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NO.42 JANUARY 1999

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D.I.Y.

Supplement



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Hi-Fi World 1998

WORLD WINNERS

We separate the best from the rest to bring you the line-up of this year's top components.



KIMBER PBJ INTERCONNECT

The PBJ is the entry-level interconnect in Kimber's extensive range and uses a braid geometry for its woven conductors to reduce the effects of electromagnetic and radio frequency interference.

Carrying 'Viola Fora De Moda' (by Ana Caram from a Chesky Jazz sampler CD) the PBJ proved to be an extremely fast sounding cable. It had the ability to track musical dynamics very accurately, lending the sound an open, uncompressed feel. The cable also proved natural and very transparent - the various bells and triangles on this track were easily discernible and well separated.

At the other end of the spectrum, drum beats had great impact and speed which helped the PBJ to sound rhythmic and involving.

Providing it's hooked up to evenly-

balanced or warmish ancillaries the Kimber gives an outstanding account of itself at the price.

Kimber PBJ

£68/1m

Russ Andrews Accessories
Edge Bank House,
Skelsmergh,
Kendal,
Cumbria LA8 9AS
Tel: 0800 373467

exceptionally high quality phono plugs. From one end to the other runs stranded Ultra-High-Purity, Oxygen-Free Copper UHP OFC) matched with polypropylene dielectrics.

The Reference may cost well below £100 but it didn't sound cheap. Bass had enough weight to form a solid foundation for music and instrumental separation was fine as the gold CD recording of La Fille Mal Gardée by Hérold-Lanchbery proved. Laid out on a quiet background, the sound stage was three-dimensional, if restricted in ultimate depth.

The most prominent trait of this cable has to be its ability to reproduce string instruments. Though a hint metallic, violin tone was sweet and lovingly-crafted, and the Bach Suites recording featuring YoYo Ma (Sony S2K 63203) sounded smooth with a broad range of tonal colour.

The Master Conduit's only downside is its mild compression of dynamics when compared with more expensive interconnects. That's no sin though given this cable's very reasonable price.

Reference Cable Master Conduit Asymmetrical
£65/m



REFERENCE CABLE MASTER CONDUIT ASYMMETRICAL INTERCONNECT

Reference Cable is a new company established by ex-Ariston man John Carrick. His gold-coloured Asymmetric is a beautifully-constructed cable with

Ecosse Maf
48 Bridgehousehill Road,
Kilmarnock KA1 4QD
Tel: 01563 524320



CREEK OBH-12 PASSIVE PRE-AMPLIFIER

Every now and again a piece of hi-fi comes along which possesses virtues that lift it above the masses. A lot of equipment these days is competently designed and executed, but that's not enough to gain it classic status. In order to beat the crowd, a component needs to be very special indeed, like Creek's £200 OBH-12.

Pre-amplifiers, rather than consisting of merely a source selector and volume control, used to be the first stage of gain to step up source signals of around 200mV-400mV. However, with CD players putting out around 2V, this gain is no longer essential for driving power amplifiers to their maximum output. A simple, passive volume control is all that is really required in most cases now.

The Creek OBH-12 contains one such attenuator. Designer Mike Creek also decided to add arm-chair convenience with remote control. So, for £200, you get a little box that weighs less than a pint glass and a wall-adaptor PSU which drives the motorised potentiometer, indicator LEDs and remote control.

In the world of coloration and distortion, the nothingness and purity of the OBH-12 was refreshing. The Creek's transparency is easily on a par with active pre-amps at more than five times its £200 price. You'd expect this though, because passive components do not suffer from the limitations of their active counterparts, like slew-rate limiting and non-linearity.

Sonically, the OBH-12 is great. Even if you're buying on the most shoe-string of budgets you can expect a truly high-end experience from this passive pre.



DNM MICA MM CARTRIDGE

What is it that makes the 1042 a design so many manufacturers use as the basis for an MM of their own? A quick listen is all it takes to find out: sweet, open, detailed and dynamic, the 1042 makes a lot of mid-price MCs quake in their generators. So how does DNM's Mica differ from the root stock? There was a certain reluctance to divulge secrets here beyond the use of higher tolerance parts and the obvious threaded holes in the Pöcan body.

If your MM uncovers few truths about your record collection, then a switch to the Mica would be a double-edged sword. The DNM is revealing enough to have you reshuffling your preferred recordings list as you realise just how bad some albums really are. A couple of modern Pop LPs took the prize for 'recording most likely to have been made through a sock' in this respect.

Of course, the side of the blade that cuts to the audiophile's advantage is the one which gives pressings worth their salt a clarity and precision many seem to consider the preserve of CD alone. You shouldn't hear smooth crooning from Janis Joplin on her Pearl LP, unless your system offers raw energy as an optional extra. What the Mica managed was that delicate tight-rope walk between the rough and the smooth.

Goldring's 1042 is one of the best MMs around, but the Mica is better - it's as simple as that. Trade in your old MM or MC and £15 on top of the 1042's £120 nets you a clean, uncoloured and transparent cartridge that'll have MCs panicking all over again.



SONIC FRONTIERS TRANSPORT 3 AND PROCESSOR 3

The Transport 3 has one of the most 'addictive' loading systems I've come across. When you see this SF in the flesh, you will understand - the pictures don't do it justice. As the curved 'petals' of the Iris slide apart camera-aperture style, you can't help but smile. And the round remote is a tasty touch too.

The law of clichés states that, with components this much more expensive than our customary sources, there should be much more of everything to be heard, and so it was. The bottom-end welly went down a treat with the drummer on Eric Bibb and Needed Times' Good Stuff album - he was smacking away on his kit with a raw, rhythmic energy which put the bump and grind back into 'Nothing Like You Used To'. The musical intent might have been hot and sweaty, but there was no lack of control to the SFs' output - imaging was pin-sharp, vocals smoother than a teflon-coated car salesman and sound staging spacious.

Transport and Processor 3 make a seriously tempting proposition, if you can afford to play fantasy hi-fi and put your money where your dreams are. Working as a pair, they produce fluid, open and very natural results a long way from the hard, flat and uninvolved noise CD has often been accused of. Add to that the very classy looks of the transport, its gorgeous engineering and the upgradability of the DAC, and the sense of spending lots of money once on a source to last 10 years instead of buying cheap every two or three years is obvious.

Creek OBH-12

£200

DNM Mica

£135

Sonic Frontiers Transport 3

£6999

Sonic Frontiers Processor 3

£6999

Creek Audio
2 Bellevue Road,
Friern Barnet,
London N11 3ER
Tel: 0181 361 4133

Virtual Reality Audio Systems
PO Box 383,
Brentwood,
Essex CM14 4GB
Tel: 01277 227355

Picture The Sound
13 Weston Road,
Guildford,
Surrey GU2 6AU
Tel: 07000 443426



DENON DVD-3000 DVD PLAYER

Take a modern audiophile recording like Joe Beard's *Blues Union*, captured by Audioquest in the summer of 1995, and you'll get an idea of the transparent sound staging and crisp imaging of which this player is capable. Beard's 60-a-day vocals were rooted dead-centre at the front of the broad sweep of sound, out ahead of the piano and drum kit which propel tunes like 'Please Don't Light The Flame' along with a relentless drive.

Having shown a clean pair of heels to most sub-£2000 CD players, the DVD-3000 extended its lead with 24-bit 96kHz discs. Classic's version of Rachmaninoff's *Symphonic Dances* was almost frighteningly better than CD. The individual sections of the orchestra and the acoustic around them were fully fleshed-out, and the unrestrained dynamics meant crescendos lost none of their ability to startle.

On CD, the Denon had been an involving music maker, but this changed with 24/96. Concentrating on reviewing became near-impossible as these discs refused to act as mere background noise - they demanded to be listened to.

If your tastes lean more towards the synthetic than the acoustic, fear not, the DVD-3000 is egalitarian in its treatment of all genres. The *International DJ Syndicate Mix 2 CD*, featuring DJ Cher, pinned me to the back wall with its high-energy beats and deep, taut bass.

The Denon DVD-3000 is sonically (if not visually) strong with a crisp, clean and involving sound. A fine performer with CD, it's better still with 24/96.

