

P-Timer

hi-fi

OCTOBER 2004 UK £3.40

WORLD



SCOOP

FOCAL point
JM lab Chorus 726S

LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

ELP LT-2XRC laser turntable



medium, rare

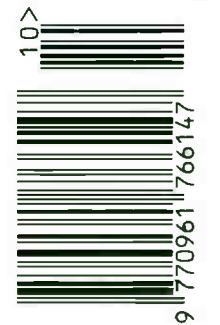
SCOOP

JVC AX-SD1: midi sized marvel



OCTOBER 2004

SOUND VALUE:
is high end hi-fi really better?
Denon DVD players: £149 vs. £1,600
engineering audio: how costs are cut
budget & esoteric from Arcam, Naim & JM labs



SPENDOR S3/5SE MYRYAD MXI2080 A&R A60 BUYING GUIDE

COMPUTER AUDIO APPLE'S NEW IPOD MINI MP3 PORTABLE

MARKET PLACE 100s OF BARGAIN CLASSIFIEDS INSIDE!

COMPETITION WIN A SUPERB NAD/KEF SEPARATES SYSTEM

Winners Breed Winners



"Distinctive delivery"

Hi-Fi World

RECOMMENDED
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

HI-FI CHOICE

AWARDS
2003/04

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

"Great musical cohesion"

Hi-Fi Choice

"Outstanding depth of image"

Hi-Fi News

The New Classics: Upholding an award-winning tradition

Attention to detail wins hands down. Purpose-built by hand, the new Classics from Exposure have been garnering rave reviews from hi-fi magazines far and wide; with our new Pre- and Power Amplifiers receiving the coveted Product of the Year 2003-2004 accolade by Hi-Fi Choice magazine. Adding yet again to the growing list of award-winning equipment already in Exposure's stable. And reaffirming our reputation as engineers of some of the world's finest hi-fi.

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World Radio History

welcome

CONTACTS: Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

EDITOR

David Price
tel/fax +44 (0) 1275 371 386
e-mail: editorial@hi-fiworld.co.uk

DESIGN EDITOR

Faiza Chunara
tel: +44 (020) 7625 3129
fax: +44 (020) 7328 1844
e-mail: adproduction@hi-fiworld.co.uk

PRODUCTION EDITOR

David Noble
tel: +44 (020) 7625 3134
fax: +44 (020) 7328 1844
e-mail: classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk

WRITERS

Dominic Todd
Patrick Cleasby
Channa Vithana

ADVERTISING

tel: +44 (0) 870 242 0567
fax: +44 (0) 208 845 3866
e-mail: advertising@hi-fiworld.co.uk

ACCOUNTS

Sharon Mehlthom
tel: +44 (0) 20 8841 8892
fax: +44 (0) 20 8841 9144
e-mail: accounts@hi-fiworld.co.uk

WORLD AUDIO DESIGN www.worldaudiodesign.com

tel: +44 (0) 1245 450 651
e-mail: sales@worldaudiodesign.com

PUBLISHER

Noel Keywood
e-mail: publisher@hi-fiworld.co.uk

PRIVATE & TRADE CLASSIFIEDS

tel: +44 (020) 7625 3134
fax: +44 (020) 7328 1844
e-mail: classifieds@hi-fiworld.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

tel: +44 (0) 1442 879097
fax: +44 (0) 1442 872279
e-mail: hifiworld@webscribe.co.uk

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Our Agents in Malaysia
Millennium Hi-Fi & AV
Simon Chang
Showroom & office, 500-1-3 First Floor
Wisma Indah (Shen Court), Jalan Tun Razak
50400 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: 603 9283 8171 Fax: 603 9281 3762
e-mail: info@millennium-audio.com

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david price

Never mind the dazzling array of products on sale; the most important question facing hi-fi buyers is how much to spend? It's every audio aficionado's most fundamental dilemma, as the budget is more important even than any choice of kit.

In general, spending twice as much on any given CD player, amplifier or loudspeaker is - unless you're particularly unlucky - going to bring superior sound. But how much better, and is the scale of improvement commensurate with the price? In this month's *Hi-Fi World*, we look at the question of 'sound value'...

By comparing a wide range of kit at different price points and gauging precisely how much better the esoteric is over the affordable, we've tried to put things into real perspective: In October's supertest (p13), Arcam CD players at £400 and £1,300 face off, and then Naim amplifiers at £700 and £4,000 meet, as do similarly priced Focal-JM Labs loudspeaker systems. The stunning £10,000 ELP laser turntable finds itself against a Michell/SME combination at one third of the price (p43). And what are the sonic, engineering and ergonomic differences between Denon's new £149 entry level DV-1710 DVD player and its top-of-the-range £1,600 DVD-A11 stablemate (p47)? We also compare Myryad's new MXI2080 integrated amplifier with its spiritual antecedent, A&R's A60 (p48, p50), and an in-depth feature by Noel Keywood gives you the engineering 'inside track' on how manufacturers build their hi-fi up - or down - to a price (p34).

Elsewhere this month we've got an eclectic range of products for your perusal, from Spendor's LS3/5a replacement, the s3/5se 'speaker' (p52), JVC's superb AX-SD1 integrated amplifier (p56), ECS's monster EA2 power amp (p58) and Aurum Cantus's svelte Leisure 2SE against Opera's Callas loudspeaker (p60). Add in our review of Apple's new iPod mini for computer audiophiles (p74) and our unique twelve page guide to the good and great of audio's old and new (p83) and *Hi-Fi World* is one thing well worth budgeting for this month!

P.S. - see p80 for details of our great **Linn Event** on October 16th at Proud Galleries, London N1 (www.proud.co.uk); any multichannel music fan is welcome to this most special occasion!

David Price

how we test the products:

- *Hi-Fi World* has its own advanced test laboratory and acoustically treated listening room.
- *Hi-Fi World* has a dedicated in-house team of experienced listeners. We review thoroughly by extensive auditioning, rather than by quick-fire group listening tests.
- *Hi-Fi World's* engineering team designs a wide range of products in-house. No other hi-fi magazine is so expert and dedicated.

WORLD VERDICTS:

As a rule we only review products we find interesting, so don't expect too many low scores. Likewise, five globe awards will be few and far between because there's only one superlative product of its type. The £ sign denotes great value for money.

- ● ● ● ● **OUTSTANDING** - Simply the best.
- ● ● ● ● **EXCELLENT** - Extremely capable.
- ● ● ● ● **GOOD** - Worth auditioning.
- ● ● ● ● **MEDIOCRE** - Unremarkable.
- ● ● ● ● **POOR** - Seriously flawed.
- £ **VALUE** - Keenly priced.

hi-fi world
www.hifiworld.co.uk

SUITE G4, ARGO HOUSE
KILBURN PARK ROAD
LONDON NW6 5LF

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LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT 42

Retailing at just over £10,000, ELP's LT-2XRC is the most remarkable analogue turntable we've ever seen - not least because it uses a five-laser pickup to read the disc, CD-style, instead of a conventional arm and cartridge! But how does it compare to much more affordable high end designs like Michell's GyroDec? And what of its most obvious laser-fired price rival, Linn's £12,000 Sondek CD12 CD player? David Price adjudicates.

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In which Denon's cheapest ever DVD spinner, the £149 DV1710 faces its biggest and most expensive stablemate, the mighty £1,600 DVD-A11. Dominic Todd assesses their relative merits.

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Myryad's sleek MX12080 is a new mid-price integrated amplifier with a rich heritage behind it. Dominic Todd listens in, and compares it to a long lost antecedent, the A&R Cambridge A60...

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Channa Vithana tries out Spendor's own vision of the BBC LS3/5a, which boasts identical diminutive dimensions but altogether better drive units and crossovers.

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Substance over style? Noel Keywood auditions two stylish standmounting 'speakers - Aurum Cantus's Leisure 2SE and Opera's latest Callas.

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JVC AX-SD1GD 56

Here's a Japanese integrated with a difference - it's small, compact, low powered, heavily Class A biased and not (officially) available here. David Price warms to it!

ECS-EA2 58

An interesting beastie, this monster power amp is the direct descendent of the legendary Mana 'Stealth' amplifier that never was. Dominic Todd lets you in on the secret...

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We take a brief listen to QED's super XT400 loudspeaker cable and van den Hul's excellent Integration Hybrid interconnect.

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APPLE IPOD MINI 74
The long-awaited Apple iPod mini gets the treatment from a henpecked Patrick Cleasby.



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visit our website for a comprehensive list of all the products we have reviewed over the past 11 years

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competition

Win a complete NAD/KEF system worth £1,000 in this month's great competition!



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linn day

LINN MULTICHANNEL EXPERIENCE 80

Announcing the Linn Multichannel AV Experience 2004.



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Chord Carnival Silver Plus

- Silver plated oxygen free copper, multi-helix wound conductors
- Air/Polyethylene spacers and central core
- Unique semi air spaced design
- Minimal dielectric conductor contact
- Available in single and bi-wire configuration

If you want to get really involved in your favourite music or spellbound by the performance of your home-cinema, then it's time you found out just what The Chord Carnival Silver Plus speaker cable can do.

Sixteen years of experience, obsessive attention to the finest detail and a real commitment to producing high performance products make all Chord interconnects and speaker cables a vital component of any hi-fi or home-cinema system.

Used and recommended by manufacturers, retailers, hi-fi magazines and recording studios throughout the world, Chord cables are chosen for their innovative design and the dramatic improvements they can bring to any level of system.

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or call +44 (0)1980 625700

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news

SOUNDING IN

Denon continues its assault on the 'affordable AV receiver' market in earnest, offering two new budget models, one of which is pitched aggressively into Cambridge Audio territory. The 'crazily priced' £249.99 AVR-1705 is a full featured 6.1 design with DTS ES 96/24 and Dolby EX, 32 bit audio decoding and 24/192 DACs, 96kHz processing on all surround formats and a claimed 110W across all six channels. Direct stereo switching and three component inputs complete the package. For those with a little more cash to

spend, the £699.99 AVR-2805 is a 7.1 AV and Multi-Room receiver boasting the latest SHARC Analog Devices 32-bit DSP, full Fast Auto-Setup & EQ, plus 'sound quality improvements throughout'. It packs 135W across seven channels and sports Dolby Pro-Logic IIx & DTS Enhanced Neo:6 at 96kHz with Denon AL24 Processing, Video up-conversion plus 100MHz HDTV ready



component inputs, and 16 Burr-Brown PCM-1791 24 bit, 192 kHz high resolution DACs on all eight channels, in differential configuration. For more information, call 01234 741 200 or point your web browser at www.denon.co.uk.

NOW 'EAR THIS

After the deserved success of its range-topping HD650, Sennheiser has started work on revising the rest of its popular headphone portfolio. Two new models have just been announced, the £69.95 HD 515 and the £99.95 HD 555. Both claim the use of advanced materials technology throughout, a new design of Duofol diaphragm for extended bass, Ergonomic Acoustic Refinement (where the acoustic baffle is aligned parallel to the head, ensuring that the sound is accurately channelled into the ear), plus soft earpads, single-sided Kevlar reinforced cable and full adjustability. The HD

515 is designed for music and extreme portable use, optimised

for people who primarily listen to stereo (not surround) music, with low

distortion and excellent frequency response accuracy from 14-26,000 Hz. Thanks to ultra-efficient drivers, it also

works well with portable audio devices. The HD 555 is for music, home cinema and surround duties, with a special internal Surround Reflector which generates an extended spatial sound field. For more details, call 0800 652 5002 or click on

www.sennheiser.co.uk.

PRETTY IN PINK, ETC.

Remember the exclusive, limited edition 'Stereophonics Rio' from a few years back - the MP3 portable that came preloaded with the latest waxing from that august Welsh rock band? We always thought it was a good promotional idea, and it seems to have resurfaced with the new XS Series of Rainbox Stix MP3 players from Ministry of Sound. Each £69 player comes pre-loaded with an exclusive 'DanceNation 2004' album, and is available in a choice of colours - including pink. Other features include 128MB internal memory (that stores around 30 tracks) and simple 'plug and play' USB PC connection.





SLIM LINE

Toshiba has two new DVD-players, the SD-240E and SD-340E. The sleek silver machines are just 50mm high, so can be easily inserted into the smallest of cabinets. Both players incorporate Component Video output with PAL Progressive Scan to insure pin-sharp picture reproduction and high quality video images - particularly noticeable when connected to a Progressive Scan TV. The SD-340E and SD-240E are compatible with DVD, DVD-R, SVCD, VCD, CD, CD-R and CD-RW discs. In addition, MP3, WMA playback and a JPEG picture viewer come as standard on both models. The 'flagship' SD-340E offers enhanced front panel operation, providing access to more functions without the need for the remote control. This model also has the ability to playback DivX movies which have been downloaded from the internet and recorded to CD-R discs. For further information, contact Toshiba on 08704 424 424 or visit

www.toshiba.co.uk.

NEW CASTLE

One of the longest running British bookshelf loudspeakers is Castle's Richmond 3 - or was, because after ten years it's got a redesign. The new £320 Richmond 3i, available now, is said to feature improvements in virtually all areas over the previous model, with the result being a smoother, more open balance with a weightier low end. Changes include increased cabinet

volume with bituminous damping

pads inside (unusual at this

price), a larger magnet for

the excellent 130mm

carbon fibre coned

bass/mid driver, improved

sensitivity for the 19mm

low-modulus polyamide-

dome tweeter, and a

completely revised

crossover delivering a

smoother response,

improved drive unit

integration and an easier

load. Thankfully however,

nothing has been done to

change the real wood

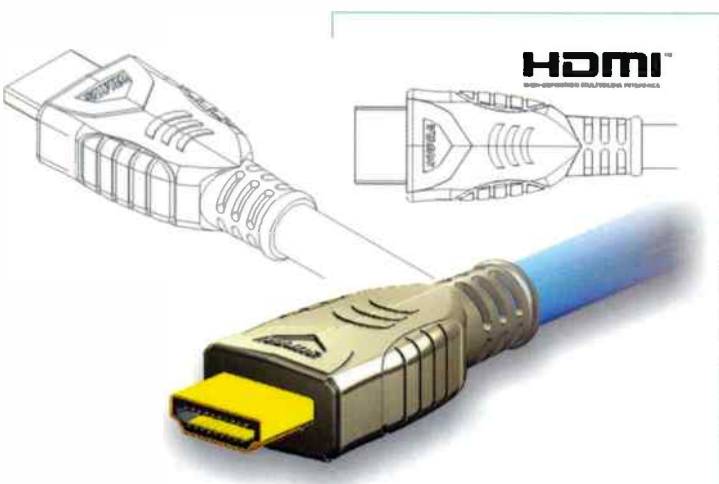
finishes, which remain

amongst the very best in

the world. For more

information, click on

www.castle.uk.com.



NICE PRICE

SUPRA is one of the very first specialist cable companies to deliver a full range of affordable Digital Video cables. All are said to be made to exacting standards, boasting 4 twisted screened pairs of silver-plated OFC conductors (with a PE foam insulation layer), Heavy Triple layer screening (1st layer: Aluminium foil, 2nd layer: Aluminium foil, 3rd layer: tinned OFC screen), 0.8 micron thick 24k gold-plated contacts on connectors and a small form factor (the diameter is only 8mm, making it easily hidden). The HDMI cable is available in six lengths up to 15m, while the DVI comes in five lengths up to 12m. Prices are £39.99 for the DVI - DVI (DVI-D, single link) 1m, £39.99 for the HDMI - DVI, 1m, and £49.99 for the HDMI - HDMI, 1m. All cables are plus £10 per extra linear metre, and available in 1m, 2m, 4m, 8m, 12m and 15m lengths. For more information, click on www.supra.com.



KEEP MOVING...

The new address for the UK importer of the following loudspeaker brand is: Dynaudio UK, PO Box 1010, Maidstone ME14 4WZ. The new telephone number is: 020 7378 1810, and the email address is: info@dynaudio.co.uk.



KING LINN

The princely sum of £4,500 buys you the company's very latest multi-channel AV system controller, the KINOS. Claimed to be a 'winning combination of stunning value and performance', Linn calls it 'the ideal choice for any enthusiast seeking a genuine high-fidelity AV system'. There's a sizeable collection of quality decoding algorithms, and audio and video sources can be enjoyed through loudspeakers or headphones in stereo or multi-channel audio. KINOS supports a range of multi-channel audio configurations including 5.1 and 7.1. Proprietary Linn algorithms are also offered, as are a number of downmix options and adjustable Lip Sync audio delay control through the Linn handset. Configuration of the KINOS is made simple by the Linn-designed user interface, first introduced in KISTO, which permits storage of customisable user or system profiles. A multi-lingual 'Help' utility can be accessed for guidance at every stage of the product set-up. A keyboard can also be connected via the concealed front panel for convenient product set-up and fast text entry when naming sources, etc. Also incorporated in the concealed front panel of the KINOS are audio and video input sockets for fast direct connection of games consoles, camcorders, etc. as well as the headphone socket. KINOS can be expanded further to distribute sound to up to four rooms throughout the home. Alternatively KINOS can be incorporated into a Linn KNEKT or third-party multi-room audio system, where plasma lifts; screens, lighting, curtains, or other home automation products can be controlled using four independent 12V triggers. Linn Specialist Retailers world-wide are currently scheduling demonstrations of the stunning new KINOS. To arrange a demonstration contact Linn on 0500 888 909 (from the UK) or +44 (0) 141 307 7777 (from all other countries). More information can be found on Linn's website at www.linn.co.uk.

HIGH CAPACITY

The curiously named SLAPPA HardBody 360 PRO CD storage case is one of the best we've seen.

Targeted at serious disc collectors and DJs, it is made from moulded X-EVA, a durable yet flexible material that's impact, heat and water resistant. Heavy duty brass handle buckles, two industrial strength zipper pulls per case and a clever double pocket system, with a soft rear pocket for disc storage, and a clear, front pocket for disc cover storage, make it a great way to transport large amounts of digital music for those who've yet to buy an iPod! For more information, visit the website at www.slappa.com.



VECTOR PLOTTING

Dynavector's new SuperStereo Adapter Adp-3 is an unusual and interesting take on the great surround sound debate. Essentially it's an analogue sub-channel processor, claimed to enable records, CDs and other two-channel music sources to be replayed 'with much greater realism'. It incorporates processing circuitry and a small two-channel 24W internal amplifier, but instead of adding time delay to back channels, it provides frequency dependent time delays to two sub speakers placed in front of the listening position and firing at the front speakers! It is claimed that the result is a sound considerably more life-like than normal stereo with enhanced immediacy, ambience and naturalness. Front panel controls give a choice of three 'SuperStereo' modes to suit different recordings and acoustic conditions, and a volume control for the internal amplifier for

the sub speakers. Priced at £1,495, the Adp-3 will be demonstrated at the Hi-Fi & AV Expo show at the London Heathrow Renaissance Hotel, 24- 26 September. For more information, call Dynavector SuperStereo on 01202 767873.



next issue

East meets West in November's *Hi-Fi World*, when we head to the Far East in search of the best hi-fi. You'll find a digital disc player supertest comparing machines from China and Japan against the best from the West. Find out what happened when intrepid editor DP went hi-fi shopping in Beijing, and read why so many UK manufacturers are outsourcing production to China. Look out for reviews on Consonance and CAV amplifiers, see how Denon's latest AV gear compares to Arcam's, and prepare yourself from a stunning surprise from Marantz, Sony's most memorable MiniDisc machine and much more... Reserve your copy now!

next issue

Walrus Systems

11 New Quebec St, London W1

tel: 020 7724 7224

fax: 020 7724 4347

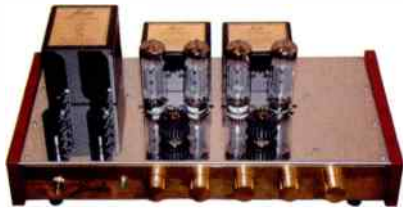
email: mail@walrus.co.uk

web: www.walrus.co.uk



Amplifon WL25 (left): 28W/channel using 6P3, £795
 Amplifon WT40 (centre): 40W/channel using 6C33, £1995
 Amplifon WT30 II (right): 31W/channel using 6H13, £1395

Amplifon is proving to be a huge success both with reviewers and customers alike - we are delighted! Now made in the EC (a warm welcome to our Polish neighbours is in order), this range of three models, all superbly built, all featuring automatic biasing, and all with large, wide bandwidth toroidal output transformers suitable for 4 or 8 Ohms, offer superb value for money. Sound quality is reminiscent of the best classic designs of the past, but modern circuit techniques and transformers give an authority of presentation and power reserve often lacking in older designs. Truly modern classics!



The Jadis Orchestra Reference (left) from France, at £1699. Output of 40W/ch using KT90s, and even featuring that long missed attribute, tone controls - my, takes me back!



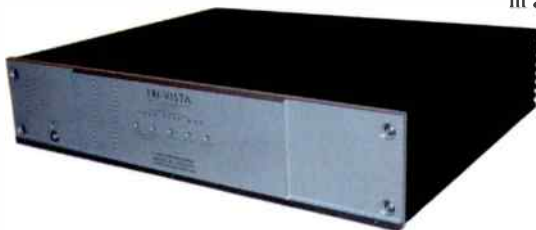
The Consonance M100S (right), £1595, is proving to be a reviewer's favourite, offering a delicacy which is a speciality of the 300B output valve, giving here 25W/channel.



For people who prefer the authentic Star Trek look, the Shanling STP80 (left) fits the bill perfectly! With superb build quality, remote control, digital level indicator, 35W/ch output, all for a mere £1295. Oh, it sounds good too, by the way.



The Audiovalve Assistent 20 (yes, it is spelt like that) is a little gem from Germany, with a very musical performance - sweet as a nut, we say. 30W/ch output, in a neat chassis, for £1600.



The Musical Fidelity Trivista DAC: We have secured some of the last remaining UK stock of this brilliant device. An utter bargain for £1200 - and, as they say, once it's gone, it's gone! Don't delay - pick up the phone now.



Cawsey may not be the best known cable (others spend more on advertising) but it's quite possibly the best sounding. We have been selling these Australian made silver interconnects for several years and can recommend them without reservation. From £250 to £900 per metre set.



Slinkylinks are solid silver air dielectric cables with the latest bullet plugs, fantastic sound at an amazingly low price: £195 for a 1.2m set!



air tangent amazon amphion amplifon apollo furniture argento audible illusions audio physic audiovalve breuer dynamic brinkmann cabasse cartridge man cawsey chord electronics clearaudio clearcover consonance decca london dnm duevel dynavector ear yoshino ecosse final lab graham slee hadcock heart incognito infinity isolda jadis jbl k2 klimo koetsu korato lavardin loricraft lyra michell engineering morch musical fidelity nordost nottingham analogue opus 3 origin live ortofon papworth pro-ject rega revolver ringmat roksan shun mook shanling shelter slinkylinks sme sonneteer spendor stax sugden sumiko tannoy tci cables tivoli audio tom evans townshend audio transfiguration trichord trigon van den hul voodoo wireworld xlo



VAN DEN HUL INTEGRATION HYBRID

£140/0.8M PR

A fascinating conjunction of different metals, this interconnect employs a completely new class of conductor based on unique production technology that combines several advanced processes. Extremely pure copper, zinc and silver are blended via complex technical processing, into a shiny gold-coloured conductor with an amorphous structure free from inter-crystalline boundaries. As per all vdH wires, it employs the company's Linear Structured Carbon technology; the core design is based on the highly acclaimed D-102111 Hybrid, but in the Integration, the two stranded metal cores have been replaced by four stranded Fusion Technology conductors in star quad configuration. Triple layered shielding is employed, and the gold coloured jacket is made of high performance, halogen free Hulliflex which is great

to the touch and thankfully flexible too. Prices range from £125 for 0.6m to £200 for 1.5m. For more information, click on www.vandenhul.com.

Although not the very best interconnect we've heard, this isn't far off and is cheap by comparison! It has an extremely self-effacing sound - the whole frequency spectrum, from bottom to top, is carried with almost no colouration. It's rhythmically very snappy and dynamically committed too - the overall effect being an extremely musically engaging interconnect that still manages to capture the original tonality and textuality of whatever music it plays. Compared to our reference LFD's Spirolink 3, it's just a touch on the bright side - but as this is the 'darkest', most neutral cable we've heard, this suggests the vdH is close to absolute neutrality, but with just a subtle touch of 'lighting' across the midband. Superb - users of most high performing real world hi-fi systems will simply never require anything better...

QED X-TUBE XT400

£18/M

Retailing for precisely £18/m, QED's top-of-the-range loudspeaker cable is pitched directly at one of Hi-Fi World's fave raves, Chord Company's Odyssey 2. Having had extensive experience of this particular wire, it was most interesting to try the QED. To the eye at least, it's a better looking cable, with an attractive satin finish to its pearl white PVC outer. Inside is what counts of course, and this is a 99.999% pure Silver Plated Oxygen Free Copper affair, with two, four square millimetre stranded braid conductors. It also uses QED's Polyethylene Aircore technology, a Copper Mylar conductive wrap with PTFE tape wrap. At 12.7x6mm, it's pleasingly compact, and not going to wreak havoc on your living space.

An excellent performer, despite bearing a brand name that's synonymous with more affordable



cables, this gives absolutely nothing away whatsoever to the high end stuff. Indeed, it's such an impressive all rounder that you'd struggle to fault it until you get into silly money territory. Essentially it's very neutral and uncharismatic - with a crisp, spry, clean and super-detailed window into the recorded acoustic. As you'd expect from a top silver-plated OFC design, it's extremely devoid of grain yet has an explicit, 'well let' midband with very well defined stereo imaging and super tight, taut bass. By comparison,

Chord's Odyssey 2 is ever so slightly more subtle and three dimensional, yet sounds just a tad warm and woolly. Of course, this is what cables are all about - tuning. The XT400 is a high performance product that's best deployed to pull out any slight midband softness and imprecision, without ever sounding harsh. Highly recommended.

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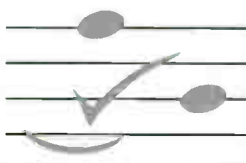
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sound value

The trouble with most hi-fi buyers is that they know the cost of everything and the value of nothing. And who's to blame them, considering that few industry players ever bother to enlighten anyone? So we thought we'd do precisely this - and compare one budget and one high end product from three respected manufacturers... David Price is your host.

If you're a *Hi-Fi World* reader then the chances are that you're a good deal more savvy about audio equipment than most. I'd venture to guess that your system is comprised of high quality kit from a variety of manufacturers - possibly from several different decades, too. You know what you like, and it's not by accident that you've ended up with the system you've got.

Well, I'd respectfully suggest that even you haven't really got your head around quite what spending 'x' thousand pounds more over what you've already got will give you. That's not a criticism, because there are only three constituencies in the hi-fi world who are at all placed to accurately gauge this - dealers, journalists and manufacturers (in that order).

You have a life - you make money, you work, rest and play. There's precious little time to accurately assess for yourself just what the benefits of spending modest amounts on equipment are - relative to vast, swingeing sums. You could spend the rest of the year in your favourite local dealer, by which time you'll know exactly where every bit of kit sits in relation to one another. But that's not a practical proposition, so we thought we'd step into the breach with an 'exploratory' look at what the relative value of entry level and high end models from Arcam, Naim and Focal-JM Lab are.

Of course, we can't be definitive about every single possible permutation of kit, but this even this limited investigation shows that some manufacturers are far stronger in some areas than others, and that the more money you spend, the more focussed a sound you get. It makes interesting reading - enjoy!



arcam

Arcam digital electronics span the centre ground of the UK hi-fi separates market, from the 'budget' £400 CD73 CD player to the 'affordable high end' FMJ CD33 at £1,300. Dominic Todd assesses what all that extra cash brings...



ARCAM CD73

The smart looking CD73 is quintessential mainstream Arcam. It's a shrewdly judged, somewhat predictable yet nevertheless impressively turned out player - something, in fact, that you'd have expected the likes of Sony to be making, had this been a decade back.

It differs from its CD72 predecessor in using a Wolfson WM8740 Sigma Delta DAC, as opposed to the Burr Brown devices used before. Not a great deal else has changed, but then it didn't really need to. The Sony optics are well proven, and the, double-sided, circuit board is as well laid out as ever before. For a £400 player there are some real touches of engineering quality here - witness the toroidal PSU, low jitter clock, quality Elna and Rubicon capacitors and damped lid.

Build quality and finish are both excellent, and there are all the features you'd every really need of CD player. Thanks to the use of Sony electronics, the CD73 is also CD Text compatible, for the few discs that use it. Perhaps of more use are the optical and coaxial digital outputs that support the twin analogue outs'. My only real grumble is a less than attractive remote control. Pretty it is not, but then at least it's functional, with controls that will also operate an Arcam amplifier. True to Arcam tradition, the CD73 is also upgradeable - the DAC board from either the CD82 or CD93 can be

dealer fitted.

Alongside the CD73, the FMJ33 doesn't really look much different. Besides slightly more 'solid' feeling buttons, there's little more to show for your extra £900 investment. The finish is every bit as good as the CD73, but at this price, and alongside the Naim CD5i, it fails to lead the class. Feature wise, the FMJ also parallels the CD73, but it does at least have a smarter remote control to show for itself. Of course, where you really notice the difference is in lifting the lid. Similar Sony optics are used for the transport, but the FMJ33 uses no fewer than 4 Wolfson WM8740 DACs. Used in parallel, it's a technique designed to reduce noise and distortion and improve linearity. It's a principle that reminds me of the old Cambridge CD2 and CD3 players of the late '80s, which used 4 16x4 Philips DACs to great effect. Another key difference with the FMJ33 is that the digital data stream is upsampled from 44.1kHz to 192kHz. Now, whilst no extra information can be retrieved from 16bit CD, it does mean that far gentler filters can be used downstream. The FMJ uses even higher-grade capacitors, output devices and other components than the CD73, but they're not always easy to spot. More obvious to the untrained eye is the more substantial casing. It may look the same from the outside, but once you take the lid off you'll notice a thicker front panel and

sturdy, separate aluminium board supports on the FMJ33.

To sum up then, if you're expecting a superior finish, more exciting styling or extra features for your additional £900, then you'll be sorely disappointed. One of the problems here is that the CD73 is simply so complete to begin with. As with all the best hi-fi, however, the changes focus on the electronics, and it's here where the FMJ33 can really justify its extra cost. That having been said it is a close call, and the CD73 is definitely the better value.

THE LISTENING

To see if the FMJ33 could carry its material advantage through to the listening stage, I hooked both CDs up to my system using identical Rothwell interconnects. On the basis that it's often easier to hear lost information rather than detail gained, I began by listening to Dr John's 'Hen Layin' Rooster' on the FMJ33. Right from the off, it was clear that here was a player of real quality. There was a generous sound stage with a decent height of sound. Bass was solid, but more importantly benefited from excellent timing. The FMJ33 managed to inject some real pace into the song, and its attack and drive came as a pleasant surprise from a brand not usually associated with such vigour. Despite the new-found sense of vim however, traditional Arcam fans will be pleased to hear that the FMJ33 still errs on the side on smoothness over absolute detail retrieval. That said, treble was a tad brighter than I'd expected, although not unrealistically so. Instrumental timbre is also faithfully reproduced. The piano had body, the brass a lively rasp, and the



ARCAM CD73



ARCAM FMJ CD33

percussion plenty of shimmer.

Playing the same song on the CD73 proved highly enlightening, and somewhat embarrassing. I have always rated the CD73 highly but, in this case, the difference between the two players was like night and day. Timing was the most noticeable casualty, with the end result sounding as though someone had slowed the pitch on a turntable. A softer bass response, and less attack from the percussion made for a less exciting listen. Interestingly, though, the CD73 did boast a smoother treble response, although this was certainly to the detriment of detail retrieval. The sound stage shrunk to a degree, but there was the same fluid, seamless response that had been apparent with the FMJ33. In isolation, and against its contemporaries, it should be noted that the CD73 is still one of the finest sub £500 players. It was very close to matching the FMJ33 in terms of instrumental timbre (a splendid achievement at this price), and had a fine level of texture too.

Sticking with the CD73, I changed the track to Daft Punk's 'Aerodynamic'. The track opened with an excellent level of resonance from the bell, and continued to impress with a real sense of control. The guitar was well separated from the other instrumental effects, but could have perhaps done with more 'fizz'. There was a good depth of staging, although perhaps not quite the punch needed from the lowest bass notes.

The FMJ33 began with an equally resonant sounding bell, but went on to open the track with far greater

attack and punchier bass to boot. It did remain, however, very much a model of control. The synthesised effects were more apparent, and appeared more complex now that a greater level of detail had been revealed. Crucially, the guitar was presented with a greater conviction than with the CD73. It sounded larger too; such was the extra presence within the soundstage it gained. Elsewhere, there was more depth to the sound stage, but not hugely so. It certainly wasn't as noticeable as the FMJ's far snappier timing.

"the FMJ33 is without doubt a better player"

The next track to grace the FMJ33's draw was 'Lady Marmalade', sung by a quartet of Divas: Christina Aguilera, Lil' Kim, Mya and Pink. Again, it was the superb timing that impressed most, but the layering of all those competing vocals was equally satisfying. Perhaps they were a little too keen to out flank one another, but there did seem, at times, to be an excessive amount of sibilance, as if the lower treble notes had been ever so slightly exaggerated. There were no such concerns at the other end of the frequency range. Bass hit hard, whilst remaining uncannily smooth. In addition, it underpinned the whole track, giving it a real sense of flow, despite the many competing vocals and instruments.

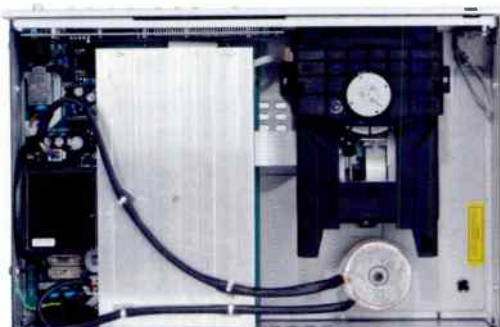
Impressively for the CD73, there wasn't as great a difference in sound here, as had been the case previously. That sibilance was still there, suggesting that this was probably more likely to be indicative of the recording than the players themselves. The timing was again slower, but, this time, there seemed not to be such a great

difference in the bass response. Perhaps it lost out on the FMJ33's ultimate control but, other than that, the differences were marginal. The vocals were all still highly distinctive, and all supremely well separated. This is a track that can sound confused and brash, but the CD73 showed a great deal of its bigger brother's mettle, in getting the music in order and still relayed with passion.

Arcam CD players have often excelled with Classical music, and the two players here were no exception. I began by trying Rimsky-Korsakov's, Sheherazade (Valery Gergiev. Kirov

Orchestra), with the FMJ33. It opened with a superb violin timbre that was one of the most convincing I've heard from a digital source for some time. It managed to be both smooth, and yet coarsely enough textured as taught hair being dragged across metallic string or plastic should indeed be. The FMJ33 also gave a delightful insight into the recording, with breaths, audience coughs, creaking chairs and even the movements of the woodwinds' valves all clearly audible. Such insight can sound rather sterile, but that the FMJ33 avoided such pitfalls is credit to its texture, timing and sheer subtlety of sound. Although light on its feet and undoubtedly pacy, it wasn't the most dynamic of portrayals. One felt that the "window" of sound could, perhaps, have been opened just a little further. Within its range however, levels of bite and control were beyond reproach.

So the CD73 was left with the final word, and did more here than ever before to rebuild my faith in this sterling machine. It is a huge credit to the CD73 that during the quieter, simpler sections of Sheherazade, it was near indistinguishable from its illustrious brother. There was the same attention to detail, the same exquisite violin timbre, and even the complete set of breaths, creaks,



ARCAM FMJ CD33



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coughs and valve seating that the FMJ33 had so carefully revealed. Equally, the brass sounded just as bold and upfront within the soundstage. When the music became more complex, however, then the differences became apparent, although not by as big a margin as you might expect. By the standards of the FMJ, the CD73 did just sound a little dynamically compressed. It was more restrained, and also a little more confused with its dealings of a full orchestra. Yet, what was retained was the smooth, fluid flow that made both machines highly beguiling to listen to.

CONCLUSION

In isolation, the Arcam CD73 remains one of my favourite sub-£500 CD players. It has control, insight and accurate timbre that are rare at the price. Furthermore, it manages to combine all this with a great sense of refinement and poise, which makes it such an appealing player over the course of extended listening. The only sonic niggle that could be levelled against it is that it is not, perhaps, the most exciting or forthright of players - arch rival Marantz still does this better. Yet, as an all round package, the Arcam looks, feels and sounds ahead of the game.

The FMJ33 isn't as ahead of the game in the £1,000-£1,500 price sector, but is an impressive player nonetheless. It features all that's good about the CD73, but adds a great deal more. Timing is far snappier, and the bass has greater attack and punch. Extra detail is revealed, but this doesn't come at the expense of fluidity or refinement. In short, the FMJ33 has even greater control over the music than the otherwise none too shabby CD73.

And so for the key question of whether the FMJ33 is worth the extra £900? Objectively, the answer has to be an emphatic no. The fact that there are no obvious aesthetic, finish or feature improvements will be enough to satisfy many that the extra cost simply isn't justified. That said, they may change their mind when it comes to a listen. The FMJ33 is without doubt a better player - and with a high resolution, high quality hi-fi, those differences

are going to become more apparent still...

As a 'final' CD player, I'd be sorely tempted to take out a 0% introductory rate credit card and splash out on the FMJ33. If however,

you simply can't afford or justify it, then the CD73 will still make a superb choice. One word of warning, though. If you do decide to go for the CD73, then just make sure you never listen to a FMJ33!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

ARCAM CD73 CD
Arcam's CD73 has the small top-end roll-off in output common to Arcam CD players and there's a small downward response trend across the audio band too. Together they should ensure the CD73 sounds full bodied and free from sharpness.

Distortion levels were very low throughout the player's dynamic range, an especially good figure at -60dB contributing much toward the exceptional EIAJ dynamic range value of 112dB. Output was healthy at 2.28V and residual random jitter virtually absent, the random noise floor being less than 20pS. Signal related components were 80pS max.

The CD73 measured very well, producing excellent results in all areas. Expect a clean, smooth and full bodied sound. NK

Frequency response	4Hz -21Hz
Distortion 0dB	0.0008
-6dB	0.001
-60dB	0.2
-80	4.2
Separation	
1kHz	-117
20kHz	-92

Noise (IEC A)	-109dB
Dynamic range	-112dB
Output	2.28V

VERDICT ●●●●£

ARCAM CD73
One of the very best players at its price, this offers so much refinement for so little. Brilliant value for money.

- FOR**
- Fine finish
 - Balanced sound quality
 - Value

- AGAINST**
- Dulled timing
 - Bland remote

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

ARCAM FMJ CD33 CD
The CD33 returns an almost ruler flat frequency response under impulse tests, without the usual downturn seen in Arcam players like the CD73. It will likely have a brighter sound, perhaps seemingly more detailed. Response limits were much the same as the CD73.

Distortion levels were low, reaching a minimum of 0.0005% at -6dB. With good results at -60dB and with dithered noise at -80dB the CD33 is linear throughout its dynamic range. Noise levels were slightly lower than those of the CD73 our distortion analysis shows. The CD33 also produces almost no random jitter and little signal related jitter: it is very clean in this respect, better than most.

The CD33 gives superb measured results in all areas. It will sound brighter and likely more open than the CD73. NK

Frequency response	4Hz - 21kHz
Distortion	
0dB	0.0015%
-6dB	0.0005%
-60dB	0.22%
-80	4.2%

Separation	
1kHz	-114dB
20kHz	-110dB
Noise (IEC A)	-116dB
Dynamic range	111dB
Output	2.175V

VERDICT ●●●●

ARCAM FMJ CD33
Dramatically superior sonics to its cheaper stablemate, but this fine machine isn't quite as bright a star of its class.

- FOR**
- Timing and control
 - Refinement
 - 5-year warranty

- AGAINST**
- Tough competition
 - Others are better finished
 - Warranty excludes laser!

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naim



NAIM NAIT 5i

Whereas Arcam has always gone for a sensible balance of features, value and sound, Naim Audio has traditionally biased its output towards the high end audiophile market. Where then does that leave its entry-level £699 Nait 5i integrated amplifier against the new middle of the range £4,000 NAC282/ NAP200 pre-power? David Price finds out.

Okay, so we now know that - in this experiment at least - Arcam has proved itself to be most accomplished at the budget end of the serious hi-fi CD spinner market. What then of Naim Audio, which comes to 'affordable' audio from a quite different start point? Back when they both launched in the mid-seventies, the only thing that the Huntingdon and Salisbury companies shared was the use of DIN plugs...

Despite being a 'mid price' design back then, the 1976 A&R A60 cost one fifth of Naim's top NAC32/ NAP250 pre-power. Then in 1984, the company sold out (according to some aficionados) by sullyng itself in the murky waters of 'cheap' hi-fi with the NAIT integrated, which was a snip at £250 - pure Arcam territory. Interestingly though, the original NAIT was beautifully engineered. This was immediately apparent if you bothered to either open up the casing or switch it on and play music, despite it looking like a late seventies 'speaker switching box from Maplins...

These days, Naim Audio has a far less quirky model range. The sad passing of its charismatic founder Julian Vereker, and his replacement with erstwhile sales manager Paul Stephenson, has seen a rationalisation of the brand, with attention turned to what many (rightly) regarded as disincentives (or deterrents) to buying into the marque. The upshot has been dramatically improved styling, perceived build quality, flexibility/ functionality, the ending of

the DIN hegemony (the UK specialist hi-fi equivalent of the demise of China's Maoist Cultural Revolution) and the subtle re-voicing of the products to make them a little easier to live with.

The £699 Nait 5i epitomises Naim's 'traditional values in a modern setting' thinking. I lived with a Nait 3 back in 1995 for almost a year, and found it a brilliant musical companion, but was disappointed by its plasticky construction, poor volume potentiometer (at low volumes, the left channel was louder than the right) and those 'frigging' DIN sockets - not ideal for a hi-fi reviewer! The 5i shows how far the company has come: its 70x432x301mm diecast zinc casework uses aluminium extrusions and covers to produce a rigid and resonance-free case, protecting the sensitive internal components from the degrading effect of microphonic vibration.

Inside, microprocessor controlled protection circuits abound. These days, input switching and volume control is of the highest order, borrowed from the recently introduced Classic series while the programmable unity-gain input allows seamless integration into even very high quality surround sound and audio-visual systems. The supplied iCOM remote control handset provides easy operation from the armchair, and there are even (whisper it softly) two pairs of RCA phono sockets on the rear panel. Back in 1984, the original NAIT was so underpowered that it made a pair of Quad II valve amplifiers seem

positively Krell-like. (It had great current drive, but some speakers need plain old unreconstructed watts.) Now, the Nait 5i boasts a useful 50W RMS per channel (quoted - see MEASURED PERFORMANCE).

At £4,000, the NAC282/ NAP200 pre-power costs nearly six times the price of the Nait 5i. Considering the integrated's redoubtable build, spec, svelte styling and brilliant ergonomics, it faces an uphill struggle to justify its price. Interestingly, where Arcam, Sony and almost every other manufacturer I can think of these days loads its budget models with every feature under the sun, Naim actually adds features to its higher end products.

The NAC282 is middle way up the company's preamplifier range (the NAC552 heads it, the 252 follows, then the 282 reviewed here, then the 202, then the 112x). It features a taller version of the Nait 5's casing ((87x432x314mm) with a row of no less than sixteen buttons, offering full play and record switching for six sources. The box looks, as per the Nait 5, brilliant. Many reviewers have complimented the company on its refusal to follow fashion and establish its own visual design language. Discrete and purposeful in black with subtle green backlighting to the fascia, it looks like no other gear on the market.

Although the extra money buys you a few extra buttons and some additional metalwork, the real deal is what you get inside - which is a far better specified and dramatically more flexible. Low resonance circuit boards and anti-vibration feet maximise isolation. Carefully matched precision rotary potentiometers with precious metal wipers are used to ensure long-term stability. It has a silent microprocessor that sleeps during listening and controls all aspects of the amplifier, including optical protection circuits that



NAIM NAIT 5i

continuously monitor the power supplies ensuring safe shut down in the event of a power cut and a user-configurable 'Smart IR' remote control. Two of the six inputs can be configured either as the usual DIN plug inputs, preferred by Naim for their superior earthing and impedance matching, or for use with the more common RCA phono connectors. The included NAPSC independently powers the digital and control circuits while the audio circuits are fed either from a NAP 150 or NAP200 amplifier or from a stand-alone power supply such as the naim Hi-Cap or Super-Cap.

The NAP200 is fourth down the rung from Naim's top NAP500 power amplifier, but one above the entry level NAPI50x. Essentially, it's the company's basic 'big' amp, with the full size case, 70W RMS per channel (quoted - see MEASURED PERFORMANCE), and features that are used right up the range. This means a new circuit design with improved earthing arrangements built on an anti-resonance main audio circuit board, resonance-controlling feet, a new 430 VA toroidal transformer (providing more than 300 VA of transient power). Separate windings provide dedicated left and right channel rectified supplies with two smoothing capacitors per channel, and there's a separate winding providing a pre-amplifier power supply for the NAC282 (or others).

The question of the use (or non-use) of 'audiophile componentry' is interestingly answered by Paul Stephenson. While other companies list the various Black Gates, Elna Cerafines, etc., used in their high end stuff much like a shopping list, Naim's MD is more circumspect.

"If we can save money anywhere and put the value into the circuitry or manufacturing procedure we will. Over the years we have tried hundreds of components and have found some that work best, either for sound or specification, in or circuits. Many of the parts that work best for us are not "audiophile" parts and we can afford to put them in all products across our range so we don't have to confront these trade-off decisions. That said, there are some very expensive parts that we



NAC282/ NAP200

can only afford to put into our top of the range products... It does not always follow that an expensive parts is always better in terms of performance in fact we have found in many cases the opposite has been true... We consider the influence of materials as part of our electronic and mechanical design process. The obvious ones are: the use of non-magnetic parts in sensitive areas;

pretty special, but here it's less night and day against its rivals. Roksan's Caspian M-Series I Integrated (although a tad pricier at £1,195) presents an extremely expansive and deep soundstage, with well defined stereo imaging and great depth perspective. It's fast too, with a fine degree of detail and a fair degree of textural detailing. Musical Fidelity's X-150 is much like this, but with a tad

"switch to the NAC282/NAP200 and suddenly you're in three dimensions"

aluminium extrusions for their superb thermal and non-magnetic capabilities; skin effect on cabling; steel and glass used in our Fram parts and the balancing of wood veneers in loudspeaker design. Materials such as carbon fibre composites do have some special properties but, so far, we have been able to achieve similar or better results when using more conventional, and far more cost effective, materials."

THE LISTENING

The Nait 5i is superb - in isolation, or against any of its price rivals - because it brings hitherto unknown levels of grip and insight into the sub £800 sector. After you've listened to the best from Arcam, MF, Roksan and NAD, then it's a revelation in terms of speed, rhythms, dynamics and grip. It's all down to that bass, which starts and stops more adroitly than all its price rivals. It's much more on-off - much less slow start, slow stop. This, along with its articulation (an ability to communicate not just temporal information, but dynamic accenting too), makes it uniquely

placed to seize a musical performance by the scruff of the neck and 'nail it'.

The midband of the Nait 5i is also

less scale but a little more insight into the tonal colouring within the music. The Nait, by comparison, has quite poor tonal contrasting - irrespective of whether the recording was done on a two track valve tape recorder in 1962, or a multi-track digital desk in 1992, it sounds pretty much the same. The Naim simply looks away from this aspect of the music, preferring to 'strain at the leash' in its enthusiasm to convey the rhythms and dynamics. Still, it's not bright, forward or ascerbic in the way that previous incarnations of this integrated could be. In this sense, it's the most listener-friendly amp Naim has yet made.

Overall then, the Nait 5i is most accomplished at what it does. Why then spend six times this much on the NAC282/ NAP200 - if the Nait 5i is so good? Well, consider first the Nait 5i's superlative bass performance. Put the NAC282/NAP200 on for ten seconds, and this suddenly sounds distinctly lacklustre. It's slow, overhung, indistinct, non-committal, indifferent - much as many of the Nait's price rivals sound in comparison to it. Of course, nothing's changed, except we're now hearing one of the best bass players in the business - a high end Naim pre-power. Even against amplifiers at five times its not inconsiderable price, it can hold its own - which is



NAC282/ NAP200

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no small thing. It is vice-like. It doesn't just pump out low frequencies, but wrestles each and every note into the loudspeaker with an iron fist. It is relentless, unflappable, utterly conscientious in ensuring that every note is amplified with equal rigour.

This sets the tone for what's in store further up the frequency range. Of course, its meticulous and precise nature makes a direct line for what it so obviously excels with - drums. Snare, rim shots, cymbals and tambourines all have an almost supernatural speed. Transients on drum and bass epics like Goldie's 'Inner City Life' are breathtaking, as is the way this combo manages to weave such intricate rhythms into one another with consummate ease. It performs the artful trick of being blisteringly fast while never even breaking into a sweat. It makes everything look so easy. Switch across to any price rival and it somehow seems to be straining, keeping up but at the same time gasping for breath.

The other dramatic difference is soundstaging. The Nait 5i has a commendable try at trying to throw out a wide and deep recorded acoustic - but it's close, but no cigar. Switch to the NAC282/NAP200 and suddenly you're in three dimensions, and there's terrific image precision within. No vague notions of where the second guitarist might be on The Byrds' 'Eight Miles High' - we know exactly where he is, something he himself never did... Instead of music that swings, Miles Davis' 'So What' becomes a brilliantly recorded acoustic, bristling with ambient detailing, all carried with pinpoint precision.

What then of that famous Naim bugbear - the notorious 'brightly lit' midband? Well, it's certainly not as dim as with many rivals (indeed it's still night and day compared to any tube amp), but nor does it dazzle and - therefore - distract. Kate Bush's 'Moving', true torture for any hi-fi separate with tendencies towards harshness, reveals itself as a brilliantly vibrant recording with that amazing, soaring, plaintive voice towering in front of the loudspeakers. Moreover, whereas the Nait carries it well, giving you real insight into the sombre mood of the song, the

pre-power drags you through extremes of emotion with her voice's every modulation. Each nuance of her phrasing is thunder - it hits at your heartstrings in a way that only seeing her live, from close up, would surely have done...

The NAC282/ NAP200 is a formidable performer, one that mesmerises, entrances and shocks the listener. It's one of those rare things in hi-fi that makes you wonder why no one told you music could sound this good before. It's very expensive, yes, but it lands a knockout blow over the Nait 5i on the first beat of the first bar - you really can tell the difference so

starkly. Downsides? You'll probably spend the next ten years re-organising the rest of your system to get round what you perceive to be its weaknesses (lack of absolute, gut-wrenching power, slightly perfunctory take on a recording's tonal colour - although it is texturally excellent). And you'll be sitting there wondering if it really is worth remortgaging your house for a HI-CAP and/or NAP500 and/or CDS3 (...it is). Still, even after being pinned to your seat for an evening by it, you can't help thinking the Nait 5i is amazing at the price...

