

# HIFI CHOICE

THE FINEST HIFI MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD | APRIL 2002 | www.hifichoice.co.uk

**EXCLUSIVE  
IN-DEPTH TEST  
OF PIONEER'S  
DV-747A**

**SACD, DVD-AUDIO, CD, DVD-VIDEO**

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**EXCLUSIVE CD SUPER-TEST**

## Sensational CD Players

Find out why CD still matters – 10 new generation compact disc players reviewed and rated



**Awesome Arcam Surround Sound**  
New receiver is the perfect solution for multichannel music and movies



**The Best of British**  
Hot and happening bookshelf models fight for the budget crown

**HOT NEW KIT!** The latest DVD players, amps & speakers from NAD, Onkyo, Ruark, Cyrus, Red Rose, Neat and more!



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# PHILIPS

*Let's make things better.*



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**Dan George** likes rock and acoustic music and plays it on a system consisting of Naim, Briston and B&W components.



**Jason Kennedy** HFC's former editor prefers the sound of esoteric Scandinavian jazz on his SME turntable.



**Paul Messenger** likes dance, folk, rock and classical music on vinyl and uses Linn, Naim and Rehdeko kit with gusto.



**Paul Miller** is the king of the technical world when it comes to hi-fi. His measurements are second to none.



**Alvin Gold** has eclectic music tastes although he prefers stuff that is miserable and downbeat.



**David Vivian** taps his toes to jazz fusion and likes his speakers to look good as well as deliver the aural goods.

### HI-FI CHOICE

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## HOW WE TEST THE PRODUCTS

Our reviewing process is the most rigorous in the business. We focus on transparency and resolution, mixing traditional hi-fi values with the latest technological developments via a blend of subjective views and scientific analysis.

**BENCH TESTS** Our main group test each month concentrates on a key area, with products from across the separates market. The testing consists of three stages: 'blind' listening, hands-on subjective testing and scientific measuring. The latter phase is conducted by our Technical Editor using the QC Suite Functional Testing Station.

**GROUP TESTS** Each issue features a number of additional tests aimed at narrowing the field in a specific product area. Here the testing involves just the reviewer concerned with no lab or panel testing, but plenty of comparisons.

**SOLO REVIEWS** As well as group tests we also review single components. In our First Impressions section, you'll find brand-new products that warrant early exposure, while High Performance concentrates on the latest aspirational, high-tech components.

## AWARDS



**BEST BUYS** are considered to offer an excellent standard of performance at an attractive price.

**RECOMMENDED** products are first-class components, losing out to Best Buys only because of a higher price or less competitive sound quality.

A third award, **EDITOR'S CHOICE**, is reserved for those products reviewed solo and is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.



# intro



We've been waiting for this for a very long time. Ever since DVD-Audio and SACD were first mooted as eventual replacements for CD, the fully loaded universal disc player has been a rumour waiting to happen. But though several

manufacturers have threatened to break the political boundaries, no-one has had the gall to do it.

Until now. Pioneer's DV-747A is the first UK machine to play both DVD-A and SACD high resolution music discs, in full surround to boot. It also plays a raft of other 12cm disc formats, DVD-Video and CD included; it's an all-singin', all-dancin', all-round future-proof entertainment machine. Baby, now we're cooking...

But can a player capable of so much do any of it well? To find out flick to page 24, because we've got hold of the very first unit to touch down in Blighty. It delivers in copious spades – strong in stereo and with a multichannel performance so intense, so absorbing, it could just ruin your social life. You have been warned.

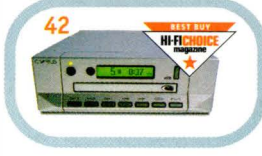
Significantly, the emergence of more universal players might mean that DVD-Audio and SACD can co-exist long-term – given adequate support, sufficient demand and a strong following wind. One thing is certain: CD isn't going anywhere for a very long time.

You're obviously a music fan, or you wouldn't be reading *Hi-Fi Choice*. That means you probably own a sizeable CD collection, which will continue to grow over the next few years. If you're keen to make the most of it, really make it sing, there's still no better way than to splash out on a serious CD player dedicated to the job – for evidence turn to page 36.

There's so much more to tell you about. The classic British predilection for low-cost, high-value speakers gets a contemporary shakedown on page 56. And anyone considering buying a stereo amp should turn immediately to our Buyer's Bible starting on page 68.

So, as those wet, blustery evenings continue to keep you housebound, pour yourself a drink, sling on your favourite sounds and settle down with *Hi-Fi Choice* – your number one guide to sonic endeavour.

Tim Bower, Editor



this month's star products





# HI-FI CHOICE

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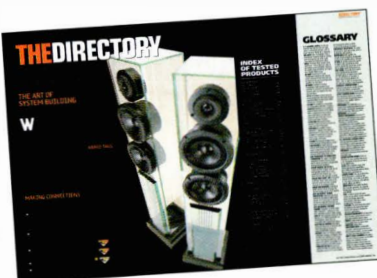
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# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

DAN GEORGE, JASON KENNEDY AND ALAN SIRCOM HEAR SWEET, SWEET MUSIC WITH THE BEST NEW KIT.



## NAD T531 DVD PLAYER

★★★★★ £329.95

**"THE SOUND QUALITY JUSTIFIES THE COST ON ITS OWN THOUGH, BOTH FOR DVD-VIDEO AND CD."**

**B**ack in the 1980s, NAD was the budget brand to beat; almost every starter hi-fi system featured NAD's 3020 amplifier, usually with a Dual turntable and a pair of Wharfedale speakers. NAD is now an upmarket brand, as evinced by the T531 DVD player; in a world of £99 machines, this £330 model is NAD's entry-level DVD spinner.

The T531 has no built-in Dolby or DTS decoders, preferring instead to squirt a matrixed optical or coaxial digital datastream to the decoder in an AV processor or receiver. Also, there is only one Scart socket, which means it cannot loop through TV signals. But, with S-Video, Scart-based RGB component and composite video on offer, it covers all the bases for common DVD usage, and it can cope with CD-R, CD-RW and supports MP3 playback, too. A stereo set of phono sockets complete the rear panel line-up.

Its traditional NAD dark grey garb is softened by the rounded edges, display and DVD drawer. NAD has also given this a far more hand-friendly remote control than usual. Backlighting and a larger 'play' button would be bonuses, however.

The T531 has a good overall video performance,

although the bright yellow splash screen is a bit too garish. It has a detailed, colourful picture that is a bit soft-edged and grainy. The sound quality justifies the cost on its own though, both for DVD-Video and CD. There are few DVD players at the price that come close to the T531's CD replay. It sounds warm and well balanced and has eradicated that sat-on dynamic range of most DVD players when trying to play 16-bit CD audio, while sound from DVD-Video is equally full-bodied. Overall, the sonic performance is rich and natural and extremely musical for a DVD player.

In an ideal world, we would own a DVD player for films and a CD player for music. But if you can fit only one 12cm disc player in your system, and you're not fussed about DVD-Audio or SACD, this is a great compromise. **AS**

### DATASTREAM

**DVD PLAYER** DVD-Video, CD, CD-R, CD-RW and MP3-compatible, region two DVD-Video replay, stereo audio output, Dolby Digital/DTS/PCM-compatible coaxial and optical audio output, ten-bit Video DAC, S-Video, composite video and Scart socket, no headphone socket.

**LENBROOK** ☎ 01908 319360





# RUARK ETUDE LOUDSPEAKER **EXCLUSIVE**

★★★★★ £650.00



**FROM THE OFF, THE RUARK IMPRESSES WITH ITS TRANSIENT RESPONSE -THIS IS A QUICK SOUNDING BOX AND NO MISTAKE.**

**R**uark's new Etude loudspeaker is one of a collection of new models in the Contemporary II collection for this year. It's more like a piece of furniture than a loudspeaker, displaying the most luxurious veneer finish you're likely to find at this price point.

The feeling of quality extends all round the cabinet, which appears well built and features a slanted baffle that directs the drivers slightly upwards. The darker than usual veneer of our review sample is a touch of class, and makes a refreshing change from the endless supply of beech and pale wood finishes descending daily upon our offices.

Ruark has plumped for a reflex-loaded paper mid/bass driver and a soft dome tweeter. They tend to like a bit of space behind them – with a

dynamic and fairly weighty sound they're not reliant on near-wall placement.

From the off, the Ruark impresses with its transient response –this is a quick sounding box and no mistake. Most striking however, is the way in which it seems to uncover layers of information in dense and rich music. Its ability to tell the musical truth is impressive indeed, especially at £650.

Its balance is a little upfront; some might feel a little too bright, though there's no arguing about the sheer level of detail on offer. But providing your amp and source components aren't too forthright you're much more likely to be charmed by this Ruark's exceptionally communicative nature. Complex rock from the likes of Led Zep simply zips along, with strong stereo imaging and a real sense of texture.

In all, a highly entertaining speaker that would grace many a listening room both visually and sonically. Ruark should be congratulated. **DG**



## DATASTREAM

**DIMENSIONS** 21x34x27cm (WxHxD), two-way monitor, 27mm soft dome tweeter, 180mm pulped fibre mid/bass cone, eight ohm impedance, 87dB sensitivity. Finished in natural cherry, red cherry, natural oak or black oak veneers.

**RUARK** ☎ 01702 601410





## CYRUS AV55 MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER SYSTEM **EXCLUSIVE**

★★★★★ £1,350.00 (BLACK £1,250.00)

**T**he transition from two-channel stereo to multichannel surround sound can seem complex and expensive but Cyrus is doing its best to make it as smooth and painless as possible. Hi-fi

aficionados face two problems when making this transition – which surround and centre channel speakers to choose and how to expand the amplification without sacrificing stereo quality.

Cyrus has the answer to the amplification issue with its surround processor and three-channel power amp. And with the introduction of the CLS50C it's got the speakers covered too. This new centre channel model is designed to work with the CLS50, the brand's smallest loudspeaker – add the £350 CLS50C to four CLS50s at £450 per pair and you've got Cyrus' entry level five-channel loudspeaker solution, the AV55.

The CLS50C employs two mid/bass drivers in place of the '50's one, the extra unit being there to cope with the high power requirements that movie soundtracks make of centre channels, largely because most of the speech comes through it. With music and movies it's crucial that the centre and left/right channels have the same character, hence Cyrus' use of cabinets with the same volume, sensitivity and bandwidth.

**“WITH MUSIC AND MOVIES ITS CRUCIAL THAT THE CENTRE AND LEFT/RIGHT CHANNELS HAVE THE SAME CHARACTER.”**

One thing you can't match with different shaped speakers is dispersion – how the sound is spread in the room – a factor that is also affected by the proximity of a TV screen. However, here the centre channel manages to blend in and combine forces to create a full-scale, high-resolution soundfield. The system appreciates quality source components and amplification and put in some stunning performances with the Pioneer DV-747A DVD-Audio/SACD player you'll find in the High Performance section this month.

If anything the CLS50C has a more forward balance than its mates – something that will favour it in outright home cinema set-ups. But musically the AV55 system is also extremely impressive. It reveals subtleties of imaging and musical inflection while being able to create the absorbing sound field that surround music is all about, making it an excellent and TV-friendly multichannel solution for both music and movies. **JK**

### DATASTREAM

**DIMENSIONS** CLS50 – 29.5x18x29.5cm, CLS50C – 13x43x24.5cm (HxWxD), sensitivity 86dB, impedance 8 ohms, bass roll-off 55Hz, mid/bass drive unit: 50/50C – 125mm/100mm polypropylene, tweeter: 25mm textile dome, cabinet: reflex loaded with dual gas flow port and wood veneer, volume 8.5 litres.

**CYRUS** 01480 435577





## ARCAM AVR200 SURROUND SOUND RECEIVER

★★★★★ £799.90

**IT IS DYNAMIC AND POWERFUL, BUT DOESN'T HAVE THAT GLASS-SHATTERING TRANSIENT ATTACK OF MANY AV RECEIVERS.**

**T**rying to achieve a good quality sound with multichannel music is not easy. Trying to do it without spending a king's ransom is almost impossible. Fortunately, Arcam's new AVR200 comes to the rescue, and all for under £800.

It's a relatively prosaic 70 watts per channel AV receiver, more or less identical to the company's previous AVR100 but with Dolby's Pro-Logic II decoding and a redesigned circuit board layout. It has also got rid of those unpopular but politically-correct BFA sockets on the rear panel.