Denon DVD-3000 £699.99

Hayden Laboratories
Chiltern Hill,
Chalfont St Peter,
Bucks. SL9 9UG
Tel: 01753 888447



SONY MDS-JA50ES MINIDISC RECORDER

When recording with the 'JA50ES, I tested both the digital and analogue inputs. The first recording I made through the analogue inputs onto a Sony ES disc was of Donald Byrd's 'Dominoes'. The fidelity to the original was striking. The dynamic range remained intact, with an especially attractive bass performance; it was taut, accurate and extended.

Playing the dynamic card I had recorded a version of Shirley Bassey and 'Light My Fire' with its full orchestral backing on a low-cost blank MD. Returning to the ES disc brought about a worthwhile improvement. Vocals were firmly rooted in the centre of the sound stage with the orchestra arrayed behind them, as with the original. Timbre was bang on, and the layering and separation of instruments superb.

The Sony rustled up equally satisfying sounds via its digital input with Finlay Quaye's 'Even After All'. It maintained a tight grip upon a bassline that often has lesser decks floundering. And the vocals, which can prove tricky, had none of the added sibilance which shows up some recorders' less-than-adequate electronics.

The MDS-JA50ES is a 'serious bit of kit'. The build is outstanding - far better than it need be, even at this price. Then there's the superb quality of the components inside the casework. On top of that, the Sony is a joy to use. Editing is a piece of cake, with all the features you could ever possibly need, right down to the separate digital record level control. The 'JA50ES shows just how good MiniDisc can get.

Sony MDS-JA50ES £1299.99

Sony
The Heights,
Brooklands,
Weybridge,
Surrey KT13 0XW
Tel: 01932 816000



WILSON BENESCH FULL CIRCLE TURNTABLE

Making up the £2000 Full Circle bundle is the Circle deck, ACT 0.5 arm and Ply MC cartridge. This last is a Matrix (which we bolted into the end of the 0.5) without the trimmings and can only be bought as part of the Full Circle.

One record that never fails to shine on a capable turntable is Nimbus Records' Supercut audiophile pressing of Joan Armatrading's eponymous album. The grooves on this disc contain all the dynamics, speed and involvement vinyl is famous for and the Benesch let them through loud and clear. There's precious few times I've heard 'Join The Boys' meaner and funkier, or 'People' crisper and faster. This player turns its nose up at groove noise and just gets on with weaving the music into a near life-size sound stage.

As far as tonal balance goes, the Circle/0.5/Matrix have an air of dry coolness to them, like the last days of an Indian summer. A spin through a range of Classical LPs showed how much detail the WB could resolve without assaulting your ears with information. All the acoustic cues fell neatly into place in the sound stage to give a very natural, cohesive and atmospheric rendition. One of the combo's aces in this respect was stage depth of the kind that most non-mortgage-inducing CD players can only dream about.

There's little out there which would challenge the WB - the Full Circle threesome deserve full credit for doing what they do at the price.

Wilson Benesch Circle	£795
ACT 0.5	£795
Matrix	£668
Full Circle (with Ply MC)	£2000

Wilson Benesch
Falcon House,
Limestone Cottage Lane,
Sheffield S6 1NJ
Tel: 01142 852656



JAMO CS5 ACTIVE LOUDSPEAKERS

The CS5s are constructed from MDF and heavyweight chipboard, and are very well finished in a silver-grey and green. The fully-shielded drive units consist of a 5.25in. main driver and 1in. dome tweeter.

One of the pair is essentially a 'slave' - the other is fitted with the volume control, mains socket, phono inputs, electronic crossovers and four power amplifiers. There is, thoughtfully, a connection for a mono subwoofer complete with an upper frequency output of 180Hz, and a 'surround' option for connection to 'rear' speakers (which need to be active or run from a separate amp) with a 7kHz upper limit.

I connected the Jamos straight to the output of my usual pre-amp and set them up as per the instruction book. (This, by the way, covers computers, surround-sound installations, wall or stand mounting and a plethora of other possibilities). Having chosen stand mounting over bookshelf placement, I turned the CS5s on and sat back. In hi-fi terms these actives offer an impressive presentation which, even after a number of days' continuous listening, still appealed. You could hear the benefits of an active crossover in the open midrange, crisp imaging and airy treble too.

As a budget alternative to an amp, loudspeakers and their cabling, the Jamos have much to recommend them. I can't bring to mind another active which gets so close to high fidelity at anywhere near this price. Even their upper-bass chestiness and slightly restricted dynamics can't prevent them ranking as a bit of a bargain at £200.

Jamo CS5 £199.99

Jamo
5 Faraday Close,
Drayton Fields,
Daventry,
Northants. NN11 5RD
Tel: 01327 301300



ANTHEM INTEGRATED 1 AMPLIFIER

Regular readers will already know about Anthem after the review of their CD1 CD multi-player with valve output stage in March 1998. For those of you who missed it, Anthem is the budget arm of the Canadian company Sonic Frontiers.

Despite wearing the trappings and possessing the weight of a mammoth transistor amp, the Integrated 1 is a 25watt valve unit. The line pre-amplifier comes with the option of a Moving-Magnet valve phono stage at £200.

'Yanar's Dance', from Nazaire's Who's Blue album, is a live recording with all the necessary background chatter and clinking of glasses. With some hi-fi this noisy ambience can become intrusive, but not the Anthem. It had a knack of judging just how much emphasis should be placed upon each and every nuance of the music.

The Sonic Frontiers continued to charm with Classical recordings. From the drawn-out decay of a cymbal to the shimmer of a tambourine in Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker, this integrated showed the sort of midrange and treble pedigree you'd expect of amplifiers costing at least several hundred pounds more.

The Anthem may not be particularly cheap, but it is good value. Stiff competition at this price doesn't stop the Integrated 1 impressing. It has those rare sonic traits that mark out a well-executed valve design - its warehouse-like sound stage, smoothness and accuracy of timbre are beyond many transistor competitors at this price and above. Considering this is only Sonic Frontiers' first 'budget' effort, the establishment had better watch out.

Anthem Integrated 1 £1295

Picture The Sound
13 Weston Road,
Guildford,
Surrey GU2 6AU
Tel: 07000 443426



MERIDIAN 508 24-BIT CD PLAYER

You may be forgiven for wondering why a 16-bit format like Compact Disc needs a 24-bit player. Well, the higher resolution DAC within the 508.24 should imbue the player with a better dynamic range and superior resolving power of all-important low-level detail, areas where many 16-bit DACs need improvement.

Early impressions proved this player would thankfully not inspire me to reach for the cotton wool. The Eberle string quartet, playing works by Gates and Bridge, prompted extended listening. The two violins had leanings towards shrillness but only when asked to do so by the nature of the instrument; in other words, what was reproduced was the realistic timbre of an acoustic instrument.

The Meridian's innately transparent and detailed presentation helped to uncover previously hidden sounds on albums I thought I knew - Garbage's 'Stroke Of Luck' yielded extra ambient background effects lurking deep in the mix.

'Teardrop' from Massive Attack's Mezzanine was the final confirmation of the 508.24's pedigree. Deep, deep controlled bass, sublime vocals from Liz Frazer and the snappy rhythm track conspired to produce superb results.

The lingering impression Meridian's 508.24 CD player will leave is of a machine that could hold its head up in the company of an LP12, which is praise indeed. Bomb-proof construction and attractive looks make its hand even stronger. The Meridian is one of the most capable and audition-worthy CD players around at its price.

Meridian 508.24 £1995

Meridian
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cambs. PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 434334

It was 20 years ago today....



In November '77, the design team of Bob Stuart and Allen Boothroyd launched their first Meridian product, an active loudspeaker of course!
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<http://www.meridian-audio.com>



SONNETEER SEDLEY PHONO STAGE

There's a certain understated, functional elegance about Sonneteer components which I can see going down well in living rooms across the land. It comes from the full-width black casework and brushed aluminium front panel. There's also that rare and expensive blue LED on the fascia which endows the Sedley with an extra bit of class compared to cheaper green or red types.

Though in no need of a spiritual uplift I turned to the R'n'B flavoured Gospel music of Bebe and Cece Winans. What raised my eyebrows was the sense of life and zest the music enjoyed through the Sonneteer. This had a lot to do with the speed and dynamics on offer - there was very little of the compression on crescendos which a lot of hi-fi inflicts.

Rhythmically the Sedley reminded me of Sonneteer's integrated amplifiers and their flair for catching subtle musical accents. Reproducing these accurately highlights the natural pace and timing of the music and makes it so much more involving and satisfying.

