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HI-FI CHOICE

THE FINEST HI-FI MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD | www.hifichoice.co.uk | july 2003



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Feel the force of PMC's fabulous OB1 speakers ▶
Halcro's extraordinary new amplifiers ▼



SPECIAL ISSUE

DIGITAL RECORDING



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WORTH OVER
£1,700

- » How digital tech can transform the way you listen to music
- » CD-R & hard disk decks tested
- » Portable recorders rated



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BUYER'S BIBLE

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HIGH PERFORMANCE HI-FI AND AV



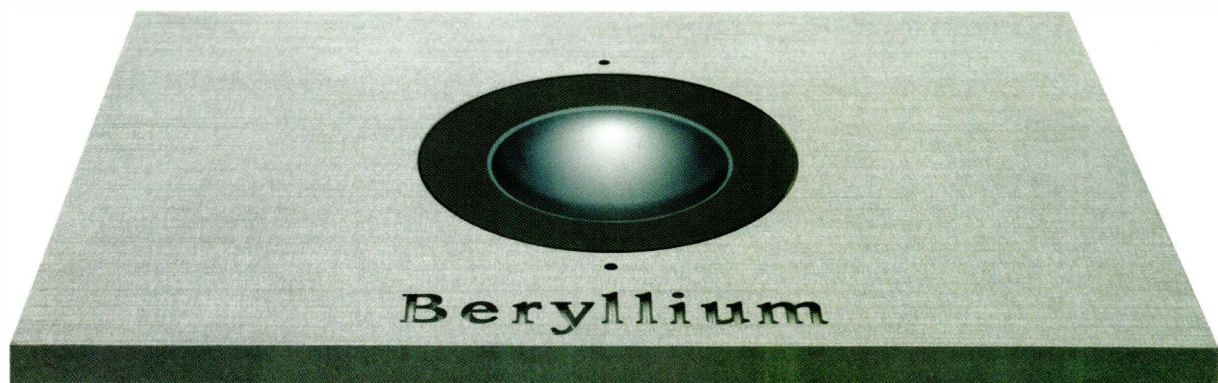
GRANDE UTOPIA

A close-up, low-angle photograph of a Focal Grande Utopia speaker driver. The image shows the intricate details of the driver's construction, including the beryllium tweeter and the surrounding metal housing. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic textures and the precision engineering of the speaker. The word 'Beryllium' is visible on the tweeter's surround.

Beryllium

Focal-JMLab UK
Lonsdale House 52 Blucher Street
Birmingham B1 1QU
Tel. 0121 616 51 26 - info@focal-jmlab.co.uk

BERYLLIUM TWEETER



Why Beryllium? Beryllium is ideally suited to meet the extended demands placed on tweeters by new high bandwidth sources. With a rigidity more than seven times higher than a Titanium or Aluminum dome of identical mass, Beryllium has allowed Focal-JMLab to create a single tweeter dome with a remarkable five octave flat response from 1kHz to 40kHz! And eliminating the problems found when using dedicated "supertweeters".

For further information visit the Focal-JMLab website at www.focal-fr.com

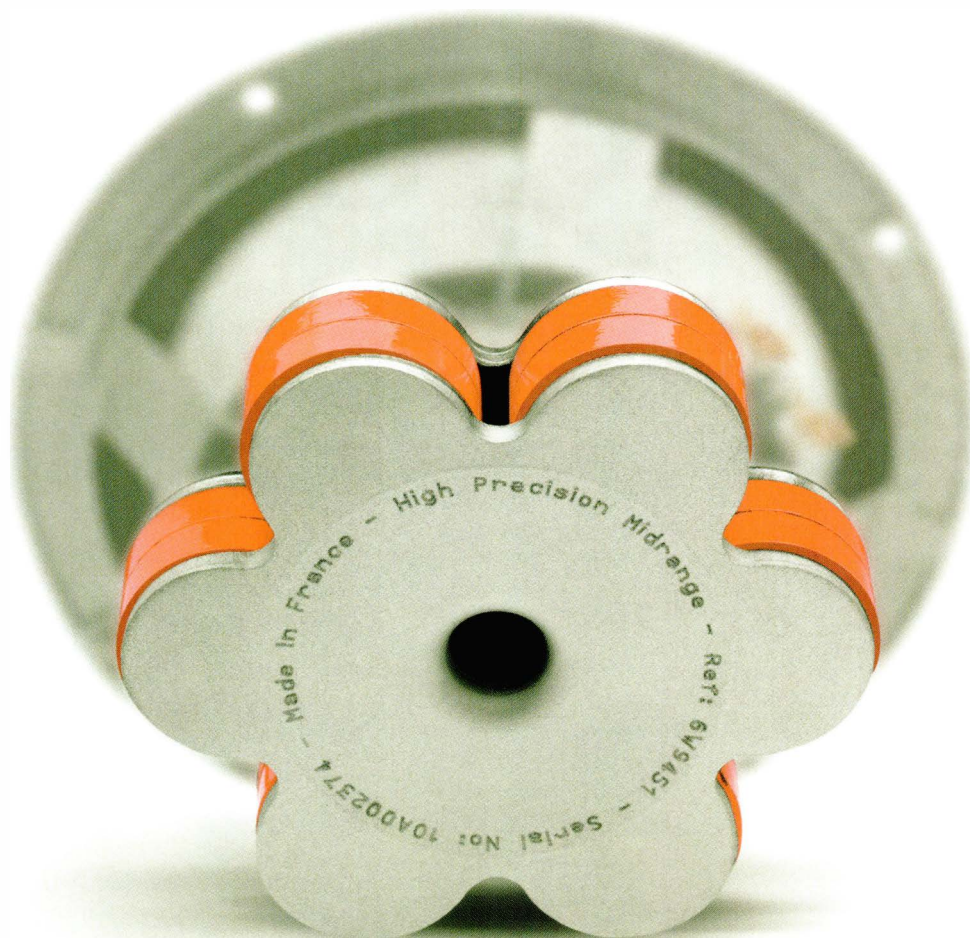
“W” MULTI-LAYER CONE



The W[®] cone concept was developed to satisfy the crucial parameters for any drive-unit diaphragm. Mass must be as low as possible. High rigidity is essential if the cone is to behave as the ideal perfect piston, while good internal damping eliminates ringing or vibration. Focal-JMLab's W sandwich construction has proven to be superior to all other cone materials in exhibiting an exceptional combination of low mass, high stiffness and superb internal damping.

For further information visit the Focal-JMLab website at www.focal-fr.com

POWER FLOWER



Power Flower® (patent pending) is an evolution of Focal-JMlab's multiferrite technology and is designed to reduce magnetic flux losses while concentrating more of the magnetic energy into the voice coil. Power Flower® and W® cone are both manufactured to the tightest possible tolerances and in combination they allow the new 6.5" midrange driver to offer an exceptionally accurate reproduction.

For further information visit the Focal-JMlab website at www.focal-fr.com

Roksan

you'll never want to leave the house again



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HI-FI CHOICE

JULY 2003 ISSUE 243

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



JASON KENNEDY

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



PAUL MILLER

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



ALVIN GOLD

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



RICHARD BLACK

Richard is one talented guy: a professional musician, experienced recording engineer and a highly knowledgeable hi-fi enthusiast to boot. He's particularly nerdy about cables. It's probably Freudian.

Music matters. And hi-fi enhances its power – that's the starting point for this labour of love we call *Hi-Fi Choice*. We don't believe in technology for technology's sake, nor do we condone building your hi-fi system at the expense of growing your music collection – without music your hi-fi is reduced to a bunch of spare parts wrapped up in a fancy box.

Passion for music is the only reason to love good hi-fi. So music is the best tool to use when testing a component's ability – after all, it's your ears that live with the end result. There are certain discs that will always nestle inside a reviewer's toolkit, and we share many of our favourites in a special feature starting on p25. There's a huge variety of music here, some well known, some rarer commodities, all trusted tools for enlightened hi-fi auditions as nominated by the most experienced reviewing team in the business. Next time you go for a dem, take a few with you to aid you in your quest.

For me, a system has to show its range of talents across the vast musical planes that inhabit my CD/LP racks, from New Order to Fauré to Sigur Rós, and a motley host besides. But what if I don't fancy lugging dozens of discs out and about? Then I'll make a 'bit-perfect' compilation on CD-R, or load up a hard disk portable with the soundtrack for a journey. In the future I might choose a hard disk media server to distribute music and other forms of home entertainment throughout the house... but will the quality measure up? Digital storage technology is transforming the way we listen to music and our in-depth guide to digital recording starts on p40. Enjoy the trip.



Tim Bownen **editor**

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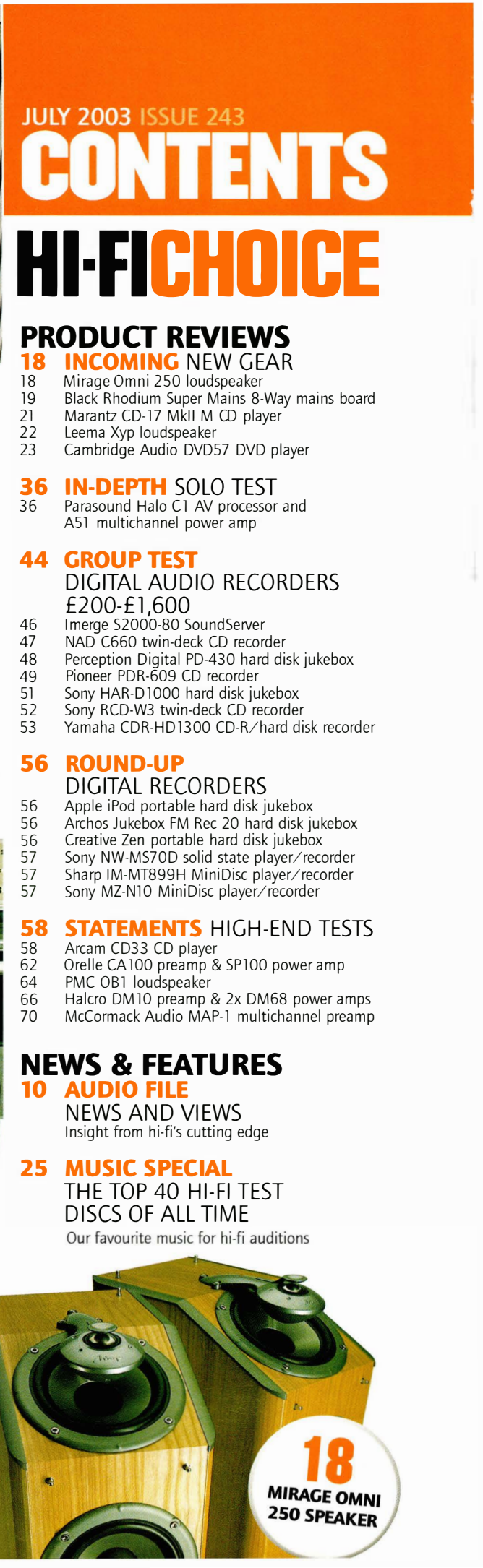
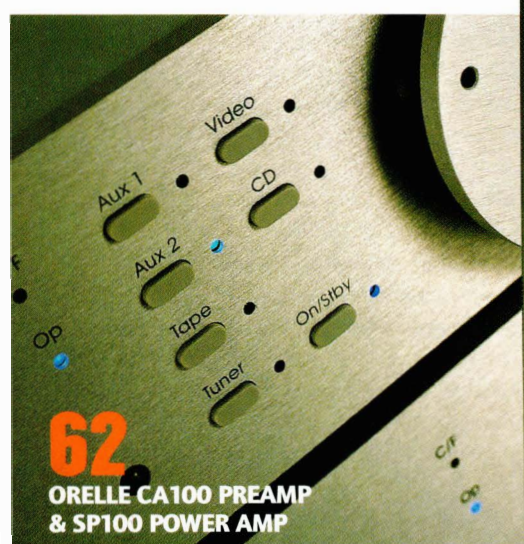
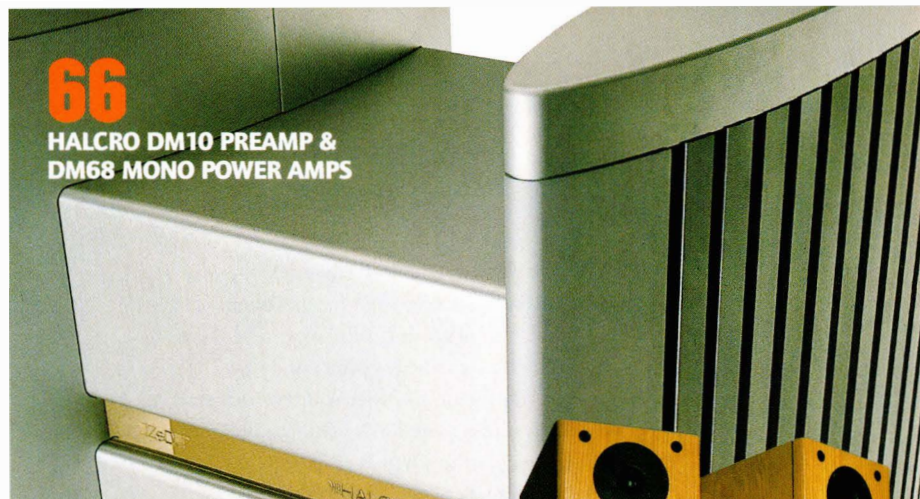
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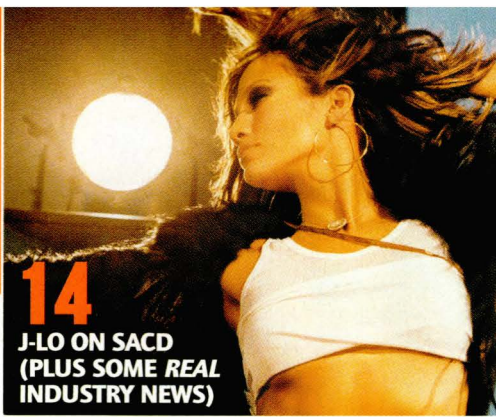
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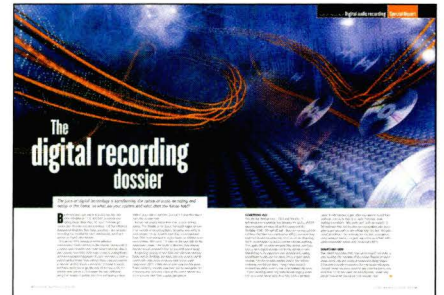
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 ALARMINGLY DETAILED DISC SPINNER



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**MCCORMACK AUDIO MAP-1
 MULTICHANNEL PREAMP**

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.

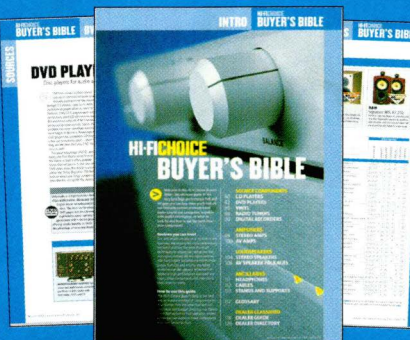
Recommended
 Awarded to outstanding products in our *Group Tests* that may not offer such exceptional value-for-money as a Best Buy, or may not be suitable for everyone, but still turn in a convincing performance.

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

For 28 years, our unique tests have brought you the most accurate guide to buying hi-fi. Our mix of thorough *Group Tests* and in-depth solo reviews ensures *HFC* is the magazine to trust.

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The ultimate guide to high performance hi-fi and AV – our favourite products for your perusal. Your shortlist starts here...



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audiofile

KRELL RIVAL

HEAVYWEIGHT US AMPS COME TO BRITAIN

Ⓢ New amps from high-end American brand Aragon could give the likes of Krell a run for their money in the UK. The Mondial Design team behind the Aragon range has a 16-year history in producing amps of extremely high build quality. Both two-channel and multichannel products feature, a highlight being the Stage One (pictured) – a bang-up-to-date AV processor sporting all current audio formats alongside high-quality video switching.

Matching power amps for the Stage One are available under the 2000 and 3000 series banners, with a choice of two, five and seven-channel models. Meanwhile, those with more traditional hi-fi tastes may find the Aragon Classic Components two-channel series more to their liking.



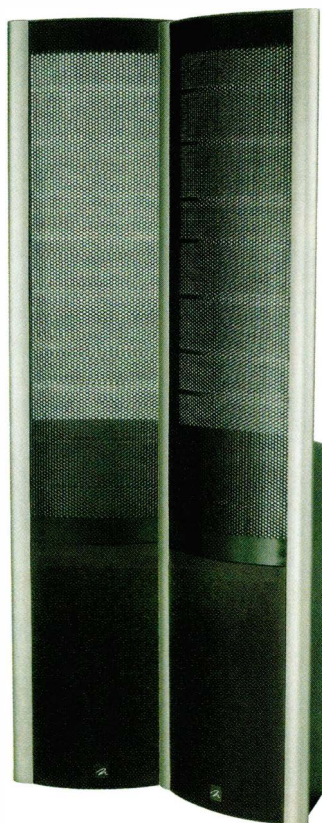
A key component in the stereo range is the 8008 power amp – a full dual-mono amplifier that had its original design work undertaken by Krell's Dan D'Agustino and was initially designed we, are assured, as a budget Krell. The £3,000 amp offers 200 watts per channel

and is available alongside an identically priced monoblock version, the Palladium 1K. Expect a *Hi-Fi Choice* review soon.

☎ Musical Design Company 01992 573030
 🌐 www.mdc-hifi.co.uk

PANEL BEATERS

NEW ELECTROSTATICS FROM MARTIN LOGAN



Ⓢ Discerning AV enthusiasts looking for a high quality multichannel speaker system will be intrigued to hear that Martin Logan has a new electrostatic solution now available in the UK.

The key speaker is the Script i ESL (pictured), a £2,000 per pair wall-mountable model featuring ML's Generation 2 electrostatic panel with a low-profile cabinet and pivoting wall bracket. Among the innovations is the introduction of a low-voltage DC power supply that eliminates the need for a traditional power cord.

The Script i ESL is joined by a pair of centre channel speakers, the Cinema i Compact (£1,900) and Theater i Reference (£2,800). Both feature the same Gen 2 panel and "breakthrough" hybrid design for "controlled dispersion and outstanding dynamic range".

☎ Absolute Sounds
 020 8971 3909
 🌐 www.absolutesounds.com



ONE MAN BAND

LINN'S UNIDISK 1.1 IS HERE

Ⓢ Linn has finally confirmed pricing and availability of its Unidisk 1.1 universal disc player, as unveiled in February's issue (*HFC* 238). Though not the first player compatible with both DVD-Audio and Video discs alongside CD and SACD, Linn describes Unidisk as "the world's first true convergence source component". The player automatically recognises and optimises playback for all major audio and AV disc formats and is claimed to offer straight CD playback close to that of the flagship Sondek CD12.

Outputs include DVI (Digital Video Interface) with HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection) encryption. The Unidisk 1.1 is available now priced at £6,500 – if that's too steep, two more affordable machines are set to follow. Watch this space...

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

SPENDOR has added a centre channel speaker to its range for stereo users converting to AV systems. Using technology from the SR5 on-wall speaker (reviewed *HFC240*), the new C9 is a three-way design featuring a six-sided cabinet that provides two rigid, self-damped enclosures. The centre section houses a wide dispersion 140mm midrange driver with a 25mm tweeter and the remainder of the cabinet houses twin 165mm woofers for the bass. With power handling up to 300 watts and an 88dB sensitivity, the C9 is relatively easy to drive with its 7-ohm impedance. Expect to pay £1,250 for one.
 ☎ 01323 843474

NORDOST's new Valkyria Reference interconnect and speaker cable are a development of the brand's Micro Monofilament technology, as featured in the Valhalla cables tested in *HFC 239*. The flat Valkyria speaker cable comes in at £3,250 for a two metre pair, with the interconnect cable priced at £1,650 for a one metre pair. Valkyria is claimed to offer "a lightning fast signal with minimal capacitance and timing errors".
 ☎ 01352 730251



Cyberhome CH-DVD400

CYBERHOME has a DVD player selling for as little as £50 in WH Smith stores. The tiny player is barely bigger than the DVD drive itself and offers CD-R, VCD and MP3-encoded CD playback. The CH-DVD400 even comes with a remote control and is small enough to tuck away out of sight.
 ☎ 0870 137625

PIONEER will be using NXT speakers in its new DVD/MD mini system that will be available in Japan next month. Pioneer's general manager is said to be delighted with the results from the NXT panels, that for the first time have been made from acrylic. Is this the shape of things to come?
 ☎ www.nxtsound.com

CHANGING ROOMS

MERIDIAN ROOM EQ CARD REVEALED

Meridian has unveiled a room EQ card for its flagship 861 processor. New version 4 software coupled with the latest EF20 DSP card offers Meridian Room Correction, a way of dealing with room resonance by controlling room modes at low frequencies. This method defies the conventional procedure of inverting the speaker/room response and is said to improve sound while calming down resonance and smoothing out the overall acoustic behaviour. Meridian is not alone in developing room EQ technology – TAG McLaren and Tannoy, among others, have recently announced technology to that end. Pricing for Meridian's solution is dependent on fitting and upgrade options.

☎ Meridian Audio 01480 445678 ☎ www.meridian-audio.com

NAUTI BUT NICE

NEW NAUTILUS SUBWOOFERS ARRIVE

B&W's new flagship subwoofers have arrived, complete with 1,000-watt power amps. Both the ASW850 and 800 feature a new drive unit, braced Matrix cabinets and are claimed to be B&W's best subs yet. The ASW850 with its 15-inch (380mm) driver extends down to an awesome 18Hz (-6dB at 14Hz), with the ASW800's 12-inch (305mm) driver hitting 20Hz. They cost £2,000 and £1,700 respectively.

☎ B&W 01903 221500 ☎ www.bwspeakers.com



VICE VERSA

DIGITAL INPUT/OUTPUT SWITCHING

TerraTec's new Vice Versa box connects devices with optical digital outputs to kit with coaxial digital inputs and, erm, vice versa can. It can serve either as a bi-directional converter or as a signal repeater. In repeater mode, the input signal, received as either coaxial or digital, is available at both of the digital outputs for connection to digital recording devices. It has support for up to 24-bit/192 kHz audio, can connect to a PC via USB and costs £50.

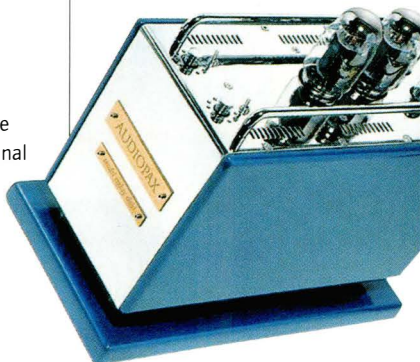
☎ TerraTec 0118 982 1612 ☎ www.terratec.de

BRAZILIAN BRAVADO

HIGH-END VALVES FROM BRAZIL

The Audiopax Stereo 8 is an all-new single-ended pentode amplifier all the way from Brazil. First seen at the Las Vegas Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in January this year, the 15-watt design uses a dual-mono construction with special output transformers that minimise distortion. The Stereo 8 uses KT88 output tubes and 12AT7 pre-drivers and boasts a TimberLock device that uses two bias control knobs to help fine-tune harmonic distortion behaviour between amplifier and speaker. Other features include an extended frequency response to 90kHz and a matched power supply that is said to offer low noise. Expect an exclusive review of the £6,000 Stereo 8 soon.

☎ Precious Music 0141 332 5205
 ☎ www.audiopax.co.uk



Soundbites

RUSS ANDREWS has introduced a new range of surge-protecting devices to protect hi-fi and home cinema equipment from mains spikes. Megaclamp has been developed from the telecoms industry, which Andrews claims has the most effective designs available. The Megaclamp can be fitted to RA silencers and purifiers for £100, or can be bought as a standalone unit for £130. Megaclamp Ultra is the flagship product, prices at £255. ☎ 01539 825500

B&W has a new £3,000 in-wall speaker that incorporates Nautilus technology and is designed to 'Signature' status. The Signature BNT uses an adapted version of the Nautilus tweeter – a 26mm aluminium dome with a tapered-tube loading system that extends to 50kHz. Also developed from the the Nautilus series is the new 'surroundless' 125mm Kevlar bass/mid driver, that is claimed to descend to 28Hz – impressive for in-wall. ☎ 01903 221500

B&W GIVEAWAY!

B&W new 16-track CD, *Emotional Quotient*, contains music based around the four basic emotions that feature in its current ad campaign. The disc is on sale through B&W dealers, but we have ten copies to give away.

Send a postcard or stuck-down envelope with your name and address to: B&W Giveaway, Hi-Fi Choice,

Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Ten winners will be drawn from the hat on 17 July 2003.

Hi-Fi diary

JUNE

24-26 **CEDIA UK Expo**
 Brighton, 01462 627377
Annual showcase for the custom install brigade

AUGUST

29-1 **IFA Berlin 2003**
 Berlin, Germany
 020 7886 3103
Europe's largest consumer electronics expo

SEPTEMBER

26-28 **HiFi Show & AV Expo**
 Heathrow, London
 020 8774 0847
London's best established hi-fi show

26-28 **What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Show, London**
New London event for 2003



LOVELY VITA
 THE LATEST SUB/SATS FROM RUARK

Fresh out of Ruark's Essex factory this month is the Vita 120 – a "no compromise" 5.1 sub/ sat package said to offer significant improvements over its predecessor, the £1,500 Vita 100.

Modifications to the subwoofer include a 120-watt amplification module for greater dynamic range, and improvements to the satellites' drivers and crossovers are claimed to provide a more open and articulate sound. A choice of adjustable wall or floorstanding brackets is available for flexible positioning, along with red or natural cherry veneers.

Also available for two-channel applications, the complete 5.1 Vita 120 package costs £1,700 and it's in the shops now.

☎ Ruark 01702 601410
 www.ruark.co.uk

MISSION STATEMENT
 NEW MISSION RANGE FOR
 AUDIOPHILES ON A BUDGET

Mission has targeted the audiophile on a budget with its new Volare speakers, priding itself on the use of wood veneers across the five-strong range. Volare comprises two standmounts, two floorstanders and a centre channel that all share 38mm front baffles for extra rigidity and come in a choice of three wood finishes. The range claims to have been "fine tuned to meet the needs of the audiophile", using 150mm Paramid composite bass/mid cones and 25mm soft-dome tweeters throughout. Prices start at £200 – keep your eyes peeled for those definitive HFC reviews.

☎ Mission 01480 423700
 www.mission.co.uk



MUSICCAST
 YAMAHA GOES WIRELESS

Affordable, high quality wireless multi-room audio is now a step closer thanks to Yamaha's MusicCAST system. At its heart is the MCX-1000 server, an 80Gb hard disk that can store up to 1,000 hours of MP3 files or 100 hours of PCM music – copied from the built-in CD drive. From here music is sent to the MCXA10 client, which has a large LCD control screen, pre-outs and a 17W per channel digital amp for driving optional small speakers.

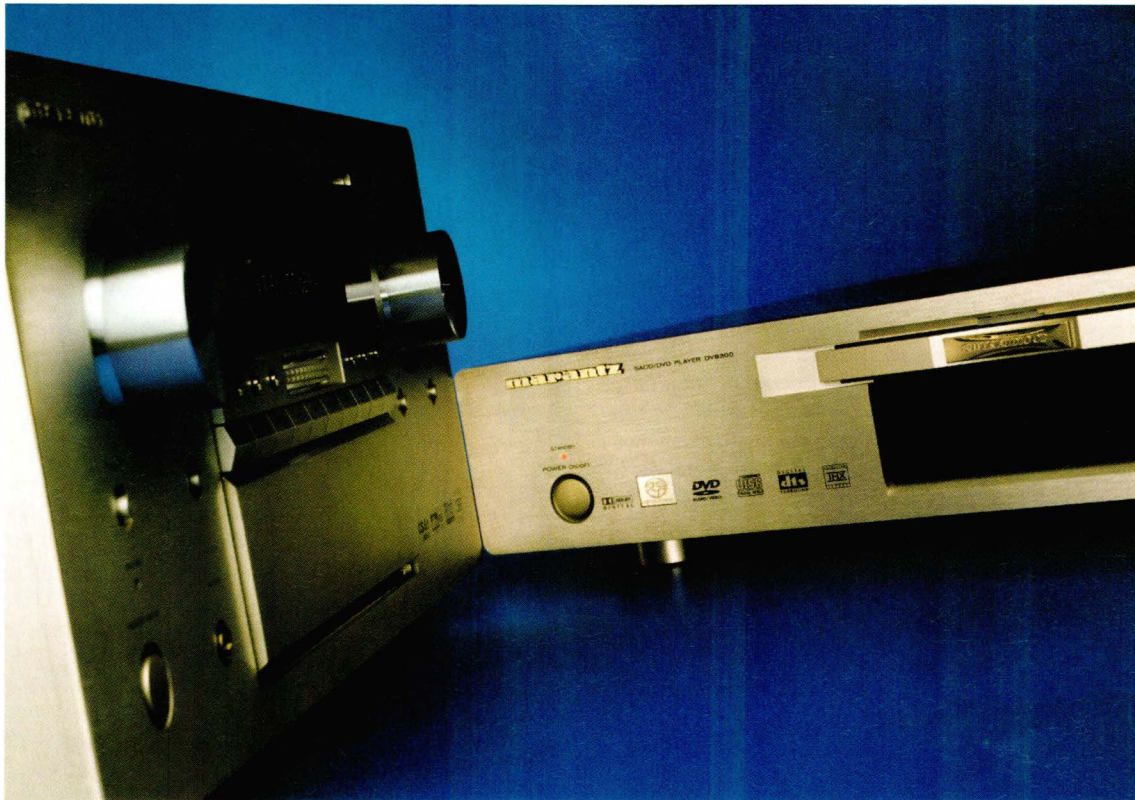
The system can provide eight zones: the server and up to seven clients, five of them wirelessly – using the industry standard IEEE802.11b system – and up to seven wired.

Yamaha expects to sell the server for £1,900, and the clients for around £500/600 each. For more on digital recorders, see our feature, p40.

☎ Yamaha UK 01923 233166
 www.yamaha.co.uk



marantz®



Combine a Receiver with a Multi-format Player and get a Dynamic Duo!

Marantz offers magnificent products, amongst them a perfect Dynamic Duo. The SR9200 THX Ultra Digital Surround Sound Receiver sets the highest standards for audiophiles and home theatre enthusiasts. It incorporates the latest generation of digital surround sound decoding technology and is software upgradeable. The DV8300 Multi-Channel SACD, DVD Audio & Video player, the European Player of the Year 2002-2003, received its merit as "an advanced AV component that not only does justice to audio material in CD, CD-R/RW, SACD and DVD-A media, but provides masterful reproduction of video signals as well, using for example progressive scan". Unleash your passions with this winning team!



THE DYNAMIC DUO

Telephone: 01753 680868 Internet: www.marantz.com

because music matters

DVD-AUDIO HYBRID OFF THE MENU

The DVD Forum has decided not to pursue an SACD-style hybrid disc that will be compatible with existing CD players. Rumours that such a disc might be in the offing were dismissed by the Forum's working group chairman Bike Suzuki who said that such a disc "cannot be played properly by existing DVD hardware".

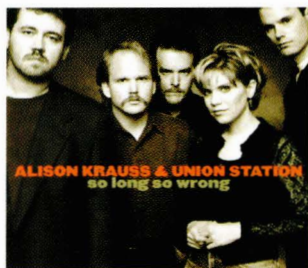
It had been hoped that DVD-Audio could become a more universally accepted format by offering backwards compatibility with CD players, but the DVD Forum's tests have established that a hybrid disc would not necessarily play on any DVD player let alone a CD player. It tested nearly 200 DVD players and found that a significant proportion either refused to play the disc or replayed the wrong layer. Even double sided discs pose a problem because the variation in thickness affects a player's ability to focus correctly.

MO VINYL

Audiophile record label Mobile Fidelity is to start releasing LPs to sit alongside its SACD catalogue. One of the oldest sound quality oriented software

companies, MOFI was once renowned for the quality of its vinyl cuts of classic albums, some of which still attract high prices today. It is to start making new LPs using its GAIN 2 Ultra Analog technology, a disc cutting system designed by Tim de Paravicini of EAR/ Yoshino with MOFI founding father Stan Ricker. The system consists of a Studer tape player with rebuilt electronics and cutting amps driving an Ortofon cutting head on a Neumann lathe. MOFI claims that the GAIN 2 Ultra Analog system can reproduce frequencies up to 122kHz.

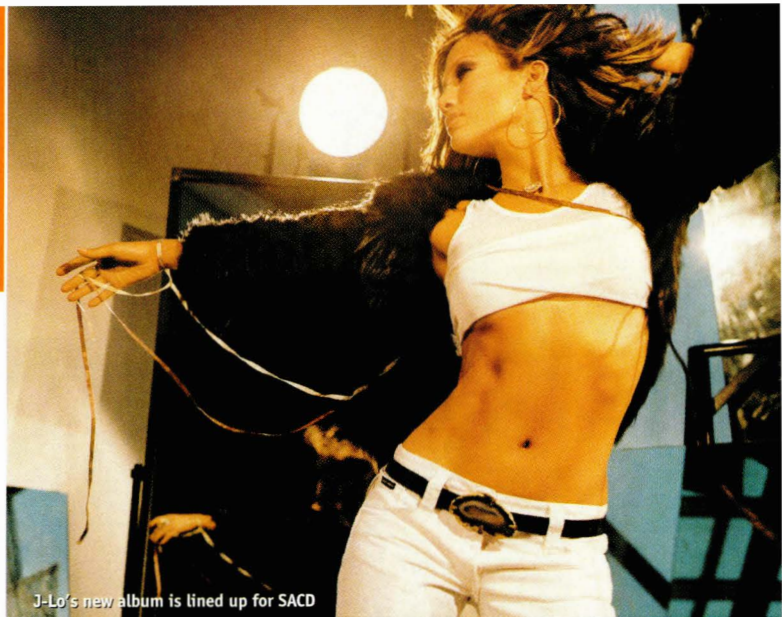
The first batch of titles include: John Lennon *Imagine*, Isaac Hayes *Hot Buttered Soul* and Alison Krauss *So Long, So Wrong*. For more details look up www.mofi.com.



SALES UP, PIRACY UP!

Despite the fact that over the counter music sales increased by seven per cent last year, the BPI (British Phonographic Industry) is complaining that piracy and unauthorised music reached a "new record total of 184m in 2002".

This represents a doubling over two years and according to BPI chairman Peter Jamieson, "piracy and illegal copying are growing at an alarming rate". He claims an 81 per cent increase in the value of commercial piracy in the UK and an explosion in the number of people burning CDs at home, a number the BPI estimates will overtake sales next year. However, this doesn't take into account the increase in online music sales via services like those from Apple and dotmusic, where the industry is starting to make real money from legitimately downloaded MP3s. See the story opposite for more...



J-Lo's new album is lined up for SACD

BIG GUNS COME OUT FOR SACD BONANZA

SACD and DVD-Audio may have yet to light up the mainstream music scene, but both formats have some exciting releases ahead. In an exclusive interview with HFC, David Walstra of Sony Europe said recently, "We've shipped between two and three million players world-wide of which half are in Europe", and revealed that Jennifer Lopez's new album will be released on SACD in multichannel. SACD versions of albums by Oasis, David Bowie, Radiohead and Ronan Keating are also promised soon.

Virgin has been an enthusiastic supporter of the format since its 2001 SACD issue of *Tubular Bells*. Now David Sylvian, Tangerine Dream, King Crimson, Michael Nyman, Ennio Morricone, Roxy Music and a whole raft of others will be getting the SACD treatment. And with over-the-counter sales of Pink Floyd's recently released *Dark Side Of The Moon SACD* reaching nearly 60,000 in the UK already, audiophiles should be encouraged by the format's immediate prospects. However, the big scoop will be The Beatles catalogue, which is currently under negotiation.

Meanwhile, upcoming DVD-A releases include Led Zeppelin, Queen, Steely Dan and Neil Young's notorious, never officially released *On The Beach* (Young had famously refused to release it on CD, claiming that the format would never do it justice).

ONLINE MUSIC GOES LEGIT

Authorised online music now has a forum at www.pro-music.org. Created by artists, record companies and retailers to promote online music services, it seeks to spread the gospel that if music is worth listening to it's worth paying for. And if the success of Apple's iTunes, which saw sales of over a million songs in less than a week, is anything to go by it won't be a hard sell. However, as long as file swapping exists the record industry will be losing sleep, something that pro-music seeks to redress with statements from artists and all you ever wanted to know about copyright laws for online music but were afraid to ask. It also has a forum if you fancy exchanging views on this thorny subject.

The site's biggest fans are inevitably record companies and Jay Berman, chairman of IFPI (one of the biggest industry organisations) said that iTunes, "is proof that if it's done right, music lovers want to get music in a way that rewards the artists and creators – by paying for it".



"HOW OFTEN
DO YOU CLEAN
YOUR EQUIPMENT?"



THE NEW CLEANING RANGE FROM

vivanco

TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice, July 1998

HFC's exclusive review of Arcam's Alpha 9 CD player



explained how the new dcs-derived Ring DAC gave it class-leading sound. Elsewhere, B&W's prestigious £8,500 Nautilus 801 loudspeaker

was born, replacing the renowned but ageing Matrix 801 that spanned the previous decade. And R.I.P. Audiolab – new owners TAG McLaren decided to dispense with the Audiolab name altogether, renaming its new product range under the TAG banner. Wise move? You decide. Of course, you can still relive those glory days by scanning our classified ads on p80-81.

TEN YEARS AGO Hi-Fi Choice, July 1993

Big noises were being made about the price of CDs by Gerald Kaufman MP and his select committee.

Its argument was that CDs should come down in price by £2, in line with the pricing of cassettes – a format with equal production costs to CD.

While the dispute raged, and with little option but to pay up, we showed you how to make the most of the silver disc with our transport and DAC group test. The smart money was on Meridian, TEAC and EAD, a brand that was making us gush only last month with its processor and power amp rig.



SYSTEM BUILDER

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



THE MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA

The Inner Mounting Flame Columbia/Legacy

The first album from the jazz rock supergroup to top them all is a powerhouse. The energy and intensity achieved by this talented five-piece has to be heard to be believed. And that's our reaction to hearing it now – it must have been incredible in 1971 when it was first released. Led by Lightnin' John McLaughlin on guitar, this first Mahavishnu line up featured Jan Hammer on keyboards, Jerry Goodman on violin, Rick Laird on bass and the explosive Billy Cobham on drums. The music mixes power and finesse in equal measure, and if you like any of the less straightforward seventies rock this should blow your socks off. The material's density requires top-notch components – the source in particular needs to get things sorted properly if the effect is to be coherent. Hence the big-budget system – intense music requires intense hi-fi.

DISC PLAYER

TOWNSHEND DV-747A £2,899

An incredibly revealing CD player that can cope with the most hard core of material, never faltering in its quest to reveal the inner workings of the musical message. Oh, and it plays DVD-A/V and SACD too!



PREAMPLIFIER

ATC CA2 £750

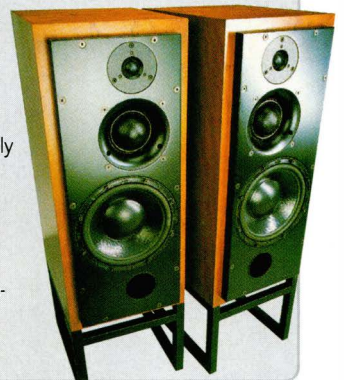
This new ATC preamp gives you 90 per cent of the quality offered by its exceptional £2,500 brother. It can drive the long balanced cables needed for the speakers (below) and keeps the sound tidy in the process.

ACTIVE SPEAKERS

ATC ACTIVE 50

£7,255

A heavyweight active speaker like ATC's recently updated Active 50 will give you the dynamic power and bass control required to translate intense material into fire-breathing music. Set the controls for infinity!



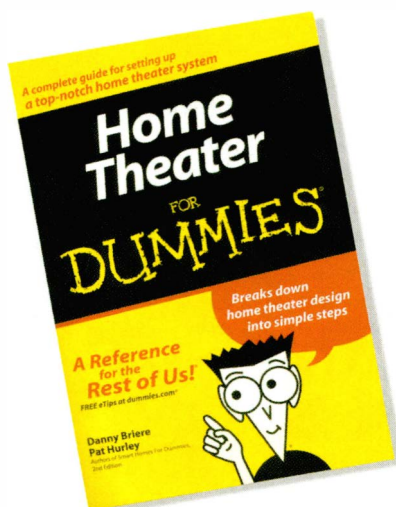
BOOK OF THE MONTH

Home Theater For Dummies

By Danny Briere

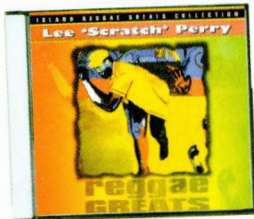
Wiley £10

Or should that be 'Theatre'? Yes, this book comes from across the pond along with the rest of the *Dummies* series, but apart from HDTV and a few Yank-specific technologies, it's superb at demystifying the murky and often bewildering world of home cinema, multichannel audio and high-end video for those in the UK too. It's written in plain English and covers everything from wiring and maximising a system to the very latest technologies. It's a little text-heavy in places but in a helpful, hand-holding way, so don't be put off. Dummy or not, if you're a hi-fi enthusiast trying to get your head around the unfolding world of AV this book is worth the investment.



READERS' DEM DISCS

YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



LEE 'SCRATCH' PERRY

Reggae Greats

"Before he burned it down in frustration at losing his favourite rubber ball, Lee 'Scratch' Perry produced the finest reggae of the seventies at his Black Ark studio in Kingston, JA. This collection showcases his sketches of Jamaican life and hymns to the Rastafarian faith. Junior Murvin's *Police & Thieves* combines a granite bass with the sweetest falsetto to test the dynamic range of any system. A great hi-fi will also reveal a hidden sample of a mooing cow and other sonic jokes on Perry's own *Roast Fish & Cornbread*. The best of many compilations, it's also available on a 180g Simply Vinyl reissue."

Duncan Bartlett via email

What's your favourite disc for hi-fi auditioning? Why not write in and tell us – 100 words on what and why – we'd love to hear about it. Email your choice to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk or write in to Classic Demo Discs, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #10

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



Optimum tracking force for cartridges

Nearly all pick-up cartridges come with a fairly broad range of useable tracking weights – say, from 1.2g to 2.2g. But how to decide which value represents the optimum? While there are certain audible benefits to be had by adjusting the playing force so it leans towards the minimum value suggested by the maker, in the

long run it's often better to veer in the opposite direction.

