	£499.95
Sony CDPXE570.....	£109.95

Free Interconnect Cable* worth £50 with ALL CD Players over £300

Recorder Selection

Marantz DR6000 CD-RW.....	£299.95
Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW.....	£199.95
Sony MDS-JE770 MiniDisc.....	£229.95
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....	£119.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....	£199.95

B&W Bowers & Wilkins DM601S3 Speakers £249.95

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



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

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION ★★★★★ January 2002

Free
Speaker Cable*
worth £30
with ALL Speakers
over £200



more entertaining



Amplifier Selection

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£349.95
Arcam DiVA A75 Plus Amplifier	£449.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1099.95
Cyrus ACA7.5 Pre Amplifier	£699.95
Cyrus Smart Power Amplifier	£549.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£199.95
Linn Kolektor Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier	£139.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity NuVista M3 Amplifier	£2974.95
Roksan Caspian MKII Amplifier	£894.95



Stereo Amplifiers
Best Buy £601-£1000

ARCAM
SOUND & VISION

DiVA CD72T CD Player £429.95

DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier £749.95

Save £80
When CD72T & A85 purchased together (Package Price £1099)

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ March 2001



MONITOR AUDIO
Silver 8i Speakers £699.95

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ April 2001

Free
Speaker Cable*
worth £60
with ALL Speakers
over £500



Videologic DRX-601ES Digital Tuner £299.95

Save
£30

"New name, new format, new winner: the Videologic story is as simple as that. The £299 DRX-601E digital tuner came out of nowhere to establish the firm as a major player in the digital tuner market. With this upgrade, Videologic goes one step further: it's still a DRX-601E at heart, but quite apart from the sleek silver styling and sexy blue LEDs it now has a better, white-on-blue display, and what the company calls 'Psycho-acoustic Compensation' - a form of signal processing designed to make the tuner sound less digital... And it works: the DRX-601ES has a presentation that's rich, clean and extremely informative. Bass is big and powerful, while the midband and treble are well controlled. The style alone would justify the slight price rise: the sound quality makes it a Product of the Year."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001



Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 27th July 2002, E&OE. * From our selected range in-store. Please ask for details.



ROKSAN

Kandy
KC-1 CD Player £544.95
KA-1 Amplifier £544.95

Kandy KA-1 "Roksan's entry-level amp is an impressive piece of equipment, with an exceptional finish and a feature list including a line-level input that can be switched to a MM phono stage. The power rating of 110W into 8ohms is one of the meatiest here and it pays dividends in the Roksan's powerful, dynamic performance... But it's not all about bluster: the Kandy displays its gentle and deft touch with Stravinsky's *The Firebird*, which is played with insight and detail. The soundstage is wide and well-defined, and the individual vocalists of the massed choir and performers are easy to follow. Things can get quite exciting at the top end with stringed instruments, but it doesn't get bright or hard. It's also capable of getting impressively loud while remaining in control and without colouration..."

So all fared well, but there has to be a winner and for us it's Roksan's Kandy KA-1. Recent upgrades have served the KA-1 well, and apart from its exemplary built quality it sounds absolutely stunning. In testing it did everything we asked of it, providing great insight with classical music and vocals, but also getting down and dirty with dance music's demanding beats and the crashing rhythms of rock. A first-rate product."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ February 2001

Free
 Interconnect Cable* worth
 £100 when Kandy KC-1 CD &
 KA-1 Amplifier purchased together

MISSION

78 Series

15%
 Off RRP on all
 78 Series Speakers.
 Offer also includes
 Free Speaker Cable*

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

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

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001



WHAT HI-FI?
 Awards
 Product of the year
 2001

Speaker Selection

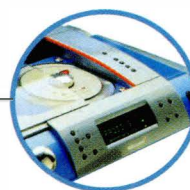
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£179.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three.....	£349.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM603 S3.....	£599.95
Cyrus CLS70 (Black).....	£799.95
KEF Cresta 2.....	£99.95
KEF Q3.....	£399.95
Linn Katan (Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Maple).....	£894.95
Mission 780.....	£249.95
Mission M71.....	£129.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95

Free
 Speaker Cable*
 worth £30
 with ALL Speakers
 over £200

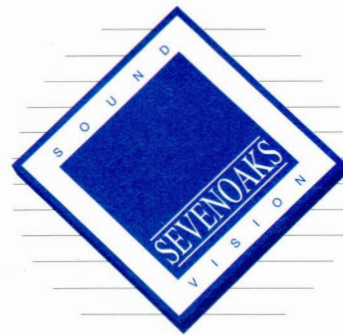
KEF Q1 Speakers £249.95

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ May 2002



more entertaining



System Selection

- Cyrus** Quattro Ex Power Amplifier & Speakers . . . **£849.95**
- Denon** 201 Ex Speakers **£599.95**
- Denon** DM50 Ex Speakers **£249.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 19 Inc Speakers **£549.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 21 Inc Speakers **£649.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 22 Inc Speakers **£699.95**
- Marantz** Eclipse 25 Inc Speakers **£799.95**
- Tag McLaren** Aphrodite Ex Speakers **£2994.95**
- Teac** Reference 100 Inc Speakers **£269.95**
- Teac** Reference 500 Ex Speakers **£679.95**
- Yamaha** Pianocraft E150 Inc Speakers **£249.95**



LINN

Classik
Music System **£999.95**

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001

Free Sale



Mission M71 Speakers worth £129



TEAC Reference 300 System **£499.95**

Save £50

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001

DENON

D-M30 CD Receiver SC-M50 Speakers

£199.95
£69.95

Save £30

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

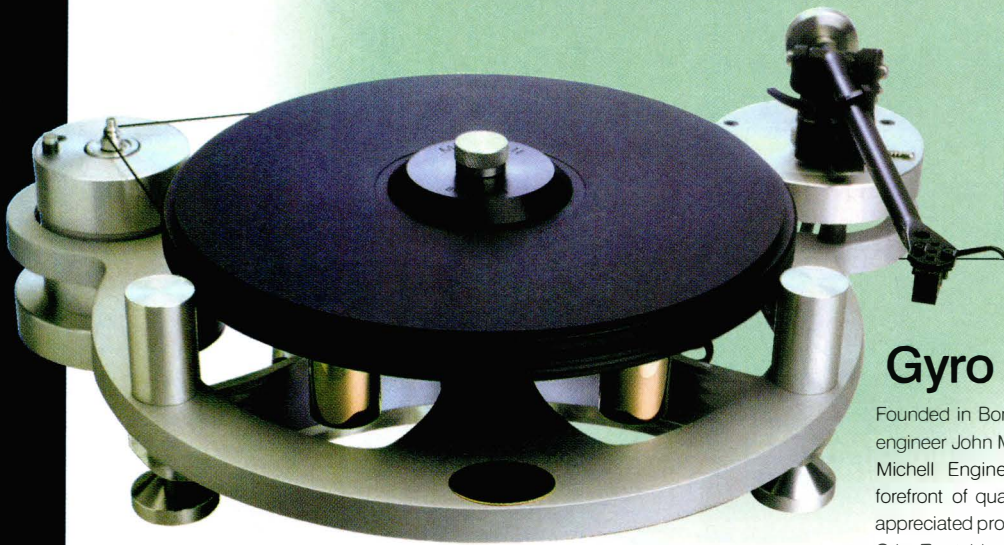
WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001

Optional Recorders:

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

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 27th July 2002, E&OE. *From our selected range in-store. Please ask for details.





Turntables
Best Buy £501-£1000

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

Founded in Borehamwood by mechanical engineer John Michell. For over thirty years, Michell Engineering have been at the forefront of quality audio, with world-wide appreciated products like the GyroDec and Orbe Turntables. In the early eighties, the revolutionary GyroDec Turntable, with its elegant and effective suspension system, was introduced. The Gyro SE is a smaller and cheaper package that retains the classy sound of the GyroDec and can be upgraded to the full GyroDec specification by adding a plinth and dustcover.

Save £50
towards a *Cartridge
of your choice

"The beautifully engineered Gyro SE not only looks the part but has a wonderfully clean and fluid sound."

★★★★★ **What Hi-Fi? July 1999**

Price includes Rega RB300 Tone Arm



LINN

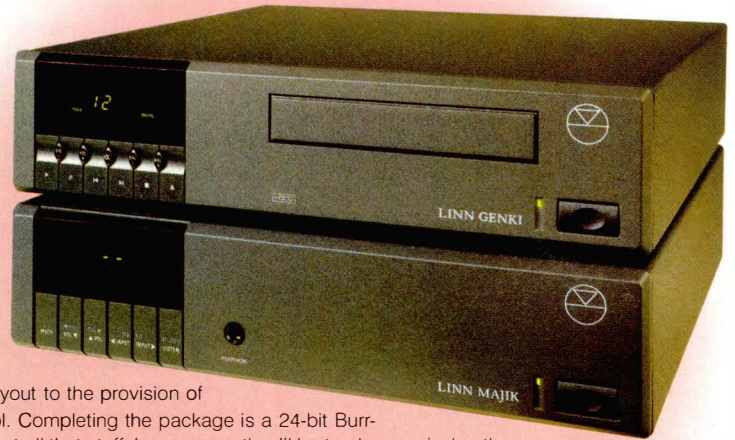
Genki CD Player **£994.95** Majik Line Amplifier **£694.95**

Free Interconnect
Cable* worth £150 when Linn
Genki & Majik purchased together

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

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

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



A limited edition of 500

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

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets. Advertisement valid until at least 27th July 2002, E&OE.
*From our selected range in-store. Please ask for details.

MUSICAL FIDELITY

3D CD Player **£2999.95**

Nu Vista

Free Interconnect Cable
worth £150

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



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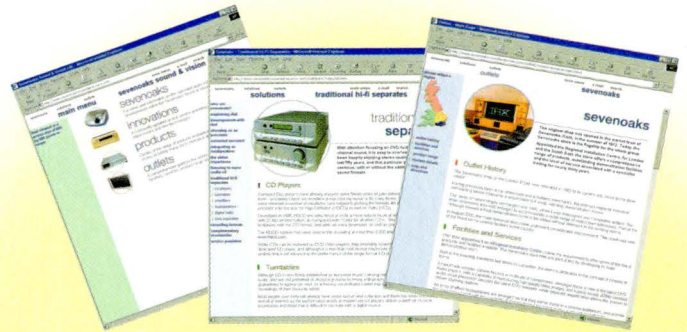
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who are sevenoaks?

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

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

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



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

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

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

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stock clearance

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

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

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

THE DIRECTORY

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

THE ART OF SYSTEM BUILDING

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

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

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

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

MAKING CONNECTIONS

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

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

AWARD TAGS

Whenever *HFC* reviews a group of like components we have the opportunity to give the best products a Best Buy or Recommended Award. Best Buys are considered to offer an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price. Recommended products are first-class components losing out to Best Buy status only because of a higher price or less competitive overall sound quality.

A third Award, the Editor's Choice, is reserved for those products reviewed solo in the high end *Statements* section. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers an outstanding level of performance.



GLOSSARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NETWORK: see Crossover.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWEETER: Treble driver.

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

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

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AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Arcam Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful	5			●	●	40	217
BB	Arcam Diva A75 Plus	450	Quick, lively and well presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●		●	●	50	224
BB	Arcam Diva A85	750	Much enhanced design topology give a more hard hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7			●	●	85	214
BB	Arcam FMJ A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7			●	●	100	201
BB	Arcam FMJ A32	1,100	Remarkably flexible and well featured with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	●	100	228
BB	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5			●		150	228
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12	190
BB	Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	●	●			40	175
	Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	●	●			40	181
	Audio Analogue Maestro	2,600	Beautiful powerhouse housed in a massively engineered chassis, big sound and silky smooth presentation	4	●	●			150	228
R	AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5			●		100	175
	Bryston B60R	1,249	Great build, but the lazy bass and opaque treble bracket an articulate midband. Comes with 20 year guarantee	5			●	●	60	175
R	Canary Audio CA-608	1,695	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4					24	202
	Chord CPM 3300	5,495	Very powerful yet compact amp with rather complex ergonomics and transparent sound. Oh, and a lovely blue glow	5			●		220	214
R	Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	●		●	●	60	189
	Copland CTA 402	1,698	A unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	●		●		35	193
	Cymbal CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40	178
	Cymbal CA3	999	Great sense of timing and good all round coherence with plenty of get up and go	6			●		60	228
R	Creek 4330	279	Diminutive but classy amp will drive anything, and can be specified in various configurations	4	●				40	192
	Creek 4330SE	499	Somewhat perplexing, though always interesting, miniature audiophile amplifier, needs careful system matching	5					50	208
	Creek 5350SE	799	Smooth, open and articulate sound and quality build, but bass is a tad heavy handed	6			●	●	85	214
R	Cyrus 5	500	A enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7			●	●	45	205
R	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best sounding audio brick around	6			●	●	60	196
BB	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high fidelity operation	5					30	208
	Denon PMA-355UK	230	Detailed, but rather inexpressive sound which doesn't quite live up to the claims.	5	●		●	●	50	217
R	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70	181
R	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned out amplifier, with mainstream appeal but bland with it	6			●		50	214
	Electrocompaniet EC1-3	1,000	Basically good, but too many rough edges to warrant recommendation	6			●		75	201
	Ezo Aria HE	449	Quick, detailed but aggressive and sometimes coarse sounding amp. Beautifully turned out, though	5				●	40	208
	Graaf Venticinque	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6					25	202
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
R	Kenwood KAF-3030R	250	Kenwood's best amplifier for some years has a lean bass but excellent mid and treble.	5	●		●	●	50	217
	Krell KAV-300iL	3,698	Good looks, stunning build and great all-round sound. Needs more inputs and a headphone socket though	4			●		200	229
	Krell KAV-500i	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5			●		250	192
	Linn Majik	845	Slightly rough and ready power amp modules, but capable preamp that can be expanded into a multiroom system	5	●		●	●	33	214
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5					23	196
	Marantz PM-6010 OSE	229	Good starter amplifier, with characteristic smooth, low key delivery	5	●		●	●	50	196
	Marantz PM7000	300	Lots of power for the price, but detail and subtlety seem to have been sacrificed	6	●		●	●	115	205
	Marantz PM6010 OSE KI Sig	400	Well-made, but somewhat ill-balanced amplifier that doesn't slot into most systems comfortably	6	●		●	●	50	208
R	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5	●		●	●	60	224
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II	999	Big, bold, but over-fruity balance – the 'fat uncontroller' as one put it	6	●	●	●	●	60	214
	Marantz PM-17 KI-Signature	1,300	Full feature audiophile amp where the end results don't quite justify the fantastic ingredients	6	●	●	●	●	60	189
R	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	●	100	228
	Mark Levinson No383	5,500	Extremely versatile design that thinks and acts like a serious pre/processor. Sounds superb	5			●		100	212
	McIntosh MA6900	4,650	Heavyweight design from a classic brand that makes a very easy to listen to sound and will drive almost anything	7	●		●	●	200	227
	Monrio Asty	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5					55	178
R	Musical Fidelity X-A2	500	A chip off the old block; sounds very similar to the X-A1 and XA-100R	6					75	208
	Musical Fidelity A3	849	Similar to the XA-100R internally, and a little too relaxed for some	5	●	●	●		85	196
	MVL A2	970	Curiously designed, and curious sounding amplifier with Sound Sentinel circuits to address perceived weaknesses	9				●	100	201
	Myryad T-40	400	The T-40 is a well built and sensible, but needs more dynamics and finesse	6	●		●	●	50	192
R	Myryad MI120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even-tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6			●	●	60	175
	Myryad MI 240	1,500	Big and powerful integrated amp sounds clean and neutral if a bit short on musical tautness and dynamic tension	8	OPT	OPT			120	216
BB	NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6			●	●	40	186
R	NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●		●		50	192
BB	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail, and a strong power yield	7			●	●	60	208
BB	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra-high power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse.	6	●		●	●	120	217
	NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and some finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			●		100	189
R	Naim Nait 5	800	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	5			●		30	214
	Opera Aida	795	Low power (in practice) minimalist integrated amp, but the mahogany wings don't help it to fly	5	●	●			60	201
	Pathos Classic One	995	Unusual looks and even more unusual electronic design, but compromised musical potential	5			●		55	202
R	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	●		●	●	45	186
R	Pioneer A-607R	300	Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	●		●	●	60	192
	Plinius 8100	1,450	Slightly rough and ready, but plenty of balls from this stripped down antipodean.	6			●		100	214
R	Præcis Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			●		100	189
R	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●		50	208
R	Primare A20 MkII	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but ballsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			●		70	181
BB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance, and healthy power yield	6			●		100	214
	Red Rose Music M5	8,000	Sophisticated integrated valve amp with powerful, refined sound and beautiful build	4					45	219
	Red Rose Music Passion	2,999	Basically equipped amp from Mark Levinson that has speed and power if not the last ounce of resolve	5				●	100	226
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●		70	201
BB	Rotel RA-931 MkII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●			●	35	208
BB	Rotel RA-971 MkII	275	Improved RA971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6				●	60	196
	Rotel RA-972	400	Better in the treble than the bass, which is a little too rounded and woolly	6			●	●	90	205
	Rotel RA-1070	1,000	Well equipped powerhouse has features designed to support multiroom operation, but sonically it lacks subtlety	7	●		●	●	100	224
	Sharp SM-SX1	3,300	Jewel-like 1-bit digital amplifier with limited power reserves but offering glimpses of sonic magic	5					50	211
	Sharp SM-SX100	10,000	The world's first stable, 1-bit digital amplifier is a technological milestone that should go from strength to strength	n/a					110	200