Boosting the involvement factor further was the abundance of detail on offer. This, again in character with the Sonneteer amps, was presented in an unforced manner that complemented the music. On Tori Amos' Little Earthquakes, for instance, her vocals were hauntingly pure; I just stopped taking notes and listened to the album all the way through.

In aspects such as transient speed and stereo imaging, the Sedley is hard to beat at the price. Add the flexibility of variable loading and fine build quality and you're on to a winner.

Sonneteer Sedley
£399

Sonneteer,
PO Box 163c,
Esher KT10 0YH
Tel: 01372 468676



LEHMANN AUDIO BLACK CUBE PHONO STAGE

If attraction is strictly a visual thing for you, then the Black Cube will certainly not set your pulse racing. A basic folded-steel case houses the electronics, fed from an external power supply. Don't be fooled by appearances though. Closer inspection inside reveals the Cube to measure up where it counts with audiophile touches such as Wima foil capacitors, a screened power-supply lead and passive equalisation.

The flexible Cube allows good compatibility with most cartridges currently available. Input sensitivity is fixed at 250uV and capacitance at 220pF, values chosen to suit both Moving-Magnet and Moving-Coil cartridges.

A small point worth mentioning is that the Black Cube requires a warm-up time of 10 days before it comes to the boil; in other words, it's best left on all the time.

After the initial thud of the stylus touching down, what confronted me was a wall of silence that gave the impression of waiting for the curtains to rise and the performance to begin. Stevie Wonder's 'Do I Do' emerged from this background complete with a broad palette of tonal colour and lightning fast percussion. Rhythmic, weighty bass further heightened the listening experience.

Lehmann Audio's Black Cube is a genuine audiophile achievement in terms of musicality and neutrality. I can't think of anything near its £395 price tag which gets within spitting distance. The Cube should keep those vinyl junkies out there defiantly anti-digital for a long time yet.

Lehmann Audio Black Cube

£395

R.T. Services
118 Mendip Heights,
Didcot,
Oxfordshire
OX11 7TG
Tel: 01235 810455



PINK TRIANGLE LITAURAL CD PLAYER

The Litaural uses a standard Sanyo transport but in this application all the transport control circuits are mounted on an independent circuit board and powered by a dedicated transformer. A great deal of attention has been paid to the power supply circuits of this player; the Litaural has three mains transformers, one for the analogue section, one for the digital and another for the transport and display.

The Litaural is one of the best sounding CD players we've heard at the price. It normally takes quite a while to gauge the abilities of any component, but within the first few moments of listening to Stravinsky's The Song Of The Nightingale I knew the Litaural was something special. Timpani, when hit hard, were as solid as I've ever heard from CD. The Pink was equally accomplished at the other end of the scale. Cymbals and triangles were focused and powerfully rendered - this player has those rare treble commodities of power and slam.

Changing tack I put on Skunk Anansie's Stooch album to see how the Litaural would cope with something more modern. On 'Brazen', Skin's vocals packed as much punch as a boxing glove full of horseshoes. The Pink handled this album like it was born to Rock, all the song's elements gelling into a whole.

Whatever your musical tastes, the Litaural simply steps aside and lets the tunes speak for themselves. Its casework might leave a lot to be desired but then the sound quality on offer is amongst the best you'll hear from CD.

Pink Triangle Litaural

£2099

Pink Triangle Projects
Camberwell Business Centre,
Lomond Grove,
Camberwell,
London SE5 7HN
Tel: 0171 703 5498



CHORD CPA 1800 PRE-AMPLIFIER AND SPM 400 POWER AMPLIFIER

It's not every hi-fi company that can boast an order book containing names like the BBC, Abbey Road Studios and the Royal Opera House. But Chord Electronics can, which isn't bad going for a company that has only been in existence for 16 years.

The feature which sets Chord's amplifiers apart from those of most other manufacturers is the use of switch-mode power supplies. These endow the power amps with high outputs without the need for transformers the size of a tractor tyre.

The first thing that strikes you when listening to the Chords is just how transparent they are without being bright or forward. The 1800/400 are uncommon components because they give you that feeling of listening straight through the electronics and deep into the recording. For this to be the case you need outstanding resolution of detail. Excellent though they are here, it's a mix of abilities unmatched by anything I've heard at this price which marks them out.

So what are these abilities? There's the natural, unforced clarity which enables you to concentrate on the musical piece as a whole. Imaging precision and stability is another. The next enviable string to these amps' bow is their dynamic power and transient speed.

This is as honest and truthful a pair of amplifiers as I've heard in a long time. If your musical tastes are broad and you prize neutrality, there are few competitors.

Chord CPA 1800 £1774
Chord SPM 400 £1325

Chord Electronics
The Pump House,
Bridge Court,
East Farleigh,
Kent ME16 9NB
Tel: 01622 721444



NAD PP1 PHONO STAGE

The PP1 comes housed in a dinky metal case complete with gold-plated phono sockets. The captive output lead is of decent enough industrial quality but doesn't give you the option of experimenting with different interconnects. Lifting the lid doesn't reveal any overtly audiophile components, but then the design is as good as a decent phono stage fitted to an integrated amp of between £200-£300.

I plied the NAD with James Taylor Quartet's 'Stepping Into My Life'. It was a relief to find the PP1 didn't fall into the trap of sounding harsh and anaemic as some phono stages can. Instead there was a broad sound stage with good depth and no real sonic nasties. The bass was a little soft, which could slow the music down if the PP1 was feeding a warm amplifier, but with anything more neutral or lean sounding, this would prove more of a benefit than a hindrance.

Granted you wouldn't expect to find razor-sharp insight from a phono stage for just four notes, but percussion had separation, accuracy of timbre and decay which would come as real eye-openers to those more accustomed to low-cost CD players.

For only £40 the NAD PP1 is something of a bargain. For the most part, there's very little to complain about in terms of sound quality - it's smooth and even, with a broad sound stage offering fine separation. It will turn its hand to most music too, although bass could be more controlled and open. At this price, I think it would be churlish to complain.

NAD PP1 £39.95

NAD
Unit 15,
Faraday Road Ind. Est.,
Aylesbury,
Bucks. HP19 3RY
Tel: 01296 82017



VADIS S15 OUTPUT TRANSFORMERLESS VALVE POWER AMP

Before listening, the S15 benefits from a 20minute warm-up and then a spot of bias resetting. Correct biasing ensures long valve life too, which is good news for your wallet, although the amp's PL519s can be had for around £20 a piece.

As the manual states 8ohm loads are preferred, we chose the 4ohm Jamo Concert 8s and a dose of Soundgarden's thrashy A-Sides CD to drop the Vadis in at the deep end. Well, for an amp that's not supposed to be happy into low-impedance loads, the S15 dealt almost contemptuously with track after track of dense, Metalhead music that floors most thermionic contenders. What the Vadis does that leaves everything else at the price in its wake is resolve detail on a microscopic scale in the wholly natural manner that tends to distinguish the best of stratospherically expensive equipment from the merely mortal.

Eric Bibb, John Lee Hooker, Stravinsky, Mahler, The Chemical Brothers - the S15 was truly egalitarian in its treatment of all. It has such clarity that it faded into the background as part of the system and relinquished centre stage to the music.

It's always a pleasant surprise to come across a new, and usually small, British hi-fi outfit producing genuinely innovative equipment. Although many such concerns fail to reach the sonic standards set by larger companies and fall by the wayside in the dog-eat-dog business of modern hi-fi, Vadis with their OTL technology could teach most valve amp manufacturers a thing or two.

Vadis S15 £2350

Vadis
32 Head Street,
Beith,
Ayrshire KA15 2EU
Tel: 01505 504128



MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANS HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER

There's a certain family resemblance that unites MF's X series of 'hi-fi in a can' components. The word 'can' is especially apt here as the little silver cylinder of the X-Cans is a headphone amplifier. Featuring a valve output stage, it's designed for use with amps that either don't have a headphone socket or possess one of dubious ability.

The X-Cans definitely shares that Musical Fidelity trait of smooth warmth which makes long periods of listening pass by without ear ache. The valve output stage allows the music to ebb and flow with the minimum of fatigue. Clearly, if the matching headphones have any weaknesses, then the MF will expose them.