A lowish tracking weight usually gives a brighter, leaner tonal balance, greater liveliness, and increased sharpness and attack. Setting the playing weight towards the upper limits recommended ensures superior tracking of loud complex passages, without break-up or distortion. Bass will probably be fuller and heavier, with a smoother treble and lower surface noise. Horses for courses? Yes – but secure, stable tracking is the basis of good LP sound, and arguably should be the first priority.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

Tommy Guerrero Soul Food Taqueria

Various Artists Africa Funk

Dzihan Kamien Gran Riserva

Justin Timberlake Justafied

Blur Think Tank

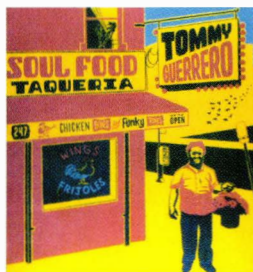
Beth Orton Daybreaker

Electric Six Fire

Super Furry Animals Phantom Power

The Webb Brothers The Webb Brothers

Stevie Wonder Songs In The Key Of Life



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

ARTISTS RECENTLY ABSENT FROM THE CUT AND THRUST OF SHOWBIZ HYPE DUE TO FINISHING THEIR LATEST ALBUMS

Ms Dynamite gets deeper... and darker



MS DYNAMITE

Title: *tbc*

Release date: winter 2003

After the Mercury Prize-winning success of last year's debut album *A Little Deeper* and a string of top ten singles, north London's Ms Dynamite is already hard at it back in the studio. She's been jokingly referring to the follow-up as "A Little Darker" but promises "more up-tempo stuff" this time around.

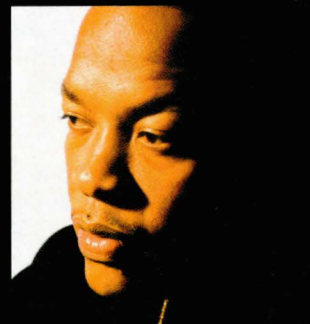
trademark combination of melody and sophisticated funk is again in evidence on a dozen new songs, including *Get It Together*, which is earmarked as the first single.

NITIN SAWHNEY

Title: *Human*

Release date: 14 July

After collecting a Mercury nomination, a Radio Three World Music award and a MOBO for 2001's *Prophesy*, Nitin Sawhney will be hoping the follow-up will add to the trophy cabinet. His most commercial effort to date, the album finds him adding a range of contemporary urban sounds to his Asian roots.



DR DRE

Title: *Detox*

Release date: winter 2003

Rap pioneer and Eminem producer Dr Dre claims his third solo album is a "hip-hop musical", no less. But he's hardly taking too much notice of the campaign to clean up rap's violent image. *Detox* apparently tells the story of a hit man through the eyes of his friends, family and victims.

ELBOW

Title: *Cast Of Thousands*

Release date: September

Manchester's Elbow took ten years to release their first album, *Asleep In The Back*. But they made up for lost time when it went platinum and won a Mercury Prize nomination. The follow-up is every bit as epic and includes guest appearances by a gospel choir and the entire crowd at Glastonbury – hence the title.

ALSO COMING SOON...

ROCK/POP

Mya Moodring (July), **Flint** Device 1 (July), **The Coral** Magic Medicine (July), **Finley Quaye** Much More Than Love (Sept), **Manic Street Preachers** Lipstick Traces (Aug)

CLASSICAL/JAZZ

David Sanborn Time Again (July), **Beady Belle** Cewbeagappic (July), **Yousou N'Dour** Shukran Bamba (autumn), **Lang Lang** Mendelssohn & Tchaikovsky (Aug)

SEAL

Title: *Seal*

Release date: 21 July

Seal won two Grammys for *Kiss From A Rose* but it's been five years since his last album, *Human Being*. Produced by Trevor Horn, his

Incoming

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

★★★★☆

Mirage Omni 250 speaker **£600** per pair **EXCLUSIVE**

Plant-potters beware! The Mirage Omni 250

floorstanding omni-directional loudspeakers have an upward-firing tweeter unit that stops dead any chance of placing something on top of the cabinet.

This Canadian design is hardly pretty. In particular, the cherry vinyl finish with grey plastic mouldings and two-piece L-shaped grille looks a bit like a car interior. But it's a solidly put together speaker nonetheless. The driver configuration is unusual, although the units themselves are not – the speaker sports a 25mm titanium-coated plastic dome tweeter and two 140mm titanium-coated polypropylene woofers with a front-mounted port big enough to lose a ferret down. This returns an above-average (claimed) 93dB sensitivity and an amp-friendly eight ohms nominal impedance.

But it's the way the drivers are arranged that is the key to the Omni 250 design. Although the lower of the two woofers is directly firing at the listener, the top bass/mid unit is slanted back by about 60 degrees. Mounted about 3cm above this driver's soft plastic phase plug is a flying-saucer type thingy, the bottom half of a hard plastic sphere with the radius of a tennis ball, designed to pitch the bass of the speaker in almost

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Floorstanding omni-directional speaker
- ▶ Frequency response: 40Hz-20kHz (+/-3dB)
- ▶ Tweeter: 25mm PTH/Titanium hybrid dome
- ▶ Mid/bass: 2x 140mm polypropylene/titanium hybrid cones
- ▶ Crossover point: 2kHz
- ▶ 93dB sensitivity
- ▶ 8ohm impedance
- ▶ Suggested amplifier power up to 150 watts
- ▶ Single wired
- ▶ Size (WxHxD): 20x97x33cm
- ▶ Weight: 20.45kg each
- ▶ Fully magnetically shielded

all directions. And directly on top of this is a cast housing with the tweeter in it. This fires upwards and also has a little inverted dome hovering about 3mm from its surface, again designed to push sound in all directions.

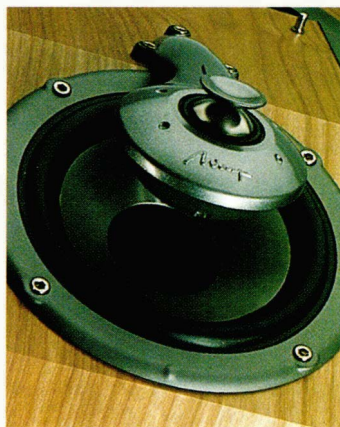
This tweeter/diffuser arm could spell danger. It's strongly built, and is bolted into the top of the speaker cabinet with long chrome bolts, though some kids may look on this as a challenge. The L-shaped grille does hide this away effectively, even if it is not the most sonically transparent grille around.

This is far removed from typical speaker designs – as a consequence, you'll either love it or hate it. Those who hate it will loathe the diffuse vocalist sound, the too-big scale and the lack of monitor-like sound. The rest of us will be amazed at just how musically enjoyable a pair of £600 speakers can be. They make a soundstage in 'CinemaScope' – big, wildly enjoyable and with plenty of detail on offer. In fact, they push the detail envelope in a different way from normal and there's a tangible spatial-temporal quality that the Omni 250



has in spadeloads. Only other (more expensive) omnis and the live event recreate this quality accurately.

Image depth is a particular forte of the Omni 250. Play something with a lot of ambience – Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* or Bach's *Mass In B Minor* spring to mind – and the sense of acoustic depth is beyond parallel. Each instrument, each voice has its own space within the soundstage. It almost feels like you can walk around the soundstage, which to a certain extent, you can. This speaker is almost entirely 'hot-spot' free.



“In smaller rooms, bass may become a prominent feature. Stick on Dub Syndicate, for example, and the low frequency power will loosen door hinges.”

There is a caveat – the bass. There is a lot of it on offer – this is a speaker from the Americas and they often use different building materials and have bigger living rooms than the average Briton. These speakers have a fuller, deeper and bigger bass than we are used to in Blighty and in smaller rooms this may become a dominant feature. Stick on some Dub Syndicate, for example, and the low frequency power will loosen door hinges at ten paces. Once you remember that many UK speaker designs – which, let's face it, are the hi-fi sounds we are most accustomed to – are considered bass-light outside of the UK, it becomes clear that the Omni 250 are bass-different, not bass-wrong.

The big bass could be largely addressed with no modification to the speaker design at all. Simply replacing the lightweight plastic outriggers and feet with a base-plate made of something substantial would tidy up much of the bottom end of the speakers, in exactly the same way as Linn's floorstanding designs sound best with their dedicated high-mass resin and stone composite stands and

plates. A big base-plate would make the speaker look less like it was sitting on clown feet, too.

The Mirage Omni 250 doesn't do everything differently, but it's sufficiently different enough to make it the Marmite of hi-fi. Try it, you may be surprised.

☎ API (UK) 01787 249656
 🌐 www.miragespeakers.com

BRIGHTER SOONER

Although the grill soaks up much of the detail and soundstaging of the Omni 250, you might want to keep that L-shaped grille on for the early days of the speakers' performance. Until it settles down, it can be too bright and uniquely, this also applies if the speakers are moved around too much. Perhaps that tweeter pod needs to 'bed into' its new environment.

The downside is that means it will likely sound too bright in a dealer's dem-room, unless the demonstrator can install the speakers semi-permanently. A longer demonstration will also help to overcome the brightness, too.

★★★★☆

Black Rhodium Super Mains 8-Way mains board £300

➤ Three ton for a mains board may seem steep, but Black Rhodium is a company that believes passionately in the value of good cabling (mains and signal alike) and consequently is not afraid to make and sell intrinsically expensive stuff. In this case, the materials aren't even the fanciest the firm can offer – there's no rhodium plating on plug and sockets, for instance, though you could try ordering either or both as a special if you want to live it large in mains-land.

What this board offers that's most distinctive is the thick, two-metre wire linking plug and sockets, made of silver-plated copper insulated with silicone rubber. Rated at 25 amps, this cable is more than capable of handling the current you can safely draw from a wall socket, and the fitted MK 'Toughplug' gives good termination and safety. The mains board itself uses individual sockets of good quality, mounted in a tough metal extrusion and linked with more of the same silicone-covered wire. An internal filter and a VDR protect against interference and over-voltage spikes.

Smarter than most other distribution boards, this one also offers a subtle but consistent and rewarding improvement in sound over cheaper alternatives, with a particularly low 'stress factor' that makes for very pleasant long-term listening. It seems to reduce treble 'grain' a little but does so without any adverse effect on incisiveness and detail, while bass is just a touch clearer. A good sonic result, then, and eight sockets is about right for a modern hi-fi set-up, making this a sensible choice on all counts.

☎ Black Rhodium 01332 361390
 🌐 www.blackrhodium.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Silicone rubber-insulated wiring throughout
- ▶ Internal filter and VDR
- ▶ Maximum current 13A (3kW)
- ▶ Shuttered sockets



ULTIMATE SONICS



Why settle for anything but the best in multichannel systems?

EAD Multichannel AV System is the world renowned system judged all over the world as breath taking. Treat yourself to the best in hometheatre system and State of the Art future proof technology. Multi-format capable plays DVD Audio, CD, DVD-V, VCD, DVD RAM, MP3, CD-R, CD-RW and some DVD-R. Picture quality is second to none.

Superb Sound quality from the processor

A more than adequate 8 channel power amplifier (300w per channel) for the most exotic AV Installations.

The EAD eight channel power amp offers the greatest perceived value while the processor provides a glorious sound, matched only by the player's astonishing picture quality. The combination brings a truly musical and enveloping sound to everything you play. - Paul Miller (Hifi Choice -June 2003)

The EAD Master 8000 Pro produced the best picture and sound I've seen or heard from any DVD player. - Stereophile Nov 2002

For more details contact

Ultimate Sonics

392 Finchley Road, London, NW2 2HR

Tel: 44 (0) 20 7435 1222 Fax: 44 (0) 20 7435 1300

email: info@ultimate-sonics.com | web: www.ultimate-sonics.com



★★★★★

Marantz CD-17 MkII M CD player £800

There are those who claim that time is being called on the good old CD – that the mind-blowing success of the DVD format leaves good old compact disc looking so last decade. While a myopic look at the budget end of the market might appear to confirm this, take a peek into a higher price bracket – say, £800 and above – and products like the Marantz CD-17 MkII M offer firm and clear proof that the CD player is alive and well.

Why? Because while any DVD player can knock out a tune to a mediocre (though to some, acceptable) degree, this simply means that, now more than ever, choosing a CD player is all about sound quality.

And quality is precisely what you get from the CD-17 MkII M. In case you're wondering, the 'M' stands for Modified – not content with the standard MkII's performance, Marantz set about improving things still further with under-the-bonnet changes that make significant improvements to the player's sonic performance (see box).

The player comes in a very solid metal casing, which gives the unit an

KEY FEATURES

- Coaxial digital output
- Optical digital output
- CD-R/RW compatible
- Single-bit DAC
- Remote control
- Display off option
- Size (WxHxD): 46x83x31 cm
- Gold or Platinum finishes

air of aesthetic style as well as reducing internal vibrations and electromagnetic interference. The front fascia display is pleasingly designed with large numbers while the remote – a long point-and-shoot with small buttons – is by some way the most stylish control you'll see accompanying a player at this price.

None of which, of course, would mean much if the player didn't offer something special in purely sonic terms. But get it into action and the player positively bristles with musical energy. The ethereal web of choir and ensemble in Arvo Part's *Passio* – rendered a homogeneous mush by lesser players – is given a scintillating performance with each and every voice delivered in crystalline precision.

And while initial impressions centre on the player's lean, clear and tightly focused midrange, the 'M' is no slouch when it comes to boogying with the best of them. From Boards Of Canada's oceanic basslines to White Stripes' rock 'n' roll bluster this player has the power, realism and dynamics to make any genre of music spring to life. An effortless all-rounder, this

Marantz also makes light work of the spacious sonics and gritty guitars on Radiohead's *Hail To The Thief* album.

The downside? It's hard to find one, apart for the fact that it appears in a fiercely competitive price bracket with a number of other fine players for you to consider. But that said, the CD-17 MkII M is more affordable than most of its rivals which makes it, frankly, something of a bargain.

Clarity, detail, realism and dynamics – these are the qualities that make this Marantz a musical all-rounder. The fact is, whatever you throw at this player it hardly puts a foot wrong.

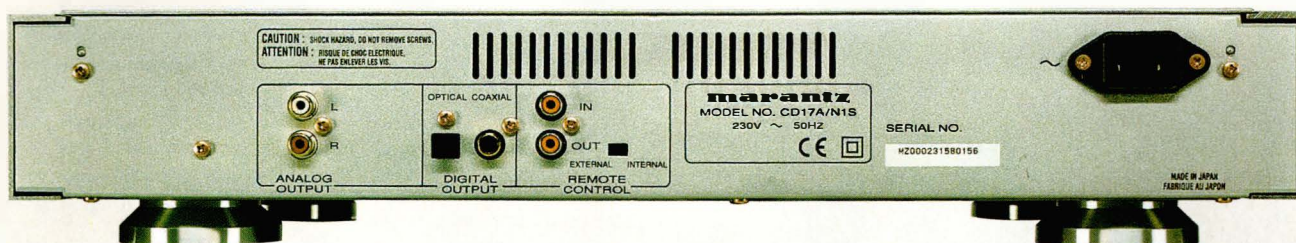
☎ Marantz 01753 680 868

🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

M FOR MODIFIED

A number of changes have gone into the 'Modified' version of the CD-17 MkII. As well as its heavy metal construction, extra copper shielding has been added to regulator ICs and transistors to reduce interference still further. Capacitors have been changed too – the previous model's 'Silmic' capacitors have been replaced by electrolytic capacitors in the power supply circuitry. The output stage is also the beneficiary of some newly customised components. Finally, the display has been improved with a new blue dot matrix illumination making track info and CD text reading easier

“The ethereal web of choir and ensemble in Arvo Part's Passio – rendered a homogenous mush by lesser players – is given a scintillating performance with each and every voice delivered with crystalline precision.”





Leema Xyp speaker

£800 per pair **EXCLUSIVE**

Leema Acoustics is a new name to these pages, but the British company's engineers are no newcomers to the world of audio. Leema is an attempt to pack the benefit of years of professional audio experience into a new range of home hi-fi speakers (see box)

And the 'Xyp' (pronounced 'Zip') is an unusual prospect straight from the box. While the maple veneer on the front baffle seems straightforward enough, the rest of the cabinet is made from a more unusual material – Medite. Despite the Xyp's large dimensions – 20x42x29.5cm (WxHxD) – it is in fact a much smaller cabinet design than it appears (think of this as a kind of reverse Tardis effect and you've got the idea).

The reason is that the Medite cabinet is very thick, 25mm to be precise, while the front baffle is dual-layered to make 4cm in thickness – most of which is invisible externally. This cabinet thickness is part of an elaborate attempt to minimise cabinet resonance.

A pair of Xyps needs considerable running-in. While they slowly warm up over a couple of days, it's after around 70-80 hours that they really start to sing. And when they do, they reveal a sonic presentation of considerable subtlety. The drivers integrate well to deliver a smooth tonal balance and insightful midband with the sprightly instrumentation of Stravinsky's *Apollo*.

The Xyp has a lively and engaging approach to music. A combination of

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Frequency response: 48 Hz-30kHz
- ▶ Sensitivity: 86dB
- ▶ Impedance: 6ohms
- ▶ Recommended amp power: 50-200 watts
- ▶ 140mm Vifa bass/mid driver
- ▶ 25mm Vifa dome tweeter
- ▶ 25mm Medite cabinet
- ▶ Crossover: 3.5 kHz
- ▶ Size (WxHxD): 20x42x29.5cm
- ▶ Weight: 11kg each



“The Xyp’s icily clear midrange, impressive in its detail and insight, doesn’t quite yield to the warmer, more resonant qualities of a piano or acoustic guitar.”

accurate timing and exact imaging gives it an impressive sense of focus, the spatial and rhythmic placing of each note offering ferocious power to Radiohead's *Hail To The Thief*.

The front baffle sports an unusually large bass port. Its size is intended to keep airtight and prevent compression, and with a relatively small (140mm) bass/mid driver, the port design adds weight and power to the bass. Generally it works well, delivering rhythmic punch to the cavernous bass of Boards Of Canada's *Geogaddi*. That said, feed it the fat bass drum of White Stripes' *Elephant* and there is a hint of coloration that doesn't quite match the realism of the upper frequencies.

For all its clarity and precision, the Xyp presents a sound that could be – for some tastes – just a little too analytical. Its icily clear midrange, impressive in its detail and insight, doesn't quite yield to the warmer, more resonant qualities of a piano or acoustic guitar. For all its qualities there's just something a little too

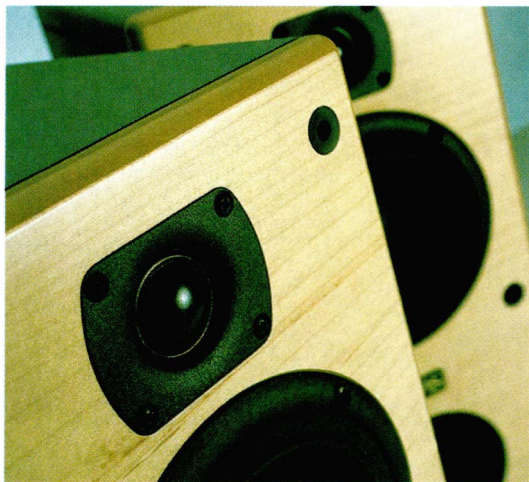
scientific about the sound that won't suit everyone.

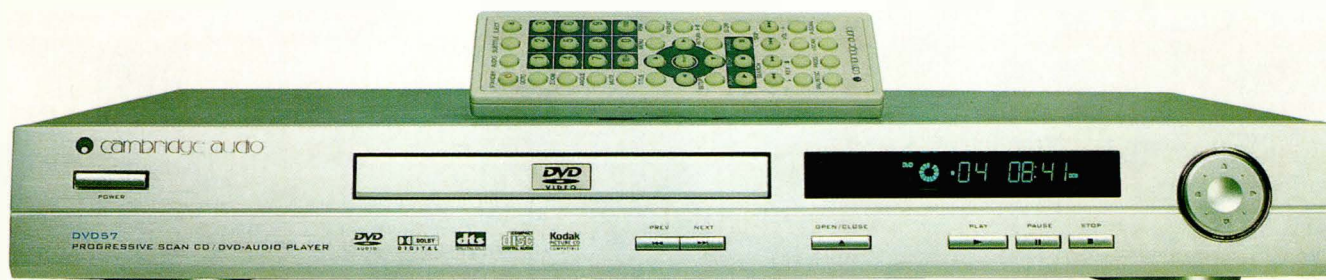
That said, the Xyp provides a revealing, well-integrated performance full of dynamic attack and rhythmic accuracy. If it suit your tastes, it could be a revelation.

Aspen Media 01442 255 405
www.leema-acoustics.com

BRIEF HISTORY OF LEEMA

Founded in 1998, British company Leema Acoustics is the brainchild of audio engineers Mallory Nicholls and Lee Taylor. Having established their reputations developing professional components for studios and mastering houses under the brand name Magtrax, they set out to develop a high-quality miniature hi-fi monitor – this led to the first Leema speaker, the Xen. The larger Xyp and the floorstanding Xavier complete the current range. Leema recommends using dedicated 'Xenith' or 'Xygote' stands with its speakers, designed by stand guru Peter Partington.





★★★★★

Cambridge Audio DVD57 DVD-A/V player £200

Just as it is difficult to find a computer with just a CD-ROM tray these days, so DVD players are stealthily becoming DVD-Audio/Video players. At least among the big names – companies that aren't the size of JVC or Denon have yet to take on the DVD-Audio challenge.

Until now, that is. Cambridge Audio's DVD57 player supports DVD-Audio and DVD-Video and more besides. The 'besides' includes Kodak photo and progressive scan replay (see box). It isn't the prettiest DVD player around – with the slightly left-of-centre DVD tray, tilted front panel and a big flashing blue LED screen, it looks a bit dated. Inside though, it's bang up to the mark and shares pretty much everything with its £150 DVD55 sibling, DVD-Audio support being the addition here.

Video buffs will take on the DVD57 for its excellent, crisp and vivid picture, and because it includes progressive scan and Richer Sounds sells the player Region Code free. So you can watch your American discs without any fuss. And both the picture and multichannel sound are very good – not in the same league as players costing £500 and above, but with crisp, detailed and vibrant images and

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Plays DVD-A, DVD-V, DVD-R, CD, CD-R/RW, MP3-CD, VCD, Kodak Photo
- ▶ Multi-region
- ▶ DVD-A, Dolby Digital and DTS decoder and passthrough
- ▶ Composite video (phono and Scart)
- ▶ S-Video (mini-DIN only)
- ▶ RGB component (via Scart only)
- ▶ Component video (phono and Scart)
- ▶ Progressive scan
- ▶ Stereo phono plus coaxial digital audio outputs

a nimble, dry sound that still makes it great value. But the CD replay, though good, is hardly good enough to replace a decent CD player. The £50 upgrade to the DVD-Audio compatible DVD57, though subtle in places, pitches the player more towards the music fan, with both CD and DVD-Audio replay.

Suddenly the slightly dry musical character fills out. Sounds are richer and more naturally balanced, albeit still with a slight shift toward the treble end of the spectrum. It also drastically improves timing. CDs with a distinct rhythm – such as Leftfield's *Leftism*, for example – take on a more direct pulse, like a similarly priced CD player, in fact. The stereo imagery is also improved, but the cheaper player was pretty good at imaging anyway, so the difference is less pronounced.

Where the player excels is with detail retrieval. Perhaps with the accent on treble, but regardless, the sheer amount of information peeled off a disc means CDs sound unusually detailed for a DVD player, particularly one at the budget end of the price scale. Add the imaging and this makes it a fine choice for Bach-loving classical buffs.

DVD-Audio performance is a bonus, but it's a worthwhile one. The same agile sound applies, but the soundstage is more expansive and the level of detail makes you long for more DVD-Audio discs. Even remasters of old classics, like The Eagles' *Hotel California*, fill the room with detail and a more musical sound than the low price suggests.

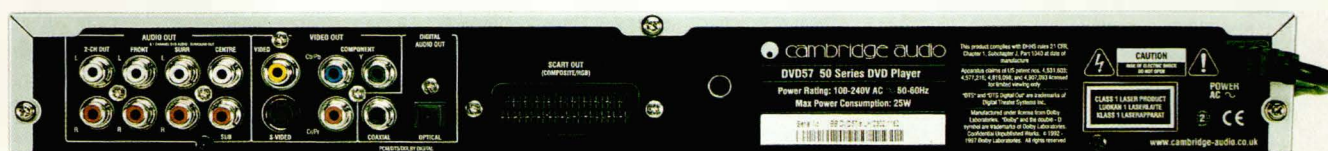
The DVD57 is undoubtedly a significant machine. It's not the cheapest DVD-Audio player, nor is it the best, but for the money it's exceptionally good and it's the first DVD-Audio player at a budget price to come from a respected 'British' hi-fi brand. One thing's for certain, however... it won't be the last.

Cambridge Audio 020 7940 2200
www.cambridgeaudio.com

PROGRESSIVE SCAN

Progressive scan is an unusual extra feature on a budget price player. It takes the component video picture output of a DVD player and changes it to play frame by frame, just like a PC picture or a real film. This is more cinematic in approach than the line-by-line picture build-up of normal TV pictures. But there are two downsides – progressive scan demands a compatible screen, which basically means a plasma or DLP projector. And until recently, progressive scan was limited to imported NTSC DVDs – components compatible with UK (PAL) discs are only just appearing.

“Where the player excels is with detail retrieval. Perhaps with the accent on treble, but regardless, the sheer amount of information peeled off a disc means CDs sound unusually detailed for a DVD player, particularly a budget one.”



where Sight

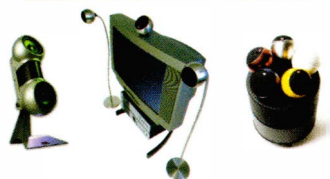
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Cornflake London Tel: 0207 631 0472	Harrods (Sound & Vision Dept) London Tel: 0207 730 1234	Music Matters Birmingham Tel: 0121 429 2811	Practical Hi-Fi Warrington Tel: 01925 632 179	Sound Ideas Faversham Tel: 01795 591 991
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THE TOP 40

TEST DISCS OF ALL TIME



Hi-fi is made for but one purpose – to play back music in the most convincing and believable fashion, to make it sound real. Scientific measuring of the kind that forms part of the HFC test regime is of great use in explaining why an audio component sounds as it does, but the ultimate test for any purchaser always comes back to the music. The key when auditioning is to take a variety of favourite discs with you, the sort your system will have to handle in order to bring you pleasure. And it always helps to have a few extremes – discs to really test certain parameters of a component's ability. To that end, here are our top 40 recommendations for hi-fi auditions, as nominated by our reviewers. These are the tools of our trade and the key to our pleasures, but it's impossible to squeeze everything into eight pages... if you'd like to share your own test favourites, turn to *Audio File: Beats 'n' Pieces* on p17 and get writing.

CONTRIBUTORS: Richard Black, Tim Bower, Dan George, Alvin Gold, Jimmy Hughes, Jason Kennedy, Shaun Marin, Paul Messenger, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Alan Sircom, David Vivian



RYAN ADAMS

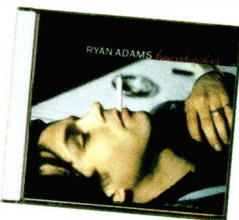
Heartbreaker

Cooking Vinyl

Featured format: CD

So the clue's in the title. This is the tousle-haired troubadour's break-up album, following the disintegration of affairs both musical and of the heart. Released in 2000, it was Adams' first solo record since his band Whiskeytown slipped into history – a more introspective collection than *Gold*, the commercial breakthrough disc which followed, and a more personal, vulnerable and volatile disc as a result.

Adam's guitar strings bleed all over this record – a country-tinged rip at the heartstrings, loaded, uplifting and shattering. Max the effect at 3am with a bottle of red wine clutched to your breast... it's the voice of an angel falling from grace, a band with whisky sours in their hearts and honey dripping from their fingertips. Breaking up never sounded so sweet. *TB*



Listen out for

If your heart was ever broken, the moment 1:22 into Come Pick Me Up when the chorus first kicks in will tug at your soul as Adams tugs at his strings, and the bass drum thuds home.

TORI AMOS

Boys For Pele

Atlantic

Featured format: CD

These eighteen songs of painfully honest, heart-wrenching music chronicle Tori's split with her producer-boyfriend of eight years, Eric



Rosse. This is the third album from the flame-haired songstress known as Myra Ellen Amos to her mum, and many would say the darkest.

But it's easily one of her best efforts – a beautifully open and diverse collection, described by the lass herself as "a journey searching for fire and womanhood". Her Bösendorfer piano chimes magically as if strung by Gandalf the Grey, the whole sounding more scrumptious than ever, with a noticeably more advanced production than her two previous albums. The many sparse vocal-led tracks augmented only by Tori twinkling the ivories will test how natural a system can sound. *DG*

Listen out for

Caught A Lite Sneeze is an ideal test track – prominent kick drum for bass extension and speed, delicious harpsichord for midrange detail and transparency, and breathy vocals for mid/treble coherence.

JS BACH

Mass In B Minor

The Sixteen, Harry Christophers (cond)

Collins Digital (70332)

Featured format: CD

Ask any classically trained musician and they will all say (probably at some length) just how much modern music



owes to Johann Sebastian Bach. Our modern tempered instrumentalist sound – whether a polite string quartet or death metal band on the rampage – was first defined by Bach with the 48 preludes and fugues of his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. It's very difficult to define his single standout masterwork when there are so many sublime compositions penned by Bach.

In a secular world, however, it could be easy to overlook the *Mass In B Minor* as just more devotional music. But ordinary devotional music isn't the *Mass In B Minor* – played with enough fire and passion, this could even make the odd atheist reconsider... and The Sixteen play Bach with fire in their bellies. *AS*

Listen out for

The Kyrie begins with the choir, then silence and finally the orchestra. During the silence, two minutes in, you can hear birds twittering on only the best hi-fi.

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART

Clear Spot

Reprise

Featured format: CD

Now packaged alongside *The Spotlight Kid*, on a single 'budget' CD, *Clear Spot* is probably the good Captain's funkiest

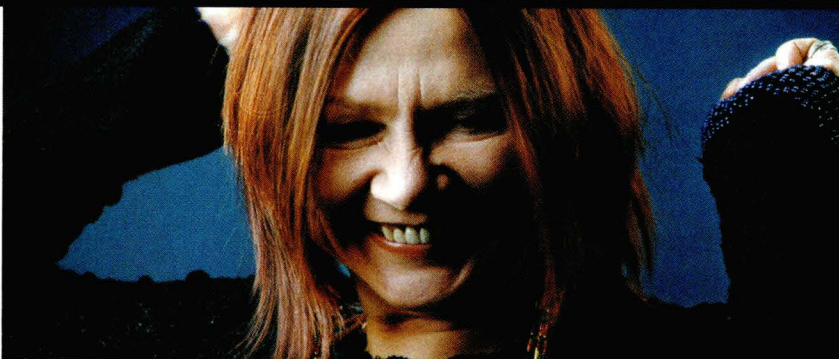


album, and one of the more commercial and accessible too, in an era that found the Magic Band at the height of its powers.

The recording quality suffers somewhat from its 1972 gestation, with occasional unfortunate lapses into 'ping-pong' stereo, though it's decent enough for its era, if a bit scrappy at high frequencies. But the music and musicianship remains remarkably fresh, is full of variety, and peppered with interesting cross-rhythms and time-signatures. From sensitive ballads to driving rock 'n' roll tracks, the interplay between Zoot Horn Rollo, Rockette Morton, Ed Marimba and Oréjon is wonderfully inventive and consistently surprising. *PM*

Listen out for

This music is all about timing, and Big-Eyed Beans From Venus should build up an unstoppable accelerating momentum. Check your pulse rate before and after this track!



MARI BOINE Eallin

Antilles **Featured format: CD**

This music defies attempts at categorisation. Mari belongs to the Sami people, from the north of Finland, so don't expect to make a great deal of the lyrics on this disc, though Mari herself – who composed most of the music – has a beautiful voice with an immense range and virtuosity.

The music's roots are certainly ethnic, just as the basic instrumentation is substantially acoustic. But much of it could pass for jazz, or even rock, and plenty of electronic processing is tastefully used to heighten the effects and enhance coloratura.

There's huge contrast between the moods of the different tracks, sometimes driving along with high impetus and energy, sometimes pausing for a delicate and atmospheric flute solo.

This 1996 recording is to an exceptionally high standard, despite the fact that most of the album was recorded live. Though it hasn't been stitched together into a coherent concert format, this certainly adds to the tension of the performances. *PM*

Listen out for

Track seven is a particular favourite for subwoofer testing – 50 seconds in, the bass comes in with a vengeance, genuinely deep but with great rhythmic thrust and significant tonality too.



BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY

I See A Darkness

Domino

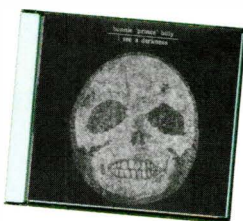
Featured format: CD

Will Oldham has recorded under an startling variety of monikers – Palace, Palace Music, Palace Brothers, Will Oldham – but it's in his dark folk lord, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy guise that he's managed to catch most people's attention. Don't let the name fool you, there's little that's bonnie about this album, and it's not some commercial sell-out. It's an album of dark, melancholic Americana that will upset more people than it engages. It's pretty unrelenting stuff, and tracks such as *I See A Darkness*, and *Today I Was An Evil One* are delivered without a hint of irony.

What it does have going for it is a rather unusual sound quality, which really positions the protagonists solidly on the sound stage, while the lead vocal is disturbingly clear. *SM*

Listen out for

A minute into Today I Was An Evil One, the moment the backing vocals appear like a spectral voice alongside Oldham's casual delivery is breathtaking – and the song just gets better from there.



JEFF BUCKLEY

Grace

Columbia **Featured format:** CD

If you are only going to record one proper album before drowning during a pointless, drunken swim in the Mississippi, then you'd better make doubly sure your debut offering is something a bit special. That's exactly what Jeff Buckley accomplished – *Grace* is one of the best rock albums of the nineties, if not one of the best albums, period. Play it to anybody who hasn't heard it and they will find something there for them – guaranteed.

From the opening angelic vocal of *Mojo Pin* to the equally powerful closer *Dream Brother*, this album is brimming with great rock tunes – with some powerful drumming and dynamic vocals – interspersed with moving ballads of failed love. He fought against comparisons with father Tim his whole career, and though there are very clear similarities in the vocal elasticity, *Grace* probably surpasses anything Buckley Senior recorded – it's just a shame his son couldn't buck the family trend of dying tragically young. *SM*

Listen out for

It's ironic that the perfect moment on this album from a man who drowned is a single intake of breath, but the one at the beginning of Hallelujah is this album's defining moment.



BUFFALO TOM

Let Me Come Over

Situation Two

Featured format: LP

Rock's great vistas have thrown up a throbbing glut of testing times for a hi-fi component's bass, dynamics, rhythm and timing.

From my own collection I could have plucked Nirvana's *Nevermind*, Pixies' *Doolittle* or Massive Attack's *Mezzanine*, but here's something a little less obvious: an impassioned roar from 1991 by a lesser-known US indie outfit, an album that rocks harder than 99 per cent of the current crop of overwrought, over-vexed and over here pretenders.

Yet hard rock this isn't. It's simple, melodic guitar-fired pop – songs of love and loss, played with a raw energy that transcends studio tricks and fake postures. It's real and engaging – flared guitars struck with finger-bleeding fervour. A thrilling and exhausting listen. *TB*

Listen out for

Every single second of the beautiful Taillights Fade. It starts with solitary guitar – alive and resonant on the right system – then bass and drums kick in and a swaggering, staggering power ballad is born.



TRACY CHAPMAN

Tracy Chapman

Elektra

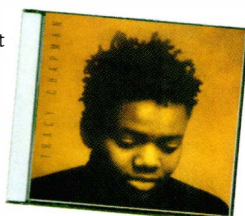
Featured format: CD

Every reviewer's toolkit is required to include a female vocal recording, and Tracy Chapman's eponymous debut album is an excellent example. The voice is rich, pungent and pure, the intonation perfect, while the songs are striking and direct.

The accompaniments are sparse but fully sufficient; and in one track, *Behind The Wall*, she sings completely unaccompanied. Some of the songs are crude polemics, but others are more subtle – the hit single *Fast Car* for instance – and they all have a personal feel. The spacious recording captures it all beautifully and with great immediacy. This is one popular recording that doesn't sound as though it happened in the mixing desk – you probably won't notice the engineering at all, and this surely is the mark of the best kind of recording. *AG*

Listen out for

Mountains O' Things with its odd, lop-sided keyboard and percussion accompaniment, which should never be swamped by the razor-sharp vocal.



ERIC CLAPTON AND FRIENDS

Unplugged

Reprise

Featured format: CD

Clapton's famous 1992 contribution to MTV's *Unplugged* is excellent at highlighting tempo/timing differences, and showing the musical benefits of a good subwoofer. Because it's a live recording, your system needs to recreate a sense of 'being there' to make the music and performances come alive.

On a good system, the recording sounds very holographic and detailed – even in two-channel stereo there's a palpable sense of depth and spaciousness, with good separation between the musicians and the sometimes rather noisy audience. But also pay close attention to quiet backing vocals and instruments such as the piano – notice how clearly they can be heard here. Above all, listen to the timing and how much of a swing the beat has. If the music sounds flat and rhythmically lifeless there's something wrong. *JH*

Listen out for

See if you can spot the piano playing slightly off the beat and rhythmically across bar lines 2:16 into Layla.





JIMI HENDRIX Axis: Bold As Love

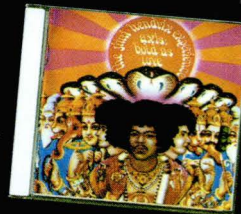
MCA Featured format: CD

Hendrix's second and finest album introduced the world to the full Technicolor widescreen dream of Hendrix's sonic imagination as he explored stereo phasing, Fuzz-toned guitars, minor modes, harmonic shifts, mellifluous backwards guitar solos and varying time signatures. *Up From The Skies* features his first use of Vox Wah-Wah pedal and *Castles Made Of Sand* has his best backwards-guitar solo ever. *If Six Was Nine*, the blistering rock-out track which made it to the soundtrack of *Easy Rider*, contained no less than three different time signatures.

The icing on the cake was the incredible title track which perfected stereo phasing for the first time in history. Incredibly, Hendrix even lost the first side master tapes one night and returned to Olympic studios to remix them in one day! He got sterling support from Mitch Mitchell (whose rotary jazz-inflected drum rolls on *Little Wing* and *Bold As Love* are exceptional stand-out moments) and Noel Redding who debuted his new Hagstrom eight-string bass on this album. *MP*

Listen out for

Hendrix's awesome backwards guitar on Castles Made Of Sand (1:31) should drip from your speakers like honeyed cream.



CORNELIUS

Point (From Nakameguro To Everywhere)

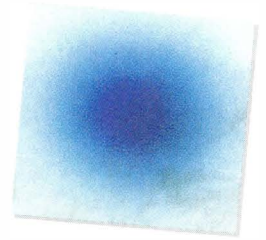
Matador

Featured format: LP

Japanese artist Cornelius's second album is a more refined and relaxed affair – there's still some oriental madness but also

some excellent tunes and a breadth of styles that is rare. One track sounds like thrash metal (*Hate, Hate, Hate*) while another reveals a piquant melody. He likes rapid changes and unusual counterpoint, blending disparate elements to create highly engaging music.

Although it employs water sounds to great effect, *Point* was largely made using 'proper' instruments played by talented musicians. There's little of the sampling that characterised his earlier work, but that background informs this material. He's happy to chop things up and come up with unlikely but effective mixes with an element of Beck at his best. *JK*



Listen out for

Speed is the real issue with this album, the transitions are extremely rapid and you need a genuinely nimble system to keep up. You know you've got it right when you can hear the space between the rapid stops and starts.

ELVIS COSTELLO AND BURT BACHARACH

Painted From Memory

Mercury Records

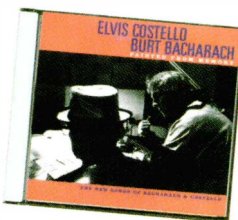
Featured format: CD

Bit of a sob-fest this bitter-sweet collaboration between the four-eyed one-time new waver and the

toothsome godfather of lounge music. If it's a quick mood-lift you're after, best give it a miss. Some of it is frankly almost unbearable to listen to, especially if you've just split with a partner.

But then the pain is exquisitely done and the combination of Costello's raw, rasping vocals and uncle Burt's achingly beautiful tunes and arrangements is massively compelling. Especially as it's all so lovingly produced.

It's not *over* produced either. EC's remarkable voice cuts through the mix like a rusty machete, often sounding raw and edgy, but so emotionally powerful you'll be transfixed if your hi-fi is doing the business. Don't be put off by the duo's appearance in *Austin Powers*; this is far better. *DV*



Listen out for

Lisa Taylor's solo at the end of My Thief – just her voice and massed strings. If the hairs on the back of your neck don't stand up, you need a better system.

MISSY ELLIOTT

Miss E... So Addictive

The Gold Mind, Inc./Elektra

Featured format: DVD-Audio

DVD-Audio

Missy Elliott's third album is arguably her best and this multichannel DVD-A rendition is nothing short of stonking. It may be a little tame with its censored cuss words but there's no escaping the phenomenal grooves and heavyweight vox. Elliott works with her long-time producer Timbaland to lay down some of the juiciest funk this side of the seventies. Combine this with Jimmy Douglas's highly inventive processing for the 5.1 channel mix and you have one of the finest contemporary discs around for exercising a high-res multichannel surround system.

The hit track *Get Ur Freak On*, while pretty good, is hardly the best on offer. If you prefer something tougher try *Lick Shots*, *Whatcha Gon' Do* or the sublime *Slap! Slap! Slap!* featuring the lightning tongue of Da Brat. *JK*

Listen out for

See if you can figure out precisely what Da Brat is saying on Slap! x3 – she kicks in at 1:46 and around 2:02 mentions the brand of shoes she bought. If your system's good, you'll know.



EMINEM

The Marshall Mathers LP

Aftermath Ent./Interscope Records

Featured format: CD

While Marshall

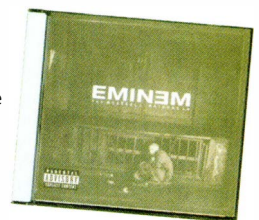
'Eminem' Mathers is clearly not a very nice person he is not the first great musician to be that way –

anyone remember James Brown? What's important is the quality of the material. Eminem is a white rapper who is richer than Croesus thanks to three phenomenally successful albums. His talent lies in his clever use of scansion, the metrical analysis of verse. Few rappers come close when it comes to timing and fluidity. What's more, he manages to bung in some highly entertaining, even original lines to boot.

The album features other MCs alongside the little peroxide one who are very impressive but effectively serve to reveal that there is only one *Real Slim Shady*. *JK*

Listen out for

The bell sounds on the typically chirpy Kill You, which come in for the first time at 00:37 should sound tuneful and varied in pitch. They also have plenty of ring on them which should be clear. This disc also has very tight bass, and that's how it should sound.



GRAINGER**Piano Music**

Marc-André Hamelin

Hyperion (CDA66884)

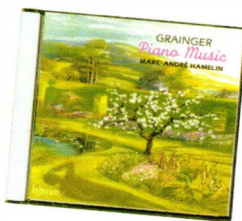
Featured format: CD

It's taken a long time for Grainger to be accepted as a serious figure in

20th-century music, but this disc has

certainly helped him along the way.