Compared to its predecessor, the AVR200 also improves bass management considerably. The AVR100 was more delegation than management, as it dealt with subwoofers in a perfunctory manner, which ultimately held the product back in both home cinema and multichannel music systems. The on-screen menus and system functionality are still a bit idiosyncratic, but the manual does guide the user well.

So what makes the AVR200 so good for multichannel music? It has that smooth, highly

musical and nailed-down solid sound that Arcam gets from its DIVA range, but does it in an integrated multichannel setting. While it is not designed to get the upmost from the extended frequency ranges of DVD-Audio and SACD, what's there is strikingly lucid from both stereo and multichannel sources without settling for sounding brash or bland. For an AV receiver, it is particularly engaging in stereo – about as good as a decent £400 stereo amp, especially if you switch off the video circuitry.

Those weaned on brash, edge-of-the-seat home cinema may find the AVR200 too laid-back, but this should be read as a seal of approval for those of us with more musically-trained hi-fi sensibilities. It is dynamic and powerful, but doesn't have the glass-shattering transient attack of many AV amps.

Here's a receiver that balances hi-fi and home cinema tastes well without compromising either. Even DVD-A and SACD sound good through the 5.1 input. Such balance is rare in integrated surround sound receivers. **AS**

### DATASTREAM

**AV RECEIVER**, claimed 70 watts per channel, Dolby Pro-Logic II, Dolby Digital dts surround sound, digital audio, preamplifier and-12V trigger outputs, 5.1 direct input, RDS AM/FM tuner, 30 FM presets, 10 AM presets.

ARCAM ☎ 01223 203200







# SONUS FABER

look to the past to hear the future



**CONCERT HOME SERIES**  
L - R: SOLO, CONCERTINO, GRAVIS

## AMATI HOMAGE



Franco Serblin is too much the artist to settle into a routine, too passionate a designer to sit still. After 20 years, he remains driven to discover better methods for reproducing sound. And just as his views change the way we look at loudspeakers, so has his medium - Sonus Faber - evolved alongside his need to further the loudspeaker art.

His loudspeakers have developed into three distinct ranges - all the better to address the needs of an increasingly sophisticated marketplace. After all, with maturity comes a clarity of vision and intent. At the time of Sonus Faber's birth, there was no home theatre to address, and digital audio was in its infancy. In 2001, the world of home entertainment encompasses discrete 5.1 channel surround sound, purist 2-channel analogue audio, emerging digital technologies such as SACD and DVD-A, and more.

Sonus Faber welcomes the future, yet it shows respect for the past, the most vivid example being the Homage series. This luxurious range consists of the stand-mounted two-way Guarneri and the three-way floor-standing



Amati, both embodying artisan skills of centuries past: the beauty and warmth of hand-fashioned cabinetry, wrapped around components which deliver sound worthy of the names of the greatest stringed instruments of all time. For more modest installations, the Signum and the Electa Amator II forge a direct link with the speakers which established the Sonus Faber name. And to serve a multitude of channels, the dazzling, ultra-modern Concerto Home series contains everything from satellite speakers and slim floor-standing models, to a centre channel, to the new Gravis subwoofer.

**Whatever Sonus Faber speaker you acquire, whether you are reacting to the looks and finish or the sound it produces, there is only one response: "Che bello!"**

*Sonus faber.*

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"SURROUND SOUND MOVES AROUND THE ROOM SEAMLESSLY, WITH A DYNAMIC RANGE THAT WILL CHALLENGE ANY SO-SO AV KIT."

## ONKYO DV-S757 DVD AUDIO/VIDEO PLAYER **EXCLUSIVE**

★★★★★ £1,000.00

**I**n both its Integra and regular lines, Onkyo makes a big play of DVD-Audio and DVD-Video alike. The DV-S757 represents the company's entry-level DVD-Audio compatible player,

although a grand is a load of money for an entry-level machine, no matter how good.

It's a slimline player, compared to its price-point peers. The main keys are illuminated with blue LEDs, though the remote control hasn't any backlighting. Under the bonnet is a 10-bit Video DAC and audio decoders that will support every format you can stuff into a 12cm disc tray (except for SACD and CD Text). It sports a full set of analogue outputs for stereo and Dolby, DTS and DVD-Audio multichannel replay, two optical and one coaxial digital outputs, and the usual raft of video sockets, including a single Scart connector. There's no progressive scan or ColorStream component video outputs however, which are almost mandatory at the price. It does have THX approval, though, which is a sign of the quality of the player.

The DV-S757 is an exceptionally competent DVD player on video. The picture and sound of a film is far crisper and sharper than most budget models and it's this precision that makes the Onkyo so highly watchable. One of the most telling passages is the opening half-hour or so of *The Matrix*; it has a green hue that in most DVD players is all-pervasive. Fortunately, the Onkyo retains the greenish tinge of the background but doesn't make the

actors look sickly in the process.

Sonically, it's a bit of a star, too, especially on that handful of DVD-Audio discs around at the moment. Surround sound moves around the room seamlessly, with a dynamic range that will challenge any so-so AV kit. Whether the surround space is filled with orchestra or just ambience, the DV-S757 fills the room with coherent, detailed sound. CD sound is similarly precisely detailed, cohesive and expansive, although compared to DVD-Audio (or a high quality dedicated CD player), the lack of an infectious, foot-tapping rhythm is noticeable.

There is only one thing holding back the Onkyo DV-S757; its price tag. Although it's an extremely good player, it's an expensive one too. **AS**



### DATASTREAM

**DVD AUDIO/VIDEO PLAYER.** DVD, DVD-R, DVD-RW, Video CD, CD, CD-R, CD-RW, MP-3 compatible, THX approved, stereo, 5.1 channel, two optical, one coaxial digital outputs, composite video, S-Video sockets, Scart socket (with RGB).

ONKYO ☎ 01788 556777



## *KJ West One London McIntosh Centre*

*For more than fifty years McIntosh has enjoyed a reputation in the hi-fi world as the 'American Power house'. Not surprising, with some McIntosh amplifiers delivering four figures, these are big systems in every sense of the word.*

*Yet, with such power comes remarkable subtlety and technological finesse, the gentle giants of both two and multi-channel systems.*



*As enthusiasts ourselves, we've long been fans of the company's leading edge valve amplifiers. In fact the latest big valve amps have attracted a knowledgeable following at KJ and we're pleased that more state-of-the-art releases are on their way to us.*

*What has been pleasantly surprising, is how successfully McIntosh has embraced current multi-channel technology. Their home cinema systems are not only as versatile as anything currently available, they are so easy to use.*

*There's a very compelling 'retro' feel to all McIntosh hardware which has a tangible authenticity. Materials and controls feel just right and massive construction suggests an investment rather than a purchase. In support of that, it's worth knowing in the United States McIntosh enjoys the highest level of customer loyalty in the industry.*

*McIntosh is highly specified, demonstrably effective equipment that stands head and shoulders above mainstream audio and home-cinema systems. An impressively comprehensive range of products is available to meet the widely different requirements of both serious music and film lovers.*

*As the London McIntosh center, we hold the largest stock of McIntosh equipment in Europe. So, whether your preference is for stereo or multi-channel, prepare yourself for a most spectacular, high powered demonstration, exclusively at KJ West One.*



*West **kj** One*

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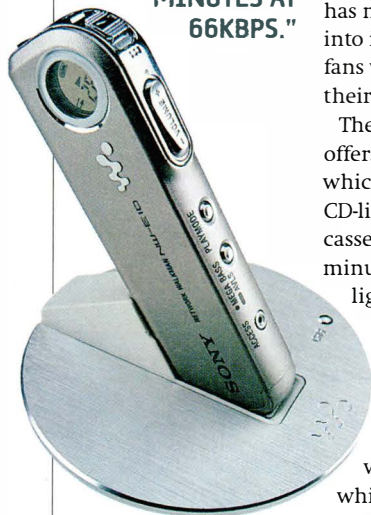
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PETERBOROUGH: 01733 341755



# SONY NW-E10 SOLID STATE PERSONAL

★★★★★ £299.99

**"IF YOU WANT TO ROUGH IT WITH CASSETTE-LIKE SOUND, YOU CAN GET AROUND 240 MINUTES AT 66KBPS."**



**I**t's hard to appreciate the popularity of MP3 considering it's a compressed format that doesn't quite live up to CD. Its success stems from the way in which file-sharing software gripped the globe in a mass-distribution, free-music frenzy. Sony has managed to cram a good measure of memory into its new solid state MP3 player, so PC audio fans world-wide can take a decent number of their music files out on their travels.

The top of the range NW-E10 Network Walkman offers a sizable 128MB of built-in flash memory, which equates to around 120 minutes of music at CD-like quality, or if you want to rough it with cassette-like sound, you can get around 240 minutes at 66Kbps. The diminutive, cigarette lighter-like player (which incidentally doesn't contain one of Sony's handy Memory Stick slots for transferring data or expanding memory) sits in a small cradle when charging and transferring data to or from a PC via the USB port. At a mere 55g you won't even notice it in your pocket, which makes it utterly portable and excellent for gym and outdoor use.

One button selects tracks and stop/play functions – although a bit fiddly it's a simple design that works. A small

backlit LCD screen offers track number and battery life information, which is a reasonable 11 hours, but you can't whack more batteries in as the internal sealed unit is rechargeable.

The supplied MG Jukebox software isn't so great. Despite being very up-to-date with Windows XP compatibility, it could have been simpler to use and more secure – a few serious crashes provoked some very colourful language. At CD-like data rates the NW-E10 performs at its best; close to CD though lacking in depth and spaciousness. At lesser data rates things get very cassette-like with some audible hiss, but it's a fairly acceptable compromise for 240 minutes of music.

A gorgeous gadget with real-world memory levels, the NW-E10 makes a fine and very svelte travelling companion. But given the high price of this solid state personal, you should consider much higher capacity hard disc portables too. **DG**



## DATASTREAM

**128MB OF FLASH MEMORY,** skip-proof design, ATRAC3 and MP3 playback, Windows Media Audio and WAV file compatibility, Windows 98/2000/ME/XP home/professional compatibility, USB connectivity, backlit LCD display, 240 minutes of playback at 66Kbps, volume limiter, bass-boost option.

SONY UK ☎ 08705 111999



## ULTIMATE DVD-AUDIO

MERIDIAN'S UPGRADED 800 SERIES COMPONENTS TAKE DVD-A TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Meridian claims to have launched the world's most sophisticated optical disc playback system with the new Version 3 updates of its flagship 800 series components.

Revisions to the 800 DVD/CD player and 861 Reference Surround Controller include the significant development of MHR Smart Link – a multichannel digital audio connection that digitally couples the 800 disc player to the 861 surround controller and Meridian's DSP loudspeakers. The full resolution and bandwidth of DVD-Audio can thus be losslessly transferred in the digital domain from source, to controller, to loudspeaker. The MHR link's digital output uses proprietary encryption technology and is the first system to be sanctioned for DVD-Audio content protection.

The link also carries additional information to the 861 Surround Controller, allowing the unit to automatically select optimum DSP settings for music and movies without user intervention.

Upgrades to the 800 player allow it to upscale audio from any source, including DVD-A, and then send it digitally to the 861 controller for further processing. The upshot is said to be the ability to distribute 24-bit/192kHz data to more channels than ever before.

Meridian heralds its new development as the first true high-end playback system for DVD-Audio, with a suitably high-end price. The 800 DVD/CD player alone with MHR Link will set you back over £10,000.

Meridian Audio ☎ 01480 445678



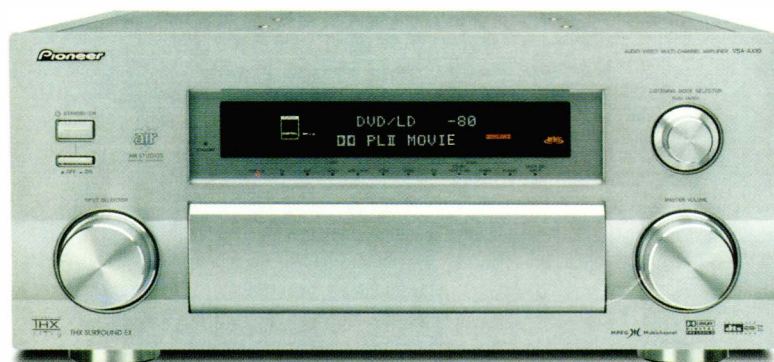
More than £10,000 – and that's just the top box!