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The NAIT 5i

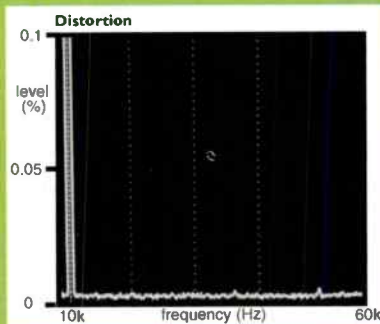
The NAIT 5i produces a solid 60watts into 8ohms, good enough for most circumstances unless you want to go really loud. Naims always have good power supply regulation, allowing them to nearly double power into a low load and in this area the NAT5i did predictably well, developing 100watts into 4ohms. Since most bass units these days are 4ohms this amounts to the power you get in practice, which is a lot.

Distortion levels were negligible at all powers and frequencies, the worst-case value being just 0.01% at 10kHz near to full output - a grueling test, but a fine result. This amplifier has enough sensitivity to work with a majority of sources, including low output tuners and cassette decks, so it matches well.

The NAT 5i is a solid performer that measures to the best current standards.

It's 'stiff' power supply will likely give solid bass in true Naim style. NK

Power	60watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	5Hz-52kHz
Separation	88dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.005%
Sensitivity	270mV
dc offset	2/3mV



VERDICT ●●●●● £

NAIM NAIT 5i

The most musically, ergonomically and aesthetically capable amplifier at the price - and pretty impressive in most other respects, too...

FOR

- Rhythm and drive
- Dynamic control
- Iconic, understated styling

AGAINST

- Sound not the smoothest
- Doesn't suit all systems
- Limited inputs

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

NAP200/NAC282

The NAP200 power amplifier produces 72W into 8ohms and 115W into 4ohms. Since loudspeakers these days are around 6ohms nominal and 4ohms at low frequencies expect around the higher figure to be available in practice. The good regulation of Naims gives them more power output than conventional specs would suggest.

Distortion was very well suppressed at all frequencies and power levels. The pattern of harmonics was also quite steady and performance did not deteriorate into 4ohms, as is the case with most amps. So the NAP200 is quite steady in its characteristics even under widely changing conditions.

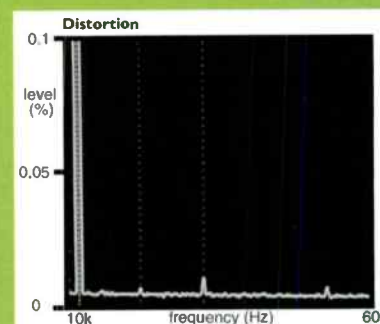
As usual with Naim amps input sensitivity was very high at 78mV for full output, so volume will rise quickly as the volume control knob is turned up from zero. The NAP200/NAC282 will accommodate all sources though, even those with miniscule output.

Frequency response was band limited to 22kHz, again in line with

Naim's design philosophy.

The NAP200/NAC282 combo measured well. They are distinctive in behaviour. NK

Power	72watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	9Hz-22kHz
Separation	118dB
Noise	-85dB
Distortion	0.003%
Sensitivity	78mV
dc offset	15/9mV



VERDICT ●●●●●

NAIM NAC282/NAP200

A brilliantly engaging musical performer with Swiss-watch precision and control. Superlative styling, build and flexibility complete the package.

FOR

- Rhythm and drive
- Dynamic control
- Iconic, understated styling

AGAINST

- restricted tonal palette
- err, that's it..

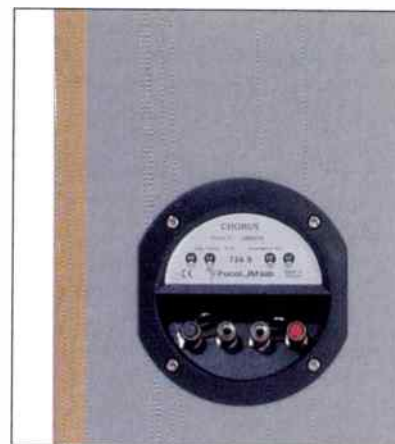
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focal

Focal-JM Lab offers competitive products in almost every sector of the loudspeaker market. Noel Keywood puts one of its mainstream floorstanders, the £800 Chorus 726S against the altogether more esoteric £4,000 Micro Utopia Be, with interesting results...



CHORUS 726S

CHORUS 726S



As hi-fi gets more expensive, so it gets ever more individual and idiosyncratic.

Top end products are often labours of love and dedication to a belief that may or may not be commercial, according to whether others are likely to share such a belief - and whether they can be reached. Whilst the middle market is reasonably sure of what it wants, or is at least stabilised by convention, at the top anything goes. The outcome is always 'interesting', but whether it is right, impressive or even acceptable depends upon taste. It's at the high end that products start to differ drastically from one another in sound quality and nowhere is this more true than with loudspeakers...

The two models from French loudspeaker manufacturer Focal demonstrate this point easily enough in their differing sizes: you pay most for the least, or so it appears. The standmounting Micro Utopia Be costs a cool £4,000, whilst the large, driver studded Chorus 726S costs just one fifth of this, £800. Even at £4,000 the Micro Utopia is so called because it is a cut down version of Focal's Grand Utopia. Here two three-way

loudspeakers are in effect combined around a shared central tweeter, D'Appollito style. They are staggered to keep their radiating centres on roughly the same vertical plane. An arrangement like this is reasonably time coherent but multiple radiating centres make for a large image lacking focus. Size wise, this sounds impressive and there are no end of multiple driver loudspeakers out there that look good, deliver a big sound and sell well. But the precision and focus of a true point source isn't there, listening tests show.

Some swear that stereo imaging isn't important though, whilst others couldn't much care. Imaging is perhaps one of the more abstruse properties of loudspeakers as far as many listeners are concerned. They may well feel that rhythmic properties are far more important, an area where the Utopias excel, although these properties are not mutually exclusive.

The Micro Utopia is a cut down version of the Grande Utopia. It has the same Beryllium dome tweeter, of which Focal are very proud. Focal claim Beryllium is superior to aluminium or titanium as a dome material, being lighter, stiffer and better damped. In a conventional motor driven tweeter like this though the voice coil constitutes much of the moving mass. All the same, Focal's tweeter measures well in response terms, looking almost as smooth as a good ribbon, like Elac's JET.

Beneath this inverted dome tweeter lies a 165mm midrange unit, with a Power Flower (!) magnet assembly and an interestingly neutral sounding cone when tapped. The cone material is a sandwich, Focal say, of foam between layers of glass tissue. The thickness of foam determines the amount of damping. A

whole variety of materials are being used for cones at present and most sound pretty good up to a point; really stiff materials can break up quite badly at high levels, introducing hardness and muddle as volume is turned up. The art is to combine good low level clarity with a sound that remains clean and unfatiguing at high volume.

Despite its price, the Micro Utopia is the baby of Focal's Utopia Be range. Above it lie four models, the Diva, Alto, Nova and Grand Utopia. So it will possess limitations and in use I found the Micro Utopia light in bass delivery, as measurement suggested. But this is a clean sounding speaker with a superbly cohesive sound that is nothing other than a model of tightness and control right across the audio band. The presence of deep bass would slow things down a bit, although a bit more weight behind bass lines on B.B. King's 'Riding With The King' wouldn't have gone amiss. But with vocals emerging from such a conspicuously clean and clear background, accompanied by no added tonal colour or temporal smear, I was impressed by just how vividly lucid these speakers are.

It wasn't a contrivance either; where CD could sound quite bland, DVD-A was suffused with detail and I found its use almost obligatory to hear what the Micro Utopias were really capable of. No doubt they have a good motor and cone assembly in the 165mm bass/mid driver. Coupled to a Denon DVD-2900 via a Naim NAC282 and NAP200 these speakers at times were startlingly fast. But they could also teeter on the far edge of easy listening. With Toy Matinee's 'Turn It On Salvador' both the T and S left this speaker like bullets from a gun. From a clean DSD recording on SACD the strings of a

plucked harp were conveyed with a startling crack, from a background that was quite obviously of deeper purity than usual - and whilst things were kept simple the Micro Utopias held together and excelled. Just as Focal claim, they sound coherent - with some reservations about tweeter character - and super clear. Vocals were balanced, natural and free from colour, transients had real bite and treble was smooth and finely detailed. However, the tweeter could get hard at times and it had a rather cold tonality that wasn't endearing.

The Micro Utopias worked well with a 300B valve amplifier, whose fatter bass gave the sound greater body. The supremely fluid sound from the valve amp helped counter the tweeter's slightly hard nature, whilst also emphasising the extreme neutrality of the Micro Utopias midband, as well as its superb detail retrieval. Ashkenazy's piano was nicely lit in Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, having a solidity and clarity that highlighted his playing. Strings were equally well lit and perfectly

"top end products are often labours of love"

clear. With classical works this was a neat combination, but not an inexpensive one either!

Stereo images were tidy enough and quite well defined, if not as focussed as might be hoped at the price. Because the Utopias are revealingly clear though, they'll need the considerable abilities of a Naim or similar amplifier. At times I found complex performances became hard on my ear at high volume too. The Micro Utopias are not the easiest listen at high levels; I suspect you are meant to move up a model or two for this. Small bass units often struggle as volume is turned up, no matter what the loudspeaker. All the same, in spite of some blemishes the

Micro Utopias are hard to beat for the sheer clarity and cleanliness of their presentation - and that's what you pay for.

Moving to the more affordable Chorus range, and this is where technology gets balanced against cost constraints and has to face up to market conditions. One of the simplest is one that KEF have found to be a problem with Uni-Q - drive unit count. So where Focal's Micro Utopia possesses just two drive units, the far cheaper 726S looks altogether more impressive. Standing 1000mm high, it houses two 165mm Polyglass bass units, a 165mm Polyglass midrange with parasitic dust cap, and atop the array an inverted dome tweeter of Beryllium/aluminium alloy. The two bass units work in parallel and are loaded by a reflex cabinet with front port. With a neat industrial grey finish, chrome hex fixing bolts and classic cabinet proportions that manage to combine size with a reasonable degree of elegance, the 726S looks well balanced.

Following convention, the 726S

uses twin bass units to gain cone area for good electrical and acoustic power handling. Twin bass drivers reduce the likelihood of burn out and keep bass distortion (doubling) within check at high volumes. Better still a big speaker like this is sensitive; we measured 91dB from one watt of input and Focal claim 91.5dB - nearly identical. It's a lot of sound from just one watt. Good efficiency from Focal's own in-house manufactured drivers doubtless contributes toward this. With a quoted maximum power handling of 150W, compared to the Micro Utopia's 100W, the 726S needs less power to go loud and it can go louder too. Since the footprint is much the same as that of the Micro Utopia's stands, it occupies the same amount of floor space.

The differences between the two are, as Focal explain it, that the 726S uses a less expensive cone material than the Utopia range, plus a simpler magnet and motor assembly. The tweeter is less exotic too, they say. All of which suggests the 726s won't sound as clear and uncoloured as the Micro Utopia, nor have such good treble. Not stated are the usual norms that a large cabinet does not image as well as a small one, but in its favour it usually produces more

bass, needs less power and can go louder. So how does a conventional arrangement like we see in the real-world 726S stack up against the super-fi Micro Utopia? Is it much worse; is it even five times worse - in line with the price difference?

Perhaps you wouldn't use a £4k Naim amplifier with a 726S in real life, but I had to keep the playing field even. And a Naim is best used with a loudspeaker of good resolution to best appreciate its own unique strengths. The big Focals were happy with this, producing nicely controlled, bass with a slight grumble to it. That they are both accurate and composed under pressure was evident from their handling of Christina Aguilera's 'Can't Hold Us Down'. It was an assault by fast dynamics, from the stabbing bass line through to Aguilera's challenging vocals. Everything was there, in perfect balance, unleashed without constraint from the Naim. In many senses this was the best I've heard the track.

The 726S exchange bass depth for control; that they cut off at 40Hz is aurally obvious. Otherwise they play a bass tune like few others, albeit with a bit of grumble and some box boof. This would probably be less obvious if the port was on the rear, as it normally is on big cabs. for exactly this reason.

The tweeter has a little bit more edge than that of the Micro Utopia and is quite prominent subjectively. But that's the way Focals are. They are also very revealing and there was much of the Micro Utopias forensic analysis to be heard in the 726S. It has a slightly darker sounding midrange and the boof of the box is ever present but I could not help but be impressed by the tidiness, accuracy, composure and high degree

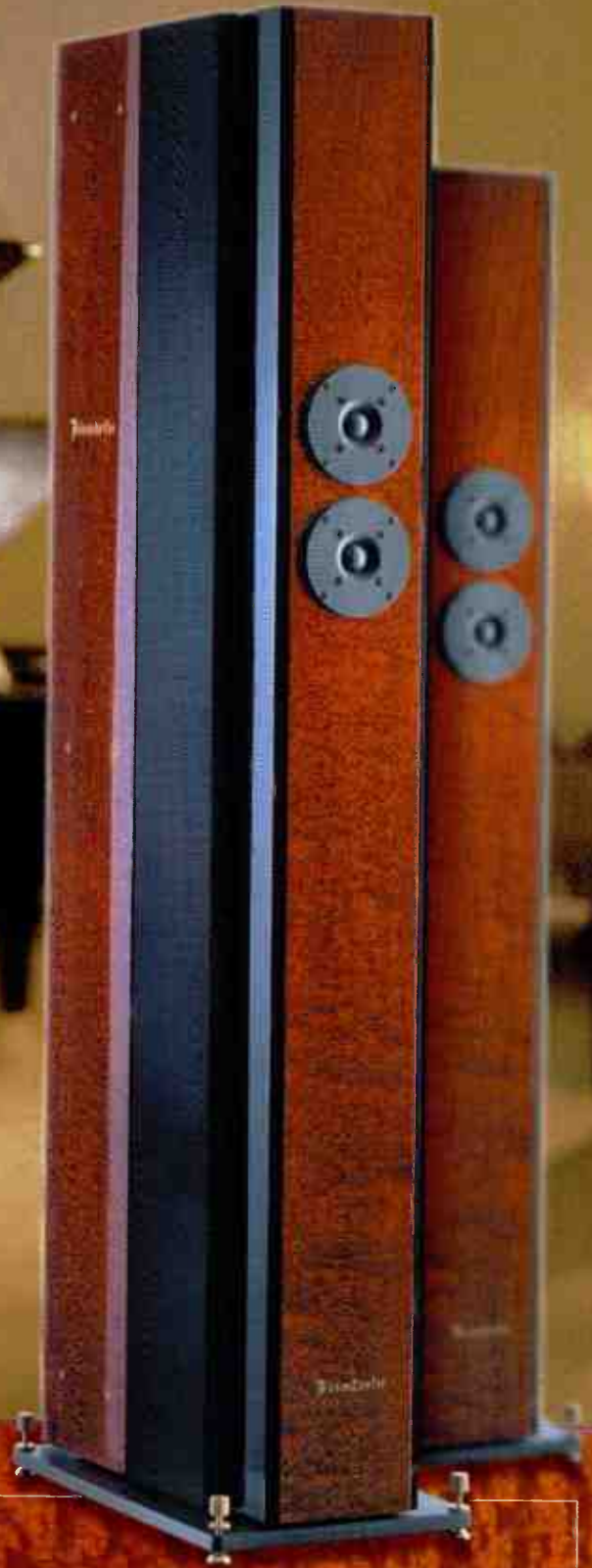


MICRO UTOPIA Be

group test

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of revelation from this speaker. The strike of plectrum against string on 'Key to the Highway' was vivid. Eric Clapton's vocals sprang clearly from left stage and B.B. King's gravelly tones followed from right. Both sounded full in voice, clear and convincingly presented from this 24/88.1 DVD-A. The 726S gives a good flavour of what the Micro Utopia achieves in terms of clarity, dynamism and trueness of tone. It has a slightly darker sound across the midrange, and is a bit more damped. The tweeter has real bite, arguably a little too much, but it is a tenacious performer, not shrinking from the task of delivery. Whilst strings of the Berliner Staatskapelle were delightfully clear and unmuddled, dancing quickly back and forth, they did at times have a conspicuously metallic sheen. Orchestra also got the box going a bit too, the boof becoming a little irritating at times.

Imaging was larger and more diffuse than that of the Micro Utopia, but the sound stage was a generous one. Whilst the 726S was less tidy and cohesive than the smaller Micro Utopia, and less projective and clear too, it was very obviously better balanced in its bass delivery and by any standards has smooth bass that is tuneful. With a little less box boof and a smoothing of tweeter output this speaker would be quite a challenge to products from KEF and Mission. It has great potential, fine basic engineering being compromised by a few prominent blemishes.

CONCLUSION

Warning: few top end products come without the sort of strong compromise found in the Micro Utopia Be. This is the nature of the beast as far as high-end goes. You buy into a belief or you don't. Expect a highly polarised product that represents a view of high fidelity, often one person's view. It may or may not be your own. Focal JM Lab use their own, high technology drive units in the Utopia range to get a sound that's nothing other than impressive. But a Tannoy Westminster is impressive and so is a Quad 989, for different reasons of course. This is the top end for you; extreme

solutions that differ markedly from one another...

Further down you get into a region where flights of fancy will be punished by what the marketplace demands. Here is a place of levity, where compromise is all. It isn't a bad place by any means though. Call

it good value. The £800 Chorus 726S loudspeakers fit this description well enough. They offer a flavour of the Utopias, mixed in with market expectations of a big cabinet, packing plenty of bass. Perhaps they aren't as vividly clear and wonderfully detailed, but then they're not £4,000 either!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

FOCAL JM LAB 726S

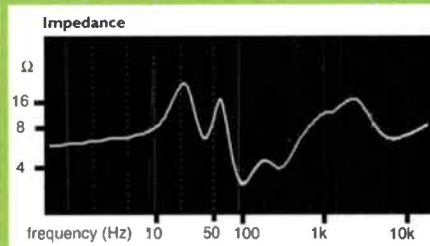
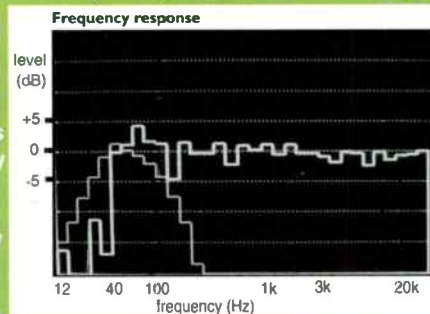
The Chorus has an almost ruler flat frequency response from 40Hz up to 20kHz. A small amount of low frequency lift is visible in the analysis, but it amounts to a small 1dB-2dB below 160Hz. Otherwise the Chorus 726S is surprisingly even in its output at low frequencies, extending down to 40Hz before rolling off. The port is tuned to this frequency and is quite narrow in its damping effect. The Chorus is likely to have a good bass kick as a result, but it does not go low. This helps keep it sounding fats and tidy however.

The inverted dome tweeter looks very smooth in its output and was well integrated over a large vertical listening angle. The general absence of perturbations, both in the tweeter and generally indicates a lack of local resonances and low colouration.

Sensitivity was very high at 91dB and nominal impedance 6ohms, as usual nowadays. The Chorus is a reasonably easy load,

without any violent impedance and V/I phase changes.

The Chorus is a picture of accuracy and balance. As big floor standers go it measures very well and is likely to sound both clean and accurate. NK



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

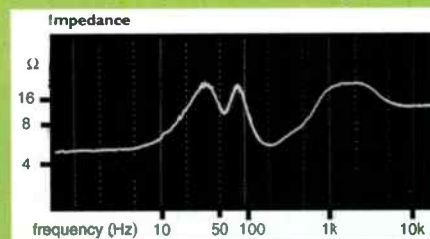
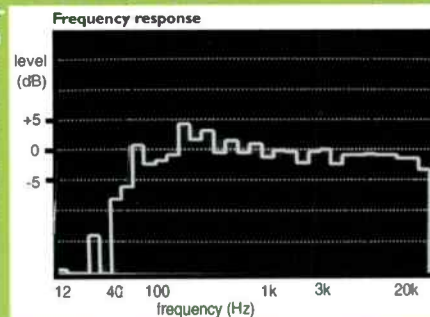
FOCAL MICRO UTOPIA Be

This dumpy stand mounter has a front port, a slot between the bass unit and tweeter. Tuned to 60Hz, it exerts a small amount of damping on the bass unit our impedance plot shows, but not much, probably due to low port area. It makes the Micro Utopia almost a sealed box in its behaviour, with quite a slow bass roll-off. The speaker's lower limit is 63Hz, but it looks as if near-wall placement is expected, which will raise low frequency output a little, at the expense of bass quality.

Whilst the Beryllium tweeter looks wonderfully flat in response terms and will likely give great results subjectively, the bass/mid-range unit is less smooth, displaying a regular pattern of peaks and troughs. Output lifts steadily toward low frequencies, which will add body or warmth to the sound. Strong peaking around 200Hz is indicative of colouration, possibly from the front port. The unusual overall trend of this loudspeaker's response characteristic suggests it has been balanced for strong bass from a near wall position.

Sensitivity was normal at 87dB from one nominal watt of input, good considering impedance is high at 8 ohms: It is largely resistive too, so the Micro Utopia Be is an easy enough load.

Like a lot of 'specials', the Micro Utopia produces some unusual results, the result of an individual design approach. NK



VERDICT

FOCAL JM LAB 726S

Extremely capable mid-price floorstander with a commanding musical performance.

FOR

- expansive sound
- strong bass
- bespoke JM Labs drive units

AGAINST

- low mid muddle
- styling

VERDICT

FOCAL MICRO UTOPIA Be

Brilliantly detailed and engaging, but incisive sound won't suit all tastes or systems.

FOR

- superlative timing
- excellent focus
- firecracker dynamics

AGAINST

- ultra incisive sound won't suit all
- highly critical of ancillaries
- styling

FOCAL

+44 (0) 121 616 5126
www.focal.tm.fr

great HI-FI WORLD'S COMPETITION giveaway

WIN A COMPLETE NAD/KEF SYSTEM WORTH £1,000
IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT COMPETITION!

October's *Hi-Fi World* gives you the chance to win a brilliantly matched separates system, comprising some of our favourite products - NAD's new C542 CD player, C352 integrated amplifier and KEF's Q4 loudspeakers.

NAD's C541i was never going to be an easy one to replace, but the new £330 C542 is a fitting successor. The toroidal power supply and Burr Brown, 24-bit, Sigma-Delta DAC remain as before. What's new, however, is the Sony transport which enables the C542 to play CD-R/W discs. Also new are Nichicon Muse capacitors with metal film resistors, and Elna capacitors in the power supply. NAD has included an optical output, a damped lid, Burr Brown 2134 op-amps and built in HDCD chip. The C542 sounds well controlled, with the vocals never

becoming strident or harsh. Instruments are finely etched within a broad soundstage, and the music never sounds mechanical or stilted. Even during the most complex passages there's excellent separation of instruments. It's a thoroughly well balanced machine, with a slight emphasis on bass warmth.

The new C352 is the replacement for NAD's C350. Improvements include a more substantial metal chassis, new Holmgren Toroidal PSU which now supplies 80 watts per channel (up 25%), updated semiconductors in the Class A preamp section and revised tone control circuitry offering shorter signal paths. The feature count is far more impressive, and the standard remote control has been improved. In his review last month, Dominic Todd observed that, "the most noticeable characteristic was the highly focused vocal performance. Waits' dulcet tones had real presence and character. This came from the tight soundstaging that didn't allow the vocals to shift from the central position, but also from the colour and texture imbued in his vocals. Another pleasant surprise was the piano timbre. I've heard amps costing twice as much that would struggle to match the resolve and realism here...As a study of balance and consistency NAD should be awarded full marks."

There's no better partner for electronics of the NADs' calibre than a truly classy pair of compact floorstanding speakers, which is why we're giving away KEF's Q4. At its



heart is the latest in Uni-Q driver arrays. A 130mm die-cast chassis houses the long throw cone and coincident mounted 19mm aluminium dome HF unit for true point source reproduction. Combine the excellent off-axis dispersion characteristics of Uni-Q with the magnetic shielding of the drive units and you get a speaker which is much easier to place in the room and one which alleviates the traditional sweet spot found with 'ordinary' speakers. The new Q4 is a true three way speaker, combining the Uni-Q array with a dedicated 130mm LF unit for extended bass output which belies the size of its diminutive cabinet. The result is an extremely open and even sound, with levels of sophistication far beyond its price.

If you'd like to win this superb system, then just answer our four easy questions, and send your entries on a postcard to: **October Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF.**

QUESTIONS:

[1] What does the C542'S sony transport enable it to do?

- [a] play LPs
- [b] play DATs
- [c] play CD-R/Ws
- [d] play football

[2] What kind of chip is built into the C542?

- [a] HDCD
- [b] MD LP
- [c] SACD
- [d] MLP

[3] What type of Toroidal PSU does the C352 use?

- [a] Loffgren
- [b] Tungsten
- [c] Holmgren
- [d] Nilsson

[4] What type of KEF driver array does the Q4 feature?

- [a] Uni-pivot
- [b] Uni-Q
- [c] Uni-versal
- [d] Unique

October Competition
Hi-Fi World Magazine
Unit G4 Argo House
The Park Business
Centre
Kilburn Park Rd.
London NW6 5LF

RULES OF ENTRY:

1. Only one entry per house hold.
2. Multiple entries will be automatically disqualified.
3. Purchase of the magazine is not a pre-condition of entry.
4. No correspondence will be entered into.
5. The Editor's decision is final.
6. No employees of Audio Publishing Limited, or of any companies associated with the production or distribution of the prizes may enter.

CONGRATULATIONS

...to Ms. Valerie Seaman of Fornham St. Martin, Suffolk, the winner of our July competition 2004.
An Anatek Audio A50 Amplifier is on its way to you!

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stocks a wide range of Hi-Fi separates, DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma screens, LCD televisions and projection systems from all the leading manufacturers.

From starter systems to custom designed multi-room and home cinema installations, our friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle. If you're interested in home entertainment and want to avoid the confusion, contact your local Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store and **experience more.**

0% interest free option* is available on most products.

*Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers
Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.



CUSTOM INSTALLATION

Modern home entertainment doesn't have to be intrusive.

A carefully considered installation of home cinema with distributed audio and video and easy lighting control can give you all the sound and vision performance you could ever dream of - enhancing your lifestyle and your home.

Our custom install services range from the most simple, affordable solutions to the most grandiose. We can help transform every room and every home, whatever your needs and budget.

Want to know more?

Why not pay us a visit and pick up a copy of our **FREE Custom**

Installation Guide, available now, from your local store.



Enjoy the freedom to listen to the music of your choice or watch TV independently from other rooms in the home



Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards and will continue to support you and your equipment long after your first visit to one of our nationwide stores



Flush-mounted in-wall speakers can give you all the sound you can handle, but won't eat into your floor space or clash with your decor



NEWSNEWSNEWS

B&W PV1 SUB-WOOFER

Bowers & Wilkins proudly announce the introduction of the new PV1 subwoofer. About the size of a basketball, this spherical subwoofer utilises technology developed over 5 years and proves that big bass can be achieved using a small box.

Although its primary use is home cinema, the PV1 is also perfectly suited to 2-Channel hi-fi systems. The PV1 includes both speaker level and line level inputs and is available in silver or gloss black.



MUSICAL FIDELITY kW500 SUPER INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



Musical Fidelity has introduced a new, super integrated amplifier - the kW500. Musical Fidelity's tradition of making superb integrated amplifiers dates back to the early 1990s when they launched the A1000 and, more recently, the Nu-Vista M³ and Tri-Vista 300.

This latest model, a limited edition of 500 pieces, features exclusive Mu-Vista tubes. Originally, these were used by the US military for crucial low noise and other missile functions and, like the tvista tube it replaces, promises to offer 'bomb-proof' reliability.

The kW500 is rated at 500+ watts per channel and about 100 amps peak. The extrusions for the front panel are custom made and all the fitments are machined from the highest quality material.

THE kW500 IS AVAILABLE AT SELECTED SEVENOAKS STORES • £3999.95
ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 22/09/04. E&OE.



THE MU-VISTA TUBES IN SITU

ABERDEEN (NEW)

BEDFORD

BIRMINGHAM

BRIGHTON

BRISTOL

BROMLEY

CAMBRIDGE

CARDIFF

CHELSEA

CHELTENHAM

CRAWLEY

CROYDON

EALING (NEW)

EDINBURGH

EPSOM

EXETER

GLASGOW

GUILDFORD

HOLBORN

HULL

IPSWICH

KINGSTON

LEICESTER

LEEDS

LINCOLN

LIVERPOOL

MAIDSTONE

MANCHESTER

NEWCASTLE

NORWICH

NOTTINGHAM

OXFORD

PETERBOROUGH

PLYMOUTH

POOLE

PRESTON

READING

SEVENOAKS

SHEFFIELD

SOLIHULL

SOUTHAMPTON

SOUTHGATE

STAINES

SWISS COTTAGE

TUNBRIDGE WELLS

WATFORD

WEYBRIDGE

WITHAM (ESSEX)

WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE
NUMBER DETAILS



HI-FI SEPARATES

Michell Gyro SE
Turntable / RB300 Tonearm
£1049.95



WORLD NO. 1
Best Buy
2003

"The Gyrodec SE sounds great, combining the best sonic characteristics of rivals... Quite simply, the Michell Gyrodec SE is terrific. Nothing compares at this price point - it's well deserving another Best Buy."

CLAIM £50 TOWARDS THE GOLDRING CARTRIDGE OF YOUR CHOICE*



Pro-ject 1 Xpression
Turntable (black)
£209.95

WORLD NO. 1
Best Buy
2003

"Compared with a £200 CD player this deck sounds remarkable. dig out your vinyl and give the Xpression a spin."

Pro-ject 1 Debut II
Turntable (black) **£119.95**

WORLD NO. 1
Best Buy
2002



THE PROJECT RANGE
STARTS AT ONLY **£119.95**

Arcam DiVA CD192
CD Player **£849.95**

NEW



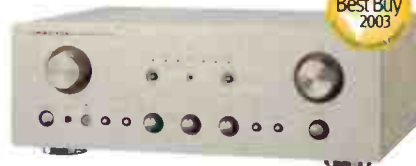
FREE GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90 WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRUS & ROKSAN*

NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



Marantz
CD5400 CD Player
£119.95

SAVE
£30



SAVE
£80

Marantz
PM7200 Amplifier
£249.95

WORLD NO. 1
Best Buy
2003

"This is one of the most powerful amps in its class, at 95w per channel, and it sounds it with anything from dance to a big orchestral work, offering a delicious combination of poise and impact. Stick with fast, dynamic speakers such as B&W DM601 S3s or KEF's equally capable Q1s and the results will amaze."

"So do you buy a digital tuner? Or an analogue one? Now you don't have to pick: just buy Pure Digital's DRX-702ES! Whether on FM or DAB, this tuner sounds superb... The overall balance is powerful, clean and crisp, making this a fine tuner by any standards, and a superb buy given its excellent flexibility."

NEW

Musical Fidelity
X-80 Amplifier **£599.95**
X-150 Amplifier **£799.95**
X-Ray" CD Player **£899.95**

Musical Fidelity has unveiled two integrated amplifiers and a CD player as part of its revamped X-series. The 40 wpc, X-80 and the 80wpc X-150 amplifiers feature a

dual-gang analogue volume control and high-output transistors for each channel.

The X-150 also includes a high quality phono stage.

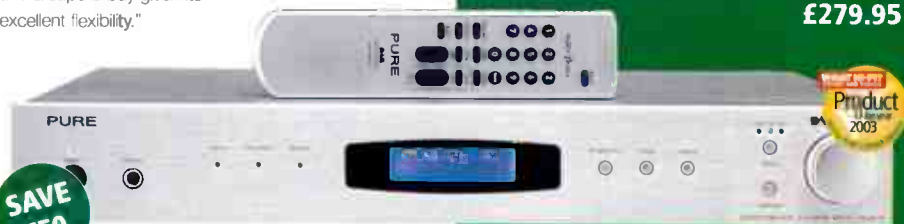


The X-Ray" CD player, is the replacement for the legendary X-Ray and uses the same DAC and upsampling principles as the acclaimed Tri-Vista SACD player. From a technical standpoint, the X-Ray" is equal of some of the most expensive players on the market.



DAB RADIO

Pure Digital
DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB Tuner
£279.95



SAVE
£50

WORLD NO. 1
Product of the Year
2003

experience more

experience more
experience more



Cyrus
CD8 CD Player £999.95
8 Amplifier £799.95

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for over 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.



SEE FREE GRADO SR60 HEADPHONE OFFER



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60

NEW

KEF Q4
Speakers £399.95

The Q4 is one of the latest additions to KEF's acclaimed Q Series. At the heart of this floorstander lies the Uni-Q driver array - a 130mm die-cast chassis housing a long throw cone and coincident mounted 19mm aluminium dome HF unit. This driver arrangement makes the speaker much easier to place in the room and alleviates the 'sweet spot' found on 'ordinary' speakers. This has been combined with a dedicated 130mm LF unit for extended bass output which belies the size of its diminutive cabinet.

FREE QED **SPEAKER CABLE** **WORTH**
WITH ALL HI-FI SPEAKER PAIRS OVER £299*

£60 WITH SPEAKERS OVER £299
£80 WITH SPEAKERS OVER £499
£120 WITH SPEAKERS OVER £999

Mission
780 SE Speakers £349.95

"The revamped Mission 780s are hugely enjoyable: anyone with up to £400 to spend should consider these standmounters. Mission's clever move has paid off."



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60

WHAT HI-FI? May 03
★★★★★

B&W
DM602 S3 Speakers £299.95

"These solidly made standmounters perform well across the whole range of musical styles... Add these speakers to your hi-fi system and you're guaranteed magnificent integration between the drivers and an even tonal balance."



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60

Best Buy 2002

Roksan Kandy
KD1/III CD Player £649.95
KA1/III Amplifier £649.95

"Timing and rhythm are excellent. DJ Shadow is delivered with clarity and a tight bass, while at the other extreme the treble is sweet and detailed, getting the most from Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. The result is a breathtaking Best Buy amplifier that betters its competition with B&S." KANDY KA1/III AMPLIFIER - AWARDS 2003



Best Buy 2003

"The Kandy KD1/III CD player offers a great array of talents - team it with its amp stablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."

WHAT HI-FI? Dec 03
★★★★★

FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60

Ruark Epilogue II Speakers £349.95

"Start there with the classy Ruark Epilogue II. They're exceptional value, but with plenty to justify that price tag. They reveal a new dimension to music by looking into the mids and highs like a sonic X-ray." WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • AUGUST 2002

FREE GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90 WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRUS & ROKSAN* NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

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.

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. Maximum balance £400. Subject to status.

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. PLEASE CALL BEFORE TRAVELLING.

*ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 22/09/04, E&OE.



Rotel 10 Series RA-1062 Amplifier £594.95 RCD-1072 CD Player £594.95

"At the heart of the 60-watt RA-1062 is a toroidal transformer and a power supply, which Rotel claims helps the amp maintain performance even at high volumes... Crank up the volume and, as promised, the Rotel keeps its composure and balance... If you want a £600 integrated, be sure to audition the RA-1062.

First impressions of the RCD-1072 are excellent. This is the slickest machine in this group: the casework feels solid and the finish exceptional at the price... On its own terms it remains an enjoyable and informative CD player."

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • SEPTEMBER 2003

COMPACT SYSTEMS



Linn Classik Music System £799.95

When purchased with speakers over £299*
When purchased on its own £849.95

"The Classik sounds simply marvellous... It offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product."



Denon DM31 UD-M31 CD Receiver £189.95

When purchased with speakers over £99*
When purchased on its own £199.95

"The D-M30 was exemplary, as its three What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards clearly show. The D-M31 is even better, making it phenomenal value for money."

NB - DENON DM31 & LINN CLASSIK PRICES EXCLUDE SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aelite Three Speakers £749.95

"Acoustic Energy's new Aelite Threes weigh in at a hefty 18kg a piece, and their curved, real wood finished cabinets both look handsome and make good acoustic sense... So how do they perform... Give them a big room and position them in free space and they'll deliver great things... If you want a big sound for sensible money, don't hesitate to audition the Aelite Threes."

WHAT HI-FI? Sept 04
★★★★★

Pioneer PDR-609 CD Recorder £169.95

"This is the third time Pioneer has won Product of the Year in the recorders section. First with the PDR-509, and then last year with the PDR-609.

Features include 24-bit/96kHz digital-analogue-conversion, backed up by Pioneer's Legato Link filtering and manual recording level controls, ideal when making compilations to standardise levels. All this means you get great copies from the Pioneer... and remarkable value."



WHAT HI-FI? Product of the year 2002
★★★★★ Pioneer PDR-609

MUSIC ALL AROUND THE HOME

You've heard of hi-fi - now welcome to the world of wi-fi! Wi-fi devices allow you to network a range of devices together - from your music system to your PC - without the wires. For example, a multiroom server like Yamaha's MusicCAST can wirelessly send music to up to five 'client' playback systems dotted around your home. That music could be stored on the MusicCAST server device or other sources - existing hi-fi kit, maybe, or an internet radio station or MP3 files from your PC: plug-in adapters make it easy to wi-fi-enable products.



Cyruslink

AVAILABLE AT SELECTED SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION STORES

YAMAHA MusicCAST

MCX A10£599.95
(MusicCAST Client)

MCX 1000£1799.95
(MusicCAST Server)

CYRUSLINK

Linkserver 160£2999.95
(Four Zone HD Server 160Gb Drive)

Linkserver 250£3499.95
(Four Zone HD Server 250Gb Drive)

Linkport£649.95

Linkwand£199.95



CYRUSLINK Linkport

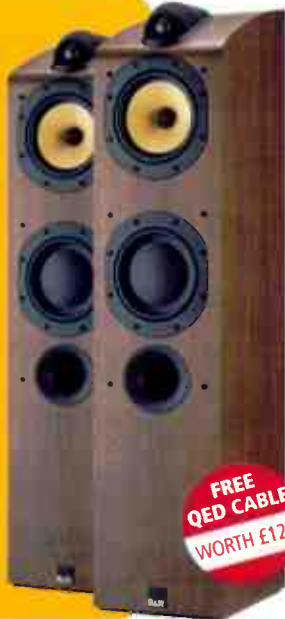


YAMAHA'S MusicCAST
MCX-1000 DIGITAL SERVER
& MCX-A10 CLIENT

B&W 704 Speakers £1399.95

The 704 speakers are part of B&W's new 700 series. These floorstanding, two-and-a-half-way vented box speakers and are available in a variety of attractive finishes. In a recent What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision group test the 704 offered "Remarkable openness and clarity that is unrivalled at this price."

WHAT HI-FI? Sept 04
★★★★★



FREE QED CABLE
WORTH £120*

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. PLEASE CALL BEFORE TRAVELLING.

*ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 22/09/04. E&OE.

experience more

experience more

experience more



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS

Rotel
RCD-02 CD Player
RA-02 Amplifier

HI-FI SYSTEM
1

Monitor Audio
Bronze B2 Speakers

For this recommended Hi-Fi System we have combined Rotel's highly rated RCD-02 CD player and RA-02 amplifier with Monitor Audio's beautifully balanced Bronze B2 speakers. This package gives a powerful, fresh and vibrant sound. The compact 'B2' speakers, available in a variety of finishes, were awarded 'Best Buy' by What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, with the sound being described as "Superb... Speakers don't get much better than the B2's".



WHAT HI-FI?
Best Buy
2003

WHAT HI-FI?
Best Buy
2002

The RA-02 amplifier features remote control and a phono input. The RCD-02 (★★★★★ - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision - August 2003) is HDCD compatible and includes a digital output for connecting to a digital recorder.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE
£799.95 | **£129**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 1 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS



HI-FI SYSTEM
2

WHAT HI-FI?
Product
of the year
2003

Arcam
CD73T CD Player
A65 Plus Amplifier

KEF
Q4 Speakers

Arcam and KEF both have an enviable reputation for producing great sounding kit without breaking the bank. This system shows why with a well balanced sound that's both musically involving and enjoyable.

At the front of this package is Arcam's upgradeable CD73T CD player - a What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision 'Product of the Year 2003'. We've coupled this with Arcam's complementary A65 Plus integrated amplifier and KEF's new Q4 floating speakers featuring KEF's unique Uni-Q technology for easier room placement.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE
£999.95 | **£149**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 2 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



SEPARATE HI-FI SYSTEMS

Roksan Kandy
KD1/III CD Player
KA1/III Amplifier

HI-FI SYSTEM
3

Monitor Audio
Silver S6 Speakers



WHAT HI-FI?
Best Buy
2003

The combination of Roksan's Kandy MK3 CD and amplifier is, according to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision, "Something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination" (December 2003). We have partnered these with the Silver S6 floorstanding speakers from British

speaker specialists, Monitor Audio. The combination of Roksan's excellent rhythm and timing, with its tight bass and sweet detailed treble coupled with the 'S6's' ability to stay unruffled even when the music is at its most complex, makes this a remarkable system.

SYSTEM PRICE | SAVE
£1889.95 | **£300**
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

FREE
SOUNDSTYLE
RACK
WORTH £300*

HI-FI SYSTEM 3 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

Sevenoaks

SOUND & VISION



PRODUCT RANGE

An outstanding selection of products are on display and available for demonstration at all Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores.

However, some products may not be available at all stores. Please call to check availability before travelling.

TURNTABLES

Golding GR1	£139.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 ESD GOLDING CARTRIDGE*	£1049.95
Michell TechnoDec (Ex Arm)	£574.95
Project Debut Phono SB	£169.95
Project Debut II (Black)	£119.95
Project Debut II (Colours)	£134.95
Project 1 Xpression	£209.95

TUNERS

Arcam DVA T61	£199.95
Cyrus FM X	£499.95
Denon TU260L MKII	£99.95
Harman Kardon TU970 DAB/AM/FM	£299.95
Marantz ST4000	£99.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£199.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£279.95
Roksan Kandy KT1 MKIII	£549.95

CD PLAYERS

Arcam DVA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DVA CD192	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1299.95
Cyrus CD6	£599.95
Cyrus CD8	£999.95
Cyrus DAC-X	£1099.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£1099.95
Linn Ikemi	£2199.95
Marantz CD540C	£119.95
Musical Fidelity X-Ray 9	£899.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308*	£1999.95
Quad 99 CD-P	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£1099.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
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engineering

Designing hi-fi is very much the art of the possible. Rarely, if ever, do manufacturers make products which are absolutely without compromise – whatever they may say! Rather, what you see in the shops is the result of a large number of specific decisions about what, and what's not, thought to be important to give the right balance of sound, styling and functionality. Hi-fi separates are an elaborate collection of compromises. In this in-depth feature, Noel Keywood explains precisely what these are, and why.

It's useful to segregate the hi-fi market into three categories, budget, mid-price and top-end, when looking at what lies behind the engineering. The mid-price sector is a natural point of reference. Here is where manufacturers can make a product without serious compromise. It's an area in which all the costings say there's a small but decent profit to be made, providing the product sells. It's also a comfort zone, because in a competitive marketplace strenuous cost cutting will result in a product costing much less than can, potentially, undermine and outsell mid-price hi-fi. Budget engineering is about cutting all costs to the bone, rather than just making something that's got fewer or cheaper parts in it. It's also about volume sales, often in a global marketplace.

And finally we have the top-end where no holds are barred. Here it can all go very right - or terribly wrong!

BUILDING ON A BUDGET

This isn't a feature on the economics of global Consumer Electronics manufacturing but it is of quite some relevance to budget audio. Manufacturing costs are so much lower in the Far East that most budget hi-fi is made there. This isn't solely a matter of low cost labour and factory space. As Japan's labour and land costs rose inexorably through the 1980s it moved manufacturing out to Malaysia and China, and with it went a knowledge. Nowadays, China has not only a plentiful supply of cheap labour but also the design skills to produce items like DVD players, unaided by Japan. That's where the £47 DVD player you see

at Tesco comes from.

Most budget hi-fi comes from China nowadays, even loudspeakers, and this impacts quality in some unusual ways. Costs are significantly influenced by packing and freight charges, storage charges and factory handling costs. Small, light products take up less space, are easier to handle and store and cheaper to ship. So expect light casework, flimsy packaging and even cost cut instruction books, all the things we associate with budget design. Low weight and fast manufacture are easier to achieve if plastics are used - anything but heavy steel in fact. So nowadays CD and DVD transports possess little metal and you see just how flimsy they have become when a thin plastic tray slowly creaks out to take a disc. Often, chassis and front panels are plastic too.

With CD and now, DVD players, it is their motors and servo electronics that count, the plastic lenses and their focussing mechanisms, and the downstream signal processing chips, all of which are digital. Mostly, these critical items come from OEMs - Outside Equipment Manufacturers. They work in tightly specialised and well defined fields, offering advanced parts to the big names, who buy in quantity and assemble. The process started with CD and increased greatly in complexity and sophistication with DVD, with its advanced video processing.

Our measurements show that modern sources like DVD players usually measure well even when they are built down to a tight budget. Chip sets and mechanisms have to give reasonable results to be commercially viable in a competitive



world marketplace. Digital processing also brings consistency. Even final filters and analogue output stages are all well worked out items built on a chip. However, budget chipsets do, in critical areas, have slightly worse performance than premium types. Less linear audio D/A converters produce more distortion and bring slight grain to the sound, for example. There will be digital jitter due to poor clocking and cheap components bring a vagueness to the sound.

The situation with budget amplifiers is a little simpler. Solid-state amplifiers are a mature technology, built largely from well developed and understood circuits and parts. Minimal levels of distortion and insignificant amounts of noise were achieved way back in the late 1970s, when MOSFETs appeared. Amplifier design has changed little since then. Class D (digital) is here and working and the big chip companies are struggling to commercialise it, but Class D at present kicks out a lot of digital rubbish that's difficult to eradicate. It's not yet hi-fi.

The single most expensive component in an amplifier is - apart from the chassis - the mains transformer. Its price is directly related to the power it can supply, determined by the amount of copper

the difference



in its windings and iron in its core - the less the better! But smaller transformers deliver less power to the output transistors, limiting power output. Lower power output means less heatsinking and fewer or cheaper output devices can be used, again saving on cost.

Another parameter that suffers is regulation, the ability to deliver a steady voltage even when heavy current is drawn by the loudspeaker. A well regulated supply gives dynamically tight bass and a good sense of transient grip. Conversely, the poorly regulated supply of a budget amplifier can make it sound somewhat soft, or rhythmically imprecise. This becomes more of an issue with low impedance loudspeakers, or ones that vary in impedance greatly.

Although it's easy enough to reduce high frequency crossover distortion to minimal levels in a well designed audio output stage, not all budget amplifiers manage this even today. Those that don't will have coarse sounding treble and may even sound a little gritty.

Cost cutting introduces other limitations. Mechanical parts, such as switches, input sockets and volume controls (potentiometers) are relatively expensive items in the build budget, so the cheapest are selected.

They have limited life, especially if used heavily. Poor quality potentiometers once so plagued budget amps that a few enterprising manufacturers started to produce high quality items. Their popularity has steadily increased, now reaching mainstream hi-fi manufacturing. The Alps pot. is the best known example, and even Panasonic make quality pots. This is the sort of item you can expect not to get when costs are cut to the bone!

Today's budget amps may be flimsy, but they can measure well and often sound smooth enough. Their sins nowadays are those of omission. What they leave out is grip, insight, subtlety and any sense of precision. Used heavily, volume controls will wear out and switches and sockets fail.

Budget loudspeaker manufacturing was the last area of expertise to leave Britain for the Far East. In the 1970s Wharfedale were turning out millions of Lintons and Dentons from an automated cabinet works in Idle Bradford. Now they are Chinese owned, like KEF and Celestion. Whilst design is usually carried out in the UK, of both cabinets and drivers, manufacturing is not. Again though, the impact upon quality from the consumer's point of view is usually minimal. Thin

walled cabinets made of compressed paper rather than MDF, with cheap, synthetic veneers are becoming commonplace. They don't withstand impact well. Corners and edges crumple easily, leaving a nasty mess that's difficult to repair. Veneers too are synthetic and barely convincing. All the same, budget

loudspeakers made in China, like Wharfedale's Diamond 8, have proved successful in raising quality over previous generations.

A low build budget means a small cabinet fitted with no more than two drive units, plus a crossover strapped to the output terminals in most cases, for speed of assembly.



Electronics production in China is carried out on a large scale in modern, well equipped factories. Wages are low, work rates intense and output prodigious, making China a major manufacturing centre.





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Drive units mass produced in the Far East look much like those found in branded Western product. Sometimes they are the same, sometimes they are copies. These two units are from a Taiwanese manufacturer.

The cabinet itself is of straightforward construction, unbraced and with little or no internal sound absorbent. Some box thrum or colouration will add a little flavour to the sound, although it is usually small. Expect an unsophisticated tweeter with a plastic or metal (usually aluminium) dome that gives bright or sharp sounding treble.

Compromises are more apparent in budget floorstanding loudspeakers. Large panels more readily resonate and colour the sound. Some manufacturers fit a sand chamber as a clever way of ameliorating this. Filling it with sand adds weight and stability, and damps panel resonances - a clever way of offering budget conscious buyers a DIY route to good quality. Drive units are usually those used in a bookshelf or stand mount design - inexpensive but hi-fi all the same.

None of this applies to seriously cheap, big speakers from non-hi-fi sources, like the notorious 'back of a white van' sales outlet. These use poor quality drive units screwed into a box, with little design input. Paper cones are used, which give a coarse and coloured sound. The box and drive unit will not be tuned to work together, resulting in lumpy bass. Frequency response will be approximate, making for an uneven sound, either bright or dull in balance, and a weak, resonant cabinet will sound boomy and coloured.

Loudspeakers like this can be seen in shop windows too, often alongside disco equipment. Knowing that people often judge 'speakers by size, number of drive units and the power rating, they are large, studded with drive units and carry ambitious power figures. Using peak power sustained for a short burst of a second, just about any figure can be justified. Drive units may even be false - a plastic grill over a hole acting as a port, for example. Bear in mind that cheap loudspeaker drive units can be bought for no more than £1-

£2 in the Far East, where they are churned out in large quantities. Putting them into a cabinet that's crudely finished results in a loudspeaker built to a ridiculously low price. Products like this are common in the Far East where they are aimed at those who can't afford branded Western goods. But some find their way to UK stores, selling at low, low prices. They are not hi-fi.

MID PRICE MARKET

The mid-price market is where normal commercial hi-fi is to be found. Low price isn't the driving force; build cost is balanced against performance to yield a product that will sell in acceptably large quantity whilst at the same time justifying its claim to be high fidelity. In this market sales must be large enough to justify volume ordering, but not so large as to demand special machinery or a large labour force. As far as UK buyers are concerned it is where products are built in Britain to higher and more consistent quality standards, using a skilled workforce; shipping becomes less of an issue.