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208
BB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5	●	●	●	●	25	224
	T+A PA-1220R	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			●	●	100	189
	Tact Millennium MkII	7,000	This digital class D amplifier represents a bold declaration on the future expansion of digital audio in the home	n/a			●	●	150	194
	TAG McLaren 60i	500	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000LX replacement	6			●	●	60	189
	TAG McLaren 60iRv	1,000	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			●	●	60	184
	TAG McLaren 60iRv sl	1,000	Highly coherent and solid sound with a slightly loud balance and plenty of features	6			●	●	60	228
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 1	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			●	●	65	196
R	Talk Electronics Storm 2	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			●	●	50	175
	Talk Electronics Cyclone 2.1	850	Not as clear or as lively as some, but essentially musical, and upgradeable for multichannel audio purposes	6			●	●	100	224
	Teac A-E2000	180	Has the potential to cause significant damage in the budget amp sector once the wrinkles are ironed out	6			●	●	50	195
	Technics SU-A808	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●		●	●	55	196
	Thule IA60B	700	Dry, edgy and glassy sounding amplifier, though the balanced input may appeal to some	6			●	●	60	214
R	Token Audio K50	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5			●	●	50	186
	Tube Technology Unisis Sig	2,400	A very attractive product which combines many fine attributes to good effect	5	●		●	●	30	202
	Unison Research Unico i	800	Open, engaging sound from an Italian charmer with limited bass power but plenty of spirit	5			●	●	100	228
	Unison Research Aria SR1	1,250	Drop dead gorgeous looks from this valve/MOS hybrid, but sonically it is lumpy and awkward, with poor definition, albeit with good image scale	5			●	●	80	224
	Yamaha AX-496	240	Lacklustre, if well equipped and powerful, amplifier shows some improvements over previous amps, but not enough	6			●	●	85	208
	Yamaha AX-596	300	Clean, agile and lean this amplifier isn't. Bold and powerful, however, it certainly is	5	●		●	●	100	217
R	YBA Intégré	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6			●	●	50	214

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Amp Flux System 2	3,000	Three-box affair with a clean, spacious sound and plenty of slam. A touch steely, but undeniably potent	5			●	●	50	187
	Alchemich Kraken APD7A/8A II	1,098	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6			●	●	55	187
R	Arcam Alpha 9C/10P	1,000	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Arcam Alpha 9P	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1			●	●	60	165
BB	Arcam A85 int & P85 pwr	1,249	Well thought through integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A-85 virtues with others, plus extra gravitas and range	7			●	●	85	225
R	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,900	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	7	●	●	●	●	100	227
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	5			●	●	60	221
	Audio Analogue Bellini/Donizetti	1,155	Curious pre/power amplifier has a number of objective and subjective character traits that make it difficult to recommend	5	●	●	●	●	60	225
	Audio Note M Zero/P Zero	998	Neat shoe box-size components. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5			●	●	8	191
R	AudioNote M2Phono/P2SE	3,198	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	4	●		●	●	18	216
EC	Audio Research LS25/VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	6	●		●	●	100	216
EC	AVI S2000M	2,348	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	5			●	●	150	221
EC	Border Patrol 300B SE	3,995	Single ended valve power amp with passion, grace and fire, and plenty of grunt to boot	1			●	●	8.5	186
	Bow Technologies Warlock/Walrus	6,490	Heavyweight dual mono pairing with superb build and rich, refined sound	5			●	●	150	216
R	Bryston BP20/3B-ST	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	8			●	●	120	212
BB	Bryston BP-20 4B5T	3,375	Quick, articulate and powerful, this is an excellent all round amp which controls difficult loudspeakers superbly	8			●	●	250	230
	Cary CAD 2A3SE	1,575	Monoblock valve power amp. Low power but gives delightful speed, coherence and transparency	1			●	●	5	196
	Chord SPM-4000	8,500	Sound is as stylish as its appearance is bold. Probably one of the best amps you are likely to hear	1			●	●	410	202
BB	Creek P43R/A52SE	949	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from fine value preamp	6			●	●	100	187
BB	Creek P43R/A43	1,050	Great value and a podium performance earning a best buy	6			●	●	140	212
	Crimson 610C/620D	775	Limited in what it does, the Crimson combo has real precision, verve and timing within those limits. Preamp is due to be replaced shortly	4	●	●	●	●	55	225
R	Crimson CS610/CS630	1,250	Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited. Slimline monoblocks with grunt and finesse	3	●	●	●	●	100	187
BB	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	3	●		●	●	30	216
	Cyrus Power	498	Detail and midband clarity and stand-out qualities. Smooth and refined with most types of music but bass-soft	1			●	●	50	183
R	Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	7			●	●	60	212
	Cyrus aCA7.5/PSX-R/aPA7	2950	Very stylish four-box modular system, slight forwardness delivers oodles of clarity and detail	7			●	●	150	216
	Densen Beat B-200	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●	●	●	100	191
R	Densen B-300	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1			●	●	100	183
	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	6	OPT		OPT	●	100	216
BB	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful broad-band transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	6			●	●	120	216
	Exposure 2010 II/2010 P	1,098	Interesting match of integrated and more powerful power amp is not as sure footed or as dynamically consistent as some rivals	6			●	●	75	225
EC	Gamut D200	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and dynamics (balanced inputs). Formerly Sirius	1			●	●	200	183
EC	Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Preamplifier combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●	●	125	195
	LFD Mistral Linstage/Power	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6			●	●	60	165
EC	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Looks can be deceiving: slim box, powerful and fast sound. One of the best power amplifiers in production	1			●	●	125	230
	Kolektor/LK85	990	Beautifully turned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all-Linn system	9	●	●	●	●	62	212
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II/SM-17	1,699	Flexible, beautifully made and as smooth as silk, but ultimately the combination fails to build on the unaided PM-17 II in biamp mode	6	●	●	●	●	60	225
	Michell Orca/Alecto mono	3,600	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound	6			●	●	100	187
R	Musical Fidelity X-P100	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little frustrious	6	●		●	●	200	200
	Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfil the demands of the most dynamic material	1			●	●	350	199
R	Myryad MP100/MA240	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	6			●	●	120	212
R	NAD Silverline S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks with heaps of power	7			●	●	200	200
	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,375	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	6			●	●	50	213
EC	Naim NAC112/NAP150/FLATCAP 2	1,850	Adding a FLATCAP 2 brings a very worthwhile sonic upgrade to the basic NAC112/NAP150 combo	6			●	●	50	213
	Naim NAC102/NAP180	2,122	More of a 'character act' than a neutral reproduction system, majors on excitement at the expense of neutrality	6			●	●	60	200
EC	Naim NAP500	10,000	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading edge definition	1			●	●	140	208
R	Primare A30.1/A30.2	2,699	Powerful, smooth, but slightly uneven performance in some combinations, but excellent control and separation in others	6			●	●	100	225
	Quad QC-twenty four/II-forty	4,000	A classic valve amplifier in circuitry and sound, but with modern ingredients and gorgeous retro styling	7			●	●	40	213
R	Roksan Caspian Power	595	Excels musically and in conventional hi-fi terms. A power amp for people with long-term satisfaction in mind	1			●	●	70	183
	Rotel RC-971	150	Low price is offset by rather coarse sound quality with certain types of music	5			●	●	178	178
	Rotel RC-1090/RB-1090	2,650	Prodigious powerful/pre/power combination with a wide range of inputs, but not ideally subtle or uncoloured	7	●	●	●	●	380	225
BB	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	6			●	●	10	216
	Samuel Johnson pca100	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia – precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●	201	201
	TAG McLaren PA20R/125M	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184
	TAG McLaren PA20R/100P	1,699	A blast from TAG McLaren's past highlights how far the brand has developed	6			●	●	100	225
R	TAG McLaren DPA32R 250MR	4,940	In a class of its own for extensibility, can double as excellent D/A, and is tremendously subtle, though it can sound constrained dynamically	6			●	●	250	230

STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Thule Spirit PR150B/PA150B	1,600	The limitations in the sonic performance mean that the competition has more to offer	6					150	212
R	T+A PA 1520 R	2,400	Powerful, punchy amp has many positive qualities, but sometimes seems to try too hard	8				●	260	230
	Unison Research S8	2,950	Outrageous Italian styling and an equally melodramatic sound, with splendid voice projection and tension	5			VOL		24	216

PHONO STAGES

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

AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam AVR200	800	Arcam upgraded its AVR100 giving it Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo sound, bit bass-light for multichannel	6			●	●	70	229
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema – what more could you want?	7			●	●	100	210
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights. Currently lacks 5.1 input for DVD-A/SACD	6			●	●	120	219
	Cyrus AV5	1,000	Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multichannel solution for music fans	4			●	●	N/A	201
	Cyrus AV5/SmartPower	2,650	Refined, detailed and attractive, but ultimately lacking in balls	3			●	●	60	210
	Denon AVR-1602	350	Low-cost home cinema amplifiers don't usually set out to excite, and this one is no exception. Listenable, but dull	6			●	●	80	223
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multichannel sound	4			●	●	75	198
	Denon AVR-3802	850	Feature-packed AV receiver with a good tuner, but low on grunt and excitement, especially in stereo	4	●		●	●	110	229
BB	Denon AVC-A1SE	2,500	A powerful, articulate 7.1-channel integrated amp, loaded with features and equally at home with music and film soundtracks	12	●		●	●	170	215
BB	Harman/Kardon AVR5000	600	Complex and capable home cinema receiver features automatic setup, HDCD and excellent interconnection possibilities	8			●	●	70	223
BB	Harman Kardon AVR 5500	749	Powerful sounding receiver with come clever features like an automatic set-up. Powerful but a bit hard-edged	8			●	●	85	229
	JVC-RX-8012R	400	Undistinguished home cinema receiver with USB in, and modestly satisfying sound at lowish power levels	9	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-X9050D	399	There are some benefits from THX Select processing in home cinema mode, but musically this is a rather mechanical, unengaging performer	7	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-V773D	800	Bold, detailed presentation, but there are some technical limitations and a slightly mannered quality, especially with music	10	●		●	●	120	210
	Kenwood KRF-V9993D	1,300	Complex amp that rocks with home cinema but loses out with music	7	●		●	●	110	215
	Lexicon MC12 Pro	9,000	Balanced output equipped behemoth of a 12 channel processor that does everything you can imagine and more	12			●	●	N/A	227
R	Marantz SR5200	400	Marantz provides undemanding but broadly satisfying listening from a well engineered, near budget home cinema receiver	8			●	●	90	223
BB	Marantz SR-5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	5			●	●	105	198
BB	Marantz SR-7000	700	Excellent at the price, and almost equally effective with two-channel music and multichannel AV	9			●	●	100	210
	Marantz SR-14EX Mk2	3,250	A weighty beast, with 7.1 processing but only five channels of amplification as standard. Highly capable with both music and movies, but rather costly all-in-all	8			●	●	140	215
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Super-powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, has marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration	6	●	●	●	●		230
R	Mryad MDP500/MA240/MA360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	9			●	●	120	215
BB	NAD7161	650	First rate home cinema amplifier that sounds more powerful than its specifications imply, and competes with specialist stereo amplifiers	9			●	●	80	223
	NAD S170/S250	5,700	Flexible and fine sounding THX Ultra processor/five-channel power amp combo with great timing	9			●	●	125	225
R	Onkyo TX-DS595	450	Unexciting but generally competent home cinema amplifier has some strong ergonomic features	7	●		●	●	70	223
BB	Onkyo TX-DS696	850	Excellent all-rounder for both hi-fi and home cinema use. Slightly characterful, but very smooth performance	7	●		●	●	100	229
	Onkyo TX-DS787	900	Obstructive ergonomics and messy sound undermine basically well-equipped receiver	7	●		●	●	100	217
R	Onkyo TX-DS989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad unsubtle	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSA-D810S	450	Thin, raw sounding AV receiver fails to stir the right nerve endings, but is materially fair value	7			●	●	100	223
	Pioneer VSA-E08	1,300	THX circuitry gives home cinema material a boost, but this is not an obvious first choice for music	10	●		●	●	100	210
	Pioneer VSA-AX10	2,700	Seven-channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and EQ, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD	8			●	●	150	229
	Primare P30/A30.5	3,700	No 5.1 channel input for DVD-A/SACD but capable of almost uncomfortable realism with real solidity and drive	8			●	●	120	210
R	Roksan DSP/5 ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels	4			●	●	80	210
	Rotel RSX-972	1,000	Not the brightest tool in the Rotel toolbox, and pricing is surely rather optimistic too	8			●	●	75	217
R	Rotel RSP-976/RMB-1075	1,700	A potent and enjoyable two-box beast that gets to the heart of both music and movie sound	8			●	●	120	215
R	Rotel RSP-985/RPB-985 MkII	2,400	The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive combo	3			●	●	130	198
R	Sony STR-B1070	600	Technical intriguing AV receiver which succeeds in extracting detail and space from recordings that sounded coarse and unexpansive elsewhere	10	●		●	●	100	223
	Sony STR-VA555ES	1,000	Feature-rich AV amplifier that performs extremely well as a multichannel device, but less so with stereo	10	●		●	●	110	229
	Sony TA-E9000ES/N9000ES	2,300	Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile but fails to cut the sonic mustard	5			●	●	110	198
R	Sony VA777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all rounder	9			●	●	100	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,749	A flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Would form the heart of a top-class multichannel system in standard or 7-channel 'EX' form	6			●	●	N/A	215
	Technics DX-950	279	Ultra-low cost home cinema receiver is impressively equipped for the price, but musically it lacks grace and air	5	●		●	●	100	223
	Technics SA-DA10	500	Lower mid-market AV amp has all the right ingredients, but fails to stir the soul	5	●		●	●	80	210
	Technics SE-A1010/SU-C1010 x3	1,350	A preamp plus three stereo amps provide a six-channel A/V solution without complex processing. Visually stunning but low on grunt and detail	6			●	●	70	215
	Yamaha RX-V1000RDS	800	Solid mainstream performer is more convincing as home cinema amplifier than for multichannel music	8	●		●	●	100	217
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	2,000	An anorak's delight, and one of the most flexible and effective soundfield creators ever conceived	11	●		●	●	110	210