## AGEIS EVOLVES

ACOUSTIC ENERGY REVAMPS ITS ENTRY-LEVEL SPEAKER RANGE

Acoustic Energy has launched a new range of low-cost hi-fi and home cinema speakers: Aegis Evolution. Changes to the existing Aegis range include new 25mm soft-dome tweeters, upgraded crossovers with bi-wirable cable terminals and a revised cabinet design featuring new finishes.

The range currently comprises the Evo One stand-mount (reviewed on page 58) and Evo Three floorstander, with the Evo Centre and Subwoofer making up the full multichannel complement. Prices start at £150 for the three-way centre and all models are available now. Acoustic Energy ☎ 01285 654432



## PIONEERING SPIRIT

SERIOUS SURROUND SOUND MUSCLE FROM JAPANESE DVD-AUDIO STALWARTS

Pioneer has announced its contender in the heavyweight AV amplifier stakes. The £2,700 VSA-AX10 lays down the gauntlet to Kenwood and Denon with seven channels at 170 watts (six ohms) and an acoustic calibration system that makes Lexicons look ill-equipped.

Developed at AIR Studios in London the VSA-AX10 comes with its own microphone and can automatically set up not only bass management and speaker delays but also make each speaker's tonal response identical and flat with respect to the room. Because it has seven channels you can even have its digital crossovers address each half of the front stereo pair, ie the woofer(s) and tweeter in a two-way design, eliminating passive crossovers entirely. This approach mimics that used by engineers when they set up speakers in a studio, hence the AIR connection.

On the visual front, video performance is enhanced by a video converter that 'boosts' the quality of low specification sources.

Pioneer GB ☎ 01753 789789





The forward-thinking  
Philips DVDR980

## PHILIPS RAMPS UP RECORDABLE DVD

NEW PRODUCTS FROM THE DUTCH GIANT INCLUDE DVD+RW AND HARD DISC RECORDERS

Philips has unveiled a host of new DVD products including two new recorders, plus a hard disc recorder with a DVD drive. The new DVDR980 and 985 support the DVD+R/RW formats, with DVD-R discs claimed to be 'virtually' 100 per cent compatible with both existing and future DVD players and DVD-ROM drives. Both machines allow one-touch recording and offer some linear editing features as well as creating an index picture screen to facilitate playback. Comprehensive socketry features on both machines, including front mounted S-Video and audio inputs.

The HDR1000 hard disc video recorder combines a DVD player with a 40GB hard disc, allowing simultaneous recording and playback with a total of up to 38 hours of recording time. Video can then be transferred from the HDR1000 by hooking up a VCR or DVD recorder. All three models are expected to hit the shops around springtime with prices starting at around £930 for the DVDR980. A price for the HDR1000 has yet to be determined.

Philips Consumer Electronics ☎ 020 8689 2166

## CLASSIK MOVIES

LINN'S FIRST VIDEO SOURCE UNVEILED

The Linn Klassik Movie System is the company's first video product, combining DVD and CD playback with an AM/FM tuner and 5.1 channels of amplification in a single compact box.

The product follows on from the success of the original Klassik – a one-box CD player, tuner and two-channel amp – and extends the space-saving concept into the realms of DVD. It also incorporates Dolby Digital and DTS decoding, along with multiroom connectivity with a link to other Klassik systems. The Klassik Movie System is available in five snazzy colours and retails for £1,995.

Linn ☎ 0141 307 7777



Three sources for the  
price of, er, three.



## FLAGSHIP Q

KEF'S NEW Q SERIES GETS ITS DADDY

KEF has launched the top model in its recently revised mid-market Q Series. The Q7 is a three-way bass reflex design sporting a newly-designed 160mm Uni-Q drive unit, with a 19mm metal dome tweeter mounted in the centre of the midrange cone. An additional 'racetrack'-shaped bass driver delivers the lowest frequencies. The result is said to be remarkably deep bass for such a slender cabinet. It comes in a choice of three finishes – maple, dark apple or black ash – and costs £800 a pair. KEF ☎ 01622 672261

## IN BRIEF

**6 MUSIC** is the first national music station that the BBC has launched for 32 years. The new digital service will go live for the first time at 7am on Monday 11 March 2002 with a breakfast show hosted by Phill Jupitus. Aimed at rock and pop fans, the network can be accessed via DAB, digital satellite television and the internet at [www.bbc.co.uk/6music](http://www.bbc.co.uk/6music). Rest assured, the *Choice* massive will be tuning in.

**VIDEOLIC** systems has announced that it plans to sell the PURE DRX-601ES portable DAB tuner at a special price in support of the launch of new digital gay station Purple Radio. The London-based station will be offering the DRX-601 from Valentine's Day for a promotional price of £240 for a two-month period only. Order via their website at [www.purple-radio.net](http://www.purple-radio.net).

**SENNHEISER** has reduced the cost of the NoiseGard noise reduction headphone system. The £90 HDC 451-1 headphones claim to dramatically reduce noise and increase intelligibility for airline travel. The powered noise reduction

system requires two AA batteries which it's claimed will last for 80 hours. ☎ 0800 652 5002

**SUBURBIA** beware! The first vehicle to feature a factory-installed entertainment system with Dolby Pro Logic II is here. The Volvo XC90 'sport utility' vehicle had its official debut at the North American International Auto Show in January and includes a Pro Logic II surround system with rear-seat A/V options. The XC90 entertainment system comprises 13 speakers, including a 140 watt active subwoofer. [www.dolby.com](http://www.dolby.com).

**PSB LOUDSPEAKERS** has launched the Image Towers range to the UK. The floor-standing models are all two-and-a-half-way designs, sharing a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter, except for the three-way flagship 7PT model that features three 165mm bass drivers and retails for £1,000. ☎ 01908 319360

**NAD** has introduced the T571, a new five-disc DVD/CD changer

IN BRIEF CONTINUES ON P.16





The clutter cutter.

## MUSIC BOX

MUSICAL FIDELITY LAUNCHES COMBINED CD PLAYER AND PREAMP SOLUTION

Designed to minimise cabling clutter without compromising sound quality, Musical Fidelity's new CD Pre<sup>24</sup> is a CD player and preamp in one box. According to its maker, it's capable of upsampling to 96kHz and borrows technology from the Nu-Vista CD player, sharing the same 24-bit DAC, filter and control electronics. The preamp stage is based on the A3<sup>+</sup> and features improvements brought about through the

development of the Nu-Vista amps, including completely separate power supplies. Part of the design brief for the CD Pre<sup>24</sup> was to outperform the Krell KPS255 for a fraction of its £20,000 asking price, something Musical Fidelity claims to have achieved for a retail price of £1,999. Expect to see a full review in *Hi-Fi Choice* soon. Musical Fidelity ☎ 020 8900 2866

## BRITS MAKE MULTICHANNEL MUSCLE

ARCAM'S NEW PROCESSOR AND POWER AMP TAKES ITS SURROUND BOW

Arcam is readying its flagship FMJ AV8 multi-channel preamp/processor for a May launch. Debuted at this year's CES show in Las Vegas, this impressive-looking unit conforms to the THX Ultra 2 standard and boasts eight stereo inputs including optional MM and MC phono, all maintained in the analogue domain for optimum sound quality. The AV8 includes an eight-channel audio input for DVD-Audio, SACD and any future formats that may arise, and up to

three component/RGB video inputs with 100MHz bandwidth. An RS232 port is also provided, through which future software upgrades may be made.

A matching seven-channel power amp is also set for a May launch. The P37 delivers up to 150 watts per channel and looks superbly built. Like the AV8, it will retail for £2,500 when it finally hits the shops.

Arcam ☎ 01223 203200



## HIGH RES, LOW COST

DVD-AUDIO AND SACD GO MASS MARKET

This could be the year DVD-Audio and SACD really take off, if the pundits at this year's CES show in Las Vegas are to be believed. Both formats were present in force, with DVD-A in particular showing real signs of infiltrating genuine mass market territory.

As the year draws on, many believe only budget DVD players will be left without DVD-A compatibility. "Any DVD player above \$249 (£190) will have DVD-Audio built-in in 2002," says Craig Eggers, director of product planning at Toshiba America. Leading the way is Panasonic – its new line-up of products due for launch later this year includes a number of micro systems and 'home cinema in a box' packages with DVD-A playback as standard.

Philips is set to join Sony with lower SACD price levels this year. Among the DVD-Video/SACD combination players the company showed at CES is the SACD900, priced at \$299 (£230).

## IN BRIEF CONTINUED

retailing at £580. It has MP3, HDCD and CD-R/RW compatibility, and uses 96kHz/24-bit DACs. A full compliment of video outputs graces the back panel including progressive scan on component video outputs, RGB on Scart and S-Video. Also included are co-axial and optical digital outputs for the audio. It's in the shops now. ☎ 01908 319360

**ETYMOTIC RESEARCH** has launched the ER-6 isolator earphones in Europe. They're designed to fit into the ear canal a short but safe distance from the eardrums. By creating an airtight seal the transducers claim to give a flat frequency response with complete isolation from external noise. Expect to pay £129 for a pair. ☎ 01425 481234

**THE NATIONAL** Vintage Communication Fair descends on the Birmingham NEC on 5 May, displaying all manner of vintage radio sets, valve amps, horn speakers and other classic hi-fi. The biannual show has over 300 stall-holders from Europe and America with collectors' clubs and magazines also exhibiting. Tickets are £5. ☎ 01392 411565





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# Designed for vision...

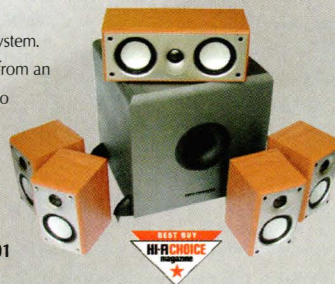
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# TOP TABLE

TERRY SULLIVAN IS THE DRIVEN GENIUS BEHIND VINTAGE TURNTABLE MAESTROS LORICRAFT AUDIO. RETRO-SCEPTIC DAVID VIVIAN PREPARES TO BELIEVE.

**T**erry Sullivan suffers from impatient thoughts. Having a conversation with him is like being confronted with a hill of people desperately clambering over one another towards a continuously subsiding summit. Started sentences are seldom finished, they get trodden on or flung to one side by the competing rush of ideas and distractions. He must pause for breath but it's hard to spot when.

Terry's customers have impatient thoughts, too. They want their immaculately restored Garrard 301 and 401 turntables yesterday. Some, with serious cash to burn, might even be counting down the days to the delivery of their 501s – the super high-ender Garrard would have made had it stayed in business. But there are only 24 hours in a day. And what with Terry being company president, chairman, CEO, MD, shop floor manager and, let's see, roughly a third of the workforce, it's all a bit of a never-ending rush. Working from a few tiny farm outbuildings on the edge of Lambourn in the beautiful Berkshire hills and not so many miles from the original Garrard factory in

Swindon, he brings a new level of meaning to the concept of "just in time". As in "phew!".

But then Terry didn't start Loricraft Audio to sit back as a square-jawed captain of industry. "It's more of an 'obby that got out of control," he explains with a sarf London accent sharp enough to have *Lock, Stock...* director Guy Ritchie reaching for a voice-over contract. He elaborates: "It probably all goes back to about 1958 and my first Bush record player (which I've still got). I remember there used to be a record shop in Wimbledon called the Music Hall – Joe Garside owned it. Me and me mate used to work in there, and there's this guy who worked for the Post Office and he'd got a Garrard 301. Cor, that's all right, I thought. Wouldn't mind one of them. Little did I know what the future held. So I've been mucking about with them for years."