Modern signal sources like DVD players can use a range of protected technologies, each of which must be licensed by the manufacturer. Dolby Labs are masters of licensing; they develop a signal processing technology like Pro Logic IIx and market it. Manufacturers like Denon, for example, will pay a license fee to use it. Nowadays, licensing is big business and much of the manoeuvring we see behind the introduction of new mid-market technologies is really concerned with establishing a dominant global position. A corum of Japanese manufacturers making up the DVD forum wrested the CD market from Philips and Sony. Philips and Sony struck back with Blu-Ray, which is licensing right now. As the DVD Forum struggled to find a suitable alternative it got hi-jacked by

Microsoft, who are now trying hard to turn Windows Media 9 into a worldwide standard for HD-DVD (High Definition DVD, the official successor to DVD), again sold under license. All are looking to control and profit from the market for mid-price audio of the future. This is a volume market, but one where quality sells, as DVD and plasma screens have shown.

Most UK specialists are unable to develop their own products within areas like this, because of high licensing costs. Notable exceptions are Arcam and Meridian. They bring the usual attention to detail to both CD and DVD, using good quality components and solid casework.



China has designated the region next to Hong Kong as a special industrial zone and Shenzhen, once a small fishing village, is now a bustling city at the centre of manufacturing.



There are many good reasons for getting product built in the Far East.

They may also offer unusual features, such as digital linking of high resolution signals in Meridian's case, or use of the new High Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI) in Arcam's.

As new, more advanced signal processing chips appear from manufacturers like Crystal, Wolfson,



A product like the Graaf GM20 amplifier embodies high-end thinking. It uses special low impedance valves in an unusual Circlotron circuit to provide direct coupling to the loudspeaker. For many technical reasons this isn't really a good idea. All the same, in spite of drawbacks, the amplifier has an interesting sound and a lot of visual appeal. Like many top-end products it's an extreme design that pursues one design aim, whatever the cost.

Burr Brown and Analogue

Devices, Britain's specialists often see an opportunity to use them in conjunction with good quality casework and power supplies to produce a high quality CD player or external D/A convertor. The market for this sort of item is too small for the big players; CD is now almost as dead as cassette as far as they are concerned. But this doesn't necessarily correspond with what people want at home today, nor what the music industry can deliver in terms of product. There's still room for 16bit/44.1kHz in the mid-price market to better reproduce what's on the CDs that fill stores today.

As the Chinese slash away at prices at the bottom end of the DVD market, the big Japanese manufacturers must ensure they enhance their reputation for both quality and innovation further up the price scale. Mid-price DVD players are crammed with special features and this may include 16bit/44.1kHz audio re-sampled to 24/192 to improve filtering, before conversion to analogue. The Japanese are not averse to technological name dropping of specialist chip manufacturers like Burr Brown or Faroudja. Audio quality is always an issue, lower distortion and noise being chased by improved techniques. Mid-price DVD players now commonly offer SACD and DVD-Audio too, both of which in theory possess analogue bandwidth to 100kHz and negligible levels of distortion for near-perfect sound quality. The industry is ahead of the market here, since the music business currently records music mostly in 24bit at 48kHz sample rate. At present even 24/96 surround-sound is not so common, as it introduces a lot of extra complexity that few people will really appreciate until high fidelity surround-sound becomes commonplace in the home.

In the mid-price range, stereo amplifiers typically gain power and drive. Bigger mains transformers and larger smoothing capacitors make for better load handling and more grunt

into today's low impedance loudspeakers. Expensive audio MOSFET output devices have greater intrinsic bandwidth, allowing more feedback to be applied at high frequencies, reducing crossover distortion for a smoother sound. Good quality resistors and capacitors, better circuit boards with thicker track and audio grade volume controls, like the Alps Blue, may be used. Taken together these parts bring an improved sense of clarity, precision and smoothness to today's amplifiers.

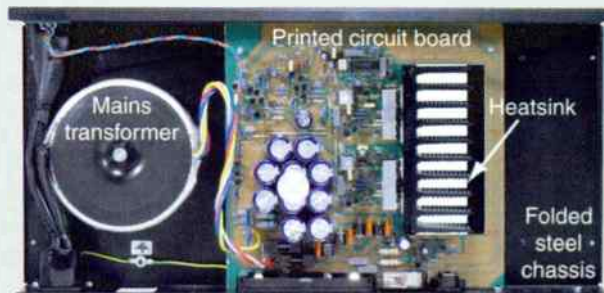
At mid-price levels surround-sound receivers are now an alternative to the stereo amplifier. These monsters usually offer at least five channels of amplification, each delivering 100W into 8ohms, and more into 4ohms. Until recently they had a reputation for crude sound quality, mainly due to the use of cheap components and the presence of crossover distortion. The vhf tuner sections were - and still can be - noisy and uneven in frequency response. All this is changing, however.

Better tuner sections and output stages are becoming more common in a race to improve quality and gain sales.

Surround-sound receivers convert incoming analogue stereo signals from CD, TV, cassette, etc to digital for subsequent processing into surround-sound, via Dolby Pro Logic II, SRS surround-sound or DTS Neo 6. Other effects may be applied, as well as tonal correction, bass management and time delay to compensate for loudspeaker distance. The digital information is then converted back to analogue before being fed to the output stages. So mid-price surround-sound

receivers are complex beasts, fast evolving as sales climb. Inevitably, with so much on-board they don't usually possess cutting-edge sound quality from amplifier or tuner, but that is not to say results are at all bad. Pushing so much power through six loudspeakers (including a self powered sub-woofer) has advantages too, offering well distributed sound and great acoustic dynamics. Mechanical quality is often poor though, meaning poor volume controls, and weak sockets, especially for the loudspeakers.

Mid-price range loudspeakers commonly handle more power and produce deeper bass than their cheaper brethren. Higher power handling is, these days, achieved by adding an extra bass unit to a basic two-way array of bass/mid-range, plus tweeter. This is easy to do and works well, possessing few intrinsic drawbacks. Extra cone area makes for lower bass distortion, in what is often termed a 'two and a half way' arrangement. It's a better solution than trying to increase the power handling of a standard 8in unit, or using a bigger driver. Manufacturers may also fit a better tweeter for smoother treble, or even a super tweeter to extend frequency response out to 50kHz to better reproduce the 48kHz analogue bandwidth of 96kHz sample rate



Much of the cost of an amplifier lies in its mechanical parts. The mains transformer, chassis and heatsink are the most expensive items. The Class A/B amplifiers used today work at around 70% efficiency. Low power budget products will be getting 90% efficient Class D amplifiers in future, in order to reduce power consumption and heat production.

digital. KEF and Tannoy both adopt this approach on their mid-price loudspeakers. Cabinets get better bracing, improved internal damping and quality crossover components, including iron or air core inductors.

The mid-price category also supports serious products for LP replay, with quality turntables and arms from Origin Live, Rega, Roksan

and Pro-Ject, for example. Mid-price cartridges from traditional names like Goldring, Shure, Stanton and Ortofon complement these turntables and arms. In combination they offer superb results from LP. This is very much an area for traditional specialists with a good understanding of the difficulties of design and details of manufacture. As our reports have shown, today's pickup cartridges offer flat frequency response to 20kHz and some models reach up to 40kHz. Tracking performance is superb and distortion low. Today's mid-price turntable offers better performance than ever from LP, even though LP production today amounts to a trickle.

Like LP, radio is very much a mid-price technology at present, but for different reasons. Vigorous promotion of DAB is drawing attention from VHF/FM, but DAB radios are, at present, still not cheap. One reason for this is that both America and Japan have rejected DAB, limiting demand and production volumes. Stereo VHF/FM was a U.S. technology, using the Zenith/G.E. system. Both radio technologies rely on high performance chipsets whose economics demand quantity production. The BBC has now been criticised in front of a Commons Select Committee for their naively enthusiastic adoption of DAB. High performance chipsets give modern mid-price vhf/fm tuners very low distortion and low noise too, plus an audio bandwidth that reaches 16kHz, equal to that of DAB in practice. Providing a good aerial is used VHF/FM gives better sound quality than DAB.

Although, specification wise, DAB is little different from VHF/FM, it suffers compression (i.e. data reduction) to reduce data rate and broadcast bandwidth. Broadcasters now realise that early Musicam compressors needed improvement to reduce the sense of vagueness with violins and such like that DAB suffers. As they upgrade early generation DAB transmission equipment sound quality should improve, to approach that of VHF/FM. DAB offers variety rather than quality; there's much more choice on digital radio. Very low data rates and mono transmissions impart transistor radio quality to many DAB broadcasts. There is room for DAB quality standards to improve in future, if there is ever any perceived need to do so. Mid-price VHF/FM tuners, coupled to a good aerial, give fine results these days. Mid-price DAB tuners are extremely sensitive

and offer a hiss free sound from even a poor aerial in good reception areas.

THE HIGH END

At the top end hi-fi can get extreme, often concentrating on certain parameters at the expense of all else to yield a result that's different and often intriguing, but at the expense of domestic practicality and often with little regard to cost. Sadly, some products are little more than lifestyle statements, especially gargantuan solid-state amplifiers, often from the USA.

There are obviously successful top-end products, like the big Tannoys and Quad Electrostatic loudspeakers. Properly installed in the right environment they can deliver devastating performance. Tannoy Westminster can move air like few loudspeakers on this planet and Quad electrostatics thumb their nose at box loudspeakers, underlining their innate weaknesses with embarrassing candour. However, both need big rooms and expensive ancillaries if they are to work properly.

By and large, solid-state amplifiers attempt to become more solid-state like as they get larger and more expensive: more power, more dynamic slam, more visceral speed. This can become all too challenging, and sometimes contrived too. Real performances, in as far as such things exist without electronic amplification, are emotionally engaging, not life threatening. Big valve amplifiers, when properly designed, can do a better job in this respect. Unfortunately, the few high performance valves able to deliver useful power, notably the 300B, 211 and 845, are fiendishly difficult to use and, with 1200V or so just separated from the loudspeakers by a sliver of transformer insulation, always of questionable real world practicality. It has been noticed that these voltages suit electrostatics fine, and direct-drive from valve amplifiers to electrostatics has been used, such is the nature of top-end audio.

Top-end audio comes into its own with the LP, with products like the magnificent magnesium SME V arm, the Van den Hul Grasshopper cartridge and esoteric turntables like the Platine Verdier.

Top-end DVD concentrates largely upon passing high resolution digital audio signals from player to receiver, eliminating the multiple analogue connections used at present. Sound quality from DVD would get a serious boost if 24/192



coding was to be used in studios, but there's little commercial interest at present. Surround-sound (24/96) as an adjunct to movies is where the action is. Although 24/192 digital is true top-end it will likely be many years yet before studios routinely use it. Top end video, namely high definition pictures progressively scanned, is demanding ever more of the budget these days, militating against further development of digital audio.

Top-end tuners are rare; there seems to be little demand. Yet with live performance radio offers better quality than most other sources. Studio discussion can be breathtakingly real. Naim make the NAT 03 tuner and Marantz and Pioneer both have top-end models that give a great sound.

Each strata of high fidelity: budget, mid-price and top-end, has its own set of well defined characteristics. At the bottom end, it's all a matter of volume. In the middle, quality counts whilst at the top-end anything goes. There's no shortage of variety here for buyers, but finding the right item in such a complex market is always going to be a challenge.

Class D digital amplifiers are appearing in budget products, especially those embodying a lot of complex digital processing, such as A/V receivers. Noise and distortion limit performance, as does the need for matched loudspeaker, making them lo-fi at present.

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COST CONTROLLING

David Price talks to Naim's Paul Stephenson about designing products to different budgets...

DP: Is it easier to design 'statement' high end products, or affordable ones?

PS: Both have their own design goals. Of course making the very best for everyone here is always high on our list. Enjoying music has always been the 100% priority for the people at Naim. Our design approach is similar for all products, from the most affordable to the most expensive. All aspects of the design are considered; circuit topologies, pcb layout, microphonic influences, thermal effects, etc, and all are optimised. Creating a product to a price holds many other different challenges and understanding effects that certain compromises within a design will bring, is well understood by our design team. My own personal satisfaction is to be able to lower the entry-level price for people to connect with the Naim sound at home. Once we achieve this we turn more people on to listening to more music: creating the hunger for higher fidelity.

What are the respective design priorities for [a] high end and [b] affordable products?

There is no fundamental difference in our approach to the design of high end and affordable products. Sound and measured performance go hand in hand in our process, we are an engineering company, we try and measure all we can and then listen to satisfy our measurement results. Of course the sound quality is the most important design priority for our customers and hence us. Over the years our design team has developed theories and measurements that define Naim's sound quality and these are applied to new designs. The listening tests are the last part of the process. If the sound doesn't satisfy us we go back and think some more. User functionality, and aesthetics come next and of course packing is important, as we don't wish our designs to be wrecked in transit!

How do you go about costing the components in your products - what makes you decide to use one capacitor, for example, and not another? Who decides this?

Fit for use/purpose within a design brief. If we can save money anywhere and put the value into the circuitry or manufacturing procedure we will. Over the years we have tried hundreds of components and we have found some that work best, either for sound or specification, in or circuits. Many of the parts that work best for us are not "audiophile" parts and we can afford to put them in all products across our range so we don't have to confront these trade-off decisions. That said, there are some very expensive parts that we can only afford to put into our top of the range products.

Is there any 'golden rule' about the improvements/compromises caused by specific components?

Not really. It does not always follow that an expensive parts is always better in terms of performance in fact we have found in many cases the opposite has been true.

How much does listening play a part in this? Do you listen to absolutely everything?

It is true to say that we don't take anything for granted. Human hearing has a vast frequency response and dynamic range and it would be foolhardy to assume that any part of a hi-fi product, electrical or mechanical, could not have an influence within this enormous listening window. A huge amount of man hours goes into all new product development; all participating team members from design to sales get involved in the listening process. Who could resist such fun?

Why do you use the construction materials you do? Do these really influence the sound? Give examples. Do you feel there's any benefit to use so-called 'hi tech' materials (carbon fibre, etc.), or is this more about marketing?

Absolutely, we consider the influence of materials as part of our electronic and mechanical design process. The obvious ones are: the use of non-magnetic parts in sensitive areas; aluminium extrusions for their superb thermal and non-magnetic capabilities; skin effect on cabling; steel and glass used in our Fram parts and the balancing of wood veneers in loudspeaker design. Materials such as carbon fibre composites do have some special properties but, so far, we have been able to achieve similar or better results when using more conventional, and far more cost effective, materials.



Why do Naim Audio's price points start and stop where they do? Is this because you can't make anything cheaper or anything better (respectively) - or is that the profits/ sales/ volumes dictate this decision - or marketing/ branding, even?

There is a price point where it's really difficult for us to go if we wish to manufacture our products Naim style. At the high end then yes, sales volume maybe so low that it would just not be economical to pursue a certain design. We had this with our electrostatic speaker project. Marketing plays only a small part; understanding the needs of our customers is our main motivator for our product road map.

Would manufacturing in China, for example, dramatically improve your profits - or would it damage your brand? What do you think are the pros and cons of manufacturing where you do, in your home country?

Where a company can outsource to gain a competitive position or to fulfil a shortfall in resource or remove non-value-added work, out sourcing is always an option. I do not believe most people are so interested were the products are made it's the performance that counts. (Some Porsche models I believe are made in different countries) A major part of Naim's performance comes from our manufacturing techniques and these would be almost impossible to transpose in the Far East. We are a manufacturing company, that's what we wish to be. When we have so little Government support or interest in our industry's needs I think it is inevitable that many companies will look elsewhere to produce their goods. We believe in creating work and wealth as close as possible to our home.

Do you see a need to move downmarket in future - everyone seems to be rushing there, after all?

It's not the lowest price that bothers me; it's the lowest possible performance- the sometimes over hyped home entertainment solutions. I don't enjoy many of the aspects currently being triumphed in our sector today. Music in the home is where it's at; we just have to help people connect with that in a qualitative way. There is nothing wrong with having the ability to listen to the news while you are in the bath or watch Terminator 2 twice as loud as anyone would wish, but let's just keep it in perspective. It's not rocket science. Naim is wonderfully successful right now - we are delivering some of the finest music making hi-fi on the planet. Our retailers are among the best in the world and whether it's our entry level or high end; our customers buy our products because of the performance they bring!



light fantastic

There's no denying what an amazing feat of engineering ELP's LT-2XRC laser turntable is, but how does it compare to other 'esoterically priced' analogue and digital disc spinners? In the first of a two part review, David Price takes up the story...

Despite having been into hi-fi for nearly thirty years now, I still find it hard to think of something as fascinating as ELP's laser turntable. Indeed, strangely perhaps, to me it seems even more wondrous than CD did some twenty years back, if for no other reason than it achieves what so many had thought impossible - tracking an analogue record groove with a laser pickup. CD, lest we forget, was designed expressly for light beams whereas vinyl was not!

Still, the surprise and delight of this laser turntable might be tempered somewhat by its apparent lack of 'newness'. After all, I can recall reading news items on this very machine as far back as the late eighties. Although apparently a chimera, people did say that it

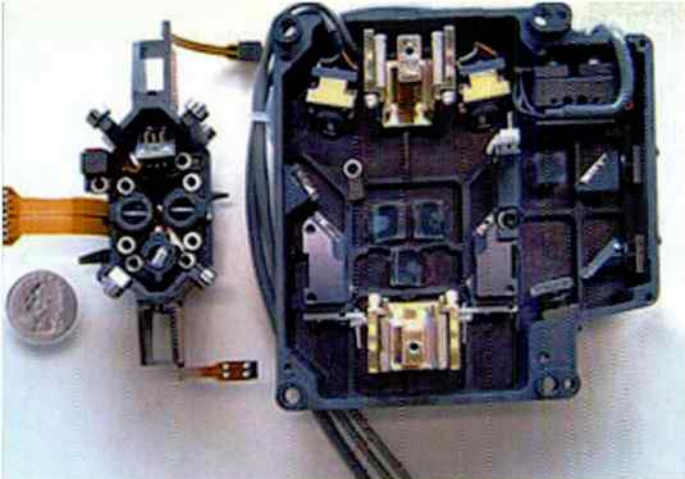
existed and indeed worked. Well, it's true that this design has been around for a while, but it's only recently that the machine has been truly debugged - making it a practical domestic proposition. (Even now, as you'll discover, it's hardly from the CD school of user-friendliness...)

In truth, the ELP machine you see here is the result of a long and tortuous development path, one that saw it move from Stanford University in the United States to Saitama in Japan. Originally the brainchild of Stanford graduate student Robert E. Stoddard, it became the first product of Finial Technology (the company he set up upon leaving). The first working turntable was completed in the late 1980s, although wasn't said to be of 'usable audio quality' due to the severe problems it experienced with surface noise. Eventually,

Stoddard and his team joined Sanju Chiba at ELP Corporation in Japan, which picked up the not inconsiderable tab for productionising the design a proper - about \$20 million, reputedly.

The machine has been in full production in Japan since 1997, with 1,000 units sold, mainly to broadcast studios and record libraries. ELP has relied on direct sales from its website, but for a specialist product like this, it's surely necessary to have a UK distributor - which is where Laser Vinyl Ltd. come in. The company is able to supply UK customers, set it up in the home and handle spares and servicing requirements, as well as give specialist advice on its many small 'characteristics' that make direct online distribution such a pain.

Okay, so it's here and working.



the bright stuff: that unique five beam laser pickup in all its glory...

But for what? Why would anyone want a laser turntable, especially when you consider that its £12,000 retail price would buy a mighty fine conventional 'AD' (that's Japan-speak for 'Analogue Disc') player... or indeed arguably the very best digital one, come to that?

Well, there are three possible explanations. One, you have too much money and not enough novel things on which to spend it. Two, you want the convenience that this fully automatic, remote controlled, drawer loading affords - and can't be bothered to seek out a secondhand Technics SL15. Third, you object to the idea of a lump of coal ploughing through your precious record grooves, and want the infinite life and/or the (theoretically) superior sound that a laser diode pickup gives.

Well, if it's the first reason, then there are few better things to 'amaze your friends and neighbours' - this is the audio equivalent to having an Aston Martin Vanquish V12 parked on your drive. If it's the second, then you must be mightily flush to countenance buying this - you could

“this is the audio equivalent to having an Aston Martin Vanquish V12 parked on your drive”.

buy a Musical Fidelity TriVista SACD and replace (or burn to CD) your entire LP collection for half the cost of this. As for the third, well there's mileage in this one. With no physical contact with the record, the turntable claims zero record wear, no rumble or background noise of any kind, no cartridge induced resonances or frequency response anomalies, perfect channel separation, zero tracking errors, no inner groove distortion and no skating or jumping! The laser diode

also typically lasts 10,000 hours of playback, rather than the 500 hours recommended for a diamond stylus

GETTING GOING

The ELP does require some setting up, and that might at first sound daunting because we're in completely new territory here. However, compared to the palaver of getting a conventional turntable/arm/cartridge combination going, this is nothing. Simply remove it from its box, loosen the transit screw from the underside, switch on, load the calibration disc and watch it auto-calibrate - at this point, the laser pickup goes looking for the physical position of the start and end of the LP record.

This done, the display confirms that it's ready to go, and you can remove the set up disc and feed the deck with a music disc. The unit plugs into any conventional MM phono input, with no need for a ground wire.

Once operating, the Laser Turntable works much like a CD player, with play, pause and stop controls. You can skip from track to track, fast-scan backward or forward and pause, either by the front panel controls or by the supplied remote control. The left front panel display

LASER WARS

At £12,000, the only obvious rival to the ELP laser turntable is the Linn Sondek - CD player! So how does the LT-2XRC compare to the CD12? Well, the fascinating thing is that, the better digital audio gets, the more 'analogue-like' it sounds, and the better LP gets, the more it takes on the strengths of digital - in short, the two paths begin to converge. Here, we have two identically priced laser disc players, one is all digital, the other all analogue - and yes, they do sound spookily similar in some respects. The CD12 is quite warm and expansive in the bass, whereas the LT is a tad crisper and yes, tighter - with a little less weight but greater dynamic articulation. Midband is more dimensional with the LT, but the CD12 sounds more immediate, engaging and upfront, just like the Michell reference turntable in fact. There's a tad more detail and space from the LT, but the CD12 is more musical. Still, the upper midband of the LT romps away, as this 16/44 PCM's traditional weak point, and where vinyl shines. Vocals have a wonderfully seamless and organic quality, whereas with the CD12 they're close but no cigar. In the treble, the

Linn is actually warmer and sweeter, the ELP sounding more spacious and atmospheric but with a rather matter-of-fact tonality. Overall, it's a dead heat - both are seminal bits of kit, with redoubtable engineering and remarkable build quality. If I were forced to choose, I'd have to give it a heck of a lot of thought...

TRACKING

As a rule, the laser turntable tracks records very well, providing they're clean, but there is provision for a good deal of tweaking should you experience problems with specific discs. Obviously, this is fiddly with casual listening, and is designed more for archiving/transcription use. The Variable Scanner Offset moves the laser beams that read the audio from the normal position (10 microns below the shoulder) to the top part of the groove that was not touched by the stylus (but which is more susceptible to surface scratches; 5 microns). Its transport is also programmed to play eccentric records, where the spindle hole is off-centre. In some cases, says the manufacturer, the mech will even play warped or rippled records (with up to 5mm deviation).

shows the record profile (a graphical 'map' of the LP surface, including the lead-in groove, where it thinks each track begins and the run-out groove), while the right one shows speed, programming, elapsed (or remaining) time. On the front panel, there are also controls to fine-tune the laser to troublesome discs [see TRACKING], and a noise blanker option to help reduce clicks and pops in real time, as you listen.

No serious listening is possible on the LT-2XRC without first ensuring that the record to be played is as clean as possible, which is why its UK importers Laser Vinyl Ltd. are bundling a record cleaning machine. To be brutally frank, how ever amazing the whiz-bang laser tracking system is, it doesn't produce surfaces as quiet as a conventional high end turntable/ arm/ cartridge combination. It's far more sensitive, and so without first ensuring that



your discs are spotlessly clean and then stored in a high quality inner (such as Goldring's Exstatic, or suchlike), then you'll find the noise of used LPs intrusive. However, once you've got your 'vinyl hygiene' routine sorted, you'll no longer find it cause for concern.

SOUND QUALITY

Hearing an analogue vinyl disc being played by a laser isn't something that

you do every day, so I was delighted to be given the chance. Still, I'd expected to be disappointed - after all, conventional LP replay equipment has now been available for nearly sixty years, and they've got it pretty right! In the end, I wasn't in the least

noticed a considerably different presentation to my reference deck - one that in many ways was significantly superior. First, the soundstage was brilliantly constructed. Left to right, and indeed front to back, image location was as good as I've ever

THE LASER PICKUP

The laser pickup head is linear tracking; the reader is always positioned orthogonal to the groove to replicate the exact tracking of the record cutter, eliminating inner-groove distortion, common with conventional tone arm tangency error. The pickup itself uses five laser beams - two tracking beams (for left and right channels), two groove reading beams (ditto) and a fifth to track the surface of the record and keep the pickup at a constant height, which allows for record thickness and any warping. The groove beams focus very slightly above the level a physical stylus will have travelled, and slightly below the typical depth of surface scratches. Because the incident area of the laser beam on the groove is only a fourth the contact area of the best stereo stylus (and twenty-six times smaller than a mono needle), this works very well as a rule, but the system struggles when the record isn't opaque or is pressed from coloured or transparent vinyl.

bit underwhelmed - in fact, it was thrilling.

The listening started with the disc that was sitting on my reference Michell GyroDec, right next to where we'd located the laser turntable. The contrast between Rush's 'Red Barchetta' through the Gyro and the LT-2XRC was striking. Somewhat ignominiously, we first had to use my Michell as a platform with which to clean the disc (with my Goldring carbon fibre brush) as cleaning is impossible inside the laser turntable, thanks to its CD-style drawer loading mechanism. So, after we'd turned the poor Gyro into a kind of post-modern Keith Monks machine, popped 'Moving Pictures' in the tray, pressed Play and selected the track (all by remote control, from the comfort of my sofa, I might

heard it. It had the precision of the best CD, but with oodles of extra scale and space. Geddy Lee's vocals were placed with geometric precision within the acoustic. The next most arresting aspect of the sound was the temporal accuracy. Although the LT is a belt drive, the lack of dynamic wow (where stylus drag creates minute speed fluctuations, especially on the loud, heavily modulated passages) was manifest. The result was the first belt drive that betters the best idler or direct drive for bass speed and articulation.

The DC powered Gyro is no slouch in conveying the attack of a struck bass drum, but the LT was a revelation, with breathtaking speed and clarity. Rather than bass guitar notes softly slurring into one another, you could easily discern the

"the contrast between the Michell GyroDec/ SME/ Koetsu and the EL LT-2XRC laser turntable was striking..."

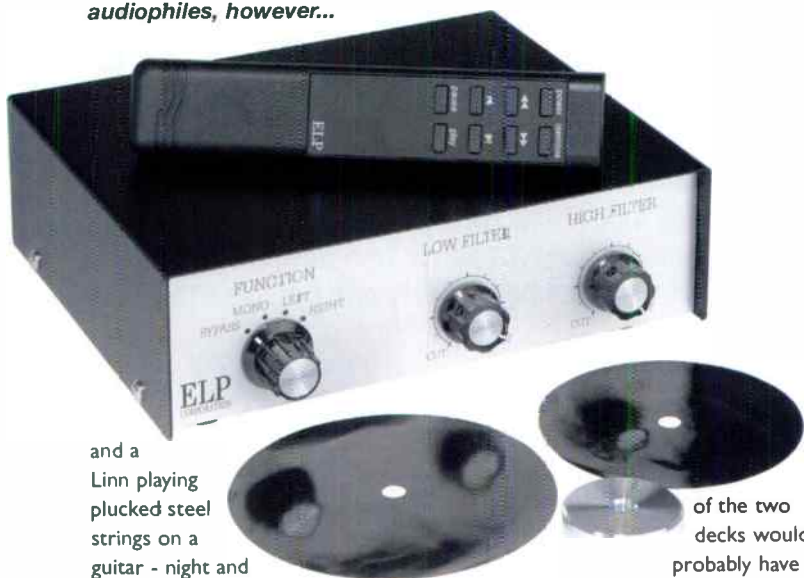
add), I waited for that opening thwack of Neil Peart's snare drums...

From the very first few bars, I

individual strings being plucked or hit. Next to amaze was Rush's 'The Camera Eye', where the tambourine sound was quite unlike anything I've heard on either LP or CD before. While CD's resolution isn't up to describing all those delicate harmonics chiming away so intricately together, no turntable I've heard has had the speed stability. The LT, however, caught the instrument in its entirety - shimmering and jangling away just like the real thing. The best analogy I can make is the difference between an eighties Roksan Xerxes



this, the top ELP laser turntable comes with an additional music recovery module (below left, below), designed to electronically remove noise. It's more for archivists and record libraries than audiophiles, however...



and a Linn playing plucked steel strings on a guitar - night and day!

of the two decks would probably have

Midband was also superb too, although here it was merely different - rather than superior - to my reference deck (and improvised record cleaner). In isolation, the LT's brilliant soundstaging and depth perspective, allied to superb clarity and detailing are disarming, but when I switched back to the Gyro, I found that the latter was giving a more immediate and gripping presentation. Step back to the LT and it's like you're moving back from the stalls to the circle. This makes for a more panoramic viewpoint, where you can discern a little more detail (because you're out of the fray), but obversely, you do find it a more cerebral and dispassionate experience.

The Crusaders' 'Street Life' again proved the LT's mettle one of the tightest, tautest, most accurate and 'architectural' turntables yet made. Again, its midband amazed with one of the cleanest and most neutral renditions of Randy Crawford's voice I've heard. Just like the very best digital [see LASER WARS], it is supremely matter-of-fact, as if to say 'there's her voice in all its glory'. The Michell/SME/Koetsu combination was more 'romantic' by comparison, more obviously coloured (sepia-tinged) and emotive (ironic, considering there's an SME tonearm involved!). You could suddenly 'hear' what that imperfect, compromised arm/cartridge combination was inflicting on the sound - but switching back to the LT, and you could also hear what that amazing laser pickup was - or wasn't - doing. What the LT was missing was a soul.

Interestingly, if this comparison had been made with Ortofon's excellent Kontrapunkt C, the sound

been noticeably more similar. The Ortofon is a stunning tracker (better than the Koetsu) but has a more analytical and dispassionate nature, which is far closer to the laser turntable. The LT-2XRC is all about forensic analysis of what's on the disc, which ironically puts it much closer in temperament to a digital disc player. The ultra high resolution of the LP record gives it the edge - in some respects - over the best CD can muster, but it definitely has a similar mechanical precision. Let's say it plays music like a Swiss watch - or a very expensive Japanese one!

If the LT's bass is the whole nine yards better than the reference Gyro, its midband a tad more expansive and accurately rendered (if a little less emotionally articulate), then the only real disappointment is its treble. Of course, everything I've said about its accuracy of timing holds, so hi-hats, tambourines and triangles (for example) have a startling 'ting' to them that I've never before heard. Yet this deck lacks the air, space and sweetness of the Koetsu-led conventional combo - it's not as gloriously colourful and feels just a touch too workmanlike. In fact, the LT doesn't have tremendous tonal palette of the GyroDec - this is one of the Michell's redoubtable strengths. While its timing isn't as impeccable (although still superb), the Gyro has a more vividly coloured window on the world. Voices, instruments and

acoustics have a certain lushness, whereas the LT is less flavourful.

Which is better? Well, as I said, they're different. The ELP LT-2XRC takes vinyl in the right direction, away from colouration, muddle, imprecision - and towards scale, depth, precision, stability, neutrality; to show just what tremendous resolution is possible from this nineteen fifties format. It makes the best conventional deck sound obviously compromised, from the very second you first set ears on it. It's a brilliant, compelling listen. Yet it simply doesn't have the ability to emote, to sing, like the best conventional decks - nor any of their euphonic colouration which some of us still rather wish to hang on to. So it's not a knockout verdict - hi-fi, and analogue especially, is absolutely never simple!

Is it worth it? Yes, I'd say so. But simply in the sense that if you're rich and committed enough to contemplate spending £12,000 on a turntable such as this, you'll not be disappointed. The trouble is, almost comparable results (with a few weak points, and a few bonuses) can be had from the best conventional deck at around one third of the price. Maybe the 'value' question doesn't really enter into it though, as this is one of the most resoundingly clever technological feats in hi-fi. Quad ESL-57, Philips CD100, Nakamichi Dragon, ELP LT-2XRC...

NEXT MONTH: THE TECHNOLOGY

VERDICT ●●●●●

Nothing less than a seminal technological and manufacturing achievement.

ELP LT-2XRC £10,500

Laser Vinyl Ltd.
www.laser-vinyl.com
www.laserturntable.com

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Michell GyroDec/ SME Series IV/ Koetsu Red turntable
- World Audio KLP-P1 tube phono preamplifier
- World Audio K5881 (modified) tube power amplifier
- Quad ESL-989 loudspeakers
- Townshend Maximum Supertweeters

HISTORY

- 1972 BSR of the UK establishes BSR Japan.
- 1988 BSR Japan changes its name to CTI Japan
- 1989 CTI Japan acquires rights from Finial company of the US
- 1991 Announcement first models: LT-1L (US \$20,000), LT-1X (US \$30,000)
- 1997 ELP changes name to WEL Corporation, establishes ELP Corporation
- 2003 new model range launched

SPECIFICATIONS (QUOTED)

Frequency response:	20Hz - 25kHz
Channel Separation:	>25 dB (20 ~ 20,000Hz, DIN 45 543 Test Record)
Output:	4.3mVrms 5cm/s 1kHz Lateral 9.7mVrms 8cm/s 1kHz 45° Left or Right modulation 11.3cm/s 1kHz Lateral
Distortion:	<0.5% DIN45 543 1kHz Ref. Level
S/N Ratio:	>55dB (Weighted) Ref. Level
Wow & Flutter:	<0.07% WRMS
Speeds:	30 ~ 50rpm: 0.1rpm steps 60 ~ 90rpm: 0.2rpm steps
Record sizes:	7", 8", 9", 10", 11", 12"
Size:	470x480x170mm
Weight:	19kg

poorer sounds

As recently as five years ago, DVD was an expensive and glamorous pursuit. Now though, prices have plunged, and as one of the format's greatest exponents, Denon has found buyers chasing ever cheaper products. The new £129 DVD-1710 is its response, but how does it figure in the great scheme of DVD things, and what exactly do you lose when you opt for such a modest machine? Patrick Cleasby put it against Denon's very own flagship £1,600 DVD-A11 to find out...

Here we have two Denon machines from either extreme of the company's range. My mission - which I chose to accept - was to find out how much commonality, and how much difference there is in design, functionality and performance terms.

On first taking the brand new DVD-1710 out of the box, it becomes immediately apparent how Denon has been able to release such a ridiculously cheap (sorry, I mean 'affordable') DVD player. This is not, after all, a brand we expect to see competing with those frightful 'petrol station forecourt machines' - but the company has obviously taken the view that it has to, as that's where most of the sales are. Compared to the vast bulk of its biggest brother, which costs over ten times as much, the unit is as light as feather - you can waft it around in one hand. Try that with the DVD-A11 and you'd snap your wrist off...

The case is made of lightweight metal, and the slimline fascia (75mm high) from moulded plastic. However we are not in Big W DVD player territory quite yet. The styling and colouring (silver or black are available) is ever so slightly reminiscent of the posher end of the family, and build quality seems decent enough compared to 'supermarket specials'. However the cheapness of the finish does mean the 1710 lacks the desirability factor common to so much Denon kit. The quality of the DVD-A11 solidity, build and finish is

really in a completely different league, as you'd expect!

The main selling point of the DVD-1710 is its videophile performance. It fairly boggles my mind that we are now seeing PAL progressive capable devices at this price point. Hardly six years ago you would buy a DVD player with a fraction of the facilities of this player for four times the price. But the targeting of this machine towards the video market means that Denon has not tried to extend universal player capabilities this far down the range. The now ubiquitous MP3/WMA/JPG on a writeable or rewriteable disc option is accommodated however. Connections are standard and basic; single RGB Scart, S-video, Composite, analogue stereo out, and S/PDIF on either coaxial or optical connections. Only the component out has the slightest whiff of the exotic, and even that is now becoming common on poverty spec machines.

One of the most amusing points of comparison between these players is the remarkable similarity between the remote units. Both are white buttons on black, laid out simply, with the only real difference being the additional Universal player-related functionality for the DVD-A11. In fact on pure physical form I probably prefer the control for the cheaper player! The loading tray and drawer mechanism are of satisfactory quality too. The simple LED display is pleasingly basic - like going back to primitive CD players of many moons

ago. On-screen displays are attractively presented and reasonably comprehensive. Switching audio tracks is achieved with ease.

Once the machine was set up, a quick perusal of the menus revealed setup to be very simple and intuitive indeed - the simple four tabs of options aping the similar presentation of the DVD-A11's menus, without all the complexities of multichannel digital connection options to surmount. Thankfully the box is shipped with the dynamic range control option set to off. The menu background is a bit tacky though - the Denon logo is to be found in the centre of a tastefully muted violet screen, but surrounded by the signifiers "Sports", "Romance", "Fantasy" et cetera in horribly cheap-looking fonts.

PERFORMANCE

My aim was to get video performance comparisons out of the way, (this is a hi-fi magazine after all), and then concentrate on working through the possible music playback audio options. As per usual my slightly dated TV setup only allowed me to test up to RGB Scart quality level, but on a 37" CRT TV this was sufficient to reveal a remarkably refined image quality at the price, although certainly not as breathtaking as when I first cast my eyes on the pictures output from the DVD-A11.

I tested using the same 'David Gilmour at the RFH' footage which blew me away on the A11. Colour is



rendered slightly less vividly, and there is a lower level of clarity and detail, but overall performance is so much more than adequate just the same. This is the benefit of 12bit 54MHz video DACs, but they just can't beat the massed converters working at four times the sampling rate in the DVD-A11...

Denon claims that the use of technology from higher up the range means that audio playback from both CD and DVD should be better than that achieved by budget machines with less hi-fi breeding. However a spin on the 1710 of 'Waiting For The Miracle' from Leonard Cohen's 'The Future' reveals the characteristic flat sound of CD playback on a DVD machine, palpably lacking the detailed imaging and the extension to Cohen's basso profundo vocal which the DVD-A11 is capable of supplying. Through its own analogue outputs, the magic of this sinuous song is lost on the budget player, it is simply nowhere near as musical. Of course, you'd not expect it to be - and I have to say that it was still an order of magnitude better than the 'off the back of a lorry' no-name brand Chinese cheapos.

It is rarely trumpeted that the DVD-Video specification allows for 24/96 audio, but with its 24/192 audio DACs and the ability to output S/PDIF at 24/96 (although downsampling to 48kHz is performed if copyright control is detected, and you can also force output to 48kHz if you need to in the audio set up menu), this is the best chance the 1710 is going to get to match the DVD-Audio quality performance of the 'A11.

The problem is that there is not a huge amount of test material. Mr. Gilmour weighs in with 24/48 LPCM on DVD-Video, and after that it is a matter of finding DVD-Audios with video segments bearing 24/96 stereo tracks. If in doubt, fall back on 'A Night At The Opera', or resort to making some of your own! Gilmour's acoustic intro to 'Shine On...' exhibits a rich and lifelike tone on the DVD-A11 that exposes the relative thinness of the 1710's sound in comparison. The same realism deficit is apparent in the piano sound on 'Love of My Life' from the Queen classic.

Once we move into auditioning DVD-Audio discs the comparison becomes even more unfair - full bitrate Dolby Digital 5.1 can sound OK on surround music discs, but when you have the ability to compare it to the MLP version of the same mix on the real reason why



lossy compression systems can never match lossless becomes apparent. Once again acoustic guitars are the key, as the enveloping parts on the title track of Dar Williams' 'The Beauty Of The Rain' DVD-Audio become brittle sounding and their placement less convincing in their Dolby guise.

DTS is becoming more and more prevalent on both movie and music DVD-Videos, but the best test is always studio surround mixes. A spin of the delicate 'Heart Attack in a Layby' from the trusty Porcupine Tree DVD-Audio disc reveals the 1710 to be highly capable of producing a tonal quality and a surround field which is much closer to the MLP version. DTS also proves very effective on film material such as Lord Of The Rings. However this is as much to do with the superiority of DTS to Dolby Digital as anything else.

Of course there is no possibility of playing an SACD on the 1710 as anything other than a CD, so if that is a requirement you will need to look higher up the range for a universal player. In trying to assess the worth or otherwise of spending that extra grand and a half for the DVD-A11 it is impossible to ignore the fact that very few potential purchasers would be interested in it purely as a DVD player. Most will be specifically interested in its ability to play both varieties of lossless high-resolution surround with equal aplomb.

While I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the DVD-1710 to those after decent audio performance on a tight budget in a video application, the lack of any significant volume of 24 bit material for such players means that 24 bit playback is reduced to an occasional party trick. Even on this most level playing field of DVD-Video 24 bit playback

the A11's realism far exceeds the 1710's. Ultimately CD playback decides it - there is still a place for high-end Universal players, if not for listening to the new surround formats at least to try and crack that eternal problem - how to obtain more than semi-decent CD sound from a DVD-video machine. Despite claims to the contrary Denon have not yet got there at budget level.

CONCLUSION

As you'd expect, the DVD-1710 is no 'magic button' to high end audio-video performance at a fraction of the price. There's a vast, swingeing difference between it and the £1,600 DVD-A11 in so many ways. However, in the context of its own place in the market, the 1710 is no less accomplished than the mighty A11 in its. Performance is superb relative to price rivals, and its video and surround sound abilities are redoubtable. Given the choice of spending £75 for a supermarket special and £130 for this, it's a complete no-brainer...

VERDICT ●●●●£

No shortcut to the high end, but its video and (to a lesser extent) audio performance are superb considering the bargain-basement price. An essential alternative to cheap supermarket DVD players.

DENON DVD-1710 £129.95
DENON
 ☎ +44 (0)1234 741 200
 www.denon.co.uk

REFERENCE SYSTEM
 Denon DVD-A11 DVD player
 Denon AVC-A1SRA AV receiver
 Monitor Audio GR2 & GR Centre loudspeakers

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Denon DVD-1710 has a distinctive frequency response our analysis shows, where below 500Hz there's a plateau low frequency lift of around +0.2dB. Together with a small amount of treble roll down the player will likely sound quite full bodied and smooth in contrast to others. Distortion levels were low as CD goes, if not up with the best, the EIAJ dynamic range value of 108dB reflecting this. Top players manage 111dB or thereabouts, mainly due to lower quantisation noise levels in the midband.

There was some random (non signal related) jitter on the output, peaking at around 2.6nS, but with budget players this is to be expected. Denon's more expensive machines are jitter free. Output was normal at 2.1V.

The DVD-1710 is a neat little DVD video player (no DVD Audio) that works well enough with CD, providing a tidy set of test results. NK

Frequency response	4Hz - 20.8kHz
Distortion (CD)	
0dB	0.003
-6dB	0.0018
-60dB	0.33
-80dB	4.0

Separation	left	right
1kHz	46	47
20kHz	46	47
Noise (IEC A)	-117dB	
Dynamic range	108dB	
Output	2.1V	

smooth operator



Relative newcomer Myryad already boasts an impressive portfolio. The new £1,100 MXI2800 is the latest addition to its flagship amplifier range...

For a company that was only started in 1995, Myryad has come a long way. There's now three ranges of products, each containing a selection of amplifiers, CD and DVD players and tuners. Top of the tree is the MX-range and it's the smaller integrated, the MXI2080, which we focus on here.

At first glance the 9mm aluminium front panel looks good, and is nicely offset by a flush volume control and blue display. Take a closer look, though, and there are a few annoying flaws with the finish. The front panel may look smart and curvaceous, but its corners are sharp. Secondly, where the lid folds around the back of the amp, it leaves two gaps in each corner. Finally, there are a number of exposed screw heads and bolts on the under carriage, which could easily catch unwary fingers. This may sound petty, but when rivals such as the Naim Nait 5i [see RIVALS] can do better for £400 less, then there really is no excuse...

The highly flexible menu system gives the user the option to set the balance, kill the display, relabel the source settings and even adjust the input level for each of the line-inputs! I was less keen on the 'digital' volume level though, which appeared to have very little effect between -80dB and -35dB. It does at least have a memory setting below -20dB and a reset position above that, thus avoiding unintentional initial volume

bursts. Connectivity is superb - as well as five inputs and two tape loops, there is an additional 'direct input'. Sources can't be recorded from this, but it should give marginally superior sound quality to the other line inputs.

Inside, the MXI2080 follows the fashionable route of a dual-mono configuration for the power amp' stage. The twin boards are fed by a meaty toroidal power supply, and each feature a duo of 6800uf capacitors. The preamp section benefits not only from its own board, but also its own mini-toroidal PSU. Rather unusually, there is no internal contact between the pre and power amp' sections. To link them together, you use the supplied cables at the rear, external, face. The preamp has its own outputs and, last but not least, there are bi-amp' outs. If you decide to take the later route, then a matching MXA2080 power amp' is available for £800.

SOUND QUALITY

With my CD player plugged into the direct input, I began by listening to The Divine Comedy's 'Come Home Billy Bird'. The MXI2080 tackled the piece with great dexterity and a real sense of balance and flow. Detail retrieval and separation were both above average, and there was fine texture given to individual instruments. Bass levels were good, but not the most thunderous. Indeed, even something like a NAD C370 or Marantz PM7200K1 would eclipse the

Myryad here. In itself, that wouldn't be so much of a problem, but the soft bass response also led to rather slow timing. In short, it meant the music didn't quite have the pace or excitement it deserved. Instead, it had excellent refinement and a particularly cohesive presentation.

With Dr John's 'Marie Lavear' there was a similar emphasis on refinement. Vocals were particularly smooth, with no trace of excessive sibilance. Indeed, such was the beguiling nature of the mid-range, that one could easily have believed this to be a Class-A amplifier. The rest of the performance, though, wasn't quite up to par. Bass had fair weight and body, but was again too soft. Once more, this slowed the timing, and made the song less involving than it should have been. This, after the previous performance, I had expected, but the somewhat imprecise sound staging was more of a surprise. The Myryad seemed to have a problem holding Dr John's vocal dead centre although, as I hadn't heard this before, I'm prepared to put this one down as a recording issue.

If anything, the MXI2080 was simply too refined with Sheryl Crow's cover version of 'Sweet Child Of Mine'. Crow's vocals sounded sweet, but too syrupy and rounded to be truly believable. The staging issues with Dr John must have been a one off, as the amp' had no such problems here. Indeed, one of its strengths was to layer and position



instruments with ease and clarity. That having been said, the percussion needed more bite and attack, no matter how detailed it was. Similarly, the violin could have used a little more verve. I would have happily swapped some of its sweet timbre for a more earthy, resonant sound. Over all, the song was nicely detailed and well integrated, but the lack of attack and bite made it sound strangely soulless.

A pattern seemed to be emerging here, showing that the Myryad was less happy with pacey or dynamic pieces. 'Seven Nation Army' by the White Stripes pressed the point home. It was good to hear all the recording detail within the piece, but the balance was too polite. The guitar had a fine sense of resonant detail, but sat too far back within the mix. It needed to be pushed further forward in the mix and have a sharper, Naim-like, drive for it to be truly convincing. Equally, the drums lacked a sense of snap and the cymbals really didn't have quite enough bite. Of course, although this may all sound rather negative, you may well have a personal preference for this type of sound. I could certainly see it suiting the more "forward" sounding 'speakers particularly well. Yet with an already smooth system, I would find the sound bland.

So, the MXI2080 is no rocker, but how does it fare on classical? Vaughan Williams' English Folk Song Suite, made for a superior synergy between amp and music. The piece ebbed and flowed just as it should in the best English pastoral tradition. Subtle detail was delivered faithfully, and the triangle sounded absolutely crystalline. Yet, even here, there occasionally appeared to be a lack of dynamic headroom. The sound failed to soar, when it was obliged to, and it felt as though the scale of sound was somewhat compressed. If you could focus upon an instrument as the cause of this, then I would put it

down mostly to the timpani drum, which simply sounded too softly portrayed.

CONCLUSION

The Myryad MXI2080 isn't going to suit everyone. Where it is undeniably at the front of the field is in its connectivity. I can think of few stereo amps, at any price, that can better the Myryad here. In other areas though, the MXI2080 is less assured. Whilst it looks good and is generally well finished, there are a few annoying flaws that really shouldn't be there on an amp of this price.

The casing and standby switch, in particular, need attention. Sound is good but not universally so. Refinement and detail retrieval are strong points. If you enjoy a smooth sound, or have bright sounding ancillaries, then the MXI2080 is well worth an audition. Others will, however, find that the sense of refinement is taken just too far, and results in an overly polite sound that lacks drive and pace. It is of course dependant on music choice, but the Myryad's beguiling mid-range isn't always enough. A good amplifier then, but given the price, it wouldn't quite be my first port of call.

YESTERDAY ONCE MORE

Interestingly, Myryad's MXI2080 is related to Arcam's late, great A60 integrated amplifier (see p50) in two ways. First, the 2080 retains all the core values of the classic amplifier - lest we forget, the A60 pretty much defined the concept of a high fidelity, do-it-all mid price integrated amplifier with built-in upgradeability all those years back in 1976. This should come as no surprise perhaps, because - secondly - the man behind the A60 is the man behind Myryad. The company's Technical Director Chris Evans was an original founder-director of A&R Cambridge (nee Arcam), and subsequently went on to NAB. Myryad Systems Limited launched in 1996, with design, administrative and manufacturing facilities in Waterlooville in Hampshire. Although not the biggest name in the UK, it exports some 50% of its production to customers in 40 countries.

THE RIVALS

These fall into two categories: the all-rounder integrated elite and the oddities. From the first camp come the Arcam FMJ32 (£1,150) and the Roksan Caspian M-Series (£1,000). Both amplifiers offer a similar blend of features and power to the MXI2080 and, as such, are natural rivals. In my opinion, though, both prove to be that bit more consistent with a wider variety of music. They are also both better finished. More unusual, but still competitive, choices would be Sugden's A21a (£1,020), the PrimaLuna ProLogue One valve amp (£800), and the ever ready Naim Nait 5i (£700). The Sugden is the closet sonic match here, but manages to do the whole Class-A thing just that bit more convincingly. The Naim on the other hand shows how music can be delivered with vigour without sacrificing ultimate refinement. It also costs £400 less...

VERDICT ●●●●● £

Smooth, refined and detailed sound, let down by a lack of drive and pace. Finish spoils an otherwise pretty design.

MYRYAD MXI2080 £1,100

MYRYAD

☎ (+44) 0123 9226 5506

www.myryad.co.uk

- FOR**
- Refined sound quality
 - Superb connectivity
 - Handsome styling

- AGAINST**
- Lacks pace
 - Finish flaws
 - Patchy ergonomics



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The MXI 2080 delivered 30W into 8ohms and clipped cleanly, but output voltage swung into 4ohms full. Limiting power to 132W, a little less than expected. All the same, the 2080 looked very competent even into this load, clipping cleanly.