To see if complex Classical music would trip the X-Cans up I plied it with an LP of Schubert's Symphony No8 (Unfinished). Timbral reproduction, particularly of strings, had an enviable harmonic richness, and the entire work was imbued with a sense of tension that's rarely achieved in most amp/headphone combinations.

In answer to the question, "Is the Musical Fidelity X-Cans worth £130?" I would say resoundingly yes. Provided you match it with a decent pair of headphones (I'd recommend spending a minimum of £100 here) it represents excellent value for money. Even if you already have an amp fitted with a headphone socket you'll probably notice big gains in terms of depth of sound, control, timbre and musicality.



CLASSIQUE SOUNDS OCTAVIA PLINTH FOR GARRARD 401

Made to order from slabs of inch-thick MDF, The Octavia plinth from Classique Sounds can be had in the raw or cabinet-finished in any veneer of your choice. The top board is undrilled, so the choice of tone-arm fixing method rests with the user. One of the styling peculiarities of the Garrard 401 lies in its chassis, which butts into the area where any sensible person would want to mount a 9in. arm. With a bit of applied fiddling and the odd curse though, we got our Rega RB300 fitted.

Considering the enormous variety of dynamics and textures which have to be reproduced in Decca's Parsifal, the Octavia retained commendable control and dug deep for the accompanying 'cello and double-bass parts. Layered above was the full range of voices on this Wagnerian feast, the Germanic speech patterns retaining their expressive sibilance while the glories of full-blown operatic soprano floated out of the loudspeakers.

A touch of the wild and wonderful was contributed by Santana's Abraxas. Its plethora of odd phase effects enabled me to be certain that what was weird stayed weird, and that the smoothness which was a notable feature of the Garrard/Octavia was not an unwanted extra.

Classique's Octavia aims at preventing vibration in the first place, and does a good job of it. It is also not unduly expensive and, coupled with a well-kept motor unit and suitable pick-up, would be a welcome, if weighty, companion on life's vinyl odyssey.



SONY TCD-D100 PORTABLE DAT RECORDER

Looking like something a latter-day James Bond would keep in his briefcase next to the PPK revolver, Sony's new TCD-D100 'DATman' seems sheer indulgence. True, DAT is not now going to be The Next Big Format - indeed many Japanese companies have discontinued it. But neither will it 'do a DCC' and disappear overnight - the strong demand for DAT in its home market will ensure that blanks will be available for many years to come.

The great thing about DAT is that it's still the highest resolution digital recording medium available to home users. The true 16-bit 48kHz resolution means theoretically better sound quality than CD, which isn't to be sneezed at. You can select the sampling rate too. 32kHz gives you twice the standard recording time, 44kHz records at CD specification, while 48kHz gives the best sound quality and Standard Play tape times.

Recordings were impressive - Isaac Hayes' 'Soulsville' was clean and smooth with oodles of detail. Bass wasn't as sumptuous as some, but tight and fast nonetheless. Midrange was spacious with a large sound stage and treble finely-etched. It would be wrong to suggest the recording was identical to the source, but the colorations the Sony added were subtle. Stereo imaging was very good, with strong, secure instrument placement and a deep, inviting sound stage.

But perhaps the Sony's biggest asset is its portability. If you're the kind of person who travels a lot and wants real hi-fi wherever you go, DAT is still the best solution.

Musical Fidelity X-Cans £129.99

Musical Fidelity
15-17 Olympic Trading Estate,
Fulton Road,
Wembley,
Middlesex HA9 0TF
Tel: 0181 900 2866

Octavia £299 (veneered)
£200 (plain MDF)

Classique Sounds
61 Aylestone Drive,
Aylestone,
Leicester
LE2 8QE
Tel: 0116 253 5821

Sony TCD-D100 £699.99

Sony UK
Brooklands,
Weybridge,
Surrey KT13 0X
Tel: 01932 816000



CREEK T43 TUNER

The word "style" is hardly the first that comes to mind when you look at the Creek T43 tuner; functional, definitely, old-fashioned, maybe. Stylish? I think not.

The T43 is a well-equipped tuner, covering as it does three bands (FM, MW and, a rare stop-off these days, LW) and featuring a comprehensive remote control.

In terms of sound the Creek certainly makes a name for itself with the way it manages to capture the mood and feel of a piece of music intact. Obviously, to do this all the technical aspects of the sound have to be in place. However, what set the Creek apart from the majority of tuners I've heard is the sense of natural vivacity that it preserves in the signal.

Listening to Tina Turner's 'We Don't Need Another Hero' showed just how good the T43 was in this respect. The emotion in Tina's husky singing plucked at my heart strings, especially when combined with the fat, bouncy bassline that's so important to the structure of this song.

To find out how the Creek coped with Classical music I tuned to R3 and was greeted with a rare openness and transparency. The Amsterdam Baroque Orchestra was playing Bach's Suite No3 in D and the spread of sound was such that the position of the Jamo Concert 8s I was using was hard to pinpoint. Instruments were nicely separated and reproduced with believable texture and body.

The T43 can be criticised on aesthetic grounds but that area is one for personal preference. In terms of sound quality it is one of the best tuners I've heard and at £400 it's a bargain.

Creek T43

£399

Creek Audio
2 Bellevue Road,
Friern Barnet,
London N11 3ES
Tel: 0181 361 4133



HEYBROOK OPTIMA LOUDSPEAKERS

The sound of the Optimas is a world away from their slightly run-of-the-mill styling. Their performance was remarkably polished and smooth, with images located within a very open sound stage.

The bass the Heybrooks produced belied their size, the ascending and descending double-bass runs in the third movement of Mahler's Seventh Symphony, played by the Cleveland Orchestra, possessing a rare speed and smack. This, coupled with their warmth, made for very involving listening indeed. In fact, the Optimas had little trouble dealing with Classical whatever the instruments. The lower register of violins and violas was whipped-cream rich without compromising on detail or sounding thick and veiled (which is a real bonus at this price) and midrange woodwind glowed with a clarity enhanced by freedom from cabinet coloration.

These aren't loudspeakers to shun Pop in favour of Classical alone, though. Radiohead's OK Computer was as depressing as the performers and engineers had intended, Thom Yorke's plaintive vocals fully fleshed out above the powerful bass guitar. For all their low-end grunt, the Optimas never failed to treat treble cleanly and smoothly - there was barely a hint of rough-tweeter sibilance on voices.

These 'speakers are happy on a varied musical diet which they never stifle with a boxy, coloured sound. Their involving, spacious character will keep you in front of your hi-fi for disc after disc.

Heybrook Optima

£259

Audio Group International
Language Science Park,
Plymouth,
Devon PL7 5HJ
Tel: 01752 607000



PANASONIC DVD-A350 DVD PLAYER

Playing John Lee Hooker's Boom Boom, the DVD-A350 had more low-down, dirty grunt than a subterranean pig farm on slop-out day. I've gotten out of the habit of listening to this album on CD as most of the 44.1kHz machinery which has passed through our listening room has made a rather feeble stab at the bass drive and raw, sandpappy lyrics that make up the John Lee Hooker experience. The DVD-A350 by contrast made music, not mush, of JLH. This was living, breathing, grizzly heartache underpinned by bass with real smack and speed. This was, in short, not what you'd normally expect from CD.

The sign of a truly competent all-round component is wheedling the best out of any recordings. Well, as you might have predicted, the Panasonic does that too. Reference Recordings' HDCD encoding of Stravinsky's Firebird was beautifully open and involving.

With our treasured Classic Records 24/96 sampler supplying the digits, the Panasonic's output took a massive step forward. Musicality was still the order of the day, only much more so - rhythmically and expressively the 'A350 in 24/96 mode just leaves CD for dead. It was the same story in all other departments as well.

Panasonic's DVD-A350 is one of a growing number of DVD players which look likely to usurp CD-only machines. The best of solely-CD machines at about £2000 do have a greater tonal scope and are free from the slightly hard, metallic edge to the Panasonic's sound, but they lag in almost every other respect and cost three times as much.

Panasonic DVD-A350

£699.99

Panasonic
Willoughby Road,
Bracknell,
Berks. RG12 4PF
Tel: 01344 862444



**MISSION 771
LOUDSPEAKERS**

Most 'speakers have at least one strong trait which you can quickly pick up on, and the 771s' is a smooth, sweet treble. Nancy Bryan's Lay Me Down XRCD had a purity to its upper registers which is conspicuously absent from the cheap and often rough sounding domes on the bulk of sub-£200 loudspeakers.