CABLES



SPECIFICATIONS

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	Acoustic Research Master	70	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection	•	•	•	•	•			224
	Audioquest Sidewinder	40	Suppresses the sound. At this price it's a disappointment	•	•	•	•	•			211
R	Audioquest Coral	99	Slightly forward imaging hardly detracts from its excellent tonal qualities and detail	•	•	•	•	•			200
R	Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble	•	•	•	•	•			211
	Cable Talk Professional 3	75	Plenty of bass, but suffers rather from congestion	•	•	•	•	•			224
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price	•	•	•	•	•			176
	Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	•	•	•	•	•			211
	Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces	•	•	•	•	•			176
	Chord Chameleon 2	90	Deep bass is fine but despite that the sound can be a bit hard and lacking body and resonance	•	•	•	•	•			188
	Chord Silver Siren	75	Dry and undynamic, though tonal balance is good	•	•	•	•	•			224
R	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried	•	•	•	•	•			200
BB	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price	•	•	•	•	•			211
R	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass	•	•	•	•	•			224
	Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)	•	•	•	•	•			176
	Insert Audio IC100 MkII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness	•	•	•	•	•			176
R	Insert Audio Image 5.1	85	Very good detail and imaging: perhaps a touch bass-light	•	•	•	•	•			200
BB	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	•	•	•	•	•			211
	Ixos Gamma 1001	70	Nice and dynamic, and bass is good, but treble disappoints and it can become rough	•	•	•	•	•			224
	Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though	•	•	•	•	•			176
	Ixos 1000	90	Nothing badly wrong, just a little bit bland and outshone by others at the price	•	•	•	•	•			200
	Kimber Crystal-Cu	115	Disappointing beside other Kimber products: great bass, but suffers from dryness	•	•	•	•	•			224
BB	Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble — excellent performance all round	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed	•	•	•	•	•			176
BB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	•	•	•	•	•			224
	Neotech NA11085	100	Balance is OK, but detail could and should be better	•	•	•	•	•			224
R	Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable	•	•	•	•	•			176
	Precious Metals SS35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic	•	•	•	•	•			188
	Profigold PGA301 MkII	40	Mellow and well rounded, but can seem a little heavy	•	•	•	•	•			211
R	Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension	•	•	•	•	•			211
R	Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price	•	•	•	•	•			211
R	Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness	•	•	•	•	•			176
R	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced, and easily rivals more expensive cables	•	•	•	•	•			211
BB	QED Qnec 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value	•	•	•	•	•			176
R	QED Qnec 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	QED QNEX Silver Spiral	90	A great cable for lovers of big sounds	•	•	•	•	•			200
	Reference CS1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at climaxes	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	SonicLink Black	49	Nickel-plated copper with a slight dryness in the bass and a hint of treble roll-off don't compromise integration	•	•	•	•	•			176
R	SonicLink Message (Lilac)	60	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass	•	•	•	•	•			188
	Sonic Link SG Voices	95	Bass reach is splendid, though there's some coloration: scores highly for emotional impact	•	•	•	•	•			224
	SonicLink Violet	95	Better bass than treble — a little dry in the upper octaves	•	•	•	•	•			200
R	Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss	•	•	•	•	•			176
	Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable	•	•	•	•	•			188
	Straight Wire Encore II	100	Slightly variable bass performance is a weakness in this otherwise capable cable	•	•	•	•	•			200
BB	Supra EFF-ISL	80	Excellent sound in all areas — nothing to criticize	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plumminess offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results	•	•	•	•	•			188
	Tara Labs Prism 55-i	195	Good with laid-back music, but seems lazy with more exciting material	•	•	•	•	•			200
BB	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value	•	•	•	•	•			200
BB	van den Hul The Bay CS	39	Terrific detail, nice balance — a great cable	•	•	•	•	•			224
BB	van den Hul PBS	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent	•	•	•	•	•			188
R	van den Hul D102 MkIII HB	80	A fine cable, but the competition has crept up and it no longer leads the pack	•	•	•	•	•			200
BB	Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round with just a hint of bass congestion — very good value	•	•	•	•	•			224



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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

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

LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DIG CABLE TYPE					ISSUE NUMBER	
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER		SILVER
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative						•	183
R	Audioquest Slate	15	Capable across the board, with just the smallest degree of dryness, but very listenable	•			•	•		203
R	Bandridge LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings			•		•		157
R	Black Rhodium Aero Space S130x2	76	Great kick in the bass, but the treble can sound dry and recessed. Price for 1m terminated pair	•		•		•		227
R	Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25	Quite well-balanced but tends to lose bass lines in complex music	•				•		168
	Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained	•				•		157
	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices	•				•		203
	Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass	•				•		192
	DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble extension	•			•	•		168
R	Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	•				•		192
	Chord Company Rumour 2	10	Performance is listenable enough but fails to excel in any area	•				•		203
BB	DNM LSC8500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire	•			•	•		133
	Ecosse Reference CS-2.15	5.75	Stereo and rhythm are good, but persistent dryness detracts significantly	•			•	•		215
R	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life. Price for 1m terminated pair	•			•	•		227
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round	•			•	•		203
R	Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	•			•	•		168
BB	Ixos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price, strong and consistent	•			•	•		203
R	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant – though only slightly	•			•	•		192
BB	Kimber 8VS	108	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	•			•	•		227
BB	Kimber 4PR	4.90	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	•	•		•	•		192
R	Kimber 4VS	8.50	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	•			•	•		183
R	Kimber 4TC	18.80	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	•			•	•		168
BB	Kimber 8TC	348	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	•			•	•		203
	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unsubtle music – can be dry and edgy	•			•	•		183
	Monster Cable Z1	12.50	Slightly bass-rich balance, and could do with a bit more detail	•			•	•		215
	Monster Z2 Reference	240	Basically competent but never outstanding, and suffers some bass muddle. Price for 3m terminated pair	•			•	•		227
	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-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
R	Ortofon SPK200	4.99	Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	•			•	•		183
R	Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass – if slightly bright at times	•			•	•		133
	Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures	•			•	•		183
	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion	•			•	•		203
	Prowire Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board	•			•	•		203
	Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound – but too messy and bloated for its own good	•			•	•		183
	QED Original	2.50	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel	•			•	•		157
BB	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	•			•	•		192



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LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding								168
R	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid-back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	•		•		•			215
	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging: good, but not the best at its price	•		•		•			203
	SonicLink S300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces	•		•		•			168
R	SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced			•		•			157
R	SonicLink AST75	2.95	Unusual materials and rather unusual performance too, strong on excitement and with plenty of bass	•		•		•			203
R	SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together			•		•			157
	SonicLink AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details	•		•		•			192
BB	SonicLink Rebel	7.50	Plenty of bass, but without sacrificing upper frequency clarity or dynamics	•		•		•			215
	Straight Wire Duo	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style	•		•		•			203
	Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music	•		•		•			192
BB	Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience	•		•		•			183
	Supra Classic 6.0	4.95	It's all there, but a persistent lack of detail seriously mars the view	•		•		•			215
R	Supra Ply 3.4	6.95	Clean sound which stays together well at high levels, with full bass – perhaps a touch of treble restriction	•		•		•			183
R	Supra Ply 3.4/S	7.95	Good in all areas with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	•		•		•			203
	Supra Octopower 25	77.98	Very low losses over long runs, but essentially sound is lacklustre – sluggish bass and hard treble. Price for 1m terminated pair	•		•		•			227
R	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues – and very minor vices – across the board	•		•		•			183
R	Tara Labs Prism Nexa	9.95	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	•		•		•			215
	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail	•		•	•	•			203
	TCI Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	•		•		•			203
R	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	•		•	•	•			203
R	van den Hul The Snowline	5.49	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	•		•		•			215
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	•		•		•			203
R	van den Hul D-352 Hybrid	84	Can be a touch dry, and bass is not massively extended, but mid and treble are pleasantly airy and detailed. Price for 1m terminated pair	•		•		•			227
	XLO Pro 600	16.50	Decent bass and good treble, but sounds confused with densely-scored music	•		•		•			215

MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audiolinx Blue Max	100	Expensive, but good value considering the improvement offered					•	•	PLT	218
	Audio Note AN-MP	99	A noticeable improvement on standard mains cable, but not as great as others					•	•		218
	Audiosource bbc	48	Very good value, extremely sharp detailing – maybe too sharp						•	PLT	218
BB	Audusa Eupen CSA	48	Reasonable cost, outstanding performance and a strong recommendation					•	•		218
	Clearaudio Accurate Power Gen	1,090	Compact and beautifully finished unit that offers positive sonic benefits that justify the price								206
	GTA PHY-HP board	299	Oozing style and quality, the board generates an extremely natural and truthful sound								206
R	LAT AC-2	99	Excellent clarity, music sounds clean and easy to follow – enthusiastic recommendation			•	•		•		218
R	Lynwood Electronics Mega Power	295	Reasonable price model that improves focus while producing a sweet, tight and clean bass								206
	Maplin Bowthorpe ASC 431	50	Excellent mains purifying abilities – including other equipment used elsewhere in the house (Maplin code B184F)					•	•		218
	Olson Sound Fantastic	80	Reasonable price, superior build quality – all in all, a bit of a bargain					•	•		218
R	PS Audio Power Plant	1,200	Power Plant improves the cleanness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving an impressive 3-D quality								206
R	Russ Andrews Kimber Power Kord	50	Impressively detailed and crisp, choice of connectors can make even more difference					•	•		218
BB	Russ Andrews Kimber/Power Block	350	Improved version that elevates music to a cleaner and more three-dimensional experience with greater stereo imagery								206
	Russ Andrews The Purifier	250	More ambitious version of the Silencer that gives a cleaner, quieter background, allowing more low level detail								206
BB	Russ Andrews Silencer	40	A cost effect solution to noise-free mains supply that reduces 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy								206
	SonicLink SG Power	80	Bright, open and detailed with sweet and natural treble frequencies					•	•	PLT	218
	SonicLink S-Gold mains	225	Delivers a clean incisive sound with excellent detail, clarity and with no increase in noise								206
R	Synergistic Res. Master Coupler	238	Absolutely outstanding performance, but extremely expensive					•	•		218
R	Trichord Research Powerblock500	300	Isolation transformer that bolsters clarity, openness and gives an increased refinement making for a purer and natural sound								206

CASSETTE DECKS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION	ADJUSTABLE BIAS	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced	•		•			•		•	158
R	Kenwood KX-W6080	200	Modestly decent-sounding twin deck, with some transport instability and ragged bass	•		•			•		•	171
	Marantz SD455	170	Works well as a single deck, especially on replay, but dubbing at high/low speed compromises sound	•		•			•		•	184
	NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise	•		•			•		•	158
	NAD 616	300	Twin deck with basic features. No Dolby setting memory, transport is too unstable for audiophile use	•		•			•		•	171
	Nakamichi DR-10	800	An ergonomic oddity, but one of the last of the great cassette decks. Worth considering against MD	•		•	•		•		•	195
R	Onkyo K-611	460	Cute drawer-loading mini-size component with three heads and dual capstan transport	•		•			•		•	146
R	Pioneer CT-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	•		•			•		•	164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	•		•			•		•	171
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest three-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	•		•			•		•	184
BB	Technics RS-A26	200	For those who can't afford the RS-A27; clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin-film head	•		•			•		•	164
BB	Technics RS-A27	270	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in state-of-the-art	•		•			•		•	158
R	Yamaha KX-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	•	•	•			•		•	171