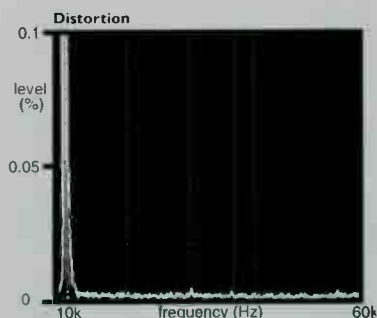
Frequency response measured flat within 1dB from 4Hz up to 71kHz, so high resolution data from SACD and DVD-A will be handled properly. The volume control introduced did not look very clean or elegant when measuring noise and gain initially would jump up when turning down, a not uncommon problem. At 330mV sensitivity was adequately high for most sources, including older tuners and cassette decks.

Distortion levels were very low at all frequencies and power outputs, a worst case figure of 0.006% being recorded when delivering near full output at 10kHz.

The MXI 2080 measures well,

although its volume control action was a bit less than perfect. Otherwise it turns in a good set of results. **NRK**

Power	30watts
CD/turner/aux	
Frequency response	4Hz-71kHz
Separation	80dB
Noise	-91dB
Distortion	0.006%
Sensitivity	330mV
dc offset	0.3/2.5mV



sixty, something

Regular readers will know of our undying love for NAD's 3020, but there's something that exceeds even this in our classic integrated amplifier estimation - meet the father of the modern British black box (and distant cousin of Myryad's MXI2080 reviewed in this issue), the A&R Cambridge A60...

Back in the mid seventies, the UK hi-fi market was a very different thing. At the affordable end of the market, names like Pioneer, Sony, JVC, Hitachi and Wharfedale ruled the hi-fi showroom shelves, whereas further up, KEF, Quad, Tannoy and Celestion prevailed. The likes of Linn and Naim had yet to enter the lexicon - even at the high end, Japanese manufacturers were thriving; that country's audio industry beginning its 'harvest years' of international audio supremacy. In the shadow of all this, small UK specialists (sound familiar?) such as Lecson, Nytech and A&R Cambridge were knocking on the outside looking in...

It was indeed a competitive market in which to launch a new product, but the brand new Amplification and Recording Company (Cambridge) Ltd., felt it had something special. The story had begun in John Dawson's room at Trinity College Cambridge back in 1971. With his friend Brian Whitnall,

John began making amplifier modules for friends. When classical guitarist John Williams visited the town to play Rodrigo's Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra, he needed reliable live amplification which sounded great. John duly obliged. Brian subsequently moved away, but John subsequently bumped into one Chris Evans at a Tape Recording Society meeting. In 1975 the two friends

of the best British competition and was built as well as any of the Japanese rivals. Indeed, in a world where a number of UK designed niche products (names withheld to protect the guilty) were prone to spontaneously self-combust more easily than a Spinal Tap drummer, its unique sales point was that superlative construction quality, giving the copper-bottomed reliability for

“the A&R Cambridge A60 trod an unusually sensible path...”

decided to make a hi-fi amplifier together, and in September 1976 the £140 A&R A60 was born.

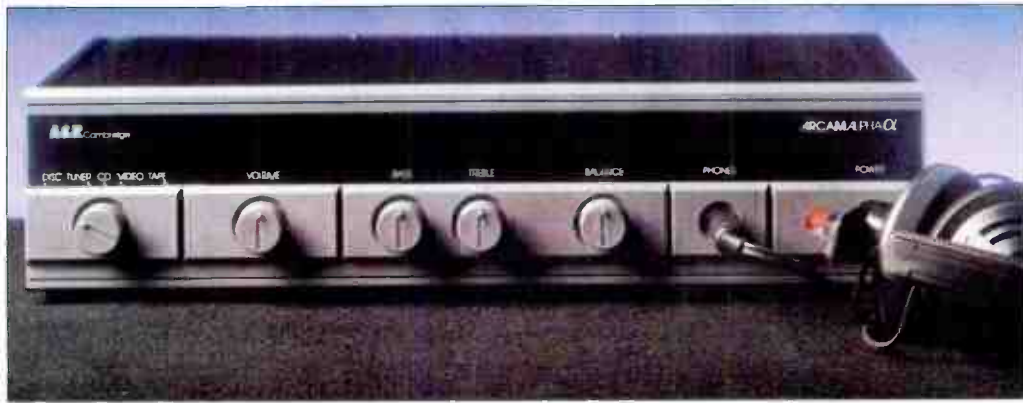
SUCCESS!

The company became limited in February 1977, when they'd sold about 50 amplifiers. Despite its rather sober 'English' styling (remember this was the age of massive Japanese brushed aluminium monsters), its sound was the match

which Arcam would become synonymous.

Indeed, the secret of this amplifier's success was down to three things - the aforementioned sonics and reliability allied to a particularly well judged feature set. While the Japanese were fighting a war to populate every last square millimetre of their products' front panels with vast, spun aluminium knobs offering some dubious





Arcam Alpha One borrowed much from the A60, except the clumsy eighties-tastic styling!

function or another ('mic mixing', 'presence', etc.), and the new breed of Brits were going in precisely the opposite way (volume, source and err, that's it), the A&R Cambridge A60 trod an unusually sensible path - useful tone controls, balance, a high filter and a mono button.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the amplifier was a runaway success - a decade later it had sold no less than 32,000 units. This is small beer to the Japanese, but for a specialist hi-fi product, the first design from a start-up, it was astonishing. One reason for this was that every couple of years, the A60 had been discretely upgraded with, variously, minor circuit modifications, a change from DIN to RCA phono connectors, a better phono stage and beefier components. The obvious thing to do was to consolidate its success, and so the matching £190 T21 tuner soon appeared, and then the £655 C200/SA200 pre-power combination. Offering extensive facilities, 100W RMS per channel and a neat wood sleeve it was a fine amplifier, but still struggled in what was now a Naim-dominated British high end market.

Indeed, it was interesting that A&R struggled with taking the brand upmarket. Perhaps it was the fact that the A60 had become so firmly entrenched as the ultimate mid-price integrated, which made the job so difficult, as high end buyers wanted exclusivity to match superb sonics. So A&R moved into other territories, introducing a range of phono cartridges offering exactly the same magic formula as the original A60 amp. The £14.95 C77, £39.90 P77 and £69.00 P78 were A&R designed, Japanese built cartridges using interchangeable styli, making for an easy and inexpensive upgrade path. Next A&R tackled loudspeakers, and the Arcam One was born. An expensive (£299) high quality stand-mount, it featured an A&R designed, Elac-sourced 200mm Cobex mid/bass unit and an A&R

PRICES:
 Thanks to that slightly awkward styling perhaps, A&R A60s are extremely affordable these days, making them brilliant budget buys. The fine build quality and excellent manufacturer support makes them all the more convincing a purchase. Expect to pay as little as £25 for early examples with DIN sockets, up to £125 for final run-out models with black wood sleeves in mint condition and the original box and manual. Either will perform convincingly, the later versions adding a touch more detail, dynamics and bass grip. In fact, even if you're not after an amplifier at all, the A60 will work great as a budget phono stage - only the likes of a Trichord Dino (at £250) will truly better it!

modified 25mm Vifa tweeter. Although highly accomplished mid-price designs, again they failed to capture buyers' imaginations like the A60 had. So it was back to amplifiers for A&R.

Such was the A60's 'halo effect', that it gave the newly renamed

plastic fascia, something that would never be acceptable today. Still, the Alpha was one of the best at its price, so much so that it overshadowed its older brother. In 1988, it was time for the A60 to bow out, to be replaced by the altogether more swish Delta 60. Still, something

“no other amplifier ever quite caught A&R's original integrated's magic formula - with one remarkable exception...”

'Arcam' a fillip into the budget integrated market in the early eighties. Just as the A60 had had everything its own way in the sub-£250 mid-price sector, so NAD's redoubtable 3020 was cleaning up in the budget arena.

After its lukewarm success in high end amplification, Arcam decided that it too wanted a piece of high volume budget action, and the Alpha One was born. Retailing for £129, it shared much with A60 and didn't sound at all dissimilar. The obvious cost-cutting was the cheap moulded

seemed to be lacking. No other amplifier ever quite caught A&R's original integrated's magic formula - with one remarkable exception, the Audiolab 8000a, which is (as they say) another story...

SOUND QUALITY
 Although this amplifier was tweaked quite extensively over its 12 years at the top, its essential character remained - smooth and powerful yet enjoyably musical. The A60's name was supposed to allude to its rated power (2x30W RMS), although everyone who ever listened to it said it sounded louder. It was big hearted and confident, yet never coarse or abrasive in the way that its Japanese competition could be. Indeed, you could call it quintessentially English - competent, polite and refined. Bass was strong and tuneful, although it lacked the sledgehammer clout of price rivals like Pioneer's SA-7800 integrated or the grippy articulation of Naim's 42/110 pre-power. Midband was open and detailed, with just a slight 'brightly lit' quality that help it image confidently in front of the plane of the speakers. Treble was pleasantly rich, never ever descending into fatigue despite the upfront midband. It was rhythmically engaging, although never in the same class as Naim's Nait, and its useful power reserves gave it fine dynamics by class standards. Overall, it was an amplifier that could partner anything from the original Spondor BC1s to the later Linn Kans. A classy phono input - built in the days when it was assumed that this was part and parcel of the amplifier's whole performance - completed a brilliant package.

space oddity?



Conventionally box shaped but less cumbersome than most, Spendor's supremely petite S3/5se attempts to resolve the problem of sharing one's living space with a hi-fi system. Channa Vithana listens in...

The 'BBC' LS3/5a is a loudspeaker that made both friends and foes with consummate ease. Some loved its explicit midband, others hated its profoundly limited frequency extremes. These days, this classic transducer has become the stuff of legend, but the philosophy lives on. Spendor's Philip Swift (previously of Lentek and Audiolab fame) says, "the S3/5 is very popular in Asia, USA and Germany. In these markets many fans of the vintage BBC LS3/5a mini-monitor consider the new Spendor S3/5se to be a better, more enjoyable and far more capable loudspeaker - a true successor".

Indeed, it is a thoroughly modern LS3/5a; redesigned, but retaining the original cabinet dimensions of 305x165x190mm. The solid (4.7kg) cabinets are constructed from thin panels said to aid dissipation of unwanted resonances and congestion. Taking the grille off you can see attention to detail with cut-outs for the drivers being circular, not squared off. Fit and finish are neat, without rough edges, and the

drive units themselves are adroitly attached into the cabinet with refreshing use of allen bolts and screws instead of the perpetually ugly wood screws (the one aesthetic flaw in the costlier and otherwise beautiful Cremona Auditor standmount by Sonus Faber, for example).

This 'se' version claims higher specification over the standard S3/5, with selected components for improved performance. They are evolved with superior crossovers and a 19mm Scanspeak tweeter replacing the Vifa type. They handle an extra 55 watts power and are theoretically an easier drive thanks to claimed minimum impedance of 6 ohms instead of the S3/5's 4.9 ohm minimum. The rear panels have four gold-plated binding posts and the supplied bridging plates (for single wiring) are easily removed to facilitate biwiring/ biamping. Usefully, a three-page guide is supplied, devoid of hyperbole, concentrating instead on helping set-up, positioning - this is a pleasure.

SOUND QUALITY

Spendor recommends between 2-2.4m apart and away from corners with toe-in and stand height around 650mm. I preferred them 500mm clear from rear walls, used atop stands of my own design (metal plates, two 18-mm thick C/BB birch

ply layers: 650x205x258mm).

Spatiality is the S3/5se's musical highlight. Their ability to transport you with ease into the music (with everything in its right place, a clean widescreen naturalness and a sense of air around instruments) is immediately manifest. Just as with the LS3/5as, they perform that grin-inducing trick of dissolving into space, even in fairly large rooms. Suddenly, it feels like you're listening to an acoustic, as opposed to two loudspeakers fixed in particular points in your room.

The second most obvious attribute of the Spendors is the surprising bass handling ability. Their LF performance successfully straddles the fine line between exuberant and overblown. Small closed box speakers such as these are invariably considered skilfully fast, providing nice but limited bass - so I thought Kraftwerk's 'Tour De France Soundtracks' would be an intriguing experiment, with its copious quantities of low frequencies. The opening thirty seconds was deliciously flush and thoroughly sumptuous, yet decently fleet of foot too. Of course, these speakers don't go down really low, but they're surprisingly well extended considering the physical size, and quite fast and pacy too.

Treble is generally very couth and smooth, if a little shut-in (a la the original LS3/5a), but I did initially experience some problems. AC/DC's remastered 'Back In Black' was rather good until it came to the lead guitar, which displayed annoying shrillness. Frustrated at this well produced slice of classic rock not sounding complete, I experimented by replacing the supplied Spendor bridging plates with equal pairings of



DESIGN MATTERS

Channa Vithana talks to Sendor's Philip Swift

CV: The cabinet is thin walled and heavily damped, what dimensions, material are used?

PS: The side, top and bottom panels are 9-mm MDF with thick 6-mm bitumen damping panels.

What damping material are used inside?

A special low reflectivity acoustic grade foam. It is a soft polyether based material.

What is the tweeter chamfered opening?

The chamfered opening around the tweeter dome is a critical part of the acoustic design, it has a major effect on the on-off axis frequency response of the tweeter, variations of a fraction of a mm would affect the technical performance and sound.

The tweeter is described as a Sendor-Scanspeak type...

Although expensive, when compared with many high performance tweeters investigated by Sendor, at the time, this particular Scanspeak model (one of a small family of 19-mm tweeters) stood head and shoulders above the rest in technical performance and sound as well as in unit to unit consistency. Without this consistency, the very close tolerance pair matching and repeatable performance from speaker to speaker, which all Sendor loudspeakers have always offered, would have been impossible to achieve.

How is it made?

The tweeter has a 19-mm soft dome with ferrofluid cooling (for good linear power handling) for the lightweight voice coil assembly. The rear of the dome is loaded into a damped chamber, which is then vented into a second damped acoustic chamber. This ensures no back reflection of sound which can lead to time smearing, it also reduces and lowers the fundamental resonant frequency of the drive unit which has a significant effect on the clarity and integration of sound in the lower mid-band.

What construction is the mid/bass driver?

The chassis is a rigid glass reinforced polypropylene injection moulding with a built in magnet back plate. The cone is a critically profiled black homopolymer (polypropylene). The surround is a very stable synthetic butyl rubber. The 8-ohm voice coil is wound on a 25-mm diameter high temperature Kapton former. The dust cap has an influence on the sound and it was deliberately designed to maintain the 'BBC sound'.

What is homopolymer?

Polypropylene, and in case of the S3/5se bass-mid drive unit, a filled homopolymer, is more rigid and is also self damped giving a much better technical performance and predictable acoustic performance. The cone is lighter to achieve higher efficiency. There are different types of polymers, which appear chemically and mechanically similar, though give quite different results when manufacturing loudspeaker cones. Some materials give consistent repeatable results whilst others are unsuitable.

Is the internal wire different to the S3/5?

The S3/5 has standard electrical hook-up cable (like the original LS3/5a), whereas the se has silver plated high purity mono-crystal copper conductors and low loss dielectric sleeve - a very pure and natural sound.

Chord Odyssey cable to match the ones coming from the amplifier, and this duly banished lead guitar nastiness. Biwiring and/or biamping should be worthwhile.

Moving to a better front end than by mid-priced Naim amplification also smoothed things considerably, showing just how revealing these loudspeakers are. The sound took on an altogether more three dimensional and finessed character. An £11,000 Dynavector L300/ Densen HX 1.2 pre-power combo gave superior focus at frequency extremes, the S3/5se gaining considerable musical grace. The Sendor's got on famously with Disney's 'Fantasia 2000' which proved alluring, augmenting that widecreen presentation. Moreover, the great 'Dusty in Memphis' remaster allowed Dusty Springfield's voice to be magically (and rightly) portrayed as a thing of beauty. George Michael's 'Patience' was a solaced delight; for example, the hi-hat track within the song 'John And Elvis Are Dead' was so sweet and for once not painful.

Philip Swift told me that, "what the S3/5e will not do - and was never designed to - is deliver a big and powerful sound with deep bass, especially in larger rooms - but we think it does a pretty good job!" He is right, they won't rock the house. But the upper bass is strong and these boxes

THEN AND NOW
So how do these S3/5ses compare with the original LS3/5as? Well, those who love the BBC design will find the new Spondors somewhat devoid of character - over polite and lacking inchutzpah. Those who dislike the oldsters will find the new ones brilliantly couth, balanced, transparent, nicely finessed and largely vice-free. Sample variation and manufacturing consistency was a huge problem on the LS3/5as, whereas the Sendor S3/5se is an altogether better engineered, more finely tolerated product - and it shows when you listen...

certainly don't sound anaemic. If you are not a bass fiend and living space/sound quality are at a premium, the Spondors do well. Their biggest drawback is simply the lack of outright level - you won't shake the room, even with a huge transistor power amp, as they don't ultimately go very loud.

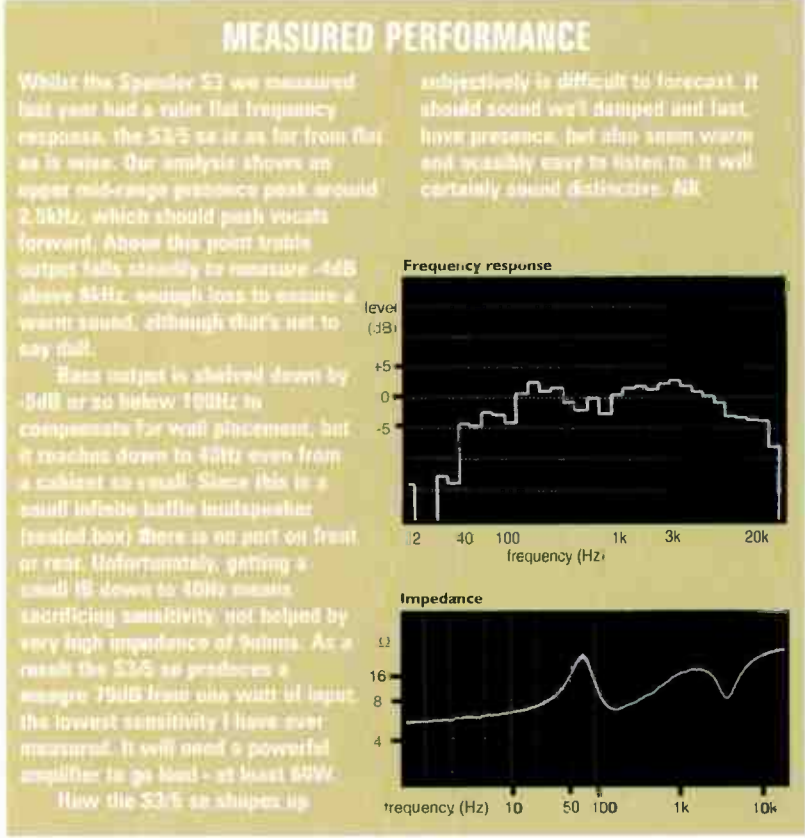
CONCLUSION

The most impressive thing about the S3/5se is that you're not immediately conscious of listening to a small loudspeaker. It's full, smooth and expansive. It doesn't dominate a room, and prefers instead to disappear into it, letting the music flood forth. It's neutral - albeit just a little congested in the midband in absolute terms - and gives an engagingly enjoyable musical performance without sounding overtly 'charismatic' (a la the original Linn Kans). If you're looking for a refined and sophisticated small loudspeaker, this is an essential audition.

VERDICT ●●●●
Despite the diminutive size, these loudspeakers are serious performers, with a couth and decorous sound.

SPENDOR S3/5SE £950
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special brew



Think Japanese amplifiers and you think oversized, overpowered and over here. JVC's AX-SD1GD integrated is none of these, says David Price - which makes it all the more remarkable.

A brief history of hi-fi: we used to make real amplifiers like the Leak Stereo 20 and Quad II, and then the Japanese came along in the seventies and spoiled it all. Big expensive Nipponese kit meant acres of brushed aluminium, loads of knobs, vast power outputs and not much in the way of musical satisfaction. The Japs got a bad reputation for serious sound, and since then we, with our natural 'Little Britain' tendencies, have sneered at their high end kit with a passion usually reserved for tut-tutting about the French.

Okay, I'm exaggerating for effect, but you get the picture. Since the excesses of the seventies, it's been terminally uncool to own Japanese high end - many UK audiophiles I know wouldn't be seen in the next room to it. It's a shame, because we've got a very biased attitude to the breed. Like every country's hi-fi products, there is good and there is bad - and most of it is invariably bad. And because Japan's bad stuff is better than anyone else's bad stuff (and until the rise of China, used to be cheaper, too) - then Japanese audio has almost become shorthand for 'cheap, well made and sonically compromised'.

Well, here's my two cents: if my predecessors in the nineteen seventies had been a little less fawning to UK Hi-Fi Ltd., then they

would have actively bothered to seek out some of the stunning slices of audio engineering that Japan was making...

Okay, that's better. Now I'm off my soapbox I can coolly make the case for this, the JVC AX-SD1GD. Now, being a style-conscious boy about town (?), I can't say the prospect of reviewing a dumpy looking midi size JVC amp thrilled me - until I looked closer, and my antennae started twitching. Consider, if you will, the facts: a claimed 35W RMS per channel into 8 ohms! When was the last time Japan Inc. ever made such a pathetically low powered device? My iPod puts out more than that! Moreover: a claimed 70W RMS per channel into 4 ohms? Hmm... must have a serious power supply. Next: copper plated chassis - well, as Ishiwata san will avow, that's a sign of the Japanese getting serious about sonics, trying to eliminate electromagnetic noise. No tone controls: it gets better! Small and devoid of clutter, yet weighs a tonne: 'shurely shome nishtake'...! Not officially imported by JVC UK: yes please, where do I sign?

So... being the top international audio sleuth that I am (nothing gets past me, etc.), I deduced that this product wasn't just another Nipponese me-too design, but was in fact something special. Noel's measurements confirmed this - not the most complimentary man in the

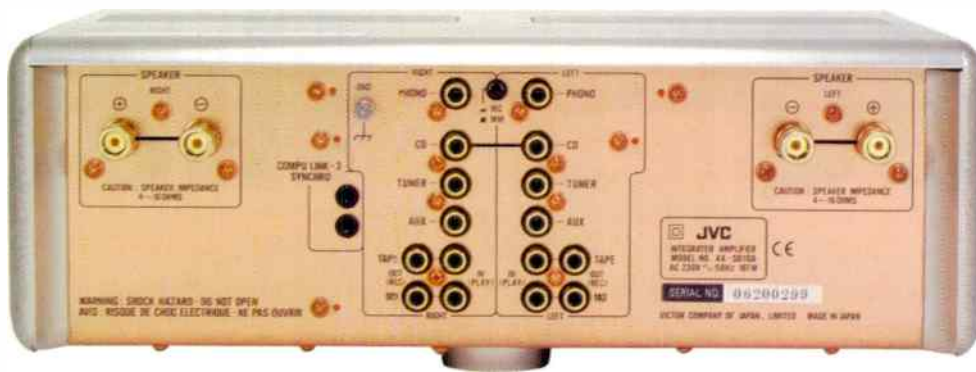
world about a lot of audio gear that passes through his test lab, after half an hour of pressing buttons on an unfeasibly complex analyser, he pronounced this amplifier to be 'serious'. Moreover, our measured power was actually higher than its quoted spec - surely a first for an amplifier from the land of the rising sun?

And so, here we have one of life's real oddballs - a beautifully engineered, heavily Class A biased high end integrated amplifier with a smattering (and only that) of useful facilities, finished to a standard that almost no UK manufacturer can achieve. Priced at £1,995, it may not seem a bargain, but when I listened to it I began to think it was. We tried to open it up to see what was inside, but the presence of about fifty screws and an inordinately complex case (no cheap pressed steel wrap, this) allied to editorial deadlines made us think otherwise. Best get on with the listening...

SOUND QUALITY

Not wishing to make the AX-SD1GD feel lonely, I decided to partner it to some of its compatriots. Unfortunately for the JVC, that meant one of the most ruthlessly revealing loudspeakers yet made - the Yamaha NS1000M. Definitely a case of 'in at the deep end', sink or swim.

In fact, the JVC proved



surprisingly buoyant - when it had a good twenty four hours to warm through and a Stello DP200 upsampling DAC to drive it. This amplifier is best described as sounding like a Sugden A21a with big boots on. It's heavily Class A alright - before I noticed how hot the room had got, my ears had locked onto its wonderfully transparent nature. The NS1000Ms are merciless, but for once they appeared happy. They went to high levels very cleanly (where the A21a would keel over and die), never screeched and positively relished the AX-SD1's tonality.

Now, this is not 'tonal colour' in the traditional valve sense, where everything simply gets 'sepia-tinged', regardless of whether it should be or not. This is the simple communication of an instrument's inherent texture, without obfuscation. To wit, the vocals on Bassheads' 'Is There Anybody Out There' were harsh and over-modulated (just like they should be), while the sampled electric piano sound was heart-warmingly rich and sonorous, positively dripping with harmonics (just as it should be). The hi-hats on LFO's 'LFO' were hard and abrasive, the sub-bass delightfully warm and sumptuous. The trick this amp pulls, which is precisely what the Sugden does (but precious few other transistor amps can) is to tell it as it is. It's uncoloured in the true sense of the word.

Yet despite this delightful and oh-so-rare trait, it's not hopeless in other departments, or even seriously flawed - quite the opposite. Bass is strong and crisp, with real wallop when needed. It's fast and even and extended, and didn't run into problems even with two twelve inch carbon fibre/paper bass cones to move. True, it's not up to (entry level) Naim pre-power standards - it lacks the latter's innate bass tunefulness, but it's really not let down in any sense. Better still, it's just a tad full and warm (although never overblown) - which is just what the doctor ordered for most systems...

Up into the midband, and it's

delightful. Soundstaging is good - if not spectacular - with a well delineated recorded acoustic stretching wide and falling back deep. Instruments are located unusually accurately, even for amps of this price. It's the speed and clarity of the mid that really seduces - it's glass-clear, giving a wonderful window on the music. It's not terribly flattering on poor programme material, but being so neutral it never adds nasties even to harsh, upfront recordings. The result being that the murky, mid-forward 'Night at the Opera' by Queen on an original EMI LP sounded most fresh and engaging. Another delight of the midband is its speed - super fast, it let the Yams show off their firecracker attack transients. With such zip, it's great with leading edges of instruments, which makes for a brilliantly rhythmically involving listen. The midband's so good in this respect, it makes up for the merely 'competent' bass speed, and any music you throw at it simply sings.

Just like the Sugden, this has a treble this isn't how you'd expect Class A to sound. It's so neutral, spry, clean, tight, delicate and detailed - but it is most emphatically not sweet, smooth and silky (that's for tube amps). Rather, it's deliciously subtle and finely etched, oozing with filigree detail. It simply blends in with that sublime midband, making the whole acoustic seamlessly even and insightful. If you're looking for euphonic colouration, look to tubes instead...

CONCLUSION

This is one of the surprises of the year for me. Just in the way I didn't expect Whest Audio's DAPI10 to work, nor did I set much hope

by this - and how wrong I was! It's an extremely well engineered bit of kit, deliberately built as a niche product for those who put performance above all else - think of it as a similar sort of thing to a Mitsubishi Evo - a generic looking but brilliantly honed bit of kit that does one thing superbly, and then other considerations follow on. And just like this automotive great, it's not available through the official import channels - you'll have to go to one particular supplier for this, or get on a 747 to Tokyo's Akihabara. My advice is - if you want a powerful, well made, well specified largely Class A integrated, give the importer a call now.

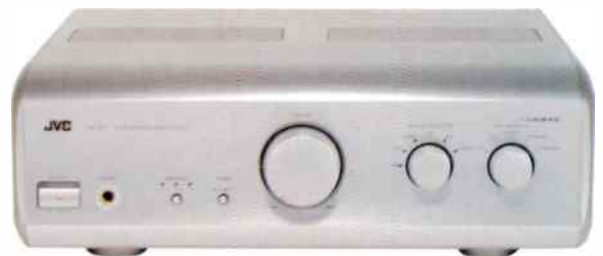
VERDICT

Highly open, transparent and musical sound makes this one of the surprises of the year. Thoroughly recommended.

JVC AX-SD1GD £1,995

Unique Sound & Vision

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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The AX-SD1 produces 50W per channel into 8ohms. A well regulated power supply allows it to almost double this into 4ohms, managing a healthy 90W of output. These are low values for an amp of the size and weight, as well as heat-sinking, suggesting there is something unusual or special about the method of operation.

Distortion levels were minimal at all signal levels and frequencies, the worst value being 0.0052% distortion at 10kHz and full output (-1dB). So the JVC has no problems in this area, being up with the best.

Input sensitivity was on the low side at 460mV, but sufficient for most modern sources, e.g. tuners and such like, as well as CD of course.

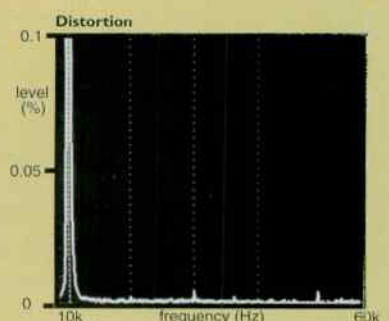
This is a very wide band design, frequency response extending past 150kHz, and down to 3Hz.

There are MM and MC phono stages, both of which were accurately equalised and possess plenty of low frequency gain for extended bass: JVC do not incorporate a warp filter. Hiss

levels were low and sensitivity fine for most MMs and MCs.

The AX-SD1 delivered a fine set of measured results. It should deliver an interesting sound. NK

Power	50watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	3Hz-150kHz
Separation	92dB
Noise	-108dB
Distortion	0.003%
Sensitivity	460mV
dc offset	3/2mV



BIG time



The good old fashioned solid-state muscle amp seems to be making a comeback, and with its EA-2 power amplifier, newcomer ECS hopes to benefit. Dominic Todd takes it for a work out...

You'd have thought that the market for high-end power amplifiers is limited, yet they must be being bought in reasonable numbers to sustain the ever-growing supply. One such newcomer is ECS, with the EA-2 - a company with but two products: the EA-1 monoblocks and the EA-2 stereo power amplifier. A preamplifier and integrated are set to follow...

Yet, for a first effort, the '2 certainly makes quite an impression. In the tradition of the finest transistor power amps', it weighs a backbreaking 22kg. A massive 7" diameter toroidal transformer is partly responsible for this. No doubt it's also something to do with the small matter of its 180 watts per channel power output. Component quality impresses too, both in quality and in numbers - there are no fewer than 4 BHC Aerovox 10,000uf capacitors and 8 fully matched bipolar output transistors. The PCBs are claimed to feature ultra low impurity copper tracks, and zero induction components are used in critical signal paths.

The design follows the popular dual mono principle, with left and right heatsinks forming the sides of the casing. Around the back, there's a choice of balanced XLR connectors or the more regular RCA phonos. Loudspeaker output terminals are doubled to facilitate bi-wiring and, to match the quality of the other components, they're sourced from connection specialists WBT.

The casing is something of a mixed bag. It's certainly strong and rigid enough. Four rods stretch the depth of the case to bolster the unit's integrity. The sheet steel and aluminium used is also of sufficient thickness to contain the weight of componentry. The finish is generally to a high standard, but I do have some concerns.

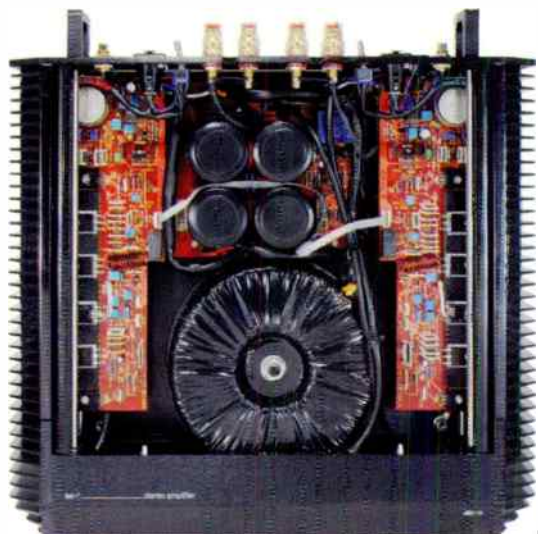
The first is that the heatsinks run in two sections. A single moulding would certainly look tidier, and hopefully prevent the front section from detaching, as ours did in transit. I also found the edges of the lid a little rough, and the radius of the front panel didn't exactly match that of the front of the heatsinks. These points may sound churlish, but at

£4,000 most customers would - and indeed should - expect manufacturing perfection. Why can Naim Audio make such beautifully hewn amplifiers at £800 when ECS can't at five times the price?

This is a lot of money for most people, yet the EA-2 is not short of competition. Indeed, the first and most obvious rival in terms of high power, high current firepower is Naim. At around £2,000 and £5,000 respectively, its NAP250 and NAP300 actually straddle the EA-2, making ECS's pricing look wise indeed. Other illustrious contenders include Gamut's highly impressive D200 Mk3 (£3,950) or EAR's seductive 861 valve amp' (£4,000). If it's power you're after, then don't rule out Musical Fidelity's new 500w monster, the KW500 (£4,000). There's certainly some pretty impressive competition out there so, to really get itself noticed, the EA-2 is going to have to be exceptionally good...

SOUND QUALITY

Dr John's 'Hen Layin' Rooster', featuring BB King, set the ball rolling. As you'd hope for a £4,000 power



amplifier, the EA-2 sounded impressive. There was an immense presence to the soundstage, and a sense of grip and control not unlike that of Naim. Also recollective of that brand was a fine sense of timing that could really captivate the listener. Furthermore, the leading edge attack and 'snap' from percussion was yet more proof of a transistor design of substance.

Yet, for all the authority the EA-2 stamped on the music, it is far more than simply a heavyweight bruiser. The ECS also proved wonderfully transparent, opening up the recording like few others. Percussion was exceptionally detailed, and brass vibrant. Vocals had tremendous presence and personality, and were given rock-solid stage location. Yet for all its power to beguile, the EA-2 wasn't without fault. Although the bass response was super tight and exceptionally well controlled, it wasn't as deep as you might expect from an amplifier of this price and power. In addition, the hard-hitting nature of the performance suggested that, although highly involving, this might not be the most neutral of amps.

This lack of absolute neutrality manifested itself to a greater degree with the rather more mainstream 'Irresistible' by The Corrs, where vocals were remarkably smooth for such a powerful transistor design. The excessive sibilance that I'd feared didn't materialise, and the EA-2 conducted itself with considerable finesse at high frequencies. However, what I did discern was a lift in the upper mid-range, which made the female vocalists sound a tad strained. The slightly mechanical rendition would certainly reveal itself against the better valve opposition yet, in this instance, wasn't a cause for great concern...

Making up for this was the same dynamic intensity as before, and superb separation. It was the manner in which the EA-2 layered the music

that impressed most. Each layer, be it singer or instrument, was given a definite position within the stage, yet each were clearly audible and easy to follow. The provocatively named 'Sex Without Bodies' by Dave's True Story gave the ECS a chance to show what it could do

with well-recorded acoustic music. The recording is made at St Peter's Episcopal Church in Chelsea, NYC. As you'd expect it has a very definite acoustic, which the EA-2 vividly painted. There was a huge sense of space, and impressive transparency. Although a fairly simple piece, I was impressed by the EA-2's engagement with the music. Here, it was almost valve-like in its ability to capture the atmosphere.

'Out of Space' by The Prodigy was less suited to the ECS. Whilst it did have an element of power and scale, bass wasn't quite as deep as expected. Yes - there was an impressive rippling texture to the lower notes - but it simply didn't reach down low enough. Although it pulled out all the elements of the mix, I also found that it didn't have the energy of a Naim power amp. Given the grip and control with other music, the slight lack of articulation here came as something of a surprise. There was a touch too much warmth that, whilst favouring other types of music, did little to help the balance.

The situation reversed with Chabrier's 'Espana'. Here the EA-2 was in its element - there was real scale and presence from the orchestra. It's an immensely dynamic piece, and the ECS gave the music the headroom it needed to truly soar. The brass section had volume and vivacity with a bite and realism like few others. Equally, the drums had real impact and authority. For all its noise and excitement, this is a piece of great contrast, and the ECS reflected that. There was plenty of detail throughout the quieter passages, and a delightfully sweet string

tone. Most impressive of all however, and the sign of true high-end audio, was the separation and instrumental decay even when the music was at its loudest and most complex. To offer this level of insight is rare indeed.

CONCLUSION

That the ECS EA-2 offers some impressive sonic characteristics is not in doubt. Even taking the price into account, the levels of transparency and rhythmic integrity are first class. Yet not all types of music benefit from what are, generally, high levels of insight. Bass simply isn't as deep as some, nor, at times, does it have quite the energy of the best. Of rather more concern was the slightly unusual characteristics in the upper-midrange. This could just make female vocalists sound strained. So what we have then is a highly impressive but flawed power amplifier. In this respect it's little different from much of the competition and therefore deserves recommendation, but not without qualification. Well worth auditioning.

VERDICT

Capable yet flawed design that competes well but doesn't do quite enough to shine. Worth auditioning all the same.

ECS EA-2 £4,000
European Circuit Solutions
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www.ecsamplifiers.co.uk

FOR

- Transparency
- Musical insight
- Attack and drive

AGAINST

- Pricey
- Not entirely neutral
- Very tough competition

ECS - A HISTORY

ECS is not a hi-fi company *per se*. It has built its reputation as a printed circuit board manufacturer supplying, along with two other partners, the petrochemical industry. So why the move into hi-fi? Well, about four years ago they were consulted by audio support specialist Mana to produce a high-end amplifier. Politics meant that the 'Stealth' amp never made it to the market place, but with a near complete design on the bench, ECS decided to launch it under its own name. And so, with a few tweaks to the power supplies, and improved casing, the Mana Stealth became the ECS EA. Not surprisingly, the EA range are designed to sound at their best when supported by Mana, or Mana type, racks!

REFERENCE SYSTEM

- Naim's CDX2/ XPS CD player
- PS Audio IV preamplifier
- Creek OBH-22 preamplifier
- Celestion SL600 loudspeakers
- B&W 805 loudspeakers
- Quad ELS63 loudspeakers

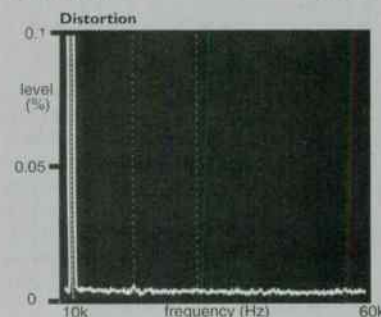
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Power delivery from the ecs was an impressive 200W into 8ohms. Into 4ohms though, where nearly double this figure is expected, asymmetric clipping held power back to 240W.

Whilst at 1W output distortion was a reasonable 0.02%, it rose rapidly to 1% at 28W, reaching a maximum of around 1.6% just below (-1dB) full output - very high figures. The distortion spectrum was extended too and this pattern existed at 1kHz and 10kHz. This isn't common behaviour so we requested a second sample but it was the same.

Whilst powerful, the ecs has difficulty delivering current into a low load and distortion levels are high. It does not measure well in relation to what is available. NK

Power	200watts
CD/TUNER/AUX	
Frequency response	20Hz-32kHz
Separation	96dB
Distortion, at 1W	0.02%
at full output, -1dB	1.5%
Noise	-102dB
Sensitivity	170mV



style wars

Can these two 'designer' standmounting loudspeakers really perform? Noel Keywood auditions Aurum Cantus's Leisure 2SEs and Opera's Callas loudspeakers...

Although the great unwashed may content themselves with sharp looking but sonically flawed audio equipment, one of the golden rules that hi-fi aficionados hold dear is, 'the better it looks, the worse it sounds'. It's a shame of course, because we're all seeking that elusive combination of high performance and high style...

This is precisely what these two standmounters promise, but past experience suggests that such a combination is about as rare as hens' teeth. I've tested so many loudspeakers whose often contrived appearance either compromises quality or has so taken precedence that quality has become a secondary issue. Only Bang & Olufsen master style so well that hi-fi credibility barely matters. Dedicated hi-fi manufacturers commonly approach this matter from the opposite direction, adding style to substance, to deliver a product with extra visual and tactile appeal, without compromise to sound quality. The

two loudspeakers in this review, UKD's Opera Callas and Aurum Cantus's Leisure 2SEs are firmly founded hi-fi designs, beautifully finished to - hopefully - deliver performance without blatant compromise.

From the box, little seems to separate these loudspeakers. They're much alike in size and weight. Both are solidly built and hefty, and both come packed as a pair in one large carton, from which I dragged them gingerly as always, since small and heavy but slippery cabinets are quick to go their own way, aided by gravity. In both cases the cabinets have a high gloss finish that makes them quick to slide through the hands!

Aurum Cantus mould their MDF cabinets into a complex form that tapers upward to help distribute internal resonances. Our samples had a piano black lacquer finish with a

blend into most settings.

Opera achieve a similar appearance by using a parallel sided cabinet, whose side panels are machined to have facets to produce a fascia that similarly narrows with height - although this is pure aesthetics, since inside the Callas is pure box! This speaker is made from solid hardwood, giving it a luxuriously deep wood finish free from veneer joins and edges. Opera take advantage of this, using heavily bevelled cabinet edges to give a cabinet with a soft outline that's easy on the eye.

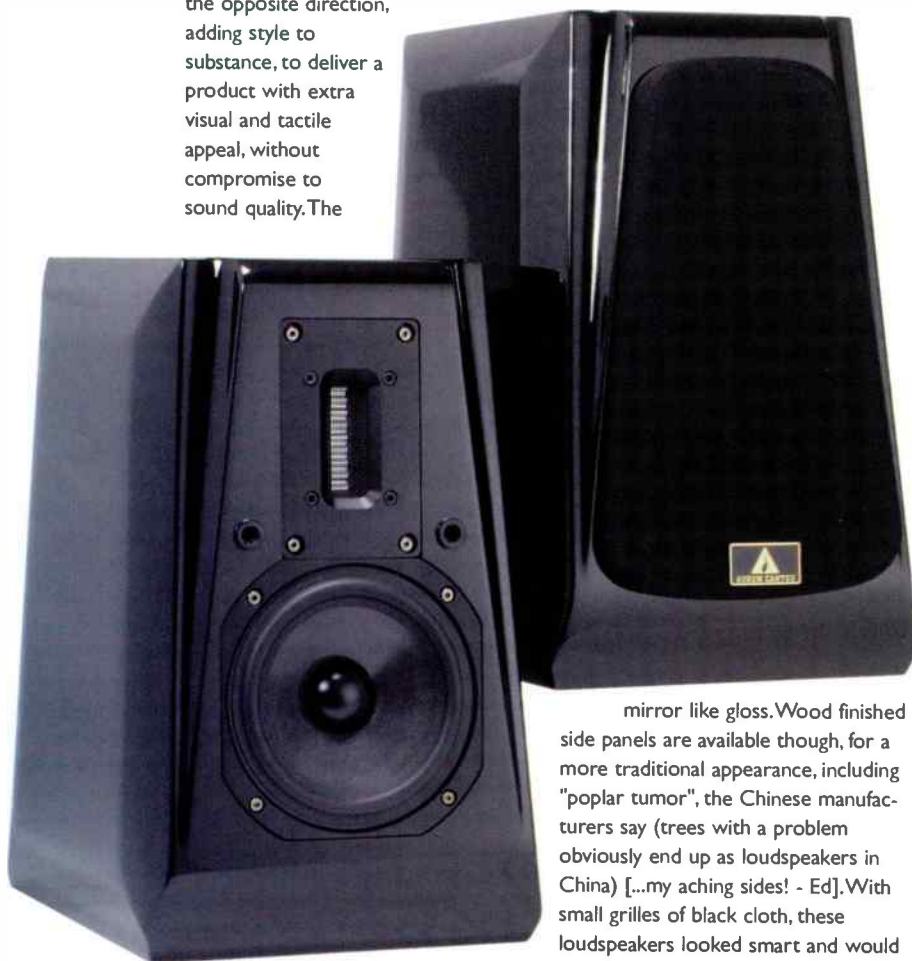
It's a lovely piece of craftsmanship, designed to appeal to anyone with a preference for the traditional. With modern homes using quality wood furniture heavily machined and well finished to approach what was once hand hewn, I'm sure the Callas will be able to find a visually sympathetic home. Not for everyone the more challenging appeal of, say, a KEF XQ1, where technology is on display, form and finish following function.

Although compact, both loudspeakers are a little too large to comfortably fit a shelf. They are standmounters with rear ports that need some breathing space. I used them atop spiked stands placed approximately 12in from a rear wall.

Opera's Callas is a known quantity to me. In early form it had a full bodied sound, easy on the ear - sumptuous, I would say. Bass was on the large side, giving an impression of plentiful power from a small cabinet, but apart from this the Callas was a well worked out design from from obvious flaws. A normal two-way with silk dome tweeter crossing over to 130mm bass/ midrange unit, it uses a classic arrangement that works well if quality drive units are employed.

Made in Italy, the Callas seemingly focuses on tradition, the suggestion being it is voiced for classical music, perhaps at the expense of Rock. A well balanced loudspeaker can handle both genres with equal aplomb though and this the Callas has managed in the past. Large terminals on the rear panel have removable links to facilitate bi-wiring. They accept 4mm plugs and

mirror like gloss. Wood finished side panels are available though, for a more traditional appearance, including "poplar tumor", the Chinese manufacturers say (trees with a problem obviously end up as loudspeakers in China) [...my aching sides! - Ed]. With small grilles of black cloth, these loudspeakers looked smart and would



bare wire with equal ease.

Aurum Cantus is a new name to the UK, coming from Jinlang Audio Co., one of China's seemingly endless 'small' OEMs based in the south, in a special commercial zone of Shandong (aka Guandong) near Hong Kong. Jinlang are notable for their ribbon tweeter range and this is a distinguishing feature of the 2SE. Just like the Callas it is a two-way design with 130mm reflex loaded bass/ midrange.

Unlike the Callas however, and unlike most two-ways except Elac's wonderful JET-equipped ribbon 'speakers, this unit crosses over to a rectangular shaped ribbon tweeter, something that's obvious from the photos. The G2 tweeter, as they term it, has a frequency response claimed to run smoothly from 1,700Hz right up to 40kHz - close to the upper limit of 96kHz sample rate digital audio. So whilst the Leisure 2SEs look almost identical to the Opera Callas loudspeakers and seemingly make the same appeal, beneath the surface they are fundamentally quite different...

As the name suggests, ribbon tweeters use a thin, light aluminium ribbon to radiate sound. The audio signal passes through this ribbon, generating a magnetic field that reacts to the field from a fixed magnet, causing the ribbon to vibrate in sympathy with the audio signal. Benefits are light weight and distributed drive. In practice, under measurement a good ribbon tweeter gives a smoother frequency response than conventional dome tweeters and also a more extended one.

The sound is often 'faster' and more incisive than that of normal dome tweeter, yet cleaner and sweeter too. String instruments in particular usually benefit, with extra detail revealing their complex nature

"the vibrancy of the playing isn't compromised by muddle or harshness, largely due to the 2SE's ribbon tweeter."

and rich harmonic structure. Here, dome tweeters become rather approximate in their portrayal. It's a fine point whilst low sample rate digital recordings on CD yield only the blandest description of string instruments in the first place, but still apparent all the same.

SOUND QUALITY

I've known the chiming guitar chords of Steve Earle's 'Even When I'm Blue' to have more visceral presence and a greater feeling of incision than I heard

from the Leisure 2SEs. I spun 'Copperhead Road' to get a quick take on how the ribbon tweeter would cope when assailed by the treble energy from pedal steel guitar. Where, in the past, domes have wobbled into uncertainty, ribbons like the Tonigen have kept their composure and



delivered the goods, with vividly fast leading edges of strummed chords, clean as a new Wilkinson Sword!

True to its name - although I'm sure this is unintended - the 2SEs were a little leisurely here - not what I had anticipated. Slightly recessed and warm in balance, they seemed gentle, pleasant but unchallenging. Looking closely at their measured response shows why; a dip at crossover brings in the ribbon tweeter at a relatively low level. Its output rises steadily but the ear is most sensitive to

frequencies below 7kHz, so performance here dominates a subjective impression. It doesn't take long to hear the G2 ribbon is, all the same, giving a beautifully clean sound that's almost gentle in delivery yet beguilingly open and easy on the ear.

Moving from one good 'ol boy to another, Eric Clapton playing 'Key to the Highway' on DVD-A, I heard plectrum strike string forcefully through the Leisure 2SEs [that's DVD-A for you - Ed]. With a recording as insightful as this the speakers lost

their apparent warmth, although they did soften out transients just a touch. With DVD-A and indeed a good number of modern

CDs the balance of the Leisure 2SEs is useful in damping things down a little.

'Three O'Clock Blues', with its simple introductory guitar line vibrant with treble energy, demonstrated nicely just how clean and clear the G2 ribbon of this loudspeaker could sound under pressure - always the best way to assess a ribbon by the way. They sing where domes break up. As Clapton and King pick their way through this track the strength and vibrancy of their playing isn't compromised by muddle or

harshness, largely due to the G2 ribbon tweeter.

Jinlang haven't made this unit's contribution obvious; it remains quite subtle in

delivery. As you'd expect from any good ribbon this one delivers a rich tapestry of detail and puts it into the context of the surroundings by revealing surrounding ambience, making for a very live sound. The only small reservation I have about the Leisure 2SE is a small degree of cuppiness somewhere in the delivery, emanating from the ribbon or the upper reaches of the bass mid I don't know. This was most apparent with massed orchestral strings, which were a little coloured. It may well have been

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SINGLE-ENDED PURITY

Our Parallel Single Ended (PSE) power amplifiers offer ultimate sound quality. Each monobloc has two beautifully linear 300B directly heated triodes in its output stage, producing 20 watts into an 8 ohm load. At the front of the circuit we there is a 6AU6 pentode, followed by an ECC82 as the driver valve. This design uses a 5U4 rectifier valve in the power supply, in combination with a 10H choke, giving an extremely quiet supply. Both mains and output transformers are built on high quality E/I pattern cores.

Feedback can be switched in or out whilst running, using a rear panel switch. Complex layered and sectioned output transformers give full output and low distortion across the audio band even without feedback, making such an option possible.

This is one of the few amplifiers in the world so good it will work without feedback - and no feedback is the preference of most buyers. It gives a spacious, relaxed and fluid sound quite unlike that of solid-state amps, all of which use feedback to correct deficiencies.

By operating linearly in feedbackless, pure Class A, single-ended mode these



300B monoblocs are as pure as it gets - and sound quality reflects the fact. Fast, clean and clear in their presentation, at the same time their purity of sound is easy on the ear.

The kit is totally hard-wired; it does not use circuit boards. We can supply without valves, or with the superb Tesla 300Bs, Russian 5U4s and European 6AU6s & ECC82. Our 300B PSE kit bears an affordable price of £895.00 (UK price) excluding valves. Each monobloc weighs 23kgs (50lbs). External dimensions with valves: 25cm(w) x 38cm(d) x 22cm(h) per monobloc.