#### NATURAL BORN IDLER

It's more than mucking about now, of course. As well as the feted vinyl spinners, the Loricraft monicker is attached to a couple of pro-standard record cleaners and a growing range of

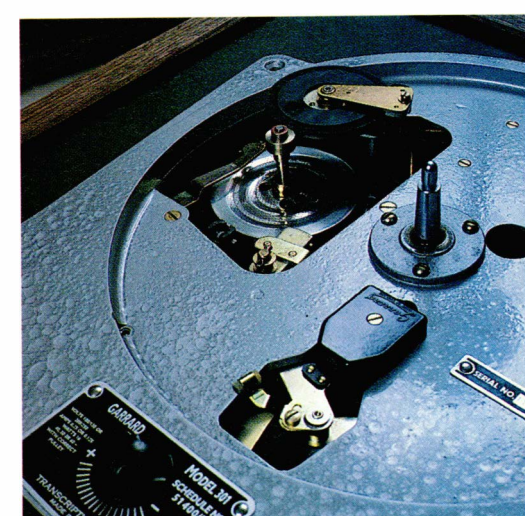
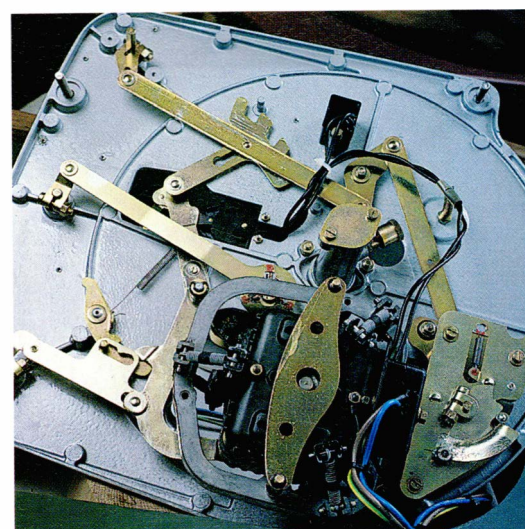
**"IT'S ALL BEEN MORE OF AN 'OBBY THAT JUST GOT OUT OF CONTROL, REALLY," SAYS TERRY**







Terry Sullivan demonstrates the fine art of idler drive turntable reconditioning.





Loricraft has branched out beyond its core business of reconditioning Garrard turntables and now produces the much-approved Missing Link phono stage (below).



power supplies, monoblock power amps, not to mention a phono stage called the Missing Link. But for many it's his custody and protection of genuine Garrard DNA that has made it one of hi-fi's more precious commodities. In effect, Loricraft has done a Jurassic Park on what Japanese aficionados often refer to as "the finest turntable the world has ever known". Not averse to the odd oratory flourish amid all the chirpy self-deprecation, is Terry. So I attempt some balance by suggesting that half a century on, Garrard technology must be, well, clapped out.

Tel's having none of it. "The idler drive system, when it's good, is superior to belt drive," he asserts without a glimmer of equivocation. "I joke about it to all my compatriots in the revolving turntable platter business. Why do they do belt drive turntables? Because they're cheap. You buy a little motor from £18 upwards and you have a belt, a pulley and a shaft and there's your turntable. Then I think of all the flamin' work in that 401, or 501 even. You've got to have all this precise geometry for the yoke, the idler bracket, all the wheels have got to be ground...

"There's a lot of work in 'em, and I think the reason they sound so wonderful is this really powerful direct drive. Now never have I knocked a Linn. You've got to thank old Ivor (Tiefenbrun) for keeping vinyl going in the eighties. Belts are great. But while the belt can iron out fluctuations, it can also remove information from the record."

#### GOTTA GET ONE

Terry has a fund of Garrard trashes Linn LP12 anecdotes to support this notion. He claims to have made numerous converts out of Linn die-hards. I'm feeling tempted myself, and I don't even



own a turntable. So, for the sake of argument, let's say I want a 301 tomorrow.

"We can do it two or three ways," says Terry, warming to the thought of another (even hypothetical) customer. "The plinths aren't generally a problem; we've got a four-week lead time for Gareth (woodwork maestro) to get it in. Now, all the really good 301s are in Japan. They usually come in a bit like those over there (Terry points to a pair of time-tarnished 301 chassis in the corner). I gave 200 quid for that one; you've got to hand over that sort of money now.

"Servicing starts at £71. Round it up to £120 – for that we'll paint the platter, too. Say the chassis hasn't got too many marks on it. We'll strip it down and overhaul it. Then it can go straight into a plinth. The plinth is the expensive bit, but there is a way to keep the cost down to about £588 if you already own a 301."

cardboard box, all packaged up – but the plinth, of course, is extra. The 401 is £764 'cos we can get them a bit easier."

Terry even does an entry-level package consisting of a fully restored 401 chassis, skeletal plinth (more IKEA than trad Garrard but functional and effective) and a re-wired Rega RB250. "All you need is your cartridge and you're up an' running," the human dynamo explains. We're offering that for £1,350 all-in. And I'll tell you now, I'll put that against any of the new ones, any of 'em. I'll go as far as putting it against a four-and-a-half thousand pounder. Put the PSU 45 power supply on it and you'd beat even that. Stone dead." Blimey.

I leave Lambourn frankly stunned. Terry isn't the man I thought he'd be. I was expecting a bloke living in the past with a pocket timepiece and a monocle, railing against the pace and shortcuts of

### "I GAVE 200 QUID FOR THAT PLINTH; YOU'VE GOT TO HAND OVER THAT SORT OF MONEY NOW."

Which, considering what goes into a 301 plinth and its size, seems more than fair.

"We also do fully restored 301s and 401s. With 301s, all the cadmium-plated stuff's probably come off. So we strip them down and send them away for replating and they come back like new. Brian Mortimer finished up as chief of quality control at the Garrard factory and he actually describes these as the finest 301s and 401s Garrard ever made.

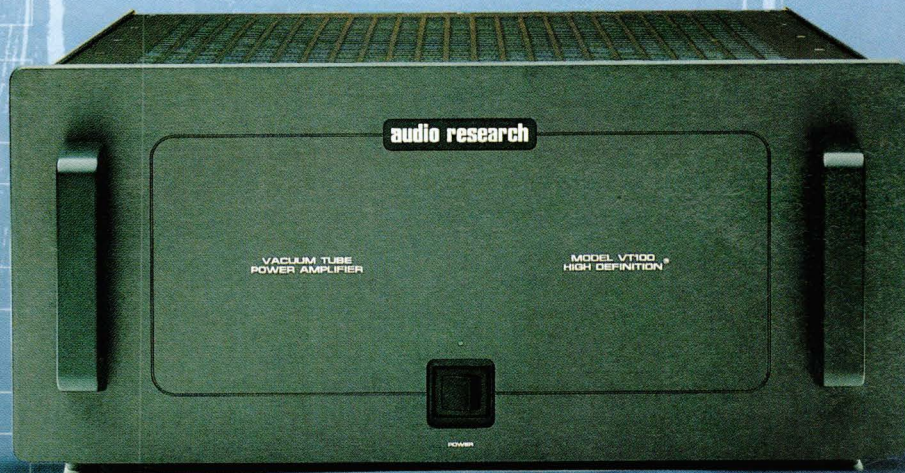
"So forget your fifteen pounds nineteen and six. A fully restored 301 is going to cost you £999, complete in the

modern existence. I was expecting a crusty, dusty iconoclast immersed in the warm glow of quaint antiquity, oblivious to the hard-nosed requirements of the 21st century hi-fi consumer. Instead I got motormouth Tel, as clued up as he is glued up and wielding an old British classic turntable design with the precision of Obi Wan's light sabre to stake his place at the cutting edge. If a bit breathlessly.

More power to his overworked elbow. Because, ever since the visit, I've wanted a Garrard too.



# ADD ANGELS



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**AUDIO RESEARCH**  
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Audio Research has always conducted itself in a manner befitting manufacturers of bespoke products of a bygone age, be they hand-crafted automobiles, fine timepieces or hand-stitched shoes. It will not be rushed. At any point in its history, Audio Research has maintained a rank at the top of its field, its position held through the change of millennia with a series of products truly deserving of the name "Reference". The Reference 2 Mk II pre-amplifier and Reference Phono, the Reference 600 Mk III and 300 Mk II power amplifiers – this family of vacuum tube components proves that traditional values such as hand-built construction, superior parts and materials, intelligent ergonomics and flash-free styling can be applied to the latest technologies: the best of the past with the best of the present, to ready the listener for the future.

But Audio Research does not restrict its expertise to its flagship models. The company has always employed a "trickle down" approach, applying the gains acquired through the development of the Reference models throughout the range. Among its latest achievements are the CD3 Cd player the LS25 Mk II pre-amplifier and VT100 Mk III power amplifier, products capable of reproducing sound of a calibre unknown at their price points.

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# HEATED PASSION

**EXCLUSIVE** CAN A SOLID STATE AMP FROM A CELEBRATED, CD-PHOBIC DESIGNER REALLY BE THE ANSWER TO YOUR ANALOGUE PRAYERS?

m

Meeting Mark Levinson last year it seemed that his true passion is not this new amplifier or even his famous wife (Kim Cattrall from *Sex In The City*, triv fans) but a dislike of PCM (Pulse Code Modulation) audio. Mark loathes the effect of this digital recording format and

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY

the CDs it creates and now that SACD has appeared on the scene he clearly feels vindicated in this opinion. He's not alone in this regard, there are plenty of die-hard analogue enthusiasts out there who are celebrating the resurgence of the LP as if it was the second coming, but he's in a minority when it comes to established figures in the US high end. It's not that he doesn't like it purely for its sound - he actually feels it's the reason why people have stopped listening to music and enjoying it the way they used to.

Therefore the Passion amplifier, along with the rest of Levinson's recently expanded Red Rose range, has been created using analogue and DSD (SACD's recording format) sources from the start. The design team that created them is headed by Levinson and Victor Tiscareno who are based in New York, but there have been "significant contributions" from the





Chinese manufacturing arm of the company. For a US high-end brand to manufacture in China is unconventional, but to get design input as well is unheard of. Inevitably it begs the question: why do Red Rose products cost so much, is it purely down to the Levinson name?

The Passion is a straightforward, no frills line-integrated amp. A £3,000 line-integrated that from the outside could be a Copland say, at half the price. Features are scant – five line inputs plus a tape out, single speaker terminals, volume and selector controls. With the exception of a headphone output that's it – no balance, no separate record out selector, not even a remote control.

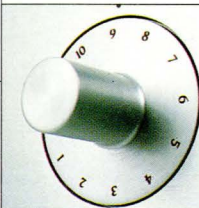
But what you do get is a 100 watts per channel rated output with what is described as

(also PCM) came across in rather forward fashion and to be frank even some of the tracks on the Red Rose SACD sampler displayed the same character at times. This is probably because of a lack of empathy between speaker and amp – Red Rose's speakers have a softer, smoother balance than my Avatars, which were designed with rich valve tones in mind.

Nonetheless with the right disc or LP the results are electrifying. Take Keith Jarrett's classic *Eyes Of The Heart*, when the band joins him for the crescendo of this live piece I was riveted, rarely have I heard it sound so real. The power and scale coupled with the Passion's irresistible speed really made the most of a spectacular performance.

I've never had a Naim amplifier at home but I

US high-end brand Red Rose Music has unconventionally used not only Chinese manufacturing ability, but also design input.



## “THE KETTLE DRUM HIT ME IN THE STERNUM. I DON'T RECALL THAT HAPPENING BEFORE, AND BELIEVE ME I WOULD.”

“tremendous power reserves”, and it must be said that I was quite astounded at its bass driving capabilities.

### SOUND QUALITY

I used the Passion to amplify the outputs of a Sony SCD-555ES SACD player, Pioneer DV-747A Universal DVD player and an SME 20A/vdH Grasshopper/TE The Groove record player. Loudspeakers were Living Voice Avatar OBX-R with wires and support from Townshend Audio.

My first impression of the Passion was very positive – it was clear why this amp had been so dubbed. It has a turn of speed that is extremely engaging, notes attack and decay with such vitality and nimbleness that you can't help but be dragged into the sound. The kettle drum on the Omnibus Wind Ensemble's interpretation of Frank Zappa's *Inca Roads* hit me in the sternum. I don't recall that happening before, and believe me I would.

You get a distinct impression of transparency with the Passion, it seems to peel away the layers until you get to the raw music. But going back to my reference amps (at about twice the price) I realised that what it's actually doing is emphasising the fundamentals of the music and glossing over some of the finer details. It could be richer in its portrayal, but without comparison it manages to give the impression of leaving no stone unturned.

This exposed approach makes it more source-fussy than average. CDs – the devil's coasters in the Levinson book – do not fare too well, tending to sound hard in the upper midrange. Even Joni Mitchell's voice from a DVD-Audio disc

wouldn't be surprised if they sounded similar to this. They're renowned for their pace and detractors find the sound a bit hard in the midrange. But in the right system they can be stunning, and the same is true of the Passion.