As you'd expect from such a small enclosure, imaging was as sharp as the proverbial pin; orchestral sections stayed put even on massive climaxes. Knitting images together into a whole was a sound stage with depth to match width, where copious low-level detail filled out the shape of the acoustic.

Considering the volume in which the mid/bass driver has to operate, the 771s do remarkably well in terms of bass quantity and quality, but the Missions take the laurels in midrange and treble finesse and tonal colour.

Where these 'speakers really thrived was with the best of Blues recordings - Buddy Guy's Feels Like Rain and Eric Bibb's Good Stuff. The clarity, rhythm and emotion in discs like these flowed through the 771s without obstruction - air guitar was definitely the order of the day. This kind of performance comes from the mix of the Missions' abilities - spacious sound staging, clear, precise imaging, dynamic speed and realistic tonal colour.

Judged solely on technological and material grounds the 771s are easily the best loudspeakers under £200. They are superb stand mounters of real refinement and musicality, although they're just a touch bass light.

Mission 771 £169.90

Mission
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cams. PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 45177



**PHILIPS CDR 870
CD-R/CD-RW RECORDER**

Philips' first CD-RW recorder, the CDR 870, records not only erasable CD-RW discs but less expensive non-erasable CD-R discs as well.

Björk's album, Homogenic, with its barrage of sequenced drum machines neatly interlinked with numerous weird samples slipped into the CDR 870. It was evidently at home with the fast beats, showing fine attack and articulation. There was also an attractive smoothness which is very well judged and never spilled over into being dull or bland.

Listening to Daboa's From The Gekko album as a recording made through the CDR 870's Analogue to Digital Convertors I found it had a fuller, softer sound than the original. Recordings made via the digital input were, unsurprisingly, far closer to the original. There were small losses in transparency, dynamics and detail but these would only show up through components costing more than the CDR 870's £500.

What about the differences between CD-R and CD-RW? On 'The House Of The Rising Sun' sung by Cyndee Peters, CD-R had a more vivid, dynamic sound. CD-RW countered this with a smoother, more controlled presentation which made the double-bass easier to follow.

As a way of putting together compilations the CDR 870 looks like a bargain. After DAT and MiniDisc have either failed or been slow to take off because of their non-existent pre-recorded catalogues, there is now an affordable recordable digital format backed up by the biggest catalogue around.

Philips CDR 870 £499.99

Philips
420-430 London Road,
Croydon,
Surrey CR9 3QR
Tel: 0181 689 4444



**MUSICAL FIDELITY X-A200
MONOBLOCS**

Borrowing its basic topology from the A1001 integrated, the heart of this power amplifier consists of three pairs of matched, bipolar power transistors, ensuring a healthy power output. Musical Fidelity claim 200watts into 8ohms, 400watts into 4ohms and 30Amps peak current from this configuration.

Following the MF family tradition, these monster monoblocs have the same input sensitivity as models like the X-A50 and E11 integrated, making bi-amping a straightforward proposition. One simple and effective combination might be the X-A50s driving the tweeters and the X-A200s feeding the mid/bass units.

These monoblocs show how much there is in a name as they put 'musical' before outright 'fidelity'. That's not to say that they weren't accurate. Their command over the flow of music was outstanding considering their cost. Grand operas snapped into focus, with artists performing across the spread of the stage and orchestras blended seamlessly in.

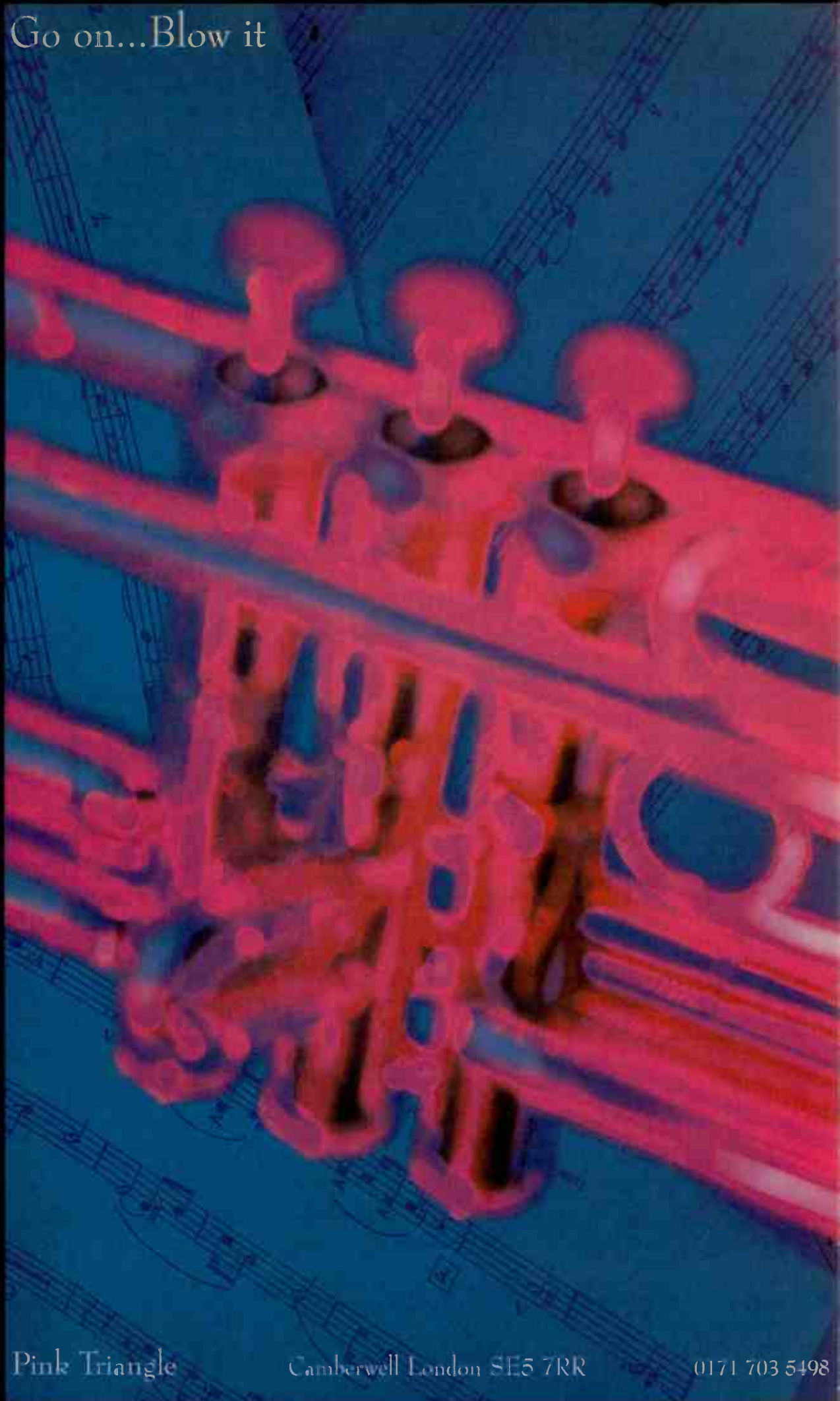
Without sweating into any load I could throw at them, the X-A200s were only mildly warm after more than eight hours of continuous playing. Throughout that time, these amps were unfailingly enjoyable music makers.

The X-A200s' styling may not be to everyone's taste, but their way with music is highly persuasive. They're not the last word in high-end components, nor are they Musical Fidelity's flagship amplifiers, but at the money, the X-A200s are almost in a class of their own.

Musical Fidelity X-A200 £1000/pair

Musical Fidelity
15-17 Olympic Trading Estate,
Fulton Road,
Wembley,
Middlesex HA9 0TF
Tel: 0181 900 2866

Go on...Blow it



Pink Triangle

Camberwell London SE5 7RR

0171 703 5498



UNISON RESEARCH POWER 35 POWER AMP

For years Unison Research have been producing valve amplifiers that are impeccably hand-crafted, curvaceously styled and offer a taste of the high-end without worrying bank managers.

The Power 35 swiftly proved it could play music with poise and composure. The feeling of effortless control was excellent at low to normal listening levels, although the grip on music did loosen slightly when more current was called for by some Pop and Rock tracks. One area where large output transformers show their worth is bass. The bottom end which the Power 35 drew from 'speakers was deep, punchy and full-bodied.