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CD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ASSEMBLY	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Advantage CD15	3,995	A CD player of some stature – what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	193
	Alchemist Kraken	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	190
R	Alchemist Nexus APD32A	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	169
	Anthem CD1	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	178
BB	Arcam Alpha 7SE	300	Sharper, clearer Alpha 7 SE, and more affordable than before	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
	Arcam CD72	400	Easy going, slightly soft-centred reworking of Alpha 7 in new, svelte DiVA clothing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Arcam CD92	850	High resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Arcam Alpha CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	225
	Audio Analogue Paganini	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
	Audio Analogue Maestro	1,500	Super smooth CD replay from this CD 'processor'. Fantastic casework compliments a loveable sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	228
	Audio Note AN-CD1	600	Easy on the ear, and for a valve player, easy on the pocket, but a bit Radio 2-flavoured	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
	Audio Note AN-CD2	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system-fussy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	195
	AVI Series 21 MC4	999	Solid, if not stolid player designed for a long lifetime, and musically proficient, if lacking in airs and graces	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	AVI S2000MC Reference	1,399	Lean, dry, high resolution player, built to outlast most of us. A fine performer in a sympathetic system	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	169
	Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5	3,995	A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
	Cambridge Audio D100	120	Hard, clanging and coloured sounding, and with suspect control logic	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
BB	Cambridge Audio D500	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
R	Cambridge Audio D500 SE	200	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
R	Copland CDA 266	1,199	Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
R	Copland CDA 289	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
R	Creek CD53	1,199	Fine, assured and well built player – balanced outputs too	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Cymbal CDP12	1,299	Clean, detailed and airy HDCD-equipped player with minimalist trappings	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
R	Cyrus dAD1.5	395	Improved dAD1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
R	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
BB	Cyrus CD7Q	1,150	Refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range, builds on the qualities of the lesser models	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Denon DCD-435	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
R	Denon DCD-655	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
R	Denon DCD-835	230	Refined sound with terrific bass extension. Some slight coloration	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
	Denon DCD-1550AR	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	179
	Densen B-400	1,280	Bold, purposeful sound, but lacks subtlety, and has some ergonomic flaws	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	Docet-Lector CDPO.5T	999	Valve powered CD player lacks resolving power, though it musters considerable physical presence	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
BB	Exposure 2010	599	Smooth, restrained but warm and physical balance from this well turned out and well priced player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	EZO Fog Stage 3	1,170	Curious player is difficult to drive, and has sound quality that both enchants and sometimes confounds	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Kenwood DVF-3030	180	Solid CD player with straightforward features	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
R	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright sounding player with strong multi-room appeal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	Marantz CD5000	150	Well equipped budget player sounds thin and rough at times	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
	Marantz CC3000	150	Ragged sounding multidisc player, but it is cheap and well-equipped	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
BB	Marantz CD6000	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
BB	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
BB	Marantz CD6000 KI Signature	500	Excellent all rounder, a well-appointed, good-value package	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	206
R	Marantz CD17 Mk II KI Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
R	Marantz CD-7	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
	Marantz SA1251	3,500	Highly refined and beautifully built multichannel SA & DVD-V player that doesn't quite match Sony's best	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	223
EC	Marantz SA-1	5,000	The brand's first SACD player is a stunning machine that's equally as strong with conventional CD	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	208
BB	Meridian 506	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
	Meridian 588	2,100	Not the most immediately striking CD player, but its neutrality and timing prove beguiling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	225
	Monrio Asty	695	Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	Musical Fidelity X-RAY	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
BB	Musical Fidelity A3 CD	800	Excellent player has few faults apart from a slight loss of EHF detail	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
EC	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE24	2,000	Gorgeous looking, substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	229
	Myryad MCD 600	1,299	Abundance of detail and resolution from this 'Super DAC' CD player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
R	NAD C520	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
	NAD C521	200	Good timing and excitement, but not good at holding the listener's attention	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
	NAD 523	250	Lacklustre musical presentation was disappointing on test; so was the absence of a digital output	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
	NAD C540	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the C540 is smooth & elegant with just a hint of aggression	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
R	NAD Silverline S500	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	195
R	Naim Audio CD5	1,125	Recommended subject to audition, a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
EC	Naim NACDSII/XPS	5,625	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
R	Nakamichi MB-10	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
R	Onkyo DX-7222	150	Competitive following recent price cut, and on the whole a strong performer musically	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	Onkyo DX-7511	300	Earthbound mid-price CD player fails to excite	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
	Parasound C/DP-1000	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
BB	Philips SACD-1000	1,300	Not quite a universal disc player, but it does SACD multi-channel, DVD-Video and CD to a universally high standard	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
	Pioneer PD-5507	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
	Primare D20	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226
	Roksan Kandy	475	Slightly old-fashioned sound quality player available in various colour schemes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	Roksan Caspian	895	Improved Caspian (retested for 2001) is still a bold, dynamic player, but rather more subtle and expressive	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	Rotel RCD-951	300	Disappointing chopped-down RCD-971 – buy the original	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
BB	Rotel RCD-971	450	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
R	Rotel RCD-1070	525	Though technically sound and well equipped, the Rotel failed to generate much excitement or involvement	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	226

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Rotel RCD-991	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability	●	●								212
	Sharp DX-SX1	2,700	Stylish player with a slightly forward but extremely nimble sound. Connects to matching digital amp via dedicated umbilical	●		●			●	●	●		211
R	Sony CDP-XE330	100	Unrefined, but lively, detailed and highly affordable			●				●			202
	Sony CDP-XE530	140	Well-equipped, but raw, scrappy sounding player lacks depth and weight			●			●	●			200
BB	Sony CDP-XB930E	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●	●								195
R	Sony DVP-NS700V	400	Outrageously good value for money DVD-VISA player, though SACD replay quality trails the audio-only Sony SCD-XB770ES	●	●							●	220
BB	Sony SCD-XB770UK	400	Expressive and expansive player in the best SACD tradition, but CD replay is disappointingly lacklustre	●	●							●	220
EC	Sony SCD-333ES	1,200	Entry-level high-end multichannel SA player is excellent with both CD and the new format, but particularly impressive in surround	●	●							●	224
EC	Sony SCD-555ES	1,200	Fabulously built with superb sound using both CD and Super Audio software, you'll be hard pressed to find a better CD player at the price	●	●							●	213
EC	Sony SCD-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch	●	●			●				●	223
EC	Sony SCD-1	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but it's a slow operator and doesn't support multichannel	●	●			●				●	194
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1.1	649	Attractively turned out, with bare bones features (though the power supply can be augmented), the Thunder 1.1 gave equivocal results on test	●	●								226
	T+A CD1210R	1,185	Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters	●	●								188
	Talk Electronics Thunder 1	550	Entry level upgradeable Talk Electronics player sounds slightly muted										200
	Talk Electronics Thunder 2	699	Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradeable in various ways										191
R	Talk Electronics Thunder 3	1,000	Clean, fast, and the availability of a complete upgrade path makes this a good long term proposition										195
R	TAG McLaren CD20R	1,249	Dry and unatmospheric, but plenty of presence – recommended with caution	●	●								188
	Teac VRDS-9	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills	●	●					●			176
	Teac VRDS-25x	1,000	Excellent, individualistic player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility	●	●			●		●			195
	Technics SL-PG390	90	It's very cheap. Very, very cheap		●								202
	Technics SL-P57	200	Strong, but ultimately rather opaque and hard-sounding, high tech CD player		●				●				207
R	Technics SL-MC7	300	Maximum storage capacity for a minimum price, and presentable sound too (multidisc)		●					●	●		204
	Thule Spirit CD100	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent	●	●								188
	Trichord Genesis	549	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority	●	●				●	●			169
	Trichord Revelation	799	Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well	●	●				●				166
	Tube Technology Fusion MkII	1,350	Improvements over the original model but still remains too inconsistent for its own good	●	●		●		●				206
	Tube Technology Fulcrum	2,800	An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre	●	●	●							194
EC	Wadia 301	3,650	Highly insightful player with digital preamp options and very good onboard volume control, try it direct for maximum effect	●	●	●		●		●			228
	Yamaha CDX-596	230	Well-priced and attractive-sounding, this player can read CD-RW	●	●				●	●			207
	Yamaha CDX-496	180	A rather splashy and approximate sound, further hampered by mechanical noise	●	●				●	●			217
	Yamaha CD-X993	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	●	●				●	●			184
	YBA Spécial	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high-end parentage. Avoid	●	●				●	●			195

CD TRANSPORTS

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

DACS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alchemist TS-D-1	300	24/96-equipped DAC sounds tidy but a little shut-in with both 16-bit CDs and 24-bit/96kHz DVDS										187
	Audio Note DAC Zero	369	Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)										191
R	Audio Note DAC Zero1x	750	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with CDT Zero)										212
	Audio Note DAC 5	18,500	Astonishingly natural and realistic in the right system, the only problem being the extravagant price										203
	Chord DAC 64	1,900	Beautifully encased converter with variable input buffering but inconvenient input socketry and a sound that doesn't quite match the looks						●				225
EC	dCS Delius	5,000	State-of-the-art resolution with considerably greater flexibility than anything else, hard to beat	●	●		●		●			●	207
	dCS Purcell	3,500	The first upsampler on the market adds significant depth and increased bass resolve with a suitable DAC	●	●		●		●			●	207

DVD PLAYERS



SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	ASSEMBL ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam DIVA DV88	1,000	A DVD-Video player built with non-obsolence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player	●	●								213
	Arcam FMJ DV27	1,600	Spirited CD performance and a great DVD-V upgrade path	●	●								219
BB	Denon DVD-1000	300	Fine, stripped down player concentrates on the essentials, and scores a direct hit	●	●								216
	Denon DVD-1600	500	Classy to look at and to use, picture quality is good, but CD and DVD-A performance is a little soft and wayward	●	●					●		●	228
BB	Denon DVD-2800	750	First-rate all-rounder, this is a gimmick-free design that is well-built and offers good CD and DVD sound quality and finely resolved pictures	●	●								221
R	Denon DVD-3300	1,000	Sometimes slightly inconsistent and strident sounding in all modes of use, but it pulls a little more off disc too	●	●					●		●	213
EC	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	Great CD playback from this stunning player. Build as solidly as they come	●	●								230
R	Harman/Kardon DVD25	449	Reasonable DVD-Video player is an excellent CD player, making this a good upgrade choice for buyers who put music first	●	●								228
	Integra research RD-V1	2,700	Refined in use and on audition, but a lack of resolving power and an unbalanced feature set mitigate against this model	●	●								220
R	JVC XV-SA72SL	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike	●	●								220

DVD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ASSEMBLY ELECTRIC OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	JVC XV-D723GD	500	Convincing DVD-Audio player that is ultimately let down by poor CD performance	●	●	●	●				206
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	899	The first multi-disc DVD-Audio player is physically large and ergonomically obstructive, but it is a smooth, slick operator	●	●	●	●	●		●	213
EC	Marantz DV-1251	2,500	THX Ultra progressive DVD-A player is a classically rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode	●	●	●	●			●	229
	Marantz DV4100	399	The DV4100 is a DVD-Video player for videophiles, but don't put the CD player out to pasture just yet	●	●	●	●				221
EC	Meridian DVS96	2,350	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●	●	●	●				218
EC	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in CD and DVD-V/A replay, with flexible modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-band digital outputs	●	●	●	●	●		●	230
	NAD TS31	330	Standard far eastern DVD-Video player in NAD clothing fails to stir the juices	●	●	●	●				228
	Onkyo DV-S939	1,999	Superb build, plenty of features, but more convincing as a video player than an audio one	●	●	●	●				220
	Panasonic DVD-RV41	300	Well presented DVD-Video player has an attractive, but far from high resolution sound, and picture quality also lacks definition	●	●	●	●				221
	Panasonic DVD-RA61	399	A nice DVD-Video player cohabits with a relatively nondescript DVD-Audio section	●	●	●	●			●	228
	Panasonic DVD-RA71	449	Well priced, but rather slack sounding with DVD-A material, but CD sounds OK, and DVD-V is excellent	●	●	●	●			●	220
	Panasonic DVD-A7EB	699	Chopped down Technics DVD-A10 retains most of the flagship's headline features with well balanced, but less refined and less articulate sound	●	●	●	●			●	213
R	Philips DVD-712	200	Rough and ready looking DVD-Video player turns out to be well equipped, and an unexpectedly vital performer, on screen and via loudspeakers	●	●	●	●				221
	Philips DVD Q50	300	Designer DVD player with oddball ergonomics and lacklustre audio performance, but video performance is fine	●	●	●	●				228
R	Philips DVD957	400	Slightly ill-disciplined, but a bold, enthusiastic player which engages even if it doesn't always convince	●	●	●	●				216
R	Pioneer DV-545	330	Stylish and well-equipped slimline DVD-Video player is an extremely attractive all rounder	●	●	●	●				221
BB	Pioneer DV-636D	400	Bold, dynamic and detailed sounding player, with slightly simplified video feature set, sharper pricing and A1 pictures to match	●	●	●	●				216
	Pioneer DV-646A	530	One of the first DVD-RW compatible DVD-Audio players is informative but not the sweetest sounding machine around	●	●	●	●			●	220
R	Pioneer DV-939A	1,200	Fine player with near state of the art video performance and attractive, easy on the ear music making, from CD and DVD-Audio alike	●	●	●	●			●	213
EC	Pioneer DV-747A	899	UK's first Universal player, compatible with DVD-A and SACD as well as DVD-V and CD. Remarkably good with every format	●	●	●	●			●	226
	Primare V10	700	Beautifully presented DVD-video player gives superb picture quality and so-so CD replay	●	●	●	●				221
R	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possesses a strong picture quality and decent CD player	●	●	●	●				206
	Rotel RDV-995	700	Bold, sometimes aggressive sounding player needs RGB output to bring picture quality up to scratch	●	●	●	●				216
	Sony DVD1500	219	Compact, low cost player is a quite strong video performer, but lacks the wherewithal to succeed as a surrogate CD player	●	●	●	●				216
BB	Sony DVP-NS400D	300	Midrange DVD-Video player has some interesting features that enhance picture quality and usability	●	●	●	●				221
	Sony Art Couture DVP-S435	350	Looks to die for and decent on-screen results, but sound is flat and grey	●	●	●	●				216
BB	Sony DVP-NS900V	500	A great all rounder, and an excellent example of the current strengths of the SACD format	●	●	●	●				228
	Sony DVD-S9000ES	1,200	First DVD machine to play SACD has a 'Lexus' sound style that never really gets its hands dirty	●	●	●	●				210
	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	A tour-de-force of engineering, albeit with matching price tag. But picture quality is second to none	●	●	●	●				212
	T+A DVD 1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-audio upgrade path	●	●	●	●				213
	Technics DVD-A10	899	Well built, early generation DVD-A player with full on-board DVD-Video decoding and a more than workmanlike sound	●	●	●	●			●	213
	Thompson DTH-4500	229	DVD-V player comes with an excellent multi-component remote control, but fails to deliver the goods, with bland sound to match the iffy visuals	●	●	●	●				221
BB	Toshiba SD-S10E	320	Great all rounder DVD-Audio from a slightly idiosyncratic player at a new low price point for Toshiba	●	●	●	●			●	228
	Toshiba SD500E	599	OK DVD-Video player, but lacklustre with music, especially when reproducing high resolution DVD-Audio material	●	●	●	●			●	213
BB	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player; in this context pricing is competitive	●	●	●	●				213
	T+A DVD-1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-Audio upgrade path	●	●	●	●				213
R	Yamaha DVD-S1200	700	Clean, agile sound quality, and decent, if unexciting DVD-Audio performance round of a good, if rather costly player	●	●	●	●			●	228

DIGITAL RECORDERS



SPECIFICATIONS

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

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	FORMAT	OPTICAL INPUTS	ELEC INPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing a CD player and hard disc recorder. Sign of things to come?	2	CD/HD		●	223
R	Denon CDR-1000	400	Straightforward but attractive single CD-R/RW deck is a respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Denon CDR-1500	449	Ultra high jitter takes the sparkle out of an otherwise attractive dual disc CD-R/RW burner	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR-20	499	High jitter player makes quite good recordings that sound less good when played back internally, especially when using the internal record capable transport	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR 30	590	Well built copier capable of good recordings but playback quality is indistinct and the asking price high	2	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Imerge M1000	3,300+	One-box hard disc solution for multi-room installations. Stores 100s of CDs with web-interface but sound is uninspiring. Single-room S1000 also available	2	CD/HD	●	●	223
	JVC XM-448	220	A hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	1	MD	●	●	205
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, ratty build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	It may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	1	MD	●	●	205
R	Kenwood DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	1	MD	●	●	191
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
BB	Marantz DR6000	400	Classy CD-R/RW recorder is also a classy CD player, in contrast to most CD recorders	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Mid-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	1	MD	●	●	177
	Philips CDR 600	230	Low cost Philips machine makes great recordings but playback is poor and the controls a mite fiddly	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
R	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well equipped, well priced CD-R/RW deck	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that receives its Recommendation due to price	1	MD	●	●	205
BB	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good if characterful player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
BB	Sony MDS-JE770	260	Smartly attired, packed with features and capable of recordings closer in quality to CD-R than MD's detractors might think	1	MD	●	●	223
	Sony MXD-D40	330	One half CD player, the other half MD recorder. Functions well enough but CD playback is weak	2	CD/MD	●	●	223
R	Sony MDS-JA555ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	1	MD	●	●	205
	Sony MDS-JA333ES	650	Serious build, serious features, serious sound. Maybe high-end MD isn't such a peculiar idea after all – but would you pay £650?	1	MD	●	●	223
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Yamaha CDR-D561	449	Twin CD-R/RW burner makes solid, believable discs, but is priced higher than equivalent models from elsewhere	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Yamaha CDR-HD1000	700	CD recorder and hard drive in one – save your music to hard disc, edit then dump to CD-R for MiniDisc style flexibility	2	CD-R(W)/HD	●	●	223