### CONCLUSION

The Red Rose Passion is a no-compromise amplifier that revels in speed and energy. It's not quite as revealing as it likes to make out and those who are after a relaxing sound will have to be careful with speaker matching. But you should always do that anyway, there's just no excuse if you want a stunning result – something this amp is fully capable of providing in less than synergistic surroundings let alone on its own turf. The price does seem steep for the hardware on offer, but the performance it provides is reason enough for the truly obsessed. £2,999, Musical Design Company ☎ 01992 573030



No frills, but when something sounds this good, who needs 'em?



# BEST OF ALL WORLDS

**EXCLUSIVE** PIONEER'S DV-747A UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER IS THE FIRST UK MACHINE TO PLAY BOTH NEW HIGH DEFINITION MULTICHANNEL MUSIC FORMATS – DVD-AUDIO AND SACD. AND IT'S EVERY BIT AS GOOD AS WE'D HOPED.

t

he notion of a universal audio and video player has been bandied around ever since DVD-Audio and SACD began competing to be the king of music formats. If there were a machine that played both discs then the two formats might more comfortably co-exist, but such a player has been a long time coming. With the introduction of Pioneer's DV-747A Universal DVD player the wait is finally over –

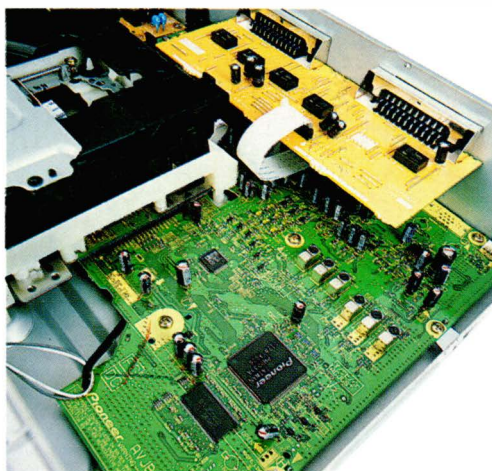
not only does it play *both* high resolution formats in multichannel, it also plays the full gamut of video disc formats. Well, almost. Apparently Matsushita's DVD-RAM is the one fly in the ointment, but it will play all the other recordable DVD formats. Truly, this is one remarkable piece of hardware.

For the music enthusiast there are three Crystal 24-bit/192kHz two channel DACs, Legato PRO digital filtering and a Hi-bit processor intended to improve CD sound quality. It also plays MP3-encoded CD-Rs and lets you name and navigate them with the on-screen display. The video side is equally well catered for with 108MHz/12-bit video conversion, component output with progressive scan and extensive picture parameter adjustments.

REVIEW JASON KENNEDY



Be prepared to spend a few nights with the manual to get to grips with this remarkable machine.



The actual socketry is familiar; 5.1 analogue outputs for DVD-Audio and SACD, coaxial and optical digital outputs for Dolby Digital and DTS if you want off-board processing and two pairs of stereo outputs. Video connections include S-Video, two SCART outputs (one streaming RGB) and component and composite phono sockets.

Build quality is lightweight but maintains the high standard one usually expects of Pioneer. It's not as gorgeous as the flagship (non-SACD-compatible) DV-939A DVD-Audio/Video player but it costs £300 less and plays more formats. A lot more. Accurate set-up is straightforward if you have a tape measure and a sound pressure metre to hand, the only minor irritation being the need to switch between screens when selecting channels and adjusting levels.

## SOUND QUALITY

Two-channel performance was assessed using an ATC SCM2 pre amp and Gamut D200 power amp via Living Voice Avatar OBX-R loudspeakers. Sony's very fine two-channel SCD-555ES SACD player and Pioneer's aforementioned DV-939A were also used for comparison. We started with CD and were pleasantly surprised by what we heard – this is a fine player, as fine it seems in nearly all respects as the reference Sony. The latter has the march on it in terms of bass resolution and solidity but when it comes to dynamics, low level detail, imaging *et al* the differences between the two were marginal.





Frankie say, "Relax with the luxurious surround experience of SACD".

With two-channel SACD and DVD-Audio the results are more impressive still. The extra resolution offered by these media brings greater naturalness and credibility to the proceedings. Competition from players dedicated to either format was not quite as easy to dismiss however, and in both instances there was an upgrade when moving to the Sony or bigger Pioneer. But in the case of DVD-Audio the margin was decidedly subtle and the outright winner might well depend on system balance – the DV-939A has a warmer, richer balance than the DV-747A, so if your system sounds rich already the Universal machine may be a better match.

Switching to 5.1 surround sound music on SACD and DVD-Audio, the Universal Pioneer delivers a performance very close to those dedicated players. Hooked up to a Lexicon MC12 processor, NAD S250 five channel power amp, Cyrus CLS50 speakers and a REL Stentor sub, the resulting sound was fantastic.

Tracks like *Welcome To The Pleasuredome* from Frankie Goes To Hollywood's recently released SACD compilation are an exercise in sound steering that make multichannel listening tremendously entertaining. It opens with a jungle setting and builds into a writhing mass of synth and bass that completely fills the room, providing great effects wherever you're sitting. More subtle recordings like the Omnibus Wind Ensemble's Frank Zappa arrangements create a highly convincing sense of space, which in turn allows the instruments to breathe more realistically than they do in stereo. Compared to Sony's multichannel SCD-333ES, another dedicated SACD player, the differences were pretty subtle, more so than with stereo SACD. Some discs offered up a bit more atmosphere on

**"THE EXTRA RESOLUTION OFFERED BY SACD AND DVD-AUDIO BRINGS GREATER NATURALNESS AND CREDIBILITY TO THE PROCEEDINGS."**





# HIGH PERFORMANCE PIONEER DV-747A UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER

## DVD-AUDIO VERSUS SACD

### DVD-AUDIO

DVD-A was the first high definition digital music format to be conceived yet paradoxically the last to make it onto the market. As a result software support still lags behind that for SACD by some margin. All DVD-A discs will play on DVD-Video players albeit not at the same quality and Audio players will also play Video discs. A direct descendent of CD, DVD-A is a PCM format that comes in a variety of qualities, the highest of which being 24-bit/192kHz which offers 96kHz bandwidth across two channels only (although multichannel 24/192 looks likely to appear fairly soon). The vast majority of DVD-A discs feature 5.1 channels of 24/96 resolution alongside a Dolby Digital track for DVD-V player compatibility and some video footage, though the latter is often just stills. DVD-A players are designed to be used with a monitor and anything other than basic operation is difficult without one. They have better surround sound set-up capabilities than SACD.

### SACD

SACD is Sony and Philips' alternative high definition format. Based on digital recording system DSD (Direct Stream Digital), SACD offers a maximum 100kHz bandwidth and up to six channels. DSD has a technical advantage over PCM in that it removes two stages of processing. Its drawback is high levels of ultrasonic noise which need to be filtered out. Discs are in two, multichannel, and hybrid variants and often a combination of all three.

SACD is a dedicated audio format and has no video element, so setting up a purist surround system is a relatively crude affair limited by what can be displayed on a small dot matrix panel. Usually this is solely the relative level of front to rear speakers.

### WHICH IS BEST?

As no one has yet issued recordings on the two formats of the same piece of music using 24/96 PCM and DSD recorders it has not been possible to directly compare them. But the survival of both depends on software support and in this respect SACD currently has the edge.



Decisions, decisions – why bother if you've got a Universal?

the Sony but there was no clear winner. In fact, the Sony player may have been hampered by its very basic bass management facilities, which give the Pioneer an advantage in terms of setup.

Alongside its big brother, the DV-939A, the DV-747A put in a sterling DVD-Audio performance. Its leaner balance makes recordings sound less rich, which in direct comparison can give the impression of a cruder performance. But listen harder and its tighter bottom end makes double bass notes sound more real and fast, and previously lush orchestral pieces take on a sharpness that makes them more compelling. The DV-939A seems to have the edge in terms of low level detail but it doesn't take long to forget this when listening to the DV-747A in isolation – stick on the Doors' *Changeling* and you're soon reminded of why this band was so influential.

### AV PERFORMANCE

With the Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks of music and movie DVD-Videos, performance is similarly impressive. There is inevitably a step down from the natural, relaxed sound of the high definition formats but with a good disc this change is not too painful and we were impressed at how uncompressed some discs sounded. Picture quality is excellent – crisp, natural and fine. The range of video adjustments is as broad as they come, taking in black level and set-up, chroma, gamma and four varieties of video noise. There's also progressive scan for those with suitable screens and a PureCinema mode intended to make the most of movies made on film rather than video.

### CONCLUSION

This is an extraordinary machine. Not only does it play virtually every audio or video disc in existence, it does so with a finesse fully in line with more expensive dedicated machines.

Which will it turn you into, an SACD or a DVD-Audio fanatic? It's perhaps ever so slightly better as a DVD-Audio player, but who cares when you can play both mediums at close to the best of their abilities and watch movies in-between? It's time to get down off the fence. You no longer have to choose which high definition music format is the best, now you can have them both. £899.00, Pioneer UK ☎ 01753 789789

## OUR FAVOURITE DISCS SO FAR

### DVD-AUDIO



**The Doors – *LA Woman* (Elektra)**  
A classic remastered from original eight-track tape that retains the energy of the original while adding the presence that only multichannel surround sound delivers.



**Joni Mitchell – *Both Sides Now* (Reprise)**  
High quality original surround recording has a luxurious sound with Mitchell's sultry voice dominating the mix.

### Deep Purple – *Machine Head* (Warner)

Another remastered oldie from a band at the peak of its powers. Slightly odd instrument placement but great fun for the air guitarist.

### Beethoven – *Symphony No.6, Op. 68/*

*Respighi – The Pines of Rome* (AIX records)  
New Jersey Symphony Orchestra/Zdenek Macal  
Double sided disc that includes alternate mixes, a voiceover by the conductor and two camera angles. Oh, and some rather nice tunes.

### SACD (ALL MULTICHANNEL)



**Various Artists – *Exceptional Masterpieces* (Siltech)**  
A direct to DSD recording of early music from Sammartini, Biber and Fux among others, produced by US cable specialist Siltech. This is a superb sounding disc.



**James Taylor – *Hourglass* (Columbia)**  
Luxurious production and quality songsmithing from an old master make this a must for anyone who appreciates West Coast rock (and owns a SACD player).



**Omnibus Wind Ensemble – *Music By Frank Zappa* (Opus 3)**  
Blumlien single point analogue recording of unusual versions of jazz rock classics, all of them more relaxed than the originals but just as grand. A fascinating disc for Zappa aficionados.



**Frankie Goes To Hollywood – *Rage Hard – The Sonic Collection* (ZTT)**  
SACD-only release featuring regular Frankie producer and eighties hit-maker Trevor Horn's remixes of the band's hits. Includes most of the *Welcome To The Pleasuredome* album, the latter being the standout track.



# Discover the natural beauty



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Heybrook's 'first order' crossover networks give the amp increased control over the drive units for greater immediacy and clarity. By comparison conventional crossovers can make speakers confused and slow sounding.

Heybrook 2000 series speakers are exclusively available through selected, specialist retailers.

*"...Clear, sharp and lively... this was an unusually likeable loudspeaker which had the litheness of a classy compact, with the bass extension and tonal range of a much bigger box...."*

Hi-Fi News - UK

*"...The HB4's achieve a small miracle. Their musical coherence demonstrates a real 'know-how' on the part of the Heybrook design team. They are quite simply beautiful and natural. Bravo!..."*

Revue du Son et du Home Cinema - France

*"...It sounds so good, that I don't think I have ever heard a loudspeaker at this price, reproduce midrange frequencies with such quality!..."*

Lyd & Bilde - Norway



Heybrook Hi-Fi

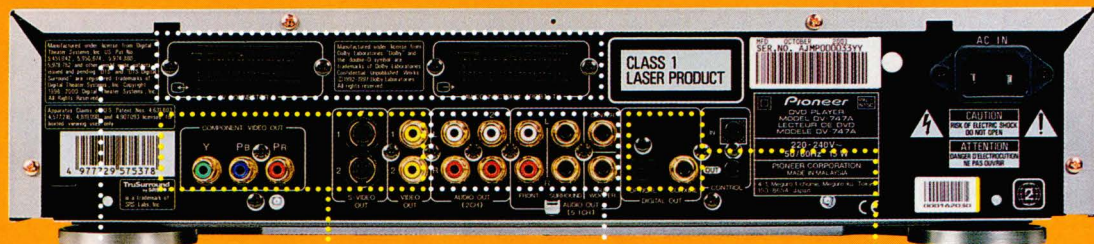
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# HIGH PERFORMANCE PIONEER DV-747A UNIVERSAL DVD PLAYER

## CLOSE UP

The DV-747A is the UK's first 'fully loaded' universal disc player. Along with DVD-Audio, SACD, DVD-Video and CD discs it also plays both CD-R and CD-RW varieties of recordable CD and can decode MP3 tracks. It includes on-board Dolby Digital and DTS decoding and handles Video-CD too, though the latter is of little relevance to the UK market. As for connection options you get a full complement – see right.