PUSH-PULL POWER

For more power, we also offer 300B in Push-Pull (PP) form. The 300B PP monobloc shares the same look and chassis as the 300B PSE monobloc. The 300B PP kit has been created for those who prefer a bit more power. With a pair of 300Bs in push-pull configuration providing 26 watts output, they will drive most modern loudspeakers to perfection. Andy Grove's design is totally feedbackless, using a 6AU6 pentode as the input valve and a 5687 as the phase splitter. The power supply uses a Russian 5U4 for rectification. The kit is constructed by hard wiring, so some experience is required. 300B PSE owners do have the option to buy the conversion kit for £250.00 to turn their monoblocs to push-pull status. Each monobloc weighs 23kg.

300B PSE MONOBLOC KIT

£1197 per pair

300B PP MONOBLOC KIT

£1197 per pair

The PRE-II is a high quality valve pre-amplifier that will drive any power amplifier. It has a gain of x5 which, with CD, enables it to deliver a large 10V output swing. To keep the amount of active amplification low, this pre-amp uniquely uses a line drive transformer to deliver a pure signal to the power amplifier. There are six inputs, a tape monitor and two sets of output sockets. It is powered by the external PSU-II power supply. The volume control uses high quality Alps Blue potentiometer which, with our solid, turned brass, chromed knob, gives a quality feel rarely encountered these days.

PHONO-II is a dedicated valve phono stage for MM cartridges, with MC input transformers an option. By using all-d.c. supplies from PSU-II and a case in which there is no power supply, PHONO II is hum free, something that is difficult to achieve with valves. With accurate RIAA equalisation right down to 10Hz (-3dB) PHONO II gives a wonderfully pure, dimensional sound from LP, possessing a sense of life and dynamism quite different to solid-state preamps.

Finally, PSU-II is a power supply unit that feeds both the PRE-II and PHONO-II. Keeping the power supply separate removes hum, often the bane of valves.



Power Supply Unit (PSU-II)	£205.00
Pre-amplifier (PRE-II)	£215.00
Phono Stage (PHONO-II)	£110.00
Moving coil step-up transformer	£77.00

SERIES II MODULAR PRE-AMP KIT

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Kel84 is an affordable, integrated valve amplifier for those who want to enjoy the valve sound, but from a simple, easy to build kit. It uses inexpensive EL84 output valves, known for their sweet sound, in conventional push-pull arrangement to provide 15 watts into an 8 ohm load. The output transformers are our own quality Ultra Linear design. Up front, the circuit employs an ECF80 input/phase splitter valve, which contributes to Kel84's extremely smooth sound.

The amplifier has very low hum and for simplicity it is built on a printed circuit board. A strong steel chassis is fronted by a 3mm anodised front panel and attractive brushed aluminium effect knobs. There are five line level inputs, plus one monitor input, with a tape output included, all controlled from the front panel.

At the rear is a mains switch/IEC power input, earth post, phono sockets, and 4mm banana sockets for loudspeakers. The Kel84 will highlight all the intricacies and depth of detail in your favourite recordings whilst retaining a warmth and fullness that is almost exclusive to pure valve amps and is rare at this price point.

Kel84 weighs 10kg. External dimensions with valves are 300mm(w) x 270mm(d) x 150mm(h).



KEL84 VALVE INTEGRATED AMP KIT

£298



Our 6550 series amplifiers are built around the rugged 6550 beam tetrode that's popular in America. This valve is widely available at a good price. Producing no less than 40 watts into an 8 ohm load (available in a 4 ohm version if required) our 6550 is a power house, since valve watts always sound louder than transistor watts!

The difference between our 6550 and most others is that we use valve rectification (5U4) and a choke pi filter, for a power supply that is quiet and free from solid-state hardness. This is a true high-end design from Andy Grove, hard wired. It is a cut above the many other 6550s, with enough power to drive most loudspeakers, including insensitive electrostatics for example. 6550 combines high

power with a top-end smoothness of sound, yet doesn't cost the earth to run, as the valves are inexpensive and have a long life.

The amplifier weighs 19kg. Dimensions are 390mm(w) x 330mm(d) x 190mm(h) with valves, or 220mm(h) with cage.

KIT6550 - An integrated amplifier with line inputs and volume control. Accepts CD, tuner, tape etc., but not LP.

KAT6550 - A power amplifier for use with a separate pre-amp. Paired with PRE II and PHONO II (+PSU II), can provide LP reproduction.

KIT6550 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT

£615

KAT6550 VALVE POWER AMPLIFIER KIT

£580

The HD83 headphone amplifier is a beautifully simple design using Mullard ECL83 valves, a triode and power pentode housed in the same envelope. It works directly from any source, be it CD, tape, tuner etc., or from an amplifier's tape out or pre-amp out sockets. The circuit uses high specification E/I output transformers that will drive any headphone load from 16 ohms to over 300 ohms depending on how the secondaries are wired up.

The HD83 is a pure Class A single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for added sonic purity, and it is as quiet as a mouse. Treble has the crispness of the best solid-state, but with the tonal resolution and delicacy associated with valves. Bass is punchy and controlled without becoming artificial.

External dimensions 18cm(w) x 30cm(l) x 8cm (h) weight 4kg.



HD83 VALVE HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER KIT

£195

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KIT6550/KAT6550 mains transformers

2 inch stack, 130mm(h)x120mm(w)x135mm(l)
drop through fitting with zinc cap. Secondaries
425V-0V-425V, 350mA, 0V-5V, 6A, 3.15V-0V-3.15V,
9A. Suitable for 120V & 240Vac operation

KEL84 mains transformer

1.5 inch stack, 90mm(h)x 80mm(w)x 95mm(d)
drop through fitting with zinc cap. Secondaries:
0V-240V 300mA, 3.15V-0V-3.15V, 5.5A, suitable for
120/240V operation

KIT34/KAT34/KIT6550/KAT6550 choke

1.25 inch stack, 65mm(h)x105mm(w) with fitting
holes x 60mm(d), clamp fitting, 2.5 H, 350mA

300B PSE mains E/I transformer

130mm(h) x 95mm(w) x 115mm(d).
drop through fitting with zinc cap.
Secondaries: 380V-0V-380V, 180mA/150V-150V,
25mA/0V-5V, 1.2A/0V-5V, 1.2A/0V-5V,3A/3.15V-0V-
3.15V,0.4A suitable for 120/240V operation

HD83 mains toroidal transformer

80mm dia. x 35mm(h). Secondaries: 0V-
165V,75mA/3. 15V-0V-3.15V,1A, suitable for
120/240V operation

PSU-II mains toroidal transformer

80mm dia. x 35mm(h). Secondaries: 0V-
270V,60mA/0V-10V,2A, suitable for 120/240V
operation

TRANSI mains toroidal transformer

95mm dia. x 50mm(h). Secondaries: 0V-
370V,150mA/0V-6.3V,3.5A 300B E/I choke
65mm(h) x 70mm(d) x 80mm(w) open frame
fitting,10H, 180mA,

KEL84 E/I choke

0.5 inch stack, 40mm(h)x 35mm(d)x 70mm(w)
clamp fitting, 1H, 250mA

PSU-II E/I

40mm(h) x 35mm(d) x 70mm (w) clamp fitting,
15H, 20mA

KIT34/KAT34 mains transformer

2.5 inch stack, 120mm(h)x115mm(w)x95mm(d),
drop through fitting with zinc cap,Secondaries
365V - 0V - 365V,300mA/0V - 5V,6A/3.15V - 0V -
3.15V,7.5A. Suitable for 120/240V operation.

2A3 PSE mains transformer:

2.5inch stack, on a 120 size lamination,
120mm(h)x115mm(w)x95mm(d), drop through
fitting with zinc plated transformer caps.
Secondary winding: 370V-0V-370V, 250mA, 0V-5V,
3A, 0V-4V, 2A x4. Suitable for
110V/120V/220V/230V operation. Can be used
for a valve rectified, dc heater (2A3), dc regulated
heater(input valve) stereo 2A3 PSE/PP amplifier.

KECL82 mains transformer:

1.25inch stack, on a 29 size lamination,
80mm(wide)x70mm(height)x70mm(depth), frame
type 2 hole fixing. Secondary winding: 0V-185V,
200mA, 0V-6.3V, 3.5A. Suitable for
110V/120V/220V/230V operation. Good for low
power amp, solid state rectification achieves a HT
of 240Vdc. Could be used for ECL82 PP/PSE
stereo amp.

MAINS TRANSFORMERS & CHOKES

KIT6550/KAT6550 E/I 16% TAPPED UL

push-pull output transformer 2 inch stack, 80mm
(w) x 95mm(l) x 100mm(h), drop through fitting
with zinc cap. Primary-secondary 4.5K, 16% UL
tapped. Secondary 4 Ohr 8 ohm, pls specify on
order. max output 45 watts, max current 180mA,
valves, KT88, 6550 etc

KEL84 E/I Ultra Linear push-pull output transformer

1.25 inch stack, 76mm(h)x 65mm(w)x 76mm(d)
Primary - secondary, 8K with 12.5% UL tap -
8ohms, max o/p-15watts, max current 150mA
valves EL84 etc

KIT88/KAT88 E/I push-pull output transformer

80mm(w)x95mm(l)x100mm(h). Primary-secondary
10K - 8ohms, max o/p-40watts, max current-
160mA valves-KT88, 6550, EL34

Pre-II E/I driver transformer

80mm(w)x60mm(l) x65mm(h). 6:1 step down
transformer, max current-10mA valves-6922 etc
pre-amp stage

KIT34/KAT34 E/I 14% tapped Ultra Linear push-pull output transformer

2 inch stack, 80mm(w)x95mm(l)x100mm(h), drop
through fitting with zinc cap. Primary-secondary
6.4K, 14% UL taps, Secondary 8ohm, max output
34watts, max current 150mA, valves EL34, 6L6,
6CA7

HD83 E/I single ended output transformer

40mm(w)x50mm(l) x55mm(h).
Primary-secondary 4K - 4 x 64ohms
windings, max o/p-1watts, max current-25mA
valves-ECL83 etc

300B PSE E/I parallel single ended output transformer

130mm(h) x 95mm(w) x 115mm(d).
drop through fitting with zinc cap.
Primary 1K5 Secondary 8R, output .

2A3 PSE E/I output transformer:

2A3 parallel single ended transformer, 2 inch stack,
78 size lamination. Primary impedance is 2.5K,
secondary impedance is 4ohm or 8ohm, max
current is 100mA. Output is 8.5Watts.

KECL82 PP output transformer

ECL82 push-pull ultra linear. 1inch stack, on a 29
size lamination,
80mm(wide)x70mm(height)x60mm(depth), frame
type 2 hole fixing. Primary 7.5Kohm, secondary
8ohms. Max current 85mA,
Good for numerous low output pentode valves in
push-pull configuration.

300B PP E/I push-pull output transformers

2.5inch stack, on a size 120 lamination.
130mm(h)x95mm(w)x115mm(d) drop through
fitting with zinc plated cap. Primary impedance 4K,
secondary 6ohm. Will suit 300Bs, 2A3s etc in
push-pull configuration.

PRINTED CIRCUIT BOARD

- KECL82 Printed Circuit Board 200mm(w) x140mm(l) x1.6mm(d)
- Kel84 Printed Circuit Board 280mm(w) x 135mm(l)x 1.6mm(d).
- F88/KaT88 Printed Circuit Board 140mm(w) x 310mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)
- Kel34 Printed Circuit Board 140mm(w) x 310mm(l) x 2.4mm(d).
- HD83 Printed Circuit Board (a pair) 120mm(w) x 215mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)
- HO83 Printed Circuit Board 140mm(w) x 160mm(l) x 1.6mm(d).
- PSU-II Printed Circuit Board 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
- PRE-II Printed Circuit Board 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
- THONO-II Printed Circuit Board 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)

OUTPUT TRANSFORMERS



Hi-Fi World in Malaysia at Millennium Hi-Fi & Av. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Hi-Fi World is now distributed through good bookshops and newstands in Malaysia. For back issues, general enquiries and advertising, contact Simon Chang at Millennium Hi-Fi & Av.

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137 Jalan Pendekar 2, Taman Skudai Baru, 81300 Skudai, Johor DT
tel: 607 554 5171 fax: 607 554 7645

e-mail: info@millennium-audio.com

These are expert kits, not for the inexperienced. You must be able to solder and read a circuit diagram. The valve kits contain lethal voltages. We cannot be held responsible for any errors arising from the construction of these kits.

wad



order on our website @

WWW.worldaudiodesign.com

AMPLIFIER KITS DESCRIPTION	ORDER NO.	QTY	UK (inc vat & carriage)	OVERSEAS (exc. vat & carriage)
Kec182 (8 ohm)	Kec182 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£195.00	£170.00
2A3PSE with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	2A3 PSE (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£570.00	£485.00
2A3PSE without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	2A3 PSE (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£470.00	£400.00
KaT6550 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KaT6550 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£580.00	£495.00
KaT6550 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KaT6550 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£450.00	£380.00
KiT6550 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT6550 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£615.00	£525.00
KiT6550 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT6550 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£485.00	£415.00
KaT34 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KAT34(with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£480.00	£410.00
KaT34 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KAT34(without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£415.00	£354.00
KiT34 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT34 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£515.00	£440.00
KiT34 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT34 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£450.00	£385.00
Kel84 with valves (8 ohm)	Kel84 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£298.00	£255.00
Kel84 without valves (8 ohm)	Kel84 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£268.00	£230.00
PSU II	PSU - II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£205.00	£175.00
PRE II	PRE - II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£215.00	£185.00
PHONO II	PHONO II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£95.00
PAS II	PAS II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£235.00	£200.00
Step ups transformers for MC use with PHONO II	MC - step up (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£80.00	£68.00
HD83 with valves	HD83 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£195.00	£167.00
300BPSE with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	300B PSE (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1197.00 per pair	£1020.00 per pair
300BPSE without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	300B PSE (no valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£895.00 per pair	£765.00 per pair
300BPP with valves (6 ohm)	300B PP (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1197.00 per pair	£1020.00 per pair
300BPP without valves (6 ohm)	300B PP (no valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£895.00 per pair	£765.00 per pair

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2A3 mains transformer	2A3 PSE mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£115.00	£98.00
6550 mains transformer	6550 mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£120.00	£105.00
34 mains transformer	KiT34 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£100.00	£85.00
kel84 mains transformer	Kel84 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£60.00	£47.00
HD83 mains transformer	HD83 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
PSU II mains transformer	PSU-II - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
300B mains transformer	300B - mains T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£115.00	£98.00
34/6550 choke	KiT34 - choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
kel84 choke	Kel84 - choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
300B choke	300B choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
2A3 PSE choke	2A3 PSE choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
PSU II choke	PSU-choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
6550 output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	6550 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
34 output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	34 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
kel84 output (8 ohm)	Kel84 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£90.00	£78.00
2A3 PSE output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	2A3 PSE O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
HD83 output (multiload secondary)	HD83 - O/P T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£100.00	£86.00
PRE-II driver transformer	PRE-II - driver T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£80.00	£68.00
300BPSE output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	300B PSE - O/P T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£94.00
300BPP output transformer (6ohm)	300B PP - O/P T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£94.00
kel84 PCB	Kel84 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£30.00	£26.00
kel34 PCB	Kel34 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£12.00	£11.00
kel80 PCB	Kel80 - PCB(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£52.00	£45.00
KECL82 PCB	KECL82 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£25.00	£21.00
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ALPS 50K dual potentiometer	ALPS - 50K	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00	£12.00
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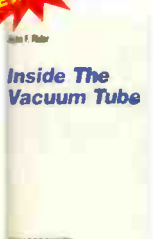


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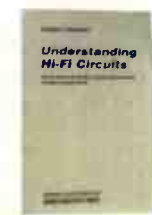
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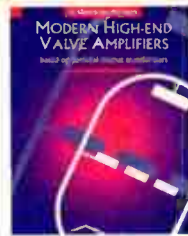
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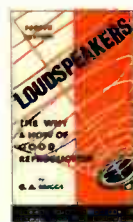


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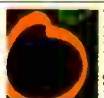
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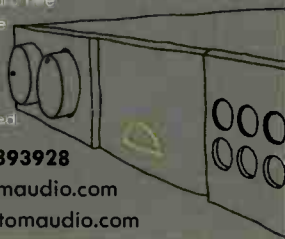
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pretty in pink

No sooner than Apple's delectable iPod mini portable digital music player finally arrived on these shores, Patrick Cleasby bought a pink one for the trouble and strife...



PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE

Wing up, how could I deny the love of my life the iPod mini she so dearly desired? Of course, my curiosity got the better of me, so I had to evaluate what would have been the latest member of the iPod family - if its arrival had not been succeeded by the debut of the fourth generation classic iPod a week later. Thankfully when the mini actually shipped, Apple had taken note of consumer resistance to the intended £199 price point, and dropped it to £179.

In most respects the mini is exactly what its name suggests - a shrunken version of the iconic digital music player. Very little is lost in the process, but extreme gadget freaks should note that the functionality for voice recording using Belkin and Griffin microphones, and for data storage using the Belkin card reader has not been carried over. However all the contacts/ calendar synchronisation notes and storage facilities are still there. You can also still use the device as a portable Firewire disk, but you will probably want to use most of the available 4GB for music.

In the usual Apple style, the

extends to its gorgeous packaging. The split and hinged box divides into the now-familiar two storage pods, one proudly cradling the iPod wrapped in "Please don't steal music" cellophane, and the other containing the belt clip and most of the accessories. Much like the new 4G 20GB iPod the iPod mini is not supremely well-equipped, lacking a dock and even the headphone

Also in the box is the documentation, and a CD-ROM. Those whose computers are already up to date with the latest version of iTunes (4.6 at the time of writing) will not have to use it, but for initiates the installation of iTunes will be necessary. Even if you have an earlier version than the included 4.5, and you intend to use Apple Lossless, WMA conversion or the iTunes Music Store

"it is impossible not to score the iPod mini with top marks. Its desirability as a stylish toy is backed up by exemplary performance".

remote control. Both are non-essential and available as separate items for £29 each. For you healthy types an armband is also available for £19, enabling you to strap the mini on for gym activities. The headphones are exactly the same earbuds as those shipped with the 3G. Obviously these were immediately discarded in favour of the trusty

you will need to update. With the shipping of Musicmatch for PC iPod users now a distant memory this all applies equally for both PC and Mac users, but on first connection PC users will undergo the reformatting of the iPod from the shipped HFS+ (Journaled) Mac format to good old FAT32.

I opened my box in a busy office,

PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE



use than simply charging – getting the music onto the iPod. Unempirical initial impressions suggest that a Firewire transfer using a 1GHZ iBook-based is marginally slower than the equivalent one to a 3G 40GB machine, but this is probably down to the smaller disk diameter in the mini iPod. Initially I loaded up fully with a random selection of albums which had been data compressed in Apple Lossless format, primarily to see what the capacity was in album/tracks terms. The advertised 4GB (as you surely know by now advertisers like to call 1,000,000,000 bytes a gigabyte - fallaciously) translates into 3.75 real data gigabytes, which in turn allows for about 150 Apple Lossless tracks, in my case equating to 12 albums.

and this was the first sighting of a mini for many a hardened male Mac-head. Even they were moved to utter, "now that's nice...". And it is. When you're used to the chunky 40GB model the baby of the family sits impossibly lightly in the hand, and the feel of its brushed aluminium body is very seductive. Shortly after laying hands on this one I handled my first example from the US, and apart from theirs bearing the legend "Made in Taiwan" and ours being "Made In China" there is nothing to tell them apart. The unit seems well put together, but I wasn't about to attempt to explore its innards!

The mini came out of the box needing a negligible amount of charging to top it up to the max. The mains charging arrangement is the familiar white shiny wall wart into which the Firewire cable can be plugged, only this time it is on a dinky slightly smaller scale in keeping with the smaller iPod. Advantages of the iPod Mini for PC users include the fact that it is capable of being charged via USB 2.0 and indeed it is shipped with a USB cable as well as the standard Firewire one. Reports from America suggest that this will even work using the USB port on the Airport Express unit, meaning that if you are going for the latter's intended "wi-fi your hotel room" usage, you will not need to carry the iPod power block with you. Unfortunately the clever technology does not yet permit iPod audio to play through the digital audio out of the Airport Express, but how cool would that be?

Of course the Firewire/ USB cable has a much more important

The mini iPod is really a 3.5G iPod, so I had a reasonable suspicion that it might be better prepared for Apple Lossless playback than the 3G 40GB, which still occasionally drops out as its buffering arrangement fails to cope. After listening to several hours of material played in exactly the same way (sequential album playback in one hour chunks) on the mini iPod I have yet to experience the same problem. Indeed I have heard improved buffering mentioned in connection with the 4G iPod so it would seem that this issue is now resolved. Listening to the same Lossless material on headphones on the 40GB and the mini revealed no audible difference in audio quality. As far as battery testing goes, I didn't have long enough to go through the five to ten charge discharge cycles recommended to get up to the claimed eight hours playback on a full charge, but it is generally accepted that the mini is slightly more capable of exceeding those eight hours than the 3G was.

Once I had completed my Lossless tests it was time to start the loading of the iPod for its owner. I would never advocate the default 128kbps bitrate for archival purposes, or for anyone intending to listen to their AAC files on serious speakers but as this was going to be a headphones and car deal I went for the rate at which Apple's publicity suggests an iPod mini can contain 1,000 tracks, and that indeed proved accurate. These files can sound a little thin and processed on revealing 'phones like the MX500s but quality will be perfectly adequate for the mini's intended audience.

The major innovation of the iPod mini was so well received that it has been carried over to the new 4G.

"Clickwheel" is now Apple's preferred terminology for the fourth iPod iteration. Devised due to the imperative of limited space on the mini's frontage, it now seems to be the logical way to allow truly simple one handed operation of any iPod, through the simple expedient of dividing the four quarters of the previous model's touchwheel and using them to double as replacements for the four buttons. These were outside the scrollwheel on first and second generation machines, and then moved to be touch buttons beneath the screen most recently. The switch to clickwheel poses little problem to the experienced iPod user, with the buttons feeling nicely positive, and they are difficult to press inadvertently when you are intending to scroll by touch.

It is impossible not to score the iPod mini with top marks – its desirability as an attractive and stylish toy is backed up by exemplary performance and ease of use. The few caveats associated with a recommendation to purchase for an audiophile audience are all related to consideration of capacity, battery life and hence value. A 4G 20GB iPod offers five times the capacity and fifty

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- Windows 2000 SP4 or XP
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- iTunes 4.2 or later (4.5 supplied)

VITAL STATISTICS

- 3.6 x 2 x 0.5 inches
- 3.6 ounces
- 1.67 inches diagonal screen

percent more playback time on a full charge (twelve hours versus eight) for around forty pounds more. I doubt that these facts will deter those covetous of the mini's colourful cuteness. Those of you who are less susceptible to the lure of the cool know what to do...



PICTURE COURTESY OF APPLE

less is more: new iPod mini (right) makes the original look positively frumpy...

meet your maker

A reference guide to Britain's manufacturers and distributors

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We are questioning our past more than ever - researching, restoring and recreating a fascinatingly wide range of products to try better to understand what has gone before and, perhaps, get a clearer idea of what may lie ahead. Yet few people in audio attach much value to historic hi-fi. What we have is a constant upgrade and improve message which, whilst understandable, is also one-dimensional. Such a restricted view of the value of the goods we produce, use and enjoy can be damaging. A reader's letter this month questions the value of 'second-hand' hi-fi, but I see it in a slightly different context.

The most vivid example of restoration - one that appeals to me because I studied aircraft engineering - is The Imperial War Museum's Duxford hangars, where old WWII fighters are being rebuilt to flying condition. I didn't realise that so much serious restoration work was going on until I walked into these hangars, to be confronted by the sight of stripped airframes, gleaming new alloy parts, massive aero engines on jigs and what have you, all being lovingly restored to working condition. There's something very evocative about machines as finely built and carefully honed as this, capable of such extreme performance.

You may have seen a restoration company in the Isle of Wight, quoted on the Freeview UK History channel, stating that today there are no fewer than fifty flying Spitfires. I asked the proud owner of an immaculate example at one of Duxford's air days what a modern Spit was worth. Around £3m was his reply, plus around £600k per annum to keep it airworthy and insured! All

of which goes to show just what value is now attached to old aircraft like this and just how serious aircraft restoration is today.

In America they always seem to do it better and I'm sure many of you know just how big the Americans are with aircraft restoration. But they also seem well

it's important that we retain some sense of the worth of older products

able to appreciate and talk up other features of their engineering heritage, including development of the telephone, the thermionic valve and much else. If you want to see an example of audio restoration, go to www.saveoursounds.org. I reached this site after reading a fascinating paper on 2D and 3D surface mapping of old Edison cylinders and 78s (see www-cdf.lbl.gov/~av). The bottom line here is that audio is seen as part of the American heritage, to be valued, rescued and restored, preferably in working form.

You might think this has little to do with hi-fi, but what is hi-fi and what is not is judged by the standards of the time. I've read plenty of claims for perfection penned back in 1950s, including Gilbert Briggs' (founder of Wharfedale) views on the Quad ESL57 when it first arrived. Today we wouldn't quite see it that way, as wonderful as the ESL57 is. In future I suspect people might laugh at what we consider hi-fi today. I'm sure that when sound recording first appeared people marveled at its quality. Quality is relative and an unreliable guide to worth.

Before consigning a piece of audio equipment to oblivion it's wise

to think carefully about whether it may have a value past its immediate utility. Any top-of-the-range product may well be potentially quite valuable, especially if hand built in limited quantity. And if it is working well, perhaps recently serviced and in perfect cosmetic condition, better still. Finally, if you are one of those people with a meticulous nature and unlimited storage space (the loft!) you might even have the original packing, instruction book, sales literature and receipt - wonderful!

The question then becomes do you keep it?

Well, how useful is it to you? Just weeks ago I finally decided I couldn't continue to store an open-reel Revox G36, but then I stumbled upon a box of open reel tapes in the loft and realised that on these tapes might well be the voices of people I have known in the past - my past - and that without the Revox I could not access them. I am not so sure that loft space is more valuable...

We can translate everything into monetary terms, but I prefer to talk about personal value here, always remembering that what is or is not valuable to you may well be to someone else. We all know of people who foolishly threw out record collections when the CD arrived only to realise they had gained convenience but lost value. Equipment is thrown away as it becomes ponderous old technology, yet in future it may have real value!

It's important we retain some sense of the worth of older products. Both for the enjoyment they can still bring by keeping old performances alive, as well as ensuring we don't lose sight of our technological history or our personal history. We don't value what we have until it has gone - then it's too late. ●

David Price



One of the most alluring things about hi-fi is that the more you put in, the more you get back. It's just like life I suppose - if you just wander idly by, then don't be surprised if nothing ever comes your way...

It's at this point that a quote from one of my favourite eighties lyricists, the great Stephen Patrick Morrissey, seems terribly apposite: "And when you want to live, how to start, where to go, who do you need to know?"

On a more prosaic level, this rings true for hi-fi too. It rewards knowledge, experience and commitment -

no matter how much money you have, you're not guaranteed a great sound unless you know what you want, and how to get it.

That's why you can, if you're clever enough, spend trifling sums on audio equipment and get rewards far in excess of the monetary value. Likewise, you can spend vast sums and get amazing results. And you can also spend those same huge amounts and end up, as the saying goes, 'whistling in the dark'...

Given that not all of us have either lots of spare time on our hands, a forensic knowledge of the great and the good of audio's past and a vast spare room well stocked with spare parts, 'new old stock' valves, workshop manuals and silver solder, then spending serious sums of cash on new hi-fi is the only way we're going to get the sound we want. But on what - and how much?

This is what this month's issue has attempted to address - and it's been quite an eye-opener for me. In short, what I've learned is that in 2004, if you're a serious, self-respecting hi-fi specialist then your entry level products have to give the perceived quality of your high end stuff. Which is why both Arcam and

Naim's cheap stuff looks and feels a million dollars. Frankly, if you warped back in time twenty years, took them into a specialist dealer and said, 'this is entry level hi-fi two decades from now', they wouldn't believe you - because it has all the perceived quality of something ten times its price back then. That's state-of-the-art British manufacturing for you...

“ One of the most alluring things about hi-fi is the more you put in, the more you get back... ”

Likewise, showing your 1984 BADA dealer a Denon DV1710 DVD player, and then telling them that it costs £149, and it's made in China, would also have them sitting down and asking for a glass of water. Aside from the amazing technical sophistication, the incredible processing power and astoundingly low price (less than the then best selling budget turntable - the Dual CS505/1 improved), the fact that it was made in China would have blown their 13A MK fuses...

Entry level audio has got startlingly better. In fact, this is where the real gains have been made. The Naim Nait 5i pastes the original NAIT in almost every respect, and it disgraces the then contemporary NAC32.5/NAP250 in terms of perceived build, finish and flexibility too (remember, just ten years back, a remote control Naim amp was anathema). Of course, the 32.5/250 sounds better - markedly so, but the Nait 5i costs the same in real terms as the original NAIT integrated, and yet still trounces its sonics, feature count and build. Much like PCs and cars I guess, the same money (in real terms) buys you so much more than back then...

What then of the qualitative differences between the high end and the entry level? Well, this is a trickier subject. Noel didn't actually like the JM Labs Micro Utopias any more than the budget 726s; he could see precisely what they were trying to do, but it's just that this didn't really agree with him. The point is that high end stuff is far more focused. Just as

you can buy a cheap suit that will offend nobody, look good at a wedding or a funeral (or in a bank), affordable hi-fi is (cleverly) contrived not to offend as many folk as possible. At the high end, however, the designer's own personal thoughts (and prejudices) on

the subject will out - and that's when people start to object...

To use the car analogy, I wouldn't go near high end BMWs with a barge pole, but I'd gladly drive a Porsche of the same price. This is precisely what high end hi-fi companies face - intensely personal intuitive choices by buyers who know precisely what they want, and are prepared to pay for it. Reading my Naim review in this month's group test, I can see just how lyrical I waxed over the NAC282/NAP200 - and the massive improvement it brought over the Nait 5i. But hang on, wouldn't I rather spend £4,000 on a serious 300B aspirated tube amp, and marry it to a pair of budget REL subs to match my Quad 989s and Townshend Maximum Supertweeters? Choices! Choices!

Designing cheap stuff is hard because the competition is so intense and people have such an tediously 'consumerist' approach to assessing kit (watts per channel, number of inputs, etc.) In another way however, I'm glad I don't have to make high end kit. Then, not only would I have to account for its silly price, but for why I voiced it in the way I did... ●

dominic todd



M P3, Hard Disk Drive and music servers. Looking back at my past year or so of columns, these have been the prominent areas of discussion and analysis. Thanks to the iPod and its ilk, I feel that these topics rightly deserve the column inches. It's to these technologies that the industry, as a whole, must turn towards to secure a long-term future and sustainability.

Nevertheless, whilst I and many others within the industry have been focusing upon the "white heat of technology", there has been something of a quiet revolution going on at the vinyl front. Now, while I believe that vinyl will never return to its glory days of the '70s and '80s, moves within the industry to get behind the format once again are worthy of analysis here.

I don't think it's controversial to say that the regeneration of the budget vinyl market can be placed solely at the feet of Pro-ject. Thanks to the likes of the Debut and Xpression, this company hasn't just given budget buyers something decent to buy, but something to buy, period. Before it came along, things were getting to the point that it was difficult even to buy the most basic products that, previously, lurked unceremoniously at the back of most manufacturers catalogues. Yet, thanks to the likes of Pro-ject, there is not only competition from the likes of Goldring and its GR1, but also a new vitality further up the turntable market.

Whilst it would be an exaggeration to say that there has been an explosion of turntables in the mid-price range, it's not untrue to say that there are more models now than, say, five years ago. More to

the point, the models around now are generally a fair step up from what was available before. Just take a look at the sub £1,000 sector and see for yourself - the Audio Note TT1, Avid Diva, Clearaudio Emotion, Michell Gyrodec SE and TecnoDec, Origin Live Aurora and Ultra, Roksan

there has been something of a quiet revolution going on at the vinyl front

Radius 5 and a host of new Project RPM models have all been launched in the past five years, and are all damn good players. More recently, the announcement of the new Rega P5 and P7 and the Marantz TT-15S1, prove that the industry's commitment to vinyl is far from transitory.

What's even more pertinent to observe is that these particular new products come from very different sectors of the hi-fi industry. Two new products from Rega aren't, perhaps, a great surprise. After all, the company was founded upon the legendary Planar decks, so it's no great shock to see Rega develop the product much as Linn has done with the LP12. More of a surprise is the Marantz. For a relative audio giant such as Marantz to launch a new turntable (even if it's not entirely all their own work) proves that there must be more to this so called vinyl revival than mere speculation. Let's not forget, that it was only a short time ago when Marantz were amongst a small band that predicted the demise of two-channel audio in its entirety...

Surprises continue further up the market. The new Roksan Xerxes (see last month's issue) is a welcome - yet

not especially surprising - addition to the vinyl world. Musical Fidelity's M1, on the other hand, came right out of the blue and surprised everyone in the industry. After all, despite having made phono stages, this was a company that had previously always kept away from turntables. Of

course, there are many other British companies that have built their reputation in the digital domain, who wouldn't dream of making a vinyl orientated product. Or would they? It recently came as almost as great a surprise as the M1, to find that Cyrus

have just launched their first phono stage [actually DT, they did make one for a very short time some five years ago - Ed.].

Those with longer memories will also recall that it was products like the Mission Cyrus (from when the companies were linked) DAD and PCM7000 CD players that did much to unseat the dominance of turntables in the first place! The Cyrus phono stage is far from being the only 'stage launched of late, either. Musical Fidelity, Creek and Graham Slee have all recently launched new designs to satisfy a small, but discerning market. As for tonearms, I fully expected the SME Series V to be the last serious tone arm ever produced. Yet, here too, thanks to the likes of the Origin Live, I've been proved wrong!

The turntable is, and will only ever be, a specialist market now. But how refreshing it is to see a niche market performing better than ever, with products that are more worthy than ever before? How those in the turbulent market of MP3 and HDD must look upon the vinyl industry's stability and high margins with envy! Still, when it comes to volume, the future is still very much in the digital domain... ●

...announcing the

Linn Multichannel AV Experience 2004!

Here's your chance to attend one of the greatest hi-fi events of the year! Linn Products, in association with *Hi-Fi World* magazine, proudly present the Linn Multichannel AV Experience 2004 at the Proud Galleries, 10 Greenland Street, Camden, London, N1 (the venue is just around the corner from Camden Town tube station).

Following on from the hugely successful Linn/*Hi-Fi World* LP12 vs. CD12 event of 2001, we're delighted to bring you a second special event, providing a spectacular multichannel music experience!

This will be a unique opportunity to hear one of the very best multichannel hi-fi systems ever made, in the comfortable surroundings of Proud Galleries. The set-up comprises the Linn Unidisk 1.1, Linn Kisto System Control and Linn Artikulat Multi-Channel Loudspeaker System - the very first UK public preview of the latter.

It will be your chance to hear what an ultra high end, state-of-the-art multichannel music system can really do with DVD-Audio, SACD and Compact Disc sources. You'll be able to compare and contrast the system's two-channel performance with its surround sound capability, and decide for yourself how much multichannel 'brings to the party'!

And more importantly perhaps, you'll be able to relax and enjoy some great music - including Beck, Barber, Clapton, Coltrane, Eminem, Gabriel, Linn Records, Mozart, Pink Floyd, Talking Heads, Who and Led Zeppelin (and much, much more) - in the congenial company of the Linn and *Hi-Fi World* teams.

The last Linn/*Hi-Fi World* event was a tremendous success - lots of fun was had by all as Linn staff including Ivor Tiefenbrun and Brian Morris, and the *Hi-Fi World* team including Noel Keywood and David Price, chatted informally with the 500 invited guests on matters analogue, digital, stereo, multichannel and more - over drinks and sandwiches. This time round, we hope to repeat the successful formula, and to take a closer look at multichannel too...

If you'd like to attend this unique event, all you have to do is send your name, address, telephone number and/or email address on a postcard (or email: linnevent@hi-fiworld.co.uk) to: Linn Event, *Hi-Fi World* magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, Kilburn Park Rd., London NW6 5LF. Due to the limited space, we can't guarantee you a place - tickets will be issued on a first come, first served basis, so we advise you to get writing now!

DATE: SATURDAY OCTOBER 16, 10am to 4pm
PLACE: PROUD GALLERIES 10 Greenland Street, Camden, London N1



patrick cleasby



The impetus behind Steve Jobs' apparent desire to take over the global music industry has recently accelerated to a degree where we can virtually guarantee having several iTunes or iPod related nuggets to impart to you each month, and so, for a second month running, here is the Apple bulletin!

After some genuinely innovative announcements we have alluded to over the last couple of months: the Apple Lossless codec, the Airport Express and Airtunes, the arrival of the iPod mini was almost old news – it was, after all, announced a very long time ago at the beginning of the year for supposed April shipping over here. Unfortunately the level of its stateside success so outstripped expectations that the launch date for the rest of the world had to be pushed back to July as all available units were flying off the shelves in America.

Exactly the same phenomenon is happening here, as initial shipments are a fraction of retailers' order amounts, and those units which do arrive are sold out on pre-orders alone. Regrettably it appears that the wonderful Airport Express may be similarly affected – at the time of writing there a few days until the end of July ETA for that one and hopes do not seem high either that it will arrive on schedule or that supply will meet demand. However any home networking and/or audio geek will want one. What can I say? I do!

This phenomenon is not the result of hype – it is the result of the perfect conjunction of beautifully-designed form with well-conceived functionality. This is also reinforced by the precipitant success of the European iTunes Music Store (iTMS) launch, driving punters to select the only complementary mobile player. There have, of course, been teething

problems with the store, not least the failure of Jobs to secure the co-operation of European indie labels before the launch date. The recent commitment of, and progressive addition of tracks from Sanctuary, Beggars Banquet and V2 has remedied that situation, and other problems of mislabelled tracks and difficult sign up for a minority are easily outweighed by the ludicrous ease with which the

unannounced.

Also interesting is the announcement of a tie-in with Motorola whereby the latter's phones will ship with an iTunes client capable of playing DRM'd [*that's 'Digital Rights Managed', if you're not as geeky as PC - Ed.*] tracks from the iTMS, transferred to the phone from the computer based iTunes. The shape of things to come? It can only be a matter of time until phone users can buy and download directly from the store. The Motorola announcement is notable for another reason – it is the first time that Apple has licensed its Fairplay DRM software for use by a third party. If Jobs is prepared to loosen the rigid iPod / iTunes tie-up which is the core driver of Apple's music success he must have a jolly good reason.

Motorola have succeeded in landing iTunes partner status where others such as Real's Rob Glasser have had their overtures snubbed. Real's response was to release Harmony, a DRM-transcoding product which enables tracks from Real's Rhapsody service to retain their Helix DRM controls in a Fairplay-compliant form. Thus protected tracks from a service other than iTunes can be played on an iPod for the first time.

It is at this point that Apple could start to look like the bad guys.

The argument is over the means by which Real obtained their understanding of Fairplay – reverse engineering or something more nefarious? If, for whatever reason, they act to suppress Real's initiative they could come across as not acting in the interests of the consumer, but rather to protect their rapidly developing monopoly. The words "The Microsoft of Music" have already been mentioned, but the real Microsoft may shortly have something to say about that...

recent announcements from Apple only reinforce their strength in this fiercely competitive market...

majority are able to sign up and purchase their tracks.

Neither do I believe the cynical interpretation that Apple is deliberately stoking style-cachet demand for its products - artificially creating a degree of exclusivity by making them hard to get hold of. I prefer the "victims of their own success" interpretation that they are merely struggling to make enough of a family of products which stand on their own merits.

The most recent announcements from the Apple camp can only reinforce their strength in this fiercely competitive market. This month has seen the announcement and launch of the 4G iPods, which at first glance offer very little over the 3G model, although there are some minor physical and software changes. At least this time we have not suffered a lag behind the Americans, and the units have arrived in greater numbers than the iPod mini. Most intriguing is the recent revelation that the new version is not just a facelift, it is a ground-up redesign, and maybe actually with the upgrade for the devotees as it contains the support for new functionality – thus far

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Digital to analogue conversion - the current state of the art?

Words are easily spoken. Yet are we to believe that the amount of superlatives extolled on the Perpetual Technologies P1-A P3-A combination is hype or the over zealous rantings of biased reviewers? We don't think so! Infact, we know that these two diminutive boxes, (upsampler and dac) plus Monolithics dedicated power supply, set the standard for digital to analogue conversion. What's more, now upgraded to full "signature 2" status by electronics wizard Dan Wright, they now rival units costing 10 times the price.



Before you make a substantial investment in this delicate, yet important area, we invite you to see what the hi-fi press have said. Hi-Fi News said "units that do something special, communicating the illusion of real musicians" Previously only available via mail order, we can offer these remarkable units to European audiophiles. Please contact Paul at Weald Audio, for those with computer access go to <http://stereotimes.com> and to <http://modwright> for more technical details and reviews.

Weald Audio can be contacted on
07966 267404 between 9am and 8pm

world classics

In this heavily revised section, you'll find the great and the good from audio's glorious past. Most are seminal designs which have earned their place in hi-fi history, but you'll also see some oddities which aren't classic as such, but are great used buys. The year of introduction is given, alongside the original UK launch price. Think we've overlooked something? Then write in and let us know!

DIGITAL

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CDI 1986 [£1500]
Inspired Stan Curtis redesign of Philips CD104, complete with switchable digital filter. Lean but tight and musical performer.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CD4SE 1998 [£200]
A touch soft in the treble and tonally light, but outstanding in every other respect.

LINN KARIK III 1995 [£1775]
The final Karik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, grippy dynamic sound, albeit tonally dry.

MARANTZ CD73 1983 [£700]
A riot of gold brushed aluminium and LEDs, this distinctive machine squeezed every last ounce from its 14x4 DAC -super musical



MARANTZ SA-1 2000 [£5,000]
The greatest argument for SACD. This sublime Ken Ishiwata design is utterly musically convincing with both CD and SACD, beating most audiophile CD spinners hands down.



MERIDIAN 207 1988 [£995]
Beautifully-built two-box with pre-amp stage. Very musical although not as refined as modern Bitstream gear. No digital output.

MUSICAL FIDELITY TRIVISTA 2002 £4000
When playing SACDs, the sweetest, most lucid and lyrical digital disc spinner we've heard. Old school stereo, pure DSD design. CD sound is up in the £1000 class, too! Future classic.

MERIDIAN MCD 1984 [£600]
The first British 'audiophile' machine was a sweeter, more detailed Philips CD100. 14x4 never sounded so good, until the MCD Pro arrived a year later.



NAIM CDS 1990 [£ N/A]
Classic Philips 16x4 chipset with serious attention to power supplies equals grin-inducing sonics.



SONY CDP-101 1982 [£800]
The first Japanese CD spinner was powerful and involving. Brilliant transport more than compensated for 16x2 DAC, and you even got remote control!

SONY CDP-R1/DAS-R1 1987 [£3,000]
Sony's first two boxer was right first time. Tonally lean, but probably the most detailed and architectural sounding machine of the eighties.



SONY CDP-701ES 1984 [£890]
Sony's first ever bespoke high end audiophile machine used a 16x2 DAC to provide a clinically incisive sound; supreme build quality allied to the pure unadulterated luxury of a paperback-sized remote control.

YAMAHA CD-X1 1983 [£340]
Nicely built 16x2 machine with a very sharp and detailed sound; sometimes too much so. Excellent ergonomics, unlike almost every other rival of the time.

COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

TEAC VRDS-T1 1994 [£600]
Warm and expansive sound made this a mid price hit. Well built, with a slick mech.



ESOTERIC P0 1997 [£8,000]
The best CD drive bar none; TEAC's Tokyo boys pushed the boat out in style. Brilliantly incisive, ridiculously over engineered.

KENWOOD 9010 1986 [£600]
The first discrete Jap transport was beautifully done and responds well to re-clocking even today.

DACs

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 1995 [£99]
Good value upgrade for budget CD players with extensive facilities and detailed sonics.



DCS ELGAR 1997 [£8500]
Extremely open and natural performer, albeit extremely pricey - superb.



DPA LITTLE BIT 3 1996 [£299]
Rich, clean, rhythmic and punchy sound transforms budget CD players.



PINK TRIANGLE DACAPO 1993 [£ N/A]
Exquisite; the warmest and most lyrical 16bit digital audio we have ever heard. Clever plug-in digital filter modules really worked!



QED DIGIT 1991 [£90]
Budget bitstream performer with tweaks aplenty. Positron PSU upgrade makes it smooth, but now past it.

TURNTABLES

ARISTON RD11S 1972 [£94]
Modern evolution of Thorens' original belt drive paradigm, Scotland's original super-deck was warm and musical, albeit soft. Still capable of fine results today.

PIONEER PL12D [1973] £36

The beginning of the end for the British turntable industry. When vinyl was the leading source, this bought new standards of noise performance and stability to the class, plus a low friction S-shaped tonearm. Later PL112D was off the pace compared to rivals

**DUAL CS505** 1982 [£75]

Simple high quality engineering and a respectable low mass tonearm made for a brilliant budget buy. Polished, smooth and slightly bland sound.

GOLDRING LENCO 88/89 1963 [£15.65]

Simple, well engineered middleweight with soft, sweet sound and reasonable tonearms. Good spares and servicing support even today from specialists.

LINN AXIS 1987 [£253]

Simplified cut-price version of the Sondek complete with LVX arm. Elegant and decently performing mid-price package. Later version with Akito tonearm better.

LINN SONDEK LP12 1973 [£86]

For many, the Brit superdeck; constant mods meant that early ones sound warmer and more lyrical than modern versions. Beguilingly musical but now off the pace.

**TECHNICS SP10** 1973 [£400]

Seminal Japanese engineering. Sonics depend on plinths, but a well mounted SP10/II will give any modern a hard time, especially in respect of bass power and midband accuracy.

MARANTZ TT1000 1978 [£ N/A]

Beautiful seventies high end belt drive with sweet and clean sound. Rare in Europe, but big in Japan.

**MICHELL GYRODEC** 1981 [£599]

Thanks to its stunning visuals, this bold design wasn't accorded the respect it deserved until recently. Early examples sound cold and mechanical, but now right on the pace. Clean, solid and architectural sound.

REGA PLANAR 3 1978 [£79]

Brilliantly simple but clean and musical performer, complete with Acos-derived S-shape tonearm. 1983 saw the arrival of the RB300, which added detail at the expense of warmth. Superb budget buy.

GARRARD 301/401 1953 [£19]

Heavy metal - tremendously strong and articulate with only a veiled treble to let it down. In many respects, better than the seventies 'superdecks' that succeeded it.

**ROKSAN XERXES** 1984 [£550]

Supposedly the first to 'better' the LP12. Super tight and clean sound, with excellent transients. Less musical than the Sondek, but more neutral. Sagging plinth top-plates make them a dubious used buy.

THORENS TD124 1959 [£ N/A]

The template for virtually every 1970s 'superdeck', this iconic design was the only real competition for Garrard's 301. It was sweeter and more lyrical, yet lighter and less impactful in the bass.

**TOWNSHEND ROCK** 1979 [£ N/A]

The product of academic research by the Cranfield Institute, this novel machine has an extremely clean and fluid sound. Substantially modified through the years, and capable of superb results even today.

TRIO LO-7D 1978 [£600]

The best 'all-in-one' turntable package ever made. Trio/Kenwood threw their 'engineering best practice' book at this one with startling results. Clean, powerful and three-dimensional sound, ultimately limited by the tonearm.

TONEARMS**ACOS LUSTRE GST-1** 1975 [£46]

The archetypal S-shaped seventies arm; good, propulsive and involving sound in its day, but ragged and undynamic now.

AUDIO TECHNICA AT 1120 1978 [£75]

Fine finish can't compensate for this ultra low mass arm's limited sonics - a good starter arm if you've only got a few quid to spend.

ALPHASON HR100S 1981 [£150]

First class arm, practically up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there is no service available now. Totally under priced when new, exceptional.

**SME 3009** 1959 [£18]

Once state of the art, but long since bettered. Musical enough, but weak at frequency extremes and veiled in the midband. Legendary serviceability has made it a cult, used prices unjustifiably high.

GRACE G707 1974 [£58]

This early Japanese example of the tonearm art has a smooth, lyrical sound. Imported by Linn, fitted to early LP12s. Sonically way off the pace now, though.

REGA RB300 1983 [£88]

Inspired budget esoterica. Detailed, tight, neutral sound but tonally grey sounding in absolute terms. Responds well to tweaking, and its cheaper RB250 brother better still.

**SME SERIES III** 1979 [£113]

Clever variable mass design complete with Titanium Nitride tube tried to be all things to all men, and failed. Charming nonetheless, with a warm and inoffensive sound.

HADCOCK GH228 1976 [£46]

Evergreen unipivot with lovely sweet, fluid sound. Excellent service backup.

**LINN ITTOK LVII** 1978 [£253]

Arguably the first 'superarm'; Japanese design to Linn specs made for a muscular, rhythmic sound with real dynamics. Now off the pace, but the final LVIII version worth seeking out.

NAIMARO 1986 [£875]

Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes.

**TECHNICS EPA-501** 1979 [£ N/A]

Popular partner for late seventies Technics motor units. Nice build and Titanium Nitride tube can't compensate for middling sound.

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS/COMBOS**DELTEC** 1987 [£1900]

Fast, dry and with excellent transients, this first DPA integrated is the real deal for eighties obsessives. Ridiculously punchy 80W per channel from a tiny, half-size box. Radical, cool and more than a little strange.

ROGERS A75 1978 [£220]

The prototypical Audiolab 8000a – lots of sensible facilities, a goodly power output and nice sound in one box. The later A75II and A100 versions offered improved sonics and were seriously sweet and open to listen to.

EXPOSURE VII/VIII 1985 [£625]

Seminal mid-eighties Exposure pre-power, offering most of what rival Naim amps did with just that little bit extra smoothness and sweetness. Still, it's by no means 'sweet' by today's standards, being lean, punchy, musical. It's also possessed of that quintessentially eighties look – frumpy black steel boxes with rough silk screened logos!

**SUGDEN C51/P51** 1976 [£130]

Soft sounding early Sugden combo with a plethora of facilities and filters, complete with seventies-tastic DIN socketry. A sweet and endearing performer as you'd expect, but lacking in power and poor load driving ability, so partner carefully.

VTL MINIMAL/50W MONOBLOCK 1985 [£1,300]

Vacuum Tube Logic was one of the Europe's biggest tube names in the eighties, and it shows. Rugged, professional build and finish allied to a lively and punchy sound (albeit with limited power) make them an excellent used buy.

A&R A60 1977 [£115]

Sweet and musical feature-packed integrated; the Audiolab 8000A used its blueprint to great effect.

**CREEK CAS4040** 1983 [£150]

More musical than any budget amp before it; CAS4140 loses tone controls, gains grip.