HEADPHONES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain						190	32		219
	AKG K100	36	Leather clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price						190	100		205
	AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight						230	100		194
	AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt						240	600		186
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal						250	66		194
	Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phones						250	60		186
	Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass						210	40		194
	Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100 per cent						210	40		186
	Beyer DT531	105	Average performer from an established player. Lacks punch and bite						245	250		205
	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor						200	250		172
	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads						295	250		186
	Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable						120	32		172
	Grado SR-60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste						200	32		194
	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality						200	32		186
	Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the music						200	32		163
	Grado SR-325	300	Elegant sound across the frequency spectrum; let down by old fashioned ear-piece design						200	32		205
	JVC HA-G77	40	Too coloured for general recommendation, and lacking detail						260	32		219
	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design						165	1/R		172
	JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily heard						280	20,000		186
	JVC HA-DX3	200	Great headphone with a rich bass, careful midrange and high comfort factor						340	90		205
	Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome on the head with prolonged wearing						250	60		194
	Koss R/200	80	Basic sound is OK, but sensitivity is too low to be useful. Features stereo width control						210	60		219
	Koss R/100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange excitement						215	60		186
	Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top						380	100		163
	Philips HP890	66	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone						330	32		219
	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled midrange and overexcited bass						247	32		205
	Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance – but detailed, and comfortable to wear						210	64		219
	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-damping headband						255	150		172
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort						270	120		205
	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed: comfortable too						250	40		219
	Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass						300	24		194
	Sony MDR-CD 2000	200	Large pads make for sweaty listening. Pure mid-tones, but weightless bass						300	32		205
	Technics RP-F500	40	Just too bright for general recommendation, though they play along with gusto						225	40		219
	Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics						160	40		205
	Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof						230	32		172
	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way						295	50		205
	Stax Lambda Nova Basic	395	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence – and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards						347	N/A		163
	Vivanco SR322	30	Weak design and uncomfortable, but redeems itself with substantial sound quality						248	32		205
	Vivanco SR2225	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates						250	32		219
	Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM tuner						210	FM		172
	Vivanco IRS800	50	Consistently musical infrared design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven						226	1/R		172
	Vivanco SR950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones						252	32		194
	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable						280	9,000		186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss						240	9,000		186

LOUDSPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				SIZE (WXHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24		86	6	30			226
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 300	400	Chunky real-wood stand-mount sounds big, smooth and shiny, but also dynamically limited	21,40,30		86	6	24			227
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 309	700	Real wood heavyweight with fine neutrality and dynamic range; could have more brio	21,98,30		90	5	23			224
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone standmount has a generous performance envelope, but sound quality was controversial	20,33,29		90	4	22			201
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,000	Very substantial, with tuneable ABR for better room matching. Sounds good but could be more neutral	24,5,37,32		89	5	30			211
	ALR Jordan Note 7	2,500	A beguiling Anglo-German collaboration delivers metal-cone precision with fine dynamic range	25,107,32		92	4	25			196
	AR 520	150	Classic standmount might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20,37,28		90	4	28			215
	AR 15	275	Neat and chunky wall/standmount certainly knows how to rock and roll, less convincing on the delicate stuff	22,37,22		90	4	45			201
	Arcaydis AKF	299	Budget compact real wood floorstander lacks some warmth; could be better finished	17,77,21		88	5	38			227
	Arcaydis Concept 2	1,199	Solid oak floorstander is a little lazy sounding, but is well balanced and smooth with modest coloration	19,90,26		86	7	25			211
	ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but lightweight bass	18,38,25.5		80	8	65			192
	ATC T16	1,750	Compact active 'home studio monitor' in colourful cast box, with considerable loudness potential	27,45,33		A	A	45			214
	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		84	5	65			219
	ATC SCM10A	1,299	Stylish, active power houses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	A	45			221
	ATC SCM50A SL	7,020	350 watts of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,71,6,48		A	A	38			218
	ATC SCM70A SL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127,40,46		A	A	20			205
	Audio Note AZ One	449	A fine partner for low power valve amps, it delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29		92	6	30			215

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		92	4	20	●		204
R	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,58,5,24.5		90	5	38	●		219
R	Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little underdeveloped	19,106,27	●	90	4	20	●		190
R	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too	20,102,30	●	89	4	22	●		180
R	AVI NuNeutron	500	A smooth and subtle though pricey sub-miniature, albeit with the inevitable limitations of the breed	14,27,23		86	4	50		●	190
R	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	559	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30		88	7	30		●	211
BB	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband, and a restrained top end	20,33,23		88	4	23		●	226
BB	B&W 602 S3	300	Large lively standmount with fine bass and low box colour; comprehensively vindicates a timeless formula	23,49,29		89	3	22	●		224
BB	B&W DM602.5 S3	400	Pretty floorstander sounds rather laid back and lacks the agility of its stand-mount stablemates	20,5,88,29	●	89	4	38	●		227
R	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		89	7	30	●		208
R	B&W CM4	900	Beautifully styled trend-setting floorstander has a big but rather dull sound	20,91,29	●	91	3	35	●		219
R	B&W CDM-7NT	1,250	A very classy floorstander, in sound as well as looks, with fine bass drive, authority and overall neutrality	22,95,29	●	90	6	20	●		208
R	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		89	12	28	●		199
R	B&W Nautilus 803	3,500	Classy looking three-way with impressively deep bass, wide dynamic range and a laid-back balance	29,108,42	●	89	3	20	●		210
R	B&W Nautilus 804	2,500	he prettiest Nautilus has tremendous clarity and imaging but lacks the welly of bigger models	24,101,5,24.5	●	89	8	38	●		200
EC	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art, needs real power but gives real sound	39,111,55	●	91	8	34	●		183
R	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	he 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	Bioburl styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17		91	4	50		●	225
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	●	94	3	40	●		204
R	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-her-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32	●	92	5	28		●	180
R	Carlsson OA52.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37	●	90	8	20		●	195
R	Castle Richmond	250	Tiny real-wood miniature has a lightweight but very coherent sound, a bit in-her-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50	●		201
R	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wall-mount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	90	5	45	●		227
R	Castle Stirling	730	Handsomely veneered compact floorstander with expressive dynamic vigour, but a little hard and unforgiving too	20,88,24	●	90	6	28		●	224
BB	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	●	89	6	50	●		219
R	Castle Howard S3	1,350	Looks gorgeous, and is a solid all rounder too, with uniquely spacious imaging; difficult to justify price premium over Harlech	21,99,32	●	88	8	38	●		229
R	Celestion A Compact	600	Provided the room isn't too large and your tastes not too heavy, this is a charming little number	17,24,21		90	3	45		●	193
R	Celestion A2	1,500	Full-scale, big sound from ultra-elegant floorstander. Smooth and slightly laid back presentation	24,93,39	●	89	6	22		●	180
R	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy-looking standmount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28		87	4	45	●		187
R	Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid-back for its own good	20,36,26		87	3	40	●		190
R	Chario Academie Millennium 1	1,399	Pretty but pricey, with a smooth even balance but limited dynamic expression	21,37,31		87	4	42	●		219
EC	Chario Academie Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●		190
R	Cyrus CLS70	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32		87	8	40	●		211
R	Cyrus Icon	2,500	First high-end NXT speaker with huge omni-directional soundstage. But they have limited dynamics and unusual imaging	34,125,29	●	84	8	18	●		216
BB	Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32	●	91	4	25	●		174
R	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	429	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18		87	3	50		●	190
R	Dali 8008	540	Deep bass and high sensitivity from a large vinyl-clad floorstander which could have more transparency and tension	25,5,101,35	●	93	4	22	●		224
R	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	●	89	4	41		●	225
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24,5,106,36	●	93	2.5	20	●		204
R	Dali Grand Coupe	1,333	Big sounding standmount with laid-back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29		85	5	45	●		219
BB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	Expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but an aristocrat amongst the breed. Is there a better small speaker around for the price?	17,28,5,24	●	87	4	40	●		215
R	Dynaudio Audience 72	1,100	Very competent in most respects, but doesn't quite grab the attention; could be more communicative	20,97,26	●	89	3	20	●		211
BB	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	90	4	30	●		229
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Stand-out performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		88	3.5	45	●		219
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII	1,842	Wonderful voice-band delicacy and loads of deep bass from a very elegant and compact box	21,95,29	●	85	4	20	●		167
R	Elac CL102 II	599	Chunky floorstander with classy drivers has a neutral, slightly 'shiny' character, and could have more punch	20,95,28	●	88	9	23	●		199
R	Elac CL 310i Jet	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	123,20,8,28.2		86	4	42	●		221
R	Elac CL 330 Jet	2,500	Arguably the most 'technical'-looking speaker in the world. Design matched by an equally explicit and dynamic sound	18,28,35		88	4	40	●		195
R	Eltax Liberty 3+	150	Bright, bassy, laid-back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20,5,38,34		86	4	25	●		187
R	Eltax Chroma Front	300	Gorgeous shiny styling package at an ultra-competitive price, suffers from an excess of rather flabby bass	19,98,28	●	87	4	25	●		201
R	Energy e:XL 25	400	Neat slimline design delivers a fine all-round performance for the price, but could sound smoother	15,87,31	●	90	4	25	●		201
R	Energy Veritas 2.2	1,295	Luxury three-way standmount has unusual features, and a very clean, laid-back sound with good bass	46,22,33		88	4	25	●		223
R	Excel 202A	1,795	Very pro-styling, a compact active monitor in BBC tradition – neutral, unboxy and laid-back	15,21,5,36		A	A	25	●		214
BB	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act, sonically and aesthetically	20,38,26		86	7	40	●		215