Undoubtedly, the Power 35 is not the same kind of amp as UR's more staple fare, namely the low-powered SETs which have made their name world-wide. Apparently, UR made a conscious decision to swap some of their characteristic immediacy and honeyed sweetness for a bolder presentation and more practical power output. What they've not lost in the process is that three-dimensional sound staging which allows the loudspeakers to dissolve away and leave centre stage to the music.

Unison Research's amps have steadily built up an enviable reputation and this new push-pull alternative is only going to strengthen their status. It may be a touch expensive, but the Power 35 could be the reason you spend a whole night listening to your favourite albums, and you won't need uncommonly sensitive 'speakers either.

Unison Research
Power 35

£1525



CAMBRIDGE CD4SE CD PLAYER

From the opening chords of Van Morrison's 'Have I Told You Lately That I Love You' it was clear that this player was right at the top of its class. With a highly fluid, natural character, plus rich, powerful bass, super sound staging and top-notch dynamics and timing, it just didn't sound like a budget CD player at all.

Bass was weightier than even the reference £350 Marantz CD-67SE. It was also beguilingly tuneful and melodic - bass guitar notes stopped and started with great speed and precision, communicating the music's delicate syncopations with consummate ease. The CD4SE could still be subtle when subtlety was needed, though, refusing to allow the bass to dominate when it should have taken a back seat.

Best of all was the Cambridge's dynamic ability. Neil Richardson's 'Riviera Affair' from The Sound Gallery CD came over as a roller-coaster ride of crashing power chords, cascading strings, seismic basslines and sheer drama.

The sumptuous two-track Blue Note recording of Lou Donaldson's 'Everything I Play Is Funky' couldn't trip the CD4SE up either. It faithfully recreated the studio's original acoustic and conveyed the way the double-bass powered the groove along fearlessly. The drum kit had an almost Linn LP12-like fluidity, the Cambridge handling the song's slack rhythm like few others.

This is one of the most natural sounding players I've heard in a long time, and it's very possibly hi-fi's greatest bargain of the moment.

Cambridge CD4SE

£199.99



UNISON RESEARCH SIMPLY 845 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

This line-level, single-ended valve amplifier is 100% Italian all the way through. Cherry-wood front and side cheeks give it that 'only in Italy' look and the chassis dimensions (600mm by 390mm by 260mm) demonstrate a certain penchant for the non-conformist. What you also get is 35kg of impressive construction quality.

The first disc through the UR wasn't chamber music or Jazz, but the bass-fest of Serialement Votre, a collection of 1960s and 1970s theme tunes given the drum-machine treatment. Surely, the 845 and its zero-feedback design would run out of grunt trying to pass a whisper? Nope.

Musically, everything in the tunes on this album happens below 100Hz where single-ended valve amps start to run into problems. Setting itself apart, the Simply 845 kept the tracks rolling along with a rare expressive flair, even on recordings as processed as mushy peas.

The 845 puts its money where its mouth is when it comes to grunt, but does it have subtlety? "Yes indeed" is the answer to that question. With minimally-mic'd acoustic recordings the Unison Research revealed an aptitude for golden cymbal shimmers, rich string tones and vocals to swoon to.

The 845 valve, like the mighty 211, can kick hard when necessary but PA-style volume levels aren't what the Simply 845 is about. Partner it with a pair of sympathetic and sensitive 'speakers and you'll discover this Italian is a true musician.

Unison Research Simply 845

£2950

UKD
23 Richings Way,
Iver,
Bucks. SL0 9DA
Tel: 01753 652669

Cambridge Audio
Gallery Court,
Hankey Place,
London SE1 4BB
Tel: 0500 333500

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Bucks. SL0 9DA
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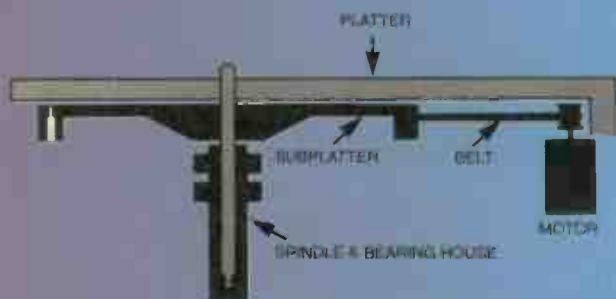
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ORIGIN LIVE TURNTABLE KITS Standard & Ultra

Now you can save money and build your own high performance deck. The standard kit version is offered at £145, and the ultra version at £279. Both decks come with a full set of drawings and guidance instructions. The kit allows for your creativity or there are optional parts that will enable you to assemble a tried and tested design within 1-4 hours. This is probably the easiest kit you will ever make.

"this Vinyl tone had my jaw heading towards the floor with the solidity and transparency of the music it was making" - "the standard came up with crystal clear images set in a broad sound stage" - "With all these goodies in place, the standard would give turntables at the £1200-£1400 mark a hard time."
HI-FI WORLD SUPPLEMENT NOV 97

"it exceptionally easy to build and professional in both sound quality and appearance"
HI-FI NEWS SUPPLEMENT NOV 97



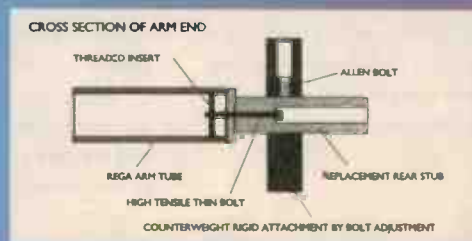
TURBOCHARGING YOUR REGA ARM

If you are the proud owner of one of these two arms why not utterly transform it into the league of super arms with the Origin live structural modification - £75 inc post & packing. This modification will enable your Rega to perform at a level exceeding that of arms costing over £1200. Rewiring with silver high grade litz cable is also offered at an additional £70.

"I have to say the Rega modifications turn this humble arm into a real Giant Killer. Gone is the rather grey, sterile sound of the cooking Rega. Instead, tonal colour is fresh, dynamics have great speed and impact, and the sound stage is huge." HI-FI WORLD SUPPLEMENT NOV 97 (structural modification only to a RB250)

WHAT HI-FI Sept 98 gave this modification a 5 star rating.

For arm modifications we normally return your arm in 2-3 days.



For further information contact:
Origin Live, 87 Chessel Crescent, Bitterne,
Southampton, SO19 4BT
Tel: 01703 578877 / 442183 Fax: 01703 398905
Email: origin.live@virgin.net
web site: <http://www.originlive.com/index.htm>



MISSION 750LE LOUDSPEAKERS

The 750LE uses a reflex-loaded 130mm mid/bass driver of Aerogel rather than polypropylene. This can hardly be a bad thing as Aerogel, with its mix of carbon and Kevlar fibres embedded in an acrylic polymer gel, has a very clean, neutral sound. This is due to its inherent self-damping properties which make it less prone to break-up and roughness in its response than paper and plastic cones.

I sat back to sample Rockin' Jimmy's 'Why You Doin' What You Do?' Without beating about the bush, the Missions had me instantly involved, such was their sense of immediacy and coherence - everything gelled. The piano was timbrally accurate, vocals expressive and the bass punchy and surprisingly weighty for such a small cabinet.

Where the baby Missions' pedigree really came to the fore was in sound staging, with a depth and width to venues which is hard to fault at this price. As Rockin' Jimmy and his sidekicks were captured on tape live, I was also able to hear the workings of the bar in the background. Far from being a distraction, this increased the music's atmosphere, which is so crucial when it comes to drawing you into the performance.

The list of the 750LE's strong points is mighty long: excellent articulation and definition; class-leading tonal colour and texture; Swiss-watch timing precision; expansive sound staging; sheer enjoyability. I could go on, but I think you get the message. The 750LEs don't merely cut the mustard, they positively blast through it with a chainsaw.

Mission 750LE

£248

Mission
Stonehill,
Huntingdon,
Cambs. PE18 6ED
Tel: 01480 451777



KENWOOD DP-3080/II

The Kenwood proved a revelation with Van Morrison. From the opening chords onwards it sounded like real instruments being played by real musicians, rather than the usual unconvincing digital facsimile. The sound stage had depth as well as width - you could clearly tell where the recording engineer had positioned each individual instrument and vocal track. The Kenwood never sounded 'in your face' - instruments just hung in the air.