AUDIOLAB 8000A 1985 [£495]

Smooth integrated with clean MM/MC phono stage and huge feature count. Extremely reliable, too. Post '93 versions a top used buy.

**MCINTOSH MA6800** 1995 [£3735]

Effortlessly sweet, strong and powerful with seminal styling to match.

SUGDEN A21 1969 [£ N/A]

Class A transistor integrated with an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

MISSION CYRUS 2 1984 [£299]

Classic eighties minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradeable with PSX power supply.

**MUSICAL FIDELITY A1** 1985 [£350]

Beguiling Class A integrated with exquisite styling. Questionable reliability.

**NAIM NAIT** 1984 [£350]

Superb rhythms and dynamics make it truly musical, but tonally monochromatic. Fine phono stage, very low power.

NAD 3020 1979 [£69]

Brilliantly smooth, sweet and punchy at the price and even has a better phono stage than you'd expect. The archetypal budget super-amp.

**MYST TMA3** 1983 [£300]

Madcap eighties minimalism, but a strong and tight performer all the same.

ROGERS CADET III 1965 [£34]

Sweet sounding valve integrated, uses ECL86 output valves, even has a half useable phono stage, sweet, warm a good introduction to valves

**ROTEL RA-820BX** 1983 [£139]

Lively and clean budget integrated that arguably started the move to minimalism.

PREAMPLIFIERS**AUDIOLAB 8000C** 1991 [£499]

Tonally grey but fine phono input and great facilities make it an excellent general purpose tool.

AUDIO RESEARCH SP-81982 [£1,400]

Beautifully designed and built high end tube preamplifier with deliciously sweet and smooth sound. Not the last word in incision or grip, but that didn't matter to those who aspired to it.

CONRAD JOHNSON**MOTIV MC-8** 1986 [£2,500]

Minimalist FET-based preamplifier from the Yank valve specialists is brilliantly neutral and smooth with a spry, light balance in the mould of Sugden high end stuff. Something of a curio, but worthwhile nonetheless.

CROFT MICRO 1986 [£150]

Budget valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance.

LEAK POINT ONE STEREO 1958 [£ N/A]

Good for their time, but way off the pace these days. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fit!

LINN LK-1 1986 [£499]

A brave attempt by the Glasgow boys to bring remote controlled user-friendliness to hair-shirt audiophile hi-fi. Didn't quite work, but not half bad for under £100.

NAIM NAC32.5 1978 [£ N/A]

The Salisbury company came of age with this, their classic high end pre. Brilliantly fast and incisive sound that's a joy with vinyl but a tad forward for digital.

LECSON AC-1 1973 [£ N/A]

Amazing styling courtesy of Allan Boothroyd can't disguise its rather cloudy sound, but a design classic nonetheless.

**QUAD 22** 1958 [£25]

The partner to the much vaunted Quad II monoblocs - cloudy and vague sound means it's for anacrophiles only.

QUAD 33 1968 [£43]

Better than the 22, but Quad's first tranny pre isn't outstanding. Responds well to tweaking/ rebuilding though...

POWER AMPLIFIERS**LEAK STEREO 20** 1958 [£31]

Excellent workaday classic valve amplifier with decent power and drive. Surprisingly modern sounding if rebuilt sympathetically. Irrepressibly musical and fluid.

**LECSON API** 1973 [£ N/A]

Madcap cylindrical styling alluded to its 'tower of power' pretensions, but it wasn't. Poor build, but decently clean sounding when working.

MARANTZ MODEL 9 1997 [£8000]

Authentic reproduction monoblocs still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after.

MICHELL ALECTO 1997 [£1989]
Crisp, clean and beautifully controlled with gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 Orca this sounds delicious!

LEAK POINT ONE, TL10, TL12.1 1949 [£28]
Early classics that are getting expensive. Overhauling is de rigueur before use, using original parts if possible. Surprisingly crisp and musical sound, that's far more modern than Quad IIs. Deeply impressive when in fine fettle.



MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 1996 [£1000PR]
200W of sweet smooth transistor stomp in a grooved tube! Under-rated oddity.



RADFORD STA25 RENAISSANCE 1986 [£977]
At the time, very possibly the least cool amplifier on the planet – and we're not talking heat dissipation here. This reworking of Radford's original late sixties design was possessed of a wonderfully rich, old school valve sound with enough power (25W) and lots of subtlety.



QUAD II 1952 [£22]
The all-time classic valve amplifier, with a deliciously fluid and lyrical voice. In other respects though, it sounds hopelessly dated. Low power and hard to partner properly.



QUAD 405 1978 [£115]
The first of the current dumpers is a capable design with smooth, effortless power and a decently musical sound. 606 and 707 continue the theme with greater detail and incision.

QUAD 303 1968 [£55]
Bullet proof build, but woolly sound. Off the pace, but endearing nonetheless. Some pipe smoking slipper wearers swear by them!

KRELL KMA100 II [1987] £5,750
Ludicrous monoblock version of the giant KSA-100 is one of the seminal eighties transistor power amplifiers. Massive wallop allied to a very clean and open Class A sound makes this one of the best amplifiers of its type, ever.

PIONEER M-73 1988 [£1,200]
Monster stomp from this seminal Japanese power amplifier, complete with switchable Class A and Class B operation. Clean, open and assured sounding, albeit a tad behind the pace on high speed dance music. Rosewood side cheeks and black brushed aluminium completes the eighties-tastic experience.



PHONO STAGES

CREEK OBH-8 SE 1996 [£180]
Punchy, rhythmic character with oodles of detail makes this a great budget audiophile classic. Partner with a Goldring G1042 for an unbeatable budget combination.



LINN LINNK 1984 [£149]
Naim-designed MC phono stage built to partner the original Naim NAIT - yes, really! Fine sound, although off the pace these days.

MICHELL ISO 1988 [£ N/A]
This Tom Evans-designed black box started the trend for high performance offboard phono stages. Charismatic, musical and punchy - if lacking in finesse.

TUNERS

MARANTZ ST-8 1978 [£353]
Marantz's finest radio moment. Warm, organic sound plus an oscilloscope for checking the signal strength and multipath.



CREEK CAS3140 1985 [£199]
Excellent detail, separation and dynamics - brilliantly musical at the price. T40 continued the theme...

NAD 4040 1979 [£79]
Tremendously smooth and natural sound allied to low prices and good availability make this budget analogue esoterica. Needs a good antenna to work properly, however.

NAIM NAT03 1993 [£595]
The warm, atmospheric sound is further proof of Naim's proficiency with tuners.

PIONEER TX-9500 1976 [£295]
Another of the serious classic solid-staters. Boasts the usual high end Jap package of fine sound, brilliant sensitivity and superb build.

LEAK TROUGHLINE 1956 [£25]
Series I an interesting ornament but limited to 88-100MHz only. II and III are arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiplex socket. Fed by a modern outboard decoder they're deliciously lucid with true dimensionality.



YAMAHA CT7000 1977 [£444]
Reputedly the best of the classic Jap analogues, this combines sleek ergonomics, high sensitivity and an explicit, detailed sound.

QUAD FM4 1983 [£240]
Supreme ergonomics and styling allied to a pleasingly lyrical sound with plenty of sweetness and detail made this one of the best tuners around upon its launch.



REVOX B760 1975 [£520]
More of a semi-pro machine than a domestic bit of kit, the Revox offers superlative measured performance although the sound isn't quite as staggering as the numbers. Fine nonetheless, and surely the most durable tuner here?

NAD 4140 1995 [£199]
Brilliant affordable digital tuner has a smooth, detailed musical sound plus sensible real-world facilities.

ROGERS T75 1977 [£125]
Superb mid-price British audiophile design, complete with understated black fascia. Fine sound in the true Rogers mould – smooth and sweet with fine dimensionality.

SANSUI TU-9900 1976 [£300]
A flagship Japanese tuner designed to steal sales from the likes of Accuphase and Revox, it boasts superlative RF performance and an extremely smooth and lucid sound, along with very fine build and finish.

SONY ST-5950 1977 [£222]
One of the first Dolby FM-equipped tuners, a format that came to nought. Still, it was Sony's most expensive tuner to date, and boasted a very good sound quality allied to brilliant ergonomics.



TECHNICS ST-8080 1976 [£180]
National Panasonic's specialist hi-fi brand was a big hitter back then, and this is no exception. Superb FM stage makes for a very clean and smooth listen with lots of detail and depth.

ANALOGUE RECORDERS

YAMAHA TC-800GL 1977 [£179]
Early classic with ski-slope styling courtesy of Mario Bellini. Middling sonics by modern standards, but cool nonetheless!



AIWA XD-009 1989 [£600]
Aiwa's Nak beater didn't, but it wasn't half bad nonetheless. Massive spec even included a 16x4 DAC!

NAKAMICHI CR-7E 1987 [£800]
The very best sounding Nakamichi ever - but lacks the visual drama of a Dragon.



PIONEER CTF-950 1978 [£400]
Not up to modern standards sonically, but a great symbol of the cassette deck art nonetheless.



REVOX A77 1968 [£145]
The first domestic open reel that the pros used at home. Superbly made, but sonically off the pace these days. B77 better, but couldn't match the Japanese.



SONY WM-D6C 1985 [£290]
Single capstan transport on a par with a Swiss watch, single rec/replay head better than most Naks. Result: sublime.

**DIGITAL RECORDERS**

SONY MDS-JE555ES 2000 [£900]
The best sounding MD deck ever, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



PIONEER PDR-555RW 1999 [£480]
For a moment, this was the CD recorder to have. Clean and detailed.

MARANTZ DR-17 1999 [£1100]
Probably the best sounding CD recorder made; built like a brick outhouse with a true audiophile sound and HDCD compatibility.



KENWOOD DM-9090 1997 [£500]
Serious and sophisticated sound thanks to well implemented ATRAC 4.5; surprisingly musical MD recorder.

SONY TCD-8 DATMAN 1996 [£599]
Super clean sound makes this an amazing portable, but fragile.

LOUDSPEAKERS

ACOUSTIC RESEARCH AR18S 1978 [£125]
Yank designed, British built loudspeaker became a budget staple for many rock fans, thanks to the great speed from the paper drivers, although finesse was most definitely not their forte...

BBC LS3/5A 1972 [£88]
Extremely low colouration design is amazing in some respects - articulation, stage depth, clarity - and useless in others (both frequency extremes). Came in wide variety of guises from various manufacturers building it under licence. Partner with Rogers ABI subwoofers for an extra two octaves of bass!



LOWTHER PM6A 1957 [£18 EACH]

This seminal full-range driver is still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

TANNOY WESTMINSTER 1985 [£4500]
Folded horn monsters which certainly sound good if you have the space. Not the last word in tautness but can drive large rooms and image like few others.



JR 149 1977 [£120]
Infamous cylindrical speaker that was ignored for decades but now back in fashion! Based on classic KEF T27 / B110 combo as seen in the BBC LS3/5a. Doesn't play loud, needs a powerful transistor amplifier, but rewards with fine clarity in imaging.



SPENDOR BCI 1976 [£240]
Celestion HF1300 tweeter meets bespoke Spendor Bextrene mid-bass unit - and the result is a beautifully warm yet well focussed sound. A little bass bloom necessitates careful low-stand mounting, but these prove that the seventies did have some fine designs after all!

QUAD ESL57 1956 [£45 EACH]
Wonderfully open and neutral sound puts box loudspeakers to shame. Properly serviced they give superb midband performance, although frequency extremes less impressive. Ideally, use in stacked pairs or with subwoofers and supertweeters.



KEF R105 1977 [£785]
Three way Bextrene-based floorstander (complete with castors!) gave a truly wide-band listen and massive (500W) power handling. A very neutral, spacious and polite sounding design, but rhythmically well off the pace. The quintessential nineteen seventies loudspeaker.

IMF TLS80 1976 [£550]
Warm and powerful nineteen seventies behemoth with transmission loading and a mixture of KEF and Celestion drive units. Impressively physical wideband sound but rhythms aren't its forte.

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- Egglston Works
- Electrograph Delphi
- Genelec
- Graham
- Gryphon
- Imerge
- In Focus
- J.M Lab
- KEF
- Krell
- Lexicon
- Linn
- Loewe
- Lutron
- Lyra
- Mark Levinson
- Michell Eng.
- Musical Fidelity
- Naim
- NEC
- Nordost
- Oracle
- Ortofon
- P.M.C.
- Plinius
- Primare
- Project
- Quadraspire
- REL
- Rockport
- Roksan
- Rotel
- Ruark
- Seleco
- SME
- Soundations
- Straight Wire
- Sugden
- Tara Labs
- Teac
- Theme Scene
- Tom Evans
- Totem
- Transfiguration
- Trichord
- Trilogy
- Van den Hul
- Vienna Acoustics
- VPI
- Wilson Audio
- Wilson Research
- YBA

H I - F I

HOME CINEMA

MULTIROOM INSTALL

BUY / SELL

Quarterly Sale items

	Our Price	Original Retail Price
ClaraVox Magnifica (Final Offer)	£2,995.00	£14,500.00
McCormack Line Drive	£395.00	£995.00
Audio Refinement Pre 5 "new"	£395.00	£995.00
Quad 33/ 303	£195.00	-
Rogers LS55 "new"	£195.00	£430.00

New this month

POWER AMPLIFIERS		
Naim Nap 500 + S00 PS	£8,995.00	£12,000.00
Krell 250 A/3	£2,495.00	£5,000.00
Parasound 12 Channel Amp	£1,500.00	£3,000.00
McIntosh MC2000 Anniversary	£5,995.00	£14,000.00

PRE AMPLIFIERS		
Naim Headline	£1,995.00	£285.00
Naim S52 + S52PS	£8,995.00	£12,100.00
Audio Research Ref 2 mk II	£4,995.00	£10,498.00

LOUDSPEAKERS		
B & W Nautilus 800 Sig	£8,995.00	£14,000.00

CD PLAYERS & DACS/DVD PLAYERS		
Naim CDS 3 + XPS 2	£5,975.00	£7,244.00
Sony SACD1	£1,895.00	£4,000.00

TURNTABLES, ANALOGUE, VARIOUS		
SME Series V Arm "new"	£1,400.00	£1,650.00
Oxford Crystal Reference/ Air Tangent	£2,995.00	£ -

AV COMPONENTS		
Lexicon MC12 rev 4	ASK	£9,500.00
Krell HTS Processor	£3,995.00	£8,000.00
Primare A30.3	ASK	£1,000.00
Primare A30.5	ASK	£1,700.00
Parasound C2 (Halo)	ASK	£3,500.00
Parasound C1 (Halo)	ASK	£5,500.00
NAD	ASK	-
Marantz	ASK	-

PLASMA PROJECTORS		
From NEC/ Panasonic/Pioneer/Sharp		
Panasonic TH-42 PWD6 "new"	FROM £2500	ASK
In Focus 5700	ASK	£3,000.00
In Focus 7200	SPECIAL	£6,000.00
SIM 2 Domino 20	ASK	£3,750.00

MULTIROOM INSTALLATIONS **		
Linn Knekt		
Living Control		
Lutron Lighting		
System-Line		
Helvar Lighting		
* Each system tailor made to your requirements		

Power amplifiers

Jeff Rowland Model I	£1,295.00	£ -
Bel Canto Evo 4i	ASK	£3,895.00
VTL MB450	£3,995.00	£7,000.00
Gamut D200 mk III "Hi Fi Choice Product of the Year"	£On Dem	£2,000.00
Musical Fidelity F15	£4,995.00	£10,000.00
Cello Duet 350	£3,995.00	£4,995.00
Krell Showcase 5	£1,995.00	£7,000.00
Tesserac TAM 60 Monoblocks	£2,495.00	£4,500.00
Muse Model 300 Monoblocks	£2,995.00	£6,350.00
Plinius SA 250 mk IV	£995.00	£2,395.00
ART V160	£4,995.00	£10,000.00
Krell FPB 250m Monoblocks	£3,990.00	£9,000.00
Melos 402 Gold Triode Plus Monoblocks 400wpc	£1,895.00	£2,350.00
Bryston 4BSST	£5,250.00	£7,000.00
Conrad Johnson Premier 140 SA	£1,395.00	£3,600.00
Krell KSA 80B	£375.00	£608.00
Naim Nait 3	£4,500.00	£8,250.00
Cary 805 C Monoblocks "new"	£995.00	£2,250.00
Cary SLA 70 mk II Silver	£2,795.00	£4,000.00
Conrad Johnson MF2500	£4,995.00	£9,500.00
YBA Passion Monoblocks	£On Dem	£5,500.00
Audia Flight 100	£On Dem	£4,500.00
Audia Flight One Integrated	£3,995.00 each	£6,000.00
Linn Klimax 500 Solo (4)	£2,695.00	£3,300.00
Musical Fidelity NuVista 300	£2,495.00	£5,500.00
Boulder 500 AE	£1,395.00	£2,000.00
ES Lab DX-54	£On Dem	£895.00
Roksan Caspian Integrated	£On Dem	£645.00
Roksan Caspian Power	£1,195.00	£1,500.00
Krell FPB 700x	£On Dem	£2,995.00
ES Lab DX-S8	£On Dem	£1,550.00
Plinius B200P	ASK	£3,750.00
Plinius SA 102 "new"	£On Dem	£2,350.00
Bryston 4 BSST	£120.00	£120.00
Linn Bass Active Card	£4,995.00	£12,000.00
Krell MDA 300	£895.00	£1,030.00
Linn Klassik CD Amp silver	£On Dem	£16,500.00
Boulder 1060 Power "new"	£1,350.00	£1,500.00
Primare 30.1 mk II Integrated	£3,995.00	£5,995.00
YBA Passion Stereo "new"		

AV components

AV COMPONENTS		
Parasound AS1 - 5 Channel	ASK	£3,500.00
Lexicon MCI	£1,995.00	£5,500.00
Lexicon MC8/ MC8B	ASK	£5,000.00/ £5,750.00
Lexicon RT10 DVD Player	ASK	£2,300.00
SIM 2 HT 300	£7,500.00	£9,000.00
Primare P30 Processor	£1,295.00	£2,000.00
Linn Klassik DVD	£On Dem	£2,000.00
Lexicon MC12 / MC12B	ASK	£8,100.00/ £8,900.00
Parasound C2	ASK	£3,500.00

PLASMAS/LCD/PROJECTORS		
Seleco/Sony/Sanyo	-	ASK

Pre amplifiers

Krell KRC	£1,995.00	£6,000.00
Audio Research LS9	£1,200.00	£2,000.00
Musical Fidelity F22	£395.00	£ -
Cello Palette Pre	£7,995.00	£ -
Tesserac Tala Pre	£495.00	£1,195.00
Audio Research LS25 mk II	£3,995.00	£5,995.00
Audio Research LS7	£695.00	£1,750.00

Mark Levinson 380 S	£4,495.00	£6,995.00
Boulder LSAE Pre Amp	£1,750.00	£3,500.00
Klein 7LX 3.5B	£2,900.00	£5,400.00
Audio Research LS3	£795.00	£1,997.00
Cary SLPPBL Remote Pre x-dem	£1,995.00	£2,794.00
Conrad Johnson PV14L	£1,650.00	£2,350.00
Audia Flight Pre	£On Dem	£4,500.00
Musical Fidelity NuVista	£995.00	£1,200.00
YBA 2a Line	£1,295.00	£1,995.00
Tom Evans The Vibe Pre	ASK	£2,700.00
Boulder 1012 (pre amp/ 24.96 dac/ Phono)	£On Dem	£13,000.00
YBA Passion Pre (inc Phono)	£3,995.00	£5,595.00
Boulder 2010 Pre	EPOA	£30,000.00
Plinius 16L "new"	£On Dem	£3,200.00
C.A.T. ultimate reference Pre Amp Inc/Phono "new"	ASK	£7,350.00

Quality speakers

Sonus Faber Amati Homage	£8,995.00	£12,000.00
JM Lab Alto Utopia BE	£On Dem	£11,000.00
JM Lab 926	£995.00	£2,200.00
JM Lab Nova Utopia	ASK	£2,500.00
JM Lab Diva Utopia BE Signature Finish	ASK	£7,600.00
JM Lab Micro BE Utopia + Stand	ASK	£4,400.00
Wilson Benesh Act 2 (1 upgrade)	£4,995.00	£9,000.00
REL Stentor III	£695.00	£900.00
ART Audio Stilleto	£1,695.00	£ -
Sonus Faber Electa Amator II (no stds)	£1,695.00	£ -
Revel Studio	Coming Soon	£ -
Revel Salon	Coming Soon	£ -
Linn Kielihds (+ Active Cards)	£395.00	£1,000.00
Wilson ACT 2 (Upgrade)	£4,995.00	£9,000.00
JM Lab Sib & Cub (5.1 spk sys)	£695.00	£859.00
JM Lab Phezzo Utopia	£3,000.00	£7,899.00
Audio Physic Asanti	£4,995.00	£7,800.00
Wilson Audio System 5.1	£6,995.00	£19,000.00
Revel Ultima Studio	£7,495.00	£13,000.00
ATC SCM 10 Passive Black	£495.00	£1,100.00
JM Lab Utopia	£9,995.00	£18,000.00
Reference 3A	£1,750.00	£2,250.00
Audio Physic Spark	£1,150.00	£1,795.00
Talon Kite Centre & Bracket	£795.00	£1,750.00
Aerial Acoustic SW12 Sub Woofer, Maple/remote	£2,995.00	£5,200.00
Mirage M3	£1,590.00	£4,100.00
Rel Q 200 E	£On Dem	£650.00
Rel Q 150 E	£On Dem	£500.00
Audio Physic Luna Sub (wood)	£On Dem	£1,799.00
Audio Physic Yara	£On Dem	£999.00
Vienna Acoustics Mahler	ASK	£6,000.00
Vienna Acoustics Mozart	ASK	£1,700.00
Vienna Acoustics 5.1	ASK	£3,500.00
Cabasse io S.1	ASK	£2,170.00
Blue Room Minipod (White)	£225.00	£299.99
Blue Room Minipod + Sub (Blue)	£625.00	£749.00
Blue Room Minipod Sub	£415.00	£468.99
Genelec 205 Active Monitors	£On Dem	£750.00
Audio Physic Virgo III "new"	ASK	£4,000.00
Audio Physic Tempo III "new"	£On Dem	£2,000.00

CDplayers & DACS

Audio Synthesis DAX	£1,395.00	£2,200.00
Audio Synthesis DAX Decade	£1,695.00	£ -
Theta Pro Prime 2	£695.00	£1,900.00
Mark Levinson 390S	£4,500.00	£6,500.00
Acuphase DP	£3,795.00	£4,400.00
Audia Flight CD I	ASK	£4,500.00
PS Audio Lambda Transp/ dac	£1,695.00	£5,000.00
Wadia 860 x	£3,995.00	£7,500.00
Theta Data Pro Prime II	£1,195.00	£ -
Gamut CD1R mk II	ASK	£2,950.00
Acoustic Arts Drive I	£1,995.00	£2,890.00
EAD DSP9000 Pro Series III	£2,795.00	£8,000.00
Wadia No 27 Dac	£3,750.00	£9,000.00
Mark Levinson 31.5 Transport	£3,995.00	£9,600.00
Theta Pro Gen	£495.00	£1,295.00
Acoustic Arts Drive I/Dac 1 mk II	£On Dem	£6,500.00
Linn Sondec CD12	£7,995.00	£12,000.00
Linn UNIDISK I.1	£On Dem	£6,500.00
Linn Numerik	£595.00	£1,500.00
Roksan Caspian CD	£On Dem	£995.00
Trichord PD-S 503	£295.00	£500.00
YBA CD1 Delta (Twin sps)	£3,995.00	£5,500.00
Audiomega Damnation CD Transport	£1,600.00	£1,600.00
Primare V20 DVD/CD	£750.00	£1,000.00
Audio Aero 32/192 Capitele CD (Ver. 4)	£On Dem	£4,500.00
Primare V25 CD DVD	£On Dem	£1,000.00
Boulder 2020 dac	EPOA	£24,000.00
Theta Data II Transport AT + link	£1,995.00	£4,000.00
YBA CD Integre "new"	£On Dem	£1,195.00

Turntables analogue

SME 20/2A	£On Dem	£5,273.53
SME 30/2 A "new"	£10,495.00	£12,289.00
PS Audio Power Plant 300 + Ultimate Outlet	£1,300.00	£1,900.00
Nottingham Analogue Hyperspace	£995.00	£2,000.00
Nottingham Analogue "The Analogue 12" arm and deck	£4,495.00	£8,000.00
Fanfare FT1 Tuner	£595.00	£1,500.00
Tara Labs 10m Bal The 2 Interconnect	£2,000.00	£5,000.00
Tara Labs FGS (Mono) pair	£500.00	£1,000.00
Tara Labs The 2 Speaker Cable 4ft	£1,300.00	£3,000.00
Roksan Xerxes 10/D51.5/ Artemiz/ Jubilee	ASK	£4,500.00
Ortofon Jubilee	ASK	£1,500.00
Roksan Caspian Phono se	£On Dem	£950.00
Roksan TMS2/ Artemiz	£On Dem	£8,500.00
Michell Orbel VC/ RB300	ASK	£2,350.00
Project RPM 6 "new"	£On Dem	£500.00
Project RPM9/ arm	£On Dem	£1,000.00
VPI TNT mk IV/ Rokport 6000/ Flywheel/ VPI Stand/ Clearaudio Accurate	£8,500.00	£16,000.00
Pump etc. "new"	£On Dem	£850.00
Roksan Radius 5 (Acrylic)/ Nima arm "new"	£On Dem	£1,100.00
Loricraft record cleaning machine	£On Dem	£425.00
Earmax Pro	£395.00	£ -
Moth Record Cleaning m/c	£245.00	£325.00
Project RPM4/ Ortofon 510 "new"	£On Dem	£500.00/ £750.00
Ortofon Rohmann	£On Dem	£ -
Ortofon Kontrapunkt a/b "new"	£On Dem	£1,100.00
Michell Gyro SE/ RB300 "new"	ASK	£495.00
Audio Synthesis Phono Eq mm/mc	£495.00	£ -
Pink Triangle PT Ext psu		

MAGNEPLANAR SMGA198X [£800]
 Technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities; fast, smooth, open, dry.



MISSION 770 1980 [£375]
 Back in its day, it was an innovative product and one of the first of the polypropylene designs. Warm, smooth, clean and powerful sound.



MISSION 752 1995 [£495]
 Cracking Henry Azima-designed floor-standers combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

HEYBROOK HB1 1982 [£130]
 Peter Comeau-designed standmounters with an amazingly lyrical yet decently refined sound. Good enough to partner with very high end ancillaries, yet great with budget kit too. A classic.

CELESTION SL6 1984 [£350]
 Smallish two way design complete with aluminium dome tweeter and plastic mid-bass unit set the blueprint for nineteen eighties loudspeakers. Very open and clean sounding, albeit course at high frequencies and limp in the bass. Speakers would never be the same again...



LEAK SANDWICH 1961 [£39 EACH]
 Warm sounding infinite baffle that, with a reasonably powerful amplifier can sound quite satisfying.



QUAD ESL63 1980 [£1200]
 An update of the ESL57, with stiffer cabinets. Until the 989, the best of the Quad electrostatics.



YAMAHA NS1000 1977 [£532]
 High tech Beryllium midband and tweeter domes and brutish 12" woofers in massive sealed mirror image cabs equals stunning transients, speed and wallop allied to superb transparency and ultra low distortion. Partner carefully!



MISSION X-SPACE 1999 [£499]
 The first mass production sub and sat system using NXT panels is a sure-fire future classic - not flawless, but a tantalisingly unboxy sound nevertheless!



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Arcam CD62T* CD Player (2Yr G/tee)	(369.00)	£229.00	Loewe 24" High Definition 16:9 TV (1Yr G/tee)	(999.00)	£499.00
Arcam CD82T CD Player - New (2Yr G/tee)	(599.00)	£499.00	Loewe Aconda 32" Flat widescreen TV (1Yr G/tee)	(1800.00)	£799.00
Arcam CD93 CD Player - New (2Yr G/tee)	(979.00)	£699.00	Naim CDS2/XPS Player & Power Sup (2Yr G/tee)	(6265.00)	£3495.00
Arcam DV88 Plus DVD Player - New (2Yr G/tee)	(999.00)	£499.00	Naim Nait 5 Amplifier (1Yr G/tee)	(890.00)	£659.00
Arcam DV89* DVD-A Player - New (2Yr G/tee)	(1299.00)	£739.00	Naim NAC 112 Preamp (2Yr G/tee)	(660.00)	£499.00
Arcam A65+ Amplifier (2Yr G/tee)	(369.00)	£249.00	Naim NAP 150 Power Amp (2Yr G/tee)	(785.00)	£595.00
Arcam A85* Amplifier Black - New (2Yr G/tee)	(799.00)	£549.00	Naim NAP 180 Power Amp S/H - (1Yr G/tee)	(1225.00)	£795.00
Arcam A85* Amp inc Phono- Blk (2Yr G/tee)	(909.00)	£599.00	Naim Hi-Cap 2 P/S - old casework (2Yr G/tee)	(930.00)	£695.00
AVI Pro 9 Plus Speakers - Cherry (2Yr G/tee)	(799.00)	£569.00	Naim NBL Speakers - Beech (2Yr G/tee)	(7700.00)	£4995.00
Linn Kolektor Preamplifier (2Yr G/tee)	(575.00)	£375.00	Pioneer DVD656S Multiplayer (1Yr G/tee)	(349.00)	£249.00
Linn Kaim Pro Line Preamp S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(1400.00)	£599.00	PMC TB2 Speakers - Black (2Yr G/tee)	(740.00)	£539.00
Linn Numerik Dac S/H (1Yr G/tee)	(1100.00)	£349.00	PMC DB1 Speakers - Cherry (2Yr G/tee)	(555.00)	£399.00
Linn Trikan Centre Spkr - maple (2Yr G/tee)	(549.00)	£349.00	Yamaha DVD 530* DVD Player (1Yr G/tee)	(199.00)	£79.00
Linn LP12/Ekos/Arkive Boron (2Yr G/tee)	(5350.00)	£2675.00	Yamaha RXV 630 RDS A.V. Amp (1Yr G/tee)	(459.00)	£299.00
Linn Keilidh Speakers R/nut inc stands S/H	(995.00)	£375.00	Vibe Zeta SubWoofer (2Yr G/tee)	(600.00)	£475.00

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Address: PO Box 30429, London, NW6 7GY

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Aurum Cantus
Leisure 2SE



Aurum Cantus
Leisure 3SE



Reference 3A
Dulcet



Aurum Cantus
Music Goddess

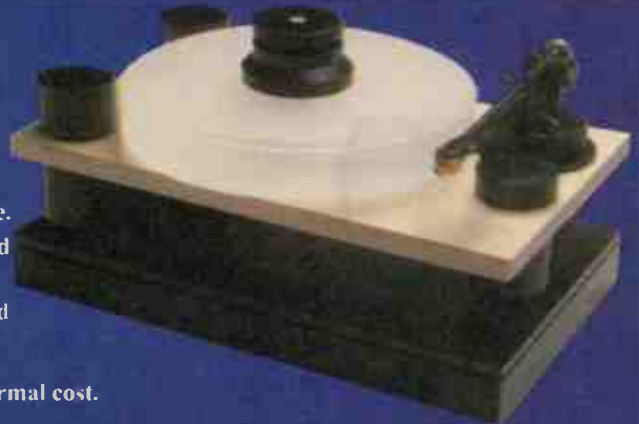


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World standards

These are the best products we've heard that are currently on sale in the UK, complete with the date they were originally launched and their current retail prices. Watch out for regular updates...!

TURNTABLES

ANTTI/ARM ONE/IQ1 1998 £25
Redesigned Systemdek IIX now off the pace, but the arm and cartridge are both star performers.

LINN LP12/ LINGO 1973 £2100
The quintessential belt drive superdeck offers a beguilingly musical midband at the expense of lumpy bass and nebulous imaging. Latest Lingo brings a new lease of life, with even more punch and polish.

MICHELL TECNODEC 2003 £575
Superb introduction to Michell turntables on a budget. Top quality build and elegant design make it the class of the mid-price field right now.

MICHELL GYRODEC SE 2002 £870
Its beauty is more than skin deep - superbly build and finish allied to clever design equals class leading performance. Latest DC motor with 'Never Connected' PSU make it all the more unassailable.

MICHELL ORBE SE 2002 £1916
Cost-no-object evolution of the Gyro adds massy acrylic platter and two-stage isolation. Fantastically capable all rounder with commanding, powerful, detailed sound that gets the best from almost any arm and cartridge



PRO-JECT DEBUT II PHONO SB 2002 £170
Fuss-free all in one starter turntable, complete with built in phono stage. Not a star performer, but a fine midi system upgrade all the same.

REGA P3 2000 £298
Great entry level audiophile deck with fine bundled tonearm. Tweakable, and responds well to careful siting on a Base platform.

REGA P25 2001 £619
Until the TecnoDec, the best mid-price turntable package. Fine build and elegant styling. Clean, open sound but limited at frequency extremes in absolute terms.

SME MODEL 10A 1995 £3333
Exquisitely engineered deck and arm combo, but dry and clinical sounding compared to rivals. Accomplished performer with classical music, nonetheless.

MICHELL TECNOARM A2003 £399
John Michell's brilliant reworking of the Rega RB250 theme, using blasting and drilling techniques usually seen in motorsport! The result is the best sounding arm at £400, and as good as most at four times the price. Runs SME V very close in all except bass, and betters it for musicality. Stunning.



TECHNICS SL1200/III 1973 £395
Slick build makes it a respectable performer, although the cheapo arm limits it - fit a Rega RB250 and it's suddenly a serious mid-price machine.

TONEARMS

HADCOCK 242 SE 2000 £649
Latest of a long line of unipivots, with added mass, revised geometry and better finish. Musical like few others at or near the price.

LINN EKOS 1987 £1700
Subtle mods over the years, including revised bearings and the recent new wiring has kept it a serious contender in the superarm stakes. Lacks the SME's slam, the OL's clarity or the ARO's emotion, but has a feisty musicality all of its own.

NAIM ARO 1987 £1425
Charismatic unipivot is poor at frequency extremes but sublime in the midband; truly emotive and insightful.

ORIGIN LIVE SILVER 2502001 £625
This fully developed and expertly fettled Rega boasts a superbly even, transparent and tuneful sound. Gives away only a small degree of finesse and dimensionality to top arms.

ORIGIN LIVE ILLUSTRIOUS 2002 £1570
A modern superarm with battleship build. Extremely strong, even and open sound in the mould of the late, lamented Zeta, plus fine tonal colouring. Exquisite.



REGA RB250 1984 £112
Sold through Moth Marketing, this is capable far beyond its price point, with a tight, lean and detailed sound. Responds brilliantly to Origin Live counterweight modification, and well to rewiring.

SME 309 1989 £767
Entry level SME complete with cost-cut aluminium armtube and detachable headshell. Tight, neutral sound with good tonality, but lacks the IV's pace and precision.

SME SERIES IV 1988 £1127
Offers nine tenths of the SME V's magic at just over half price. Exquisitely built and finished, and a design classic. Faces stiff competition these days, but lovely nevertheless.

SME SERIES V 1987 £1614
The so-called Best Pickup Arm in the World isn't, but comes close. Vice-like bass with incredible weight, ultra clear midband and treble. Does everything except beguile the listener.

CARTRIDGES

ORTOFON KONTRA' B 1999 £720
Surprisingly articulate performer by Ortofon standards. All the brand's usual polish and detail allied to real vim. Loves making music!



AUDIO TECHNICA AT-110 1984 £29
Great starter cartridge that's refined, detailed and musical beyond its price.

DYNAVECTOR DV10X5 2003 £250
A distant descendent of the classic Ultimo 10X, this has warmth and sweetness in spades, allied to a punchy bass. Beats G1042 comfortably.

GOLDRING G1042 1994 £135
One of the best MMs going, with sweet and extended treble and punchy, muscular bass.

LYRIA LYDIAN BETA 1998 £600
An altogether more beguiling listen than the MC30S, although not quite as incisive. Superb all rounder, nonetheless.

SUMIKO BPS 1995 £250
Charismatic performer with rhythm aplenty, but in other respects way off the pace - lacks smoothness and sophistication of the DV10X5.

DYNAVECTOR DV20X-H2003 £395

The best modern budget MC combines deliciously sweet sound with fantastic get-up-and-go. High output version works a treat with valve phono stages too.

**LYRA PARNASSUS DCT 1997 £1895**

Jonathan Carr's masterpiece is a brilliantly lyrical and fluid performer, with a deliciously sweet tone and immense subtlety and polish.

ORTOFON MC25FL 1994 £285

Strong budget MC with a cleaner and more detailed sound than the Dynavector; more sterile and less emotive, however.

ORTOFON MC30 SUPR' 1995 £550

Beautifully clean and detailed device with real finesse, albeit a tad mechanical sounding.

MUSIC MAKER 1999 £575

When mated with a good quality arm, this hand finished high-output pick-up gives an ear-boggling account of itself. Very high compliance ensures maximum information retrieval. An absolute (grain orientated) gem.

SHURE VISXMR 1994 £350

The most musical MM yet made – brilliantly dynamic and punchy in the classic Shure mould, yet refined and tidy too.

DIGITAL DISC PLAYERS**ARCAM DIVA CD82T 2002 £600**

Oodles of finesse, but not the most gripping performer at the price. A fine all rounder in the classic Arcam mould.

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO

DVD57 2003 £200
Crisp, lively DVD-A sound makes this superb value for money, but 16bit playback is way behind similarly priced CD spinners.

CREEK CD5011 2004 £699

Extensive revisions make this an altogether more beguiling machine, and one of the best at its price. Extremely musical sound that's surprisingly upfront for a Creek design. Excellent mid-price purchase, with only its Marantz rival to challenge it.

CYRUS CD8 2003 £1000

Highly incisive, engaging, grippy and dynamic sound, but needs careful matching to smooth ancillaries. Optional PSX-R adds bass and dimensionality.

DENON DVD-AI 2002 £2500

Middling CD performance, but a genuinely strong DVD-A sound with masses of space and detail. Excellent pictures, too!

**LINN GENKI 1999 £995**

Undeniably fast, lithe, musical and fun - but some won't take to its dry, wry character. Works best in all-Linn systems, where it really rises to the challenge!

LINN IKEMI 1999 £1950

Has the brilliant focus and clarity of the previous Karik III with a dose more tonal richness and polish. More grip and poise than most at any price - still superb!

MARANTZ CD6000KI 2001 £500

Brilliantly warm and voluptuous sound will endear it to vinylphiles and tube lovers alike. Musical, colourful, polished and powerful like none others at or near its price.

MARANTZ CD17 II 2002 £800

Oft-overlooked middleweight boasts a truly beguiling sound with lots of tonal flavour. Sits awkwardly between the £600 and £1000 price points, where some brilliant value buys reside, though.

NAD C5411 2002 £330

Highly musical and articulate budget machine in the classic NAD mould. Second only to Cambridge's CD500SE in the value stakes.

NAIM CD5 2001 £1195

Taut and grippy like no others at the price, but lacks the warmth of the Marantz CD6000KI at half the price. To wit, it's a very focussed product, best used in Naim systems.

MERIDIAN 507 2003 £1195

Quintessentially Meridian mid-price machine; smooth, warm, expansive and seductively musical. The best all rounder at this competitive price point.

**NAIM CDX2-XPS2 2003 £4950**

A fine high end machine, but add an XPS2 and it becomes one of the most charismatically engaging 16bit machines we've ever heard. Plays music with such passion!

DENON DV-2900 2003 £850

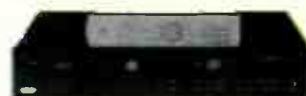
Superbly designed and built do-it-all player that delivers fine sound and great vision. Sonically class of the sub-£1000 DVD universal field, but the i-Link and HDMI direct digital capability of arch rival Pioneer DV-868AVi may swing some towards the latter, and its DV-2200 baby brother is even better value, though.

**NAIM CDS3 2003 £7050**

The most polished Naim CD to date; tremendously capable and musical, but lacks the Rotweiler quality of the cheaper CDX2-XPS2.

ARCAM FMJ CD33T 2003 £1,300

Superbly detailed midband allied to excellent bass extension makes this a powerfully musical machine in the best traditions of Arcam CD spinners. Nothing to criticise at the price, everything to recommend it!

**PHILIPS DVD963SA 2003 £400**

Creamy CD sound allied to superb SACD and DVD video playback makes this brilliant value for money.

REGA PLANET 2002 £498

Rhythmic and beguiling performer, although lacks the warmth of tone needed to better its Marantz rival. Superb ergonomics and design, nonetheless.

REGA JUPITER 2002 £1000

A Planet on steroids, this machine adds depth and breadth to its baby brothers already impressive sound. Good, but facing stiff competition.

MARANTZ SA-17S1 2003 £1400

Brilliant CD playback comes close to the best at any price, while SACD performance is almost as convincing - superbly warm and three dimensional nature makes listening a joy. However, the lack of DVD-Audio decoding and poor feature count makes it look middling value compared to some of the universal players here.

**CAMBRIDGE AUDIO****640C 2003 £250**

Tremendously well-rounded yet engaging sound makes this the best budget silver disc spinner by far. Build quality is excellent at the price, and the styling bang up to the minute. Blistering value for money.

CREEK CD5011 2004 £699

Extensive revisions make this an altogether more beguiling machine, and one of the best at its price. Extremely musical sound that's surprisingly upfront for a Creek design. Excellent mid-price purchase, with only its Marantz rival to challenge it.

MUSICAL FIDELITY**TRI-VISTA21 DAC 2003 £1,200**

Superbly neutral and expansive sound makes this offboard digital-to-analogue convertor an excellent upgrade to any mid-price CD player - fed by a decent transport, few 16bit players at any price come close.

**DENON DVD-2200 2003 £499**

Superb do it all mid-price player; fine DVD-A and SACD sound allied to excellent video performance will be all many could ever want. Ultimately it's a little bright and mechanical sounding, but you have to go into high end territory to truly better it. Stunning value.

PANASONIC DVD-S75 2002 £120

Real ability and fine measured performance for an unbelievably low price. Impressive in its own way, if not truly audiophile. If you just want a cheap DVD spinner with DVD-Audio as a bolt-on goodie, this is the one.

PIONEER DV-868AVI 2003 £799

Pioneer's most accomplished mid-price machine to date, this boasts full DVD-A/SACD playback, a welter of facilities and the all-important HDMI video and i-Link audio digital outputs, making it nigh-on future-proof. Factor in fine - if not outstanding - sound and superb pictures and it's practically impossible to fault.

SONY SCD-XB790 2003 £250

Quite unlike any other budget Sony CD spinner we've heard, here's a very 'analogue' sounding machine that's smooth and warm and even. Factor in fine SACD playback and this machine is a brilliant budget buy – unless you want DVD-Audio that is, which it lacks.

**ORELLE CD100EVO** 2003 £1,200

Extremely engaging and musical sound, but maybe a tad too bracing for some tastes. Superb aesthetics complete an attractive package.

DIGITAL RECORDERS**APPLE IPOD 40GB** £399

Genre-defining best of breed, thanks to supreme ergonomics and build allied to fine sound.

PIONEER PDR-609 2001 £200

Brilliant value CD recorder that makes excellent recordings from its digital inputs. Half decent digital converters, too.

PHILIPS DVDR880 2003 £370

Poor CD audio playback, but makes great DVD video recordings and boasts fine ergonomics. Top AV value.

SONY RCD-W3 2002 £250

Usual superb Sony ergonomics make for non-sense budget buy. Fine direct digital copies, but analogue input poor. Middling sonics, but there's a digital output!

YAMAHA CDR-HD1300E2002 £600

HD means MD-style ease of editing, but compromises recording quality ever-so slightly. Add decent CD replay and it's a fine all rounder nonetheless – top value.

**ONKYO MB-S1** 2001 £1100

An interesting machine complete with MP3 functionality, but high price, fussy ergonomics and over-smooth sound make it mediocre value against the Yamaha.

PHONO STAGES**CREEK OBH-21SE** 2003 £250

Musically enjoyable yet highly refined for the price – a superb buy. Gives the Dino a real hard time.

EAR 834P 1993 £400

Classic tube design with a deliciously warm and expansive sound – shame about the loose bass and veiled treble!

LINN LINTO 2000 £900

A musical and incisive performer, with more speed than the Delphini at the expense of detail and tonal colour.

QED DISCSAVER 1995 £35

Rhythmic, bouncy sound via battery, although it's bright and forward. Great value, but £100 more on the X-LP is well worth it!

TRICHORD DINO 2002 £299

Great all rounder with switchable MM/MC. Fast, fluid and smooth like no others at the price.

TRICHORD DELPHINI 2003 £995

The very latest 'Never Connected' variant is easily the best, bringing velvety smoothness to an already refined and engaging performer. Neutral to a fault – some will mourn the passing of the charismatic ISO.

MUSICAL FIDELITY**XLPSV3** 2003 £249

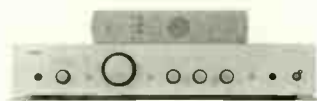
Fine all rounder at the price, which a satisfyingly full bodied sound that's smoother than the Creek but a tad less engaging. Only Trichord's Dino, with its easy upgradability for just £50, reflects badly on this fine bit of kit.

PROJECT PHONOBOX LE2004 £99

Great little box that improves on most bundled phono stages found in budget integrated amplifiers, adding detail and definition and a measure of smoothness too. If £100 is all you're prepared to spend, then do it happily on this, but you'll get obviously better results from the £250 brigade.

AMPLIFIERS**ARCAM DIVA A65 PLUS** 2002 £370

Classic budget Arcam fare – decently sweet and open with sensible facilities and plenty of power.

**ARCAM FMJ A32** 2001 £1150

For those who value serious power and labyrinthine facilities over outright clarity or grip. A very impressive all rounder with an unusually muscular power amp at this price.

AUDIO ANALOGUE**PUCINNI** 1999 £495

Brilliant value mid-pricer is a real step up from budget designs. Smooth, fluid, natural sound with adequate power and no nasties. Fine phono stage too!

AUDIO NOTE OTO SE 2000 £1199

This baby tuber is beautifully sweet and creamy, but lacks solid-state's clarity, detail and incision. Low, low power means speaker choice critical.

AUDIO NOTE SORO SE 2000 £1699

Wonderfully out-of-the-box sounding tube middleweight is all about sweetness and fluidity. Limited power and loose bass, but little the worse for it.

CYRUS 6 2003 £600

Cracking do-it-all mid price design, bringing svelte sound, good connectivity and upgradeability and stunning style and build.

CYRUS 8 2003 £800

Unusually warm and lyrical for a solid-stater, with decent power and punch. PSX-R adds dynamics, detail and dimensionality.

**MERIDIAN 551** 1994 £895

Evergreen middleweight is a serious performer even now. Tonally a tad dry, it's still very smooth and svelte with bags of power, detail and grip. Class act.

MUSICAL FIDELITY**A308** 2002 £2400

Impressive monster integrated. Vast power delivered with clarity, even-handedness and finesse. Musical, with real tonal colour. Separate pre-power version better still, but less good value.

NAIM NAIT 5 2001 £845

A fast and thrilling listen, thanks to taut and articulate bass and midband. Surprisingly polished for a budget Naim amp, both sonically and ergonomically.

**NAD C320** 2002 £220

Not the giant killer that the 3020 once was, but a very strong budget design. A great starting point; forms a fine system with NAD's partnering C541i CD player.

SUGDEN A21A 1993 £1020

The most musical amplifier at the price, bar none. Delicious Class A sound is smooth, sweet and wonderfully transparent with true tonal colour. Low power, so match carefully.

HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS**SUGDEN HEADMASTER** 2003 £600

Unusual combined preamplifier and headphone amplifier, this boasts a surprisingly smooth and open sound which suffers only when compared to preamps at twice the price.

MUSICAL FIDELITY**X-CANS V3** 2003 £249

Mr Michaelson's best headphone amplifier to date, with an extremely open and explicitly detailed sound plus serious bass wallop and the ability to drive any phones to very high levels. Errs towards brightness with some headphones, so match carefully and use smooth cables.

PREAMPLIFIERS**CREEK OBH-12** 2000 £220

Brilliant value budget passive, giving little away in sonics to far more expensive designs. Connectivity and build aren't great, but what do you expect at this price?

**MF AUDIO PASSIVE PRE** 2003 £1010

Novel and effective pre with switchable gain via a transformer, and balanced operation. Open and incisive sound, yet makes most active rivals sound edgy by comparison.

NAIM NAC112 2002 £660

Affordable admission ticket to the Salisbury high end experience. Detailed and dynamic, if tonally rather lacklustre.

LINN LK140 2000 £800

Dry and grey sounding, but decently dynamic and musically engaging all the same. A worthy worker in a budget Linn system.

MUSICAL FIDELITY

A308 CR 2003 £2400
Superb transistor behemoth, worth partnering with any high end CD player or preamp. Oodles of grunt served up with poise and purpose.

MARANTZ SM-17 2001 £700
Useful budget power amp with plenty of clean transistor power. Not the most transparent, but sweet and clean all the same. Fine build completes a great value package.



NAIM NAPI50 2002 £795
Driven by a decent source and a NAC112, this gives highly enjoyable results - providing you like the Naim sound! Taut, fast and feisty despite its relative lack of power.

QUAD 909 2001 £900
The latest current-dumper has a smooth and expansive character with enough wallop to drive most loads. Not the most musical, but super value all the same. Lovely build, finish and Quad's legendary service are nice.

CROFT TWIN STAR 2003 £1750
With a taste of the best of both tube and transistor, this latest update of the Croft classic is a truly endearing experience.



GRAAF GM20 OTL 2003 £3,300
Awesome output transformer-less valve power amp gives dazzling speed and incision, with an ethereal soundstaging and delicious filigree detail. Tremendous punch belies its humble 20W power rating. Factor in one of the most exquisite finishes this side of an Aston Martin and it's very hard to say no...

SUGDEN MUSICMASTER2003 £1,300
Quintessential Class A Sugden sound is not warm as many expect, but extremely neutral and open with real tonal colour. By comparison, tubes sound bloated and standard solid-state hazy and brittle. Superb when partnered with efficient loudspeakers like Revolver R45s, but many will find it underpowered.

**INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS**

AUDIO RESEARCH VSI552003 £2,895
The Naim NAP250's tubular alter ego; oodles of power allied to a strong bass and smooth open midband makes this a brilliant all round amplifier. Lacks the subtlety and finesse of the low powered single-ended brigade but makes up for it with sheer brio.

CREEK A50IR 2004 £550
Consummately smooth yet engaging sound makes it a serious player at the price, but don't expect Creek's traditional sumptuousness. Fine value nonetheless.

MONRIO MC207 2003 £1,100
Powerful, muscular sound allied to real finesse makes this unusual integrated an essential audition at the price.

MARANTZ PM-17MKII KI MODIFIED 2004 £1,500
Gloriously offbeat do-it-all design with a truly warm, smooth and three dimensional sound. Think of this as a latter-day Audiolab 8000a - with a good deal more colour and finesse - and you'll have its measure. Lowish power output at the price, but fine real world speaker driving ability.