Hamelin, an astonishing pianist in any repertoire, evidently feels very much at home with Grainger's wide-ranging music, from the haunting *Colonial Song* to bracing folk-song arrangements such as the humorous *In Dahomey*, one of the most smile-inducing pieces of music ever composed. Tony Faulkner's recording makes the most of Hamelin's solid but subtle piano tone with terrific bass impact and particularly fine dynamics. A good piano recording like this can reveal a lot about a hi-fi system, not least whether it rattles on energetic transients, and is pretty revealing of resonances and smearing of detail. *RB*

**GRATEFUL DEAD****Reckoning**

Arista

Featured format: CD (originally 2x vinyl)

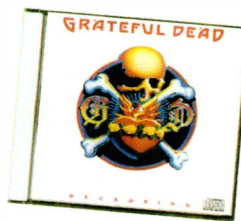
The original

'unplugged' album (long before the MTV series), *Reckoning*

was taped live in 1980 and released

in 1981, when the band was beginning to settle into middle age. The Grateful Dead is/was always a live performance experience, and they have released many live albums, often of dubious sound quality. Not so this gorgeous sounding and beautifully transparent acoustic set, which, despite the odd bum note, makes its gentle, lyrical way through some of the most tuneful tracks from their mature repertoire.

The virtual absence of electric instruments keeps the Dead's traditional self-indulgence under control, but the stand-out feature is Phil Lesh's beautifully delicate, light yet purposeful bass playing, which keeps everything driving along in full truckin' mode. *PM*

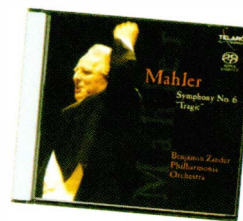
**MAHLER****Symphony No 6 in A Minor**

Philharmonia Orchestra, Benjamin Zander

Telarc (60586-B)

Featured format:**SACD**

Mahler's music was always a better fit with compact disc than with vinyl LP, and the new high-resolution multichannel formats add a new dimension. Mahler's most coruscating and embittered score famously includes the three hammer blows that appear to presage his fate: the death of his daughter, his anti-semitic sacking from the directorship of the Vienna Philharmonic and the diagnosis of his fatal heart condition. Although in some ways the most forward-looking of all his symphonies, the 6th is also the least accessible, and this blazing performance is a good choice for those unfamiliar with the work. The recording also includes alternative versions of the finale, with and without the third 'hammer blow', excised by Mahler himself in later editions of the score. *AG*

**Listen out for**

In *Dahomey* has some hair-raisingly deft fingerwork, captured in the utmost detail. If you can really hear all the notes, your system's doing something right!

Listen out for

Check out the bass picking on *Jack-a-Roe*, which will show up any shortfalls in bass agility or timing, and ruthlessly reveal any unwanted resonances.

Listen out for

From its measured, doom-laden opening to the final shriek that presages its denouement, the finale is profoundly impressive, virtually a symphony within a symphony.

DAVE MATTHEWS BAND**Before These Crowded Streets**

RCA

Featured format: CD

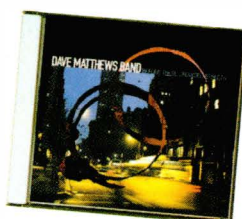
Some of Virginia's best jazz-trained musicians joined South African-born singer/guitarist Dave Matthews when he decided to put his

songs on to tape back in 1991 to give his ideas "more depth." He clearly got more than he bargained for. A skilled group emerged including David Harrington on violin, saxophonist Leroi Moore and quite possibly the tightest drummer/percussionist the state could offer in Carter Beauford.

The heavily jazz-influenced fusion that resulted is no chart-topping bag of hooks and tricks. Instead it's a complete music lover's armchair workout – with its compulsory air drumming, earthquake-inducing, foot-stomping allure and magical percussion. If your hi-fi is more slow lane than Autobahn, the power and majesty of this album will be wasted on you. *DG*

Listen out for

From the top of *Rapunzel*, guitars, violin, bass, and drums align with a vice-like grip which will fully test your system's musicality, transient speed and dynamics.

**LAMBCHOP Is A Woman**City Slang **Featured format: LP**

Lambchop, masters of the quiet revolution, brew a strangely powerful stew with their army of muted instruments. More a collective than a band, Lambchop's sound is not as relaxed as a casual hearing might suggest. This is the dark underbelly of contemporary Americana and it's a disquieting place to be. The weirdly broken up lyrics don't tell half the story, it's the haunting phrases and far away rumblings which evoke the myriad dangers in the home of the brave.

Kurt Wagner's bunch of not so merry men do however weave a magical spell over anyone who is prepared to listen closely, and there are some powerful emotional currents running through this album's guitars, piano and even drums. It's a sonic version of an Edward Hopper painting – there doesn't seem to be much going on but it's all there if you bother to look. And once you've stared deep into its spidery soul you'll be forever tangled in its web. *JK*

Listen out for

A sense of perspective and image depth from tracks like *Caterpillar*, which can really open up and stretch the boundaries of sonic space – most of those sounds come from real instruments and thus should sound that way!



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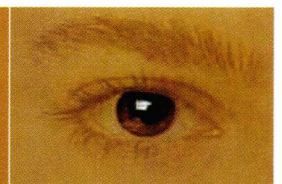
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MARCUS MILLER Official Bootleg: The Ozell Tapes, Marcus Miller Live

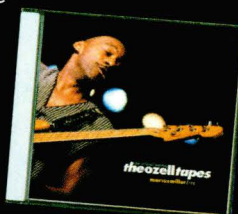
Dreyfus Jazz. Featured format: CD

Since most funk is bass and rhythm driven, it's a good test of basic muscularity, control and agility. Dumps the wimps in a blink. This two-disc set – recorded direct from the back of sound engineer Dennis Thompson's mixing desk to a Sharp 702 MiniDisc in a bootleg stylee on the great Marcus Miller's 2002 spring tour – doesn't strictly adhere to the genre but the energy created by Miller's incomparable bass playing and Poojie Bell's drumming is as funky as it gets.

It may not be purist hi-fi, but the unprocessed immediacy and impact of this recording is startling. No post-production enhancements, not much production at all. Just the live performance straight, no chaser. Sound quality has an analogue-like warmth and fatness that's immediately appealing and with amazing dynamics considering the MD recorder. Don't think of it just as a bass dem, either. Miller's a whizz on the bass clarinet, soprano sax and keyboards, too. But when he cuts loose on his Fodera fretless five-string bass, it's more or less what hi-fi was invented for. *DV*

Listen out for

The super-low bass-synth pad that kicks in at 00:31 in Lonnie's Lament on Disc 1 – a real test of bass extension with control.



CURTIS MAYFIELD

There's No Place Like America Today

Curton

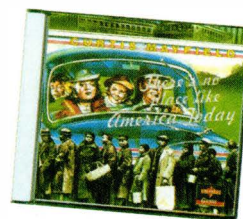
Featured format: CD

Known for his generally upful, righteous calls to *Move On Up* or *People Get Ready*, Curtis Mayfield delivered one of his darkest, least pop-conscious and most brilliant albums in the post-Nixon era of 1975.

Lyrical it deals with hard times in the ghetto, and musically it sounds sparse and bare, yet the arrangements are actually quite lush, with strings, horns and congas augmenting Curtis's group. The secret seems to be that nothing is over-used, brought in to make a point or over-staying its welcome. It's a masterclass in the oft-used dictum of 'less is more' – no flim-flam, no excess, no fat, just lean meat on bone. A naked, raw, quietly impassioned message to the powers that be, to his people, to the world at large, about the way things are... with only a glimmer of hope that things could get better. *DO*

Listen out for

Mayfield is under-appreciated as a guitarist of subtlety and taste. His barely-there rhythmic touches underscoring Billy Jack are a beautiful thing which not all systems appreciate fully.



CHRISTY MOORE

At The Point: Live

Grapevine

Featured format: LP

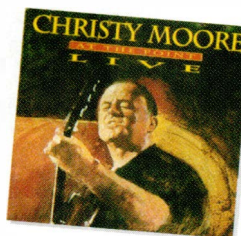
Irish folk minstrel Christy Moore's career stretches back over three decades, and this experience comes through in his brilliant

stagecraft and the relaxed way in which he works – and works with – a live audience.

Christy's a great performer, but an even better songwriter, combining some wonderfully lyrical moments with a ferociously sharp and barbed wit. Some of the repartee can get a bit tiresome when you've heard it a hundred times, but plenty of the songs here will stand up for years to come. He knows how to spin a yarn too, with an Irishness that makes you want to head for Dublin. *At The Point: Live* is exceptionally well recorded, perhaps tending a little bit towards the dry side, but with the lovely atmosphere and tension of the very best live recordings. *PM*

Listen out for

The vocal dexterity on *Welcome To The Cabaret* is a tough test for any hi-fi component, with Christy's clever use of microphone technique, and dynamic acoustic guitar work.



PINK FLOYD

Wish You Were Here

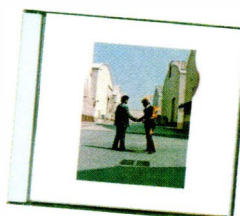
EMI

Featured format: CD

The ultimate ambient rock album and a major inspiration behind the ambient techno movement of the 1990s (Dave Gilmour's spacious opening four-note guitar chime graces The Orb's very first 1989 Peel Session, *Loving You*). Mostly instrumental, *Wish You Were Here* is a showcase of dazzling keyboard skills by Rick Wright on MiniMoog synth, Fender Rhodes and electric organ. Gilmour also ascends to a pinnacle of musical greatness with a guitar technique which defines the physical space all around it. You can hear the throb of the VCS3 on Roger Waters' *Welcome To The Machine* and the acoustic title track has become a must-play for fans and buskers alike. A UK/US number one in 1975, *Wish* is peerless 1970s ambience on disc. *MP*

Listen out for

The first four and a half minutes will test any system. If it cannot pick up the synth drip six seconds in, deal with the incremental drone volume or separate the ambience around the tinkling glasses and Gilmour's heavenly chime (4:07) give your system an early bath.



STEVE REICH

Music For 18 Musicians

ECM

Featured format: CD

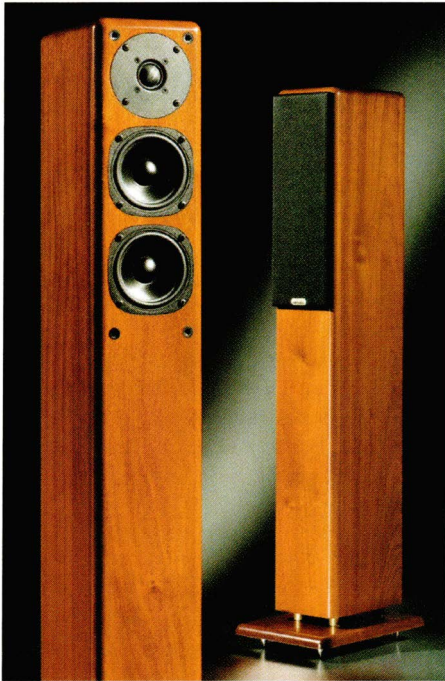
American minimalist Reich's most famous piece has universal appeal across generations and genres of musicians because it's simply unique. Released in 1978, it combines Reich's love of exotic Balinese percussion with more familiar Western classical instruments, xylophones, female voices and most famously the pulsating bass clarinets at the beginning and end which really get under your skin.

18 Musicians found Reich a new audience away from the avant garde ghetto and among young hipsters already familiar with the tonal ambience of Floyd's *Moon*. Those intimidated by Reich's precise minimalism will be relieved by his statement that "there is more harmonic movement in the first five minutes than in any other complete work of mine up to then". *MP*

Listen out for

Those incredible stuttered bass clarinets at the beginning, middle and end. If you cannot separate the high percussion instruments and voices from the clarinets at 00:20, 21:40 and 51:45, try a different set of speakers.





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PAUL RIEDO, DALLAS WIND SYMPHONY

Pomp And Pipes

Reference Recordings

Featured format: CD

Got a big system? Really want to test it to destruction? Then you need a copy of *Pomp And Pipes*.

Featuring a huge pipe organ pitted against massed wind instruments, brass, and percussion, this CD defines the outer limits of dynamic extremes and frequency range. Awesome is a rather overworked adjective, but there's no other word to sum up the power and range of this remarkable disc.

Yet balances and perspectives are natural and unexaggerated. Bass is incredibly deep – even if you had a monster death wave-inducing subwoofer, this CD (or the two-disc vinyl version for that matter) would push it. It's bass you feel rather than hear, a disc to shake floors and rattle windows – just make sure the neighbours are out before you crank the volume! *JH*

Listen out for

The Vikings by Arthur Wills starts with quiet menacing brass and percussion, then the organ comes in and it's no turning back – shake rattle and roll time...



CHARLES MINGUS The Black Saint And The Sinner Lady

Impulse **Featured format:** CD

Frustrated at what he increasingly saw as the musical limitations of jazz in 1963, Charles Mingus (never Charlie, he hated it) wrote a ballet for dancers and a jazz band, with a musically notated score, albeit one that left plenty of room for improvisation. In doing so he created his most intricate, involving and affecting work. It's a fantastically rich and varied brew, with a full range of dynamics – ensemble horn parts give way to solo flute, classical-style piano (played by Mingus himself when the hired piano player couldn't understand the effect he was trying to achieve), flamenco guitar and a world of overlapping drum rhythms.

Mingus arranged alto, tenor and baritone saxophones in a V shape, with the tenor furthest from the mic in an attempt to balance out non-directional overtones and give the impression that there could be anything between two or five saxes playing at once. The resultant near-cacophony is a Mingus trademark. *DO*

Listen out for

The horn ensemble two minutes into Duet Solo Dancers with contrabass trombone, building into a densely overlapping conversation between alto, tenor and baritone saxes and muted trumpet.



NITIN SAWHNEY

Beyond Skin

Outcaste

Featured format: CD

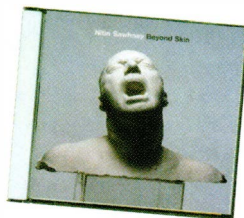
For his fourth solo album in 1999, multi-instrumentalist, composer and sometime scriptwriter Nitin Sawhney produced his most

seamless and perfectly realised blend of classical (both Western and Indian), drum and bass, jazz and hip-hop to date. Its gently undulating tone can work perfectly well as background beats, but the detail is there if you look for it, and its gently insistent plea for understanding, peace and tolerance has a cumulative effect, gently building up in alternating layers of reason and passion.

With an eclectic mix of styles and a veritable army of collaborators, Sawhney concocts a blend of images (musical and lyrical), moods and themes that warns, cajoles, reminds and instigates with music that excites both the head and the heart. *DO*

Listen out for

Devinder Vikyat Singh and Sushmita Ghosh's percussive vocals on Serpents build with drums, flute and electronic effects into a dizzying swirl of rhythmic and melodic interplay.



SPACEMONKEYZ VERSUS GORILLAZ

Laika Come Home

EMI

Featured format: CD

There's something deeply satisfying about hearing an already funky album made even funkier by judicious

dubification. Here, the Spacemonkeyz tangle with the Gorillaz on their splendid first album and shovel up more bass than any system can realistically cope with. Also, with the benefit of decent studio equipment, this manages to sound good while it's shaking your window panes free from their putty.

These are not plinky-plonky pretty audiophile sounds, but the sheer brute force of the bass-line will put a smile (or possibly a grimace) on your face. Play this at a decent lick though, and body parts loosen up, heads ache and you get neighbour complaints... from the next county. Not so much a remix album, more a weapon of mass destruction. *AS*

Listen out for

The heavy dub break 3:44 into 19/2000 has just about the deepest bass on CD, subsonic and almost painful. Your speakers will either lap it up or give it up.



SPARKLEHORSE

Good Morning Spider

Capitol

Featured format: CD

Mark Linkous's Sparklehorse project has two faces. One is noisy indie rockers with a hefty Neil Young influence, but it's the more

interesting moody and experimental pieces which hold greater sway on this album.

Written in the wake of his near-fatal collapse from a prescribed drugs overdose in 1996 which left him partially crippled, it's introspective, dark and fearful but never morbid. Quiet, slow, never hurried, his deeply personal stories of emotional conflict inhabit a parallel universe mid-way between waking and dreaming, with spacious arrangements that cry out for an open system to pick up the myriad lovingly placed details. Guitar, piano, strings and ambient electronics combine to produce a work that's poignant, sad, wondering and hopeful all at once. *DO*

Listen out for

The chorus of Saint Mary's delicate slivers of acoustic guitar, piano, cello and barely articulated vocals offer as poignant a picture of an analgesic-numbed near-death experience as you're likely to hear.





THE ROLLING STONES *Let It Bleed*

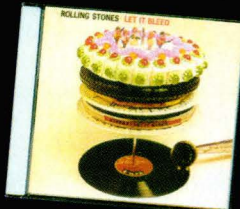
ABKCO **Featured format:** SACD

Everyone knows the Rolling Stones, or thinks they do, and this is the classic album from the band's most fertile late sixties country-meets-rock-via-the-medium-of-heroin period. Some of the Stones' finest moments are here – *Love In Vain*, *Midnight Rambler*, *Gimme Shelter*, *Country Honk* and that track that features strongly in *The Big Chill* and is so beloved by ad-men, *You Can't Always Get What You Want*. Better still, this new Super Audio CD hybrid remaster by audiophile record label ABKCO goes back to the original tapes to make a CD that sounds better than the original record and an SACD that's so good, only those who worked in the studio at the time heard a better sound.

Let It Bleed is the Stones album for people who don't like the Stones – and those that love them. It still appears disturbingly fresh and recent (unlike the band) despite being well into its 30s. Oh, just buy it... your CD/SACD player will be so-o-o pleased. *AS*

Listen out for

Midnight Rambler shifts up a gear after 2:15 as Jagger picks up a harmonica and the beat gains momentum. Can your system cope with the changes in rhythm?



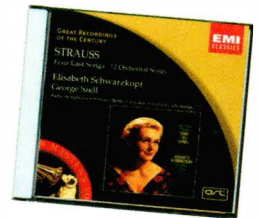
RICHARD STRAUSS

Four Last Songs

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, RSO Berlin/London SO, George Szell
EMI (566 908 2)

Featured format: CD

This recording, dating from the 1960s, is as much a standard recommendation now as it has ever been, even though Schwarzkopf has always had her detractors – but then what singer with an element of distinction hasn't? Musically, this is beautiful music beautifully performed, and it's also nice to hear some of Strauss's less well-known songs beside the familiar ones. From a technical point of view, it's arguable that the voice is just slightly too prominent (producer Walter Legge clearly wasn't trying to imitate a concert balance, which is fair enough, but perhaps loyalty to his wife took him half a pace too far), but the recording of the orchestra is very good throughout and a fitting match to Szell's noted skill in achieving orchestral sonorities. *RB*



Listen out for

The portrayal of stereo image depth is truly excellent, and the beginning of track three shows this up nicely as the opening motif moves up through the strings.

TAKEMITSU

Quotation Of Dreams

London Sinfonietta, Oliver Knussen (conductor), Paul Crossley, Peter Serkin (pianos)
DGG (453495-2)

Featured format: CD

A near-perfect introduction to contemporary classical music, *Quotation Of Dreams* consists of a series of relatively short, intricately scored pieces composed in the final decade of Takemitsu's life – he died in 1996. The music consists of episodic, swirling, dream-like fragments of sound, producing extraordinary colours and textures which are a constant surprise and delight. Although the music may sound rather enigmatic at first, and it's not exactly hummable, the musical language is in a direct line of descent from Debussy and Messiaen, with snatches of John Cage, but it is direct enough to quickly get under the skin. The disc is beautifully performed, and the recording is one of the best, with every detail audible in an easily identifiable acoustic context. *AG*



Listen out for

How Slow The Wind is an exquisite gem, an exotically scored miniature masterpiece which will test the resolving ability of any system.

JAMES TAYLOR

October Road

Columbia

Featured format: CD

You just can't go wrong with good old JT. Hugely likeable voice, lovely songs, lyrics that are intelligent, amusing and wry. And – perhaps most important of all given the magazine you're holding – impeccable production values. If you merely want to demonstrate to a sceptical friend what good sound and hi-fi are all about, you'll be hard pressed to do better than this.

On a basic level, the listenability of this album is off the scale. With the exception of the overly schmaltzy *Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas*, every track's a gem and it's doubtful if Taylor has never been in finer voice. Sound quality is superbly natural and unforced. So much so that this CD is guaranteed to make almost any system sound more expensive than it is. And it will make a good system sound a million dollars. *DV*



Listen out for

The unusual combination of synth bagpipes, penny whistle, French horn and massed female chorus on the melancholy Belfast To Boston. If the bagpipes sound real you've got a problem!

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Headz

Mo' Wax

Featured format: LP

Compilation albums make notoriously poor test discs. There are however, a few exceptions, and this triple vinyl set is a prime example of collections that buck the trend. This excellent selection of tracks from the early years of James Lavelle's Mo' Wax label brings together some of the most experimental tunes the broad world of hip-hop had to offer at the time. It veers from jazzy vibes to downbeat chillout to heavy beats without catching a breath.

It's the latter style of tracks that stand out from the test disc perspective. Tricky drumbeats are laid down and then messed up until only systems with perfect timing have a chance of conveying them as they were intended. Vinyl or CD, whatever your flavour of choice, you are in for a treat, as long as you are willing to search out this now-deleted gem. *SM*



Listen out for

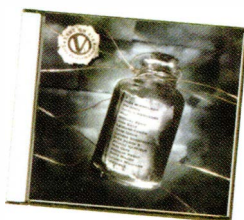
DJ Shadow's Lost And Found is the album's killer track. Thirty seconds in, the strident drumbeat of U2's Sunday Bloody Sunday never sounded so good.

VARIOUS ARTISTS**Rare On Air Vol One**

Mammoth

Featured format: CD

Public-service radio does exist in America, and some is truly excellent. This album is a collection of KRCW's *Morning Becomes Eclectic*



programme broadcast out of Santa Monica to most of Southern California.

Each track was recorded live, direct to a two-track DAT recorder and the musicians were playing together in one room and, aside from one track, there were no overdubs. So, you get to hear doors banging, bum notes, creaking chairs and the rest, but you also get some of the most exciting direct recordings of artists like Tori Amos, Beck, Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds and Natalie Merchant. Our favourite, though, is Evan Dando and Juliana Hatfield singing *My Drug Buddy* – two voices, one guitar, and nothing less than audiophile heaven! *AS*

Listen out for

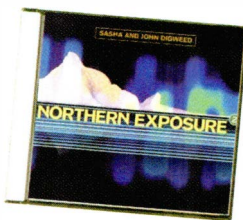
My Drug Buddy (all 2:54 of it). You want a three-dimensional acoustic? You want full dynamic range? You want acres of detail? You want all this and a track you can enjoy? Look no further!

VARIOUS ARTISTS**Sasha and John Digweed:****Northern Exposure series**

Ministry Of Sound

Featured format: CD

Sasha and Digweed have blazed the intelligent house/trance trail for over a decade. In 1997 they created the first



Northern Exposure – a series that took the superstar DJ mix album to new and blissful shores. Here's the difference: unlike the majority of mix compilations you can actually *listen* to these discs without being off your face on disco biscuits. A warm, pervasive pulse underscores layered and quietly euphoric electronic vistas – not bengin' or 'avin' it, just intelligent ebb and flow. Though the series wasn't a best seller and S&D subsequently switched to harder, more fashionably progressive territory, these three double albums (*NE 1* and *2* plus *NE Expeditions*) deserve their cult status as intelligent jewels amid the dumb, humdrum dross. *TB*

Listen out for

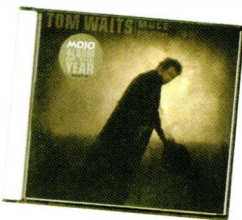
The mixing is as inspired as the track selection – listen how a track like Doi-Oing's Blue (NE 2, Disc 1) glides into the slipstream of Spooky's Little Bullet – a good hi-fi will unravel the layers and highlight where tracks begin and fade.

TOM WAITS**Mule Variations**

Anti/Epitaph

Featured format: CD

Although *Mule Variations* (released in 1998) does not stray too far from the epicentre of Tom Waits' musical



stomping grounds, it is a tour de force of volcanic music making which is at once raw and unpolished, often indulgent and occasionally obsessive (*What's He Building?*), though there are also tender, ironic ballads (*Pony, Georgia Lee, Take It With Me*). *Mule* is notable for an abrasive vocal style, a refreshing disdain for normal production values – endings for example can happen execution style mid-note – and an audacious and not always proportionate use of percussion to bludgeon the listener, rather than just underpin the rhythm. Business as usual in fact, but this disc trumps most of his recent output, with consistently excellent songwriting, and extraordinary sound quality to match. *AG*

Listen out for

Big In Japan, with its classic dustbin lid percussion accompaniment, will blow the cobwebs out of any system... but it only comes to life when played VERY, VERY LOUD!

BUGGE WESSELTOFT**Moving**

Jazzland

Featured format: LP

Bugge Wesseltoft's third album is, so far (another one's due very soon) his best yet. Some would call it jazz, others electro, but



whatever it is, it certainly ain't Miles, Mingus or Monk! The only stuff you'll find that's vaguely similar is Keith Jarrett in his funkier moments, but it sounds a whole lot more up to date than that. Most of it centres around keyboard-led grooves with a strong rhythmic drive provided by drums, double/electric bass and percussion, with many of the tracks sporting a tendency to start out quiet and build incrementally into a sonic maelstrom.

There are a couple of ballads, to use the term loosely, where Bugge shows his reflective side, but for the most part this is danceable music which also has enough going on to entertain the contemplative listener. *JK*

Listen out for

You know your system is working well if you can hear the percussion sounds – particularly the electronic shaker sound on Heim – travelling around the room QSound style.

**WILCO** Yankee Hotel Foxtrot

Nonesuch Featured format: CD

Released last year to a drizzle of critical acclaim, this wilfully muted album marked something of a departure for these generally quite jaunty alt.country rockers. Some called it Wilco's *Kid A*, but while there are similarities between this and Radiohead's 'difficult' fourth album – in places the music is injected with ambient warblings, the general mood is subdued and the melodic structure occasionally melts into something more atonal and freeform – overall the tone is less chilly, the textures and tunes much warmer.

For kindred spirits think *All Shook Down* era Replacements, The Church circa *Starfish*, Eels at their most laconic and caustic. This is rock that's both subtle and poignant, bleak yet beautiful – a stiff whisky washed down with a smooth, oaky red. Slothful, soulful Americana at its best (also available on 180g vinyl). *TB*

Listen out for

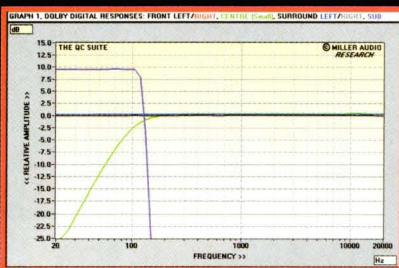
Hi-fi should clearly resolve background instruments brought into the mix, like the strings at 1:08 and slide guitar at 1:58 in Jesus, etc. And when the band clicks up a gear in a track like Pot Kettle Black your system should too, clearly defining guitar, bass, drums and cymbals instead of a splashy, homogenous mess.



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
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 ★

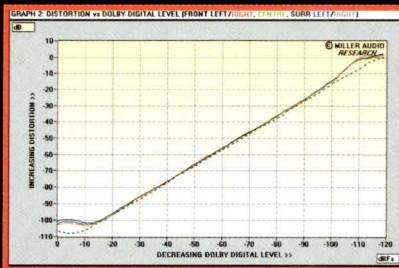


LAB TEST: DOLBY DIGITAL RESPONSES



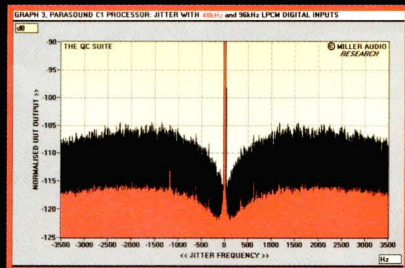
With the sub (purple) and centre channel (green) crossover frequencies set to 100Hz, there is some misalignment in their respective roll-offs. Nevertheless, channel balance and bass management is textbook in execution.

LAB TEST: DISTORTION V DD LEVEL



Distortion with Dolby bitstreams is very well matched across all front, centre and surround channels, and is <0.001% over the top 15dB of its dynamic range. LPCM stereo digital inputs (dotted line) enjoy lower distortion still.

LAB TEST: JITTER



Jitter clearly increases with higher sample-rate digital inputs (black is 96kHz, red is 48kHz) but its nature is noise-like rather than correlated. Hence the lack of traditional jitter 'peaks'. The subjective impact is some smearing rather than graininess.

Parasound AV amp system

Halo C1 processor **£5,000**

Halo A51 multichannel power amp **£3,500**

EXCLUSIVE *The processor features a natty video screen, but this combo's best asset is its sound*



What's the simplest way of conveying the myriad setup and configuration options available to a modern, THX Ultra 2-specified AV processor? Answer: benefit from the falling price of colour, 4:3 aspect ratio TFT displays and move the OSD (on-screen display) onto the front panel of the processor itself. Following in Levinson's pioneering footsteps, this is exactly the route chosen by Parasound for the top model in its new Halo AV product range. As a result, the C1 processor is simplicity itself to set up and also has the added 'wow' factor of movie replay, at least for cueing purposes, slap-dab in the centre of its fascia. The processor is THX Ultra 2-specified and has the capacity to decode all Dolby and DTS formats, save the more recent DTS 96/24.

Complementing this voluminous, though not heavy processor is the substantial A51 multichannel power amp, which can deliver well over its rated 250 watts per channel. Both single-ended and balanced inputs are provided, matching the balanced XLR outputs on the C1. Do bear in mind that, unlike Arcam's P7 or the EAD TheaterMaster 8300, the A51 only has enough power amps for standard five-channel Dolby and DTS decodes. As a result, additional amps, such as Parasound's two-channel A21, are required to flesh out the full 7.1-channel THX EX (or proprietary '7.5 Channel Enhanced Surround') outputs available from the C1.

KEY FEATURES

Who could fail but be intrigued by the five-inch colour TFT display that dominates the C1's gently curved fascia? Aside from its novelty, this display is very useful for projector-based

home theatre installations where the screen is not always in use. Adjustments to the system set-up, for example, can be effected by navigating the C1's own on-screen display before the lights are dimmed and viewing begins in earnest. Parasound provides a master remote with its own LCD display and an appropriately named 'Sidekick' handset with a few buttons for everyday use. Both remotes are based on the Theater Master MX-700 and can be re-programmed using the MX-Editor software available from Parasound's website.

Even without the remote control, the C1's OSD can be navigated using the 'menu' button, while the rotary encoder (volume) control scrolls across the selected page. Set-up menus for audio, speaker, source, display, trigger and THX are comprehensive, but logical. Parasound even includes a microphone and 25ft of cable for autocalibrating both speaker level and distance, a procedure that takes some five minutes, provided it's not interrupted by movement or extraneous noise in the room.

Parasound's own Halo set-up software is also available from the Web site (www.parasound.com/halo) and lets you store entire system configurations on your PC. Not only does this cover all functionality on the C1 itself, but it also allows you to re-program certain default messages such as Turning On or Shutting Down. In the event of a disaster, such as the C1 being 're-programmed' by a child, having a backup configuration file could be invaluable.

Otherwise, the C1 offers a multitude of both single-ended and balanced inputs; the latter with a bypass option in stereo mode, the former with a two-channel bypass in 7.1 channel mode. The 7.5 Channel Enhanced Surround includes its 7.1 channel outputs, combined with two further subwoofer channels and two outputs that contain a programmable mix of signals from other sources. There's also a Stereo96 mode that increases the sample rate of the analogue-to-digital converters (ADCs) from 48kHz to 96kHz, while disabling digital tone and bass management features. Although analogue inputs are still routed via the ADCs then re-converted via 24-bit/96kHz DACs, this is as close to a pure audio mode as you'll get.

TECHNOLOGY

Although Parasound is a US-based firm, the C1 processor is built in Finland using Flextronics' decoder technology. Flextronics has developed its own Dolby and DTS decoder software that runs on a Motorola platform – a solution used with success in home-grown products such as the AV2 from Naim. There are many individual touches, however. Bass management, automatically invoked when some speakers are configured as 'small' or 'no', is achieved with a mix of DSP from the Motorola Symphony processor and piggy-back analogue circuitry.

This is Parasound's method of avoiding distortion when bass is diverted from a multitude of 'small' speakers to the sub or

"The processor has the added 'wow' factor of movie replay in the centre of its fascia."

ON-SCREEN MENU 1



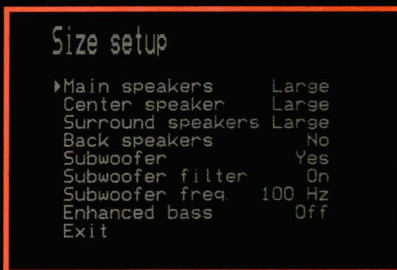
Parasound's TFT display can superimpose its OSD menu onto the video input and display the combination on its front panel. The background clip here is from *The Italian Job*.

ON-SCREEN MENU 2



Turn the superimpose feature off and the OSD reveals itself as a simple text-based operation. Hit the Menu button to skip down the list and use the Volume knob to cycle through the various options.

ON-SCREEN MENU 3



Speaker set-up is very simple. Just set the speaker size(s) to Large, Small or No, and the bass management/subwoofer filters in 10Hz increments from 40Hz to 140Hz.

front channels, while reducing the phase anomalies that can occur when these same channels have different delay times. It's interesting that some of the best-sounding processors, including the EAD reviewed last month, accomplish bass management in the analogue rather than digital domain. The reverse is almost always true, I'm bound to add.

Robust engineering rather than radical technology sees the THX Ultra 2-specified A51 power amplifier through the day. The amp uses a mixture of FET input amps with high-current, bi-polar output devices on five separate power amp modules. Each of these is richly biased to eliminate crossover distortions at low signal levels. But even with the copious heatsinking that flanks the sides and rear of its casework, the A51 does run fairly warm in practice. The grabhandles at the rear of this potentially vicious enclosure are a godsend!

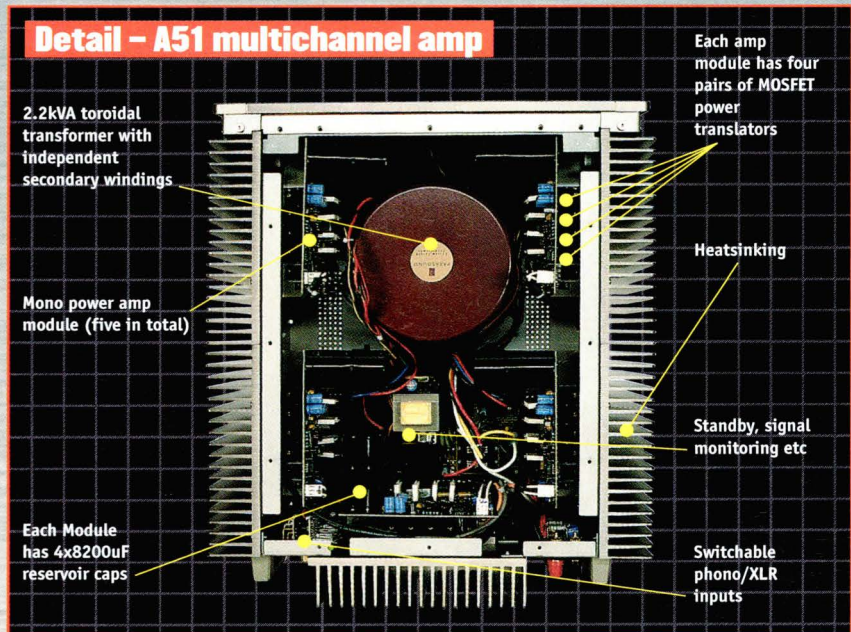
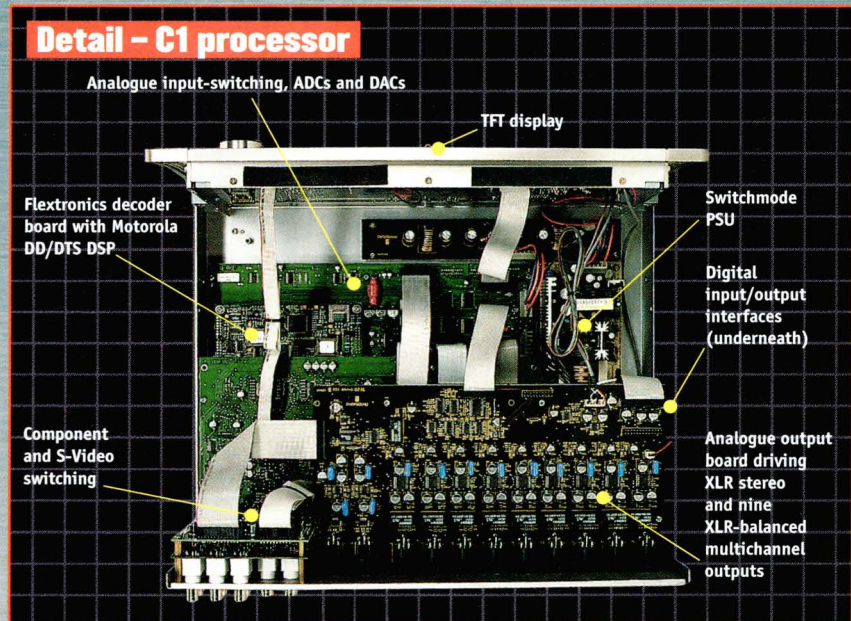
PERFORMANCE

There is a roughness or gruffness about the Parasound combo's presentation that lends it a very agreeable, no-nonsense style with action and sci-fi movies, even if it can be slightly heavy-handed with multichannel DVD-A. The recent Dvorak *Slavonic Dances* release certainly boasted a gravitas and meatiness with Parasound's duo at the helm, even if this was traded for some loss in transparency.

But listen to the SuperBit version of *The Fifth Element*, a film littered with surround effects, and the C1/A51's forte is clear. Chapters such as *On a Ledge* sound as spacious as the images are graphic and expansive. The foot-tapping soundtrack, fills the room, while the rasp of the hover vehicle's exhaust rips from the front through to the surround speakers. This is a powerful but controlled sound that comes alive with big, full-range loudspeakers such as the B&W 802/804's used in the test room.

I'm usually cautious about recommending any additional DSP on top of a 'straight' Dolby or DTS decode, but Parasound's reverb is worth exploring. The 'Dry' setting is a little too, well, dry, and the sound from each channel tends to hang around its respective speaker. Reverb settings of '1' and even '2' launch both 5.1 channel and 6.1 channel mixes out into the room without any obvious hollowness or echo. A film like *Gattaca*, which has lots of scenes recorded in hard, reverberant acoustics, is revealed with what seems to be a plausible ambience – reflective, but not cavernous.

The C1 also makes a very good fist of Dolby PLII (Movie mode) with the optical digital output of a Sky Plus box where, once again, the rich and fulsome sound of the combination successfully masks any lack of subtle detail. High treble detail might be a little 'sweetened', but there's no shortage of atmosphere, bringing a real chill to films like *The Untold*, where the ambient sound of wind in the trees and haunting soundtrack spills into the room from front and rear. This exceptional PLII matrix



has a strong and convincing delivery from the surrounds that successfully bridges the gap into the middle of the room. Crucially, there's no sense of multichannel music or film soundtracks hanging around each speaker.

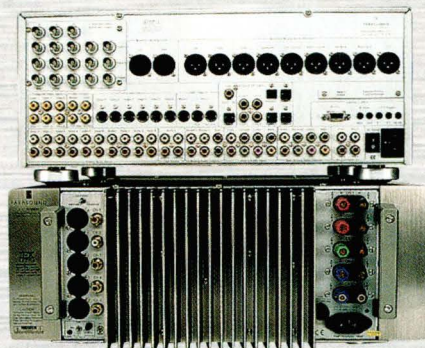
In common with the best processor/amplifier combinations – including the exceptional

£10,950 EAD system reviewed last month – the Parasound duet allows the most substantial loudspeakers to melt from the scene. On balance, the C1/A51 might have the bigger sound, but it's arguably slightly less 'musical' (though still top league) with straight CD or DVD-A material. All of which makes it potent AV hardware, big-hearted but never aggressive in its delivery and a perfect solution for that big-screen home cinema experience.

VERDICT

Faced with row of lookalike AV processors, it's the one with the movie playing on its fascia that will get noticed! But once your attention is grabbed, rest assured that the performance of the C1 and A51 is as flexible and impressive as you could hope for.

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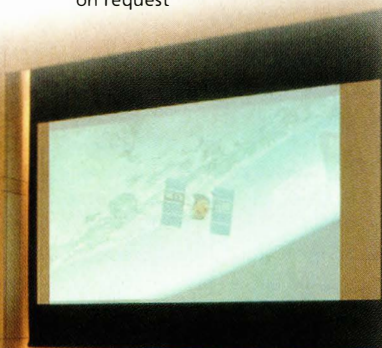
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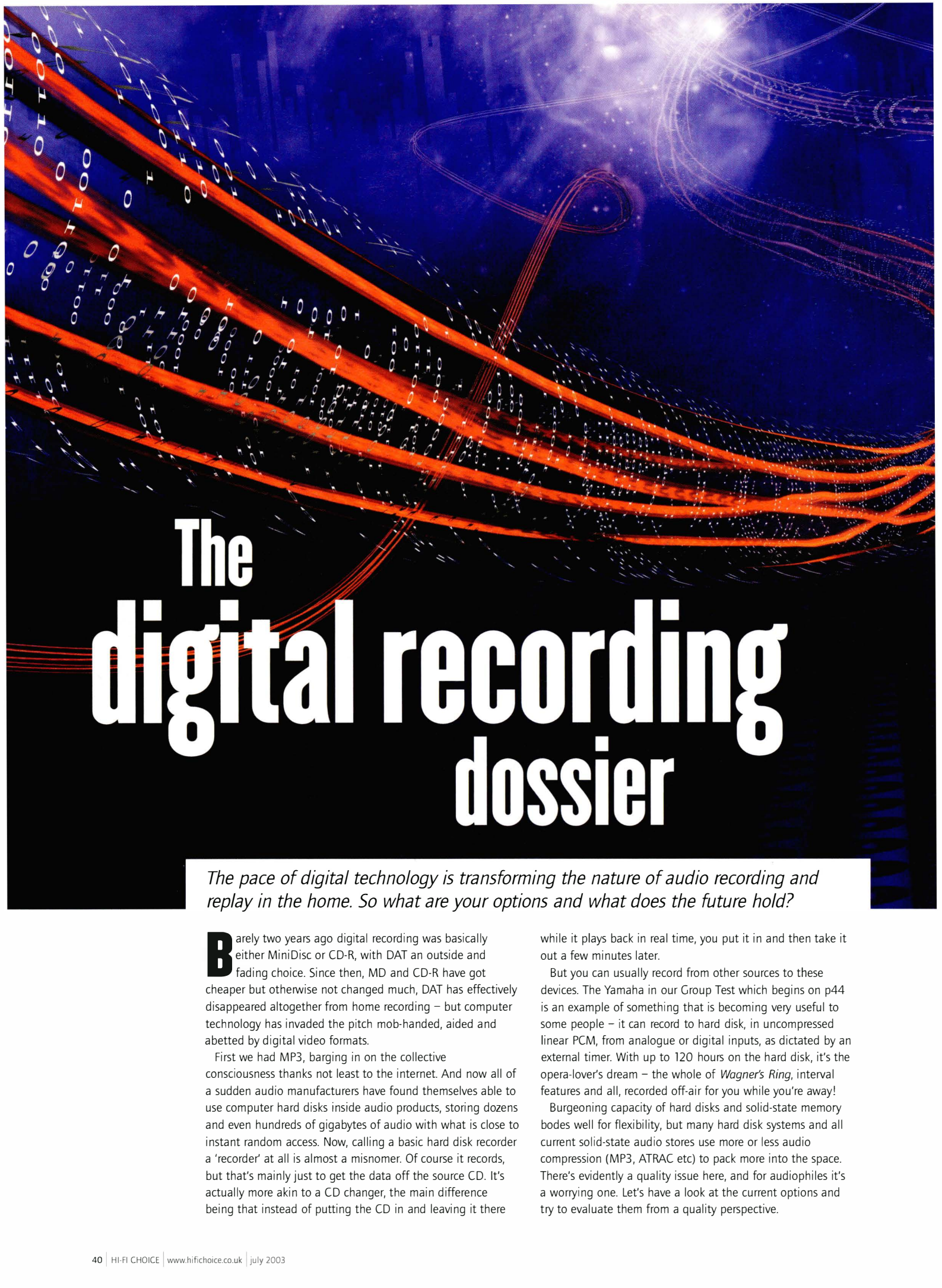
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The digital recording dossier

The pace of digital technology is transforming the nature of audio recording and replay in the home. So what are your options and what does the future hold?