### SCART OUTPUTS

Two Scart sockets are provided for AV connection, one carrying an RGB video signal. Use this one for higher quality video performance.

### VIDEO OUTPUTS

Choose between two S-Video outputs, two composite outputs and a set of component phono sockets.

### ANALOGUE AUDIO OUTPUTS

A pair of two-channel audio outputs is included for connection to a stereo amp, plus 5.1-channel outputs for DVD-A/SACD playback through a surround system.

### DIGITAL AUDIO OUTPUTS

Both optical and coaxial varieties are provided.

**“ONE DUAL-LASER TRANSPORT ACCOMMODATES DVD, DVD-R, DVD-A AND SACD WITHOUT COMPROMISING COMPATIBILITY WITH OLDER DISCS.”**

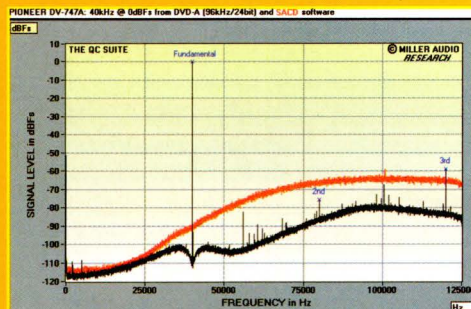
## TECHNICAL REPORT

Up until this point, the rivalry between SACD and DVD-Audio has ensured the players were always mutually exclusive, even though the *mechanical* characteristics of the two disc formats are, in fact, identical. Both use the same substrate, the same groove pitch and length and offer the same data capacity even though the nature and packing of data is completely different. Hence, Pioneer's DV-747A can make use of one, dual-laser transport to accommodate DVD, DVD-R, DVD-A and SACD playback without compromising its compatibility with older CD, CD-R and CD-RW discs.

Once the data is stripped off the respective disc in its raw form it is separated according to type. That is, PCM data for DVD and CD goes one way, and DSD (Direct Stream Digital) data for SACD goes another. Entirely separate decoders are employed for DVD-A and SACD, the latter drafted in from Sony. In addition, DVD-A data has a further processing block to accommodate the various bass management and delay facilities that are unavailable to SACD. Finally, both decoded PCM and DSD data are switched into a series of Crystal CS4392 DACs, which will accommodate *both* data types.

Three stereo DACs are used, to feed all front, centre, surround and LFE channels. However, from an audiophile perspective, the SACD data path is significantly shorter and less intrusive than the winding road trod by CD and DVD's PCM code.

The DV-747A's technical performance is determined both by the capacity of each data format and the limitations of its own digital and analogue circuitry. So, its peak output is 1.96V, midband distortion an incredibly low 0.0005% and the A-wtd S/N ratio a creditable 110dB regardless of format. Distortion at lower levels is determined more by data format, so CD yields 0.055%, SACD gives 0.02% and DVD-A an impressive 0.009%, all at -60dBFs. Similarly, while CD's low-level resolution peters out below -100dBFs, both DVD-A and SACD succeed in coding low-level information to about -120dBFs. On the other hand, the increased sample rates of DVD-A and



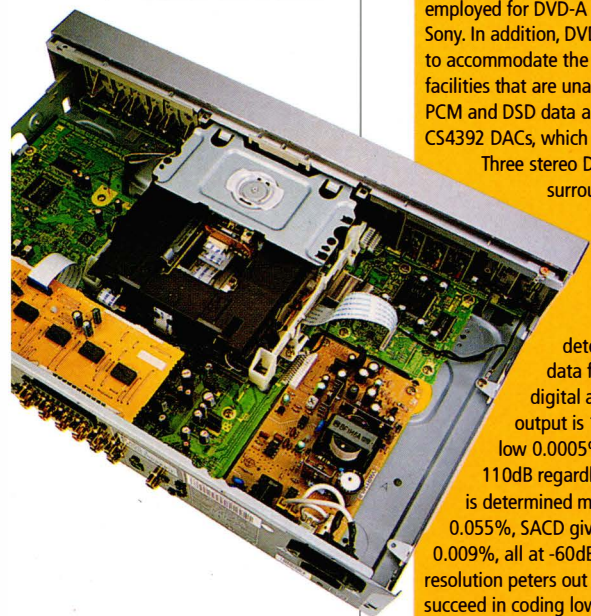
Black trace: Ultrasonic noise reading with DVD-A.  
Red trace: SACD 'built-in' noise reading.

SACD actually result in more ultrasonic noise and high frequency distortion (0.065% and 0.095% respectively at 20kHz) than occurs with CD (0.03%). But these faster sample rates also yield wider frequency responses, so while CD software is limited to a 20kHz bandwidth, both DVD-A and SACD extend beyond 80kHz. With 192kHz/24bit DVD-A software, the response is just -1.1dB down at 60kHz and -2.3dB at 80kHz. SACD discs are slightly more tailored at -1.6dB and -4.1dB respectively, but this is remains a far 'flatter' response than that delivered by any of the Sony/Philips/Marantz SACD players we've tested recently.

If proof were needed that SACD and DVD-A both surpass CD in bandwidth, the graph shows a very high resolution spectrum of a 40kHz signal (labeled 'Fundamental') with second and third distortion harmonics also indicated. Though Pioneer's implementation has more ultrasonic noise with DVD-A (black trace) than many other players, it still betters the 'built-in' noise of SACD (red trace) by a fair margin. SACD, on the other hand, does not suffer the 560psec of jitter and other spurious artifacts incurred by the PCM code used by both CD, DVD and DVD-A. So, while the DV-747A is immensely versatile in its handling of CD, DVD and SACD, other single-format players are individually more capable.

Paul Miller

Despite the rivalry between the formats, the mechanical characteristics of SACD and DVD-A are identical.





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



# TALL 'N' NEAT

NEAT MAY BE FAMED FOR ITS SMALL LOUDSPEAKERS, BUT HOW ABOUT A FLOORSTANDER THAT'S NEARLY FIVE FEET TALL?

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine



# n

eat Acoustics is best known for the little Petite loudspeaker, which has long been a favourite of this reviewer and is surely one

REVIEW PAUL MESSENGER

of the best tiny speakers on the planet. The company's new Ultimatum, however, is probably among the largest speakers most readers would be willing to accommodate – which is not to say that the two designs don't share a certain amount in common.

The most dramatic elements in this speaker are its price, which is a hefty £8,500 per pair, and the not inconsequential fact that it stands 1.5m tall. Since your eyes and ears are normally about 1m off the ground when seated in your favourite armchair, the speakers do rather tend to loom over you even though the front view is a fashionably slim 22cm.

Handsome seems a better adjective than pretty to describe a speaker which is certainly good-





looking, but in a rather severe way. A choice of real wood veneers decorate the sides and back, adding a welcome touch of domesticity, but the matt charcoal front panel – with or without the optional ‘stocking mask’ grille cloth – will keep things a little gloomy.

Such a tall, slim speaker might well lack physical stability were it not for a proper plinth to extend the ‘footprint’. And what a plinth! Curvaceously carved from centimetre-thick, crackle-finish black steel, it adds mass, stability and elegance in very impressive spades, with four large domed chrome bosses to accommodate the very serious spikes.

Like the plinth, everything about this speaker is exceedingly substantial, which is why the total weight adds up to 66kg. The enclosure is fashioned from birch plywood and actually consists of seven separate cavities, which will necessarily provide substantial internal bracing.

large ported sub-enclosures. In-room measurements show an impressive smoothness and neutrality. Sensitivity is a modest 87-88dB, but the load makes life easy for the amplifier and bass extension is among the very best we’ve ever measured. Best results were found with the speakers well clear of nearby walls.

### SOUND QUALITY

The Ultimatum’s most obvious ‘character’ is that the treble is a little stronger than average – just like the Petite 3, reviewed in *HFC* 211. This might or might not appeal, depending on your own personal taste, but it certainly made the sound very explicit and detailed, even at very low levels.

Fundamentally, this speaker just gets out of the way and lets the musical messages through unobstructed. The hallmark of the very best loudspeakers is that they somehow manage to



The top-mounted super tweeters (below) could be seen as something of an indulgence, but when you’re paying this sort of money, you want as much space and air as you can get.



## “FUNDAMENTALLY, THIS SPEAKER JUST GETS OUT OF THE WAY AND LETS THE MUSICAL MESSAGES THROUGH UNOBSTRUCTED.”

Further icing on the cake is provided by a ‘sandwich’ construction for the driver-mounting front and top panels, incorporating a polyethylene membrane ‘filling’ to damp out any vibration.

The intriguing thing about this design is the way it combines simplicity and complexity. Although there are seven enclosure cavities and nine drive units in each loudspeaker, the crossover network is a very simple five-element affair. That in turn is because it follows a basic two-and-a-half-way configuration – essentially a two-way with additional help through the bass region (and, in this case, also the treble).

How come nine drive units then? Five form a visible array along the length of the front panel – four 6.5-inchers flanking a central inverted-dome tweeter. Two additional disc-shaped ribbon-type tweeters are fitted into the top surface, pointing upwards. That makes seven. The other two are additional 6.5-inchers, completely hidden inside the boxes.

The front panel array actually represents a double-d’Appolito arrangement, with all four 6.5-inchers delivering the bass frequencies, the top and bottom ones rolling off early so that just the inner two carry on up through the midband to meet that central tweeter. Note that the latter have ‘bullet-shaped’ central polepiece extensions, to optimise their midband performance. The bass-only drivers are each backed up by a hidden identical driver, operating in isobaric acoustic series in relatively

highlight and communicate the differences between different sources and even recordings, and in this regard the Ultimatum turns out to be a very good speaker indeed.

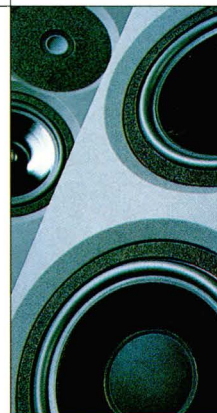
There’s no tendency here to ‘bland out’ the material it’s being fed. A warts ‘n’ all, ‘garbage in; garbage out’ mentality won’t always please everyone, but it implies a refreshing honesty and ensures that when the source or recording quality is top notch, the musical enjoyment will be maximised. The contribution of the top-mounted ‘super tweeters’ is very subtle, though worthwhile in the final analysis, for that little bit of extra air and delicacy.

Qualitatively, the bass end is quite superb. Very few speakers can match its ability to deliver genuinely deep in-room bass without muddying things up with excessive and thumpy midbass. The bonus here is that the bass is also exceptionally agile and lively, cabinet coloration is vanishingly low and the speaker showed little tendency to excite the suspended floor of the listening room.

### CONCLUSION

Over the long haul of several weeks, my respect for this speaker continued to grow. Few if any can match the way it combines the coherence and communication skills of a simple two-way with most of the advantages of a much larger design. The Ultimatum is an exceptional achievement in every respect.

£8,500, Neat Acoustics ☎ 01833 631021



### DRIVERS IN BRIEF

The Neat Ultimatum employs no less than nine drive units per speaker.

- Four visible front-firing 6.5-inch mid/bass units.
- Two additional 6.5-inch mid/bass units hidden inside the cabinet.
- One front-firing inverted dome tweeter.
- Two upward-firing disc-shaped ribbon tweeters.