Tonally the DP-3080/II was an accomplished performer, with superbly controlled and extended bass. Further up the range, the midband proved itself one of the best in the business, with real transparency and low-level detail. Treble was a winner too - the tiny little drum machine hi-hats at the back of the sound stage sparkled away sweetly through the Kenwood.

Much as I hate to harp on, the Kenwood is also a highly dynamic player. Rather than making everything sound loud, it's able to follow all those little rhythmic inflections that help communicate the emotion in music. Its superb slam, allied to deep, powerful bass, meant that the Kenwood was tops at everything from the crashing chords of 'P-Machinery' to the manic Hammond work on 'Funky'.

Make no mistake, if there's any life in a piece of music, this player will find it. To call the DP-3080/II an artificial sounding machine would be to scurrilously misrepresent it - it's a real music maker that does so much so well you'll find it nigh on impossible to fault.

Kenwood DP-3080/II

£179.95

Kenwood
Dwight Road,
Watford,
Herts. WD1 8EB
Tel: 01923 816444



ORIGIN LIVE SOVEREIGN LOUDSPEAKERS

Given the tonal sweetness and crisp dynamics that characterise the Kevlar mid/bass units manufacturers like B&W prefer, we were hoping for a clean, smooth top end from the Sovereigns' tweeters. This they duly delivered on Chesky's Sampler Volume 1 and an Opus 3 HDCD recording of the Zetterqvist String Quartet, where strings were incisive and powerful without resorting to hardness or 'spit'.

Transparency turned out to be another of the hall marks of the Sovereigns. Where a lot of loudspeakers manage a passable simulation of sound stage width, many fall at the fence of front-to-back perspectives. Not so in this case - the Origin Lives simply stood aside and let through the detail and spaciousness these CDs capture so well.

When it comes to amplifiers, these 'speakers were really quite easy to please - sensitivity isn't particularly high at 87dB but an overall impedance of 11.4ohms helps lighten the current load. Getting their positioning right is trickier, though. If you push them too close to a rear wall, the sound stage shrinks and the bass starts to waffle; too far away, and you begin to lose overall cohesion. We settled on a final location three feet into the room with 20 degrees of toe-in.

Eric Bibb and Needed Time's Good Stuff album shone with the Sovereigns suitably ensconced. Sparser acoustic numbers like 'Saucer 'n' Cup' were addictively open and natural, as a worn Repeat button on the Pink Triangle Litaural's remote control testified to.

Origin Live Sovereign

£1225

Origin Live
87 Chessel Crescent,
Bitterne,
Southampton SO19 4BT
Tel: 01703 578877

With our new range we admit we've cut

corners



D-M3 Super Micro RDS CD/Receiver

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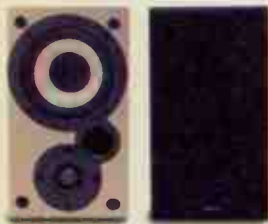
The full range includes a very compact CD Receiver and a CD Receiver with a 3 disc changer.

Options are a matching Cassette Deck and Mini-Disc Recorder.

High power British made speakers are also available.

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<http://www.denon.co.jp>



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Designed especially for Denon's latest micro systems.



D-M5 Super Micro RDS CD/Receiver

As above but with the addition of a 3x CD changer and a power increase of 30 watts rms per channel. The 3 tray CD changer allows CDs to be changed individually even while one is playing.



Optional DRR-M10 Autoreverse cassette deck

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Optional DMD-M10 Mini-Disc Recorder

Looking to the future the DMD-M10 features comprehensive editing facilities including a new 'Pick Record' function.

The next generation from **DENON**



PANASONIC DVD-L10 DVD PLAYER

Measuring just 160mm wide by 215mm deep (with the rechargeable battery fitted) by 43mm high and weighing less than 2kgs, the DVD-L10 might be more brick-like than your average portable, but then this is no average portable with a choice of CD and DVD replay for video as well.

Armed with Grado's cheap SR40s and Sennheiser's more up-market HD 580 Precisions at £200, I plugged into the DVD-L10 with a slice of a reviewing stalwart, Stravinsky's Firebird. Even via the humble Grados and built-in headphone stage, the Panasonic was up to something special. Strings had a smooth sweetness and natural timbre conspicuously absent from most CD players, portable or not. Sound staging was beyond the norm too.

With 44.1/16-bit this tempting, 24/96 was unlikely to be lacklustre. On Red Rodney's 1957, the bright cymbalwork was powerful and incisive without becoming brash, double-bass taut and fast. Above all, though, chewing more digits, the DVD-L10 blossomed into a deeply involving, musical performer, easily capturing the nuances and dynamic contrasts which set feet a-tapping.

Powered by the battery and warmed up for 30 minutes, the DVD-L10 is on a par with better static CD players at around £500. Driving headphones with its on-board stage, the Panasonic pulls up its socks and goes for the rhythmic jugular in the same way as its bigger brother, the DVD-A350. For music (and video) on the move, the Panasonic is the business.

Panasonic DVD-L10 £999.95

Panasonic
Willoughby Road,
Bracknell,
Berks. RG12 4PF
Tel: 01344 862444



MICHELL ORCA/ALECTO PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

The Orca is extraordinarily quiet, in a way that usually only comes with battery power. That means a surprising amount of recorded ambience and detail comes through, including some very low-level outside chatter on a Nimbus CD (which escaped not only the engineers but me for several years) and a hall ambience on a Klemperer ASD LP that truly and naturally enveloped the orchestra. More importantly, it also means very pure instrumental tone that made not only strings but all forms of brass a delight. Listening to the excellent Isis recording of Martin Souter showed the George IV harpsichord had every plucked string perfect, plus a clear sense of the room at Kew. The higher notes can sound jangly even on more than competent equipment, but not with the Orca. It didn't soften them, just gave each its perfect interval.

The second sign of superior equipment is simply discovering that you play a great deal of music of practically every genre, and sit back and enjoy it. Here the Orca suffers a problem: poor recordings will, alas, stay poor.

Too many CDs and LPs fed the Orca and Alectos for me to go into their titles, but they all had a high-end timbre on instruments, holographic and precise imagery and, especially on the part of the new Alectos, free and effortless dynamics.

Michell Orca £1650
Michell Alecto £1989/pair

JA Michell Engineering
2 Theobald Street,
Borehamwood,
Herts. WD6 4SE
Tel: 0181 953 0771



QED PROFILE SILVER 12 LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

The Profile Silver 12 is made up of a flat ribbon of 12 silver-plated Oxygen-Free Copper cables grouped in threes which happens to be eminently suitable for slipping beneath carpets to disguise it in a domestic setting. The individual bunches of wire are then wrapped in a transparent Low-Density Polyethylene plastic covering, the whole measuring about an inch wide.

The Silver 12 rustled up a broader sound stage than you might expect for the money, enabling the old audiophile's game of Hunt The Instrumentalist to be played with ease. It had a fractionally louder sound than the cheaper van den Hul Skytrack it was tested against too, most likely down to the QEDs' lack of any serious midrange compression or confusion.

The same comments could be made of the apparent extension at the bottom end, although the Silver 12's very lowest octaves were a fraction looser than the van den Hul cable's. At least this never degenerated into flabbiness, even on very testing tracks, where the QED remained in control.

At the other end of the scale, touches of fine detail such as the guitarist's fingers slipping over the strings were transmitted with no questions asked. And the QED's fine tonal resolution means it will fit snugly into systems where many other lesser wires would be out of their depth.

QED Profile Silver 12 £15/m

QED Audio Products
Ridgeway House,
Ridgeway Close,
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Surrey GU18 5XU
Tel: 01276 451166



BRAIN BOX

Calling all hi-fi trainspotters! So you think you know about all things audio? Pit your wits against the World team and their trivia teasers.

1) Which famous motor racing team recently bought Audiolab?

- A. Ferrari
- B. Wartburg
- C. TAG McLaren
- D. Jordan

2) Aerogel is a type of what?

- A. Chocolate bar with bubbles in the middle
- B. High performance shaving foam
- C. Light, stiff compound used in loudspeaker cones
- D. Sporty Honda Civic

3) Back in May, Hi-Fi World interviewed Robert Kelly from dCS. What is his company's name an acronym of?