UNISON RESEARCH S6 2002 £1,625
Tremendously musical and lithe sound with real finesse and subtlety too. Very slightly upper mid forward encourages careful partnering with ancillaries (Revolver R45s are ideal), but overall fantastic value for money.



ORELLE SA100EVO 2003 £1,200
Fine build, exquisite design and a wonderfully lucid sound make this an essential audition at the price.

AV AMPLIFIERS

DENON AVR-2803 2003 £650
Superb mid-price 7.1 channel extravaganza with nearly all the decoding power you'll ever need. Powerful, open and clean sound (at the price) makes it capable with music, and superb on movies. Fine ergonomics and great build makes this receiver hard to beat as an all-rounder.



NAIM AV2/NAP 150/NAPV 175 2002 £4,190
Brilliant audiophile multichannel pre-power amplifier combo; not as good with music as a two-channel Naim set-up at the same price, obviously, but surprisingly close. Elegant control layout plus a strong, clean and brilliantly engaging sound make this a serious crossover product. Ultimately lacks power compared to similarly priced Arcam gear, but is more musically involving.

PIONEER VSA-AX51 2004 £1,000
The ability to hook up to Pioneer's DV-868i via i-Link (nee FireWire) means that this multichannel AV amplifier can do all the digital conversion onboard makes the a very special product, which when used with the aforementioned DVD spinner sounds better even than the sum of its parts.

**LOUDSPEAKERS**

EPOS ELS-3 2003 £200
Plenty of brio and a decent degree of refinement makes this budget baby a fine value contender.



B&W CDM1 NT 2002 £750
Fine clarity and imaging allied to pleasing warmth and great rhythmic cohesion make these standmounters an essential audition.

CASTLE CONWAY 3 2003 £930
Superbly smooth and crisp performers, with a big hearted musical sound. Ultimately coloured though, with a slow, plummy bass.

CYRUS CLS70 2001 £800
Charismatic performer with a fast, tight and open midband, but lacks cohesion and scale.

KEF Q1 2003 £250
Highly polished and articulate standmounters at the price, but demand good ancillaries for best results.

KLIPSCH HERESY II 1997 £1100
An outstanding high sensitivity loudspeaker with midrange and treble horns coupled with infinite baffle 12" bass driver. Effortless, fast and accurate.

TDK S-80 2002 £90
Ingenious NXT multimedia sub/sat system has a wonderfully even and open sound - like baby electrostatics.



LINN NINKA 2001 £995
Major on rhythms and dynamics, making them an involving listen. Reasonably refined, too - but tonally disappointing.

MISSION 782SE 2003 £900
Bright and tight design capable of brilliant speed and grip, at the expense of warmth. Demands high quality, high powered ancillaries.

W'DALE DIAMOND 8.1 2001 £120
Still the best baby budget standmounters around. Tight and grippy thanks to Kevlar drivers, but invariably limited in the frequency extremes.



MONITOR AUDIO B4 2003 £350
An unusually smooth and lucid performer at the price, and its 3-way design means it drives rooms well. Fine engineering, but build and finish so-so.

REVOLVER R45 2003 £899

Wonderfully easy to drive floorstanders that are a dreamboat for tube amplifiers, and great for party-minded transistor users too. Great attack transients, fluid and musical bass and midband and couth treble make them fine all-rounders.

**MORDAUNT SHORT 9142002** £300

Warm, detailed and articulate performer, but a touch loose in the bass and veiled up top. Fine partner for budget valve amps.

NAIM ALLAE 2002 £1990

Taut and grippy like few others, this speaker majors on transient speed. Surprisingly smooth for a Naim box, with nicely etched treble. As always, tonally dry.

QUAD ESL-988 2001 £3400

Wonderfully neutral and self-effacing with sublime imaging and projection. Treble lacks extension, bass lacks weight - although the pricier 989 answers the latter resoundingly.

PERIGEE FK-1L 2002 £5000

Charismatic Aussie ribbon design with deliciously open mid and treble, allied to fine bass weight. The right room and ancillaries essential. Engaging, musical and powerful sound. Superb.

MARTIN LOGAN CLARITY 2003 £2,895

Supremely transparent and open with brilliant depth perspective and image projection. The midband is up there with the very best at any price, while the bass and treble integrate well but don't especially shine. Dynamically limited, with middling bass punch, but that's not the point - that deliciously fluid and intricate midband wins great respect.

**TANNOY EYRIS DC1** 2003 £699

The combination of dual concentric treble/midband drivers plus supertweeters make for a very spacious and expansive sounding loudspeaker, albeit one that's a little bright and loose in the bass. An excellent mid-price design well worth auditioning.

MONITOR AUDIO GR60 2002 £2,295

In some ways, these come close to Yamaha's legendary NS1000Ms, thanks to their tremendous clarity, great transients and 'full-fat' wide bandwidth performance. Bright and clean, but never fatiguing or uncouth. A truly accomplished all rounder that gives a real taste of 'super-fi' at a reasonably affordable price.

TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM 2003 £800

Another brilliant niche product from Max, these ribbon aspirated supertweeters add space and atmosphere to any good high end loudspeaker, and more surprisingly perhaps make things more fluid and musical too. Superb affordable esoterica.

HEADPHONES**JECKLIN FLOAT TWO** 1998 £99

Wonderful panel-like sound from these esoteric-looking headclamps.

SENNHEISER HD-590 1998 £199

The company's best real-world cans to date. Open and smooth with plenty of detail. Brightly lit midband makes them an ideal partner for a valve headphone amp.

**SENNHEISER MX-500** 1999 £19

Our unqualified recommendation for those seeking a serious sounding pair of in-ear phones. Smooth, detailed and musical.

SENNHEISER PX-100 2002 £29

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NORDOST BLUE HEAVEN £150/M

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CYRUS FM X £500

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NAD S400 2003 £600

Highly accomplished specialist high end analogue tuner with a deliciously open and lucid sound, but it can't quite match the Myryad all the same.

PURE DIGITAL DRX-702ES 2003 £249

Great with Digital Radio, but thin a tad sounding on FM at times. It's a top hybrid, nonetheless...



SYSTEMS

DENON D-M31 2003 £250

Excellent CD receiver package with surprising sonics and a brilliant tuner as a bonus, although its amplifier section doesn't quite match the Onkyo. Optional speakers are mediocre.

ONKYO CS-210 2003 £300

Superb value thanks to excellent sound, great build and ease of use, but the bundled 'speakers' rather let the side down.

LINN CLASSIK MOVIE SYSTEM DI 2002 £2,995

Superb ergonomics and performance from this one-box beauty, but it's just a tad expensive and in value for money terms, compares poorly to the original Classik Music System.



PIONEER NS-DV990 2003 £799.95

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Following on from the hugely successful Linn/*Hi-Fi World* LP12 vs. CD12 event of 2001, we're delighted to bring you a second special event, providing a spectacular multichannel music experience!

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And more importantly perhaps, you'll be able to relax and enjoy some great music - including Beck, Barber, Clapton, Coltrane, Eminem, Gabriel, Linn Records, Mozart, Pink Floyd, Talking Heads, Who and Led Zeppelin (and much, much more) - in the congenial company of the Linn and *Hi-Fi World* teams.

The last Linn/*Hi-Fi World* event was a tremendous success - lots of fun was had by all as Linn staff including Ivor Tiefenbrun and Brian Morris, and the *Hi-Fi World* team including Noel Keywood and David Price, chatted informally with the 500 invited guests on matters analogue, digital, stereo, multichannel and more - over drinks and sandwiches. This time round, we hope to repeat the successful formula, and to take a closer look at multichannel too...

If you'd like to attend this unique event, all you have to do is send your name, address, telephone number and/or email address on a postcard (or email: linnevent@hi-fiworld.co.uk) to: Linn Event, *Hi-Fi World* magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, Kilburn Park Rd., London NW6 5LF. Due to the limited space, we can't guarantee you a place - tickets will be issued on a first come, first served basis, so we advise you to get writing now!

DATE: SATURDAY OCTOBER 16, 10am to 4pm
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Letter of the Month

SANDY, BEACHED

Further to your introduction to the systems supertest (July issue, p. 12), I've learned to buy hi-fi equipment on the basis of (some) reviews rather than personal listening because my mistakes have resulted from listening in shops, not from buying well-reviewed equipment. It's essential to read the right reviews, though - as a one-time reader of Hi-Fi Answers I'd happily agree that Mr Keyword's "rigorous reviewing" (p. 11) has left an "indelible impression", and I like to think that HFW carries on the good work.

There was one exception for me, which probably goes to prove a rule. In 1984 we went to Gramms to audition the well-reviewed Planar 3, and they were kind enough to demonstrate it alongside an LP12 and at least one other high-end turntable of the time (which I'd made it clear I couldn't afford). Second only to the Linn, the Planar 3 was the most natural, and we've always enjoyed it.

I was spurred to write about sand by two articles in the July issue, Dominic Todd's entry level system review and David Denyer's article on his sand-filled platform. The subject may seem trivial but the results are not.

Having sand-filled my Mission 733s (haven't found my bargain ES14s yet, and thanks for the advice) I'd been looking speculatively at my

Revolver R105 system stand, uncomfortably aware that it rang horribly when tapped. Let me say immediately that this doesn't mean it's a bad stand - far from it, it concentrated the system's mind wonderfully when put into use.

I do think however that Revolver should seal up all the orifices in the R105 so that it can be sand-filled without tears - how DT managed it without turning his floor into a beach I can't imagine. Suffice to say that it took my Significant Other three hours, she said, to seal up all the joints in my R105 with polyester filler, and me some inexpert spraying to restore its good looks. That was after I'd filled the big holes in the bottoms of the legs, which appear to serve no purpose.

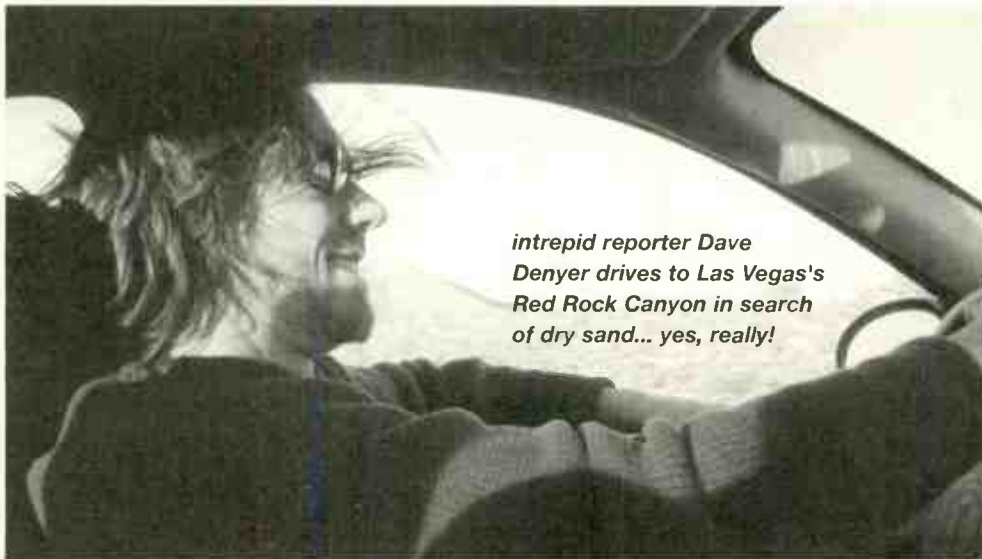
Having done all that and put in ten kilos of dry sand (by tipping the stand sideways one can persuade the sand into the front and back horizontal rails as well) we were surprised and pleased with the results - no ringing, more focus, more clarity, more ambience, as we called it in the 1980s, just more realism. More bounce and dynamic rage, I fancy. Significant Other, who had devotedly done the fiddly gap-

filling while unconvinced of the worthwhileness of the job, was especially impressed.

As for David Denyer's kitchen floor and buying kiln-dried sand, I'd observe that (1) I haven't seen any bags marked "kiln-dried sand" yet, although the sand I bought for the stand was in fact bone-dry, and (2) what you do with wet sand is put it in a plastic box about 12 x 18 inches and 10 inches deep and leave it in the kitchen to dry. This takes a week to ten days, during which time you stir it about and write graffiti in the surface. This is clearly foreshadowed by Brian May's "39" (Queen) - "Write your letters in the sand till the day I take your hand ...". I would seriously encourage anyone with a budget stand to make this amazing upgrade (and anyone without a stand, to buy one and sand-fill it).

Keith Aburrow

Imagining the state of Dave's kitchen after that feature, I'm sure his girlfriend could be heard playing that old Genesis classic, 'Mad Man Moon' from 'Trick of the Tail'; "if this desert's all there'll ever be, then tell me what becomes of me...?" DP



intrepid reporter Dave Denyer drives to Las Vegas's Red Rock Canyon in search of dry sand... yes, really!

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Dear Mr Price,

I have to respond to Jayne Lee Wilson's letter in the July issue. While many classical music lovers prefer CDs there are also many who still listen to vinyl. They attend concerts too and some play in orchestras as well, I believe this possibly includes Setright.

I've just listened to three superb performances on disc. The Concerto for Orchestra by Lutoslawski, played by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Seiji Ozawa, is on a well played single-sided EMI test pressing from 1971 and has everything: attack, delicacy, rhythm, ground-bursting timpani, emotion and a scratch in the quiet passage at the start of the third movement. The Sonata Representativa by Biber! played by Romanesca, is on a digitally recorded CD; it's vibrant, warm and intimate but if I could get it on vinyl I would. The most involving is Hungarian Rhapsody No. 10 by Liszt on a Columbia 78 from the mid-thirties; this direct-cut disc is still able to convey Ania Dorfmann's passion and drive seventy years on despite wear caused by steel needles.

Is this preference for analogue because my Arcam Alpha CD player is now thirteen years old? The LP source is a Garrard 301, Michell TecnoArm a, Ortofon MC 10; the 78 source a Garrard 401, SME3009/11, Shure M44 with Expert Stylus Company 78rpm styli. They feed a nineteen year-old Rotel RA840BX amplifier and Monitor Audio R352 speakers. EQ for 78s is provided by a graphic equaliser. I don't know if this system qualifies as well balanced but it plays a lot of music!

Or is my preference because of compromises inherent in CDs? Some of our newer local buses have digital multiplex control systems, you can tell when ringing the bell. Press the button and nothing happens so you press it again. By then the first signal has reached the bell, so it rings twice. I think this is true of CD, the quantisation rates are not fast enough for us.

I'm now upstairs listening to a lunchtime concert of Mahler songs on BBC Radio 3. 1950s TSL valve FM tuner, Leak mono Varislope 111 and TL 12 plus amplifier, AR4xa speaker, bliss. After Mahler some Franz Ferdinand on CD or maybe Art Hodes on a Blue Note 78 or Marta Sebestyen on LP. My daily bread is good music and it is delicious. Ignore the flak, your balance is spot on.

Richard Zarywacz

Reading

Nice to hear that you appreciate performance, across time and genre, and that you aren't worried about

technical perfection. Recordings can transport us back to another time, something I was reminded of the other day listening to a U.S. recording made in 1887. It was fascinating to hear so far back in time. The lyrics were of war, but this was the American Civil War.

Sadly, much of what we talk about in high fidelity today either has a commercial slant or involves yet another new technology, the two not being unconnected. By understanding the value of worthy old products and maintaining them accordingly we have a way of reaching back that's of historical value too. This is another side to hi-fi.

As formats change we are threatened with losing our ability to play old recordings in original form. Anyone who threw out their Beatles LPs when CD versions came along will probably realise they made a big mistake! And whilst original LPs can have value, modern copies will not. It's good to be able to appreciate great performers and performances, even if they don't qualify as hi-fi by today's standards.

As higher resolution digital coding becomes more common we may well end up acutely aware of how limited CD was. From the little 24/192 I have heard to date really good digital has a lot going for it. I would be less likely to blame the Arcam than the disc it plays. CD was a great way to kick off the digital age, but perhaps we should see it as the Edison cylinder of its time.

NK

You're right - the music is important and the format secondary, but when the format gets in the way of the music, aren't we right to say so? I think we are - we're a hi-fi magazine for heaven's sake! Who else is going to - 'What Caravan and Tent-peg?' magazine? That's why we've been critical of CD, as it's not the universal panacea some would have us believe. But it's done in a friendly and constructive spirit - we're not all diehard vinylistas thinking up a plot to bring down digital audio! I use MP3, AAC, iTunes Lossless, MD, CD, DVD-A, SACD and LP - plus a large dose of MW, LW and FM radio - for my music, so as you can see it's the music first for me! **DP**

NO VALUE IN HI-FI?

I enjoy buying hi-fi magazines and like to assume that the editorial teams and contributors are champions of 'our subject', supporting and promoting it in

all its aspects. Unfortunately that's not always the case and I was disappointed to read an editorial input to one of your advertisement pages (121, August issue) which pronounced that there is very little intrinsic value in second-hand hi-fi...!

You must be aware of how difficult it is, currently, to increase the circulation of any serious hi-fi title and it's no different in the hi-fi marketplace itself, new customers aren't being attracted to the subject in anything like the numbers from previous decades, so it does nobody any favours when you are so pompously disparaging about a vital niche in the marketplace. And what a patronising panel it is; 'Guidelines for Buying and Selling Second-Hand Hi-Fi'. I can't think of any other subject that involves high cost items where the sector's editorial slant translates so obviously into "because our readers are such a bunch of dummies!"

Have you elevated yourselves above the ambitions of mere enthusiasts, those of us who regularly buy the equipment which underpins your very survival? Have you forgotten the 'upgrade trail' which is as pivotal to hi-fi as part-exchange is to the car industry? Would you advise your readers to trash their old hi-fi components and cancel all your magazine's used equipment advertisement content? In fact it's interesting to calculate that a substantial part of your revenue must be generated from equipment resellers, would you prefer they weren't supporting you?

You might think I'm over-reacting, but as much as magazines help promote our interest, they also complicate the topic unnecessarily, undermining the very subject they should be supporting. I used to work as a 'back-room boy' in the hi-fi industry and whilst appreciative of the truly excellent work some hi-fi writers have produced, I also have reason to believe that, in contrast, it's frequently been ill judged editorial that has turned off any number of prospective enthusiasts, a malaise which is just one reason (I'm convinced) why there are so few new enthusiasts today.

Every month you have a unique opportunity to convey the almost miraculous phenomenon that is high fidelity music reproduction to someone who might be picking up your magazine for the first time. What a pity if he or she returns it to the shelf thinking "there is very little intrinsic value in that". I do wish you well, we need you but I hope you'll always be aware that it's reciprocal.

Jim Baines

Over-reacting? How could we think that! But you do make some good points. The observation that there is "very little intrinsic value in hi-fi" is a generalisation that applies to most used consumer goods. Cars offer a good enough example of plummeting value. Much mass produced hi-fi has virtually no market value once superseded by later, 'better' models. Only a few rare classics can be confidently said to have a material value in an open marketplace. It is because Hi-Fi World has, alone amongst the magazines, championed certain classic hi-fi products, like the Leak Troughline and Garrard 401 for example, that demand has appeared and prices started to rise. Not everyone is happy about this, saying that what were once bargains are now inaccessible. **NK**

Agreed (with NK). Ninety percent of used hi-fi is totally forgettable. Another five percent is over-hyped mediocrity. But that still leaves thousands of classic products for the taking, some (still) at sensible prices. I think this mag has almost single-handedly brought 'classic hi-fi' back into focus, whereas so many other publications either ignore it or simply aren't aware of its existence in the first place. It's an audacious claim, and I'm not about to make any more, but the fact that so many fine 'equipment resellers' advertise with us speaks volumes! **DP**

ORTO-GONE?

Can you help me I wonder? Back in the sixties my Dad bought a pair of Ortofon speakers from a hi-fi fair in London. At the time rumour had it there were only a handful in the country. They are about 4 foot wide and about 3 foot high including the legs. There are seven cones in each cabinet and they sound great. The only information on the back is: ORTOFON 5658 SF40 FONO FILM INDUSTRIES COPENHAGEN. I don't think I've ever seen a pair of speakers made by Ortofon before and thought you could throw some on them? **Andie Batchelor**

Ortofon UK's Laurence Armstrong replies; "The Ortofon speakers you mention are most certainly historical items as Ortofon stopped using the "Fono Film Industries" name prior to 1950. The name derives from Ortofon's origins as the first company to put sound on to a movie film which led, through time, to their entry into the home audio market. However, I regret that there is no one at Ortofon with length of service great enough to have

knowledge of this product. Although this was Ortofon's first foray into the domestic speaker market, it wasn't their last. A range of 6 models was introduced in the mid seventies and another smaller range in the nineties."

'No one at Ortofon UK old enough...', eh Laurence? So how come you recently came to visit me in a Riley Pathfinder, tried to pay for our lunch in Guineas and fed the parking meter with sixpences? Don't be bashful about your age, old boy... **DP**

NEW RESOLUTIONS

I would like to say how much I enjoy reading Hi-Fi World and I get the magazine on regular order. The reviews of DVD audio and SACD are of particular interest to me because I like surround music. I recently phoned Warner Music to ask about the release date of a DVD-Audio title and was told that there were no new titles planned as they were re-forming the format. Have you any information on the future of these surround formats, is DVD audio going the hybrid way with more up to date recordings, is SACD going to increase their output and lastly is there somewhere this information can be obtained?

M Jennings

I think Warner were referring to the upcoming DualDisc, over which there's a lot of debate. Due late in 2004 we're told, it is a hybrid with CD one side and DVD-A on the other, to make it compatible with CD players. **NK**

Glad to hear that you find our reviews useful - you are already reading the best source of up-to-the-minute information concerning what is going on with the new formats. If you need more information all the best rumours, gossip and sometimes even hard facts can be found at www.highfidelityreview.com and www.quadrasonicquad.com, both of which I must confess I have been known to contribute to... [so that's why your HFV copy's always late! - Ed.] Another regular plug is the fact

that www.play.com are fairly well-stocked and well-priced on both formats, and their 'coming soon' announcements have been known to surprise even me! **PC**

BRAIN SALAD SURGERY

The August edition certainly caused brain overload - first you review a subwoofer that sounds perfect to go with my refurbished Quad ELS 57s, but should I continue instead to save for some Quad 898s in about two years. £1,500 versus £4.5k less trade in for the ELSs.. I'm happy with the 57s but realise there's some more bass to be had - and feel the 989s are the way to go but would the REL plus 57s work better - advice please?

Then just as I was looking a possible bargain on a Tri-vista SACD player you review the Marantz SACD at significantly lower cost. So I read your March 2003 Tri-Vista review, and still don't know - will I get 4 times more something with the Tri-Vista? The winner would be replacing Californian Audio Labs Alpha/Delta combination which is pretty good (it's an early one not the upgraded version). The rest of the set up I'm happy with - WAD 300B monoblocks with the upgrades, Audionote M2 pre-amp, Voyd tlt with lo cartridge. Music range is Folk Rock to Kate Bush via Bob Dylan.

Ian Gerrard



highfidelityreview.com, whereupon a certain Patrick Cleasby can be found...

Bass from big electrostatic panels like the 989 has a quality that's much different to box speakers, especially powered subwoofers. It is agile, seemingly detailed and supple, displaying a quality that's quite different from the norm. Drums don't just 'boom', but clearly have a complex character where you hear the strike on the skin, followed by the resonance within the body. It's a sobering experience! The only caveat being that the room must be large

enough to allow the rear wave to be 'lost', or least well attenuated for this to be apparent. Box bass is very contrived - a bland booming sound - so there's a big difference between the 989s and the ESL57s plus subwoofer. All the same, that is not to say there's a clear winner. A big REL subwoofer will deliver enormous power right down to 20Hz or so and you may like the effect. Most of us are fairly uncritical about bass quality - we just want to be moved! I've found REL's complement Quads reasonably well. **NK**

In quantitative terms, the Quad 989s don't have brilliant bass - I use them along with Yamaha NS1000Ms and the latter really kick you in the back of the diaphragm, whereas the Quads rather politely but matter-of-factly inform you of the presence of low frequencies. Still, NK's right in the sense that what they do have is effective - it has fast attack (although electrostatics aren't the fastest necessarily - we're still talking



Quad 989 - taut and tight, but no subwoofer substitute...

vibrating Clingfilm here) and is beautifully even. I think a pair of small RELs (turned down very low), a pair of ESL57s (preferably with rebuilt panels from One Thing Audio) and a pair of Townshend

Maximum supertweeters (mounted either side of the mantelpiece) would give a pretty stunning sound that would tide you over until you can afford the 989s, whereupon you can retain the subs and supertweeters for one of the very best ways of listening to music yet devised. The 989s are gorgeous, but only really come to life with the aforementioned ancillaries and a decent source and amp driving them. The Marantz SACD spinner is excellent, but at £699 isn't going to be a serious improvement on your CAL, unless you play SACD all the time. The Musical Trivista SACD is stunning regardless of what it plays - and this is the one you should aspire to! **DP**

STAND ON ME

Quick note that may interest you or your more financially challenged readers (me included)... I could never afford a decent high quality rack for my equipment, and as such was seriously degrading my hi-fi's playback ability and visual appeal. The other day I saw a full width hi-fi rack in the Argos catalogue and bought it (mainly to make the hi-fi look nice - keep the other half happy etc. but also though it would do a basic, but not great, job of keeping things held steady and may afford a small improvement). So the box arrived at the counter and my number was called... Cool I thought - just grab the box - hmm that's a bit heavy (as I subsequently noticed it said 24.5kg on the side of the box so no mere slip of a thing).

Well I write to you due to my surprise at this hi-fi performance bargain. The finish is good (although the tubular steel legs are in silver paint finish - but it is well finished, has no blemishes and to be honest better than most budget products), thick tempered glass shelves, adjustable feet and plastic spacers. It, to my surprise, came packed better than any product I have ever purchased (regardless of price) which was a rather nice touch...

It was easy to assemble (just unscrew all the leg sections and start with base sections, pop on spacers at either end, pop on shelf, pop on the top spacer and then screw the next leg sections on tightly over and over until the top caps - it took me twenty minutes, mostly due to the amount of unpacking. The fit wasn't 100% - some of the cross sections inside the steel leg were welded in a little off, meaning when tightening it up you would see a little wobble (and may need to slightly tighten more or loosen a few mm to get the next glass shelf to line up to the

threaded pins - although not a huge amount out it is totally unnoticeable when the unit is built and shouldn't cause any issue). As it turns out the unit instructions said the rack was built by Acoustic Solutions (the company who make the unbelievably cheap separates for Argos).

The good bits: the rack was very solid with no play, flex or any discernable movement apparent, the adjustable feet were easy to use and did a good job. The hi-fi was duly installed and the sound was transformed; more separation, better soundstage and tonality, small quiet instruments here and there that had previously been obscured (and surprisingly although very clear and clean sounding it didn't get the usual slightly glassy, hard or crystalline sound that glass shelves usually induce). So you may ask - what does this cost? £79.99! This truly is the performance bargain of the impoverished audiophile and should be high on the list of things to buy next.

John

Sold to the man in the Argos queue! Thanks John - any other tips from readers would be much appreciated... and no, that Ikea Lack coffee table was not an April Fool, etc... **DP**

HO HUM

I read with interest an article about system tuning in the July edition of your magazine. Part of the budget test included the Cambridge Audio Azur 640C, which got good reviews. The player sounded like it was very good for the price, so I decided to get one to try with my old Cyrus I amp. I must admit it does sound very good and doesn't sound worse than others I have auditioned which cost an awful lot more. One thing I have noticed with it though is that with unit powered up, there seems to be an audible hum coming from the player. Did you notice this when you auditioned it?

Andy

Hum? Definitely not! CD players are meant to be ultra-quiet, with no hum at all. Either yours has a fault or there is a hum loop in the system, although this is uncommon with CD players. You may just conceivably need to re-site it if near to the mains transformer of your amplifier.

NK

Sometimes, hi-fi units get through with slightly noisy mains transformers - even my old high end Sony ST-S770ES used to make a bit

of 'mechanical hum'. You could either write to Cambridge Audio's ever-helpful public relations supremo Henry Griffiths (a sort of Max Clifford of affordable audio), enclosing a packet of Marlboro Lights and your purchase receipt in the hope of remedial action, or buy a set of FoculPods (which will ground some of the hum) and/or experiment with placement... **DP**

IMPORTANT NOTICE

A question for you - what exactly is the situation regarding import duty/ tax when it comes to hi-fi kits or ready built gear? The explosion of the web and the attendant number of non-UK based suppliers which are now within easy reach of anyone with a credit/ debit card means that bargains are a lot more accessible. I for one would be interested in purchasing from abroad if I had a sure-fire way of working out how much extra I would have to pay to extricate my new purchase from the postman on arrival!

Is there an easy formula which we can use to get at least a ballpark figure for the final cost of each item? I recently bought a DVD box-set from Amazon in the US and the mark up from the Post Office appeared to be nothing more than the VAT on the cost of the discs themselves (once converted into GBP) or was the shipping charged included in the import tax - or not? I'm getting a headache just thinking about this - Help!

Euan Stuart.

We phoned H.M. Customs & Excise (HMCE) about this and came away little wiser! You are supposed to pay Customs Duty on all imported goods, but the duty can differ from zero to 99% they told us, and can only be found in The Tariff. The correct procedure is to phone 01702-366077 to find the Commodity Code (10 digits), they said, then phone HMCE on 0845 010 9000 to find out what the import duty is, as well as the VAT. You can also go to www.hmce.gov.uk/ Useful Links/ European Commission/ a database called Taric, for the codes.

You then pay VAT on the goods, import duty (a tax on a tax!) and carriage, whether inside or outside the EU. From within the EU, VAT rate is set by the country of export: from outside the EU VAT rate is the UK's standard 17.5%. The nature of the goods is meant to be declared on the outside of the package for customs purposes. Since it is impossible to know what the duty is without phoning HMCE it is difficult to see how the Post Office could ever

charge properly on the thousands of parcels that must enter the UK daily... **NK**

FOUR ON THE FLOOR

Over time, I have read with interest the increasing amount of hardware that tries to combine multi-channel flexibility with current stereo high performance and the various arguments as to whether such hybrid amps can achieve the standards of previous stereo set ups.

Most of this for me is quite moot as my income precludes purchasing much of what is reviewed. What I do have though is okay and gradually I acquire kit as money allows. It currently consists of a Rega P3 with an RB300 arm and Dynavector cartridge, a Technics SU-X911 amp with Class A circuitry for the CD line, a cheap but adequate DVD/CD player and a pair of Celestion Ditton 22s. Cabling isn't much except the pair of Precious Metal Cable's I was awarded for having a letter published previously (many thanks!). I use this on the phono outs of the DVD player to the CD input of the amp.

So far, so good. However, after being tempted to get into a surround amp setup at some time and having listened to a few that friends have, it's quite obvious that they are unsuitable for ordinary music listening, especially vinyl. I believe I have found my solution though. About 10 years ago, I bought, second hand, a Sherwood ES-1280 Dolby surround separates unit. This involves feeding a line in/out back into the preamp out/in of my amp, the Sherwood having its own amp for the rear channels. Although this is only 4.0 Dolby (pre Pro-Logic), it preserves the stereo quality I have already via a By-Pass button turning off the 2 rear speakers plus Dolby Surround for any DVD or video I may happen to play. I understand that this Dolby format uses two mono rear channels for effects and isn't any form of hi-fi, but it does the job quite nicely. Maybe there is a market for amps to drive only the Surround channels via a pre out, thus preserving the Stereo integrity of good kit?

Paul Clewlow.

Things have moved on Paul. Old sum-and-difference quadraphonic boxes that derived rear channel 'ambience' from stereo were quite simple in the way they worked. Results were pretty approximate and not always convincing. Dolby Pro Logic does, at heart, work on the same principle, but using sophisticated digital signal processing to eliminate anomalies and yield far more convincing results. I for one have become very impressed, in a way I never was with quadraphonic.

Surround-sound receivers are now becoming serious hi-fi. Earlier models were a bit ropey and cheapies probably still are. Pay over £600 or so however and you will get something that's pretty respectable from the big brand names, like Marantz, Denon, etc. In fact, as I write this an e-mail Press Release has just arrived telling me Denon have released a new budget receiver, the AVR-1705, that offers 6 channels at 110W/ch for £250. All these things offer a Direct Mode to bypass the A/D conversion process, in order to listen in pure stereo. Some even have phono stages, meaning old Quadraphonic SQ and QS matrix encoded discs can be decoded in approximate fashion too.

The existence of the discrete centre front channel in 5.1 surround-sound makes it an awkward fit with stereo. Although a centre channel can be derived by summing Left and Right of stereo, when discrete 5.1 is played an independent centre front channel must be available. The great irony here is that often there is so much emphasis on centre front, with vocals, drums and much else all stuffed in, it's like listening in mono! **NK**

Analogue surround sound fans should watch out for our review of the Dynavector Adp-3 SuperStereo Adapter next month! 'The Quadfather' **DP**



Quadraphonic - any fool knows that it's two better' than stereo...

RELIABILITY RUN

Those of us like myself who use hi-fi as an end to enjoying music at home are not very pleased when a product fails every few months and I'm sure prospective purchasers have the right to know this. My own experience after years of no problems was when I finally had enough money to buy the esoteric equipment we all drool over. A CD player raved over by you and many other magazines, costing over £2,000 in 1988 by a now defunct company, had to be returned three times in the first 18 months. It has now failed again and I have no idea how to get it repaired. Its replacement - a limited edition CD player by a very well known company - which cost even more is now being repaired for the second time within a year.

If consumers knew that fashionable brands were unreliable, the companies concerned might have to do something about their quality control. It is all very understandable for a reviewer to rave over the sound of a product but there is no way they can know if the item will still work in even three months time. I have to compare the above to the ultra reliability of a certain 1953 UK turntable that I bought as a joke, only to find that it outperformed my top of the range Linn in every way and continues to provide the goods with only the occasional check-up for spindle greasing. Mind you, the only time I ever had to take the Linn to its dealer was for an upgrade...

Stefan Herber.

There's no evidence that "fashionable brands are unreliable". Specialist products may well be less reliable than those that are mass produced, having less research and development behind them, but it is difficult to be categorical about this. Some would argue the opposite I suspect. Unfortunately, it is impossible for any review to check reliability. Products do go wonky on us at times, but this is always met with a barrage of excuses from the manufacturer - "it was just a one-off" - that we are unable to really question. The laser of CD players is meant to have a limited life span of a few years if used heavily, but in practice it often seems to be the draw and loading mechanisms that fail, especially when they use small rubber belts. **NK**

Hmmm... yes, I think I know which CD player you're referring to! It's easy to be definitive about reliability with hindsight though - all we can do at the time of a review is to report

our findings honestly. We get a surprisingly high number of bits of kit which never make it into our pages, because the review sample(s) have failed. When this happens, we are not amused (all that wasted time, packing and unpacking, photography, measurement, etc.). So it's fair to say that the stuff that does get into the mag at least has a head-start on the kit you don't see in terms of reliability. **DP**

DRIVING ME NUTS

Reading your magazine over the years has led me to purchase what I consider to be a nicely balanced and sonically delightful system. I was lucky enough to have come across a nice example of a Voyd turntable, to which I have bolted an OL Silver 250 and Dynavector DV-20X high output MC cartridge. This combo feeds its signal, via a Gram Amp 2 SE, to a Sugden A21 which outputs to another 'lucky' purchase, my Living Voice Auditoriums.

Now it could be that my ears have become keener and more aware and that this is just one of the imperfections of vinyl, but I have recently noticed that on some recordings, there seems to be high frequency distortion - along the lines of some extremely high pitched white noise (at a low enough level just to be audible) accompanying high frequencies - for example female vocals, pronunciation of 's' in lyrics, high strings, etc. Is this just down to the quality of the vinyl, gunk in the groove or is it anything to do with the cartridge? If it's not damage to the cartridge, is there anything I can do at all to alleviate it, as it's driving me nuts, especially through my headphones?

Laurence Robertson

Pronounced sibilance - which is what you seem to be suffering - is a result of a peaky treble response and/or high frequency mistracking. Both are attributable to the cartridge. High output MCs have more coil turns and more tip mass as a result. This degrades their high frequency tracking. So I would put the DV-20X at the top of the list of suspects. **NK**

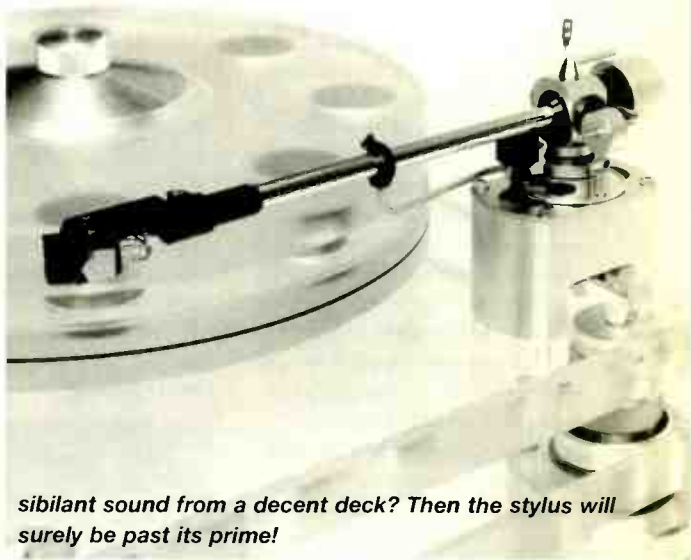
DON'T PANIC!

I would like to thank you for "The Guide" article in your July issue. It was full of useful tips and ideas. One that I took up was the purchase of a couple of Audiophile Furniture's Base Platforms. With one under my Arcam Alpha 9 CD player and another under a Chord DAC 64 it did indeed make improvements to the sound adding weight and better imaging to the sound stage. I then tried one under my Pro-ject RPM6 Turntable and the improvement in sound really showed what both the Base Platform and the Pro-ject turntable are capable of.

Since purchasing the boards I telephoned Audiophile Furniture and spoke to John McCurly who informed me that there is a prototype for a new Platform due out later this year. It will be more expensive but is said to be a big advance on the present one. It would be helpful if you could get hold of one and give us all the benefit of your findings. I have been reading Hi-Fi World since you began publishing and I believe your magazine stands up to scrutiny. Keep up the good work.

David Burgess

Yep - the Base is a great budget tweak - I still use two under my Michell Orbe. Look out for a review of the new one as soon as it comes out. **DP**



sibilant sound from a decent deck? Then the stylus will surely be past its prime!

SURFACE TENSION

Reading Jayne Lee Wilson's letter last month reminded me of something that happened to many years ago. I was at a 'friend-of-a-friend's' house and he put on an LP on his then new B&O system, which I think had the parallel tracking arm. Within a few seconds he took the record off and gave it a good clean. He repeated this many times, saying he

couldn't put up with the 'pops' and 'clicks' that he said he could hear. I wasn't aware of said 'pops' and 'clicks' and if they were there, they were certainly less noticeable than on my Garrard SP25 MkV deck that I had at the time.

Anyway, I came to the conclusion that he was more

interested in his showing off his acquisition than in the music and he was trying to convince his guests that his system was perfect and that it should be the envy of all in the room.

After that I found it noticeable how good quality turntables lacked the surface noise distractions of the cheaper alternatives. Even in quiet parts of the music (and although I am not a classical music listener, some of the 'Prog Rock' that I listened to - and still do I am proud to admit - had quiet parts) were free from any real surface noise issues and I had! have absolutely no trouble enjoying the music. All of which leads me to wonder why some people have an issue with this. Are they defending their choice of CD over LP by citing surface noise as a problem on LPs? (Or am I defending my choice of LP over CD by ignoring surface noise?) Needless to say I think surface noise is all (okay, nearly all) in the mind of those who are anti-LP. By the way, my local Virgin record store, in addition to an expanded range of 12" singles, actually had an LP in stock! Must have been fifteen years since that last happened! HMV also seem to be increasing their stock of vinyl, both black and coloured. The LP is fighting back. Long may it do so.

Mark Crabtree

Now what would a Prog rock kinda guy like yourself be doing with LPs, Mark? Do you hang up the gatefold sleeves on your wall as 'art', or use them as a convenient base for rolling your (tobacco, of course) cigarettes? Sorry, I'm being facetious - anyone who insults the mighty church of Prog is committing, well, the Crime of the Century, and should be sent to the Dark Side of the Moon. **DP**

MY WIFE THINKS I'M SAD

On reading your esteemed journal you have made it clear as to what hi-fi is all about - namely trying to create a live



progressive rock music on Long Playing microgroove record - definitely one to go for...

performance. This is where I disagree with you and presumably the vast majority into hi-fi. I am looking for realism in a different sense. I do not wish to create in my own listening a live jazz gig at Ronnie Scott's or Pizza Express (what with the smoke, the smell of the food, the people talking through the performance and me munching on an American hot pizza, this is not what I wish to recreate). [why ever not? - Ed.]

Nar when I saw Al Jarreau do I wish to recreate the appalling sound system nor the tired feet of standing up at the Jazz Café under someone's armpit who was considerably taller than me. Obviously it is great to listen to live music but what I want to listen to at home is entirely different. Listening to a record or CD which was recorded in the studio means that I would be listening to that artist's best possible performance with the best possible session musicians with a wide and deep soundstage and hopefully the best possible production. So when I listen to music in my own room with the lights dimmed, a glass of claret in hand and I close my eyes, then I feel that I am in the recording studio rather than listening to a live version.

Trying to get the best from CD and records is so important to me. I do not wish to plug any particular manufacturer however what I have learnt as of late is that Russ Andrews was right - the mains is of great importance. I have now had an ISOTEK Mini-Sub for a few months and I would say it is one of the biggest upgrades I have had in a long time. My wife thinks I am a sad person. When using a mains conditioner (there are loads of them about made by many companies) the sound I am getting from my hi-fi sounds like when I used to creep downstairs at four in the morning because things sounded so much cleaner, sharper, more in focus. Maybe the Mini-Sub would not be suitable for other people's equipment

and homes. Maybe it is something to do with my equipment and my mains supply. It could be that if I lived elsewhere I would not need one.

With the Mini-Sub "blacks" sound "even blacker" but everything sounds so natural and I think that maybe that HFW should give these pieces of equipment some house room so that you should consider what they are like.

This brings me on to my sources. My main two sources are a Shangling tube CD

player and a Wilson Benesch Full Circle. I remember a recent vinyl issue where various people in the business compared vinyl and CD. Obviously there was a thumbs up for vinyl. Even though there was not a thumbs down for CD, the common consensus was that it does not sound as good. I too would go with that. However, CD can sound fantastic too (and I am using my words carefully) - it all depends on the recording.

I am of the firm belief that the importance of the quality of the recording as well as the production is so much more important than if a particular album in on CD or vinyl. If CD is well recorded it can sound fantastic too and if vinyl is poorly recorded it can sound absolutely awful. There are so many poor recordings by top artists. I recently bought the new Lionel Richie album on CD and the recording quality was absolutely hopeless. I even cringe when I listen to it in my car. However there is a new Dave Koz album out as well as a relatively new Chris Botti album and these sound absolutely fantastic on CD - fantastic that is if you like smooth jazz, but boring and pedestrian if you do not! When listening to these albums on CD I do not hanker after vinyl.

I do however feel that I have a problem with my record deck, but maybe I am being too picky. I used to have a Linn LP12. After having purchased Shangling CD player I felt that its performance was better than my Sondek LP12/ Lingo/ Cirkus/ Ekos/ Klyde set up.

What I loved about the LP12 set up was its smooth, melodic, organic and possibly euphoric way of putting across the music. However I felt that it was slightly too coloured and after having listened to the Full Circle with its clear and incisive control over the music, which is why I decided to "upgrade" - not that it was necessarily an upgrade. Over extended listening it turned out to

be just different. I think I prefer the Full Circle. However this brings me on to my problem!

The Full Circle can sound a tad over bright and I think the reason for this is two-fold. Firstly because of domestic constraints I am using a large AV rack to support my turntable (with all my other equipment which consists of amongst other things Musical Fidelity A3/CR3 pre and power amps, Jamo Concert 11 loudspeakers and various cabling from Black Rhodium, Hovland, VDH – The First Ultimate and Kimbar 8TC speaker cable). Everything sounds a tad too bright even after purchasing a Russ Andrews Torlyte and platform and some Clearlight RCD cone cups. Even though things improved the treble seems a little more bright than ideal, even though the sound is organic and very detailed in a hi-fi sort of way. It is obviously not as involving as the LP 12.

Therefore I think the equipment support is one culprit and secondly the other culprit I believe to be phono stage. Even though I tell everyone not to do it, ashamedly I bought a Trichord Dino phono stage "unheard". All the reviews were great and they did not seem to be anything else according to you hi-fi scribes who would recommend anything else for the money. I clearly should have borrowed the Dino and taken it home to listen to it first of all.

I therefore think that the combination of the phono stage and the huge AV stand with loads of equipment sited on it (the shelves are glass and I cannot put the turntable anywhere else) seems to be making for a bright listening experience – or could it be that my Shangling CD player which sounds fantastic is smooth as the proverbial baby's bottom and this is a sound I have now got used to?

It may well be best to change the phono stage to maybe an EAR valve phono stage which I believe cost about £550 or so or could it be the Matrix moving coil cartridge (which is a Benz Micro Glider in drag). Your thoughts would be much appreciated. Having said that, people who have listened to this vinyl system are totally bowled over

by the fantastic noise that it does make. As I say, maybe I am being a bit too picky.

Bearing in mind I now have a tube CD player you can see that I am into somewhat of a smooth sound and I would love to get immersed by the music rather than occasionally (and I would say occasionally) gritting my teeth on a bright recording. Maybe the Full Circle is simply being faithful to what is on the vinyl whereas the Shangling is smoothing everything over? My system has been carefully set up and I have spent a fair amount of money on cables. I know you David have intimated in HFW over many years that a lot of cables are a waste of money. The Hovland generation three cables sound absolutely fantastic. I have not heard any other cables like them. I use them in between the phono stage and the pre amp and this also helps smooth things out somewhat.

What I have concluded is that the Full Circle is everything that the LP 12 is not and conversely the LP 12 is everything the Full Circle is not – if you get my drift. They are both brilliant bits of kit and they both have their upsides as well as downsides. I assume that you cannot have your cake and eat it and this will always be the case with whatever kit you buy.

Also maybe you can answer this question? Why are specialist hi-fi companies unable to make their own transport mechanisms and their own converter chips? All the stuff the companies use are all bought off the shelf – Sony/Phillips/Pacific/Delta Sigma/Burr Brown/Wolfson – you get my drift. I have always been too embarrassed to ask why and guess that the answer to my question is that a firm such as Linn or Meridian simply would not have the R&D clout to develop such things. I would have thought that if a specialist hi-fi company develops such pieces of electronics then the sound would be superior. Any thoughts?

Lastly being "an ex-flat earther" and having fond memories of hearing an LPI 2/ Ittok/ Troika feeding into a

sure such an article would generate a great deal of interest amongst your readers. I too had an LP 12 with an Ittok. I could not afford the Troika and could only afford the Asaka. My Isobarik had to be driven passively with an LK1 and LK280. However at the time this sounded wonderful and I thought was "the dog's danglies". Keep up the good work.

Paul Diamond.

Very briefly, I agree - many folk do like a hi-fi to give a brilliant studio sound, and there's nothing wrong with that. Indeed, I have to confess a certain personal sympathy with your sentiment. As for your Full Circle vinyl source and its harshness, stick it under either an Audiophile Furniture Base SP01 platform or Townshend Seismic Sink (depending on your budget) and be amazed - you'll find it smoothes out and opens up in equal measure. If this doesn't do it, I'd definitely look at the cartridge, which isn't famously rich. The Koetsu Red is, however, and this cracker is an essential audition, complete with its deliciously velvety, sumptuous sound. Every digital disc player seems to have an off-the-shelf DVD-ROM mech in these days for cost's sake. It's very sad, but you have to ask yourself - if they can save 15% of the total price of the player and spend the money elsewhere - for an arguably very small loss of sound (and this is arguable) - then why shouldn't they? Finally, if anyone does have an eighties-tastic Linn/ Naim six pack system and they'd allow me round for a listen, I'd love to do a feature. Meanwhile, flat earth fans should watch out for a forthcoming piece of the last remaining pair of 'new old stock' Epos ES14s which we wrested from a dark, cold place (no, not Noel's wallet but Epos's ex-MD Steve Harris's attic), which I'm currently running in via the Naim pre-power in this month's group test! **DP**

PINK LINK

In the September edition of your excellent magazine there is a letter entitled 'In the Pink No More' from David Woods. Perhaps you could make him aware that PT spare belts can indeed be obtained in the UK at Doug Brady Hi-Fi in Warrington for about £14. I have just replaced my PT TOO belt for the first time!

Paul Kabrna

Thanks - many readers will appreciate this tip! **DP**



ye olde Philips CDM0 swing arm CD mech - shame all today's machines use cheapo DVD-ROMs..

brace of 135's actively driving a pair of Isobariks, would it be a good idea to compare the results to some more up to date pieces of kit? I am

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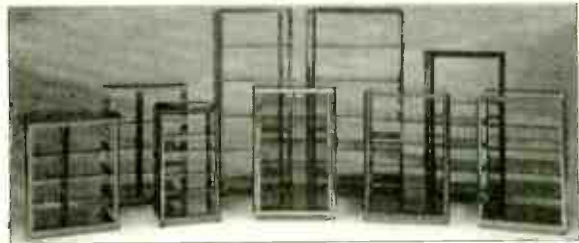
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 - Tannoy 609 with stands great for valve amps £195
 - Tannoy M20's £95
 - Wilmslow Audio transmission line speakers with volt drive units Hi-Fi News recommended £295
- Turntables**
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 - Project RPM 4 ex dem £225
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 - A&P wedge shaped CD Player mint boxed £95
 - Cyrus PSXP fantastic improvement when used with DAD7 £275
 - Marantz CD63 top loading CD Player champagne finish £395
 - Marantz CD63 MK2 Kl Signature £399
 - Mission 200 series Tricolor Clock 2 transport boxed mint £299
 - Meridian 300 series transport boxed £135
 - Meridian 203 DAC £75
 - Mission DAD5 CD Player boxed mint £1500
 - Mission DAC7 boxed mint £795
 - Musical Fidelity FCD valve Cd Player £275
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 - Naim CDS boxed as new £795
 - Sony SACD X9940 new £550 £275
 - Teac VRDS7 £235
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 - Leak Traculine Tuner 3 various £190
 - Meridian original shoebox tuner £150
 - Quad FM3 Tuner (boxed mint) £145
 - Quad FM3 Tuner £95
 - Quad FM4 Tuner old style £225
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Selected products from: ATC, Audio Physic, EAR Yoshino, Nottingham Analogue, Dynavector.