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STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	PRICE	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/M)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Genelec HT206	1,400	Baby active monitor goes very loud for its size. Very neutral but a tad boxy	20,31,24	A	A	40	●	●	214
R	Heybrook Prima 2	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18	87	6	50	●	●	179
	Heybrook HB1	180	Good value but an uneven performer, the HB1 provides plenty of fun with the volume turned well up	21,38,25	88	3	50	●	●	207
E	Heybrook Heylette	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19.5,30,22	88	4	45	●	●	187
E	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
E	Heybrook Heylios	269	Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	23.5,36,27	89	6	25	●	●	201
	Heybrook Ultima	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29	●	89	6	45	●	174
R	Heybrook Duet	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30	88	11	27	●	●	199
	Heybrook Octet	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	●	90	6	25	●	180
E	Infinity Alpha 30	300	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression adds up to a great value floorstander	22,86,29	●	89	4	30	●	215
	Infinity Alpha 40	500	Cool hi-tech looks and drivers, but sounds closer to competent than emotionally engrossing	22,92,33	●	89	4	20	●	224
	Infinity Prelude MTS	9,700	Strikingly slim, elegant 'tower'/subwoofer combo sounds exceptionally clean, neutral and spacious; clever bass tuning	24x94x52	●	88	4	<20	●	228
	Jamo E800	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17.5,33,29	87	3	30	●	●	207
R	Jamo E 850	300	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	17.5,87,34	●	86	5	30	●	224
	Jamo A410PDD	650	Clean-edged and space-efficient solution with neat wall-mount sub for anyone who wants to move into decent 5.1 channel sound	Various	●	N/A	5	35	●	225
	Jamo D830	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	24.5,38,32	88	5	30	●	●	211
E	JBL Ti200	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30	92	5	40	●	●	193
	JBL Xti 80	579	Big and good looking three-way goes loud with beefy bass delivery, but lacks coherence and lightness of touch	23, 100,32	●	89	4	28	●	227
	JBL LX70	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy, scratchy treble	26.5,94,30	●	91	4	33	●	183
E	JBL Xti40	500	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass, and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31	●	88	6	40	●	210
R	JBL SVA 2100	1,250	Monstrously large and brutish styling, goes very loud as well as deep. Fine focus but some boxiness	37,114,52	●	91	8	<20	●	180
E	JBL Ti-2K	1,250	Very elegant and solid standmount with boat-tail rear end and highly detailed, spacious sound alongside weighty bass	42,28,42	88	8	45	●	●	230
E	JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20, 94, 28	●	90	4	22	●	227
R	JMLab Cobalt 816	860	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	90	3	22	●	224
R	JMLab Electra 905	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23,5,47,28	90	4	40	●	●	204
E	JMLab Cobalt 826	1,229	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	91	3	35	●	219
E	JMLab Micro Utopia	2,749	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41	89	3	50	●	●	220
R	JMLab Mezzo Utopia	7,250	Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	35,115,47	●	92	4	30	●	186
	JPW 201	150	Looks very sharp with shiny silver front and clever grille, but sound is a bit small and midband coloured	15.5, 26, 24	86	4.5	45	●	●	226
	KEF Cresta 2	149	A good-looking value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24	91	4	40	●	●	195
R	KEF Reference One-Two	1,200	Limited low bass but bags of headroom. Coherent and lively sound, but could be more transparent	22,5,87,35	●	89	3	40	●	211
	KEF RDM Three	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27	●	90	4	40	●	189
	KEF Reference Model 2	1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	23,103,34	●	89	4	30	●	167
R	Keswick Audio Torino	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	26, 93, 28	●	90	4	20	●	167
R	Linn Kan	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19	86	4	45	●	●	187
R	Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23	A	A	40	●	●	214
E	Living Voice Auditorium	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21.5,98,29	●	91	4	25	●	180
E	Living Voice Avatar	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21.5,104,27	●	91	8	40	●	218
E	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	21.5,104,27	●	89	8	45	●	196
	Magnat Vintage 320	350	Loads of speaker for your money, but the sound is thick, heavy and lacking in presence and authority	25,102,30	●	90	4	20	●	201
	Magnat Vector 77	450	Tall, dark and a lot of speaker for the money. Beautiful balance, but lacking in subtlety and transparency	22,115,29	●	89	5	30	●	183
	Magnat Vintage 710	800	Very competent but didn't particularly stand out; distinctive styling and slightly shy sound	20-27,42,32	90	5	25	●	●	211
R	Magnat Vintage 720	1,200	Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity	29,113,32	●	88	4	20	●	180
	Martin-Logan Prodigy	8,967	Combines the finesse of an electrostatic with the grunt of cleverly engineered cone bass to good effect	42,179,71	●	91	4	28	●	204
E	Meridian M33	1,495	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22	A	A	45	●	●	214
	Mirage FRX7	550	Neat slim floorstander has a heavy, laid-back balance, probably better suited to movie than music reproduction	17.5,95,32	●	90	4	25	●	204
	Mirage OM-5	3,000	A meaty model that goes loud without distortion, digs deep with aplomb and creates plenty of depth of image	133,30,42	●	90	6	22	●	206
	Mirage OM-10-1	2,000	Tall black omni-bi-pole has plenty of bounce and dynamic vigour, but is more room sensitive than most	23,118,30	●	88	4	20	●	210
R	Mission 771e	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22	86	6	45	●	●	207
R	Mission M71	130	Neat looking and very discreet sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17, 29, 28	88	4.6	40	●	●	226
E	Mission M73	200	Sharply priced and good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,87,5,31	●	88	3	25	●	215
	Mission 780	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16.5,28,27	86	6	40	●	●	201
	Mission M74	300	Lots of speaker for the money, and a big, weighty sound, but a bit bright and also dynamically weak	20, 97, 33	●	90	5	25	●	227
R	Mission 773e	400	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all-round entertaining sound	17.5,88,26	●	92	4	30	●	193
R	Mission 774	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	●	90	4	40	●	183
R	Mission 782	699	Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills	16.5,82,28	●	86	9.5	25	●	199
R	Mission 775e	800	Lots of speaker for the money, and musically involving too, if a little short on serious weight and authority	23,115,30	●	93	3	25	●	204
	Mission 783	1,000	Plenty of bass weight, and a clean, articulate midrange, but the two don't quite seem to gel	20,5,97,33	●	87	5	20	●	211
E	Monitor Audio Bronze 2	180	A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all-round sonic performance	18.5,35,27	89	3	30	●	●	207
R	Monitor Audio Bronze 3	270	Very similar to the Bronze 2, though not necessarily better. Good value with better dynamic expression than most of its ilk	18.5,87,24	●	90	3	30	●	215
	Monitor Audio Silver 5i	450	Great-looking, sharply-priced real wood floorstander, but bottom end lacks drive and tension	20,81,21	●	87	5	30	●	210
	Monitor Audio GR20	1,500	Solid and confident design with all metal drivers and neutral if slightly uninspiring sound	20,92,5, 30	●	89	6	30	●	212
	Mordaunt-Short MS902	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget standmount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25	87	4	45	●	●	207
R	Naim Credo	1,060	Involving sound, but rather forward and cold. Good clarity, but some coloration and a lack of richness	24,89,30	●	88	8	28	●	180
R	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander with complex mechanical decoupling has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24, 94, 28	●	90	6	40	●	229
E	Naim NBL	6,648	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	89	4	20	●	200
R	Neat Critique 2	445	Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing	22,32,24	86	6	50	●	●	183
E	Neat Mystique Mk2	575	This elegant package delivers a fine overall sound quality; some might find the top end too insistent	20,86,18	●	85	6	23	●	177
R	Neat Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,30,5,20	86	5	30	●	●	211
R	Neat Elite	1,195	A highly entertaining all-rounder, has a planar tweeter that sounds sweet, if not particularly smooth	20,88,18	●	88.5	6	25	●	195
E	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22, 150, 40	●	88	6	20	●	226
	NHT Super Zero	200	If tiny size is top priority, the Super Zero is worth considering. It looks nice and sounds articulate, but it definitely needs a subwoofer	14,23,14	84	8	100	●	●	215
E	NHT Super One	250	A fine compromise between size and performance, sensitivity and hence loudness capability is modest	18.5,29,23	85	8	30	●	●	170
E	NHT 1.5	400	This compact standmount sounds much bigger than it has any right to. Good timing and communication skills	18,42,26	85	6	40	●	●	177
R	NHT Super Two	550	Black and shiny compact three-way floorstander has marvellously even balance and good coherence	18.5,100,26	●	87	8.5	25	●	199
	Oheocha D2-Iso-5	2,500	Radical aluminium pawn-shaped cabinets combine with multiple drivers to make a subtle and refined sound	37,94,37	●	89	8	30	●	217
	Opera Prima	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31	90	4	40	●	●	190
R	Opera SP-1	525	SP1s make a strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. U-shaped back does wonders for the appearance, sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23	86	8	50	●	●	225

STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/M)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	PMC TB2	700	A worthy and prettier successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type class for neutrality and transparency	20,40,5,31		88	8	30	●	●	211
R	PMC LB1	999	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,5,26		87	6.5	40	●	●	199
BB	PMC FB1	1,275	Handsome floorstander has the lively coherence of a simple two-way alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	88	6	20	●	●	204
R	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32		A	A	25	●	●	214
	ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact standmount is classically balanced, if a little on the bright side of neutral	19,36,26		87	6	30	●	●	204
	ProAc Studio 125	1,000	Pretty if pricey compact floorstander with a beautifully natural and neutral midband, and some bass thump	20,94,28	●	87	8	28	●	●	192
	ProAc Reponse 1.5	1,790	Gorgeous but pricey floorstander has lovely midband voicing but limited bandwidth resolution	19,98,25	●	86	7	35	●	●	219
	Quad ESL-989	4,600	A very 'different' speaker experience, with magnificent midband transparency and imaging, but limited loudness capability	67,134,32	●	83	3	38	●	●	213
	Red Rose Music R3	3,500	Compact two-way with lovely veneer and ribbon tweeter: probably the most sophisticated small speaker out there	20,40,5,26		87	4	46	●	●	219
R	Rega Jura	450	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom'n'tizz'	22,5,92,5,26	●	90	5	25	●	●	193
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	85	4	20	●	●	221
R	Ruark Epilogue	269	Beautifully finished miniature with a lively balance and plenty of charm; best suited to smaller rooms	17,29,23		87	8	47	●	●	183
	Ruark Prologue One R	949	Strikingly contemporary compact floorstander is well voiced but a little lean in overall balance	17,5,93,28	●	88	5	25	●	●	204
R	Ruark Prologue II	1,250	An attractive shape and a compact enclosure alongside a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22,5,96,24	●	92	8	40	●	●	229
R	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	90	5	38	●	●	219
R	Ruark Excalibur	7,000	A big, handsome speaker with a big, laid-back but open sound, rocking bass and loads of headroom	30,125,53	●	90	4	30	●	●	186
	Sequence 400	300	Very affordable pseudo panel offers flexible design options and acceptable sound. Limited bass, though, and doesn't like playing loud	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
	Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready standmount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30		87	6	25	●	●	190
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	89	4	20	●	●	211
	Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
	Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	35,5,19,30		91	8	45	●	●	196
	Sonus Faber Concertino	599	A beautifully neutral loudspeaker in a beautiful Italian suit of clothes. Classy, if quite pricey	21,32,29		87	5	30	●	●	193
	Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home	1,589	Classy walnut'n'leather floorstander with fine engineering and lovely midband voicing	23,5,29,108	●	90	3	25	●	●	214
	Sony SS-LA500ED	340	Versatile metal miniatures with integral stands. Given a little more bass and a slightly less excitable treble, they'd be hard to resist	17,25,19		89	4	55	●	●	225
	South Coast Speakers Lancelot	895	Pretty compact standmount has nice ribbon tweeter but sounds a bit soft and lacks dynamic vigour	19,36,26		84	8	45	●	●	199
R	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced and unboxy sub-miniature lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	16,5,30,5,21		82	6	30	●	●	224
R	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large stand-mount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33		88	8	50	●	●	219
R	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency in a good-looking floorstanding package, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	89	8	40	●	●	229
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	90	8	37	●	●	223
	Syn Factory U-Vola	1,480	Hefty oval shaped speakers designed to be hung from the ceiling. Sound is tight and detailed but also a little flat	21,42,21		86	8	45	●	●	225
EC	TAG McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	91	6	38	●	●	215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	92	2.5	23	●	●	225
	Tannoy Kingdom 12	6,000	Something of a throwback, but great fun, with fine dynamics and authority, but a tricky amp load	54,106,46	●	92	3	28	●	●	213
	Tannoy mX1	120	Smooth and very well behaved but a bit dull and unexciting; makes a good surround speaker	16,5,30,22		87	4.5	40	●	●	226
BB	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	18,5,33,25		89	4	45	●	●	207
	Tannoy Revolution 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
BB	Tannoy mX3	230	A great all-round compromise at a very modest price, combining good looks with fine midband voicing	18,5,87,26	●	90	5	40	●	●	201
	Tannoy mX4	350	Pretty 2.5-way has a clean and unboxy sound with respectable transparency, but lacks the dynamic grip and drive to make music really involving	18,5,96,26	●	89	3	20	●	●	215
BB	Tannoy Revolution R2	350	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid-back	17,94,24	●	90	4	20	●	●	193
	Tannoy Revolution R3	550	Handsome real wood floorstander does a decent job, but lacks the evenness of its smaller R2 brother	18,5,103,28	●	89	8.5	28	●	●	199
R	Tannoy Eyris 1	599	Pricey but very cute wall-mount miniature; oddball but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17,35,26		88	6	40	●	●	227
R	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	This add-on supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage, but at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
	Tannoy Eyris 3	1,200	Trickily unusual styling with top-mounted supertweeter, the sonics show fine scale, weight and spaciousness, but lack dynamic excitement	20,102,26	●	89	6	38	●	●	229
R	T+A Talis TL53	1,799	Super slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver effortlessly musical results with superb imaging. Great marriage of style and sonics	15,130,17	●	90	4	30	●	●	225
	Triangle Cometes	359	Communicative standmount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	22,40,29		91	4	42	●	●	193
BB	Triangle Zephyr II	599	Loads of fun. Dramatic dynamics and righteous timing will give any hi-fi system a wake-up call	22,94,29	●	91	4	25	●	●	190
BB	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	92	3	40	●	●	219
	Triangle Celius 202	1,095	Very tall and not too pretty, it has magical midrange communication skills, but could be smoother, warmer and richer	22,113,30	●	94	4	28	●	●	229
R	Verdersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Cosmetically weird, but very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness, and splendid stereophony. A genuine classic	41,109,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	229
EC	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lowther drivers	30,110,47	●	104	4	50	●	●	191
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid-back but very charming, and musically literate	17,97,30	●	88	7.5	25	●	●	199
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with absolutely any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way, too, though bass is detached	21,100,21	●	90	4	45	●	●	225
R	Wharfedale Diamond 8.2	150	Sonically a bit crude and in yer face, but neat styling and plenty of speaker for your money	21,36,5,25		86	4	30	●	●	226
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●		6	45	●	●	212
EC	Wilson benesch Bishop	20,000	Deep and even bass sets new standards for cleanliness and clarity; lovely open midband too	23,161,561	●	89	4	520	●	●	189
	Wharfedale Diamond 7.2	140	A good-hearted, lively and up-front performer that's a little lacking in subtlety and smoothness	19,29,5,23		88	4	45	●	●	169
	W'dale Diamond 7.2 Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24		88	4	40	●	●	187
	Wharfedale Pacific PI-20	350	Good material value and a decent fun factor, though a somewhat wayward balance compromises neutrality	22,95,28	●	87	4	25	●	●	224
	Wharfedale Pacific PI40	500	A lot of speaker for the money, but bass is unruly, even in a large-sized room. The smaller PI30 might give a better bottom-end balance	22,113,36	●	89	3	25	●	●	215
R	Zingali Overture 2S	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●	195

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/M)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub which comes with handy infrared remote control	41,37,29,5	●	A		35	●	●	225
	Castle Classic 8	800	Adequate performance, but misses the mark at the price		●	A		20	●	●	225
	Jamo D8SUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the D8SUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,5,41,45,5	●	A		30	●	●	210
	M&K MX70	795	Cutely compact and entertaining too, but lacks the ultimate extension to justify its high price	37,32,30	●	A		25	●	●	210
	M&K MX700	1,595	Fine dynamic sound with music or movies. Compact unit but expensive and short on features		●	A			●	●	225
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	●	A		27	●	●	225
R	Paradigm PDR-10	150	Not much grip, drive or authority, but it doesn't get in the way and it is very cheap	34,5,36,42	●	A		25	●	●	210
	Polk PSW430	400	A lot of subwoofer for your money, but lacks deep grunt and is more movie than music oriented	38,5,45,46	●	A		25	●	●	210
R	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	41,5,62,33	●	A		18	●	●	225
	REL Q400E	1,000	A class system, and good for movies, but has a tendency to thicken textures and add a bit too much 'thump' to music	39,42,43	●	A		16	●	●	217
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	●	A		16	●	●	217
R	REL Strata III	800	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42,52,33	●	A		20	●	●	210

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SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	REL Q50	375	This good-looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31	●	A		20			210
R	Ruark Log-Rhythm	775	Adds weight and scale with commendable discretion, making a positive contribution to the whole musical exposition	43,43,43	●	A		<20			210
BB	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	●	A					225
	Soliloquy S10	1,050	Pretty subwoofer, cosmetically matching SM 2A3 speakers, pricey and mid-bass a bit strong	51,30,5,46	●	A		25			196

SATELLITE & SUBWOOFER SYSTEMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AE Aego2	300	Not quite a serious hi-fi speaker system, but a seriously fun type product for all that (19x35x27cm sub)	7,10,9		A	n/a	45	●		218
R	Bandor Trident II	776	Loudness is limited, but overall sound is impressively homogeneous and coherent (31x46x31cm sub)	12,13,10-12		83	6	25	●		218
R	Boston Micro 90	650	Lacks warmth but the midband is smooth and impressively evenhanded (37x36x39cm sub)	10,17,14		88	4	28	●		218
R	Cabasse Jupiter/lo	1,230	A sub/sat combo that really competes with proper stereo speakers. Striking styling and stereo imaging (40x43x41cm sub)	15 diam		94	2	30	●		218
	KEF KMS2002	499	Looks the business, but lacks deep bass and the presence/treble is also too restrained (32x36x32cm sub)	13,23,14		85	3	45	●		218
	Mission FS2	450	Intriguing NXT speaker technology has minimal visual impact, and lacks dynamic precision (32x47x25cm sub)	13,5,28,4,5		86	6	40	●		218
	NHT Super Zero/Sub One	1,000	Decent enough, but not the prettiest nor the best value around for music replay – one for movie fans (40x41x42cm sub)	14,23,14		84	8	30	●		218
R	Ruark Vita 100	900	Not the cheapest sub/sat, but certainly one of the most accomplished, sonically and visually (30x42x30cm sub)	11,20,17		86	6	40	●		218