Barely two years ago digital recording was basically either MiniDisc or CD-R, with DAT an outside and fading choice. Since then, MD and CD-R have got cheaper but otherwise not changed much, DAT has effectively disappeared altogether from home recording – but computer technology has invaded the pitch mob-handed, aided and abetted by digital video formats.

First we had MP3, barging in on the collective consciousness thanks not least to the internet. And now all of a sudden audio manufacturers have found themselves able to use computer hard disks inside audio products, storing dozens and even hundreds of gigabytes of audio with what is close to instant random access. Now, calling a basic hard disk recorder a 'recorder' at all is almost a misnomer. Of course it records, but that's mainly just to get the data off the source CD. It's actually more akin to a CD changer, the main difference being that instead of putting the CD in and leaving it there

while it plays back in real time, you put it in and then take it out a few minutes later.

But you can usually record from other sources to these devices. The Yamaha in our Group Test which begins on p44 is an example of something that is becoming very useful to some people – it can record to hard disk, in uncompressed linear PCM, from analogue or digital inputs, as dictated by an external timer. With up to 120 hours on the hard disk, it's the opera-lover's dream – the whole of *Wagner's Ring*, interval features and all, recorded off-air for you while you're away!

Burgeoning capacity of hard disks and solid-state memory bodes well for flexibility, but many hard disk systems and all current solid-state audio stores use more or less audio compression (MP3, ATRAC etc) to pack more into the space. There's evidently a quality issue here, and for audiophiles it's a worrying one. Let's have a look at the current options and try to evaluate them from a quality perspective.

SOMETHING OLD

First, the two familiar ones – CD-R and MiniDisc. A well-rehearsed compromise here between the quality of CD-R (good recorders will make bit-perfect copies) and the flexibility of MD. MD isn't all bad – there are commercial CDs out there that have been mastered on MD (!) and while they might not be winning prizes they don't sound too disgusting. But it can be tripped up and it's not the ultimate anything. Then again, MD portables are great little devices and if you want a home digital recorder just for the odd bit of radio time-shifting or for supporting your portable and making compilations to take out and about, MD is a good choice. However, only the format's inventor Sony is now actively marketing new full-size decks – Sony's latest model is imminent but didn't arrive in time to be featured this issue.

If your recording needs only really include copying whole CDs, or at worst whole tracks from CDs, CD-R is perfectly

viable. It only becomes a pain when you want to record from analogue sources, be they LP or radio. Automatic track marking is unreliable, false starts can't easily be erased (CD-RW addresses that, but the discs are incompatible with many players) and you can't do any editing 'after the fact'. MD gets round all of those – but ironically the hiss that accompanies many analogue sources is a great way to trip up ATRAC, MD's audio compression system (and, incidentally, MP3).

SOMETHING NEW

Then there's recordable DVD. Any use for music? Not really, to date. Existing DVD recorders of the various flavours all record stereo sound only, and mostly in compressed Dolby Digital 2.0 at that (a couple of machines from Panasonic will record 'straight' stereo, but that's about it), and since the blanks cost more than CD-Rs and there's no extra flexibility added, why bother? Now when standalone DVD recorders start



DIGITAL RECORDING: BYTES, BITS AND PIECES

BIT-PERFECT COPIES

A digital copy is either bit-perfect or not, no ifs or buts, and any kind of processing at all makes it not. Can bit-perfect copies sound different, and if so why and under what conditions? The important point is that they only become different at the stage of final conversion to analogue. Hard disk recorders often have higher levels of jitter than CD players, so can be expected to sound different – worse, generally. But make a digital copy, bit-perfect, of the output from a hard disk recorder to CD and play it on a CD player with low jitter, and you've circumvented the problem entirely. Use a good DAC with high jitter rejection (such as the excellent Chord DAC 64 used throughout these tests) and the differences vanish – assuming you've actually got a digital output to play with, of course.

That means, for instance, that although PCs tend to be terrible for jitter, CDs created on them needn't be. The problem for the domestic user is establishing whether copies really are bit-perfect, and there's no trivial way of doing this (it's easy on a PC). Current CD recorders from Philips and Pioneer generally make bit-perfect copies from 44.1kHz sources, and most twin decks make bit-perfect 'clones'.

RECORDING FROM ANALOGUE

It's become evident that the analogue *inputs* of digital recorders, while certainly not all equal, are often better than the outputs. At least two of the recorders in this group gave basic measured noise and distortion performance that, astonishingly, better that of a famous and much respected £5,000 professional ADC – sonic

results are pretty good too. If you do a lot of archiving of analogue sources this will of course matter to you, and it's worth mentioning that Philips, Pioneer and Yamaha are particularly reliable for decent inputs. But perhaps even more important, make sure your replay gear (LP, cassette, whatever) is in tip-top shape. You may not have the time, energy or opportunity to do the transfer again!

ON THE MOVE

Music on the move has become an important part of many people's lives. Portable CD has come on but will obviously remain bulky. MD is great for the application, but solid-state probably has the most potential in the long run. It's already sensibly priced and capacities will continue to rise, and the ability to load up a memory card rapidly in a PC or sound server is probably the clincher. Portable hard disk players may offer higher capacity at present, but the lack of moving parts in a solid state player is surely a big advantage.

THE FUTURE – HOW WILL WE BUY MUSIC?

Many envisage a future in which we download all our music on a broadband connection, maybe even in real time as we play it. That may yet come to pass, but there's a lot to be said for buying a real, physical disc with real printed notes. Okay, so you then load the contents of the disc on a sound server of some sort, but the point is that you have the physical disc as back-up and the printed notes which you can read without needing to sit at a screen. In the end, we may find that both have a place.

⊖ recording 5.1 audio, especially in uncompressed form...

The obvious growth area at the moment, as evidenced by four out of the seven machines in the following group test, is hard disk recorders. Take a cheap commodity hard disk – about £1 per gigabyte (GB) retail, about the same as decent branded CD-Rs – put some suitable logic round it, bung it in a box with audio inputs and outputs, and you've got a potentially very handy machine. What manufacturers haven't all quite decided on yet is what best to do with such a device. Use it as a replacement for a CD jukebox? Tempting, and with a standard 80GB disk equating to around 100 CDs even with uncompressed audio it's clear that capacity isn't a problem.

Even so, many such jukeboxes use some form of compression (optionally or as standard), so you can get over 1,000 hours of music on there – that's if you can be bothered to load it all! And that sort of data reduction does nothing for sound quality. What's more, many jukeboxes haven't by any means cracked the nut of ergonomics satisfactorily. That'll

come for sure, but in the meantime a plethora of messy, half-baked user interfaces are likely to mean plenty of users will simply give up in frustration.

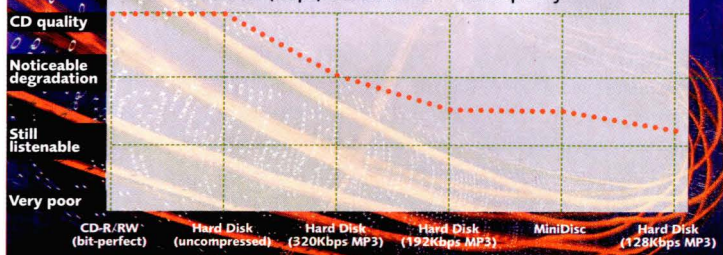
SOMETHING BORROWED

With almost every household now owning a PC, is that a viable centre for audio? With two provisos, yes it is. The first is simple – PCs almost invariably have a noisy fan, in addition to the noisy hard disk(s), and who wants that in their ear while trying to listen with rapt attention? Second, you have to be more than a little wary of sound quality issues. It's obvious that a £25 sound card is not going to have the same sort of attention to sonic detail that will grace a good CD player. However, a growing number of sound cards have digital audio inputs and outputs, making quality independent (in principle) of the card and indeed the PC. On the other hand, some of these automatically convert the sample rate of everything, perhaps not very carefully, introducing another variable we don't want. And latest versions of Windows have a tendency to store all audio in compressed format, given half a chance.

If you're going to use a PC you have to take great care that the bits that go in can come out absolutely intact, and unfortunately that means scouring websites and often reading between the lines a bit. But get that sorted and the PC becomes a fantastically flexible audio centre. Rip audio from CDs, import digital data from any source, rearrange and edit tracks at will, burn new CDs (even DVDs in surround, for surprisingly little money these days), play direct from hard disk, create MP3 files for portable players – the possibilities really are endless. For \$69 you can download Cool Edit 2000, which is one of the most flexible editors around, and you'll be doing full studio post-production jobs to a very high standard on a machine which, let's face it, costs less than many of the 'mid-price' CD players we recommend in these pages.

SOUND QUALITY

This graph is an approximate comparison of the 'recording' quality of various digital storage media. Compression formats like MP3 enable more data to be stored in a given space, but the lower the bit-rate (Kbps) the worse the sound quality.



O & A

But you've got to be a bit of a techie to want to bother with all that. What would be nicer, perhaps, is an audio-dedicated machine that guarantees not to convert sample rates, compress without warning, lose beginnings of tracks and play all the tricks that computer audio experimenters soon learn to love. It's arguable that we've got one of the very first in the Group Test beginning overleaf – the Yamaha CD/HD recorder, a dedicated audio device that really does seem to care about both quality and convenience. Let's hope that other manufacturers pick up that particular ball and run with it, bringing even better features and ease of use.

Perception Digital, another participant in the test, shows an alternative strategy, one of less interest from a purely sound quality point of view but potentially powerful, making the 'jukebox' an MP3 server for one or more portable devices too, and at the same time employing a powerful database to identify and label discs. Actually that CDDDB database, which aims to catalogue all CDs with title, track and artist details (even cover art) seems like a pretty handy invention all-round. PD's idea of preloading it on the hard disk is a good one, though you'll still have to dial up from time to time for updates. But it could solve the problem that all serious record collectors face regularly – what have I done with X? Where is it? That alone may attract many people to hard disk solutions.

Finally, the Imerge SoundServer and similar devices show the way forward for those fortunate enough to be able to consider the 'smart house' approach (hardly a cheap option from any point of view). Will we eventually have all our audio on one central hard disk? Frankly, why not? If it's a big one we won't need to compress anything, and consider this: the simplest cabling solution is a single digital cable, terminating in a DAC in each room. That could be quite a cheap model – or it could be something like Chord's £1,900 DAC 64. Now do you really have a problem with the sound server idea? ☺

Imerge is a prime mover in the development of hard disk audio applications for multi-room installations. As well as marketing its own hard disk SoundServers (the latest is reviewed on p46), the company licenses its hardware and software kits to other manufacturers, including Marantz and Naim. Imerge brand manager Chris Janes, gives us his angle on the future.

HFC: Do you see this as the future for all home audio?
CJ: We can safely predict that hard disk recorders, in various forms, will be appearing in more home audio systems. Currently, the price and complexity of installation for a multi-room audio solution means that the product sells primarily to an 'upmarket' consumer. In time however the cost of the core technology will fall and new audio distribution technologies such as home networks and Wi-Fi (wireless transfer) will lead to a broader audience.

Do you see downloading of music, as well as CDDDB-type data, as an important part of music in the home?
*Download*ing of music from the internet is with us now and it is difficult to see how it will not become more commonplace. I believe it is only a matter of time before the copyright owners work out a reliable way of charging for a downloading service and then this will become the 'normal' way that many people will buy their music.

Downloading from a CDDDB (Compact Disc Data Base) site is a different matter. The current Imerge SoundServer range (S2000 and M1000), dial in to a dedicated Imerge portal. As well as providing album, artist, track and cover art information we see this site as being able to deliver additional online 'entertainment' content in the future. This could include music purchase, news, reviews and more, all on a convenient interface away from your PC.

How do wireless options compare to wiring a house?
Wiring a house can be expensive, but an increasing number of new homes are 'pre-wired' for multi-room audio/video systems – if the wiring is done at this stage, then frankly, it is almost free. But most people don't move into new houses, so the answer could be a 'wireless network', which allows computers and devices to connect to each other without wires. The digital data is 'broadcast' from one unit to another like two-way radio stations.

Imerge can do this with music. The NP200 is a mini stereo receiver, which can be 'connected' to an S2000 via a 'wireless network'. A number of NP200's can be situated in different rooms of your house and used to both listen to and completely control the S2000 in the main system.

Portable devices such as in-car hard disk units exist now, though currently media is loaded by taking the HDD from your PC or by recording media in-car. Wireless 'beaming' of media is the obvious next step and could be possible by incorporating current wireless technology, though present problems with interference will need to be overcome.

CD-R/ RW BLANK MEDIA

Not all blank media are created equal. Unfortunately things change so fast in terms of who makes discs for which brand, not to mention the variables of which media work best in which recorders and players, that it's hard to make definitive recommendations. In general, look for respected brand names such as TDK, Maxell, JVC and Verbatim. 74-minute CD-Rs, now getting rare, have slightly better data security than 80-minute discs, and if that's an issue for you, remember that most finger damage to CDs occurs near the edge – so just don't fill 'em right up. CD-Rs are now so cheap (as little as 50p each for brand-name audio discs in quantities of ten) that it's worth finding a brand that sounds right with your equipment and buying a batch of them. Here are some general recommendations based on our recent listening tests:

BEST FOR SOUND

TDK CD-R Audio Pro
 £3.99 each

BEST FOR VALUE

JVC CD-RA 74
 £4.99 (10 pack)

BEST REWRITABLE

Maxell XL-II 74 RW
 £1.40 each

BEST FOR 80-MINUTE RECORDING

TDK CD-RXG80
 £7.99 (10 pack)



REVIEWS – Richard Black

DIGITAL RECORDERS

Digital audio recording technology is moving fast. So which format is right for you?

ON TEST



IMERGE S2000-80 SOUNDSEVER
£1,599



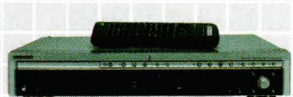
NAD C660 TWIN-DECK CD RECORDER
£500



PERCEPTION DIGITAL PD-430
HARD DISK JUKEBOX
£350



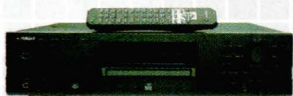
PIONEER PDR-609 CD RECORDER
£270



SONY HAR-D1000 HARD DISK JUKEBOX
£600



SONY RCD-W3 TWIN-DECK CD RECORDER
£250



YAMAHA CDR-HD1300
CD-R/HARD DISK RECORDER
£600

The state of digital recording today is in a state of flux, to say the least. CD recorders, MiniDisc recorders (of which there are still a few about, though we saw none for this group), hard disc recorders, MP3 recorders – not to mention DAT, which still clings on tenaciously in the semi-pro market and can be had for around the £500 mark. So which is right for you? The answer to that obviously depends greatly on your application, your budget and on the equipment you already own.

It's obvious to even the most cursory glance that this group is to some extent comparing apples and oranges. A straightforward single-deck CD recorder is not aiming, even remotely, at the same kind of application as a dedicated music server with multiple independent outputs. But between those two extremes is a continuum of sorts, taking in CD twin decks and hard disk recorders of various kinds.

So you have to ask yourself: what exactly do I want a digital recorder for? If it's primarily to copy CDs to play in the car or to make compilations, for example, the answer is not the same as if it's for recording off-air. But hang on a moment. If you do a lot of CD copying for portable applications, are you convinced that CD is the right medium? Sure, it was, until very recently, the obvious one, but now there are solid state and hard disc portable and in-car devices, and while that implies a quality hit next to CD, does it

really matter to you in that context? Maybe a hard disk recorder that can also encode MP3 tracks and download them to memory cards is a better bet?

Again, if you find yourself making copies of favourite discs so you don't have to hunt for them all over the house, maybe the better answer is to bite the bullet and get a multi-room server. It's currently an expensive option, but before long there will be cheaper models and the hardware to connect them to remote amps and wireless speakers. Apart from giving specific insights into current models, we hope the following reviews will provide food for thought on the way that a very fast-moving market may be heading. ☐

EQUIPMENT USED

SOURCE COMPONENTS

Chord DAC 64
Meridian 206 CD player
Townshend Rock turntable/Rega RB250 arm/Denon DL304 cartridge

AMPLIFIERS

Aura preamp
EAR 509 power amps (mono)

LOUDSPEAKERS

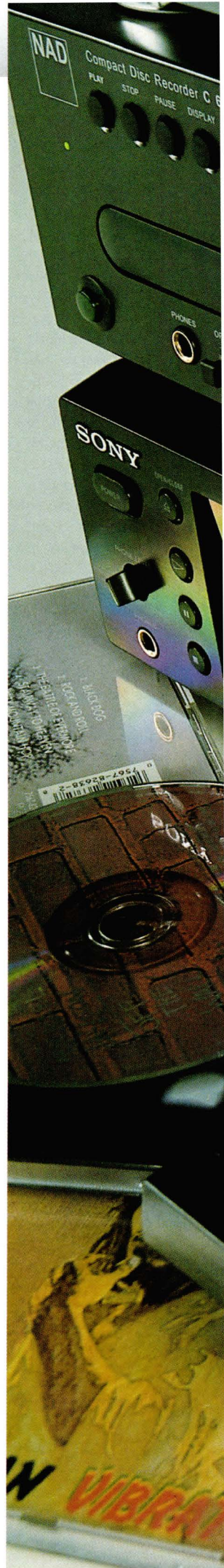
Quad ESL63 speakers

CABLES

Kimber and Straight Wire

MUSIC USED

Beethoven *9th Symphony*
(Philharmonia/Klemperer)
Sorabji *1st Organ Symphony* (Bowyer)
Miles Davis *Kind Of Blue*
Pink Floyd *The Wall*
Donald Fagen *Kamakiriad*





POWER

PUSH TO OPEN

MP3

CD TRACK TIME
0802:35

OPEN/CLOSE
CD SYNC
DUBBING
SPEED
OPEN/CLOSE
INPUT
RECORD
FINALIZE
ERASE
AUTO MANUAL

PLAY
STOP
PAUSE
DISPLAY

SKIP/SCAN

compact disc
Digital Audio
Recordable
Rewritable

CD/CD-R/CD-RW
1:50:08 OPEN

TDK
CD-R XG
FOR AUDIO

80 min.
RETIKX
DIGITAL AUDIO
RECORDABLE
REWRITABLE

OPEN/CLOSE

REC
REC LEVEL

CD-R/CD-RW

ELECTRIC



£1,599 ☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.imerge.co.uk

IMERGE S2000-80 HARD DISK SOUNDSERVER

The latest music server from a prime mover in hard disk-based multiroom audio

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: You can control the device from the front panel, but that's not the point. Apart from recording, most users will always control the unit from elsewhere via a suitably programmed multiroom installation with its own 'look and feel'.

CONNECTIONS: Enough connections for you? The audio inputs don't work yet, but that still leaves the three independent outputs, connections for TV and PC monitors, Ethernet, modem and USB and data connectors for use with multiroom controllers – even with PDAs and LANs.

This product's most distinguishing feature is that it's the only single box in this test that can play three separate tracks to three separate outputs. So it's immediately clear that it's not aimed at the classic audiophile who listens solely in one room. In fact, it's one of a new but growing breed of audio products designed expressly for multiroom installations.

It remains true that if you simply want the cheapest, simplest means of playing music in several rooms you'll just buy a separate mini-system for each. That's fine until you and others in the house want to play the same disc in two rooms, or you lose track of where your CDs are. What's more, it lacks a little in 21st-century grace and style. It's more attractive to have a central bank of recordings that plays out, via installed wiring (or even such futuristic means as a Wireless Local Area Network), to any room on demand, the equipment in each room being as simple as a controller and some speakers.

Imerge has gone straight for that market. Inside this classy and well-made case is much the same gubbins as in any hard disk jukebox – a CD drive and a hard disk – but the control part and connections are far more sophisticated. There's even an internal modem, which is handy as it means the S2000-80 can connect to the internet without needing a PC. Why do that? In order to look up CD tracks on the 'CDDB' database and download details from it, so that they can be fully labelled on the hard disk with next to no user effort.

This means you get track names, not numbers, on the front panel display, and likewise on the remote control panels in each connected room; and on the TV, since there is an S-Video

VERDICT

RECORDING	★★★★☆
PLAYBACK	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆

A vastly capable and extremely flexible machine with a couple of minor operating quirks, which can, however, be ironed out by suitable choice of control strategy on installation. Good sound and build, and really makes a case for the 'smart house'.

CHECKLIST

BIT-PERFECT COPIES	✓
DIGITAL RECORD LEVEL CONTROL	✗
HIGH-SPEED COPYING	✓
CD TEXT	✓
DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓

output; and on your PC, if you want to connect it (via USB). One thing you can't do yet is record from the digital and analogue inputs – these are "to be supported in a future software version".

Operation from the supplied remote or front panel isn't always intuitive, but bear in mind that for playback, control will normally be via the multiroom controller, so Imerge's direct controls become irrelevant. Recording is simple enough once you get used to it. There are four quality levels – uncompressed, 320Kbps, 192Kbps variable and 128Kbps – offering between 120 and 1,300 hours of music from this 80Gb hard drive. For initial load-up, dealers may offer a bulk-loading service.

The digital output mirrors analogue Output 1, so most often you'll be listening via analogue outputs. No problem there: sound is good and solid, with fine detail and some particularly commendable bass depth and scale. Think of a good £300 CD player as a reference – no shame in that (hey, you've got three of them and a bunch of extra functions here!).

That's uncompressed. With compression, quality drops a little, but 320Kbps sounds decent and the variable 192Kbps rate is acceptable for moderate-level background listening. Measured performance in all modes is good, with notably low jitter. In all but the finest multiroom systems, speakers are liable to be as much of a limitation as either of those compression rates.

This is a very versatile, fine-sounding unit that makes a good case for a new take on audio in the home. Considering the number of ways it can be integrated with other gear, its flexibility is near-endless and it's thoroughly thought-out and well made to boot. 🗣️



£500 ☎ 01908 319360 🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

NAD C660 TWIN-DECK CD RECORDER

Most twin-deck recorders sacrifice sound quality for CD-to-CD convenience. Not this one...

At more than twice the price of the Sony twin deck also included in this group, NAD needs a couple of tricks up its sleeve. Reading the publicity for this deck, you'll soon find that one of those is the ability to play MP3 CD-ROM discs. The other is claimed to be high-sound quality. The irony is rather obvious: on the one hand, plentiful claims for high performance; on the other, the ability to play for up to 20 hours (per deck) in what is at best 'near-CD' quality and at worst quite unfortunate.

Still, when and where might one want 20 hours of uninterrupted music? Arguably only in the background, so perhaps it's best in the present context to regard the MP3 side as largely a red herring. True, NAD does point out that its MP3 decoder is a high-quality one, but by and large, decoder performance is fixed by the specification anyway, differences being at the encoding end.

NAD has equipped this deck with quadruple-speed copying from deck to deck, including CD Text information. As usual with such devices, that's by far the easiest way to copy and it results in bit-perfect copies that will generally sound very close to the original. A less common feature is that each deck has its own audio outputs (yes, digital too) and both can be played simultaneously, giving rise to all sorts of possibilities – you can also record from an external source, while playing a disc on the other deck. Both decks will even play HDCD discs, unusual for a machine such as this.

The full set of CD-RW features is supported, including erasing the last track and unfinalising discs. Recording from external sources is a little less flexible than on the best single decks;

VERDICT	
RECORDING	★★★★☆
PLAYBACK	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆

A neat combination of twin-deck convenience, complete with high-speed copying, and sound quality more often associated with single decks. Independent operation of the decks gives useful extra flexibility and HDCD replay is another plus.


CHECKLIST	
BIT-PERFECT COPIES (INTERNAL ONLY)	✓
DIGITAL RECORD LEVEL CONTROL	✓
HIGH-SPEED COPYING	✓
CD TEXT	✓
DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓

for instance, having no adjustable threshold for automatic track marking. But this is a well-featured deck, let down only by its small and indifferent level metering. Digital record level is adjustable over a small range which works well.

Sound is on the whole good. On the replay front and including bit-perfect dubs made internally (stick to single speed for lowest jitter – the review sample also seemed rather jumpy at high speeds with a few discs), there's not quite as much detail in evidence as the best single decks can reveal. In some particularly revealing classical recordings there was less stereo image depth than we've heard elsewhere, but there's an excellent tonal balance between the registers, from well-defined bass to open and very clear treble. Nice decay on percussive sounds too.

Via the digital input there's a slight veiling and a degree of vagueness about images. Investigation showed that the sample-rate converter (which accepts inputs up to 96kHz) is permanently in the path, and though its distortion performance is exemplary it appears to add some jitter.

On the other hand, analogue inputs are very good, among the best we've encountered, with very low distortions of all kinds and particularly clear, open and informative sound, lacking little or nothing in the life and excitement of the original.

This deck seems to offer an attractive combination of user convenience and genuinely high sound quality. And while it might not quite outperform the best single-deck recorder and player you could assemble for the money, it does add some extra features and is neater too. 

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: You'll need the remote for controlling the digital record level and replay programming, but generally this is an easy deck to operate. Note the thoughtful optical input on the front, which enables you to connect quickly to portable players.

CONNECTIONS: Plenty of sockets! Normally, whichever deck is playing gets routed to both outputs, but separate operation is possible. Inputs can be monitored via the line outputs, but not through the headphone socket.

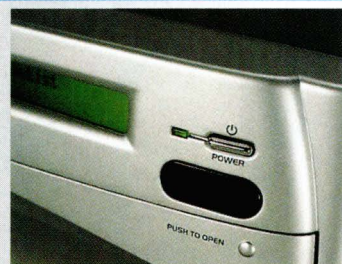


£350 ☎ 020 7940 2200 🌐 www.perceptiondigital.com

PERCEPTION DIGITAL PD-430 HARD DISK AUDIO JUKEBOX

Tacky looks aside, this hard disk audio player/recorder is surprisingly good for the money

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: The front panel buttons are usable, but not easily. The remote is better with its informative display, but some functions are still hard to find. Little things annoy, like the way the 'Play' and 'Stop' buttons don't work in certain modes.

CONNECTIONS: Not much going on, and the digital output gave distorted sound on the review sample. Don't rely overmuch on that analogue input – sound is a bit rough and you can't adjust level. USB connection to a PC allows easier operation and online updating of the CDDB database.

Perception Digital's website lists a range of portable MP3 players in addition to this recorder (and a version of it with a CD-RW drive), which gives you some idea where the company is coming from. In fact, this unit interfaces rather nicely with an MP3-based system, with a USB socket to allow high-speed downloading of MP3 files from a PC and a SmartMedia socket so you can load up memory cards from the PD-430's contents. Neither of those connections works in reverse, by the way.

But from a hi-fi perspective, this is principally a hard disk-based jukebox that can store vast amounts of digital music, together with information such as track names, artists and so on, the stored information making it easier to find music when selecting playback (have you ever tried to find a track in a poorly-documented CD jukebox? 'Nuff said). But the clever part is that you don't have to enter all the information yourself, nor do you have to hang around while the unit connects to the internet and searches – The PD-430 is shipped with a copy of the 'CDDB' database installed on the hard drive.

This means that with a surprisingly large number of discs in all genres, all that's required is to insert the disc and press Record a couple of times. The Jukebox looks up the disc in its internal database, then copies it to hard disk at four times normal playing speed, while displaying relevant information on the little front-panel LCD. Alternatively, you can listen as you record the details – at normal speed, of course!

You can choose CD-quality (bit-perfect copies), 320Kbps (high-quality MP3) and 128Kbps (standard MP3), giving between around 60 and 600 hours on

VERDICT

RECORDING



PLAYBACK



FEATURES



VALUE



Scoring relatively poorly for ergonomics, though improving if it can be connected to a PC, this unit does still offer useful functionality at an unprecedentedly low price. Well suited to a highly MP3-aware household.

CHECKLIST

- BIT-PERFECT COPIES ✓
- DIGITAL RECORD LEVEL CONTROL ✗
- HIGH-SPEED COPYING ✓
- CD TEXT ✓
- DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓

the 40Gb disc. Recording from line inputs is possible, but there's no level control or metering.

Operation isn't quite what it might be. The front panel controls are fiddly and unintuitive, and the promising-looking remote is not much better. Still, bi-directional data transfer, to and from the remote, means its display gives more useful information. Better to use the 'PDJockey' software on a PC to control the unit via USB, but then you might as well play out audio direct from the PC itself... There's not much available in the way of editing, but sorting tracks is pretty straightforward.

After that, and with misgivings based on this unit's resemblance to a cheap VCR (though it's quite well made inside), it's a relief to find that sound quality is decent, going on good. Okay, standard MP3-grade recording sounds horrid through any half-decent hi-fi set-up, but at the higher bit rates there's fair detail, a well-extended frequency range and generally a good feeling of life in the sound. It can't quite match the best budget CD players for insight, but it comes close. It comes even closer if it can be put out of earshot, as the high-speed hard disk is a little noisy. The optical digital output failed to work on two review samples, for reasons we couldn't establish.

If you simply want a hassle-free way to store and organise your music collection, with quick-access playback and reasonable sound, this machine does the job. It competes with conventional CD jukebox autochangers and wins on size, added features and, arguably, sound too, though you may throw the remote at the wall a few times before you get the hang of it. But the price is right. 🕒



£270 ☎ 01753 789789 🌐 www.pioneer.co.uk

PIONEER PDR-609 CD RECORDER

Now something of a veteran, Pioneer's excellent single-deck CD recorder still leads the pack

Pioneer's been in the CD-R game as long as any, and this model's been around a while too. But if it ain't broke... and given the reviews and awards it's received in its life Pioneer can reasonably claim that it isn't. It even bears a clear visual resemblance to Pioneer's earliest affordable recorders, though in these penny-pinching times even Pioneer has been forced to go with the flow and replace the aluminium fascia of old with a plastic one. In fact, fit and finish is below the company's usual standards but looks smart enough from the front, and let's be duly grateful for nice big keys, clearly labelled.

More brownie points are scored on features, where this is equipped with pretty much every facility available in the world of recording CDs. CD Text, skip IDs and unfinalising of CD-RW discs are supported, all of them useful. There's a headphone output with its own level control. You can select the level (for digital and analogue inputs) at which track breaks are detected and track markers inserted. Digital record level (and balance) is adjustable over a wide range and adjustable automatic fade-in/out is included.

You can monitor an input without a disc inserted, while an audio buffer allows synchronised recording via the analogue inputs, and subsequent track marking, without losing any audio. There are 24-bit converters on input and output (though only 16 bits get recorded), 'Legato Link' conversion on outputs, optical and coaxial digital inputs and outputs, a CD Text input socket – and one of the best recording level meters we've seen on recent decks, which responds to the fastest transients and makes level-setting the breeze it

VERDICT

RECORDING



PLAYBACK



FEATURES



VALUE



A very capable recorder with both analogue and digital sources which also plays back to a high standard. Add excellent ease of use and you have a splendid all-rounder.

CHECKLIST

- BIT-PERFECT COPIES ✓
- DIGITAL RECORD LEVEL CONTROL ✓
- HIGH-SPEED COPYING ✗
- CD TEXT ✓
- DIGITAL OUTPUT ✓

ought to be. Finally, and importantly, the sampling rate converter automatically drops out of the loop when copying 44.1kHz sources.

If that's not enough to convince you, the sound will help. It would be downright churlish to deny that this is a very fine machine. Judged first as a CD player, it already impresses with good strong sound, decent stereo imaging and well-extended bass. Legato Link remains a question of taste, giving a superficially more relaxed-sounding treble, though ultimately with some loss of insight. But it's not a big deal and many folks like it.

On the recording front, digital copies from a 44.1kHz source (like CD) are essentially indistinguishable from the original, as they should be (small differences can and will occur, and they will vary in nature between players and brands of disc too). The sample rate converter works well and loses little when dealing with 48kHz originals, and the analogue inputs are very fine, with low noise, no whistles, hums or other extraneous sounds, and admirable levels of detail and clarity. It takes real concentration to distinguish a copy of a good LP from the original replay.

One warning note – the digital level control sounds rather poor. Investigation showed that it doesn't dither as it should, so using it at any cut or boost setting will introduce nasty distortion on low-level recordings. The analogue record level is fine.

Apart from that oversight, this is evidently a first-rate digital recorder that not only records well, but also plays back to a standard that is quite competitive with playback-only machines (the few that are left, that is!) at its price. 🗣

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: Well laid out, with enough buttons to make functions easy to find and a very good display. Text input with the remote control is simple enough. The 'Monitor' function allows use as an emergency D-A converter without loading a disc.

CONNECTIONS: A full complement of digital inputs and outputs makes this simple to connect up, and minimises the amount of plugging and unplugging required in multisource systems. Sampling rates between 32kHz and 48kHz are accepted.

"Halcro's dm58: The Best Amplifier Ever!"

Stereophile Magazine, October 2002

The music,
the whole music,
and nothing but the music.

It is a fact of physics that amplifier distortion is responsible for creating ghost notes. For example; when two notes are played simultaneously, say E in one octave and C in the octave above, the distortion of an amplifier will create a third note, G, in the octave below that of E. Within harmonically complex music, distortion clutters the signal with exaggerated, harsh and confusing sounds.

Halcro's circuitry has been designed to virtually eliminate these intrinsic non-linear effects. Total Harmonic Distortion is less than 1000 parts per billion at full power (20kHz). A fraction of that of other amplifiers.

If you want the clearest possible signal,
if you want absolute musicality,
if you want recorded music
sounding like the real thing
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Website: www.audioreference.co.uk
www.halcro.com

HALCRO™

GamuT

www.gamutaudio.com

The new Gamut
D200 MkIII is now
available

the absolute sound: "...in some respects, it's hard to beat for any amount of money", and "the GamuT D200 has the best soundstaging I've yet heard from any amp ... superb width, depth and layering ..."

In the UK HiFi News wrote: "Through all types of music the GamuT D200 shows spectacular three-dimensional layering of the stereo sound stage." ... and "excellent retrieval of ambience and an accurate rendering of the space around instruments."



the absolute sound says of the CD-1: "...what the Gamut does let you hear, on disc after disc, is the music" ...and... "The music lover says, this thing is a joy and, for the money, a dream."

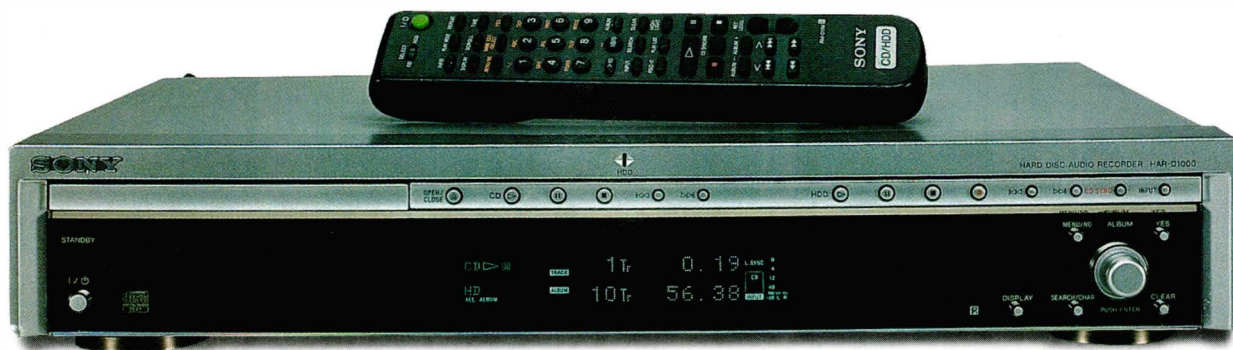
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£600 ☎ 08705 111999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

SONY HAR-D1000 HARD DISK AUDIO JUKEBOX

No 'bit-for-bit' copies here – some nice ideas marred by poor sound quality

Like Perception Digital's Jukebox, this unit is primarily a hard disk version of a big CD changer. Load up your CD collection and have it to hand – what could be more attractive? Well, storing uncompressed audio would be nice. It's good that Sony has minimised unnecessary options to make operation simple, but it has restricted recording to 132Kbps using Sony's own 'ATRAC 3' data-reduction coder.

It's a straightforward unit to use. It powers up quickly (20 seconds or so) and looks comfortably like traditional hi-fi. Assuming there's enough light to read the minute lettering beside the tiny buttons, it's fairly obvious what to press to begin playback from CD or hard disk, and recording isn't any trickier, thanks partly to Sony's well thought-out menu structure. The remote works well, too, with buttons that always do the same thing, in contrast to 'clever' remotes.

In terms of functions, this roughly equates to a MiniDisc deck in most areas. Having copied the CD to the hard disk (at single or double speed), you can edit tracks by dividing, moving and combining them, remove or reduce spaces between them, and programme their replay order. You can also record via analogue or optical digital inputs.

As with any large-capacity device, the potential pitfall is keeping track of all the information stored. Sony doesn't employ PD's trick of preloading the CDDb database, but instead provides software ('M-crew') that can be run on a PC to connect to the online CDDb and identify and label tracks on the HAR-D1000. To this end, a USB port is provided. M-crew also allows PC-based control of the HAR-D1000, and there's a friendly synergy between M-crew (for

VERDICT

RECORDING
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

PLAYBACK
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FEATURES
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

VALUE
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A potentially promising machine, let down by basic playback quality and the fact that all recordings to the hard disk are compressed. Pleasant enough to use, though.

CHECKLIST

BIT-PERFECT COPIES ✗

DIGITAL RECORD LEVEL CONTROL ✓

HIGH-SPEED COPYING ✓

CD TEXT ✓

DIGITAL OUTPUT ✗

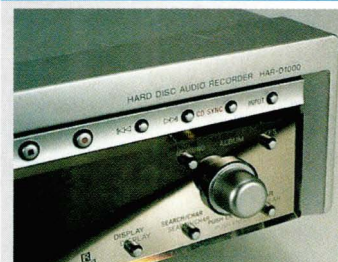
titling etc) and the unit's 'native' controls for day-to-day operation. Once titles are stored on the hard disk, you can search for tracks by keyword. Tracks from CDs not on the CDDb, and tracks recorded from rear panel inputs, can be labelled manually.

There's no digital output, so you'll be listening only via the analogue ones – and they're disappointing. It's a shame to report it, but simply playing a CD directly clearly shows up shortcomings in the audio circuitry, which sounds opaque, coloured and in some music slightly 'phasey', as if data reduction had already been applied. It would be unreasonable to expect performance to wipe the floor with 500 quid's worth of specialist CD player; it's more in the sub-hundred league. Rock music lacks bite and kick, orchestral loses precision and instrumental separation, and vocals are dry and lacking character.

Given these limitations, the ATRAC 3 coding seems to work pretty well. There are moments when its effects are distinctly audible; for instance, at the start and end of sudden bright sounds (cymbals, solo trumpet, string chords), though it doesn't do more than slightly lessen detail. It certainly seems less irritating to listen to for long periods than MP3 at about the same bit rate.

This is all slightly frustrating, but maybe the limited audio outputs don't matter so much. This unit isn't going to form the centre of a full-on hi-fi – its home is in the kitchen, bedroom or study, where its neat size and handy 600-hour storage offset the audio drawbacks (including mild whispering from the hard disk) in the context of music on demand. No formal Recommendation, but respect for a nearly-hi-fi job neatly done. 🗣️

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: Hardly recommended to anyone with weak eyes, the front panel does carry all the buttons needed for normal use. The remote is nice to use, though the slide switch for CD or HDD operation will catch out most users a few times.

CONNECTIONS: No digital output, which means analogue input quality can only be assessed via the flawed analogue outs. USB connection to a PC allows control and CD information exchange via the CDDb website, and most Sony CD changers can be controlled from the HAR-D1000 too.



£250 ☎ 08705 111999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

SONY RCD-W3 TWIN-DECK CD RECORDER

Sony's first CD recorder is a twin-deck with a few foibles but a tempting price

KEY FEATURES



CONTROLS: Separate controls for each deck make operation a breeze, and they can play in relay for extended listening too.

Loathsome record-level meter – it's slow and completely uncalibrated. Track and time displays can be misleading too.

CONNECTIONS: Digital input and output is a definite plus, though the input is permanently subject to a sample-rate converter. Analogue inputs go via a conventional level control, so at least can't overload in the way digital-control inputs sometimes do with high-level sources.

With its paternal fondness for MiniDisc, Sony came late to the CD-R game. It still doesn't offer many models, but though this one is quite basic, it's an attractive enough product and shows no sign of being an afterthought in the company's range. By no means the only twin deck on the market, it is one of the cheapest and offers some nice features, notably x4 copying speed. To that extent, if you do a lot of disc copying for the car or portable player, it has obvious attractions, even if you almost never listen directly to the thing.

Features are fairly limited. There's no CD text, for instance, and no adjustment of recording level when recording from either the internal player deck or an external digital source. Analogue record level is adjustable with a good old-fashioned potentiometer, but the metering is so poor you'll have a job doing it – classic by-ear techniques work best here! Track markers can be added automatically with a 'level sync' detector, but again this is not adjustable so you'll have to live with its decisions. In short, this is not a very flexible device.

For all that, build quality isn't bad, with decent A-D and D-A converter chips (Sony seems to have given up making its own, interestingly), and operation is quite slick. Optical digital input and output make for simple hook-up to the ever-increasing number of AV amplifiers with digital connections, and the headphone output is handy.

Audio playback quality is not the absolute highest, but this unit is capable of some surprises. It doesn't have the best detail retrieval in the world, but paradoxically (for the two often go hand in hand) it manages very

VERDICT

RECORDING



PLAYBACK



FEATURES



VALUE



A basic twin-deck machine lacking some features, but with handy high-speed copying and decent sound in and out. Apart from setting recording level, it's nice to use, too.