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# FORUM LETTERS

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## RADIO RANTING

Recent goings-on at the BBC and changes to their digital radio service make for interesting reading. What has happened is that the bit-rate on Radios 1, 2 and 4 has been reduced from 192Kb/s to 128Kb/s and the transmission mode from stereo to joint stereo. In addition Radio 4 is now 80Kb/s mono from 20:00 – 09:00 daily, and audio processing has been introduced on Radios 1 and 2. The processing was introduced around September and the bit rates were changed on 21 December.

When the processing was introduced on Radio 2, there was large distortion on the peaks and when I contacted Engineering Information, I was asked to supply them with screen shots of the audio in CoolEdit and sound files, which I did. Following my complaint the sound quality of Radio 2 improved only very slightly.

I contacted BBC Engineering on 27 December and was told that the bit rates were changed to make room for new services and the processing to improve the "listenability" of Radios 1 and 2. Their advice was that if I was unhappy with the bit rate changes or wished to listen to Radio 4 in stereo during the evening, get an FM tuner. The same BBC engineer also said that 192Kbps was an unnecessary extravagance for Radio 4!

The only reason I purchased my digital receiver in 1999 was following a talk with Engineering Information when they suggested it, claiming I wouldn't have to put up with the processing on the FM networks, and I was also told that DRC (Dynamic Range Control) would be a

feature of the digital service. Now two and a half years later it would appear that DRC will only be available on Radio 3 and that my £800 digital receiver is only good as a door stop and that I should go back to FM! *David Laine, via e-mail*

*The Editor replies...* We sympathise with your situation and are concerned to learn of extra processing and lower quality audio on the nation's most popular radio stations. We contacted Lindsay Cornell, Head of Digital Platforms at the BBC, who had this to say: "Before Xmas we adjusted the bit rates on some services some of the time in preparation for new services which are due to be introduced later this year. Our policy is to analyse the content across our services at different times and adjust accordingly. For example, a live concert on Radio 1 might benefit from a higher bit rate but in that case another programme, perhaps a speech service, may need to be broadcast with a reduced bit rate to compensate. We believe that the rates we are using are perfectly acceptable for most people." He also assured us that there are no plans to further reduce the bit rates from those presently employed, so you may still have a dual use for your £800 door stop after all.

## MULTICHANNEL DEBATE

While multichannel may be the 'future' of music, the rational economic case for adopting it now looks very weak to me. Even neglecting issues like DVD-A vs SACD, and fitting extra speakers in small

rooms etc, multichannel must either cost a great deal more than, or mean inferior components to, a two-channel set-up. Unlike the switch from mono to stereo, playback of legacy material either wastes the additional components or adulterates the sound with dubious processing. I feel it can only make sense to install multichannel hardware if a sufficient percentage of your source material (at least 50%) exists in multichannel first.

After three years of DVD-V, and one of SACD/DVD-A, only seven per cent of my collection has more than two discrete channels, while broadcast multichannel is vestigial at best. Since I'm still buying audio CDs it could take another twenty years for multichannel to reach parity, and possibly justify a new investment.

Of course, if you're young enough or keen enough, your listening may already have reached breakeven. There are always compulsive early adopters. And the power of marketers to maliciously reissue classic stereo material with iffy multichannel mixes can't be discounted either. But for anyone with a bulky stereo back-catalogue on their shelves, the numbers aren't going to add up for a very long time. *Dave Lockwood, via e-mail*

*The Editor replies...* I'm sure most readers can relate to the bulky stereo back-catalogue you mention! Multichannel does indeed require an additional outlay, and compromise with living arrangements, but it can be a more acceptable compromise if the results are deemed spectacular! Sales of packaged DVD systems as well as DVD players continue at great speed. Soon enough it may be these consumers who buy high-resolution multichannel music because their DVD player offers SACD and DVD-A playback through their 5.1 channel system. The increasing development of these one-box sources is the way we're headed. Check our review of Pioneer's do-it-all machine on p24 this month.



# FORUM HELP

TROUBLE WITH THE RIG? LOST IN THE UPGRADE JUNGLE? FEAR NOT, DAN GEORGE IS HERE TO GUIDE YOU TO SONIC SAFE HAVEN.

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Forum: Help  
Hi-Fi Choice

99 Baker Street  
London W1U 6FP

Or e-mail:

dan.george@futurenet.co.uk



Arcam A75 Plus

## SYSTEM

### NICE BUT DIM

My system as a whole sounds too bright for me. I use an Arcam Alpha 7 SE CD player, with a Cyrus 3 amp plus PSX-R and Mission 753 speakers. I like listening to classical music and salsa. Do you think there is something wrong with my combo? I'm tempted to swap the speakers for B&W 600 Series 3. Would that improve things?

Jeff Grimmonster, via e-mail.

Before you do anything too drastic, try to mass-fill your speaker cabinets if you can and try them positioned with the tweeter firing straight out with no toe-in. If you're still unhappy try to home-dem a different amplifier, perhaps the new Arcam DiVA A75 Plus at £500. Failing that try some other speakers, B&W should serve you well and are likely to be more relaxed than the Missions.

## SURROUND SOUND

### HEN PECKED

I'm mailing you from Belgium and I hope you can give me some advice to help me upgrade. I recently bought a nice Loewe Vitros TV and would like to extend to home cinema either now or at a later stage. My living room is bit cluttered with furniture for the moment but is of reasonable size (37 square metres). I read about the BOSE 35 home entertainment system and I thought, hmm, it doesn't take up much space, has small speakers,

does everything, it might be the easy way out, but what about quality?

My wife doesn't want the speakers to dominate the room considering it's already dominated by the big LOEWE TV. My budget would be £2,000-£3,000.

Arie Verschoor via e-mail



Ruark CL300

BOSE is very partner-friendly and they're very popular with your German neighbours. But, although your wife may approve, I doubt that you will in absolute sonic terms. How about some funky speakers like the glass Waterfall Victoria (HFC 225) at £1,650 or some svelte electronics like Cyrus. You could try the Quattro system, comprising CD, preamp and tuner for around £850, with a smart power amp at £550. That should serve you well for around £3,000 and it will look unobtrusive in your spacious pad.

Waterfall Victoria



## SUBWOOFER

### BASSLESS

I recently bought a Sharp SD-NX10 one-bit digital audio system for £1,000. Visually I'm pleased with this system; it's just the sound that slightly disappointed me. More specifically the amount of bass it produces, which quite frankly is poor.

I was just enquiring if it is somehow possible to add a subwoofer? There are no extra outputs at the back, so I can't think of a way. If a sub was to be added would it need its own power source? If this is not possible, can I buy another amplifier to fit this system?

Adam Simpson, via e-mail

It doesn't sound good I'm afraid. With no outputs you can't run a subwoofer or add a power amplifier. You may have to radically re-think your system. If you choose to replace it, look for an amplifier with a preamp output, allowing you to run an active subwoofer if you want more bass.



RADIO TIMER

## AWAY DAY

I've got a CD and MD deck from Sony and I want to link them up to a tuner to be able to record particular Radio 1 shows. Is it possible to buy something that will allow me to do a timed record while I'm not there? I'm after a component to start the tuner and record function.

*Duncan Collins, via e-mail*

Strictly speaking, no. Unless there's a gadget deep in the shelves of Maplin's warehouse you have limited options. We do know of a TEAC CD-R deck that incorporates a timer facility, it's the TEAC RW-800, though this fix will cost you around £350.



TEAC RW-800

CD UPGRADE

## FUTURE PROOF

I am planning to buy a dedicated player for CD playback. Should I invest in a player for SACD or DVD-Audio, or buy a traditional CD player that is capable of taking full advantage of the latest CD formats, such as HDCD and CD text? I heard that the DVD-Audio has lost its momentum and SACD is gaining ground steadily. Is it true?

*John Choy, via e-mail*

Yours is a question troubling many upgraders this year. SACD is doing well, what with Sony's ad campaigns in the national press and players well below £500 now available. But the battle is still on with DVD-A, and now we are beginning to see hybrid players such as the Pioneer DVD-747, a DVD-A/V player with SACD capability. For the ultimate in CD replay a dedicated player is what you want - something like the Primare D30.2 at £1,500 would be worth seeking out as our test in this issue confirms.



Pioneer DV-747A

SYSTEM

## OHM-Y

Just a quick technical question; will speakers with an impedance of six ohms work with an amplifier with an eight ohm output? *C. Jewell, via e-mail*

Yes! Your amplifier's power output in watts is expressed using a standard measurement of eight ohms. Ohms are a measure of resistance that the loudspeaker presents to the amplifier. As a rule the lower the impedance the harder the speaker is to drive, as it requires more current. In practice this may mean that a particularly low power amplifier may have difficulty with very low impedance speakers. However, six ohms is not uncommon, and the duo should work with no problems.

SPEAKERS

## WHICH?

I am thinking of buying some new speakers and have been considering the Mission 773 or the KEF Q35.2 both of which can now be picked up for a pretty reasonable price. Any opinions on these two or any other speakers you recommend? I heard that some standmounters sound better?

*Loz Ring, via e-mail*



EPOS M12

Often our loudspeaker group tests conclude that at entry-level prices, standmounts are king. Out of your two choices, we'd go for the Missions as we gave them a Best Buy, where as the KEFs didn't quite do it for us. For a tasty standmount try the EPOS M12s at £499, although lean, we think you'll like them.

SPEAKERS

## THE WALL

I am looking for small wall-mounted speakers in light oak or beech. My budget is £200-£300, can you tell me which are the best on the market?

*Philip Nixon, via e-mail*



Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One

Some small designs are specifically made with threads at the rear for wall-mounting. Mission's £100 M70 is a five-star example of this design. Most other 'bookshelf' speakers can be wall-mounted with a fairly standard bracket, provided they don't object to near-wall placement - for under £300 we'd suggest the B&W DM303 at £180, the Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One, also at £180, and the £250 Castle Richmond.

AMPLIFIER

## HIT LIST

Please could you suggest an audition list for my upgrade dilemma? I am looking for a new amplifier for about £500 to partner a Marantz CD6000KI Signature and KEF Concerto 1s. I am after a big, transparent soundstage that's kind to vocals. Musical taste is wide and varied.

*Tim Stevens, via e-mail*

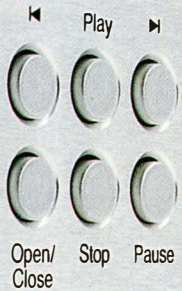
You'd be mad not to try the Arcam A75 Plus at £449.90, and have a look at Rotel's £275 RA-971 Mk11. Finally have a play with the very musical Rega amps in your budget. The Brio is £298 for a 40 watt amp, and the larger 60 watt Mira will set you back £498.



Rega Brio

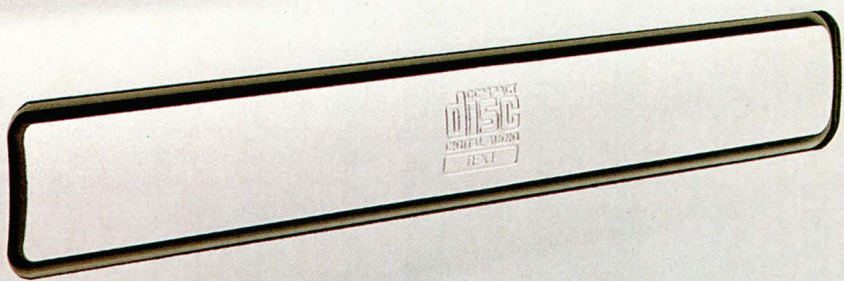


CIRRUS



**CD53** Compact Disc Player

TRAPANI



POWER



OPEN/CLOSE



# CD PLAYERS

THERE'S A LOT OF LIFE IN THE OLD DISC YET, AS ALVIN GOLD DISCOVERS.

**T**here was a period which stretched over much of the last year, perhaps more, when it appeared that we would not be able to assemble another group test of compact disc players. DVD had arrived on the scene, been taken to the public's bosom, and appeared to have effectively conquered all. After all, DVD players are also CD players, and you can pick one up for under £100, so why would anyone want to buy a player that does a whole lot less, probably for a whole lot more money?

Of course you know exactly why one might want to do such a thing, and this test provides the confirming evidence you need. Given that none of the alternatives to compact disc will be in a position to offer anything approaching the richness of repertoire available on CD for years, and probably decades to come, a player dedicated to the art of high quality CD replay still makes great sense for music fans.