LOUDSPEAKERS

SPECIFICATIONS

MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	High value floorstander has deep and even bass and a smooth neutrality thereafter	19,90,25	●	90	5	22	●		198
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit pkg	1,230	Could sound more exciting, but imaging, solidity and neutrality all impressive. Poor centre magnetic shielding	var	var	90	5	23	var	var	224
R	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20,5,55,32		90	5	20	●		198
BB	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. Decent size, high quality drivers in standmount enclosures still make sense, whatever the prevailing fashion	var	var	89	3	22	●		224
	B&W Nautilus package	6,500	This classy, laid-back package is arguably too good for current programming. Very bulky centre speaker	var	var	n/a	3	20		●	210
R	Castle package	1,199	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	var	var	85-90	6	28		●	224
	Dali Blue system	1,007	Incorporates some interesting ideas, and decent value for money too, but a rather movie-oriented package	var	var	88-93	4	22	var	var	224
	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31	●	91	5	28	●		198
	Dynaudio LIRC 120	439	Slim centre and front standmount, has an evenhanded but rather laid-back balance but lacks drive	16,5,57,31		89	5	25	●		198
	Infinity Alpha package	833	Distinctive high tech styling, fine build and advanced drivers. Sounds thoroughly competent, but didn't excel	var	var	84-89	4	20		●	224
	Jamo E8 package	775	A tad bright for some tastes, and without quite the grip and drive to make the most of multichannel material	var	var	86	5	30	●		224
	Jamo Concert package	2,500	Lovely main speakers sonically overshadow the centre, while surrounds are a bit obvious too	var	var	n/a	5	30		●	210
BB	JBL Xti-series package	1,190	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all round tension	var	var	n/a	5	40		●	210
R	JMLab Cobalt package	1,707	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	var	var	88-90	3	22	●		224
	KEF Q-series package	880	Cleverly designed, vinyl-finished UniQ package packs a goodly thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
	Martin Logan system	9,991	Stunning electrostatic-based multichannel package, as adept with stereo music as it is with surround sound	var	var	89	4	20	●		227
	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration	var	var	n/a	4	20		var	210
R	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		92	4	120		●	198
	Mission M package	480	A very inexpensive and good looking system, but the surround bits are better suited to movies than music	var	var	88	4	25	var	var	224
	Mission Cinema 8 package	1,400	Beautifully styled and cleverly designed package, but could have more grunt and drive for the price	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
	Polk RTE 1000p	1,300	Tall elegant tower with built-in powered bass 'subwoofer' that needs using with discretion. Bright but engaging	20,110,35	●	91	4	25	●		198
	Monitor Audio Silver series	1,000	Great-looking conventionally styled package lacks something in dynamic drive and tension	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority but must be 5.1-connected	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,485	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20		●	210
R	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	var	var	n/a	4	25		●	210
R	Spendor package	1,630	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness; best suited to smaller rooms	var	var	82-86	6	30		●	224
BB	Tannoy mXAV4 package	500	Lacks grunt, grip and authority, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6LCR	400	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	21,38,29		89	6	25		●	198
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29	●	91	4	20		●	198
R	Wharfedale Pacific package	700	Plenty of loudspeaker for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward but unquestionably entertaining	var	var	87	3	25	●		224

CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/m)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis Centre	140	Good value centre-front speaker but a tad shut in and with a slightly obvious top end (price per speaker)	46,17,20		89	5	50	●		198
	B&W Nautilus HTM1	1,500	Very bulky for a centre speaker, though very capable too – a little less laid back than its siblings	76,37,30		89	4	30		●	210
	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,29		88	8	45	●		198
R	Definitive Technology CLR2002	595	Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,17,5,31		90	4	40	●		198
	Jamo Concert Center	550	A decent balance match but lacks the class and grip of the Concert 8s, and is bulky and pricey too	55,22,30		87	5	100		●	210
BB	JBL Xti10C	200	An elegant, cleverly designed centre and a good match for the 40s. Better value than most too	51,19,5,27		88	5	50		●	210
	KEF Q95C	200	This artfully designed UniQ centre looks much better than most on top of the TV set	40,17,17		89	3	120		●	210
	Mirage OM-C2	600	Large but discreet omni-bi-pole matches OM-10-1 well but lacks tight focus, and seems expensive	64,18,5,31		88	4	50		●	210
R	Mission 77C	199	A good centre-front match for 77-series, the triple tweeter might be a curiosity, but voicing is very good	42,17,21		91	4	100		●	198
	Mission 78C	350	Makes a good visual and sonic match for the 782, but quite pricey by comparison, given the ingredients	45,17,19		86	3	100		●	210
	Monitor Audio Silver Centre 10i	300	Neat and good-looking partner to the Silver 5is, but a little more forward, and quite expensive too	50,17,21		87	4	100		●	210
R	Mordaunt-Short MS 504	200	Smart yet discreet and a good match for the 502. Sounds clean and expressive, and is well priced	50,19,20		88	3	120		●	210
R	PMC TB2M/C	325	This bulky centre speaker is quite pricey, but it combines good transparency with some authority	40,20,31		87	6	50		●	210
	Polk CS 1000p	999	Monstrously large and heavy centre-front speaker, presumably for those with monstrous intentions	87,22,35		92	4	25	●		198
R	Rega Senta	185	The very compact Senta is sensibly priced, a bit bright maybe, but articulate and expressive	32,16,21		89	4	120		●	210
BB	Tannoy mXC	100	Could be more exciting, but a very impressive centre speaker at an unusually reasonable price	42,16,21		88	4	120		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6C	200	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	38,21,29		89	6	25	●		198

PERSONAL / INTERNET

SPECIFICATIONS

PERSONAL STEREO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa HS-PX307	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette		●				204
R	Aiwa AM-HX50	180	Neat play-back only personal with an impressively full-bodied sound, though short on detail	MiniDisc		●				204
	JVC XL-PG31	60	"Challenging" looks and frankly unpleasant sound add up to a player that's best avoided	CD						216
	JVC XM-R700SL	250	The most expensive player here, but its in-ear-face sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Kenwood DPC-X517	100	Clean, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD						216
R	Panasonic RQ-SX71	70	A sleek aluminium body, decent sound and superb features	Cassette		●				204
	Panasonic RQ-SX91	80	A super-slick personal for well-heeled cassette users. Sound is rather bright	Cassette		●				204
R	Panasonic SJ-MR220	180	The smallest MD recorder in the world, at the time of writing. Lacks some oomph but fully featured and good value	MiniDisc	●	●				223
	Panasonic SJ-MR100	250	Well built and nicely appointed, though performance is unremarkable at the price	MiniDisc	●	●				204
R	Philips ACT7582	115	A splash-proof body and an entertaining sound – the perfect CD personal for holiday japes	CD						204
R	Sharp MD-MT877H	230	Pleasantly up-front sounding player in a sexy little package, well worth your attention if you like that kind of thing	MiniDisc	●	●				216
R	Sharp MD-MT888H	230	An MD personal that's packed with features and delivers a powerful, involving sound	MiniDisc	●	●				223
	Sony WM-EX404	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette						204
BB	Sony D-EJ925	150	Beautiful design matched with a beguiling sound – a clear Best Buy	CD		●				216
BB	Sony MZ-G750	200	Light, simple to use, and with a relaxed and enjoyable sound, and with a tuner too!	MiniDisc	●	●				216
EF	Sony MZ-R91	250	A petite and sexy beast with good sound and excellent facilities	MiniDisc	●	●				204
R	Sony MZ-R900	250	Gorgeous little MD personal with a well-balanced sound. Makes great recordings but lacks a little punch	MiniDisc	●	●				223

INTERNET AUDIO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aiwa MM-VX100	130	Aiwa's expertise in the personal stereo field is visible, but performance is only average	Solid State	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
BB	Creative Labs Digital Jukebox	349	Smartly designed high-capacity portable with storage for over 1,000 tracks	Hard Drive	●		Agnostic	USB	5.7GB	208
R	DigMedia Music Store	350	Innovative CD/hard drive combo with optional solid state portable. MP3 with or without a computer	CD/Hd	●		MP3	USB	5.4GB	208
R	Intel Pocket Concert	171	Big, substantial sound and large 128Mb built-in memory, but no expansion slots	Solid State	●		MP3/WMA	USB	128MB	223
	JazPiper MV32P	125	First wave player that looks good but sounds bright. Includes voice recording and phone book features	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	LG MF-PD360	130	Good-looking and temptingly affordable, but features and performance are nothing special	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	208
	LG AHA-FD770	200	Cassette and solid state personal in one – novel idea, poor execution	SS/Cass	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	Logix Evzone	219	Novell MP3 player that uses lomega Klik! discs for storage. Chunky but quite effective, and discs are much cheaper than memory cards	Klik! Discs	●		MP3/WMA	USB	40MB	213
R	Neo-25	420	Sparsely equipped but efficient hard drive portable with an exceptionally high potential capacity. Average in the sound department	Hard Drive	●		MP3	USB	10GB	213
	Philips eXpanium EXP401	150	Neat little personal that plays 8cm CD-R discs, two-thirds the size of regular CDs. Use your computer's CD writer to burn on MP3s	Mini-CD	●		MP3/AAC	USB		223
R	Philips eXpanium EXP103	190	The best MP3-CD personal, at least at the time of writing... An effective solution for MP3 on the move	CD			MP3			213
	Philips Rush SA126	250	Sound is a little thin and wishy-washy, and the fiddly controls and lack of remote make it difficult to use	Solid State	●		MP3	USB/PRL	64MB	216
R	Pine D'Music	120	Good build, solid sound and a voice recording mode make this a good first-time buy	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Pontis SP504	158	Not the best aesthetically, but exceptionally good MP3 sound	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	204
R	Rio 500	190	Well featured and a strong performer, though new generation Rios have now arrived	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	195
R	Rio 600	169	Neat design, strong future-proofing, good features and sound. Only its memory lets it down	Solid State	●		Agnostic	USB	32MB	208
R	Rio 800	300	If you're interested in solid state, this player's great sound and ease of use make it worth a look	Solid State	●	●	Agnostic	USB	64MB	216
R	Samsung Yezz YP-30S	200	Tiny MP3 player with a solid, punchy sound. Some limitations but a cool design	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	223
	Sanyo SSP-PD7	250	Cute but pricey with limited supplied memory, but sound is good and it's one of the first to employ AAC coding	Solid State	●		MP3/AAC	USB	32MB	213
	Schneider MPMan F20	99	The world's first MP3 personal. Basic but still good value	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	Smart Portable MP3 Disc Player	119	CD personal that also plays MP3 tracks burnt onto CD-R discs	CD			MP3			208
	Sony NW-M57	249	A gorgeous little personal using Sony's Memory Stick storage. Good but pricey	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	208
	Sony NW-M59	300	It's got size and simplicity on its side, but it's up-front, boomy sound is significantly below par	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	216
R	Sony MDC-PC3	350	A MiniDisc deck which hooks to a PC. Introduces cheap and flexible MD media to the world of MP3	MiniDisc	●		MP3/ATRAC	USB		213
R	Thomson Lyra Personal Jukebox	300	Neat portable with a big 10Gb capacity – enough for 1000s of MP3 tracks. Some control foibles but sounds good	Hard Disc	●		MP3/MP3Pro	USB	10GB	223

RECORD PLAYERS

SPECIFICATIONS

TURNTABLES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	●			33/45	●	●	●		229
BB	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
EC	Avid Acutus	4,995	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings, don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	●			33/45	●	●	●		194
	Clearaudio Reference	3,990	Opulent beast tested with Souther TQ-1 arm. Tends to gloss over detail, but can sound bold	●			33/45	●				144
R	DNN Rota 2	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table	●			33/45	●		●	●	144
R	Dual CS415-2	160	No denying it's cheap and cheerful, but it does what it's paid for happily enough		●		33/45					214
	Dual CS 455.1	220	Neat record player with automatic convenience (and 78rpm), but doesn't match simpler manual rivals sonically			●	33/45/78	●	●	●	●	203
R	Dual 505-4 UK	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph			●	33/45			●	●	103
R	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc. still top rank	●			33	●		●		103
R	Linn LP12 Lingo	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains	●			33/45	●	●			91
	Moth Alamo	285	Basically a Rega P2 with a Perspex platter: doesn't seem to justify the price difference	●			33/45			●		214
BB	Mitchell Orbe SE	1,725	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	●			33/45	●				192
BB	NAD 533	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	●			33/45			●	●	203
BB	Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	●			33/45			●	●	159

TURNABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	●			33/45			●	●	164
	Pro-ject Classic Cherry	450	A great-looking turntable with a generous and dynamic sound, but lacks something in overall coherence	●			33/45		●	●		203
	Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best	●			33/45	●		●		192
R	Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	850	Don't think of this as a deck with a good arm, but as a scaled-down Oracle Delphi — it's that good	●			33/45	●		●		138
BB	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	●			33/45			●		214
R	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	●			33/45			●		214
BB	Rega Planar 25	619	Great-looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	●			33/45		●	●		203
EC	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter, and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	●			33/45		●	●		228
BB	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with midband detail	●			33/45			●		159
R	Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight	●			33/45		●	●		159
EC	SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V309 hybrid arm, superbly built	●			33/45		●	●		195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	●			33/45/78		●	●		186
BB	Thorens TD166 VIUK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MMMC budget cartridges	●			33/45			●	●	103
	Thorens TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●			33/45		●	●		203
	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled	●			33/45		●	●		159
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	●			33/45		●	●		203
R	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limp quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●			33/45		●	●		136
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	●			33/45		●	●		205

CARTRIDGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MC	REPLACEMENT STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford		●		0.5		203
BB	Audio Technica AT110E	28	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●			4.5	6	214
	Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	330	A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting		●		0.4	8	192
BB	Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy		●		0.55	11.5	175
	Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life'. Is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail		●		0.1	6	103
BB	Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price		●				103
R	Dynavector DV-20X L	299	Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high-quality turntable and arm		●		0.25	8.6	192
	Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent		●		0.15	5.3	158
W	Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm		●		0.25	12	84
R	Dynavector Te-Kaitora	1,698	A real smoothie, but pricey. Worth checking out for its delicate laid-back transparency and low needle-talk		●		0.25	8.5	175
EC	Dynavector DRT XV-1	2,500	Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining		●		0.3	13	208
	Goldring 1006	70	Disappointing sound, marred chiefly by persistent harshness which affects all but very quiet music	●			6.5	7	214
	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 Erica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative		●		0.5	8	84
	Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though	●			6.5	6	91
	Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest		●		0.5	8	103
	Goldring Excel VX	525	Good bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end		●		0.45	8	175
R	Grado Prestige Black	49	Capable of admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●			4	6	214
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Rich-sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge	●			4	6	158
	Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users	●			1.7	6.5	175
	London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records	●			5.0	6	84
	Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge — smooth, agile and dynamic in character		●		0.5	8	192
R	Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed		●		0.3	7	158
EC	Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			0.5	8	215
	Lyra Parnassus D.C.t	1,895	A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak	●			0.22	10.5	175
BB	Ortofon 510P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues — weight, clarity and neutrality	●			3.0	5	85
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	Bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle — take it as it comes		●		3.3	4	103
BB	Ortofon MC15 Super II	130	A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close-up		●		0.35	7	103
	Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable		●		0.5	11	139
	Ortofon MC25FL	250	A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP		●		0.5	11	139
BB	Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300	A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings		●		0.5	10.7	192
	Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525	Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings		●		0.5	10.7	158
BB	Ortofon Rohmann	1,000	A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound		●		0.25	8.5	175
R	Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere — one of the very best		●		0.12	10	84
	Ortofon MC5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo		●		0.12	10	91
	Rega Bias	42	Can sound a little hard and lacking bloom, though often exciting	●			5	4	214
R	Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	●			5.0	5	67
R	Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●			6.5	6.3	192
R	Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised		●		6.5	5	91
BB	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties — one of the best around for less than 300		●		2.5	9	192
R	van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●			5.5	6	103
	van den Hul DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy		●		0.35	7.6	158
R	van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass		●		0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-One	900	This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale — worth all the extra money		●		0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal		●		0.4	6	72
R	van den Hul Frog	1,500	Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm		●		0.65	7	175
R	van den Hul G' hopper GLA III	1,999	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse		●		0.4	6	122
R	Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive		●		0.58	6	158
R	Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573	Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound		●		0.45	7	175

TONEARMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High		●			79
R	Linn Ekos	1,500	Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths	Med		●		229	67
BB	Rega RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
BB	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low		●		237	60
R	Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though	Low		●		240	91
R	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low		●		233	60
R	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low		●		233	60

STANDS & SUPPORTS

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

SPECIFICATIONS

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

SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHEET TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason Akros II 60D	79	Good-looking, well-equipped with decent ingredients. Evenhanded but lacks dynamic enthusiasm	62	16.5		●			220
	Alphason HDS	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5, 15.5		●			189
	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15, 12.5		●			189
	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51, 40, 51	18		●			202
BB	Atacama Nexus 6	50	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60, 50	14.5, 18		●			202
R	Atacama R724	150	Atacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price	60	15, 17		●			189
	Atacama R724/Atabite	250	Good basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine-sounding stand at its price	61	16, 21.5		●			220
R	Cyrus CL550 stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19					220
R	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original with better focus and detail	61, 56, 51	16.5, 18		●			202
R	Elemental Isotube S2se	599	Stands of distinction, able to free the speaker's sound from its box in a way budget stands simply can't	61	23, 27		●	●		189
	Gale t60	70	Neither the least expensive nor the prettiest, and the sound is undistinguished too	63	16.5		●			220
	Green Apple Diamond Bevel	225	Sounds soft, gentle and somewhat dulled at the top, but takes top honours for style	61	15					220
R	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean, sweet and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20		●			220
R	JPW HS1	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61	19, 21		●			189
BB	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20		●			220
R	Mana Sound Base	175	The Sound Base plinth simply improves the sound of every speaker placed on it	8	29, 32					202
	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19, 15		●			202
	Mission Stancette	60	Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price. Sounds OK considering	60	16.5, 22		●			220
	Mordaunt-Short Atlas	90	Shiny silver Atlas looks great, but sound doesn't transcend the very basic engineering	53	17.5		●			220
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than most of the competition	50-100	19, 22		●	●		189
R	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15		●	●		220
R	Partington Dreadnought Ult.	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	20.5, 23.5		●			202
	Quadraspire QS speaker stand	150	Styled to match the company's equipment racks, a very decent sounding stand at a fair price	62	14					220
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33.5, 24					189
	Sonus Systems Excel	110	Strong performance when filled with sand but design flaws let it down	65, 45	20, 22.5		●			202
R	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16		●			220
	Sound Organisation Z524	69	A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes	61	16, 17					189
	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16, 17		●			202
	Target HM60	106	A solid and well-built stand laid-back to the point of coma	40-70	16.5, 19		●			202
R	Towshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers	4	38, 48					202

TUNERS

ANALOGUE TUNERS

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESSETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM, M, L	64			●	●	193
R	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM, M, L	64		●	●	●	193
R	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			●	●	211
BB	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM, M, L	40	●			●	193
R	Denon TU-1500RD	250	A well balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension	FM, M	40	●			●	184
	Magnum Dynalab FT11	499	All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality	FM	3			●	●	184
BB	Harman Kardon TU940	179	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30	●			●	221
	Leak Trough Line - GTA	300	A renovated classic with a style all of its own coupled with an emotive and gutsy performance	FM	0			●	●	206
	Linn Pekin	545	Smart and high-tech tuner which integrates well with Linn systems but offers less appealing performance out of that context	FM, M	80		●	●		211
R	Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80		●	●		142
	Marantz ST-17	600	Great looks, but sound let down by opaqueness due to pilot-tone breakthrough	FM, M, L	60	●			●	221
BB	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM, M	60	●				184
BB	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●				211
R	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		●			193
	Myryad T-10	530	A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price	FM	20			●	●	184
	NAD C 440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM, M	30	●				193
BB	NAD S400	600	One of the best around - bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●	●	●		230
	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM, M	40	●			●	166
BB	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30	●			●	230
	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat facia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50		●	●	●	184
	Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM, M, L	30	●			●	193
	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
	Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM, M	20					166
R	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good honest budget tuner: loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	●		●	●	221
	Sony ST-SA3ES	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best	FM, M, L	30	●			●	157
R	Sony STS-B920S	180	A little hiss and image compression don't detract from the clean performance of this feature-packed tuner	FM, M, L	30	●			●	184
R	TAG McLaren T32R+DAB	2,290	Classy hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB and a joy to own and use	DAB, FM, M, L	99	●	●	●	●	230
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM, M	59	●		●	●	157

DIGITAL TUNERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DAB	FM	M	L	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DRT	800	The first DAB tuner and arguably still the best, but the system's still not perfect	7	●	●	●	199
R	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	16	●	●	●	221
	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	7	●	●	●	211
	Cymbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	8	●	●	●	199
	Pision Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable		●	●	●	211
R	Pure DRX-601 ESM	330	Cheap, small and capable, but with major tonal variations from neutral which confuse the issue		●	●	●	230
	Radi DAB-606	199	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless		●	●	●	221
	Sony ST-D777ES	550	Smart and useful with DAB and FM in one box, but neither band really shines		●	●	●	211
R	Technics ST-GT1000	500	Handy tuner that combines DAB, FM and AM in one unit and substantially lowers the price bar for DAB entry		●	●	●	199
BB	Videologic DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	10	●	●	●	211
	Videologic DRX-601ES	349	Tweaked version of 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste	10	●	●	●	221



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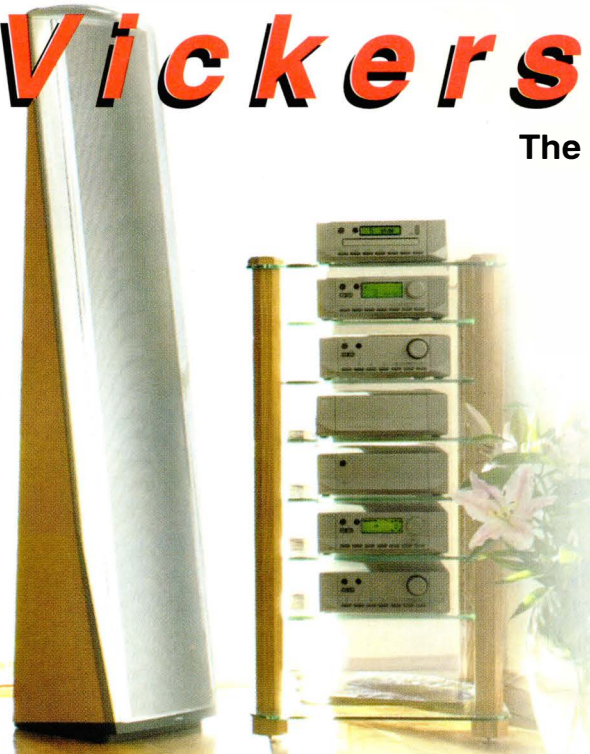
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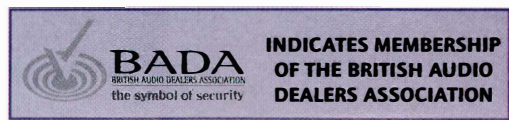
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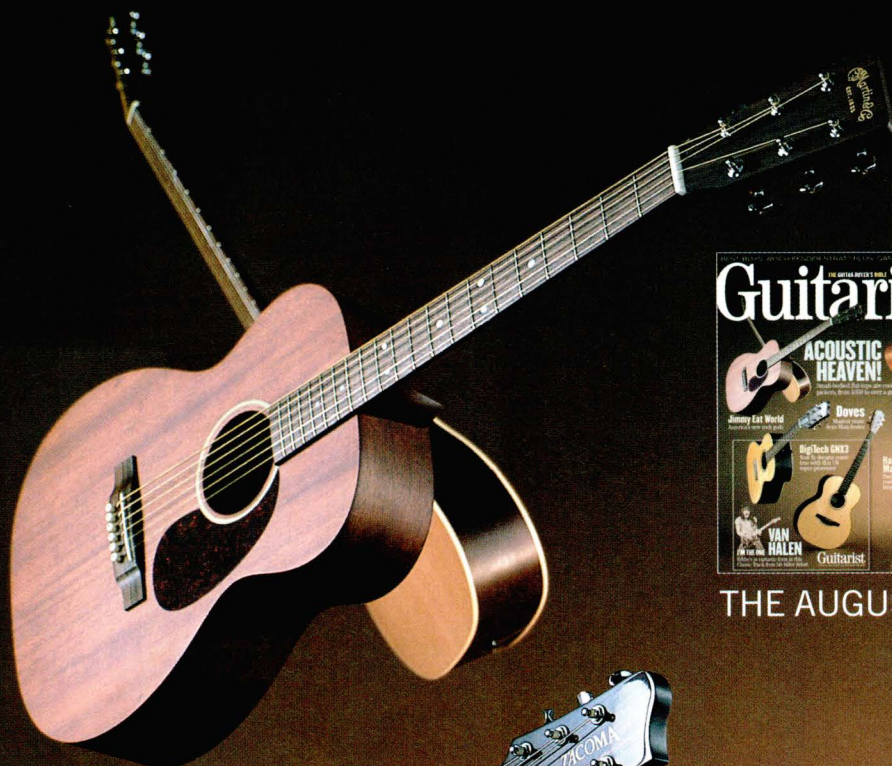
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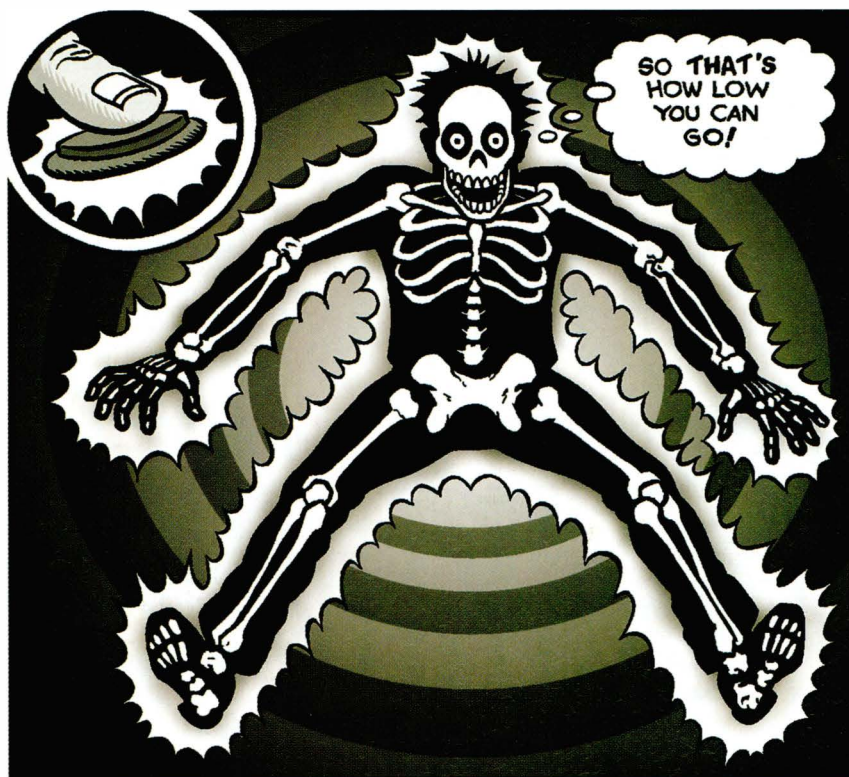


Killer bass

For a brief period in the fifties, infrabass really could have been a killer, claims David 'the truth is out there' Vivian.

The REL Studio III is, by any standards, a beast of a subwoofer. If you haven't already read the review (pg24), here are the scary bits. At over 200 pounds, it needs two people to lift it. It has a 500 watt rms direct-coupled MOSFET amplifier. The pair of downward-firing ten-inch Volt drivers shift as much air a one 21-inch bass unit. And, perhaps most impressively of all, output reaches down to a claimed nine hertz, well below the point (about 15 hertz) at which audible sound leaves the building. In other words, REL's heavyweight flagship is an infrabass generator of considerable power. To you and me, that's something that makes music sound more real.

To conspiracy theorists, though, it's a close relative of that *X-Files* casebook perennial, the acoustic weapon. An almost mythic figure connected to the notion of "killer bass" is one Dr Vladimir Gavreau, a research scientist who developed robots for use in battlefields in the late fifties. Working in a large concrete building, Gavreau and his colleagues would, from time to time, feel nauseous for no obvious reason. Fumes were suspected but the cause was traced to the building itself and a mal-installed motor-driven ventilator. The loosely fitted low speed motor, located in a cavernous duct of several stories, was causing the "nauseating vibrations". They were so low in pitch they couldn't be measured by any available microphone. In fact, the slowly vibrating motor was activating an infrasonic resonant mode in the large concrete duct, effectively



"Pressure waves impacted against the entire body in a terrible and inescapable grip, an envelope of death."

operating as the vibrating 'tongue' of an immense 'organ pipe' which the cavernous industrial enclosure amplified.

LOW BLOWS

This got Gavreau thinking. If such debilitating infrasound could be produced by accident, what were the chances of harnessing its power as a defence initiative – a weapon that couldn't be seen or heard? Theoretical discussions moved on to the possibility of producing coherent, directional infrasound: an infrasonic 'laser'.

The story goes that Gavreau and his research group made two organ pipes six feet in diameter and 75 feet long, one using a constant stream of compressed air to generate the output, the other using a piston. The main resonant frequency of these pipes was alarmingly referred to as "in the range of death" between three and seven

hertz. Alleged symptoms of those exposed to short bursts from the pipes were even more terrifying than listening to Gareth Gates' *Unchained Melody*, described as "pressure waves that impacted against the entire body in a terrible and inescapable grip, an envelope of death".

Then the pipes nearly destroyed the test building. Apparently one brave technician managed to ignore the crushing pain for long enough to shut down the power supply. Sounds like science fiction. Some of it probably is. Infrabass weapons continue to be a source of speculation but sane heads say they'd have to be impractically large for a very limited range. The problem is that deep bass likes to spread itself around and dissipates its energy quickly.

So set your sub for 'stun' by all means, but don't expect it to exterminate the neighbours. Or there's always Gareth...



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