CHECKLIST

BIT-PERFECT COPIES (INTERNAL ONLY)	✓
DIGITAL RECORD LEVEL CONTROL	✗
HIGH-SPEED COPYING	✓
CD TEXT	✗
DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓

good stereo imaging. Tonally there's a touch of coloration in the lower treble, which subtly alters the sound of female vocals and may be disconcerting in A/B comparisons, but isn't distracting in the long term. You won't find yourself hearing many new insights in familiar recordings, but there's nothing offensive going on.

As for copies, those made digitally from the internal deck are good, though not always perfect subjectively. There were small but consistent measured differences in jitter between those copied at normal speed and those copied at high speed when played back on this machine, and in some of the listening material, they were audible too – a small loss of clarity in the high-speed dubs. Next to the originals, copies tended to be slightly veiled, though in simpler music without too much treble complexity the difference was hard to hear.

The digital input automatically goes through a sample rate converter (the 'SRC' logo only lights up when sources at rates other than 44.1 kHz are used, but in fact the converter is clearly in circuit at all times), so it's no surprise to find that recordings made that way are more consistently distinguishable. All the same, differences are not vast and in isolation there's little enough to complain about. The analogue input is actually rather good, though detail is slightly marred by a just-audible background whistle.

This is not a particularly exciting or sexy product, but it does a decent enough job at a low price. If you have a use for a high-speed copier from time to time, and perhaps already own a good-quality player, this could be a useful adjunct to your system. **C**



£600 01923 233166 www.yamaha-audio.co.uk

YAMAHA CDR-HD1300 CD-R/HARD DISK AUDIO RECORDER

A hard disk jukebox and CD editing suite combined – a perfect example of digital recording tech

At first glance, this might appear to be much the same kind of beast as the hard disk jukeboxes from Perception Digital and Sony: it can store lots of tracks on hard disk and to that extent matches them. But this is a very differently angled product. A clue is provided in the fact that it has no kind of data reduction built in, merely recording bit-for-bit copies of CDs to the hard disk. The second clue is that the CD drive is a recorder rather than just a player.

What this turns out to be is an all-inclusive CD editing station for the audiophile. No, it doesn't do EQ, artificial reverb or any other fancy tricks that can be done on a PC, but it allows tracks to be copied to the hard disk, shuffled, chopped up, joined together, packed, even given neat fade-in and fade-out ends and adjusted for level, then burned back to a CD-R (or -RW). Sound attractive? How about adding high-speed CD-to-CD copying (via the hard disk) and – joy! – timer operation with vast capacity, thanks to the hard disk? And as an added bonus, you get Yamaha's 'Audio Master Quality Recording', which burns slightly longer pits to the blank disc, reducing playing time but allegedly improving jitter performance.

Yamaha has really thought this one through. It's very slick, for a start, with up to 10x record speed from CD to HD and 8x the other way round, plus the front panel display gives plentiful and generally easy-to-follow information. If that's not good enough, you can connect to a TV via the S-Video socket on the back and view information that way. CD Text is supported, so titles entered on the HD as an aid to finding the tracks again can be transferred to

VERDICT	
RECORDING	★★★★★
PLAYBACK	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
A really useful addition to the variety of digital recorders on sale today, almost a whole editing suite. Operation is slick and straightforward, and the quality is high throughout.	
CHECKLIST	
BIT-PERFECT COPIES (INTERNAL ONLY)	✓
DIGITAL RECORD LEVEL CONTROL	✓
HIGH-SPEED COPYING	✓
CD TEXT	✓
DIGITAL OUTPUT	✓

CD. If you make a mistake while editing, there's an 'Undo' function. As you'd expect, there's a full complement of inputs and outputs, and build quality is good. A hinged cover at the rear allows the hard disk to be swapped, though Yamaha doesn't say whether higher capacity than the supplied 80Gb (120 hours) can be accommodated.

Audio performance is, for the most part, good. Starting with CD replay, there's good depth to the bass and extension to the treble, though sometimes treble seems a little 'feathery' and disconnected from the rest of the image; a slight effect, but occasionally disconcerting. Rhythmic drive scores particularly highly in rock, jazz and suchlike. Replay from the hard disk isn't substantially different, though in a couple of particularly tricky classical tracks it did seem that the CD drive had the edge in clarity.

The digital input includes a sample rate converter so that bit-perfect copies can't be made, but the converter's performance is generally excellent, its only drawback the smallest compression of stereo image depth in a few tracks. Analogue inputs are astonishing, barely any less detailed than bit-perfect dubs made via the internal CD drive, with just a hint less bass extension.

As for AMQR, recordings made in this mode did seem to have very slightly less measured jitter (an area in which the device is good, but not great) but on this and other players were not easy to distinguish from 'normal' CD-R copies. Using more area for the data is attractive from a data security point of view, though.

This fine-sounding and highly flexible machine really adds something to the field of quality home recording. **C**



CONTROLS: The layout may, perhaps, be a bit random, but everything you need is here. It's worth reading the manual carefully, as sometimes the unit gets too keen, recording and finalising the disc before you've realised you've asked it to!

CONNECTIONS: Both flavours of digital input and output, plus video connection so you can see on the TV what you're doing – useful. RS232 is for diagnostics. The hard disk is accessible behind the hinged flap. The fan must be temperature-sensing – it never operated on the review sample.

CONCLUSIONS

It's all here, from making your own CDs to storing music on HD and piping it round the house

One recorder in this group made a really good impression. Yamaha's CDR-HD1300 really is a boon, and does the things users have been demanding. It brings the full flexibility and ease of use of MiniDisc, together with the full sound quality potential of CD. It even has added features and its AMQR mode (though the jury will have to stay out on that just now). For those who care enough about


their recordings to spend time sorting and tidying, it has a lot to offer. Don't overlook the jukebox aspect either!

That leaves three other hard disc recorders, of which the Perception Digital and Sony models are relatively similar, while the Imerge is a breed apart. In fact, it's hardly comparable to the others, since it doesn't (in its present form) even record from any source other than CDs. Treat it as a rather enticing

demonstration of what some hi-fi will be doing in the future. It's a great tool for its job, if not in a 'conventional' hi-fi system.

PD and Sony's offerings are much nearer to our understanding of hi-fi. On balance, the PD, irritating though it can be to use, is probably the better machine, not least because it gives the option of uncompressed audio storage. All the same, it does look a bit rushed to market – though it

gets Brownie points for joined-up thinking on the MP3 and database front. The Sony, however, works nicely enough, it's just let down on the audio front.

As for the CD recorders, the Sony and the NAD do much the same job, but the NAD, at twice the price, unsurprisingly does it with more refinement and features. Both are very fair value. Pioneer's PDR-609 does a simple job very well and is a classic Best Buy. 

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HINTS AND TIPS

- ⊕ Don't cheap skate on blank media. Ensure discs are clean and scratch-free before use.
- ⊕ On HD recorders, ask whether you need the extra hours you'll get with data compression. Then, switch it off or set to the highest bit rate.
- ⊕ Keep on top of labelling recordings, be they on HD or CD. Both are dangerously anonymous!
- ⊕ It's best to be conservative with recording levels when copying from analogue to digital. Overload sounds awful, under-recording merely adds (negligible) hiss.
- ⊕ Recorders don't like being jolted when working, which can result in burning 'frisbees'.

STAR PERFORMER

YAMAHA CDR-HD1300

Even though in absolute terms the replay side of this machine is slightly outdone by the much cheaper Pioneer CD recorder, it opens up a whole new world of home recording. It does this by marrying the flexibility of hard disk audio editing to a traditional audio interface and pretty good ease of use. And there's no denying that its audio performance is, by most standards, very good, with excellent analogue inputs. Add a good DAC to boost replay standards and you'll have an outstanding combination of recording/playback performance and practical, useful features.



DIGITAL RECORDERS AT A GLANCE

MAKE	Imerge	NAD	Perception Digital	Pioneer	Sony	Sony	Yamaha
MODEL	S2000-80	C660	PD-430	PDR-609	HAR-D1000	RCD-W3	CDR-HD1300
PRICE	£1,599	£500	£350	£270	£600	£250	£600
RECORDING	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
PLAYBACK	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★★
CONCLUSIONS	Intended as the main source for a round-the-house installation, with fine performance and intelligent operation.	A much dearer twin deck than most, but one that offers genuinely improved sound quality and extra features.	A clever concept with good computer and MP3 connectivity, but operation is awkward and sound is merely so-so.	Basic CD recorder, which majors on sound quality to very good effect. Not new but still tops for the money.	Smart but basic hard disk recorder, which is let down by its sound quality and lack of flexibility.	Limited features and unremarkable sound from this easy-to-use twin deck, though direct dubs work well enough.	A great concept well executed, adding enormous flexibility to home recording. Good sound too.

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- HI-FI CHOICE MAGAZINE

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BELFAST	028 9032 1332
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READING	0118 959 1111
ROMFORD	01708 747 727
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SHEFFIELD	0114 266 1616
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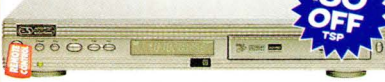
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APPLE IPOD PORTABLE HARD DISK JUKEBOX

Not happy with having cast a huge shadow over the MP3 world for the past 18 months, Apple has finally released the new iPod. The first had the competition in a choke grip, but this one looks like it might go in for the kill. It's an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, redesign – thinner and lighter, with the case a whiter plastic sheen than its predecessor's translucent finish. Gone are the navigation buttons around the jog dial; they've been relocated to a series of QuickTime-style touchpads below the LCD.

Also new are the capacities – the 30Gb one sets a new benchmark for a player this size. You can now connect by USB 2.0 if you're on a PC, and the iPod's addition of a dock (also seen on Sony's NW-MS70D) should guarantee that all of 2004's digital audio players come with one. Sound is top notch for an MP3 personal and – if you can stand in-ears – the supplied 'phones are capable of anything from big Haydn movements to bass-demanding jungle tracks. Now more than ever, Apple's iPod is simply in a league of its own.



Requires PC or Mac

£300 ★★★★★ ☎ 01793 441 510 🌐 www.archos.com

ARCHOS JUKEBOX FM REC 20 PORTABLE HARD DISK JUKEBOX



Requires PC or Mac

Archos has been busy this past year, to say the least. As well as a video-playing portable jukebox and a pocket-sized flash memory player, it's also managed to find time to make this – the first hard-drive MP3 jukebox to come with an FM tuner built in. Cosmetically, the Jukebox FM Recorder 20 is the bottom of the pile when sat next to the iPod and the Zen. It's a car crash of mangled styles and – unlike its rivals – just a mite too big to fit into the average trouser pocket.

The FM radio function is by the far the neatest feature here. As well as listening to radio – and the Recorder 20 usually gets strong reception – you can encode broadcasts to MP3 on the hard drive. You can even set Retro Record, a constant 30-second cache, in case you decide you want to keep a programme having listened to the first 29 seconds. Sonics are good (though MP3-only), but what would have been a pretty impressive player is miserably let down by a slow and unwieldy interface.

£329 ★★★★★ ☎ 01189 344 322 🌐 www.uk.europe.creative.com

CREATIVE ZEN PORTABLE HARD DISK JUKEBOX

Creative's otherwise excellent hard disk jukeboxes were always held back by one thing – size. The Zen, however, looks like a DAP Jukebox that has been force-fed Weight Watcher milkshakes. It's so tiny that Creative labelled it "the smallest USB IEE 1394 hard drive player" yet. But since Apple's new iPod also has USB 2.0, it no longer has even that difference. And it's fairly butt-ugly compared to the 'buy me' sexiness of the iPod – despite the fashionable silver finish it looks more

eighties cassette Walkman than 21st century audio marvel.

The Zen's big advantage over the iPod (and Archos' Jukebox) is Windows Media Audio support, as well as MP3. If you go for Microsoft's proprietary audio format, neater compression means you can fit up to 667 hours on board to MP3's 333. Sound quality is precise and powerful, and you can adjust EQ to your heart's content. Creative's software is workable, while the wraparound phones are good sonically, but uncomfortable.



Requires PC

RECORDERS

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SONY NW-MS70D SOLID STATE MEMORY PLAYER/RECORDER

This tiny device is the smallest Walkman ever. It's also, we'd venture, the best-looking ever, dinky enough to fit in a shirt pocket and light enough to hang medallion-style around your neck. Neat design touches abound – the distinctive bar across the unit slides to act as the hold function, the headphone socket screws in to prevent the player falling and the device even comes with a dock for recharging and USB (1.1, sadly) file transfer. When docked, you can even sync the player's clock with that of your PC.

Inside, you get 256Mb of onboard flash memory, and a Memory Stick Duo slot for swapping in (rather limited) 64Mb Duo memory cards. Navigation is a cinch, and the sound is full of punch, if a little richly-toned. The bad news is it will only play Sony's ATRAC3 and news ATRAC3plus formats, which involves converting and transferring music using the company's slow, unstable and copy protection-riddled software, SonicStage 1.5. A beautiful and utterly desirable piece of micro-design, marred by record label politics.



Requires PC

£260 ★★★★★ ☎ 0161 205 2333 🌐 www.sharp.co.uk

SHARP IM-MT899H 'NETMD' MINIDISC PLAYER/RECORDER



PC use optional

This is the first non-Sony 'NetMD' personal – a MiniDisc player/recorder that lets you store MP3 PC audio files on MD as well as recording from CD (both audio types are converted to MD's ATRAC format before recording). Cosmetically, it's very similar to previous Sharp MD recorders. You get a fairly uncluttered front panel, compact dimensions and a smart silver finish – the only design gaffe is the ugly protruding silver extension that houses the USB and remote sockets.

Recording and playback quality is fine for mobile use, the supplied headphones are OK and you get a neat clip-on in-line remote. As this is a slightly older model than Sony's N10 (below), you get OpenMG Jukebox PC software instead of SonicStage 1.5, but there's little between the two – both suffer from copyright protection irritations. This is a fine MD recorder, but as an MP3 player there's little to recommend it when Sony's N10 has faster file transfer and better design.

£280 ★★★★★ ☎ 08705 111 999 🌐 www.sony.co.uk

SONY MZ-N10 'NETMD' MINIDISC PLAYER/RECORDER

This year is a special one for MiniDisc – it's ten years old. Introduced last year, NetMD is Sony's attempt to make MD the format of choice for the MP3 generation. Using the USB cradle, you can port more than five hours worth of LP4 (long play, lowest-quality) music onto one disc from your PC. Unfortunately, to get the music across you need to use SonicStage 1.5, which is a PC audio fan's nightmare – it's slow and frequently falls over. As if that wasn't

bad enough, you'll also have to convert all your MP3s or WMAs to ATRAC.

On the plus side, the player's design is typically Sony. It feels reassuringly solid, yet it's the smallest and lightest NetMD so far. Audio is vibrant and dynamic, provided you stick to the standard non-LP mode, which drops capacity to 80 minutes. A sound option for those who want to record straight from a CD player as well as (or instead of) a PC, but for MP3-style use alone the iPod is a neater and faster portable solution.

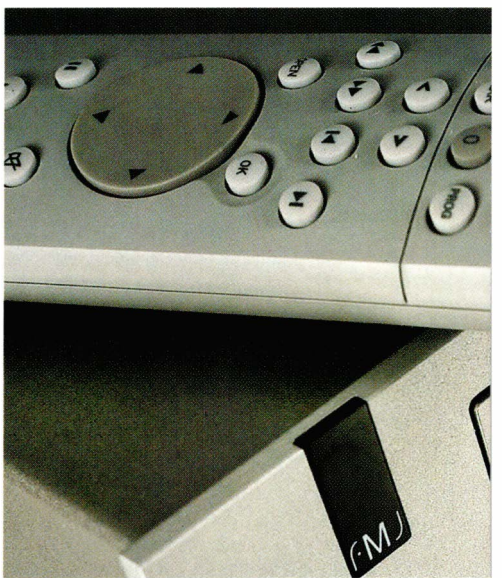


PC use optional



EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine
★

“This muscular and bold-sounding player is also capable of tackling low-level acoustic material with kid gloves.”



Devil in the detail

Arcam's CD23T is dead... Long live Arcam's new CD king, the ultra-polished FMJ CD33T

FMJ is Arcam's take on the affordable high end, with designs often mirrored in less expensive DIVA range models, but with better physical construction, superior finish, cleaner aesthetics and appropriately beefed-up internals. When the range was first unveiled a few years ago, the Ring DAC-equipped FMJ CD23 became Arcam's flagship CD player. A minor revision followed, resulting in the CD23T, but now Arcam has a new flagship to take its place – the FMJ CD33T – costing £150 more at £1,300.

The dCS Ring DAC was the core technology for the CD23 and the Alpha 9 before it, and in its day it was an unusually sophisticated and capable D/A converter. But four years is an age in digital converter design terms, and Arcam believes it has a superior solution for this new model.

This player's headline feature is the use of upsampling (see boxout). Upsampling is sometimes claimed to improve resolution, which isn't strictly accurate, but the filter algorithms involved do have a sonic pay-off when executed properly, as they appear to be here. The new D/A converter stage is

VERDICT

Arcam FMJ CD33T CD player
£1,300

▲ High resolution sound and smooth yet lively demeanour from new top of the range Arcam player.

▼ Slightly 'locked in' sound by the highest standards, remote control a little unappetising.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
With all the polish of its predecessor, the CD33T adds levels of detail and vitality up with the very best in its class.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Upsampling to 192kHz
- ▶ 4x Wolfson WM8740 hybrid multibit Delta Sigma D/A processors
- ▶ Analog Devices AD797 and Burr-Brown OP2134 op amps
- ▶ 1 optical, 1 coaxial digital out
- ▶ 2 sets of analogue outputs
- ▶ External remote control input
- ▶ CD-RW compatible
- ▶ Supports CD Text

based on Wolfson dual differential mode DACs, previously used in Arcam's own DV88 Plus DVD player and in other Arcam products. Four are used in each channel – they include their own digital filters, and as each DAC only contributes to one channel, there's less scope for interchannel cross-talk.

DC coupling with servo control is used in the output stage to prevent DC offsets, and reduce low-frequency losses that can occur with capacitor coupling. The four-layer PCB has internal ground planes for reduced noise, and there are two mains transformers, including a toroid for the audio circuits

If you ignore what's going on inside, little appears to have changed. The latest FMJ player still has two digital and two pairs of analogue outputs, the display is a green fluorescent type, and the most important functions are accessible from the front panel – exactly as with the CD23. The player itself, however, is heavy, well specified internally and beautifully engineered from top to bottom, and this includes the smooth-acting (but slightly noisy) Sony mechanism. The unusually rigid and well-damped chassis is based on a laminated construction, the separate laminations providing mutual damping. The 8mm thick machined front panel plays its part too, by helping to prevent parasitic vibrations that can impose themselves on the audio signal. These are key strengths, and they directly impinge on the way the player sounds.

Last, and in this case it's hard to avoid

saying least, we come to the remote control. The handset is a full-function design, but it's not the easiest to navigate or the most attractive in its class. Now if Arcam was to strike out for perfection, maybe they could do something here – perhaps an optional no-frills handset with tactile and properly signposted control buttons. In other respects, the CD33T is a pleasure to use. The good news is that the front panel controls make the remote all but academic if you can manage without its track programming and repeat options.

PERFORMANCE

No sample of the CD23 was available for comparison, but we've had a lot of experience of the CD23 in its original form and its later CD23T incarnation, and it seems certain that the new model is an improvement on the others. The CD23 was notable for its open, three-dimensional imagery and a very smooth, almost silken tonality, and the new model excels in the same areas. But this is only the start.

Using as a quality yardstick Mark Levinson's superb (and costly) 390S player, the Arcam immediately impressed with its lively and outgoing character. The top end sparkles, raising the stakes with a Telarc recording of Brahms' *2nd Piano Concerto* (Previn/RPO), whose orchestral sound tends to be rather ponderous, the piano itself not ideally separated. The Arcam's unusual resolving ability cuts right through the mix and the piano takes

TECHNOLOGY: DAC DESIGN AND UPSAMPLING

The CD33T's four Wolfson DACs are connected in parallel, their positive-going outputs commoned together, and the same for their negative-going outputs. The aim here is not to reduce noise. Because the DACs are inherently differential, noise levels are already a long way below the 93dB (approx) noise floor for a fully dithered 16-bit audio signal, and any further reduction in the noise floor would have been academic. Instead, the commoning of their outputs has the effect of minimising distortion and enhancing linearity by averaging errors out.

The CD33T is also notable for its use of upsampling, the first Arcam player to feature this technology. Upsampling is performed by an Analog Devices processor that upsamples the 44.1kHz, 16-bit data off disc to 192kHz with 24-bit precision. Upsampling is analogous to oversampling – indeed, the differences are smaller than their similarities. This can subjectively enhance 'resolution', but the resampled data also allows more relaxed analogue anti-aliasing filters for what Arcam describes as a "smoother and more natural" treble.



the AUDIO CONSULTANTS

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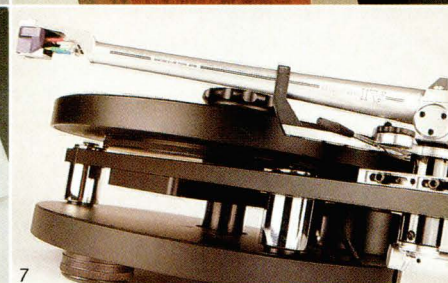
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The new integrated from this excellent company. High quality sound for its price with good looks as a bonus. Teams well with Triangle and Opera loudspeakers. £2500



3. Living Voice loudspeakers

The new improved version of these speakers are now with us with the sonic improvements bringing these popular speakers into an even higher league. Auditorium £1700, Avatar £2700, OBX-R £4000



4. Shanling CD - T100 player

The amazing, highly flexible CD player with valve output and upsampling. Superb sound and certainly makes a statement with its appearance. £1650

5. Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player

This player now has the improved, quiet drive and the resulting uplift in sound quality has been astonishing. Tremendous value at £2850

6. Unison Research Unico R

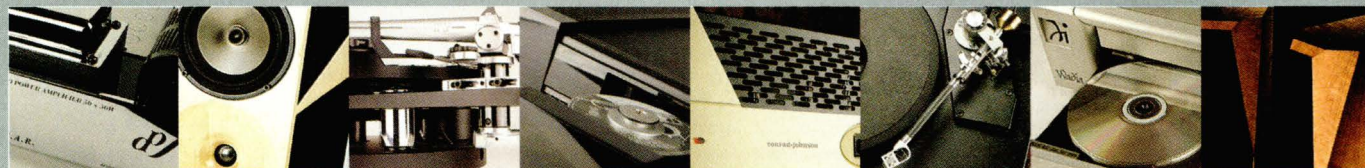
80wpc integrated valve mosfet amplifier £750. With phono stage £800. Matching valve CD player also on demonstration and sounding amazing. £1095

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One of our best selling combinations consistently over the last few years. A first class, high-end sound at an affordable price. Turntable £2644. Tonearm £1127.

Cartridge shown is Transfiguration Spirit Mk3. £950

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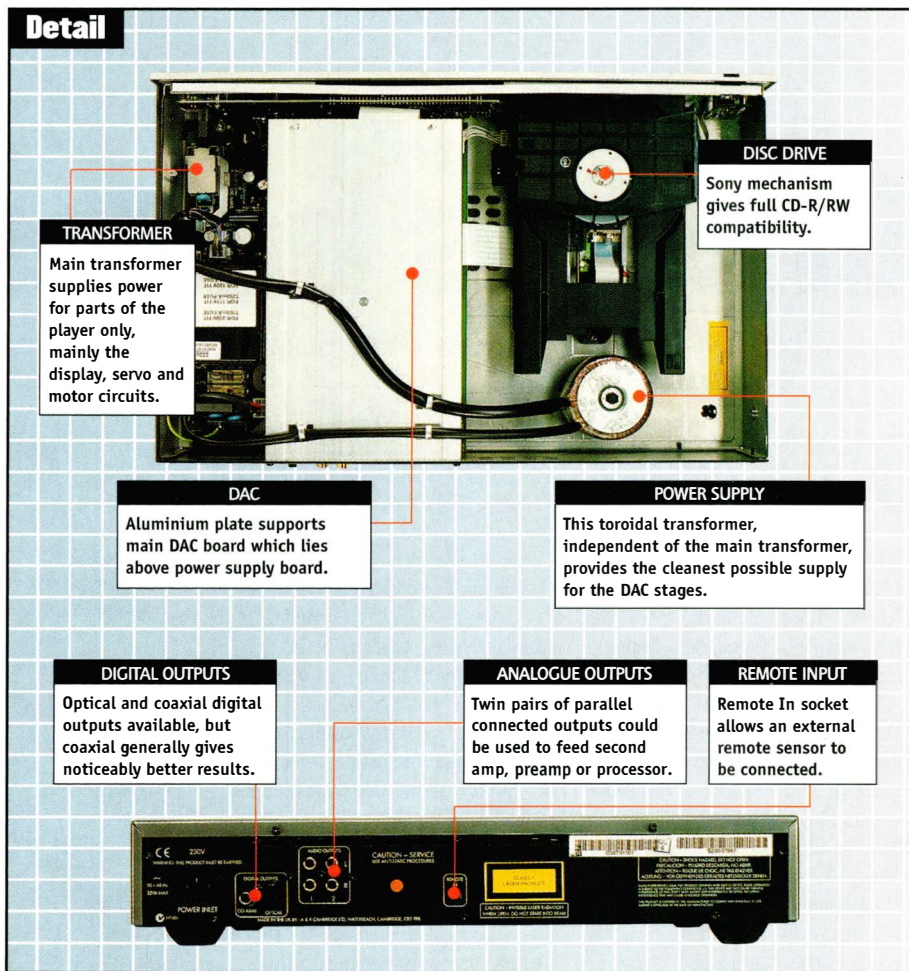
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on a much more independent role. These qualities appear to arise naturally as a result of the player's resolving power, rather than an elevated treble. Although the piano sound is more than normally open and sparkling, it's not bright and there are no signs of the sometimes mechanical edginess that afflicts lesser players. Although the Arcam doesn't have the Mark Levinson's ability to paint in the harmonic complexity of a large-scale performance – the Levinson player is always more pungent and the structure of music is presented in a more architectural way – the Arcam still appears to have the edge over its direct price rivals.

On test, the CD33T repeated its class showing across a range of quite different source material. Rickie Lee Jones' whimsical and rather Gallic-sounding *My One And Only True Love* was suitably bright and breezy, the bandoneon, nylon string guitar and bass accompaniment sounding agile and spacious, though the acoustic seemed more locked into the speakers (Revel Performa M20) than with the Levinson. This recording is an object lesson in applied subtlety, and although the £6,500 Levinson does a better job in the end (as it should), the Arcam is extremely impressive and few players in its class can live with its subtlety. If anything, it's even more impressive with Tom Waits' *Big In Japan* (from *Mule Variations*). Played loud, the CD33T proves just as unerringly energetic and accurate in its headlong leap for the solar plexus.

This is an excellent player whose resolving ability is up there with the true high end, and which certainly



“This is an excellent player whose resolving ability is up there with the true high end, and outclasses most of the competition.”

outclasses most of the similarly-priced competition. But it is not just finely, sometimes exquisitely detailed, it's also capable of getting down and dirty – *Mule Variations* is the real acid test here. It is a muscular and bold-sounding player, which is also capable of tackling low-level acoustic material with kid gloves. 📍

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

ALSO CONSIDER

COPLAND CDA822 £1,499
A beautifully natural and fluid sounding player, capable with all music types but particularly good with acoustic material.

MERIDIAN 507 £1,195
The entry-level player from Meridian is impressively poised between detailed accuracy and toe-tapping musicality.

PRIMARE D30.2 £1,499
Top class player gives a strong sense of musical structure and physicality.



Orelle's belles

EXCLUSIVE *Orelle is back in business with this ambitious yet minimalist pre/power amp combo*

Orelle has been out of the limelight for some time, which is a pity, as a few years back the brand had one of the nicest of all mid-price amplifiers in the SA100. Then a couple of months ago Orelle broke cover with a new integrated sporting a similar name but considerably higher price tag (the SA100 evo, reviewed in *HFC* 241). And now there's the CA100 preamp and SP100 power amp. The preamp is essentially new from the ground up, as the preamp in the SA100 evo is a simpler passive design. The SP100, however, is based on the design of the power amp in the SA100 evo.

What's on offer here is a single-ended Class A component preamplifier with a range of five line-level inputs and a tape circuit, and a stereo power amp rated at 100 Watts per channel into eight ohms and 200 Watts (one channel only) into four ohms, suggesting a reasonably robust power supply. It's worth spending time examining the features Orelle has included and those it has left out. Included is the ability to accept an optional moving magnet phono stage, available shortly, along with a really cute remote control – a few millimetres thick and smaller than a credit card. It's the kind of handset you sometimes see with camcorders, but almost never with hi-fi. Let's hope that battery life isn't too short.

Remote control apart, this is a truly minimalist product. The only controls

are source selection and volume. While there are two sets of 4mm loudspeaker binding posts, they're not switchable and are included for bi-wiring speakers where the input end requires four terminals. The preamp has just one pair of outputs – a pity as it complicates the task of adding a second power amplifier for bi-amping, an option some owners may want to exercise.

The preamp has a substantial power supply stage, and uses a discrete Class A circuit with split rail power supplies and a servo control instead of AC coupling to prevent DC offsets. Inputs and power switching are indicated by blue LED telltales.

For both preamp and power amp, the case is part of the overall acoustic design. It is made from a high-grade non-magnetic aluminium alloy, whose curved end sections are thicker than the top plate that helps damp the structure. But the case is not enough to cool the power amp at maximum dissipation, and cooling is supplemented by a thermostatically switched fan. When it does cut in, it can only be heard from very close up. In practice, it isn't often needed and it was necessary to heat soak the SP100 on top of a big AV amp before the fan would switch on.

PERFORMANCE

Overall performance is very good. The original integrated was a fast and transparent amplifier, though somewhat

more system-dependent than it should have been due to interactions with some loudspeaker loads. The balance of the new model may still be deemed rather system-dependent, and the Orelle pairing will suit some systems and tastes better than others. But there is no evidence for any special sensitivity to the nature of the electrical load presented by the speakers. The Orelle simply has a particular kind of sound that will tend to suit some systems better than others.

In fact, the sound quality findings are almost universally positive. From the start, it was obvious that the Orelle pre and power amp are clean, transparent and highly detailed. It has a well-disciplined quality and the bass is open, extended and tuneful. Imagery is well handled too, though slightly foreshortened in the depth plane, and timing is precisely articulated and very on the button. It's all of very obviously good quality, but it can sound rather lightweight – agile rather than punchy, refined rather than in your face. And this is exactly what many systems thrive on.

The Orelle combination was used extensively with a pair of Revel Performa M20s, a costly and sophisticated speaker where the amplifier contributed a great deal to the system's resolving ability and refinement. The system was consistently capable of pulling detail off disc that was lost to other amplifiers used in its place, and presenting it in a coherent and articulate way. One of the side effects is that listening at low-volume levels is a surprisingly fulfilling experience. The sound hangs in the space around and between the speakers, and the finest detail remains

VERDICT

Orelle CA100 preamplifier

£1,000

Orelle SP100 stereo power amplifier

£1,000

▲ Refined, articulate and fabulously detailed, the Orelle combo is a very good match for high-resolution systems.

▼ Not as musclebound as many component packages and only has a single preamp output.

CONCLUSION

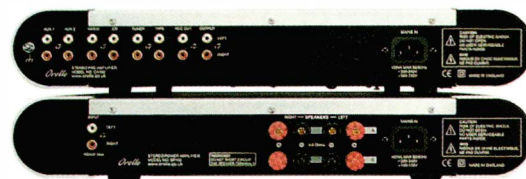
A significant addition to the under-populated ranks of medium-power, mid-price pre/power amp combinations. Subjectively more brains than brawn.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Power output: 100 Watts per channel RMS into 8 ohms
- ▶ 5 line inputs
- ▶ 1 tape circuit
- ▶ ITSS – Integrated Temperature Sensing System
- ▶ X-Flow symmetric pre-driver circuit
- ▶ Two pairs of speaker terminals (permanently connected) for bi-wiring
- ▶ Remote control of volume and source selection
- ▶ Optional moving magnet phono stage

TECHNOLOGY: T E OUTPUT STAGE

The SP100 power amp's output stage uses bi-polar output devices from Sanken with on-board temperature sensors, which allow the bias voltage to be altered in real time as the output delivered to the loudspeakers varies. The result is said to be a cleaner, lower distortion output, which is less affected by changing music dynamics. But Orelle takes this one stage further, by using this on-die sensor to feed a microprocessor-based output protection circuit that is claimed to be non-intrusive, and which protects against abnormal operating conditions and excess temperature. This circuit is tied in with the muting circuit that keeps the amplifier disconnected from the load for a significant interval after being powered up, while DC levels are stabilised. It's an elegant scheme, which has allowed Orelle to design a relatively simple output stage that is almost as bomb-proof as the MOSFET output of the old SA100 amp. But because it is bi-polar, it has a much better current yield. The microprocessor enters sleep mode when it is not required, reducing internal RF noise from this source, and a front panel red LED indicates fault or muting status.





“The sound hangs in the space around and between the speakers, and the finest detail remains audible. By any standards, this is truly a class act.”

audible, even though at its quietest the music is almost down at the threshold of listening. By any standards, this is truly a class act.

With bigger speakers, in this case a pair of Mission m53 floorstanders, the sound is light and clean, and it goes loud, but it wears the extra power at its disposal lightly. It's all there, and the level of detail and refinement is particularly striking, but somehow it doesn't have the forcefulness and dynamic swing of some other designs, as bypassing the power amp with a pair of TAG McLaren 250MRs quickly demonstrates. It's not the hard-hitting, slam in the pit of the stomach style bass that might be expected from a muscle-bound pre and power amp combination. It goes loud, but it all happens in a matter of fact way. Apart from the extra working headroom, the sound is quite similar to that of the new SA100 evo integrated model.

About the worst that can be said of the Orelle CA100/SA100 is that it doesn't quite qualify as an all-rounder. To some extent, its place is rather undermined by the integrated model, which often sounds little, if any, worse. But in systems with less sensitive speakers, or in large, well-furnished rooms of the type that suck power away from any system, this is the better choice. 📍

📞 Orelle 020 8991 9200
 🌐 www.orelle.freeserve.co.uk

ALSO CONSIDER

ARCAM FMJ A32/P35 £1,980

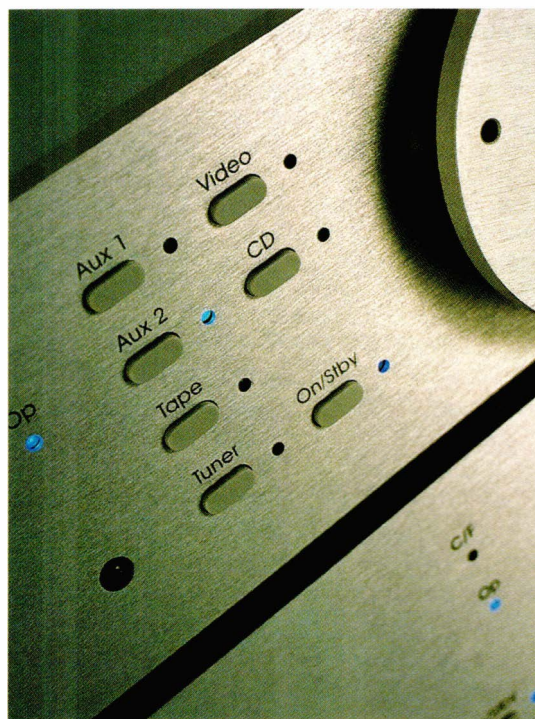
One of the few correctly level-matched integrated/power (bi-ampable) combinations. Sound has real gravitas and sophistication.

EXPOSURE XXIII/XXVIII £2,790

Highly natural and dynamic pre/power combo that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors.

NAIM NAC202/NAP200 £2,720

The latest incarnation of the classic Naim pre/power combo offers traditional name rhythm and timing alongside new refinement.



Feel the force

EXCLUSIVE PMC's FB1 is a Hi-Fi Choice favourite. Now it's got a bigger brother – the OB1

PMC has built itself a fine reputation in both the professional monitoring and the domestic hi-fi sectors over the past ten years, during which it has probably been Britain's fastest-growing speaker brand, percentage-wise.

Three years ago, *HFC* exclusively reviewed the company's first domestic floorstander, the two-way transmission-line-loaded FB1 – rated a Best Buy at £1,275. Now it has a big brother, christened the OB1, which looks very similar indeed but is actually very slightly larger and features a full three-way driver line-up, with a large (75mm) soft fabric dome covering the midband.

The bad news is that the extra complexity involved has raised the price to £2,450, but the three years it has taken to bring the OB1 to the market is evidence enough of the effort that has gone into its development.

It's an attractively slim and rather tall speaker, with nicely rounded baffle edges, and finished in a choice of three basic but high quality wood veneers. A chunky and curvaceous black MDF plinth extends the footprint, providing secure accommodation for tough floor spikes, and greatly improving both the appearance and the stability.

PMC always uses transmission line bass loading, and a tall floorstanding enclosure makes a natural partner. The idea is to use the long, tapered and damped conduit – three metres in effective length here – so that only the low bass gets right down through to

the large port output at floor level, reversing the phase and therefore reinforcing the direct bass driver output. The folded, tapered line makes cabinet construction costly and complex, but all that internal partitioning provides considerable stiffening for the sides.

The bass driver here has a 170mm cast alloy frame with a 125mm doped paper cone/dome diaphragm, the midrange has a 75mm doped fabric dome, while the tweeter has a 25mm fabric dome with short horn flare. Unusually – but most creditably – triple terminals are fitted, permitting the full flexibility of bi or tri-wire/amp options. The crossover network actually uses nearly five times as many components as the FB1, partly because of the move from two to three-way, but also because steeper 24dB/octave slopes are used to avoid driver overlap. PMC also offers active-drive versions (primarily for its studio customers), using Bryston power amps fitted onto the back panel.

Far field in-room measurements show that the transmission line is very effective in generating deep bass extension, registering an impressive -3dB at 20Hz. Sensitivity is a relatively modest 87dB/W, but that's perfectly acceptable considering the bass extension and a fairly benign (five ohm minimum) impedance.

Although the bass output might have been smoother – there are close similarities to the FB1 here – it's well balanced overall, and clearly favours siting well clear of walls. The midband

is notably smoother than the FB1's, if a little more restrained through the upper mid, while treble output looks smooth on paper, though a shade exposed.

PERFORMANCE

One of the problems with changing loudspeakers frequently is that one is inclined to judge a new arrival by the standards of whatever immediately preceded it, and the OB1 had the misfortune to follow models costing ten and twenty times its price. As such, some lack of muscularity was evident from the off, if quite excusable in context. At the same time a smooth evenness and genuine neutrality clearly identified it as a class act.

The bass here is both deep and agile, but also just a little on the dry and cool side, so although it hangs on in there quite satisfactorily, it doesn't really set the main agenda. Instead, the main attention focuses on the midband, which is very even but also a little restrained and laid back towards the presence zone.

It can sound a shade shut-in, adding a hint of nasality to speech, but the up

VERDICT

**PMC OB1
loudspeaker**
£2,450 (per pair)

▲ A lounge-friendly package with genuinely deep bass and a lovely overall neutrality. Smooth, even-handed and an all-round class act.

▼ Upper mid is a little restrained, midband could have more tension and transparency, and though bass is well extended it lacks some punch.

◎ **CONCLUSION**
A great all-rounder with extended bass and good overall neutrality, but a few price rivals deliver a bit more excitement.

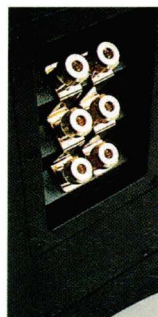
KEY FEATURES

- ▶ 3-metre transmission line loads bass unit
- ▶ Bass driver: 125mm doped paper cone/dome
- ▶ Midrange driver: 75mm doped fabric dome
- ▶ Tweeter: 25mm fabric dome
- ▶ Triple terminals for bi/tri-wiring/amping
- ▶ Real wood veneers
- ▶ Size (WxHxD): 20x102.5x32.5cm

TECHNOLOGY: MIDRANGE DOME

75mm soft fabric, edge-driven dome drive units are relative rarity on the hi-fi scene, where small cone drivers remain the kings of the midrange. Yet they've been the preferred monitoring choice of many professional audio engineers for the last twenty years. And since PMC's roots are firmly planted in studio monitoring, a dome midrange is no surprise.

There are, as usual, pluses and minuses. The major benefit is that a 75mm dome fits better half-way between a 165mm bass driver and 25mm dome tweeter than a typical 110mm cone midrange, and this means that the lateral dispersion – and hence the off-axis and power responses – will be that much smoother. The dome midrange also has magnificent power handling (a major reason why the pro guys like them), but suffers from a relatively low sensitivity.



side is that you can wind up the volume to quite high levels without the sound becoming unduly aggressive. And if the treble does sound a shade strong and obvious, as indeed the measurements suggest, it's also clean and informative, adding an incisiveness to fine detail.

Timing is good, with fine top-to-bottom coherence. The dynamic range is impressively wide, and there's a fine freedom from boxiness, with precise and open stereo imaging showing good depth perspectives. A first impression was that dynamic expression was a little muted, but that didn't stand up to closer long-term scrutiny and in fact turned out to be a function of the broadly restrained upper mid and presence bands.

That said, a mild lack of dynamic tension and transparency in the midband does make for a speaker that's perhaps a little short of romance and charm. Although highly appropriate to a monitoring loudspeaker, there's a slight matter-of-factness about this OB1, which might not satisfy every listener. How it compares in this regard to the FB1 must be purely conjectural, but there's no disputing the superior accuracy and smoothness of the new model, which should repeat the success of its slightly smaller brother. **CD**

📞 PMC 08704 441044

🌐 www.pmc-speakers.com

ALSO CONSIDER

B&W NAUTILUS 803 £3,500

Essentially neutral if a touch laid back, with good dynamic range and fine, driving bass.

LIVING VOICE AVATAR £2,700

Simple yet very refined, the Avatar combines fine dynamic expression with truly excellent detail resolution.

SPENDOR S9 £2,500

A meaty three-way design with classy presentation, superb bass and an explicit midrange with lots of detail.

VANDERSTEEN 2CE SIG £1,990

This longstanding 'classic' design has curious styling but fine neutrality and freedom from boxiness.



Wizard of Aus

EXCLUSIVE Australian pre/power combo has vanishingly low distortion for stunningly crisp sound

Amplifiers simply don't come much bigger or heavier than this gigantic three-box affair. It consists of a preamplifier plus two monoblock power amps, each stuffed to the gills with hi-tech cred and capable of putting a substantial £38,000 dent in your savings.

It's actually Australian in origin, designed by one Bruce Candy, a long-term audiophile who has also had wide experience in non-audio electronic design. But Australia has a modest population and hence hi-fi market, so it's pretty clear that the Halcro brand has been conceived to provide competition for the leading US high-end brands in all world markets.

The £11,650 dm10 preamp plus two dm68 mono power amps (£26,300 the pair) is the top combo in the Halcro range. There's a less expensive dm8 preamplifier available, which looks much the same but omits the vinyl replay stage, and also a less costly dm58 mono power amp, plus a stereo

version close to production.