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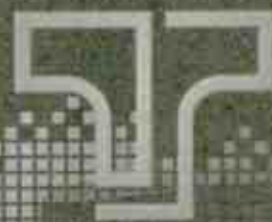
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MUSICAL FIDELITY P140	£395	£ 195
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QED A240 SA	£195	£ 95
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ROTEL RB985 Power Amp	£900	£498
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SPECTRAL DMA 1005 Power	£4200	2948
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● Amplifiers valve

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CONRAD JOHNSON PV 10 Pre	£1600	£845
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CONRAD JOHNSON Prem 8 Monos	£16,000	£8995
CONRAD JOHNSON PV14L (Remote)	£2200	£1596
CONRAD JOHNSON PV12L	£2000	£1296
COPLAND 301 Pre	£1250	£798
COPLAND 504 Power	£1995	£995
CR DEVELOPMENTS Carmelo (Pre)	£900	£345
HOVLAND HP 100 + MC Phono	£5750	£3496
JADIS DA30 Integrated	£3500	£1746
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● Tuners Tape Misc

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M.I.T. 330 1.5m pair Phono	£520	£358
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NAKAMICHI DRAGON	1995	1195
NYTECH CT206		£128
PANASONIC SU-V3700	£1000	£398
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Sonic Frontiers Line 3 phono stage, mint, boxed [£1999]	£950
Unison Research Unico P [hybrid, integrated, 50 watts NEW]	£750
Unison Research Unico Line [hybrid, integrated, 80 watts NEW]	£900
Black Cat Electronics Type 46 Valve Stereo bloc [Lowthers]	£850
Black Cat Electronics Valve Pre amp, Valve Phonostage/linestage	£275
Papworth M100's [boxes as new], two mono blocs EL34's	£1850
Quad II's re-built beautifully by Concorde EL34's mint	£750
Leak Stereo 20, valve, good rebuilt condition with stereo pre EL84	£575
Rogers Cadet II pre/power valve, near mint ECL86	£425
Rogers HG88 [ECL86's]	£225
Leak TL10's rebuilt/mint, valve, beautifully clean KT61/SP25	£650
Dynatron LF15/16 mint excellent pair, valve, WITH original cages EL84	£425
Pye Mozart two mono blocks, valve, plus mono valve tuner nice single ended EL34	£425
Audion Silver Night 300B beautiful x 2 Monoblocs, new valves [£2000]	£1250
Audion Sterling integrated, valve, EL34's very nice [£899]	£525
Affordable Valve Company KT88's like new [£1000]	£625
Shanling integrated amp [New]	£1250
Audion 300B Stereo Intergrated Boxed, new valves £1650	£875
AV20 Monoblocs [New] 6L6 Valves	£375

TRANSISTOR

Puccini integrated, 40 watts[NEW]	£525
Corelli stereo power, 60 watts [NEW]	£695
QUAD 99 two mono blocks	£725
QUAD 77 integrated	£375
QUAD 33/303 pre/power	£175
QUAD 44/405 pre/power	£425
QUAD 34/306 pre/power	£400
QUAD 44 pre-amp	£275
Cyrus 5 integrated silver, boxed	£289
Arcam Alpha 8 amp	£215
Marantz PM60100SE integrated	£175
Meridian 201 pre	£345
Meridian 605 power monobloc [Boxed]	£875
Onix OA22 intergrated	£175
Heybrook C2/P2 pre/power	£275
Musical Fidelity A1 good condition	£150
Musical Fidelity B1	£125
Sansui C77/B77 Pre/Power	£175
Sugden C51/P51	£225

SPEAKERS

Tannoy Rectangular Yorks 15" Golds excellent cloth and cabinets	£1850
Tannoy Canterbury's 12" recls nice, repro cabs	£1750
Tannoy Lancasters 15" Golds very nice	£1250
Tannoy Chatsworths 12" Golds lovely condition	£650
Lowther Acousta's PM6A's	£325
Tannoy 3LZ's 10" golds lovely condition	£450
Wharfedale Airdales very nice original condition, a seriously under-rated speaker	£525
Leak Sandwich good condition	£120
Rogers BBC LS3/5A's teak finish very good clean condition	£650
Chartwell BBC LS3/5A's beautiful	£650
Rogers LS3/5A's black ash original boxes	£650
Epos LS 11	£275
Epos M15's	£385
LOWTHER 1.3's [Lowther of America design, maple as new PM2C's]	£625
Tannoy Cheviot's 12" just re-coned, beautiful	£375
BOSE 141 [new]	£150
Rogers LS1 Bookshelf speakers	£125
Tangent TM1 [Kef units nice condition]	£185
KEF Coda 9 Speakers	£175
Tannoy 12" dual concentric PA speakers [£1300 new]	£425
JR150's [uses LS3/5A drivers, cylindrical aluminium cabinets]	£375
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NEW SHANLING CDT100 VALVE cd player	£1650
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Audio Analogue Paganini CD [NEW]	£895
Audio Analogue Maestro CD [NEW]	£1700
Shanling CDT 100 [as new and boxed £1650]	£950
Sonic Frontiers Anthem CD1 [as new and boxed £1850]	£1150
Arcam Alpha 8 cd	£165
Marantz CD6000 OSE	£155
Marantz CD5000 [brand new and boxed]	£125
MYRAD CD10	£215
MYRAD CD20	£295
Pioneer reference CD PD91	£395
Cyrus [CD] daD 1.3 silver	£225
Micromega stage 2 CD	£225
Nagaoka CD NG7700[LINN]	£195

OTHER EQUIPMENT

Graham Slee phono stage ERA GOLD	£460
Graham Slee phono stage GRAM AMP 2SE	£195
Graham Slee phono stage GRAM AMP 2	£125
JBL 2405 tweeters	£500
QUAD FM3 £100 QUAD FM4	£250
VITAVOX S2's compression drivers	£600
Vitavox S3's £350 [Various 4 cell horns]	
Nakamichi BX2 [cassette deck]	£115
AUDIO Alchemy-dac in a box	£85
AV1 Pre 200 series	£225
Tandberg 3002 Pre Amp	£175

TURNTABLES

THORENS TD125-SME ARM-SHURE V15 £325 THORENS TD166 MKII £125	
MICHELL orbe £2298 MICHELL gyrodec £1126 MICHELL gyrode SE £895	
MICHELL Technodec £575 MICHELL Techno Arm 'A' £399 ORIGIN LIVE AURORA £970 ORIGIN LIVE AURORA GOLD £1470 ORIGIN LIVE MODIFIED OLI 1 ARM £359 ORIGIN LIVE SILVER ARM £599 ORIGIN LIVE ENCOUNTER ARM £970 ORIGIN LIVE ILLUSTRIOUS ARM £1570	

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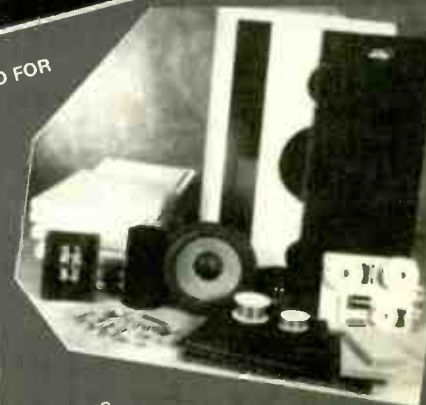
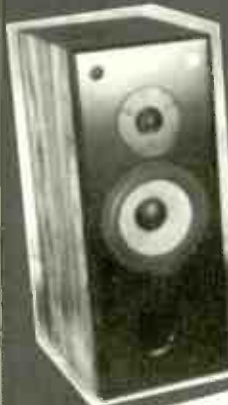
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ROTEL RB-993 THX CERTIFIED AMP X 3 X 200 WATTS	MINT/BOXED	£795
MARANTZ SC-22 PRE & MA-22 MONOBLOCKS	REMOVED	£1100
CONRAD JOHNSON PF-1 PRE INC. PHONO STAGE	REMOVED	£995
ROKSAN LS-2 PRE AMP	MINT	£375
ORELLE SA-10DR REMOTE AUDIOPHILE AMP	REMOVED	£375
CYRUS STRAIGHTLINE	MINT	£275
PINK TRIANGLE INTEGRAL 3 MONTHS USE (£4000)	REMOVED	£2495
THORENS TTA CLASS A POWER AMP	MINT	£450

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Naim NAP 90/3 power amp £350
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Adcom GFA 5300 Power Amp £350

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Accuphase DP67 CD Player Unused £2995
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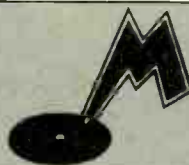
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Here's your chance to attend one of the greatest hi-fi events of the year! Linn Products, in association with *Hi-Fi World* magazine, proudly present the Linn Multichannel AV Experience 2004 at the Proud Galleries, 10 Greenland Street, Camden, London, N1 (the venue is just around the corner from Camden Town tube station).

Following on from the hugely successful Linn/*Hi-Fi World* LP12 vs. CD12 event of 2001, we're delighted to bring you a second special event, providing a spectacular multichannel music experience!

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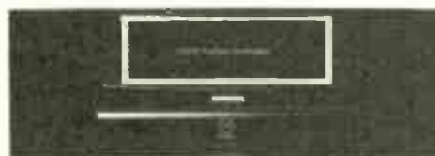
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The last Linn/*Hi-Fi World* event was a tremendous success - lots of fun was had by all as Linn staff including Ivor Tiefenbrun and Brian Morris, and the *Hi-Fi World* team including Noel Keywood and David Price, chatted informally with the 500 invited guests on matters analogue, digital, stereo, multichannel and more - over drinks and sandwiches. This time round, we hope to repeat the successful formula, and to take a closer look at multichannel too...

If you'd like to attend this unique event, all you have to do is send your name, address, telephone number and/or email address on a postcard (or email: linnevent@hi-fiworld.co.uk) to: Linn Event, *Hi-Fi World* magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, Kilburn Park Rd., London NW6 5LF. Due to the limited space, we can't guarantee you a place - tickets will be issued on a first come, first served basis, so we advise you to get writing now!

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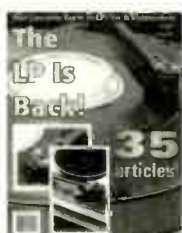


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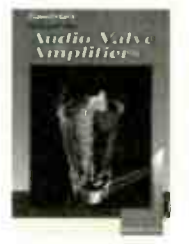
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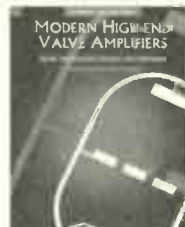
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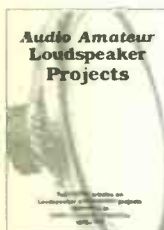
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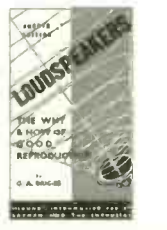
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WADIA 301 CD player £2750. Chord amplifiers 1200C power and 3200 pre, £4995 pair. A.T.C. SCM20/speakers, piano black £1750. All boxed including manuals. Less than 12 months old. Mint condition. Tel: 07813 763 913 (Oct/1)

WHARFEDALE EVO 30 floor-standing speakers for sale. Rosewood finish, good condition. Genuine reason for sale. One year old. £330 ono. Tel: Colin 0161 303 8859 or 07985 781177 (Greater Manchester) (Oct/1)

AMAZING SPEAKER bargains, enclosures offered for sale 2 way floor stander and bookshelf designs, professionally built, £25 and £15 a pair, further details ring Mike on 0118 969 3377 (Oct/1)

VANDERSTEEN 3A Signature speakers. One year old. Mint. £2100. Kimber KS1121 .5m £280, KS1120 3m. £495, KS3033 1m. £420 and Monocle 1m. £180. Tel: 01488 648 272 or Email: Kevin@sagepartnership.com (Oct/1)

TACTAUDIO RCS 2.0S new £1500. Tel: 020 8473 6997 (Oct/1)

CYRUS SMARTPOWER mint condition, one year old £450 ono. Tel: 0116 274 5056 or Email: JB81@Le.ac.uk (Oct/1)

FOR SALE: Totem Arro, black with 'bullets', immaculate £750. Rotel RCD 971, with fitted LK audio clock £250 as new, Rotel RA 971 Mk2 £150 as new, Cyrus I £95. Mission 751 with upgraded capacitors £95. Tel: Nigel 01332 865 381 (Derbyshire) (Oct/1)

KEL80 MONOBLOCKS, professionally built, recently serviced, Electro Harmonix tubes, £400. Tel: 020 8668 2409 (Oct)

WANTED: HITACHI HA7800 amp, Hitachi DE65 cassette deck. Armstrong 621 amp. Leak 2200 amp. Sugden A48 amp, teak case. Tel: 01843 843 145 (Oct/1)

QUAD ELS 57 speakers, superb clarity. Demonstration. Excellent condition. Also experimental stands for vertical mounting. Improved bass and imaging, but ugly. £450. Tel: 01483 422 901 (West Surrey) (Oct/1)

ROGERS CADET II control unit and amplifier two horn loaded speakers Goldring Lenco GL70 turntable all in teak chest stored last 20 years. Offers. Tel: 01892 82 2213 (Oct)

AUDIO INNOVATIONS amplifiers, S1000 monoblocks £750. P2 phono amp £300. S200 pre-amp £100. Snell K light oak speakers and Pirates stands £250. Tel: 01484 845 905 (Oct/1)

TDL REFERENCE standards. Rare opportunity to acquire this unique 7 driver design. Latest 1995 spec. Metal cone, midrange units, bass to 16Hz. Awesome presence, great imaging. Last available at £7000. Reluctant sale £2500. Tel: 01344 751 446 or 07713 622 115 (Oct/1)

VINCENT SP-991 plus monoblock pair 36kg weight each. 6 months old, £1700. JBL TI 5000 speakers in perfect condition, £1300. Tel: 077737 88317 (London. Paddington) (Oct/1)

CELESTION DITTON 66, stained black, rebuilt crossovers and OFC rewired £300. Also 66 original £260. Ditton 25 original £180. 15's £40. Heybrook HB2 £35. All prices o.n.o. Tel: 01332 780 884 (Oct/1)

DAVIS CINEMA One Projector £2000 new £4250. Owl 6' motorised screen £425. Kimber speaker cable 8TC 8' (pair) £400. Krell 400 XI amplifier £2300. Naim CDS II CD player £3650. Electa Amator II speakers Ironwood stands £1950. Transparent Ref SE interconnects. Tel: 01792 798 253 (Oct/1)

SIMAUDIO MOON Nova CD player, less than 1 year old, £2000 ovno. Audio Research VT50 superb - still under guarantee £1800 ovno. Both boxed, manuals. Also Sony SCD-XB940 £200. Tel: Chris 020 8543 5531 evenings (Oct/1)

QUAD ELECTROSTATIC loudspeakers ESL 57s, recommended by Classique Sounds. Original bronze grills, excellent condition £800. Tel: 020 8783 1250 or Email: anthonymurphy@blueyonder.co.uk (West London area) (Oct/1)

CHORD SPM 1200, CPA 1800, £1350 each, £2500 pair. ATC SCM 10 monitors with Target 4 pillar stands £495. Roksan ROK DPI transport £450. All boxed, black, as new. Tel: 01909 518 131 (Oct/1)

SHANLING SCD-T200C valve/solid state CD/SACD player £1699 (new). Shanling CD-T100 CD valve/SS CD player £1049. Both UK spec. Sony SCD1 SACD/CD player £1849. Bel Canto DAC2 (new) £749. Tel: 07979 903 989 (Bristol) (Oct/1)

ROKSAN CASPIAN CD player. Hardly used by elderly owner. As new. Cost nearly £1000. Bargain, £350. Tel: 01473 682 909 (Ipswich) (Oct/1)

WANTED: PAIR Celestion Kingston speakers. For Sale: Celestion SL700SE with stands, as new boxed. Pair restored Leak 3090 speakers which now weigh 102kg. A rare and unique speaker system (would part exchange or swap these for something else smaller). Pictures available on request. Tel: 020 7480 7964 or 079320 63335 or Email: amwllon-don@tiscali.co.uk (Oct/1)

PARASOUND HCA 3500 350wpc power amp £1400 (£2800). Parasound HCA 1200II 220wpc power £400 (£1600). Parasound HCA 750 75wpc £250 (£750). Rotel 03 pre £150 (£290). Transparent Music Waveplus speaker cable 2x 15ft £300 (£850). Audioquest Midnight II 2x 4m £150 (£550). Counterpoint Pre 708e Prologic £160 (£1800). Boxes. Manuals. Tel: Bill 01993 851508 (Oct/1)

MERIDIAN 563 DAC boxed, immaculate, £325 ono. Meridian 200 transport. Trichord Clocked, remote, as new, £275 ono. Yamaha DSP E580 surround sound processor £30 ono. Can demo. Call 0781 781 2614 anytime. (Oct/1)

NAIM SALE, CD2 CD player, NAC 82 pre-amp, Hi-Cap power supply, SBL loudspeakers (cherry), QLN Projekt equipment rack (cherry). All equipment purchased new from Grahams HI-FI in December 1997. Mint condition, very low usage, boxed with manuals. For prices please ring Mark 01708 224 319 or 07813 332301 (mobile) (Essex) (Oct/1)

LINN, KARIK, Numerik, Kairn (all SPS), Chord 1200C, LP12 Lingo, Arkiv, Proac Response 2.5 rosewood. Awesome performance. Boxed. Mint. Cost £17,500+ new. Sell together for £7500 ono. Bargain hi-end system. Tel: 0161 962 6319 (Oct/1)

LINN TROIKA in good condition, re-tipped by The Cartridge Man, complete with stylus guard etc. £230 no offers. Tel: 01302 854 426 (South Yorkshire) (Oct/1)

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Linn	LP12 Sondak - largest used stock in the UK	call
Linn	Basik LV - vgc, black	199
Linn	Basik plus - vgc, black	149
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Michell	Orbe - largest used stock in the UK	call
Michell	Gyrodec - largest used stock in the UK	call
Mission	All Models - Best trade ins	ON DEM
Origin Live	774 - ex, lgb 80s tonearm	159
Rega	Rega Arm mods - Best Trade ins	ON DEM
Rega	LP1/RB22 - reason - ex/ex	149
Rega	Planar 2/RB200 - ex, wood plinth original	119
Rega	Planar 3/RB300 - vgc/ex	179
Roksan	Nima - nearly new, boxed	249
SME	309 - nr mint, boxed	299
Lowsend	Elite Rock Mk2 - c/w plinth and lid, nr mint	399
Trichord	Dino - Best Trade ins	ON DEM
Voyd	Valdi - vgc, mahogany, lab twin motor deck	499
Digital		
Many more inexpensive CD players in stock		
Arcam	Alpha 8 - nr mint, remote	199
Arcam	Alpha 8SE - nr mint, remote	249
B&O	CD3500 - ex, silver/black	399
Cyrus	Dad7 - nr mint, black, remote	89
Krell	DP1100 - ex, v, ungraded	149
Marantz	CD-DSP - ex, clear and smoked glass, remote, stunning	69
Marantz	CD46 - ex, remote	49
Marantz	CD63SE - nr mint, remote	69
Marantz	CD52SE - ex, remote	69
Meridian	200 transport and matching dac - ex, Trichord tweaked, superb combination	449
Micromega	Stage 2 - ex, smooth sound on a budget	199
Micromega	T-drive and T-dac - vgc, boxed, remote, superb sound, £1000s new	799
Musical Fidelity	CD10D - nr mint	69
Naim	CD1 - ex, remote	119
NVA	The Transparent Statement - vgc, crated, remote - ultimate NVA	1749
Pioneer	CLD SB15 - Laserdisc, vcd, cd, PAL, NISC	119
Roksan	Caspian - nr mint, silver, boxed, remote	449
Teac	CDP4500 - ex, remote	99
Amplifiers		
Albany	AP3 passive pre - ex, capable little unit	139
Arcam	Alpha 7R - ex, ss above with remote	249
Audiolab	8000A - ex, black, boxed	249
Audiolab	8000S - nr mint	329
Creek	CA5404 - ex, boxed	79
Cyrus	PSK R - nr mint, black	249
Exposure	X integrated - nr mint, boxed, black	199
Harman Kardon	Citation 17 and 19 - vgc, boxed	399
Harman Kardon	PM655 - nr mint, variable capacitance phono stage	119
Leak	2100 - vgc, c/w 2300 tuner	99
Linn	LK1/Ditral - ex, black, mm/mc exceptional vfm	199
Marantz	PM66SE Ki - nr mint, boxed	149
Marantz	1072 - vgc, champagne finish	99
Meridian	605s - ex, pair boxed mono blocks	799
Meridian	505s - ex, pair mono blocks	949
Mission	Cyrus Two and PSX - gc, nextel finish	229
NAD	304 - nr mint, great value	99
NAD	3020i - nr mint, renowned entry level integrated	179
Pioneer	4400 - ex, phono	119
Quad	405/2 - good, brown	225
Quad	405 - nr mint, early brass heatsink version	199
Quad	405 - ex, standard brown version	179
Quad	33/303 - nr mint	175
QED	C300/P300 - Pre/Power, nr mint, proverbial steal at	179
Roksan	Caspian - nr mint, silver, boxed, remote	399
Shearpe	Phase 2 - nr mint, boxed, blue marble styling	279
Sugden	AU41 tuner - ex, black	499
Tico	2x L-05M - ex, with free preamp - call for details	749
Speakers		
Acoustic Energy	AE505 - ex, dsp, superb floorstander	249
Acoustic Energy	AE505 - new sealed box, superb floorstander, were £800!!!	499
Acoustic Energy	AET - new tweeters, scruffy grilles	279
Acoustic Energy	AE mk2 - vgc, rosewood	379
Castle	Durham 900 - ex, black, larger bookshelf	99
Castle	Howard - ex, mid oak	549
Castle	Kendal - nr mint, new model in light ash	199
Celestion	3000 - vgc ribbon standmount	249
Celestion	7000 - fair/good, huge ribbon and twin bass bargain!	249
Dynaudio	Audience 10 - ex, boxed, black	149
Epos	M15 - nr mint, light cherry, boxed	449
Epos	ES11 - fair, 80s classic	99
Epos	ES14 - nr mint, boxed, 80s classic c/w dedicated stands	349
Heybrook	HB100 - vgc, superb vfm	79
Leak	2030 - nr mint	79
Linn	Kaleigh - ex, black, fully boxed with ku-stone stands	249
Mission	781 - ex, black floorstander, boxed	119
Mission	781 - ex, black larger bookshelf	99
Monitor Audio	50 - nr mint, boxed	299
Monitor Audio	Studio Centre - ex display, boxed	299
Monitor Audio	R700MD - nr mint, black	149
Monitor Audio	Bronze B2 - nr mint cherry, boxed	129
Musical Technology	Kestrel SE - ex, very pretty floorstander	149
NEAT	Critique - ex, walnut, boxed	299
QED	Petite - Best trade ins	ON DEM
QUAD	Aria - ex, dsp, mini surrounds	399
QUAD	ES163 - nr mint, unused since Quad service with new boxes	149
Rega	Kyle - ex, wood finish	119
Rega	EL8 - fair, wood floorstander	199
Robers	Studio Monitor - Original vgc, with stands - suit valve amps	199
Rudak	Templar - ex, medium sized quality floorstander	199
Tanberg	Studio Monitor - Ex, large standmount	499
TDL	Studio 1 - vgc, wood finish transmission line	249
Wharfedale	305.2 - nr mint boxed, black standmount	75
Turners, Tape		
Arcam	Delta 280FM - ex, black	79
Cyrus	FM7 tuner - black, digital, presets, nr mint	299
Cyrus	Original - vgc	66
Depon	TU2601 tuner - ex, black, digital, presets	49
Nakamichi	580 cassette - nr mint, black	99
Nakamichi	BX 125 - vgc, black	179
Sugden	DIFM - gc, rare, makes A4Bmk3 etc	99
Teac	TX3000 tuner - ex, digital, presets	99
Teac	V1010 cassette - ex, 3 head	79
Technics	STG90L tuner - ex, digital, presets	89
Systems, cables and miscellaneous		
Atacama	Equipment supports - Your kit deserves them!	ON DEM
Beyer	D1231 galactic - new	30
icos	10.4 - new 5m interconnect	15
icos	10.4 - new 5m interconnect	15
Sennheiser	IS380 - new, infrared	40
Stax	Lambda Nova Signature - nr mint, superlative quality	699

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6CA7 (EL34 eqv)	Electro Harmonix	£11.95
300B	Electro Harmonix	£64.95
12AX7/ECC83	JJ TESLA	£7.95
12AU7/ECC82	Philips 5814 Mil spec	£8.95
6SL7	Philips 6188 Military spec	£14.95
6SN7	Electro Harmonix	£9.95

You are welcome to contact us for advice
 For matched pairs/quads add £1 each (power valves only)

Decca Pickup arm original boxed/instructions	£49.95
De Matt Amazing improvement to Philips/Marantz type CD Players, probably the biggest improvement for the least money	£13.95

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KB8 Balanced XLR to Balanced XLR .8m	£69.95
KB8 Balanced XLR to Balanced XLR 1.2m	£79.95

Loudspeaker Cables

KB8 LS Banana or Spade 2.5m	£59.95
KB8 LS Banana or Spade 3m	£89.95
KB8 LS Banana or Spade 3.5m	£99.95
KB8 LS Banana or Spade 4m	£109.95
KB8 LS Banana or Spade 5m	£129.95
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NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE Graphic turntable, Alien arm, Tracer 3 cartridge, excellent sonics/condition (£2750 1995) £625. Quad 2 monoblock amplifier, perfect original, £130. Armstrong 224 valve tuner, no sound?, £10. Tel: 01273 541 462 (Oct/1)

GARRARD 401, SME 3 arm, Denon DLI 10 £350. IMF TLS80 speakers £325. Michell Hydraulic Transcriptors turntable £325. Thorens TD160 turntable £90. Luxman T112 tuner £55. Quad 44, faulty, £35. Tel: 01273 299 718 (Oct/1)

LENTEK INTEGRATED amplifier £525. Revox A77 including 50 tapes £125. Audio Technica 1130 arm £75. Pioneer PD-S703 £40. AR 91 speakers £35. Leak Stereo 70 £20. Rogers Ravensbrook amp/tuner £40. Tel: 01273 299 718 (Oct/1)

FROM SEPTEMBER 2004 ISSUE

TECHNICS SL1 200 Mk2 pick-up arms for sale (3off), £30 each plus postage. Soundmaster V400 power amplifier, immaculate condition, large PSU, 150watts RMS per channel, amazing sound-staging, £195 plus carriage. Tel: 01253 724 321 (Sep/1)

QUAD II AMPLIFIERS, unmo- lested Mullard KT66, handbook, fabulous sound £650. Pioneer TX9500 tuner, mint, handbook, £300. Primare 928 preamp, remote, phono inputs, stunning, £1400. Micromega Duo DC 2.1, Duo Pro 2, mint, £1000. Tel: 01226 710 605, mobile 0781 889 1892 (Sep/1)

MARANTZ CD-63 MkII KI Signature £200. Marantz PM-66SE KI Signature £200. Tannoy Revolution R2 (cherry) £150. Standesign Saturn 5 rack (cherry) £150. Denon TU-260L tuner £50. Aiwa AD-F450 cassette deck £50. Kimber PBJ interconnect (1mtr) £30. All immaculate, boxes, instructions. Tel: 01827 282 430 (Oct/1)

MAGNUM DYNALAB MD 102 tuner (£2200) £1100. 'Stunning'. Beard CA 506 preamp with phonostage, new valves, classic £450. SA EC WE 308L tonearm, boxed, unused £500. Tel: Paul 029 20 369 052 or Email: Uyndes@hotmail.com (Oct/1)

ANALYSIS EPSILON ribbon speakers, good condition £3500 new, £750 ovno. Pioneer PD9700 CD player £400 new, £100 ono. Rotel RA 820A mint condition £70 ono. Tel: 01634 323683 or 07901 893 982 (Oct/1)

FOR SALE: Quad 99 pre and 909 power. Excellent condition. Boxed, manuals, remote, links (£1650) asking £1250. Tel: 0131 664 5433 or Email: phillip@evans1952.freeserve.co.uk (Oct/1)

KELLY KT2 loudspeakers, 95dB, very dynamic, good condition, £200 ono. Tel: 01279 304 671 evenings (Essex) (Sep/1)

FOR SALE: Linn Basik turntable with Akito tonearm with Reson Mica cartridge, £180 ono. Ring Graham after 6pm on 01482 641 261 (Sep/1)

NAIM. FLATCAP, NAP90, NAC92, NAT03 tuner, NAC3-5. CD player, six years old, with manuals. £650 the lot. In good working order. Tel: 01284 760 829 (Sep/1)

QUAD 2 amplifiers. Original GEC KT66 valves. No modifications. No repainting. Complete with handbook and £200 worth of spare valves. £550. Tel: 01483 855 603 (Sep/1)

WANTED: SUGDEN A21a, Mission 782se speakers, Yamaha CDR-HDI 300 recorder, AVI Laboratory Series amp or Cyrus 8 amp. Tel: 01225 317 127 (Oct/1)

QUAD ESL 57s, black cloth, with stands, supplied 2002 by Classique Sounds with refurbished treble panels, £750 (in West Midlands), too large to post. Audio Innovations S500 Integrated Amp £475, Audionote 'Snell' J type speakers in black £475 both plus carriage. Tel: 01445 712023 or Email: ian@santosa.co.uk (Oct/1)

LOWTHER ACOUSTAS, PM7As, silver wired £400. Leak Stereo 20 (rebuild) and Point One Stereo pre (with Octal) £400. Leak Troughline II Stereo tuner £85. All items in very good condition. Tel: 01737 771 570 evenings (Surrey) (Oct/1)

AVANTGARD UNO Horn speakers £3500. Sonus Faber Cremona speakers £3000. EAR V20 integrated amplifier £1500. Aloia PST11.01i pre-amplifier, Aloia 15.01i power amplifier 60 x 100 watts £1800. Tel: 020 8531 5979 (Oct/1)

LUXMAN 507X amplifier £150. JVC JA-S77 amplifier £90. Bose 601 Series II speakers £100. Technics ST-610L tuner £30. Harman Kardon HK 400 XM cassette deck £100. Tel: 020 8281 0029 (Sep/1)

DYNAUDIO CONTOUR 1.3 MkII loudspeakers, cherry, £625. Audiolab 8000A integrated amplifier. £125. Leak Troughline 3 Stereo FM tuner, £65. Tel: 01661 871 010 (Sep/1)

ROKSAN KANDY amplifier. Mint condition in makers carton. Complete with remote and instructions etc. £250. Tel: Clive 01628 666 526 (Sep/1)

B.A.T.VK31, boxed, mint, £1250 ono. Tel: 020 8473 6997 (Sep/1)

PINK TRIANGLE Anniversary SME arm, Pink Triangle Ventrical speakers, Sugden Bijou CD player, EAR 834P phono amp, DPA pre amp, power amp, best offers accepted. Tel: 0777 912 3411 (Oct/1)

CYRUS III int amp, Cyrus power amp 2x PSX-R power supplies mint condition and boxed cost £1700 sell £650. Tel: 01869 241 358 (Oxen) (Oct/1)

AUDIO SYNTHESIS Pro Passion duel mono 3 box pre-amp balanced singledend, mint £295. Pink Triangle Ordinal 1307 DAC, mint, boxed, inst. £295. Garrard 401 chassis SME plinth £150. Tel: 01246 209 578 or 01246 570 556 (Oct/1)

MERIDIAN D6000 (pair) £4000 (good condition). Meridian 562 digital/analogue controller £950 (excellent condition). Meridian 500 CD transport £1100 (excellent condition). Prefer not to sell separately. Tel: Roberts 020 8991 2731 (London) (Oct/1)

WANTED: ROGERS: Harbeth or similar, one pair of BBC LS3/5a speakers. Private buyer. Tel: 01394 388399 (Nov/1)

NAD 541C CD, boxed, mint, one month old, £189. NAD C350 amp, 60wpc, bass, treble, pre-out, boxed, mint, one month old, £149. Could deliver Midlands. Tel: 0115 960 3934 (Nottingham)(Sep/1)

DENON TU260 tuner £65. Quad 520 twin channel professional power amplifier (circuitry developed from 405) £245. (£679 new). DNM speaker cables 4x 2m £55. Mission platform equipment support £20. Tel: 020 8688 6397 (Sep/1)

LYNWOOD MAINS Conditioners (two). The Advanced £50. The Mega £125. Nordost Silver Shadow digital interconnect 0.6mtr £225 ono. Tel: 01249 821 288 (Sep/1)

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Hidden Cameras	Mississauga Goddam	£12.90
Hives	Tyrannosaurus Hives	£15.90
James Yorkston	Just Beyond The River	£TBC
Mark Lanegan	Bubblegum	£13.90
Minus 5	Down With Wilco (feat. Jeff Tweedy)	£15.90
Polyphonic Spree	Together We're Heavy	£17.90
Razorlight	Up All Night	£12.90
Rush	Feedback	£10.90
Secret Machines	Now Here Is Nowhere	£14.90
The Roots	The Tipping Point	£17.90
The Thrills	Let's Bottle Bohemia	£TBC
Various	Ska down Jamaica Way (Vols 5-8) each	£12.90
Velvet Revolver	Contraband	£14.90

ALBUM OF THE MONTH

Diana Krall "Girl In The Other Room"

German Double LP on Verve

NEW ROCK, POP AND AUDIOPHILE REISSUES::

13th Floor Elevators	Easter Everywhere/Psychedelic	£10.90
Ash Ra Tempel	Join Inn/ Schwingungen	each £13.90
BB King	The Blues (1960 - Get Back)	£TBC
Howlin' Wolf	London Sessions (Speakers Corner)	£19.90
Byrds	Cancelled Flytes (Sundazed 5x7" set)	£22.90
Deep Purple	Burn - 30th Anniversary (Very Ltd)	£15.90
Elvis Presley	A Date With Elvis (Speakers Corner)	£19.90
Humble Pie	Rockin The Fillmore (double audiophile)	£TBC
Judy Sill	Judy Sill / Heart Food	£14.90
Ken Nordine	Colours	£12.90
Leadbelly	Black Betty	£TBC
Lou Reed/Cale/Nico	Le Bataclan '72	£TBC
Norman Haines	Den Of Iniquity	£15.90
Pearls Before Swine	One Nation/Balaklava	£10.90
Rodriguez	Cold Fact (Limited ed. 500)	£12.90
Sly And Robbie	Riddim (1978/1980 Dubs)	£17.90
Stone The Crows	Teenage Licks (Arkarma)	£14.90
Tim Buckley	Sefronia (Get Back)	£TBC
Timothy Leary	You Can Be Anyone (ft Hendrix)	£13.90
Yardbirds	Shape Of Things (Get Back 7LP Box)	£59.00

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ARCAM ALPHA 7R AMP	£280.00	£189.00		D
IMERGE M1000 H/D Sound server	£1500.00	£.0095		D
ARCAM DV88 DVD PLAYER	£1,000.00	£679.00		D+N
ARCAM FMJ A22 AMP	£1,100.00	£679.00		D
ARCAM FMJ A22 Inc DAVE AC3/DTS processor	£1,850.00	£895.00		N
AUDIO RESEARCH LS16 PRE AMP - BLK	£3,500.00	£2,195.00		D
CELESTION - C2 - Floorstanders	£499.00	£299.00		D
CELESTION C1 - Compact speakers	£199.00	£114.00		D
CYRUS 5 AMPLIFIER	£500.00	£329.00		D+N
CYRUS 7 AMP	£700.00	£479.00		D+N
CYRUS AV MASTER - PROCESSOR	-	£100.00		D
CYRUS DVD7	£1,000.00	£599.00		D
SUGDEN Bijou system (Pre/Power/CD - no spks)	£2647.00	£1795.00		D
AVANCE TECHNOLOGIES Active Subwoofer	£1200.00	£695.00		N
MARTIN LOGAN SCENARIO	£2,498.00	£1,629.00		D
Musical fidelity XCan V2 new	£129.00	£89.00		N
MERIDIAN DSP1500 Subwoofer	£1350.00	£895.00		D
MERIDIAN 556 - 2 CH POWER AMP	£995.00	£649.00		D
MERIDIAN 556 Power amp	£995.00	£595.00		D
MERIDIAN 562v.2 Controller	£1,500.00	£995.00		D
MERIDIAN 568.2 mm Smartlink (as new)	£4,305.00	£2,995.00		D
MERIDIAN 598 DVD Player smartlink (as new)	£3,195.00	£2,395.00		D
LINN Kairn (brilliant PSU) Pre Amp	£1400.00	£ 795.00		D
LINN ESPEK	£2500.00	£1695.00		D
MISSION 78 AS Active sub (new)	£700.00	£450.00		D
MISSION 780 - ROSEWOOD	£300.00	£219.00		D
MISSION 783 - BEECH (Good condition)	£1,000.00	£599.00		D
Denon DVDA11	£1699.00	£1295.00		N
MUSICAL FIDELTY XA100R - INT AMP	£900.00	£599.00		N
PROCEED AVP PROCESSOR. VGC/LIGHT USE	£4,700.00	£1995.00		D
PROCEED PMDT DVD PLAYER. VGC/LIGHT USE	£5,495.00	£2495.00		D
REDROSE Valve system (amp & speakers) 1yr old	£10,000.00	£3,995.00		SH
SONUS FABER SIGNUM SPEAKERS	£1,250.00	£799.00		D
VIENNA MALHER (Beech)	£6000.00	£3295.00		D
TAG MCLAREN DPA32R (Digital pre inc DAB)	£1,990.00	£1,189.00		D
TRICHORD GENESIS CD PLAYER	£500.00	£150.00		D
VIENNA BEETHOVEN Speaker (Beech)	£2,500.00	£1,750.00		D
VIENNA MOZART Speakers (Beech)	£1,500.00	£1,050.00		D
VIENNA WALTZ centre Speaker (Beech)	£500.00	£350.00		D
YAMAHA HD1000 Hard Disc Recorder	£699.95	£500.00		D

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FROM SEPTEMBER 2004 ISSUE

KRELL CD-DSP player
 £1000. Levinson ML12 pre custom PSU phono sockets £700. Levinson ML9 100 watts £1600. Buy as system £2500 for quick sale. Upgrading to 39 20.5. Offers considered. Tel: 07709 144 987 (Sep/I)

PERPETUAL TECHNOLOGIES P3A DAC £390 (£799). Musical Fidelity Class A power amplifier £890 (£2500) Boxed and original condition. Audio Research and DNM cables complete sets. Tel: 07973 220 663 (Leicestershire) (Sep/I)

MINT QUAD II's pre tuner £575. Monitor Golds £525. Audio Boons £50. Transcripator Sweep arm, original packaging £30. 3009 arm £95. PPI phono £25. 124 Mushrooms, Idler, Wheel Plotter £30. Tel: 01274 599 234 (Sep/I)

QUAD 303 + 33 + FM3 tuner £400. Marantz CD50 £60. Kef Concord speakers £50. Tel: 01689 856 606 (Sep)

NAIM NAPI40 power amp, good condition, s/n 48XXX, can be auditioned in good system £300 ono. Tel: 07752 568 785 (Manchester) (Sep/I)

WANTED: AUDIO ALCHEMY Power Station 3 DAC power supply. Tel: 077 1254 1254 or Email: nut.comery@virgin.net (Sep/I)

SENNHEISER HD650 headphones with Russ Andrews dedicated HCI headphone cable (£160) mint £240. Tel: 01752 773 369 (Sep/I)

KLIPSHORNS MUCH Improved silver wired Deflex lined £3750. Loricraft PS80 mains regeneration units £725 each. All boxed. Kondo KSL-Digital cable £420. Living-Voice speaker cable set top model £850. Tel: 01923 826 830 (Sep/I)

AVANTGARD UNO Horn speakers £3500. Sonus Faber Cremona speakers £3000. EAR V20 integrated amplifier £1500. Aloia PSTII.01i pre-amplifier, Aloia 15.01i power amplifier 60 x 100 watts £1800. Tel: 020 8531 5979 (Oct/I)

LINN LP12, Ekos, Arkiv, Lingo, mint, boxed, manuals. Just run in. New business forces sale. Phone David 07887 997668, 01959 523024 (mobile) (evenings) (Sep/I)

WHARFEDALE PACIFIC Evolution 20 loudspeakers, beech finish, very good condition, too big for room £250 ono. Tel: 01383 416 263 (Sep/I)

NORDOST VALHALLA Interconnect 1m RCA, brand new, mint condition £1500. Nordost Valhalla speaker cable 3m bi-wire pair, brand new, mint condition £4000. Both in original presentation boxes. Tel: 07855 450 927 (Sep/I)

AUDIO ANALOGUE Puccini amplifier, mint £320; Rega3 T/T, black, Linn K9 cartridge, excellent £190; Philips CD723 player, mint £50, Marantz CD48 player, excellent £50; Yamaha KX390 cassette player, mint £50; Denon TU260L tuner, excellent £20. All ono, boxed with instructions. Tel: (Danny) 07746 948 559, (Southampton) (Sep/I)

NAIM AUDIO HiCap power supply, olive green, 1998, unmarked mint condition, SNAIC lead, manual and box, £445 ono. Tel: 023 8090 5264 or 0795 2067738 (Sep/I)

CYRUS III int amp, Cyrus power amp 2x PSX-R power supplies mint condition and boxed cost £1700 sell £650. Tel: 01869 241 358 (Oxen) (Oct/I)

MARTIN LOGAN Ascent I latest spec only 3 months old. Mint. £3450. Vincent SA.93 PRE/SP991 mono blocks, 300 watts. 3 months old. Mint. Superb build + sound £2000. Tel: 02380 224003 (Southampton) (Sep/I)

NYTECH /ARC 101 Active Amplifier/Speaker System. Complete Cta252xdii System C/W Active Crossover And Arc 101 Speakers And Stands. Excellent Condition. £250. Buyer Collects From London Or Carriage Arranged. Wanted: Epos Es14 Original Type Frame Stands. Tel: 07834 737865 (Sep/I)

QUAD ESL57's Quadropod stands, black £450. Albarry mono power amps, 50 watts, red, £300. Project 1.2 turntable arm cartridge £100. Croft Super Micro £175. Records, mainly 60s pop, £4 each. Lists. Tel: 02476 327 948 (Sep/I)

RATA TORLYTE turntable stand, black, £180 ono. Nakamichi Tri-Tracer 1000, £Offers. Wanted: Voyd power supply, lid, platter, Valdi lid, platter, armboard. Tel: James 020 8858 5021 or 07866 031113 or Email: james@cix.co.uk (Sep/I)

AUDIO SYNTHESIS Pro Passion duel mono 3 box pre-amp balanced singlended, mint £295. Pink Triangle Ordinal 1307 DAC, mint, boxed, inst. £295. Garrard 401 chassis SME plinth £150. Tel: 01246 209 578 or 01246 570 556 (Oct/I)

NAIM NAC52 Preamplifier & Supercap. £2,495. Naim Prefix £195. Both Excellent. Tel: 020 8642 6516 Daytime Only. (Sep/I)

PROAC STUDIO 125 floor standing speakers, yew finish, excellent condition, superb sound £500 ono. Tel: 01525 854 652, Mob 07796 366 347 (Beds) (Sep/I)

REL STRATA III active sub-woofer. Cherrywood finish, perfect working condition, some fine scratches and one small nick on top. £350 inc. delivery. Tel: 07754 976 443 or Email: magurry@supanet.com (Sep/I)

PINK TRIANGLE Anniversary SME arm, Pink Triangle Ventrical speakers, Sugden Bijou CD player, EAR 834P phono amp, DPA pre amp, power amp, best offers accepted. Tel: 0777 912 3411 (Oct/I)

LEAK TROUGHLINE 3 Stereo tuner and Stereo 30 amp together in teak sleeve. Tuner in original condition amp 1 channel down. £130 ovno. Tel: Peter 07780 786 437 (Hants) (Sep/I)

QUAD 303 + 33 + FM3 tuner £400. Marantz CD50 £60. Kef Concord speakers £50. Tel: 01689 856 606 (Sep)

FOR SALE: Quad 99 pre and 909 power. Excellent condition. Boxed, manuals, remote, links (£1650) asking £1250. Tel: 0131 664 5433 or Email: phillip@evans1952.freeserve.co.uk (Oct/I)

LYNWOOD MAINS Conditioners (two). The Advanced £50. The Mega £125. Nordost Silver Shadow digital interconnect 0.6mtr £225 ono. Tel: 01249 821 288 (Sep/I)

WANTED: AUDIO ALCHEMY Power Station 3 DAC power supply. Tel: 077 1254 1254 or Email: nut.comery@virgin.net (Sep/I)

CROWN DC300A Classic power amplifier in superb original condition, ex Greenwich Audio, 2x 150 watts into 8ohms at £450. Tel: 07932 664 480 (Sep/I)

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American 5670 valves

KT88 valves are more expensive than 6550 valves

Expensive non-magnetic stainless steel chassis

Ultra Linear £1,050 £1,150

£1,250 Triode Connection

£1,400

larger transformer

huge transformer

American 5670 valves

KT88 valves are more expensive than 6550 valve

2 or 6 pieces of silver capacitors

Ultra Linear £650 £750

Triode Connection £850

£1,000

Properly matched famous Svetana EL34 valves

40 watt + 40 watt

larger transformer

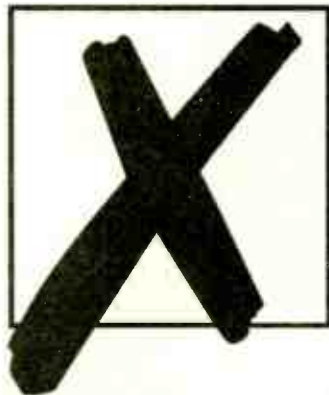
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American 5670 valves

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LEONARD COHEN

The Future

1992

This is nothing less than the record upon which one David Gilmour bestowed the honour of 'best record of the nineties'. While another worthy contender for this title - Jeff Buckley's 'Grace' - exhibits a deep vein of organic power which slaps you in the face the first time you hear it, Leonard Cohen's 'The Future' is a record which reveals its lyrical richness only after several listens, and contains well-wrought lines which hang about in your brain long after you have finished listening...

Of course Leonard is also responsible for the high point of 'Grace', being the author of the incomparable and much-covered 'Hallelujah'. Even before Buckley's appropriation, the song had already been wrested from its owner in John Cale's inimitable version, but it is that of Buckley which will now steer those in search of the source back to Cohen's oeuvre. There is much on 'The Future' which is every bit as good as 'Hallelujah'.

'The Future' came four years after the second of the two albums Cohen released during the eighties, the exemplary 'I'm Your Man' which resuscitated the Canadian poet's career commercially. Bizarrely CBS in the US had passed on its predecessor 'Various Positions' - despite it being the album which featured 'Hallelujah'. However the huge success of long-time Cohen backing singer Jennifer Warnes' 'Famous Blue Raincoat' tribute album made them think again. Once it was followed by 'I'm Your Man', containing the Cohen versions of classics like 'First We Take Manhattan' and 'Ain't No Cure For Love', CBS wasted no time in making his back catalogue available in CD form.

Those four years between 'I'm Your Man' and 'The Future' gave Cohen the opportunity to undergo the difficult process of gradually honing the words which gives 'The



'Future' its lyrical power. He himself claims that the meanings of his songs do not reveal themselves until he has turned them over at length and refined them. Listening to the record there is a real feeling of exquisitely considered poetry, where individual word choices have been anguished over in order to generate exactly the desired effect for the listener. Some of the lyrics, such as 'The Future' and 'Democracy' are involved and acerbic commentaries on the shape of the world, some are his customary elliptical odes to love and sex, and some are simple and witty, wry and resigned like 'Closing Time'. Much as in the case of The Smiths, anyone who tells you Leonard is miserable has only a surface appreciation of the man - there is much humour here.

The major obstacle to the enjoyment of these lyrics can be the sterility of some of instrumental settings. Listening to the latter Cohen albums first could be a mistake - the taste is best acquired by understanding how Cohen's voice, his themes, and his musical style has evolved over an amazing forty year recording career. Although it is a taste worth acquiring, by the time of 'The Future' Cohen's compositional tool of choice was the synthesiser, and on 'I'm Your Man' and 'The Future' you have to be prepared to

wear some dated examples of FM synthesis. That having been said, this record does contain some fine playing by the cream of LA session men, but their work is always subservient to Cohen's massive lugubrious drawl. It seems to take up a huge space in the centre of the soundstage, and despite its technical deficiencies he uses it to tremendous effect to emote wearily with his phrasing.

Like the rest of the individual albums, 'The Future' has never been given the remastering treatment. Bob Ludwig was worked on the two disc round-up 'The Essential...' but as I have all the albums and have not extended to purchasing the compilation, I can't comment on how much of an improvement it is. As the catalogue resides with Sony, the wise approach really has to be one of waiting for the eventual issue of SACD versions.

There has only been one live album and one studio album (2001's 'Ten New Songs') since 'The Future'. The good news is at the venerable age of nearly seventy the old buzzard is apparently preparing for a new release later this year. It will be a real shame when he finally gives up, as he is a true original, whose ability both to move and to amuse remains undiminished. **PC**



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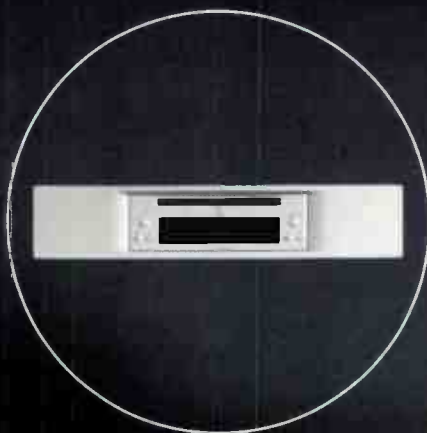


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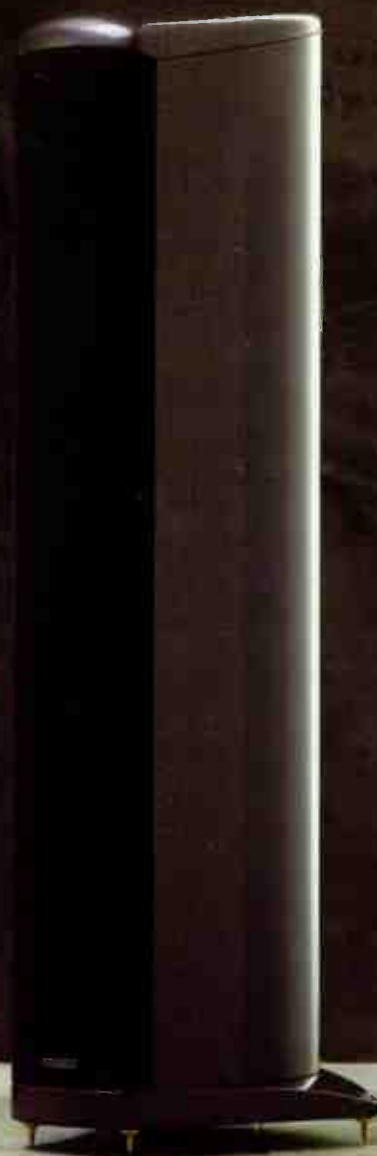
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