- A. Deliciously Clean Sounding
- B. Data Conversion Systems
- C. Digital Converter Systems
- D. Done Counting Sequentially

4) What was Musical Fidelity's very first pre-amplifier called?

- A. Dr Robert
- B. Dr Thomas
- C. Dr Alban
- D. Dr Spock

5) What's MiniDisc's data compression system called?

- A. ATRAC
- B. PAYE
- C. DISCO
- D. BASF

6) Who's the man behind Myryad?

- A. Dave Lee Travis
- B. Chris Evans
- C. Noel Edmonds
- D. Danny Baker

7) Which British company recently launched the first digital tuner?

- A. Arcam
- B. Amstrad
- C. Audio Innovations
- D. AR Sugden

8) DVD, as in Digital Versatile Disc, originally stood for something else. What was it?

- A. Digital Vector Dynamics
- B. Digital Video Disc
- C. Desirable Video Disc
- D. Does Very Decently

9) Who are the two founder members of Meridian?

- A. Bob Mortimer and Vic Reeves
- B. Bob Stuart and Allen Boothroyd
- C. Bob Carolgees and Spit the Dog
- D. Bob Harris and Alan Partridge

10) The new Mission 774 is a floor standing loudspeaker. What was the original Mission 774 of two decades previous?

- A. A music centre
- B. A cartridge
- C. A radiogram
- D. A tone-arm

11) Translated into English, what does the Japanese name 'Denon' mean?

- A. Love and peace
- B. Harmony
- C. Natural noise
- D. Electric sound



DVD on the move from Panasonic.



Is this Love and Peace's top transport?

12) What's the connection between Pink Triangle's Da Capo convertor and Cambridge Audio's budget wonder player, the CD4SE?

- A. Both have the same on/off switch
- B. Both feature expensive Nichicon Muse electrolytic capacitors
- C. Both use state-of-the-art Crystal CS4321 24-bit convertors in an elaborate piggyback implementation
- D. Both come from the design desk of digital guru John Westlake

13) A Syrxin was a type of Scottish what?

- A. Antiseptic mouthwash
- B. Long, bendy spring
- C. Hi-fi tone-arm
- D. Intestinal parasite

14) What is a Digital Turntable?

- A. A laser pick-up equipped parallel tracking record player found in music libraries
- B. A posh name for a thumbwheel
- C. A South Korean microwave oven
- D. A £700 CD player from Trichord

15) To what does 'The Wind' refer?

- A. An interconnect from van den Hul
- B. A gastric affliction
- C. Noel Keywood on his motorbike
- D. Luxman's vacuum stabiliser system from 1978

16) Teac is a popular Japanese hi-fi brand. What is its high-end division called?

- A. Lushness
- B. Esoteric
- C. Lavish
- D. Exotic

17) Which is the cheapest CD player currently on sale with switchable digital filtering?

- A. Kenwood DP-3080/II
- B. Marantz CD-670SE
- C. Sony CDP-X3000ES
- D. Naim CDS



Wilson-Benesch's Jelly-baby arm?

18) Wilson-Benesch's radical ACT 2 tone-arm is made of which of the following materials?

- A. Magnesium
- B. Veroboard
- C. Jelly babies
- D. Carbon fibre

19) What's the link between the original Pink Triangle turntable and the aviation industry?

- A. The PT's motor was similar to those used to drive Concorde's windscreen wipers
- B. The PT's plinth damping felt was the same as that used by British Airways in their carpet underlay
- C. The PT's packaging materials were recycled from Aeroflot catering products
- D. The PT's sub-chassis used Aerolam, an aluminium honeycomb material found in aircraft wings



Quad's founder.

20) What was the real name of the original Mr. Quad?

- A. Peter Walker
- B. Peter Falk
- C. Nancy Walker
- D. The Walker brothers



Wharfedale's budget winner.

21) What was the name of the midget loudspeaker gem from Wharfedale?

- A. Pearl
- B. Ruby
- C. Diamond
- D. Emerald

22) What's the unit of a potential difference?

- A. An amp
- B. A squabble
- C. A volt
- D. A coulomb



Nothing kinky going on here.

23) What does KT stand for in valves like the KT66?

- A. Kirk Twentaprize
- B. Kinkless tetrode
- C. Kinkless triode
- D. Kiss 'n' tell

24) What was the name of the original Rega turntable?

- A. Charlie
- B. Cosmos
- C. Planet
- D. Rega

25) Which initials graced the famous folded-horn cabinet from Tannoy?

- A. GWP
- B. GRF
- C. GPO
- D. GOM

26) Which mythical character do The Chord Company remember in cable?

- A. Medusa
- B. Polyphemus
- C. Siren
- D. Fury



X-otic styling from Musical Fidelity.

27) What were Musical Fidelity's latest components christened?

- A. X-Rated
- B. X-Press
- C. X-Enbekon
- D. X-Series

28) What does RMS usually stand for?

- A. Router Milling Stand
- B. Rough Mix Sequencer
- C. Root Mean Square
- D. Rotary Mutation Syndrome

29) Which company invented direct drive for turntables?

- A. Technics
- B. Kenwood
- C. Garrard
- D. Strathearn

30) Where will you find the name 'Starget'?

- A. Repeats of cheesy Seventies sci-fi films
- B. Cans of astrological dog food
- C. On a telescope
- D. One of Elna's audio-grade capacitors

31) Which company built the vintage Mozart range of valve components?

- A. Peas
- B. Beer
- C. Mash
- D. Pye

32) What do the initials HDCD stand for?

- A. Highly Dubious Coding/Decoding
- B. High Definition Compatible Digital
- C. High Density Compact Disc
- D. Hugely Delightful Compact Disc

33) Where in audio will you find a spider?

- A. Under that old valve system in the loft
- B. On the World Wide Web
- C. In a loudspeaker drive unit
- D. In a hi-fi junk shop

34) What is the name for timing inaccuracies in a CD player?

- A. The DTs
- B. Jitter
- C. The shakes
- D. Heeby-geebies

35) Which German engineer patented the Tractrix horn profile?

- A. Voigt
- B. Volkswagen
- C. Vermeer
- D. Vermicelli



Saintly 'speakers, but from whom?

36) Which British hi-fi firm is renowned for their horn 'speakers'?

- A. Thomas The Tank Engine
- B. Thomas Aquinas
- C. Thomas Transducers
- D. Thomas Tallis

37) What is Alnico?

- A. 100% proof rum from Jamaica
- B. Weed killer
- C. The replacement for Tarmac
- D. A type of loudspeaker magnet

38) Which famous British 'speaker had a 'piston-action' cone?

- A. Swiss roll
- B. Onion bhaji
- C. Leak sandwich
- D. Chelsea bun

39) What is NPN a type of?

- A. Resistor
- B. Transistor
- C. Monogram
- D. Capacitor

40) What was the name of the British engineer who pioneered stereo in the Thirties?

- A. Bulmer
- B. Plumblin
- C. Blunlein
- D. Plumduff

41) Who founded Wharfedale?

- A. Gilbert Briggs
- B. Gilbert And Sullivan
- C. Gilbert Harding
- D. Gilbert Herring

42) What are believed to be the first words mechanically recorded?

- A. "One, two; one, two..."
- B. "'Twas on the Good Ship Venus..."
- C. "Mary had a little lamb..."
- D. "Is this thing working yet?"



No, it's not the Snail from B&W.

43) What is the name of B&W's top loudspeaker?

- A. The U-boat
- B. The Nautilus
- C. The Titanic
- D. The Trident

44) What is the Flying Cow?

- A. A budget A/D and D/A
- B. Air transport of beef to the continent
- C. Cattle on hallucinogenic drugs
- D. A hamburger served on a 747

1) C; 2) C; 3) B; 4) B; 5) A; 6) B; 7) A; 8) B; 9) B; 10) D; 11) D; 12) D; 13) C; 14) D; 15) A; 16) B; 17) C; 18) D; 19) D; 20) A; 21) C; 22) C; 23) B; 24) C; 25) B; 26) C; 27) D; 28) C; 29) C; 30) D; 31) D; 32) B; 33) C; 34) B; 35) A; 36) C; 37) D; 38) C; 39) B; 40) B; 41) A; 42) C; 43) C; 44) A

ANSWERS:

O.T.T?



N.A.D.



Some manufacturers like to load their CD players with a huge number of features - Over The Top.

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