Finished in matt anodised aluminium, the preamp is a bulky affair, partly because its tall sides rather self-consciously echo the styling used in the power amps, and needs a shelf capable of supporting its very considerable weight (22.5kg) and height (24cm). Naturally there are no tone controls here, but as is increasingly common in our microprocessor-driven world, this is quite a complex affair in other respects, and an extremely flexible beast too. The front panel has a large and informative fluorescent display, a discreet group of buttons and a couple of knobs, one to select input, the other volume. Input, output and phono stage sections are kept separate by internal metal partitions.

One reason for the bulk might lie in the forest of inputs and outputs that completely fill the rear panel. There are four pairs of unbalanced line-level inputs on phono sockets (one with a low impedance for current source

connection), plus three more on balanced (XLR) inputs. Any five of these may be assigned to labelled inputs accessible from the handset or front panel. Then there's an unusually elaborate phono section, toggle switchable between MC and MM options, with balanced and unbalanced inputs, and three gain settings. Rotary knobs provide variable resistance and capacitance to 'tune' the HF resonance of moving magnet cartridges for a maximally flat response.

Outputs are no less comprehensive, with one pair of balanced XLR voltage outputs, two pairs of unbalanced current outputs and two pairs of unbalanced voltage outputs, all on phonos, ensuring flexibility and aiding 'bridged' operation. High-quality headphone drive is also fitted.

Rated at 225 watts into eight ohms,

VERDICT

Halcro dm10 preamp

£11,650

Halcro dm68 mono power amps

£26,300 (per pair)

Wonderfully clean, especially through the midrange, with magnificent dynamic range, sparkling clarity, prodigious bass and superb imaging. Fine ergonomics and flexibility.

Expensive and bulky. Could have tighter timing, with more drive and dynamic tension.

CONCLUSION
An extreme amp that will probably polarise opinions, with a wonderful midrange clarity, but some time-smear.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Very flexible, configurable balanced and unbalanced inputs and outputs
- ▶ Power factor corrected mains connection and switch-mode supplies
- ▶ Power rated at 225W into 8 ohms, 400W into 4 ohms
- ▶ Top class MC/MM phono stage, with adjustable loading for MM cartridge types
- ▶ Substantial handset with ergonomically superior button layout
- ▶ Large and informative fluorescent status display

MAINS ISOLATION

Under the skin, the Halcros feature a number of unusual and advanced electronic techniques, alongside exceptionally high quality componentry. One notably interesting feature is its Universal Power Factor Corrected (UPFC) power supply, which is intended to avoid some of the problems associated with conventional power supplies.

Like some leading UK brands (Chord and Linn, for example), Halcro uses 'switch mode' supplies, which switch at 100+kHz, which is well above the audio band. This means that the amplifier's power supply is effectively isolated from the mains electricity by electronic circuitry, and that circuitry can be designed so that the load that the mains 'sees' behaves just like a simple resistor, taking up voltage and current as a simple sine wave.

This is very different from the situation with the supplies – known as 'peak rectified' – used by conventional amplifiers. Here the mains 'tops up' the supply as required, but only actually supplies current for a short part of its alternating cycle. The current is therefore delivered in short bursts, which in turn will affect the quality of the mains feeding other system components.





or 400 watts into four, the power amps seem much closer to the form-follows-function tradition, and are floorstanders standing an imposing 79cm high – style cues are taken from ‘tower’ PCs, in the manner of top models from Mark Levinson and Classé. Those large fluted verticals (or one of them mainly) act as capacious heatsinks as well as providing interesting styling motifs – the units run warm to the touch but never actually seem to get hot.

These side-cheeks sandwich three separate metal boxes which correspond to three distinct sections of the power amplifier circuitry, ensuring electromagnetic isolation between each section. Two pairs of hefty and very neat multi-way terminals facilitate bi-wiring, and inputs are again very comprehensive and flexible, with a choice of four modes – balanced XLR, plus three unbalanced phono options.

Day-to-day operation is via a hefty handset with a superbly well thought out button layout (for the right-handed), which duplicates all the front panel functions. A neat ergonomic trick is that when a new input is selected, the unit reverts to the volume setting previously used for the new input. The volume covers -60dB to +20dB, moving initially in 0.5dB steps, but if you hold the button down you’ll find that it starts jumping by 5dBs, which takes a bit of practice. Relay switching ensures that each change in volume comes with a little click.

PERFORMANCE

Powered and warmed up, the Halcro combo immediately and spectacularly impresses, with the extreme clarity, cleanliness and sweetness of its mid and top in particular. One of Halcro’s main claims to fame is its vanishingly low distortion. History might not give particularly good correlation between measured distortion and sound quality, but there’s no denying the observation that this amplifier does sound exceptionally clean, with a startlingly

“This gigantic three-box affair is stuffed to the gills with hi-tech cred and is capable of putting a substantial dent in your savings.”

wide dynamic range, through the midband in particular. Massed voices singing in choirs were particularly effectively reproduced.

The Halcro actually arrived as part of

a complete system package, alongside a pair of enormous JMLab Grande Utopia Be loudspeakers. At a quarter of a ton each, these were virtually impossible to move, so were used for most of the

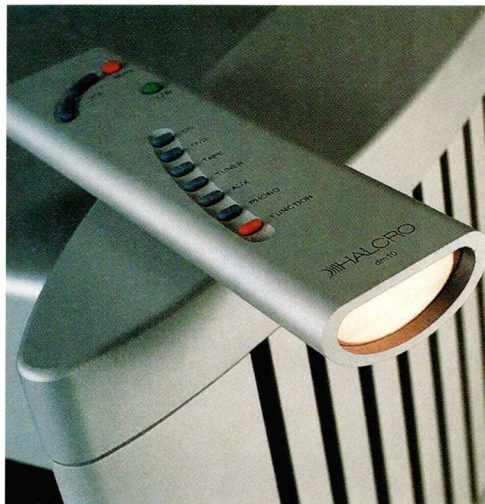
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“The thing that really stands out here is prodigious bass weight and extension, which often seems to reveal previously unsuspected weight and ambience.”

auditioning. The two complemented each other very well in the mid and treble, but the bass was rather more difficult to assess.

The various inputs and outputs between pre and power were all tried, giving some differences but not significantly affecting the underlying character of the amplifier. A number of different speaker cables were also tried,

the curiously co-axial Audience AU-24 giving excellent results.

The sound does tend to focus the attention towards the upper midband, judging by the strength of Bob Dylan's harmonica on *The Bootleg Series Vols 1-3*, for example. But the second thing that stands out here is prodigious bass weight and extension, which often seems to reveal previously unsuspected

weight and ambience. Although the extreme top end seems a little restrained, this amp can dig out new detail from your best loved recordings, with a remarkable freedom from low-level 'grunge', and excellent imaging. The vinyl input gave superb results from low-output with MC cartridges (MMs were not tried), with lovely delicate dynamic shading, and notably low surface noise.

However, this is not the fastest or most time-coherent amp around, factors which do lead to a slight weakness in drive and momentum on rock and dance music, and some lack of dynamic tension. This is, ultimately, an extreme amplifier, in that some listeners will react to it very positively indeed, while others may stay relatively cool about the way it goes about its music making. The price is undeniably high, but the build, engineering and presentation are all superb, with unusual flexibility and intelligent ergonomics throughout. Audio Reference 01252 702705 www.halcro.com

Detail - dm68

- SPEAKER TERMINALS**
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Superior surround

EXCLUSIVE All-analogue multichannel preamplifier delivers surround sound for audiophiles

There are some very fine multichannel processors and power amps around at extremely high prices, and integrated multichannel amps are getting better with each succeeding model generation. But still you know that taking that precious six-channel signal from an SACD or DVD-Audio disc and feeding it through the inputs of most multichannel amplifiers and processors is playing Russian roulette, and that sound quality is invariably the loser.

Unfortunately, there's no easy solution. Multichannel recordings usually include video, and DVD-Videos store audio in a form that requires codecs such as Dolby and DTS to unravel, and these things are difficult to square with the idea of purist audio signal processing. So how about a multichannel preamplifier that doesn't handle video, and which also omits all the usual multichannel Dolby and DTS algorithms?

Welcome then the McCormack Audio MAP-1, a multichannel audio-only preamplifier, with no, or almost no, on-board surround sound processing. But what use is such an animal? Well, the obvious main application is to provide speaker management and volume control for DVD-Audio and SACD discs. As such, it is a natural adjunct for a purist multichannel audio system. But it

TECHNOLOGY: HAFLER V ARM

If memory serves, Hafler's approach to ambience retrieval was a three-channel system that provided a single rear-channel that consisted of the difference between left and right signals (L-R). In the MAP-1, the ARM mode provides a centre channel that is the sum of the left and right signals (attenuated by 6dB, so that a mono signal to L and R will produce equal output in L, R and C channels) and surround channels. As in the Hafler approach, the rear channels are based on the difference between L and R. But unlike Hafler, the ARM sends different signals to two rear channels – (L-R) to the left rear, (R-L) to the right rear.

VERDICT

McCormack Audio MAP-1 multichannel analogue preamplifier
£1,995

▲ Beats most fully loaded AV processors anywhere near its price for straight stereo and multichannel DVD-Audio/SACD sound. Impressive analogue multichannel algorithm for stereo sources (ARM).

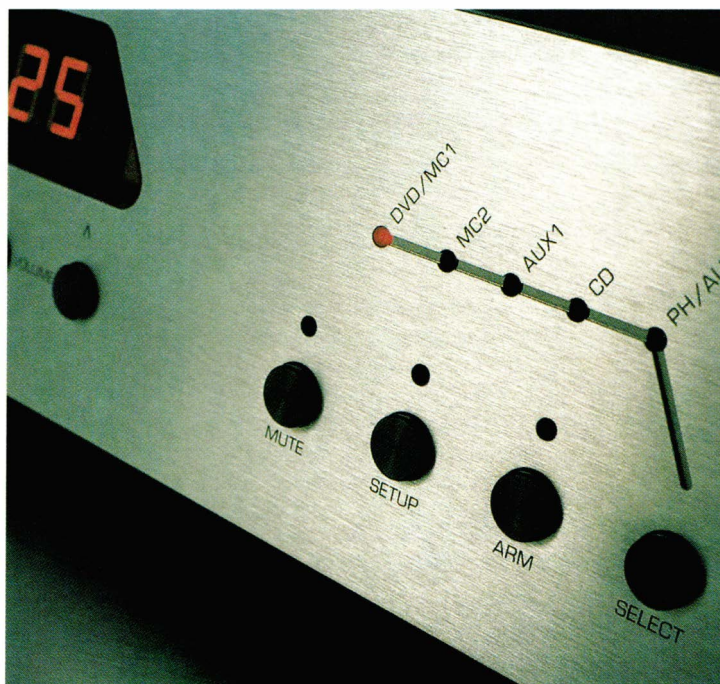
▼ Dolby/DTS processing and bass management limited to the multichannel disc player; impossible to set speaker levels independently on the multichannel inputs.

CONCLUSION

This defiantly different device is limited in a complete AV context, but for a music-oriented multichannel system its smooth, spacious and beautifully relaxed sound quality may be just what the doctor ordered.

KEY FEATURES

- ▶ Three stereo line-level inputs
- ▶ Two 5.1 channel analogue inputs
- ▶ Optional MM/MC phono module (£490)
- ▶ Remote control
- ▶ Ambience Retrieval Mode (ARM) for surround sound from stereo sources



does rather better than this, as most DVD players have their own Dolby Digital (and usually DTS) decoders, which therefore don't require external processing. So why not base a complete AV system on a unit like this?

The MAP-1 has two 5.1 channel inputs and three stereo inputs, one of which can accept an internal MM/MC phono step-up module (not supplied for test). The stereo inputs can be processed by an Ambience Retrieval Mode (ARM) circuit to generate a 5.1 channel surround signal from a stereo feed, and the levels of each channel can be set up independently of the multichannel set-up. McCormack recommends turning down the rear channels so that they are barely audible, and with most material we concur. The multichannel inputs can be set up in the same way.

For some time, McCormack has been part of the Conrad Johnson group, and build quality – internally and externally – reflects this. A remote control

accessing all functions is supplied and allows direct access to the inputs, which are otherwise only available using a sequential button on the amp's fascia.

PERFORMANCE

Set-up is easy using the front panel display, the balance control to select the channel you're setting and the volume control to set individual channel levels. The display is simple and unobtrusive under low light conditions. It can't be turned off, however. The only quarrel with the MAP-1 setup is that it's not possible to set the speaker levels independently on the two multichannel inputs. This one-size-fits-both limitation could be an issue for those with separate DVD-Audio and SACD players. And remember that bass management, where required, must be performed at source, which means by the disc player.

On test, the McCormack MAP-1 was used with a Krell KAV-2250 and KAV-3250 (a total of five channels of



"The surround sound is more coherent, more convincingly three dimensional than is usually experienced in all but the very finest multichannel systems."



power amplification), and also a TAG McLaren 100x5R:10 ten-channel power amp. Various players were tried, including a Sony DVP-NS905V DVD/SACD player and an Arcam FMJ DV27A DVD-Audio/Video player, and five-channel speaker systems from Tannoy and B&W. The capsule version is that the MAP-1 is little short of a revelation, as well as being a damning indictment of the audio performance of most of the fully-featured alternatives.

The MAP-1 is essentially nothing more or less than a minimalist audiophile quality preamplifier, except that it can deal with six channels and not just two. It stands up extremely well with straightforward stereo inputs from

CD and high-resolution disc sources. It draws a strong but generally expansive image space and reproduces music that breathes with real warmth, depth and vigour. In fact, bass quality is exceptionally well extended and voiced, which contrasts with the rather clipped, dry presentation of typical multichannel hardware. It works beautifully with the TAG McLaren power amp, sounding fuller and generating greater image depth than TAG's own AV32R Dual Processor, when used in the same way via its multichannel analogue input.

Multichannel performance is sonically identical to two-channel performance, as far as can be ascertained. What does surprise, though, is that the surround sound experience is more enveloping and coherent; in fact, more convincingly three dimensional than is usually experienced in all but the very finest multichannel systems.

On paper, the ARM circuit sounds like a classic filler, designed to plug a rather

obvious feature gap. In fact, it's much better than one might expect. Very loosely analogous to the classic Hafler sum and difference matrix (see box), it's not as precisely focused as Dolby Pro Logic II, but it is often more realistic, providing good centre fill with considerable depth when adjusted as recommended. A worthy addition to a genuinely audiophile multichannel sound solution.

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 Multichannel non-processing valve preamp offers an excellent and relatively inexpensive alternative to the McCormack.

ROKSAN CASPIAN DSP £995
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TAG MCLAREN AV32R £2,595
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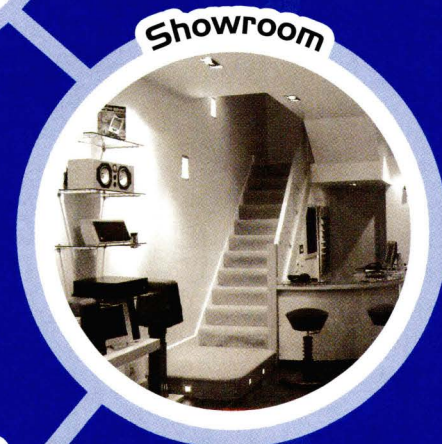
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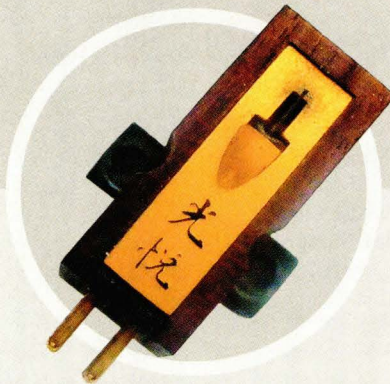
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RETRO

KOETSU RED K MOVING COIL CARTRIDGE



For more years than most of us have had hot dinners, Absolute Sounds has dominated the UK market for imported high-end esoterica. The distribution company has introduced a once sceptical market, conditioned to the high-end according to Linn and Naim, to the joys of celebrated brands like Oracle, Krell, Magnepan, Apogee, Beveridge, Wilson Audio – and Koetsu.

Koetsu (‘light’ and ‘pleasure’ in Japanese) was introduced in the UK by AS following the Jeweltone Ribbon moving coil cartridge, Precision Fidelity Valve Preamp and the Beveridge Electrostatic Loudspeakers. Beveridge might excite some warm memories, but it was Koetsu that put Absolute Sounds on the map, and was its first unequivocal success. By the mid-seventies, Koetsu had become the most famous and exclusive of all high-end cartridges, a status it enjoys to this day.

Yosiaki Sugano, who founded the company, developed the basic blueprint for the Koetsu cartridge for his own satisfaction as a part-time activity while working for Toyota. He had been trained in the Japanese traditions of swordmaking and ceramics and lacquering in his youth, as well as receiving an early introduction to choral singing and the western classical music tradition, which he embraced. He bought all he knew about materials to bear on this cartridge design, which started life as a modification to existing designs, and specifically the Supex SD900, which he helped develop, and which you may know as the first cartridge to be imported by Linn Products.

Koetsu went on to produce cartridges which stretched from the Black at the low end – it sold for around three times as much as any other cartridge at the time – to the Jade Platinum, which with a one-piece diamond stylus and cantilever currently costs almost £6,000. Koetsu cartridges are customised for the climate of the country they are to be used in, the damping tweaked to cope with the temperature and humidity levels expected.

I was privileged to meet Sugano, an enormously dignified man, some years ago at his home outside Tokyo. His living room housed an exotic and very musical hi-fi system which included

“It became clear that cartridge making for Sugano was a mix of the highest levels of artistry and craftsmanship.”

multiple low-power Class A single-ended valve amplifiers (single watt monoblocks for the mid and treble, and ten watts for the bass), driving four horns stacked on top of each other. He had an enviable collection of records, many of which were classical titles from EMI and Decca. In a side room was the workbench and tooling where the cartridges were painstakingly assembled. We talked about hi-fi and music, and it became clear that cartridge making for him was a mix of the highest levels of artistry and craftsmanship. By the time we met, his advancing years meant that production was winding down. He died in January 2002, but production – and the name – continue with his son Fumihiko, trained by his father, at the helm.

The Red K Signature is a low output moving coil, with a nominal 0.6mV output (5cm/sec), with low compliance necessitating a tracking force of the order of 1.8g-2gm. The stylus is a line contact type, and means low groove wall pressures, and its longevity before retipping was required is legendary. It sits in the groove snugly, with final alignment set by micro-adjusting the tracking force to ensure the optimum cantilever orientation. Get it right, and groove noise is minimised and definition maximised. The magnet material is samarium cobalt, the cantilever boron, and the body made from aged rosewood, recycled Sugano told me from antique furniture because by then it is fully stable. The Red K Signature was launched in 1992 at £1,645, and remarkably it remains available to this day, priced at £2,299. With platinum coils the Red K is known as the Pro Mk4, and in the US simply as The Signature. Whatever you call it, it's undeniably still a great cartridge, unequivocally in a different class to other cartridges, with a sense of space and solidity that others can only hint at. ●
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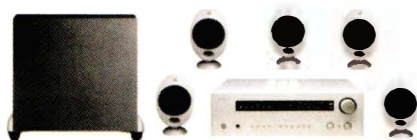
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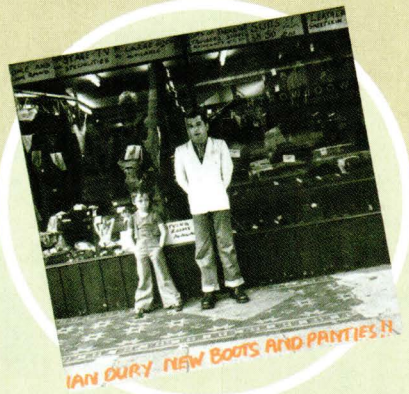
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MUSO

IAN DURY AND THE BLOCKHEADS
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Success didn't come easy for Ian Dury. This fine artist from Harrow, Middlesex, (not Essex) who reinvented himself as a Cockney rocker with a winning line in Estuary repartee was 35 by the time he made his breakthrough record. By that time he already had a failed career (as an art teacher), a failed marriage (that's his son, Baxter, with him on the cover) and a failed band (pub rock stalwarts Kilburn and the High Roads) behind him.

But the band with the polio-crippled, seemingly demented front man earned a fearsome live reputation, despite undergoing numerous line-up changes as Dury struggled to find the definitive sound for his often sexually explicit, scatological and defiantly London-centric songs. By 1975 they had split up and after a brief period in the doldrums, Ian met jobbing singer, guitarist, keyboardist Chaz Jankel, who would become his most enduring collaborator. The pair clicked and between them concocted a sound that would fly fully in the face of punk's then-fashionable rawness and yet provide as pure an epitome of its energy and subversiveness as there could be.

Jankel's love of American funk wasn't an obvious match for Dury's affected Essex banter (despite his carefully constructed image, Ian's initial upbringing was firmly middle class), but his smooth and supple arrangements proved to be the perfect foil for Ian's many rough edges.


But it was no master plan. The album was recorded in several locations over a few months in 1977, but some of the songs had been written up to five years earlier, with a variety of musicians and collaborators. The studio band was largely put together on the hoof, comprising various ex-Kilburns (those that the volatile Dury hadn't completely alienated) and session musicians.

Yet despite its chaotic construction, *New Boots And Panties* (the only things that the then virtually destitute Dury would buy new, apparently) produced by Jankel, managed to achieve a cohesive and extremely distinctive sound. It begins with the sensuous, ribald funk of *Wake Up And Make Love With Me*, and

"Its sound would fly fully in the face of punk's rawness and yet provide as pure an epitome of its energy and subversiveness as could be."

moves through a paean to Ian's first major musical influence and fellow rock cripple, *Sweet Gene Vincent*, a moving tribute to Ian's (mostly absent) bus driver father in *My Old Man*, the raucous rocking number that gave his band their name, *Blockheads* (which incidentally contains absolutely the most disgusting Moog fart in the history of recorded music) and the song that all but defined Ian's laddish persona, *Billericay Dickie* (like many ironies in his life, this update of English music hall innuendo was co-written with American guitarist Steve Nugent).

Officially, there were no singles on the album – much to the chagrin of record label Stiff, Dury insisted that singles should always stand on their own. But as it began to sell, his first solo single, *Sex And Drugs And Rock And Roll* was sneaked on to later editions of the album (side two, track one) but without a credit on the cover – you'll need to count the tracks on the disc to know if it's there.

It was released to universal critical acclaim in the summer of 1977 (the NME's Charles Shaar Murray's assertion that it was "the working man's *Tubular Bells*" was not atypical) but along with a few subsequent singles, would prove to be his finest achievement, the balance of rhythm and rap proving to be difficult to recapture. And it is this album which is most fondly remembered – without it, he would never have become the much-loved British institution he has become. His death in March 2000 prompted a tribute album (non-essential, but the thought was there) featuring cover versions of the album's songs by the likes of Robbie Williams, Sinéad O'Connor, Madness, Billy Bragg and Sir Paul McCartney. But the original is peerless. 
Dave Oliver

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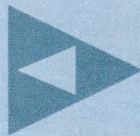
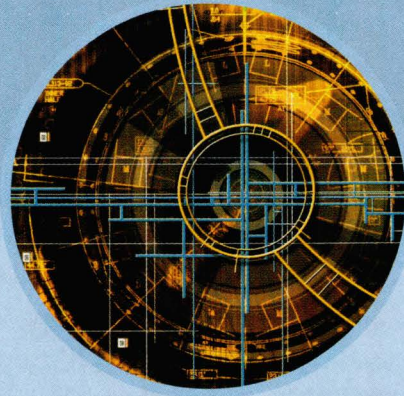
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DIGITALIA

HIGH-RES DIGITAL VERSUS VINYL



Last month we looked at recent strides made in the development of solid-state media with Sony's Memory Stick PRO. But we also touched on our insatiable appetite for greater media capacity.

While this is typically driven by the PC market, some audiophiles are also fixated by the apparent inadequacy of current digital data rates. Twenty years ago, with the launch of CD, I had some sympathy with the argument that a sample rate of 44.1kHz and resolution of 16 bits might not be sufficient.

But now we have uncompressed multichannel audio sampled at 96kHz and encoded at a full 24-bit resolution. Two-channel DVD-Audio stretches this to 24-bit/192kHz. But now I hear the suggestion that the sound quality offered by vinyl LP will only be surpassed once a Blue Ray technology offering 32-bit/384kHz capacity is fully developed. The idea that throwing ever-increasing amounts of data at digital replay will cause a reversion of sound quality back to that of the vinyl LP is, in my view, quite naïve. Naïve, because it assumes that data capacity, rather than the coding and manipulation of the data itself, is the key to achieving the most realistic replay.

Let's put this into perspective. The technical limitations of CD include a bandwidth that's a whisker proud of 20kHz and a dynamic range of 96dB. Stereo DVD-A provides a bandwidth up to 90kHz with the potential for some 140dB+ of dynamic range. Bearing in mind that the hearing of the most acute listeners extends to just 20kHz and that the threshold of pain will be exceeded with 140dB, then this seems more than generous.

Of course, the musical harmonics of piano and some brassy instruments can extend to 40kHz and even 50kHz. And there's also plenty of evidence to suggest that while our direct perception of sound stops around 20kHz, many people are also 'aware' or at least sensitive to ultrasonic sounds over the next octave (up to 40kHz). Nevertheless, this is still well within the envelope of current DVD-A and SACD formats.

Now, nobody in their right mind will suggest that vinyl replay offers anything close to this resolution or bandwidth. For

“One or two passes through a vinyl groove will ‘polish’ fragile wiggles from the relatively soft, black substrate of an LP. Diamond is, after all, tough stuff.”

example, while the best cartridges are capable of producing electrical signals beyond 20kHz, one or two passes through a vinyl groove will 'polish' any such fragile wiggles from the relatively soft, black substrate. Diamond is, after all, tough stuff.

So, if DVD-A remains insufficiently 'musical' in some quarters, then perhaps digital filtering rather than resolution is the cause. This is the same digital filtering used in CD players and, with most conventional high-order implementations, causes both pre- and post-echoes of the data to appear. While post-signal echoes are natural, pre-echo is certainly not. SACD, which represents the musical waveform as a very high speed stream of single bits (a 'bitstream' in the truest sense) does away with digital filtering.

Is this why the first SACD players were almost universally praised as sounding more natural and 'analogue'? Or is this simply a function of SACD's sweeping noise floor behaving as an ultrasonic dither? It's certainly intriguing to note more recent SACD players, that include DVD functionality, sound less impressive. Just how the musical waveform is 'represented' by digital data clearly has some subjective impact. Of course, while the vinyl LP 'stores' its data as a direct analogue of the musical waveform, it's as well to remember that the source of a modern pressing itself is, more than likely, a *digital* recording!

I would suggest, therefore, that the reason why some listeners prefer the 'sound' of a vinyl transcription of a digital recording rather than a direct digital copy onto SACD or DVD-A, stems from a mechanism other than data capacity, bandwidth or resolution. Perhaps all these listeners really need is an add-on DSP processor that brings the additional noise, distortion and microphony of an LP turntable to modern digital replay! ☉

Paul Miller

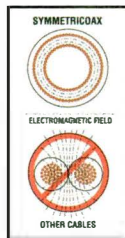
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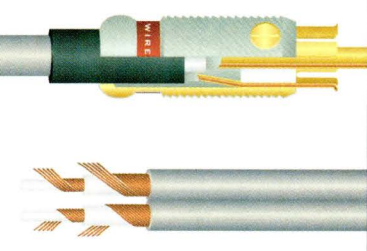
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KRELL KAV300I integrated amplifier, 150wpc, remote, manual, boxed, as new condition, (£2,550) £1,500 ono Matthew Baker 07976 833168 (Bath)

LOWTHER TP1 corner horn speakers, pair, classic speakers for the enthusiast. PM3 drive units need some attention. Sensible offers Karl 01684 562203 (Malvern).

LUX M6000 power amp £3,000. Lux L1000 £400. Pioneer F91 tuner £225. 01474 708631 (Kent).

MARANTZ SR5200 AV receiver (£420) £240. Under 20 hours use. Great reviews. Martin 020 7684 2046 (London, City).

MARANTZ SR73 Dolby Pro-Logic receiver, 2x70W front and 3x40W surround, very good condition, learning remote. £75. Yamaha KX500 cassette deck, Dolby B/C/HX Pro, vgc, programmable with full remote. £50. 01235 528217 (Oxon)

MERIDIAN 206 CD player, good cond with opt dig output and remote £250 ono. Simon Andrew 01536

WANTED

EAR 802 preamplifier with phono input. Barry Day 01745 336553 or 01745 331681 eves (N Wales).

HI FI YEARBOOKS 1981, 1982. Others for exchange 01708 457961 (Essex).

NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE Spacedeck, must be October 2002 onwards, with Spacearm VTA adjustment or Interspace and MC cartridge. 01234 302769 after 6pm (Bedford).

SME model 10 turntable with SME arm and MC cartridge. Also Michell Cyro SE DC motor model. Private buyer. 01234 302769 Bedford)

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MONITOR AUDIO STUDIO 20 SE speakers (black). Bought Feb 2002. £600. Ben 07790 907 718 (London)

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Cyrus CD7Q



424322 (day) or email idbrunt@v21mail.co.uk (Bolton).

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QUAD 34 PREAMP VGC £120, Nordost Solar Wind interconnects, one metre RCA, boxed £45. Mike 01758 613790 (N Wales)

REGA 3 plus Rega cartridge £80, Sony tuner STS370 £35. Technics amp A900MkII £85. Mahogany cabinet £80 (WxHxD) 97x72x42. 01202 429623 (Bournemouth).

REGA ELICIT amp, mint, boxed with manual £275. Call 01782 810295 (Staffs).

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

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Key Features

- Manual cleaning bath.
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Knosti Disco AntiStat

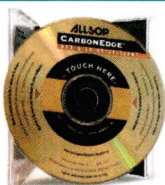
The principle is simple – two discs with a 100mm diameter clamp each side of the record's label, thus protecting it during cleaning. This then rests in a groove at the top of the

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Rega Heavyweight	£89.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

DIGITAL ACCESSORIES

Marigo Orpheus CD Crossbow Mat	£79.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
A-Z CD Clips	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allsop DVD Optimiser/Laser Lens Cleaner	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AudioPrism CD Stoplight	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chesky DVD Surround 5.1 Set-Up Disc	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AudioPrism CD Blacklight™	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ringmat CDi Blue	£37.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ringmat The Statmat MkII	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sound Improvement Disc (Model 14/15)	£17.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compact Dynamics CD Plus	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Compact Dynamics CD UpGrade	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AVIA Home Theatre Set-Up & Calibration	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Densen DeMagic CD	£11.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Furutech RD-1 Disc Demagnetizer	£349.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Chesky Ultimate Demonstration Disc	£15.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lasertrack CD2000 Set-Up Disc	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opus3 Showcase (HDCD)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ultra Burn-In CD3000	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
XLO Reference Test & Burn-In CD	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tommy Larsen CD-Lift™	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

CD STORAGE PRODUCTS

CaseLogic Koskin 208 CD Wallet	£34.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CaseLogic Koskin 88 CD Wallet	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CaseLogic Koskin 64 CD Wallet	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CaseLogic Koskin 32 CD Wallet	£9.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CaseLogic ProSleeves®	£5.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CaseLogic Nylon 208 CD Wallet	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CaseLogic Nylon CD Wallet 88	£17.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CaseLogic Hardshell CD Case	£5.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tommy Larsen Multi Media Rack	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

CARE/ CLEANING PRODUCTS

Allsop Carbon Edge Laser Lens Cleaner	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allsop CD & DVD Fast Wipes	£4.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allsop CD Scratch Repair Kit	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Allsop Radial CD Cleaner	£10.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Caig OpticALL	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
CD Radial Cleaner	£9.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Carbon Fibre Record Brush	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goldring Deluxe Record Brush	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goldring Exstatic Record Sleeves	£11.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lyra SPT Stylus Cleaner	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Me-We CD Sound Elixir	£9.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Miniature Vacuum Cleaner	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Optrix CD Cleaner & Clarifier	£16.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Onzow Zerodust	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ross Mini Disc Head & Lens Cleaner	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Turbo Mini Vac	£16.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
DeoxIT (DeoxIT 200ml)	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
ProGold (ProGold 20ml)	£13.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Power Cleaner	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last All-Purpose Record Cleaner	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Record Preservative	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Stylus Cleaner	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Last Stylast Stylus Treatment	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nagaoka Antistatic Record Inner Sleeves	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unbranded Inner Sleeves	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

ISOLATION RACKS - CONES

A.R.T. Q-Dampers	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AudioPrism 2.5 Iso-Bearings	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AudioPrism 3.3 Iso-Bearings	£84.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Spikes (Each)	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

Foculpods Support Systems (4)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polipods Support Systems (8)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Superpods Support Systems	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
IXOS Sorbothane Feet	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michell Tenderfeet Small	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michell Tenderfeet Tall	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michell Tenderfeet Cups	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost Pulsar Points (Aluminium)	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 1 Cones (Qty 4)	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 2 Cones (Qty 4)	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC Cone Cups (Qty 4)	£17.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 3 Cones (Qty 4)	£44.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 4 Cones (Qty 3)	£119.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 5 Cones (Qty 4)	£119.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDP Feet	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ringmat Feet MkII	£74.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spikes M6/M8 (4x M6/M8)	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stands Unique Carbon Fibre Isolators	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC SPP Platform	£109.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC Super Position T	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
3D Seismic Isolation Platform	£234.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Atacama Audio Equinox Series	£139.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Atacama Audio Nexus Series	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Townsend Audio Seismic Sink Rack Model One (530x400mm / Internal 430x400mm 3 Tier)	£670.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Townsend Audio Seismic Sink Rack Model One (530x400mm / Internal 430x400mm 4 Tier)	£810.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voodoo AIRTEK (430x360mm / 20kg)	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voodoo AIRTEK (490x430mm / 45kg)	£249.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voodoo AIRTEK (510x480mm / 75kg)	£299.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
Black 4 Shelf Rack	£549.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
Black 4 Shelf Rack Cherry Legs	£599.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
Grey 4 Shelf Rack Beech Legs	£649.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

AUDIO BOOKS

The Complete Guide To High End Audio	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home Theatre For Everyone	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
How to Set Up And Fine Tune A Turntable	£7.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
The LP Is Back	£9.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Ringmat Support System	£7.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Classical Long Playing Record Book	£119.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Arms: **Rega** 300/600/900; **SME** Series IV and V; **Kuzma** Stogi; **Triplanar**.

Cartridges: **VanDenHul** Grasshopper and Colibri; **Kuzma** KC Ref; **EMT**;

Reson Recla and Elite; **Cartridge Man** Musicmaker; **Benz-Micro** including

Ruby Open Air; **Kondo** Io J.

Amplifiers: **Border Patrol**; **Canary**; **Sugden**; **Art Audio**; **Monarchy**;

Western Electric; **Icon**; **Tom Evans Audio Designs**; **SJS**.

CD Players: **Wadia**; **Sugden**; **Primare**; **Resolution**.

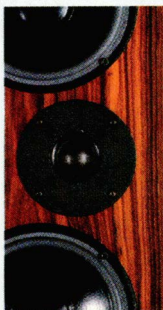
Louspeakers: **Living Voice**; **Vitavox**; **Lowther**.

Cables and Tables by **Living Voice**.

Sale of Part Exchange and Ex-dem Items

	Sale	New
SME Model 20 / 2 - 5 years old	£1500	£3658
Dynaudio Confidence 3 - Rosewood - perfect, boxed - giveaway	£2300	£4800
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn - Mahogany	£1500	£3800
Mirage 890i - fine condition - giveaway	£200	
Art Audio Symphony - 300B SE 10 watts integrated - full chrome	£2250	£4000
Art Audio Vinyl 1 - moving magnet phono stage - chrome - fabulous	£1100	£1550
Art Audio VP1 - line pre-amp - chrome	£1000	£2000
Art Audio Concerto - 6550 line integrated	£1200	£2650
Art Audio VP1 special - line pre-amp - full of Hovlands	£1150	£2250
Canary Audio CA 301 - 300B - 22 big watts - very good	£3400	£5400
Canary Audio CA 303 - 300B monos - 22 lovely watts - better	£5400	£7400
Canary Audio CA 309 - 300B parallel p.p. - 45 mad watts - superb	£9500	£13500
Canary Audio CA 601 - line pre-amp - very, very good	£1900	£2750
Canary Audio CA 300 - single ended monos - valve rect. - 8 watts	£2000	£3500
Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace - turntable - 2/3 years old	£1000	£1700
Nottingham Analogue Space - tonearm	£250	£450
Nottingham Analogue Mentor - tonearm	£390	£800
Jamo Concert 8 - loudspeakers - 2½ years old - spotless	£800	£1365
Townsend Seismic - speaker stands - for bookshelf speakers	£450	£695
Tube Technology MAC - mm and mc phono - nearly new	£700	£1400
Audio Innovations L2 - line pre-amp	£350	£750
Audio Innovations Series 1000 - silver circuit - 50 watts class A	£1100	£2500
Audio Research SPLS2(B) - line pre-amp	£1250	
Alchemist Forsetti ADP 15A - integrated amp	£700	£1400
Alchemist Forsetti ADP 20A - stereo power amp	£700	£1400
AudioNote Soro - phono integrated - serviced - new valves	£700	£1900
Sonus Faber Guameri	£3000	
Unison Research Feather One - line pre-amp	£450	£800
Clear Audio Master Reference - turntable with Master TQI arm.		
2 years old - Incredible. Go on, be crazy! A snip at only...	£8000	£13000
Audio Research LS2 B - line pre	£1250	
Pro Ac Tablette - Cherry - cute - perfect	£300	
Meridian 502 - pre-amp - 4 years - techy - spotless	£700	£1385
Meridian 557 - power - 4 years - techy powerhouse lump - spotless	£800	£1525
Voyd Standard - turntable - Black - perfect - collectable joy	£1500	
Sugden Masterclass - CD player - very nearly new	£2000	£2500

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Hi-Fi Plus *Product of the Year*
Hi-Fi Choice *Editor's Choice*

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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



Welcome to the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible* – the ultimate guide to the very best high performance hi-fi and AV gear you can buy. Here you'll find all our favourite current products listed under easy to use categories, together with useful information on what to look for and how to get the most from your components.

Reviews you can trust

Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most thorough techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these pages, from CD and vinyl to the latest multichannel disc players. Whether hi-fi stereo or high performance surround and vision, these components will take you a step closer to reality.

How to use this guide

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

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

SUPER AUDIO CD



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

Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

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

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

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

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



Marantz CD6000 KI Signature £500

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



Meridian 507 £1,195

The entry-level player from British digital audio specialist Meridian is an absolute peach – a transparent and detailed sound, and superb build quality to boot.

Our favourite CD PLAYERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
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EDITOR'S CHOICE
NEW GEAR REVIEW

Audio only CD and SACD players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER	
				SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET		VARIABLE OUTPUT
UP TO £1,000												
EC	Arcam CD92	900	High-resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing		●	●		●				212
EC	Copland CDA 822	1,598	Well built and carefully thought out, if you go for the more sophisticated musical forms it is superb value		●		●		●			241
R	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks		●							212
EC	Exposure 2010	600	Undistinguished in the final analysis, but the 2010 nevertheless is a return to form for this famous marque		●	●	●	●				231
R	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal								●	212
EC	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain		●	●		●		●	●	217
EC	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	500	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built		●	●	●	●		●	●	231
EC	Marantz CD-17 MkII	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step		●	●		●	●	●		206
EC	NAD C541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money		●	●	●					231
EC	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well		●	●						231
R	Rotel RCD-1070	495	Technically sound and well equipped, this player lacks a little excitement but shows excellent precision		●							226
ABOVE £1,000												
R	Arcam FMJ CD23T	1,150	Refined FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility		●	●	●	●				226
EC	Audionet ART V2	2,300	Built to last forever, this CD has a dark natural sound with excellent bass and would be cheap at twice the price!		●		●					231
EC	Classé CDP-10	1,599	Very natural yet capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner		●		●		●			238
R	Exposure XXII	1,175	Natural sounding player, great with voices and acoustic instruments and makes for engaging listening		●	●	●					238
EC	Gamut CD1R	2,350	Natural, precise and impressively 3D sound that marries precision with emotional communication		●		●		●			240
EC	Krell KPS 25sc	24,998	One of the finest CD players available, this is also a state of the art preamplifier with Cast interface technology		●	●	●	●	●		●	236
R	Marantz CD17 MkII KI Sig	1,200	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II)		●	●						226
EC	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		●	●	●		●		●	231
EC	Meridian 507	1,195	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer		●	●	●					238
EC	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE ²⁴	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities		●	●					●	229
EC	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made	●	●	●	●	●				237
R	NAD S500i	1,200	A beautifully built machine that treads the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb		●	●	●		●			238
R	Naim Audio CD5	1,150	Recommended subject to audition – a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses									212
EC	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●					238
EC	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●				●			226
EC	Sony SCD-XA333ES	1,200	High-end multichannel SACD player is excellent with CD, impressive in surround	●	●	●		●				224
EC	Sony SCD-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch	●	●	●		●	●			223
EC	TEAC D-70/P-70	13,000	This two-box solution is one of the best CD replay systems available, with a fantastic range of facilities	●	●	●		●	●			239
EC	Wadia 301	3,650	Insightful player with digital preamp options and good onboard volume control. Try it direct for maximum effect	●	●				●		●	228

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



Copland CDA822 £1,598

A beautifully built Scandinavian player with an equally attractive sound. If natural, fluid music-making sounds up your street, make sure you give it a spin.



Naim CDX2 £2,650

A superb player that mixes rhythm and timing with precision and poise. Add the £2,300 XPS power supply (pictured) to make one of the best CD players in the world.

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video

➤ DVD has proved a phenomenal success in commercial terms and has virtually extinguished the market for budget CD players – you can't really beat a multiformat player when it comes to features. Early DVD players were not particularly good CD spinners because of the enormous amount of RF interference produced by video circuits, but as this problem has been identified manufacturers have begun to tackle it. Nowadays, most DVD players are competent CD players and a few are remarkably good – often as not they are the ones that play DVD-Audio discs as well.

The great advantage of DVD, apart from being the first digital video format for the home, is that it offers discrete multi-channel sound. In the case of plain DVD video discs, this music is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit onto the disc alongside the video data. You



can use a DVD player with your stereo system by connecting the stereo outputs, though this won't give the surround benefits that the format specialises in.

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

Use the analogue outputs for CD, DVD-A and SACD, and the coaxial digital output for DTS and Dolby Digital movie soundtracks.

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

The best connection is component video closely followed by RGB Scart, which is clearly superior to S-video and the basic composite video option.

DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

Only if you want to hear the benefits of surround sound. DVD players can be used with stereo amps to great effect, but you won't be able to decode the Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks on movies.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

Not unless you have a progressive scan/NTSC compatible monitor or TV – as yet there is no PAL version.

DVD-AUDIO

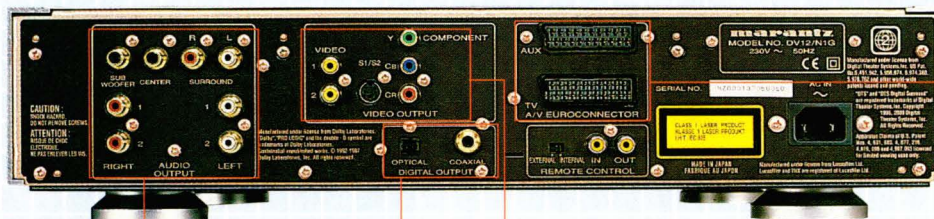
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs.



The discs can be played on any DVD player, but the CD-beating high-fidelity sound can only be appreciated with a DVD-A player. While offering similar benefits to SACD, it has the advantage of on-screen display for

information – lyrics, images and so on. To save you having to decide which format to go for, a few brands are bringing out universal players to cover SACD and DVD-A, and this would seem to be the best route if you want to enjoy high-resolution digital audio. If you're after a high-end model, look for one with a 'high bandwidth' digital audio output as well as 5.1 analogue outputs.

CONNECTIONS



ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS: For stereo and multichannel connections, use these for best results with DVD-Audio, SACD and CD.

DIGITAL OUTPUTS: For Dolby Digital, DTS and PCM audio bitstreams.

VIDEO CONNECTIONS: Yellow sockets are composite; red, green and blue sockets are for component which gives best results, while the black multipin socket is S-video, which sits qualitatively between the two.

SCART CONNECTIONS: These are a good-quality option for video, especially ones that output RGB.

Our favourite BT GROUP TEST BEST BUY RT GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EC EDITOR'S CHOICE NG NEW GEAR REVIEW

DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
EC	Arcam DIVA DV88 Plus	1,000	The first DVD player (just) enabled to deliver progressive scan with UK-spec PAL discs. Superb picture and good sound			●	●		238
RT	Cyrus DVD 7+	1,000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with moderate picture quality to match						237
RT	Denon DVD-2800 MkII	750	Excellent Silicon Graphics processing, a wide range of features and sharp pricing make this a winner			●	●		237
RT	Denon DVD-3800	1,000	High and progressive DVD-Video player with good CD and DVD-Audio capabilities, priced below its station	●			●		234
RT	Pioneer DV-656A	400	Astonishing value for money, although not great hi-fi, this player comes alarmingly close to the heavyweight competition	●	●	●	●		240
RT	Pioneer DV-757Ai	800	State of the art universal player with iLink digital interface provides performance stretch currently unavailable to others	●	●	●	●		240
RT	Pioneer DV-656A	400	'Universal' SACD/DVD-Audio/Video player does everything moderately well or better, and is an excellent buy	●	●	●	●	●	234
RT	Primare V25	1,000	Bold pictures on screen are matched to easy, likeable sound quality and a huge range of outputs	●		●			237
RT	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD is a distinctly superior package, with above average performance	●		●		●	234
ABOVE £1,000									
NG	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs				●	●	238
EC	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse	●		●	●		230
EC	Marantz DV-12S1	2,500	THX Ultra-progressive DVD-A player is a classy all-rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode	●					229
EC	Meridian DVD596	2,485	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player			●			218
EC	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs			●	●	●	230
RT	Roksan Caspian DVD	1,195	A good all-rounder – a solid and propulsive sounding DVD player which is also a surprisingly capable picture-making machine			●	●		237
EC	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	An engineering <i>tour de force</i> . It's pricey and plays neither DVD-A nor SACD, but performance – especially video – is top notch			●	●		212
EC	Townshend DV-747A	2,899	Major upgrade to Pioneer machine turns it into a giant slayer of a disc player, available as an upgrade to existing owners	●	●	●	●		232

SPECS KEY **DVD-A COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution DVD-A discs in two and multichannel modes. **SACD COMPATIBLE** Plays high-resolution SACD discs in two and multichannel modes. **ELEC DIGITAL OUTPUT** Electrical coaxial output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **OPT DIGITAL OUTPUT** Optical Toslink output for digital connection to a multichannel amplifier or receiver. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** Quarter inch (6.3mm) headphone jack fitted to the DVD player.

TOP BUYS



Sony DVP-NS905V £400
SACD-compatible DVD-Video player offers excellent audio and video performance.



Denon DVD-3800 £1,000
This DVD-Audio compatible player is excellent with music and equally sharp with video.



Pioneer DV-757Ai £800
Pioneer's latest 'universal' disc player - strong with CD, SACD, DVD-V and DVD-A alike.



Marantz DV-12S1 £2,500
A superb DVD-Audio/Video player – great with DVDs and unusually fine with CDs too.



The most complete & thoroughly integrated solution to quality vinyl replay.

ACUTUS



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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



Record players or turntables offer the digital revolution serious competition when it comes to sound quality. Even a modest model can turn musical tricks that most CD players struggle with. Some call it vinyl warmth, but in reality it's a lack of digital hardness that makes the format so engaging. True, the software requires a bit more care, but even a knackered LP is more playable than a scratched CD.

Record players are made of three, perhaps four, fundamental parts. The turntable is the plinth and platter, usually also containing the motor and any suspension system. A tonearm sits on the plinth and allows the cartridge to trace the vinyl groove by pivoting or parallel tracking over the record. The cartridge contains the means of turning the mechanical movement of the groove wall into an electrical signal.

A fourth element is an amp dedicated to the delicate job of amplifying and equalising the cartridge's insubstantial output. This is called a phono stage and can be found in some integrated amplifiers and preamps, but is increasingly purchased separately for use with line-only amps.



TURNTABLE SET-UP

Setting up a turntable varies from model to model, but the general principle is to level the platter by adjusting the suspension or, as with solid platters, the surface it sits on. Sprung suspensions sometimes require a bit of fine-tuning to sound their best, but the principle is to achieve a smooth, pistonic bounce. Cartridge set-up is even more critical, as the angles at which the stylus traces the groove affects its tonal balance and levels of distortion. A good alignment protractor is essential if you are intending to set up your own cartridge, as is a degree of patience. In essence, there are two angles you need to get right: the tracing angle as the cartridge crosses the record if you are looking from above, and the vertical tracking angle (VTA), which is adjusted by raising or lowering the arm base to bring the arm parallel with the record surface.

There are two types of phono cartridge: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC), and with a few exceptions the latter outperforms the former. But MCs produce a lower output and require better-quality amplification to be heard at their best. As a general rule, MCs offer a broader bandwidth, greater dynamics and more detail, but the better moving magnets do most things well enough to distract you from your CD collection.

TOP BUYS



Rega P3 £298

Latest version of a hi-fi classic is a very capable deck for a very modest price, with very little serious competition from other makes. A great turntable for the money and a very safe buy.



Audio Note TT1/ARM1 £594

Simple, unpretentious and relatively inexpensive, Audio Note's TT1 delivers a real taste of high-end performance at a realistically affordable price.



Michell Orbe SE £1,825

A fine example of the turntable art, the stripped down SE version of Michell's flagship now features a DC motor. Does justice to the best arms and cartridges.



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

A beautifully made turntable that delivers a high-end vinyl experience without costing the earth. Neutral, even-handed, detailed and frankly spellbinding.

Our favourite TURNTABLES

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
 GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
 EDITOR'S CHOICE
 NEW GEAR REVIEW

Record players

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	●	●	●	203
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●		229
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Acutus	5,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	●	●		194
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bluenote Bellavista/Borghese	1,594	Charming in appearance and sound if not particularly practical. Start your love affair with vinyl here	33/45			● opt	239
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearaudio Champion Level 2	1,955	Neutral balance, great looks, but only so-so detail. Benefits greatly from isolation	33/45			● ●	223
<input type="checkbox"/>	Linn LP12 Basik	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc are still top rank	33	●		● ●	103
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michell Orbe SE	1,825	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor.	33/45	●			235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject RPM 6	500	Basic, very neutral turntable and arm combination that can take a very expensive cartridge. A high-end bargain!	33/45			●	236
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject RPM 9	1,000	Capable deck with some unusual features. Highly engaging sound with an essentially neutral character	33/45			● opt	239
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	33/45			●	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	33/45			●	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rega P25	619	The contemporary aesthetic wins admiration, the sonic assurance turns it into your own personal music shrine	33/45			● opt	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	● ●	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	● ●	195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	● ●	186
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in clean, clear reproduction	33/45	●	●	● ●	205

Our favourite PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
			MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
Audio Technica AT110E	29	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	214
Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	●			223
Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms		●		235
Goldring Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone		●		235
Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	192
Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
Van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●		235

Our favourite PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
			MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AOL GAIN	AOL IMPEDANCE	
Creek OBH-8SE	160	Neutral, relaxed and involving sound from this neat little unit	●				223
Lehmann Black Cube	275	Creates a well balanced sound that has few limitations and plenty of good qualities. Very flexible for the price	●	●	●	●	234
Pass Labs XOno	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist	●	●		●	201
Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price	●	●			201
Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension alongside good tonal colour this is the one to beat, excellent value for the money		●			234
Tom Evans Microgroove Plus	700	Stunning detail, gives new insights into familiar discs		●			223
Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for maximum information retrieval off any LP		●			201
Trichord Dino/Dino+	498	Relaxed yet resolute with very good image depth and natural balance, not to mention great flexibility	●	●	●	●	234

TURNTABLE SPECS KEY **SPEEDS** Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you. **SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE** Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown. **CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY** **MM** Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **MC** Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. **REPLACEABLE STYLUS** Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

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- TX-32DT14
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JVC

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- XV-N55
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- HM-HD54
- HR-XV20EK

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- DV-747Ai
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- DV-454-S
- DV-656-S

HITACHI

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- RX-V730RDS
- RX-V1200RDS
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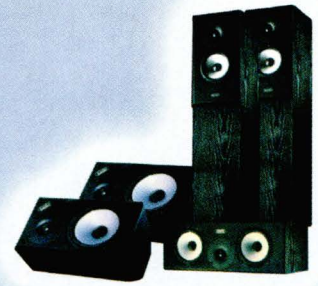
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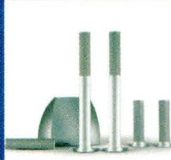
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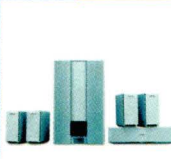
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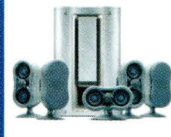
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Panasonic DMR-HS2EBS

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- 12HRS RECORD IN EP MODE
- TIMESLIP TECHNOLOGY



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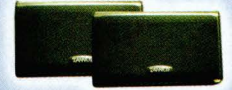
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	STR-DB780
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	HTK25 + DVP-F25E
PIONEER	NS-DV1000
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CASSETTE DECS	TC-KB920SS
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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



Radio is a fantastic musical resource that's in danger of being taken for granted, but whatever your tastes there's someone out there catering for it. If you haven't got a decent tuner hooked up to your hi-fi already, you're missing out!

DAB or FM?

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

Where FM scores over DAB is in the lower cost of hardware and the greater reception

area. It can also provide higher sound quality if reception conditions are favourable. Absolute sound quality judgements are muddled by the fact that you are listening to different forms of compression and processing at the studio for each station.

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

RECEPTION

The quality of signal you feed a tuner will dictate its sound quality. So serious FM listeners should get a decent external aerial and connect it with as few junctions and splits as possible. Every time you split the cable (ie take a feed for another tuner) you halve signal strength! With DAB the same applies but get a DAB-specific aerial. See www.bbc.co.uk/digitalradio for details.

TOP BUYS



Denon TU260L II £130

The benchmark for all other budget AM/FM tuners, with great sound and features.



Cambridge DAB300 £150

A low-cost DAB radio that gets very close to much more expensive digital models.



Rega Radio 3 £374

An excellent sound-first FM/MW tuner – low on features but big on sound.



Magnum Dynalab MD102 £2,200

If you're serious about radio this superb FM tuner is about as good as it gets.

Our favourite TUNERS

BB GROUP TEST BEST BUY GR GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EC EDITOR'S CHOICE NG NEW GEAR REVIEW

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
GR	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			● ● ●		193
GR	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64			● ● ●		193
EC	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
EC	Magnum Dynalab MD102	2,200	Unique remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5		●	● ● ●		241
GR	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90	●		● ● ●		211
GR	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29			● ● ●		193
GR	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30	●		● ● ●		230
BB	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30			● ● ●		230
BB	Rega Radio 3	374	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20		●			242
GR	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30	●		● ● ●		242
DAB TUNERS										
GR	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16			● ● ●		221
BB	Cambridge Audio DAB300	150	Simple unit with limited features (no RDI) but decent sound – a very near match for more expensive models	DAB	10			● ● ●		242
NG	Pure DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99			● ● ●		234
GR	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99	●		● ● ●		242
GR	TAG McLaren T32R+DAB	2,290	Classy hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB, and a joy to own and use	DAB,FM,M,L	99	●		● ● ●		230

SPECS KEY WAVEBANDS Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. **PRESETS** How many stations can be stored in memory. **RDS** Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). **REMOTE CONTROL** For the couch potato. **SIGNAL STRENGTH METER** Useful for setting up an aerial. **ROTARY TUNING KNOB** An ergonomic alternative to buttons.

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



Philips CDR802 £300

Multidisc recorder that's slick and accomplished, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



Marantz DR6000 £400

Quality in a box – it eschews gimmickry, but it does a simple job very well.



Sony MDS-JE480 £130

Entry-level MD recorder that does exactly what it says on the tin, at a bargain price.



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 £600

Impressive implementation of hard drive technology for home audio applications.

Our favourite DIGITAL RECORDERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW

CD-R/RW, MD and HD recorders

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS		
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS						
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		218
	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		233
	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1		205
	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		233
	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		205
	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well-equipped, well-priced CD-R/RW deck	1		218
	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single-deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good, if characterful, player	1		218
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		218
	Sony RCD-W3	250	Superb Sony build and ease of use complement great recording ability and amiable CD playback	2		238
MD RECORDERS						
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		233
HDD RECORDERS						
	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	CD-R/RW and hard drive in one – a flexible beast, one of the best of its ilk thus far though just short of formal recommendation	2	80	237

SPECS KEY **DECKS** Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.



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RPM4
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Denon TU260L MKII Tuner	£99.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner	£109.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable	£1049.95
Michell TecnoDec Turntable	£599.95
Project Debut Phono SB Turntable	£169.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Black)	£119.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours)	£134.95
Pure Evoke 1 DAB Radio	£99.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB Tuner	£219.95
Sony ST-D777ES FM/DAB Tuner	£499.95

"If you want severe turntable styling on a budget, you need look no further than this. The shape of the main plinth here follows the outline of the record platter and arm to give a cut away look to the deck, and while it looks a bit like a cakestand with the dustcover in place, in use the RPM4 looks much more the business.

The RPM4 soon impresses with the quality feel of its arm and the screw-down clamp to hold and flatten records, and as soon as the stylus settles into the groove it's clear this is a superior player. There's much less surface noise than with the Debut, and the music has much greater scale and power, allied to closer detailing. That lovely organic feel you only seem to get from great vinyl playback is apparant... This is a very grown-up record player for reasonable CD player money: it's well worth exploring."

WHAT HI-FI? August 2002

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



Michell Gyro SE/RB300
£1049.95

STARTER SYSTEM

marantz[®]
CD4000 (Black) CD Player
PM4200 (Black) Amplifier

MISSION
m71i Speakers

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Includes **audioquest** Cable Worth £20 FOC

ROTEL RCD-02 CD Player **£379.95** RA-02 Amplifier **£349.95**

RA-02 Amplifier "The amp has a fast, detailed and yet satisfyingly full presentation. That allows it to make a fine job of the beats of Groove Armada's *Goodbye Century* set without losing sight of the fine details of the mix, and also husking out Marianne Faithfull's deliciously smutty vocals on *Kissing Time* with real relish. Add in decent levels of equipment - and the convenience of remote control, and we reckon Rotel has a winner on its hands."



WHAT HI-FI?
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AMPLIFIERS
£751-£500

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2002

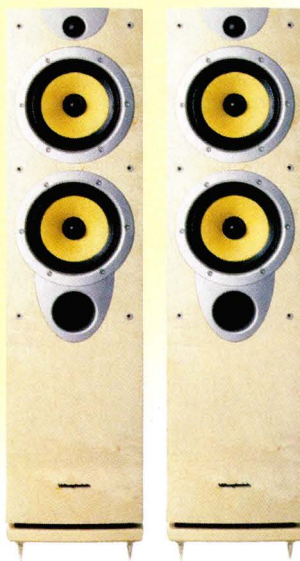
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Arcam DIVA CD72T	£449.95
Arcam DIVA CD82T	£599.95
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Marantz CD4000	£99.95
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Roksan Caspian	£994.95
Rotel RCD1070	£494.95
Sony CDPXE570	£99.95

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets.
*NICWAOO = Not in conjunction with any other offer. E&OE.

Wharfedale Pacific Evo 30 Speakers **£649.95**



"Evolution? This is more like a revolution: Wharfedale's new range is more than just an upgrade of its Pacific series. The changes are radical, but the most obvious transformation is the removal of the original's unattractive tweeter module, which was situated on top of the speaker. The tweeter housing is now sunk into the Evo 30 cabinet, the intention being to improve dispersion and benefit from the improved rigidity of the strongest point of the cabinet.

Listen to the Evo 30s and the sonic changes leap out at you. Sitting on their chunky spikes and situated in free space, the speakers sound wonderful: low frequencies delve deep and delivery is punchy and fast..

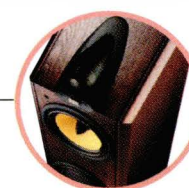
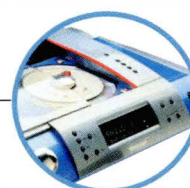
You'll have gathered by now that we love the Evo 30s. They're beautifully made and are great all-rounders."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ March 2003

Free audioquest
Speaker Cable
worth **£40** with **ALL**
Speakers over **£170**
*NICWAOO



Also Available
Acoustic Energy
Aegis Evo One
£179.95



experience **more**



Amplifier Selection

Claim 10% Off RRP On Selected British Amplifiers

Ask instore for details - *NICWA00

Arcam DiVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£369.95
Arcam DiVA A75 Plus Amplifier	£429.95
Arcam DiVA A80 Amplifier	£599.95
Arcam DiVA A85 Amplifier	£799.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1149.95
Cyrus 6 Amplifier	£599.95
Cyrus 8 Amplifier	£799.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£199.95
Harman Kardon HK670	£299.95
Linn Kolektor Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier	£149.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308 Amplifier	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier	£3994.95
Quad 99 Power Amplifier	£549.95
Roksan Caspian Amplifier	£894.95
Rotel RA-01 Amplifier	£249.95



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SOUND & VISION

GRAND SYSTEM £999.95 Save £290

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A75 Plus Amplifier
T61 RDS Tuner**

List Price £1189 • Arcam Grand System not available in conjunction with any other offer.

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ARCAM
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When purchased together with any Arcam CD & Arcam Amplifier combination.
Min Spk Value £400 - Offer excludes 'Grand System'
*Not in conjunction with any other offer

MISSION

780SE Speakers £349.95

Free audioquest.
Speaker Cable
worth £60 with ALL
Speakers over £280
*NICWA00

"The Mission 780s held our Product of the Year title until the pesky Quad 11Ls appeared and knocked them off the winner's rostrum. So how does Mission respond? Simple, it designs a 780 Special Edition.

The main aim is to increase detail and resolution throughout the frequencies, and after a 50-hour run-in, this wish seems to have been fulfilled... The revamped Mission 780s are hugely enjoyable: anyone with up to £400 to spend should consider the standmounters. Mission's clever move has paid off."

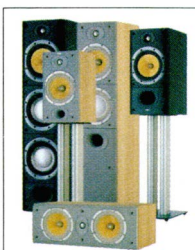
WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ February 2003



Mission 782SE
£899.95

PURE
DIGITAL

DRX-701ES Digital Tuner £219.95 Save £30



Also Available
B&W 600 Series

"This new tuner from the recently renamed Pure is based on the 2001 Award-winning Videologic DRX-601ES, but under the lid is an all-new third-generation digital radio engine, in the form of Frontier Silicon's Chorus FS1010.

The tuner uses 24-bit/192kHz conversion with 4x upsampling and data interpolation, and is powered by a low-noise toroidal transformer - such attention to sonic detail pays off. Digital outputs are provided on electrical and optical feed, but most people will use the analogue out, and these sound very good indeed.

As usual the tuner is subject to the signal quality off-air, but when it's fed from a high-quality outdoor aerial and a good signal it's capable of a crisp, powerful and detailed presentation. Even more populist music stations like Radio 6 benefit from the mix of a neutral balance and fine weight, while speech is also neutral and easy to follow... if you want a quality home tuner for digital radio, you need look no further."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2002
PURE & HOME CINEMA AWARDS
TUNERS
Pure DRX-701ES

pricing policy

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.



CYRUS
Claim £250 Off the Speakers of your choice
 When purchased together with any Cyrus CD & Cyrus Amplifier combination. Min Spk Value £400
 *Not in conjunction with any other offer



CD8 CD Player £999.95
8 Integrated Amplifier £799.95

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for nearly 20 years. Today their upgradeable, modular product range includes multi-room systems, home cinema and some of the world's finest hi-fi systems. Cyrus products are hand finished, half size die-cast enclosures and include a hidden digital command system that allows simple operation of any size system.

Joining the new Cyrus 8 amplifier is the stunning new high performance, upgradeable CD player, the CD8. Other new models in the 8 series include the AV8 digital AV processor and a new disc player, DVD8, featuring specially tuned video and audio circuitry.

Cyrus 8 Amplifier "The 8 is a large step forward from older generations of Cyrus amplifiers, and takes the company back into the leading pack in the sub-£1000 integrated amp sector... The Cyrus 8 is a must-audition product." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ January 2003**

Also Available
Roksan Caspian Amplifier
£894.95



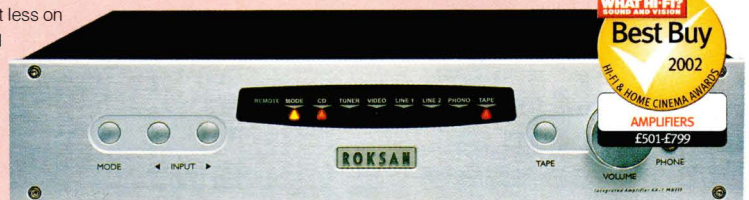
ROKSAN
Kandy KA1 MKIII Amplifier £544.95

"When we last reviewed Roksan's Kandy integrated amp in February it fought off serious competition to come top in a *Supertest*. This is its replacement, the MkIII. Internal changes include an updated power supply for the preamp section and identical mono modules for the left and right power amp sections. Roksan also claims 50 percent lower distortion on line-level inputs and a whopping 150 percent less on the phono input. The rated power output is an impressive 120 watts per channel into 8 ohms, and this amp has a confident, muscular way with music that bears this out. But don't be fooled into thinking this amp is raw but unrefined. With Van Morrison's *Down the Road* the Kandy has the guts to render the performance exciting and dynamic, but also the guile to deliver subtle details.

Also Available
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier • £3994.95



ROKSAN
Claim £200 Off the Speakers of your choice
 When purchased together with any Roksan CD & Roksan Amplifier combination. Min Spk Value £300
 *Not in conjunction with any other offer



The upgraded Kandy MkIII is an excellent amp; the MkII version was impressive, but MkIII is a stunner. It betters all the amps here in the timing department, and has a wonderfully robust character that works well with all types of music. It manages to retain the good points of the MkII while adding extra resolution and subtlety. All the amps here have a place in the market. It's just that at £550 the Kandy really does set the pace." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002**

Free audioquest.
 Speaker Cable worth £60 with **ALL** Speakers over £280 *NICWAOO

QUAD

11L Speakers £379.95

"Quad is best known for its superlative electrostatic designs, which start at £3500. So any £379 pair of speakers that carries the company's name has to be going some to avoid tarnishing the family reputation. The first surprise is that the 11Ls come in real-wood veneers covered with piano-gloss lacquer. This type of finish is almost unheard of at the £1000 mark, let alone at this price. Has anything been sacrificed for such a luxury finish? Here's the second surprise: apparently not.

The final surprise? Well, saving the best for the last, the sound quality of the 11Ls is phenomenally good. These are small speakers at just

33cm tall, but the scale and authority of

their performance is terrific. The laws of physics dictate bass extension limitations, but thanks to a clever dual rear firing port arrangement the 11Ls plumb the depths with the determination of a rottweiler, even when placed in free space.

If you're in the market for a pair of top quality standmounters these Quads are a must listen. Quite simply, they're good enough to scare the competition big time."

Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII
Prices From £1699.95



WHAT HI-FI? PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2002
Product of the year 2002
WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2002
Home Cinema Awards 2002
SPEAKERS
Quad 11L



Speaker Selection

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three.....	£349.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM601 S3.....	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3.....	£299.95
KEF Q1.....	£249.95
KEF Q3.....	£399.95
KEF XQ1.....	£999.95
Linn Katan (Cherry/Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Cherry/Maple).....	£1044.95
Mission 780SE.....	£349.95
Mission 782SE.....	£899.95
Mission m74i.....	£299.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2.....	£199.95
Monitor Audio Silver S1.....	£299.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Quad 22L.....	£895.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Ruark Etude.....	£649.95
Wharfedale Diamond 8.3.....	£199.95
Wharfedale Pacific EVO 30.....	£649.95

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets.
 *NICWAOO = Not in conjunction with any other offer. E&OE



experience **more**



MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

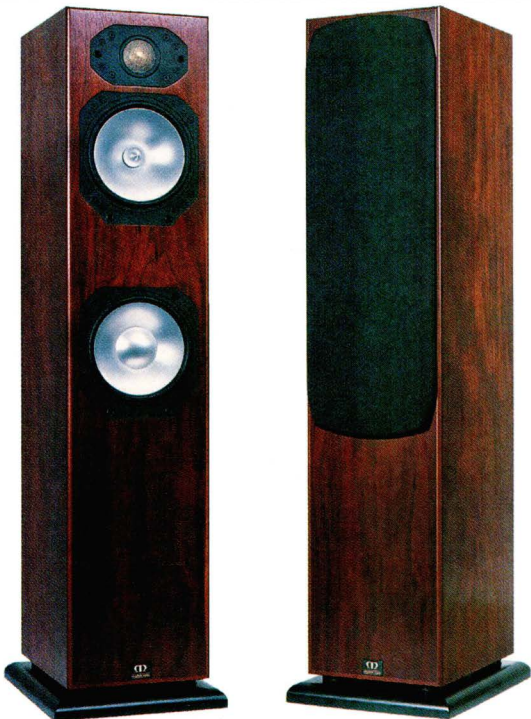
A3.2 CD Player £999.95
A3.2 Amplifier £979.95

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

MUSICAL FIDELITY

Claim £350 Off the Speakers of your choice

When purchased together with any MF CD & MF Amplifier combination. Min Spk Value £600
*Not in conjunction with any other offer



MONITOR AUDIO Silver S6 Speakers £599.95

Free audioquest.
Speaker Cable worth £100 with ALL Speakers over £500
*NICWA00

British loudspeaker manufacturer Monitor Audio has introduced a replacement series for its acclaimed and award winning Silver Series speakers. "The aim has been to offer real advances in performance and value", says technical director Dean Hartley. "New models include the S1 and S2 standmounters, the S6, S8 and S10 floorstanders.



Also Available Gold Reference GR10 & GR20

"With a close-miked track such as James Taylor's *Line 'Em Up* from SACD they really deliver the character of the singer's voice and they're just as expressive with the cultured rhythms of Groove Armada's latest outing, having just the right mix of rhythmic control and fluidity... But amazingly the best is yet to come: these are simply beautiful speakers for classical music, once a few days' thrashing has tamed their initial rawness. With the latest release of Holst's *The Planets* on DVD-Audio, they thunder out *Mars* with true conviction.

These are rather magical speakers, with a poise and grace that belies their ability to turn on the power when required. Pair them with a good CD player and suitably accomplished amp, and you won't go far wrong."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002

Pioneer

PDR609 CD-RW Recorder £189.95

"While it looks simple, the Pioneer has an impressive array of features, including the handy double-speed disc finalization and CD-Text compatibility. Internally, the PDR609 is a big step up from the Award-winning PDR-509 it replaced: the DAC is now a 24-bit/96kHz number, aided and abetted by Pioneer's Legato Link conversion technology, and it has 24-bit A-to-D conversion, which is ideal for copying your vinyl onto CD. If this is your plan, you'll appreciate that the Pioneer makes it easy to create first-rate copies from any source, helped by the manual recording-level controls. It was hard to tell our copy of Jim White's *No Such Place* from the original.



Last Few!
Also Available Marantz DR6000 CD Recorder • £269.95

While the Pioneer's replay quality can't match the Marantz, it costs £120 less, which would buy you a lot of blank discs. If you've already got a dedicated CD player, we'd go with this recorder."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2001

Recorder Selection

- Harman Kardon CD-R30 CD-RW.....£499.95
- Marantz DR6000 CD-RW.....£269.95
- Sony RCDW3 CD-RW.....£219.95
- Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck.....£119.95
- Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck.....£199.95
- Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW.....£499.95



WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★
Product of the year 2002
H.I.F.I. AWARDS
RECORDERS
Pioneer PDR-609

pricing policy

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.



Systems
Best Buy £1000 plus



Claim £250 Off

the Speakers of your choice when purchased at the same time as the Linn Classik Music System

Minimum Speaker Value £350

Includes **audioquest** Cable Worth £50 FOC

*Not in conjunction with any other offer



LINN

Linn Classik Music System **£999.95**

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

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

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Awards 2001



Also Available
Classik Movie System
£1499.95 • **SAVE £500**

Save £100



Free audioquest Cable
Worth £100 When You Purchase any REL Subwoofer Over £499
*Not in conjunction with any other offer

Strata III Subwoofer (Wood) **£699.95**

REL is an audiophile company who take great pride in designing and building their highly acclaimed subwoofers. Because of their total commitment to performance, REL sometimes adopt unusual solutions to otherwise straight-forward problems.



Quake (Wood) **£424.95**

"The aggression of Rage Against The Machine's Take The Power Back is near-tangible, the midrange a spitting, spiteful companion for the tight, deep, air-agitating bassline. As for the more deft creations of Chick Corea, the REL's articulate nature serves subtly to underpin basslines, rather than swamp them. The adaptability makes the Strata III a highly recommended subwoofer - it's a very versatile, musical piece of kit, and it doesn't cost the earth."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ July 1999



Free audioquest Cables
Worth £500 When You Purchase the AV30R & 100x5R Combination
*Not in conjunction with any other offer



TAG McLaren

AV30R AV Processor **£1799.95** 100x5R Power Amplifier **£2994.95**

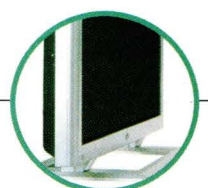
TAG McLaren's AV30R AV Processor is aimed at the home cinema enthusiast who is concerned with keeping up-to-date with the latest surround

formats. When partnered with TAG's 100x5R Power Amplifier it makes an exceptional combination.

According to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine in their October 2002 issue: "In use, the AV30R, connected to TAG's 100x5R power amp, is superb. True, it can't quite match the clarity and power of the latest-specification TAG flagship, the AV32Rbp-192, but by any AV standard this is a very high-end piece of kit, with excellent impact and fine detail across a range of movie soundtracks from Once Upon A Time In America to the explosive actionfests. Channel steering is immaculate, and the sense of a soundfield wrapped around you - even in 5.1-channel mode - entrancing, with spine-tingling rear-channel effects. The fine Pro Logic II implementation serves music as well as it does non-discrete AV soundtracks, and with an SACD machine hooked up via the 5.1 channel inputs, the lack of coloration and sheer bass oomph is extraordinary."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all outlets.
*NICWAOO = Not in conjunction with any other offer. E&OE



experience more



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Kingston 43 Fife Road **020 8547 0717** Open Sunday
Southgate 79-81 Chase Side **020 8886 2777**
Swiss Cottage 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd **020 7722 9777** Open Sunday
Watford 478 St Albans Road **01923 213533** Open Sunday

Please call to verify hours of business.

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

who are sevenoaks?

Founded in 1972, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision is 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 Hi-Fi Separates to Widescreen Plasma Televisions and Projection Systems, all at highly competitive prices.

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

new outlets now open

We are delighted to announce that we have opened new stores in the following locations. **Poole** 01202 671677 • **Solihull** 0121 733 3727 • **Swindon** 01793 610992 and **Wolverhampton** 01902 312225. Also, our **Leeds** store has re-located to larger premises.

custom installation

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision's Custom Installation Service enables the integration of a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home as neatly and seamlessly as possible. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.



Retractable Screen and In-wall Speakers

Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards in all areas and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for a multi-room system, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control or lighting system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products available to cater for all your requirements.

sevenoaks online

The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its 48 outlets nationwide. The website is designed to provide you with answers to the questions you may have when buying new equipment.

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

For impartial advice and information, just click on sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

stock clearance

With 48 outlets nationwide, the Sevenoaks Sound & Vision group stock and display a wide range of products. As individual models and product ranges are changed or superseded, the preceding models are made available at a reduced price, for clearance. Visit our Website for an up-to-date list of the clearance stock, listed by outlet, within the Sevenoaks Sound and Vision group.

0% finance option†

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

pricing policy

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

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

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

Stereo imaging is how solid or three-dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two rather than one speaker is to make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that seems to extend the room.

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

TOP BUYS



Rotel
RA-02 £349

A terrific budget integrated from Rotel's latest line-up. Offers pace, guts and finesse, wrapped up in a prettier package than one might traditionally expect from the marque.



Primare
120 £750

This revised version of Primare's A20 MkII sounds significantly more engaging, with genuine punch and rhythm coursing through its circuits. A real musical maestro.



AVI
Type S21 MI £1,399

This AVI's full name is Lab Series Integrated Amplifier Type S21 MI – a lengthy moniker for such a neat little amp with a hugely accomplished sound.



Exposure
XXIII/XXVIII £2,790

A beautifully natural and dynamic sounding pre/power amp combo – a transistor design with a touch of the valve amp sound.

Our favourite BT BB EC EG NR **STEREO AMPLIFIERS**

Integrated amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
BB	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
BB	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
BB	Arcam DIVA A85	800	Powerful, engaging amplifier with extensive non-intrusive features, and strong upgrade potential	7		●	●	85	239
NR	Cyrus 6	600	This entry-level Cyrus offers all the subtlety and much of the power of the 8	5		●	●	40	240
R	Cyrus 8	800	Superb at low to medium volumes, and a clear improvement on its predecessor, but deteriorates at high power levels	7		●	●	70	239
BB	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high-fidelity operation	5			●	30	208
R	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal, but a bit on the bland side	6		●		50	214
R	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5		●	●	60	224
R	Myryad Z140	450	Slimline beauty with genuine integrity and coherence, if relatively limited power	5	●	●	●	50	232
EC	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
BB	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
R	Naim Nait 5	825	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	6		●		30	214
EC	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
BB	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian MkII	895	An excellent all-rounder, with an articulate, assured delivery and excellent drive capability with a wide range of loudspeakers	6				70	239
NR	Rotel RA-01	250	Take a Best Buy amplifier and rip out the remote control to save £100. No wonder we love it!	4	●		●	40	237
BB	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
BB	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	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
EC	AVI Lab Series S21 MI	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution but effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
R	Canary Audio CA-608	2,250	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4				24	202
EC	Karan KA-i180	3,900	Lean, sharp and articulate, this impressively constructed heavyweight is almost up there with the audiophile pre/power elite	4		●		180	236
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
EC	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	3,999	If you audition one, you will want to be one of the handful of Tri-Vista owners	5	●	●	●	350	239
BB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214

Our favourite BT BB EC EG NR **STEREO AMPLIFIERS**

Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
BB	Arcam DIVA A85/P85	1,330	Integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A85 virtues plus extra gravitas and range	●	●	7		85	225	
EC	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	100	227	
EC	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5			221	
BB	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●	●	6		140	212	
BB	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●	30	216	
R	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
EC	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after NuVista	●	●	4	●	250	231	
EC	NAD Silver Series S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	●	●	7		200	200	
EC	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		50	213	
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	
ABOVE £2,000										
R	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	●	●	4	●	18	216	
EC	Audio Research LS25/VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	●	●	6	●	100	216	
EC	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		150	221	

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite GT GROUP TEST BEST BUY RT GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EC EDITOR'S CHOICE NGR NEW GEAR REVIEW
STEREO AMPLIFIERS continued

Pre/power amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)
EC	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●			20	231
RT	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	300	241
EC	Classé CP-35/CA-101	2,797	Very classy Canadian pre/power combo with a natural, open and no-nonsense sound	●	●	4		100	237
RT	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6		120	216
RT	Exposure XXIII/XXVIII	2,790	Highly natural and dynamic amplifier that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors	●	●	6	opt	70	241
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it		●			700	234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●		4			238
EC	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect		●			125	230
EC	Mark Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Pre has precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	●	●	6		125	195
RT	Naim NAC 202/NAP200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		70	241
EC	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition		●			140	208
EC	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●		6			233
RT	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Beautifully built with great selection of features and serious power delivery	●	●	7		120	241
EC	Steinart DVP 2XR/Fidello 102 DD	7,440	Brilliantly musical, making even difficult material enjoyable, but gets hot and has ergonomic foibles	●	●	7		100	236
RT	TAG McLaren DPA32R/250MR	4,940	In a class of its own for extendibility and it's tremendously subtle, though it can sound constrained dynamically	●	●	6		250	230
EC	Unison Research Unico Pre/DM	2,590	Hybrid designs with a rich powerful performance that makes a fine balance between valve and solid state sound	●	●	3		150	242

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies



The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 systems are where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have amplification on board and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as

their movie DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo.

There are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Pioneer
VSX-D2011 £900
A feature-packed receiver, and a great sounding one to boot. Only Denon's AVR-3803 currently competes at the price.



Marantz
SR9200 £2,000
Few AV receivers manage to sound as musical as this one. A top all-rounder and an excellent multichannel solution.



Denon
AVC-A1SR £3,000
Denon's AV behemoth is arguably the best integrated multichannel amp to date – superbly cinematic and one of the very few with genuine 'hi-fi' music credentials.



Arcam
AV8/P7 £5,498
A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand – a top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

Our favourite AV AMPLIFIERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY | GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED | EDITOR'S CHOICE | NEW GEAR REVIEW

Multichannel amplifiers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
INTEGRATED AV AMPS								
[R]	Arcam AVR200	800	Upgraded AVR100 with Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo, a bit bass-light for multichannel	●	6	●	70	229
[E]	Denon AVR-3803	899	Feature packed 7.1 channel AV receiver which needs a lot of studying but does everything well	●	11	●	110	239
[R]	Denon AVC-A11SR	1,800	Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality		11	●	●	235
[E]	Denon AVC-A1SR	3,000	An AV amp with genuine high-res hi-fi credentials. Includes a ground-breaking 'wide bandwidth' digital audio link		8	●	170	232
[E]	Harman Kardon AVR 5550	850	The upgrade to the AVR 5500 comes with features that are actually of some use to the audiophile and a meaty sound to boot	●	9	●	85	240
[R]	Marantz SR9200	2,000	Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike	●	9	●	●	235
[E]	Pioneer VSX-D2011	900	Outstanding sonic performance for the price and a remarkable features list to boot	●	10	●	140	235
[E]	Pioneer VSA-AX10i	2,700	Seven channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and eq, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD		8	●	150	229
[R]	Sony VA-777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all-rounder		9		100	210

AV PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS

[E]	Arcam AV8/P7	5,498	State-of-the-art processor (£2,999) and seven-channel power amp (£2,499). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	●	180	235
[E]	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights		6	opt	120	219
[E]	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
[E]	Cyrus AV8	1,100	A refined and listenable processor that will integrate into an existing hi-fi system with ease		9			235
[R]	Cyrus AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
[E]	EAD TheaterMaster 8000 Pro	5,200	Arguably the most 'musical' sounding AV processor to date – tested with the PowerMaster 8300 multichannel power amp		9	●		242
[R]	Marantz PS-17/2 x SM-17	3,400	Classy and capable system, great steering, warm solid sound and high detail resolution, and some great gadgets		10	●	60	238
[E]	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
[R]	Myrad MDP500/MA240/360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music		9	opt	120	215
[R]	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	●	50	238
[R]	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	●	120	238
[R]	Roksan DSP/5ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels		4		80	210
[E]	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,994	Flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel system in standard or seven-channel 'EX' form		6	●		215

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc
7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification.
5-CHANNEL POWER (W) Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp

Sound Fantastic

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

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

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- ✓ RFI 10A Mains Filter & Surge Suppressor
- ✓ External Earth Stud
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- ✓ UK Plug - 10A Fuse Fitted
- ✓ Colour Black
- ✓ Specials to order

TYPE NO.	NO. OF SOCKETS	OVERALL LENGTH	PRICE
HF 4	4	446mm	£83.72
HF 6	6	557mm	£92.47
HF 8	8	670mm	£98.70

Call 020 8905 7273

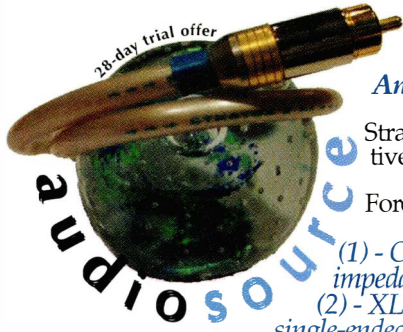
Home Entertainment — **POWER VERDICT UP** — **Home Entertainment, May 2001**

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Question: How does a £99 interconnect offer high performance without the multiplication factor of marketing and distribution costs?
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Stratos was conceived by a leading audio designer and evolved over six years by exhaustive subjective evaluation. It is manufactured from unique materials and techniques not available elsewhere.

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- (2) - XLR (chassis plus Line and Return). Balanced signal cable earth drain employed even on RCA single-ended and mixed interconnects e.g. RCA to 3-pin plugs
- (3) - 3-T solder. Time, temperature and twinned tin and silver solder to assure long-term adhesion

Market research indicated that most competing cables merely redesign off-the-shelf materials, but we found most wires and phono plugs degraded sound audibly. Stratos series III interconnects feature our own design of 140 strand 8N purity copper with proprietary di-electric, geometry. Triple shielding gives an industry high of over 80% effectiveness using the standard measure. Beautifully finished in pearlescent clear sleeving, the interconnect is sealed at both ends to resist capillary moisture and oxygen.

Our phono plugs are unequalled. Made from direct gold-plated phosphor bronze, it is machined from bars, not folded metal; this retains the desired crystal structure and makes a very handsome finish; fully shielded with reflective outer surface; centre pin and outer (earth) are internally connected very close to signal transfer which is passed to the socket by levered and high grip "teeth" - centre pin is generous in size and sprung levered.

In short nothing has been left to chance or term deterioration. By offering 1.2 metres for no extra charge over the standard 1.0 meter, you get the advantage of the standing wave phenomenon. Over six years, 87 prototypes resulted in series III - an interconnect which will make all the difference to the music. Try it and "hear". Save your music signal and save money by direct buying with 28-days trial offer. Visit www.audiosource.co.uk for further information.

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Digital	LIST	SALE
BOW ZZ 8 CD Player I2S Bus (ex-d, mint)	£4,995	£3,495
Gryphon Adagio (3 months old, s/h, mint)	£4,300	£3,250
Neukomm Reference CD Player (ex-d, mint)	£2,250	£950
Amplifiers		
Art Audio Diavolo monoblocks 300B chrome/gold (ex-d, mint)	£5,995	£3,995
Audio Note M7 Pre-amp (ex-d, mint)	£7,500	£3,500
Audio Note Keron C Poweramp (s/h, mint)	£87,000	£22,000
ATC CA2 Preamp (s/h, mint)	£765	£495
BOW ZZ 1 Integrated Amp (ex-d, mint)	£2,795	£1,995
Conrad-johnson PV10AL (s/h, mint) (brand new NOS Tungstram Valves)	£1,195	£495
Gryphon Callisto 2200 Int Amplifier (s/h, mint, with phono)	£5,790	£4,150
Neukomm Ref Amplifier 150 wpc (ex-d, mint)	£2,500	£950
PassLabs X-2 Pre-amp (New)	£2,550	£1250
PassLabs Aleph-5 (s/h, mint)	£3,350	£1750
Proceed Pre-amp (Fully Balanced, s/h, mint)	£1,995	£795

Sugden

Masterclass Phono Amp (ex-d, mint)	£1,250	£850
Masterclass Pre-amp (RC, bal, s/e, ex-d, mint)	£2,300	£1,450
Masterclass Monoblocks pair (bal, ex-d, mint)	£6,600	£3,990
Sugden Bijou System (ex-dem)		
CDMaster (ex-d, mint)	£1,299	£1,095
HeadMaster pre (with R/C) (ex-d, mint)	£659	£550
FMMaster tuner (ex-d, mint)	£949	£850
AmpMaster power amp (ex-d, mint)	£689	£575
Unison Research 845 Absolute (s/h, mint, very rare, beautiful and sonically without an equal)	£19,995	£8,500

Loudspeakers

Audiostatic Wing Electrostatics (ex-d, slight mark)	£5,000	£2,495
Audiostatic Wing Electrostatics+Fins (ex-d)	£5,500	£2,995
ATC Active 10 (s/h, mint)	£1,600	£950
Avalon Arcus (cherry finish, mint, s/h)	£7,800	£4,650
Proac Future 2 (ex-d, mint, birds eye maple)	£11,450	£5,995
Wilson Audio 6.1 (s/h, mint)	£20,000	£9,995
Zingali Overture Reference 1S (Ex-D, mint, old style grills)	£1,990	£1,550
Zingali Overture Reference 4S (Ex-D, slight dent on one corner of one speaker)	£4,750	£2,950

Analogue

Nakamichi Dragon Tape Deck (mint)		£1,095
SME Model 10 + IV Arm + Audio Note ANVx + VDH Frog Mark 2 (s/h, mint)	£5,658	£3,995
Sumiko Pearwood MC Cartridge (new)	£1,195	£850

List no 85. For an updated and comprehensive list of equipment and audio cables, please visit www.audiosalon.co.uk

Pathos • ProAc • Proceed • Revel • Shanling • Simon Yorke • SME
 Stax • Sugden • Sumiko • Trichord • Unison Research • Zingali

STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

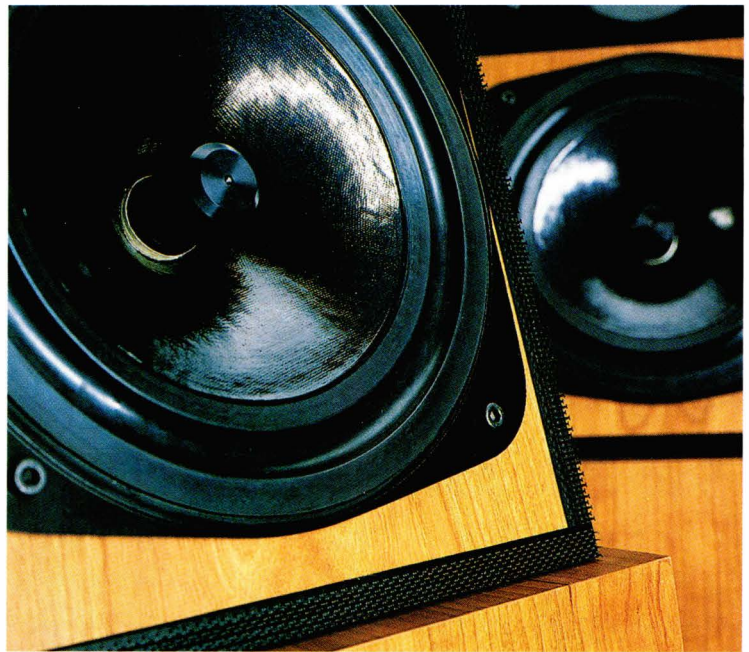
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



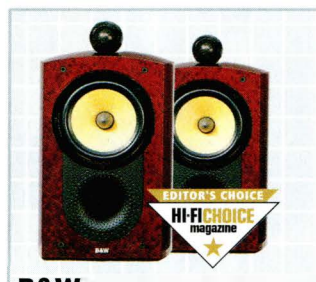
Dynaudio
Audience 42 £400

It might be expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but it's an aristocrat among the breed, and we'd be surprised if there's a better small speaker around for the price.



JMLab
Cobalt 816 Sig S £999

One of the best all-round performers below £1,000, combining a lively and dynamic character with an unusually smooth and neutral balance.



B&W
Signature 805 £2,250

You won't get this degree of resolution out of a wider bandwidth speaker at anywhere near the price, and most of your music will sound considerably better through them.



Neat
Ultimatum MFS £2,995

A standmount speaker that sounds much bigger and more spacious than it looks. A touch bright-sounding perhaps, but superbly informative.

Our favourite STEREO SPEAKERS

BT GROUP TEST BEST BUY
 RT GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
 EC EDITOR'S CHOICE
 NG NEW GEAR REVIEW

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (W)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
UP TO £1,000									
BT	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24	A	30	●	226	
NG	ATC SCM12	999	Transparent, engaging and quick – a revealing, high-fidelity performer that's not afraid to bare all	22,39,25	A	62	●	237	
RT	Audio Note AZ One	449	Delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29	●	A	30	●	215
RT	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	599	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30	A	30	●	211	
BT	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23	A	23	●	226	
BT	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29	A	25	●	234	
NG	B&W DM309	330	All the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●	235
BT	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●	231
RT	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29	A	30	●	208	
RT	Blueroom Minipod	249	Wonderfully blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17	A	50	●	225	
RT	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	A	45	●	227
BT	Castle Conway 3	930	Lovely real wood finish and a beautifully balanced sound, fine dynamics and transients, but might have more 'air'	22,91,27	●	A+	30	●	237
RT	Dali Royal Tower	750	Cutely compact floorstander has a delightful liveliness and lightness of touch to match its luxury real wood finish	17,85,22	●	A	25	●	237
BT	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24	A	40	●	215	
RT	Dynaudio Audience 62	729	Pricy but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●	231
RT	Elac JET 205	650	Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall	20,33,29	A	40	●	231	
RT	Energy Connoisseur C-5	600	Has a marvellously even and neutral overall balance, if a little too laid-back with restrained dynamic expression	20,95,37	●	A+	23	●	240
NG	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60	●	241	
BT	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act	20,38,26	A	40	●	215	
BT	JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28	●	A-	22	●	227
RT	JMLab Cobalt 816	899	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	A	22	●	224
BT	JMLab Cobalt 816 Sig S	999	Great all-rounder – lively and dynamic, smooth and neutral, marred only by a slight treble 'sting'	22,98,31	●	A-	25	●	242
RT	KEF Q1	250	Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall	22,35,30	A	30	●	234	
RT	Mission m71	129	Neat-looking and very discreet-sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28	A	40	●	226	
BT	Mission m73	199	Good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,88,31	●	A	25	●	215
NG	Mission m51	300	Distinctive and dynamic – not the last word in subtlety but enjoyable with both music and video sources	21,32,34	A+	58	●	228	
RT	Mission 782SE	900	Definitely one of the prettiest speakers around. Very even balance but could sound more exciting	17,80,30	●	A	35	●	242
NG	Monitor Audio Bronze B2	200	A lively and entertaining speaker with tight controlled bass and pronounced midband	18,5,35,25	A	42	●	238	
NG	Monitor Audio Silver S1	300	Super-quick sonics thanks to the C-CAM metallised drivers. Resolution and speed – a great value box	18,30,24	A	45	●	236	
RT	Monitor Audio Silver S8	800	A thoroughly impressive all-rounder, notable for its wide dynamic range, excellent imaging and fine neutrality	19,90,27	●	A	20	●	237
RT	Monitor Audio Silver S10	1,000	Timing might be less than the best, but the full balance and fine dynamic range deliver plenty of detail.	20,100,27	●	A+	20	●	242
NG	Mordaunt Short MS914	300	An even and open loudspeaker that is both detailed and precise. A budget gem	21,90,27	A	50	●	234	
RT	Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,31,20	A	30	●	211	

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners)



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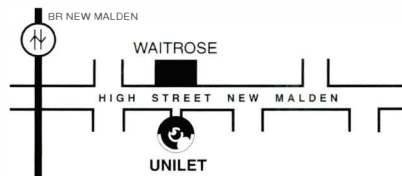
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The Usual Suspects

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Our favourite **STEREO SPEAKERS** continued

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxHxD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
RT	Opera SP-1	525	A strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		A	50	●	225	
RT	PMC DB1	555	Lacks a little weight and authority, but beautifully balanced, free from boxiness, and loads of fun for a tiny	16,29,24		A	50	●	240	
RT	PMC TB2	700	A worthy successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type for neutrality and transparency	20,41,31		A	30	●	211	
RT	Sonus Faber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		A	40	●	233	
RT	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced, unboxy, lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	17,31,21		A-	30	●	223	
RT	Spendor SR5	1,000	This wall-mount very cleverly avoids the usual colorations, delivering a very dynamic if rather dry sound	31,31,18		A+	50	●	240	
RT	Tannoy Mercury mX3-M	229	Beautifully balanced and voiced, with low coloration and good transparency, but could be more dynamic	19,87,25	●	A+	45	●	234	
RT	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricey but very cute wallmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17, 35, 26		A+		●	227	
RT	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26		A	20	●	231	
RT	Tannoy Sensys DC2	649	A great-value speaker combining a super-tweeter and Dual Concentric drive unit at a real-world price	21,97,29	●	A	35	●	242	
RT	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	A-	40	●	219	
ABOVE £1,000										
RT	ATC SCM10A	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	45	●	221	
RT	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent, but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		A-	65	●	219	
RT	ATC Active 20	2,538	30k + 300W equals resolution and bass that most amp/speaker combinations dream about – a bargain	56,28,36		act	45	●	240	
RT	ATC SCM50A SL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		A	38	●	218	
RT	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		A+	20	●	204	
RT	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling, but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,59,25		A	38	●	219	
RT	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		A	28	●	199	
RT	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art. Needs real power, but gives real sound	39,111,55	●	A-	34	●	183	
RT	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	●	A-	34	●	186	
RT	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●	231	
RT	B&W Signature 805	2,500	Staggering transparency and resolution for the money, one of the best standmounts money can buy	24,42,34		A-	42	●	232	
RT	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30		A-	40	●	204	
RT	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33		A	50	●	219	
RT	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricey compared to some though	21, 99, 32	●	A+	38	●	229	
RT	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear, but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	●	A	41	●	225	
RT	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	A	30	●	229	
RT	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Outstanding performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		A-	45	●	219	
RT	Ferguson Hill FH001	6,853	Looks and sounds wonderful, with realistic dynamic expression, but needs careful amp matching and sub(s)	90,166,80	●	A+	180	●	242	
RT	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●	233	
RT	Infinity Intermezzo 2.6	1,600	Bi-amp speaker sounds laid back and 'disappears' acoustically; highly enjoyable, looks and sounds great	25,38,29		A+	27	●	233	
RT	JBL Ti-2K	1,250	Solid standmount with boat-tail rear end and highly detailed, spacious sound alongside weighty bass	42,28,42		A	45	●	230	
RT	JMLab Cobalt 826	1,279	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	A-	35	●	219	
RT	JMLab Micro Utopia	3,349	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41		A-	50	●	220	
RT	Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23		act	40	●	214	
RT	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	New improved version even better than before. Beautifully natural and expressive – a real universal soldier	22,97,28	●	A+	35	●	239	
RT	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	●	A+	40	●	218	
RT	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R	4,000	Discreet, but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	22,104,27	●	A+	45	●	196	

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Our favourite GROUP TEST BEST BUY GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED EDITOR'S CHOICE NEW GEAR REVIEW
STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxH) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		act	45		●	214
	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40			229
	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	A-	20		●	200
	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20		●	232
	Neat Ultimatum MFS	2,995	Wonderful five-driver standmount sounds bigger than it looks. Very spacious and informative, if a little bright	22,38,37		A+	25		●	241
	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	A-	20		●	226
	PMC LB1	1,150	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17.5,53,26		A-	40		●	199
	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	A	20		●	204
	PMC AML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude, 'in yer face' balance and great dynamics	20,40,32		A	25		●	214
	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47		A-	25		●	237
	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	A-	20		●	221
	Ruark Prologue II	1,250	Attractive shape with a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22.5,96,24	●	A+	40		●	229
	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	A	38		●	219
	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	A	20		●	211
	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large standmount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33		A+	50		●	219
	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	A+	40		●	229
	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99.8,38	●	A+	37		●	223
	TAG McLaren F1	17,995	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127.48	●	A-	25		●	202
	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	30.5,85.5,30	●	A-	25		●	240
	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	38		●	215
	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style, plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	A-	23		●	225
	T+A Talis TLS3	1,799	Super-slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver marvellous musical results with superb imaging	15,130,17	●	A	30		●	225
	Triangle Zays 222	1,295	Wonderful freedom from time-smear gives invigorating and realistic dynamics, but colorations are also obvious	26,116,32	●	A	22		●	242
	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30		●	229
	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way	21,100,21	●	A	45		●	225
	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	●	A-	20		●	234
	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	A-	45		●	212

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a

video monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position – this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £750
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



KEF
Q AV7 £1,300
With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



Mission
m5 package £1,450
A five-speakers-plus-sub package giving a strong performance with both music and film soundtracks. Excellent value.



Mirage
Omni 2 £2,650
Dark tonality but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies alike.

Our favourite AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
 GROUP TEST RECOMMENDED
 EDITOR'S CHOICE
 NEW GEAR REVIEW

Multichannel speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE-OF-DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 300	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema	A-	6	27	●	●	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures (uses 602 S3s at the front)	A-	5	22	●	●	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28	●	●	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dynaudio Audience 42	1,142	AV package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	B-	5	53	●	●	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	JMLab Cobalt	1,797	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	A	5	22	●	●	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	JMLab Electra	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●	●	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●	●	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●	●	232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as does big bass for movie fans	B	6	28	●	●	241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25	●	●	210
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PMC FB1/TB2	2,485	Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight	A	5	20	●	●	210
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	A	5	25	●	●	210
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Spendor S-Series	1,650	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness	A	5	30	●	●	224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy mXAV4	500	Lacks some grunt, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence. Excellent value	A	5	20	●	●	210

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite SUBWOOFERS

GROUP TEST BEST BUY
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 NEW GEAR REVIEW

Bass speakers

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE (WxHxD (CM))	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub, which comes with a handy remote	41,37,30	200	35	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Strata III	700	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence, this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42, 52, 33	100	20	210
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59, 56, 39	200	16	217
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5.40	300	30	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72x48x72	200	20	239

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet; in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.
BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.



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HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals

enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.

Our favourite HEADPHONES

Stereo headphones

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
			ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK		WEIGHT (g)
AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain			●	●	190	●	219
AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price		●		●	190	●	205
AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●	●	270	●	230
Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●	●	250	●	194
Beyerdynamic DT931	150	Nimble, well resolved and extremely comfortable, this is a cracking pair of cans			●	●	295	●	240
Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●		●	200	●	194
Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise.		●		●	200	●	230
Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●	330	●	219
Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●	270	●	205
Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			●	●	250	●	219
Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics		●		●	160	●	205
Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●	295	●	205

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.



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CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA phono plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection. Speaker cable is sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing the best cables is not quite as

straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances

electrical varieties sound better than optical, but if you are after a smoother sound the light carriers have the advantage, as they do if long lengths are needed (10m+). Optical outputs tend to have Toslink connectors (around 99 per cent), but some electrical digital outputs are of the superior BNC type, which uses a bayonet-type socket. Check which type your digital component has before buying a digital interconnect.

Our favourite CABLES

Interconnects and speaker cables

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
			STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS							
Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●		●		211
DNM TBB75	75	Bass not always completely consistent, but sound has great clarity and insight		●	●		241
Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●		211
Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●		224
Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●		211
Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●		241
Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●		224
QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●		211
Townshend Audio DCT100	99	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●		241
Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●		234
van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●		224
van den Hul The Well	49	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●		241
van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●		234
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS							
Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●		E 207
QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E 207
QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E 234
Ross OP004	20	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value				0	207
Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E 241
van den Hul Optocoupler MkII	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types				0	234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE							
Black Rhodium Aero Space S130	20	Bi-wire cable with great kick in the bass, though the treble can sound dry and recessed	●		●		227
Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●		241
Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●		227
Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●		241
Ixos Gamma 6003	3	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price; strong and consistent	●		●		203
Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●		192
Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		227
Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●		203
Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●		241
QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●		192
QED XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●		234
QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●		●		215
Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●		203
Townshend Isolda DCT	150	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●		241

SPECS KEY **STRANDED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

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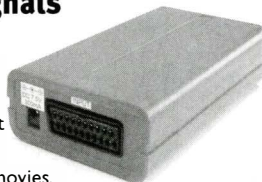
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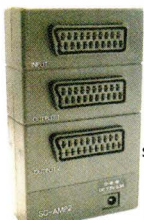
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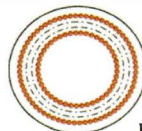


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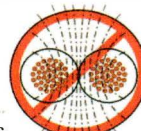
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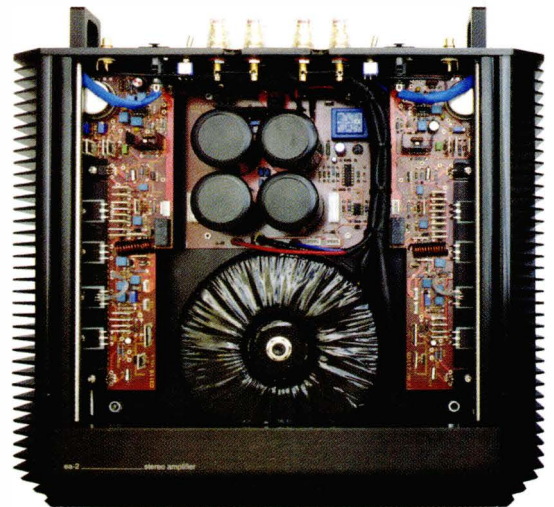
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See the EA-2 review in the June issue of Hi-Fi News

	model no. EA-1	model no. EA-2
Power Output	200W into 8 ohm	2 x 180W into 8 ohm
Input Impedance	47k ohms	47k ohms
Frequency response	-3dB points @ 5Hz & 100KHz	-3dB points @ 5Hz & 100KHz
Inputs	Balanced XLR or Unbalanced RCA rear panel switchable	Balanced XLR or Unbalanced RCA rear panel switchable
Input connectors	1 x XLR-Pin 2 +ve 1 x RCA	2 x XLR-Pin 2 +ve 2 x RCA
Output connector	4 x 4mm sockets. Ability to accept Spade type connectors	8 x 4mm sockets. Ability to accept Spade type connectors
Power cable	Audiophile grade (type 1)	Audiophile grade (type 1)
Case dimensions (HxWxD)	112 x 438 x 428mm inc handles	112 x 438 x 428mm inc handles
Mains Supply	115v and 230v 50 or 60 Hz consult dealer	115v and 230v 50 or 60 Hz consult dealer
Weight unpacked	22 Kg ea	22 Kg
Weight packed	25 Kg ea	25 Kg

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STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



In hi-fi there are two types of stand. One is a rack that holds turntables, amps, CD players and so on and is described as an equipment support, and the other is a speaker stand. The latter comes in three basic varieties, two for standmount speakers: lightweight, multilegged types; and heavy designs with fewer legs and the ability to be mass-loaded for extra solidity. The lighter variety is

said to have a quicker sound, while heavyweights give deeper bass and a calmer sound. The third speaker stand type is a platform that sits under floorstanding speakers or speaker/stand combinations, the pneumatic Townshend Seismic Sink being an example.

There are two speaker-to-stand interfacing options: spikes or Blu Tak in each corner of the top plate. Try both and take your pick.

Our favourite EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Equipment supports

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
			HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47		4	MDF	193
Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53,5,45		4	MDF	217
Custom Design Aspect 650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
Naim Frain	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45,34		5	Glass	232
Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple, but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49		4	MDF	206
Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39,5		4	MDF	217
Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack System	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54, 49		4	Torlyte	240
Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50,8	●	4	Glass	193
Townshend Seismic Sink Stand MkII	1,140	multi-shelf air-suspension support which isolates like few others. Recommended	92	58, 45		5	MDF	240

Our favourite SPEAKER STANDS

Speaker stands

PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
			HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
Aacik Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14,5,18	●		3	202
Cyrus CLS50 Stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17,19			1	220
Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16,5,18	●		2	202
hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20	●		1	220
Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15,20	●		1	220
Partington ANSA 60	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17,15	●	●	5	220
Partington Dreadnought Ultimate	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	21,24	●		1	202
Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		4	220
Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48			0	202

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. **TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)** Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand.

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Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major hifi brands:

Apollo, Arcam(Diva/FMJ), Ash Design, Atacama, **Atlas** (spkr cables & interconnects) B&W, **Chord Company**, **Creek**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Epos, **Exposure**, **Genelec**, **Anthony Gallo Acoustics**, Harman Kardon, Infinity, Iso Tek, KEF (including **Reference**), Linn Products(including Knekt), **MJ Acoustics**, Meridian, Michell, **Mirage**, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, **Naim**, Ortofon, Pioneer, **PMC**, **Primare**, **Proac**, Project, Pure, QED(including Systemline), Quad, Quadraspire, REL, Rotel, Sennheiser, Soundstyle, **Spendor**, Stands Unique, **Tag McLaren**, Wharfedale, Yamaha.

Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major Home Cinema products:

DVD players: Arcam & FMJ, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha,

Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/FMJ, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.

Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,

Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.

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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

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

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

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

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

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

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

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

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

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB, it has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP or Digital Signal Processor. Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

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

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

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

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the

ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

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

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

SACD (super audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWEETER Treble driver.

TWO/THREE-WAY Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a two-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

WATTS (per channel) The watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed

sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, transparent. A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

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Fitted with IEC (Martin Kayser) and MK Tough Cable can be supplied fitted to our all steel 4, 6 and 8 way distribution blocks. We can rewire the distribution blocks with Eupen cable as an extra cost option. Refer to our web site for details.



AUDUSA EUPEN GNLM 05/04

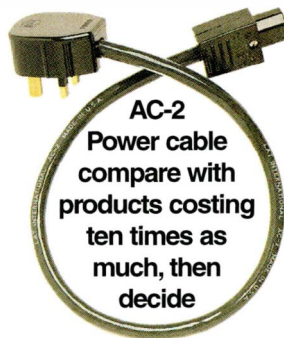
GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA2.5) £48 for 1.0m, £58 for 1.5m, £68 for 2.0m, Off the reel £30 for 1st meter, £20 per m thereafter. GNLM 05/04 £58 for 1m, £68 for 1.5m, £78 for 2.0m Also off the reel. Both GNLM cables available for export

AUDUSA - Eupen and LAT AC-2 mains cable available with 16 amp IEC (for certain models of amps by Krell, MF, Levinson etc), Maringo 320 IEC, Figure of eight, Bulgin, USA Hubble, European Schuko, Australian, Swiss, Danish, and Neutrik plugs.

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We have developed a cabling (weaving) pattern along with an unusual shielding/filtering system that gets rid of the garbage that contaminates your components. The difference you hear with our cord is astounding. Our power cord takes advantage of silver in its design through use of our proprietary Silverfuse conductors. The conductors are 10 gauge and with PTFE; the best insulation available. Fitted as standard with IEC / MK Toughplug. . 60cm £62, 90cm £75, 1.2m £88, 1.5m £101, 1.8m £112 etc Other lengths available and off the reel. **4,6 and 8 way all steel mains distribution blocks** fitted with **UK, Schuko or USA sockets**. CE tested & approved mains distribution units manufactured of heavy gauge steel, finished in black and fitted with high quality 13amp sockets. It has no filters, circuit breakers, surge protection, transformers, resistors, capacitors, LED's, on/off switches, chokes, regulators, just fitted with 1m of AC-2 mains cable. From £166 for 4 way, £198 for 6 way, £229 for 8 way.



SILVERFUSE is a near alloy of silver and copper. IT IS NOT SILVER PLATED OR SILVER CLAD. Plating (or clad, which is the same thing as plating) causes a dioding effect when signal is passed through resulting in brightness and distortion. The Silverfuse process starts with seven nines OFHC copper wire with a diameter that is slightly larger than the required size. It is then pulled through a trough of molten silver. The wire with a silver deposit, is then forced through a compacting die where it is subject to tremendous pressure. The silver and the high purity copper are fused together into a near alloy. The compacting fusion also reduces the wire diameter to the desired size. No dioding subsequently occurs with this process. The result provides for the benefits of silver; which are excellent definition and clarity, with the high purity copper benefits of warmth and mellowness.

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Five Stars for Value

**Does the best price always mean the best deal?
Ask the UK's top twenty specialist hi-fi dealers.**

"I thought I had this buying hi-fi business sorted out. I bought all the hi-fi magazines and read them thoroughly, because I reckoned their experts knew exactly what they were talking about - at least a lot more than I did! It was reassuring to see the same product names cropping up regularly and I figured the writers' experience and guidance would steer me straight to the system of my dreams. The trouble is I've ended up more confused than when I started".

One reviewer said a product I fancied was absolutely brilliant but another said it was nothing special at all. How can that be? Surely one CD player is pretty much the same as another? And how can a loudspeaker that's one magazine's top recommendation not get so much as a mention in any of the others? I don't mind admitting it, I'm completely lost."

Plan B - I'm going for a deal

"So, I've decided to adopt plan B. I'm sure there can't be any really dramatic differences between all this gear and it's all bound to work together properly, so I'm going to check the price lists and the adverts and shop around for the best deal. I know getting the right hi-fi is important hey, I'm as mad about music as anyone but if I can get close to the mark and save a few quid, I'm sure I'll end up with a good system and be happy. I know there are specialist shops out there that do demonstrations and reckon they've got all the solutions but, to be honest, I'm a bit scared of going to one. I'd really welcome some advice and guidance but I don't know all the technical jargon and I'd feel daft sitting there trying to 'hear the differences' if I couldn't. Anyway, a friend told me that these shops only sell the really expensive gear and that they're not interested if you don't have loads of money to spend."

And so another hi-fi buyer starts his journey down the road to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a permanent overdraft.

There is only one way to buy a hi-fi system that will prove satisfying, reliable and

deliver true value for money, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Let's face it, you wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details and a photograph. Even if you're spending far less, say buying a jacket or a pair of shoes, you want to try them on to make sure they fit you.

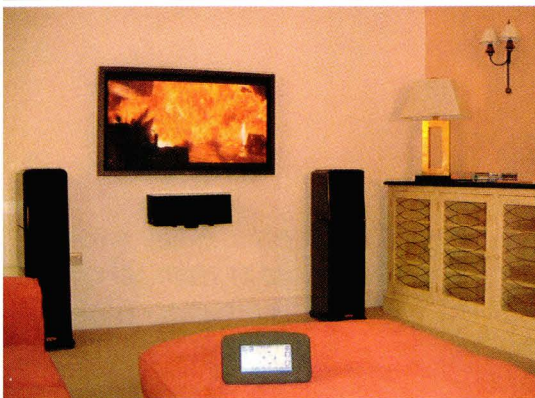
Buying a hi-fi system is no different. It doesn't matter what the specifications say or what the 'experts' think: if it doesn't measure up to what you want from a system, then it's not the right choice. Knowing that you've bought a room full of five-star favourites or best-buys is no consolation when you can't bear to listen to them for more than five minutes. Even that ten per cent discount on the price won't make them sound any better.

Buying or being sold to?

Mind you, most of us are easily suckered when it comes to buying hi-fi. Given the choice of venturing into the unknown territory of a specialist dealer's shop and exerting some influence over what we buy, or taking what looks like the easy route having adverts and magazine reviews push us along a path sweetened with discounts and special offers - we opt for the latter. We don't buy a system, we allow ourselves to be sold one. We side-line our own ideas about quality and personal satisfaction and buy someone else's opinion of what's good for us and good value for our money.

Take control!

Now there's a group of long-established, independent specialist dealers who are



“ You wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details. ”

totally committed to putting the customer back in the driving seat. They're encouraging the buyer to take control with a little help and guidance provided where required. They know how difficult it can be to establish the true quality and worth of hi-fi and home cinema systems. They know that without experiencing the performance of the systems they offer, you can't possibly assess the value of them. That's why their idea of 'selling' is to play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost

certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. With the dealer's help and advice you will be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met ... and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problems you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand into your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure that you're entirely happy with the way it works.

Why bother?

There is, of course, one question that hasn't been answered: why should you and these dealers go to all this trouble? Well, from your point of view maybe it's because a good deal is about a great deal more than just price. unless you've got money to burn,

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

you'll be living with your new system for years - years during which most of those five star products will probably stop shining quite so brightly. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

Listed below are 20 of the best hi-fi shops in the country. They all have lots of stars. You'll find them on the shop floor: they're the people waiting to guide customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road
020 7226 5500

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea
020 7924 2040

W4 MARTIN-KLEISER
109 Chiswick High Road
020 8400 5555

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High St. 01233 624441

Beaconsfield MARTIN-KLEISER
9 London End
01494 681300

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245

East Grinstead

AUDIO DESIGNS
26 High St. 01342 314569

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street Hampton Wick
020 8943 3530

Lakeside Retail Park

RAYLEIGH HI-FI

Dansk International
Furniture World
01708 680551

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High St. 01268 779762

Ringwood, Hampshire

PHONOGRAPHY
Star Lane 01425 461230

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
132/4 London Road
01702 435255

Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI

213-217 Tarring Road
01903 245577

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE
3 Church Lane
01295 272158

Birmingham

SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street, Bloxwich
01922 493499

Leicester CYMBIOSIS

6 Hotel St. 0116 262 3754

Northampton LISTEN INN

32 Gold St. 01604 637871

Shrewsbury

CREATIVE AUDIO
9 Dogpole 01743 241924

NORTH

Cheadle THE AUDIO WORKS
14 Stockport Road
0161 428 7887

Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL

12/14 Shaw Road
0161 633 2602

Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS

184 Fitzwilliam St
0114 275 6048

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh

RUSS ANDREWS HI-FI
34 Northumberland Street
0131 557 1672

Glasgow STEREO STEREO

260 St. Vincent Street
0141 248 4079

N. IRELAND

Belfast LYRIC HI-FI
161 Stranmillis Road
028 90 381296

DEALER DIRECTORY

Choosing a good hi-fi dealer is the most vital step in acquiring the system that is right for you. This unique directory gives full information on dealers able to help in your area.

BATH/BRISTOL

THE RIGHT NOTE, tel: 01225 874728. Give your ears a new reference point for the best sounds at any price. Forget reviews and trying to put together a system like a patchwork quilt with the 'best' bits around. It's *our* job to do the assessing, you judge the results. Come here, or we'll come to you, and *plan* a system for the future, even if you spread the purchases. Leave "upgrade-itis" behind, save money and enjoy music. Just listen, and you'll know. CD: Accuphase, Advantage, Audio Synthesis, Balanced Audio Technology, dCS (Elgar etc), Meracus, Pass, Sugden, Wadia. Vinyl: Audio Synthesis, Basis, Clearaudio, DNM, Graham, (The) Groove, Lehmann (Black Cube), Michell, Sumiko, Transfiguration. Amps: Accuphase, Advantage, Balanced Audio Technology, CAT, DNM, Gamut, Lumley, Meracus, Michell, Nagra, Pass, Sonneteer, Spectral, Sugden. Speakers: Audio Physic, BKS, Ethos, Harbeth, Lumley, Magneplanar, NEAT, Totem, Verity Audio. Tuners: Accuphase, Magnum Dynalab. Cables: Argentio, Chord Co, DNM, Hovland, Nordost, SonicLink, Siltech, Yamamura Churchill. Mains: Accuphase.

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AUDIO COUNSEL, 26 High Street, Cheadle, Cheshire. Tel: 0161 491 6090, fax: 0161 491 6990. Please see entry under Greater Manchester.

DOUG BRADY HI-FI, Kingsway Studios, Kingsway North, Warrington WA1 3NU. Tel: 01925 828009. Email: doug.brady@dougbradyhifi.com. Website: www.dougbradyhifi.com. For the widest range of high quality hi-fi in the Northwest. Family business est. 42 years. 3 demo rooms, inc. home cinema, home trials; deliveries throughout NW; Mastercard, Visa, credit facilities. Open 10.30 - 6. Send for free map. **BADA**

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THE AUDIO WORKS, 14 Stockport Road, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 2AA. www.theaudioworks.co.uk. Email: larry@theaudioworks.co.uk. Tel: 0161 428 7887. Stockists of Spectral, Accuphase, DCS, Sugden, Creek, Epos, Mark Levinson, Roksan, Musical Fidelity, Focal JM Lab, MusicWorks, Monitor Audio and Quadraspire. Loewe TV, Plasma & Projector systems. Hi-Fi and Home Cinema demonstration rooms. All major credit cards accepted, interest free credit available.

THE HI-FI SHOWROOMS, 12A West Str, off West St Car Park, Congleton, Cheshire. Tel: 01260 280017. E-mail: mail@hifishowrooms.co.uk. Web site: hifishowrooms.co.uk. Naim Audio, Audiolab, Rega, REL, Arcam, Technics, KEF, NAD, Harman-Kardon, Yamaha, Rotel, Lexicon, RCF, Millennium, NHT, JBL, Onkyo, Sony, Marantz, Toshiba, Panasonic, Ruark, Jamo, Celestion, Qed, Teac, Castle. Front and rear projection systems, 3 demonstration rooms, 1 A/V with 8ft screen, customer car park. The North West's Premier Audio Visual Specialist. Mastercard, Visa, Amex, JCB. 9.15-5.30, Closed Sun/Mon.

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SUTTONS HI-FI, 18 Westover Road, Bournemouth. Tel: 01202 555512. Acoustic Energy, Arcam, Atacama, Celestion, Cable Talk, Denon, Definitive Audio, KEF, Linn, Meridian, Mission, M+K, QED, Rotel, Sennheiser, Teac, Sony, Talk Electronics, Tag McLaren, Wharfedale, Yamaha, DTS & Dolby Digital, DVD. 2 single speaker listening rooms, home demonstrations, free installations. Open Mon-Sat 9-5.30. Call for details. **BADA**

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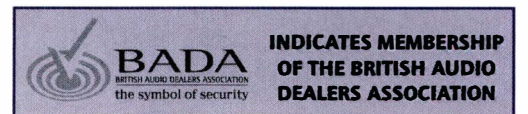
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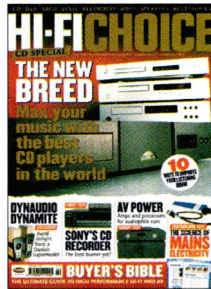
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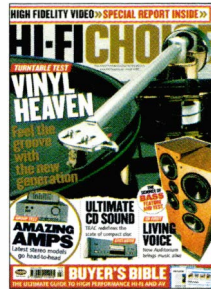
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- Group Test: DVD players
- Test Feature: DACs
- Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD player



FEBRUARY 2003/ISSUE 238

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- Group Test: AV amps and processors
- Test Feature: Mains cables & filters
- Ways to improve your listening room



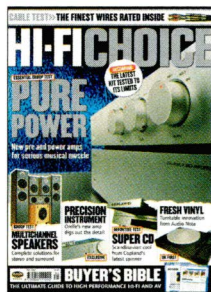
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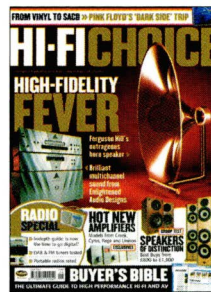
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B&O Beolab 5

NEXT MONTH

YOUR HI-FI OR YOUR MORTGAGE

Never has there been so much high-end finery in one issue, so prepare to indulge. *Exposure's* new £1,200 CD player spins the company upmarket, *Beauhorn's* distinctive single-driver horn, the B2 gets rated, as does the new *Living Voice Avatar OBX-R*, complete with its external crossovers. Not content with that we've also got *B&O's* extraordinary Beolab 5 speaker, *Resolution Audio's* upsampling Opus 21 CD player and bags more gear from *vdH*, *AKG*, and *Isotek*.

AMPS YOU MUST HEAR

The most spectacular and thorough amplifier round-up you'll have seen anywhere this year. Our eight-engine group test scrutinises brand new amps from *Rotel*, *Exposure*, *Bryston*, *Cyrus* and *Rega* against more established models from *Arcam*, *Musical Fidelity* and *Marantz*.

TONEARM MASTERCLASS

Everything you wanted to know about tonearms but were afraid to ask – their history, construction, and set-up tips, all in our dedicated feature on perfecting your vinyl rig. Plus, we test five of the most important tonearms currently on the market from *Rega*, *Michell*, *Bluenote* and more. Become an expert – read *Hi-Fi Choice!*

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HANDBAGS AND GLADRAGS - STEREOPHONICS

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO - THE CLASH

SOLSBURY HILL - PETER GABRIEL

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MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE - THE POLICE

WHY DOES IT ALWAYS RAIN ON ME - TRAVIS

DON'T YOU (FORGET ABOUT ME) - SIMPLE MINDS

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A lust for power

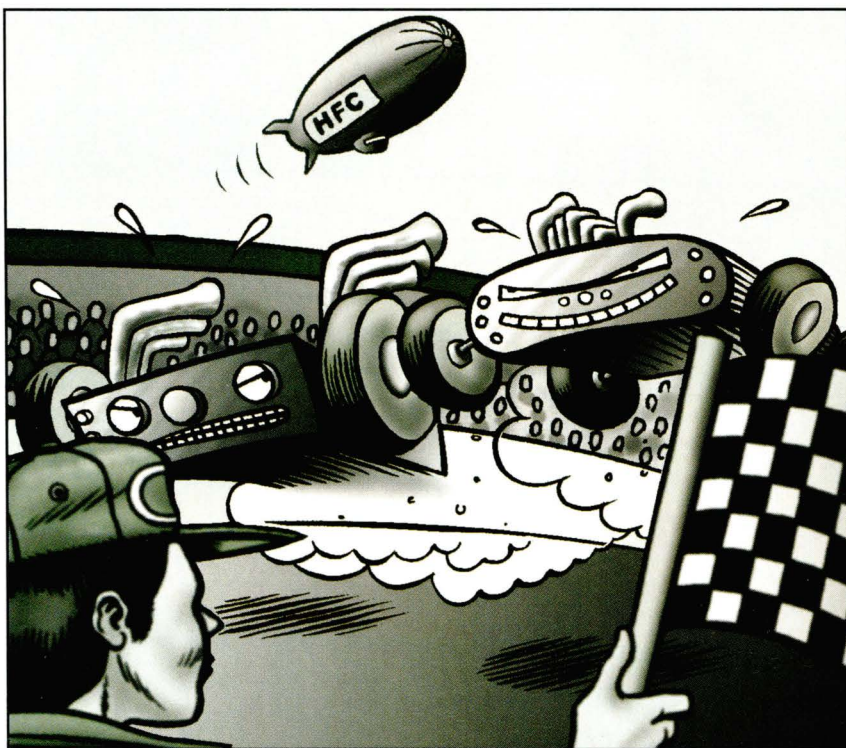
David Vivian explores the thrill of pointless power

We think we know better. We pretend to have it under control. A sense of perspective, we believe, is all that's required. But we're wrong. Whichever way you want to cut it, the concept of 'power' looms large in human desire, and it's getting larger all the time. We all accept it's dangerous stuff. Dangerous because it's addictive. Dangerous because it exhilarates and corrupts in roughly equal measure. Dangerous because it has the capacity to make fools of us all.

Power fogs judgement. It deludes reason. It allowed the Wachowski brothers to make *The Matrix Reloaded* which, to borrow a sentiment from the original film, is "major boring shit" instead of the thrilling, thought-provoking sequel it should have been. It's as plain as the shades perched on the bruv's hopefully now slightly out of joint noses.

Excess seems to be the problem. The bloke ahead of me in the queue to watch *TMR* was clearly into body building. I knew this because he was wearing a white T-shirt two sizes too large for his midriff but three sizes too small for his neck. After walking from the car park, smoke was gently curling from between his legs as the tightly stretched denim clinging to his thighs rubbed together. His arms stuck out at 45 degrees which made it hard for him to take the tickets from his jeans pocket. He was, to put it mildly, ridiculous. And you can be sure I didn't tell him.

Later this year – a year in which the car industry has literally gone power crazy – Bugatti will launch a 16-cylinder, £750,000 supercar called the Veyron 16.4. It will have as many turbochargers as it has driven wheels (four apiece), two clutches, a seven-speed gearbox and 1,000bhp. It will be able to get to 60mph in the time it takes its driver to gulp and hurtle on to a top speed of 252mph. Needless to say, early production is already sold out. Nobody




"If the amp is a hi-fi's 'engine' then wattage per channel is brake horse power and sound pressure performance."

needs this absurd car, just as nobody needs a 21-inch neck (though, arguably, the latter would be handy to withstand the acceleration of the former). It's all about the lust for power.

There's clearly an equivalence in audio. If an amplifier is the 'engine' of a hi-fi system then wattage per channel is brake horse power and sound pressure performance. When street drag racing was stamped out in smalltown America in the early seventies, the kids transposed the power kick to their cars' sound systems, the contest no longer to see who was fastest but the loudest. Today, the legacy of those times booms out across every high street.

The most powerful domestic hi-fi amp I've heard is Chord's £33,000 SMP12000, which pumps 800 watts per channel RMS into eight ohms, 3.2 kW into two ohms and, at the time of the demo, made a pair

of usually bomb-proof B&W 801s plead for mercy. Wonderful and quite fantastically pointless. Krell's fridge-sized £80,000 Master Reference Amp monoblock weighs 690lb and is said to deliver 8000 watts into one ohm and 16,000 watts into 0.5 ohm. Possibly even more staggeringly ludicrous than a 252mph Bugatti.

But in my search for the Incredible Hulk (new movie version) of hi-fi amps, I stumbled across the Kutya'i, a valve amp research project that requires a three-phase air-blast unit just to cool it. It uses ten gargantuan 5J/180E tubes in a push-pull arrangement, "biased at the very limit of conduction to maximise efficiency". Claimed output is 50,000 watts per pair of tubes, or 250,000 watts overall. Its creators call it "the world's most powerful hi-fi amplifier". And that, I have no doubt, was the only point of building it. 



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