The test covers ten models over a price range of £525-£1,500, almost all of which can blow any DVD player you care to name out of the water when judged by their ability to play compact discs, including DVD-Audio and SACD compatible players. The whys and the wherefores are not really of concern here, the really important point, and the only one that you really need to know, is that making a DVD player that plays CDs well is no trivial undertaking, and it simply cannot be done on the cheap. Pay peanuts and you get monkeys, as the saying goes. Remember that little maxim when it comes to deciding how much to pay for your next CD player.

## ON TEST

Arcam FMJ CD23T	£1,149.90
AVI Series 21 MC4	£999.00
Creek CD53	£1,199.00
Cyrus CD70	£1,150.00
Docet-Lector CDP-05T	£990.00
Exposure 2010	£599.00
Marantz CD17 Mk II KI Signature	£1,199.90
Primare D30.2	£1,499.00
Rotel RCD-1070	£525.00
Talk Electronics Thunder 1.1	£649.00

## EQUIPMENT USED

JMLab Mezzo Utopia loudspeakers  
 Arcam A85 amplifier  
 B&W DM602 S3 loudspeakers  
 Musical Fidelity A3 amplifier  
 Nordost Valhalla loudspeaker cables and interconnects

## THE LISTENING PANEL

Steve N Harris (Tag McLaren Audio)  
 Terry Murphy (Yamaha)  
 David Inman

## MUSIC USED

Marc Cohn - Marc Cohn  
 Ravel/Minoru Nojima (pno) - Alborada Del Gracioso  
 Vaughan Williams/Richard Hickox (cond), London Symphony Orchestra - Symphony No 4  
 Ry Cooder - Jazz  
 Joanna MacGregor (pno) - Play  
 Eels - Electro-Shock Blues  
 Stravinsky/Gergiev (cond), Karol Orchestra - Rite Of Spring  
 Mary Coughlan - Love For Sale







# ARCAM FMJ CD23T

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	<b>£1,149.90</b>	<b>CONTACT</b> 01223 203200	www.arcam.co.uk	<b>GUARANTEE</b> 2 years
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**T**his first significant revision to the FMJ CD23 was triggered when the mechanism and HDCD filter specified for the original CD23 were discontinued, but Arcam has capitalised on the situation by incorporating a package of running improvements and ratcheting up the model designation. The new Sony mechanism can cope with CD-RW discs and is CD Text-enabled. Other changes include a newly laid-out double-sided pcb (printed circuit board) with revised grounding, and although the dCS Ring DAC remains, there have been changes to its support circuitry, mostly to accommodate

the new Pacific Microsonics PMD-200 HDCD filter. Finally, the analogue output filtering has also been revised. There are two pairs of analogue outputs, optical and electrical S/PDIF digital outputs and remote control link sockets so that a complete Arcam system can be operated from a single handset. The handset itself is an improved model which features less reflective control button legends.

### SOUND QUALITY

Everything points to the new model being broadly in keeping with the old, but without a direct side by side comparison, it is difficult to say definitively whether the new model

represents an improvement or not. It certainly has the same open, well-balanced quality, the same smooth yet vivid tonality and the same spacious three-dimensional imagery.

If the FMJ CD23T has a fault, it is as one panellist put it, in its "lack of testicular capacity". Comments suggesting inoffensiveness and listenability certainly outnumbered those that spoke of an exciting ride. Others pointed to a lack of detail resolution, specifically with complex material rather than generally, but based on my own listening this is probably a reaction to the refined and articulate, yet unobtrusive character of a player that goes about its business in a natural and unforced manner. The CD23T doesn't throw its weight around, at least not in any obvious way, but the panel was agreed that it is adept at reproducing the ambient context for the music, as well as the notes themselves, and that it can reproduce a palpable stereo image.

The new version of the CD23 is a significant step up from its predecessor.

"This is the most successful player I've heard today..." was one epithet, "I can hear through the music". Another pointed to its "nice (sense of) light and shade", and its "ability to convey a feeling of power".

### CONCLUSION

Other than the changes necessary to accommodate the CD Text display, the new model is virtually indistinguishable from the old, with its now familiar, clean and elegant slab front panel and aluminium top. The changes are said to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary in character, but they are also said to impact "usefully" on sound quality, and while we couldn't confirm this directly, the CD23T is a thoroughly accomplished and likeable player, exceptional in its ambient resolution and firmly Recommended.

**"IT DOESN'T THROW ITS WEIGHT AROUND, AND IS ADEPT AT REPRODUCING THE AMBIENT CONTEXT FOR THE MUSIC."**



## THE LAB REPORT

**ARCAM HAS UPGRADED ITS** CD23 player with the CDText-compatible transport from Sony (the same BD25 mechanism used by Talk and Exposure), replaced the old PMD100 digital filter/HDCD decoder with the latest PMD200 and revised the output stage to boot. The 256psec of very low-rate jitter compares favourably with the 245psec recorded for the CD92 (HFC 212) and the 265psec for the original CD23 (HFC 206), because all three players use the same Ring DAC technology sourced from dCS.

Distortion is impressively low (0.0009% at -10dBfs and 0.0045% at -30dBfs) while ultrasonic noise and digital images are all but wiped off the map, further enhancing its compatibility. Low-level resolution is good to +0.0/-0.3dB over a 100dB range, but the HDCD filter limits the final A-wtd S/N ratio to 98.5dB – more than sufficient for CD's 96dB dynamic range. The response is just -0.15dB down at 20kHz, de-emphasis is correct and separation exceeds 105dB at all frequencies. The CD23 is still a cracker.





## AVI SERIES 21 MC4

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£999.00** **CONTACT** 01453 765682 [www.avihifi.co.uk](http://www.avihifi.co.uk) **GUARANTEE** 2 years

**T**he fourth AVI-designed CD player is the progenitor of a new product range, though it has the same mid-size form as the 2000 series. It consequently makes a suitable dancing partner for existing AVI components, though the maladroitness of styling may not go down well in other combinations. The design uses OEM transport and other key components in a way that allows them to be readily substituted if they become discontinued. With proprietary filtering and other circuits, the aim was to produce a player that will last longer and be more serviceable than others.

The control system is unhelpful, for example by blocking track selection until the first track has started play, and more generally thanks to the rapid but noisy drawer mechanism, but there are improvements over its 2000 series predecessor. It is now possible to select tracks from the front panel for example, and the new

display will show track numbers and timings simultaneously. The remote control has tiny control buttons that probably won't go down well with granny, but it is at least functional, and the raised badge helps personalise an off-the-shelf item.

### SOUND QUALITY

This player split the panel, two of whom described the AVI as "smooth" and "foot-tapping for the first time" (in the test sequence). The Marc Cohn track was deemed "generally holographic – it hangs together with more authority than the previous players", and the Ravel piano was "not as intrusive as with some of the others and more pleasant to listen to". Another listener also pointed to the "comfortable" nature of the AVI's music making. The third panellist however was adamant that it was flat and tedious – "musical Mogadon" – with some disparity between channels, and what he

described as "the digital equivalent of mistracking" on the right hand channel, which coincidentally or otherwise corresponds to the small measured disparity between channels.

No meeting of minds here then. But a resolution of sorts suggested itself with further hands-on listening, with an outcome that perhaps inevitably settles somewhere between the two extremes. The AVI is indeed smooth and comfortable, but equally it is rather more obviously constrained than some of the others. It is constrained in the frequency domain, which shows as a slightly truncated tonality and a lack of

The MC4's comfortable listening experience won't be available at this price for long.

individuality of tonal colours; it's constrained dynamically too in the sense that it tends to sound hard and driving, even when the music demands a more subtle response.

### CONCLUSION

Aesthetics aside, this is a thoroughly well-engineered player that should last as well as the maker suggests, though it sounds slightly hard-nosed and unrefined at times. The pricing, by the way, is said to be a limited introductory offer.

**"SMOOTH AND COMFORTABLE, BUT EQUALLY IT IS RATHER MORE OBVIOUSLY CONSTRAINED THAN SOME."**



### THE LAB REPORT

#### THIS PLAYER MARKS A MOVE

away from the 20-bit Burr-Brown DACs used in its S2000MC (HFC 169) and Philips SAA7323 found in the S2000MCII (HFC176) to Crystal's CS4390 bitstream part – itself becoming a little long in the digital tooth. Ultrasonic noise is generally well controlled, but my analysis did show the presence of out-of-band stopband images and other distortions. Jitter is low at 255psec but includes an unusual mix of low rate (<20Hz) and very high rate (3.3kHz) distortions.

Harmonic distortion is very low at 0.0008% at the required 2.0V peak output just as the A-wtd S/N ratio clocks in at 102.8dB – a typical value for this converter. This sample showed a channel balance error of 0.3dB at 20kHz with the right channel flat and the left down by -0.3dB while de-emphasis was slightly wayward to the tune of 0.75dB through the upper mid-range. The latter is the preserve of Crystal's DAC, the former probably a function of AVI's own OPA2604-based analogue filter stage.



▼ WHERE TO FIND US

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30 Crown Street

**BRISTOL** 0117 926 4975  
65 Park Street

**CARDIFF** 029 2022 8565  
134/136 Crwys Road

**CAMBERLEY** 01276 685597  
173-175 London Road

**CHELTENHAM** 01242 583960  
38 Winchcombe Street

**CHESTER** 01244 345576  
86/90 Boughton

**ENFIELD** 020 8367 3132  
159a Chase Side

**EPSOM** 01372 748888  
15 Upper High Street

**EXETER** 01392 491194  
156 Sidwell Street

**GLOUCESTER** 01452 300046  
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30-32 Castle Street

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190 West End Lane

**OXFORD** 01865 765961  
19 Old High Street, Headington

**READING** 0118 958 5463  
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Chandlers Ford

**SWANSEA** 01792 474608  
9 High Street

**SWINDON** 01793 538222  
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**Naim Audio** Naim enjoyed a phenomenal six years of success with its slimline range and has recently redesigned each of the products to enhance their sound quality, appearance and flexibility. At the heart of the 5 series is the NAIT 5 integrated amplifier, all of its functions are controlled by a microprocessor that is only powered when interpreting a button push, remote control signal or volume control movement before returning to sleep mode. Maximum flexibility has been built into the NAIT 5 for easy system expansion with no loss of sound quality.



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## CREEK CD53

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,199.00** **CONTACT** 020 8361 4133 [www.creekaudio.co.uk](http://www.creekaudio.co.uk) **GUARANTEE** 2 years

**T**he CD53 is an aesthetic and electrical match for Creek's 5350 amplifier. It boasts a 10mm thick machined aluminium front panel with an attractive brushed finish and an alloy case rather than the pressed (and magnetic) steel more usually specified. The moving parts include a compliantly mounted CD-R/RW compatible Philips CDM12 mechanism with control exercised by custom software, though there is little to distinguish it from other mainstream players with Philips mechs.

Pressing 'play', for example, reverts to the start of the current track. Under the skin beats a Crystal Delta Sigma DAC with 24-bit/192kHz equivalent claimed resolution. This, along with the master clock generator, jitter reduction circuitry and associated power supplies, is mounted on a separate pc board which can be replaced by updated or higher spec boards, as and when they

become available. The digital outputs are transformer-coupled, and the rear panel interfaces include a balanced XLR output as well as the usual single-ended variety.

The remote control is similar to the unit supplied with the AVI player, which means small buttons, but differential colouring of the various control groups is used to good effect to assist with navigation.

### SOUND QUALITY

On the minus side, the CD53 came across to the panel as a little cold, even "frigid", the listener responsible for that comment suggesting that it's particular balance would be enough to put him off buying CDs. But this was in the context of a high resolution test system with a rather dry and arguably unforgiving balance, and almost certainly Creek's more forgivingly-balanced 5350 would be a much better match. The other panel comments were more positive in

tone. "It's pretty good... and hangs together well", "sprang to life in the Ravel piano piece, which sounds percussive, though the spaces between the notes don't seem as silent as they should be", "nice cadences (in the Vaughan Williams)... musically very competent, with excellent weight and mood" are representative comments.

In the hands-on testing, the Creek came in the top group. I found it subtle and engaging, with plenty of low-level detail, and although it lacks the neutrality and subtlety of the Arcam CD23, or the physical presence of the Marantz or the Primare, it acts as an effective and

The CD53 is usefully upgradeable thanks to its removable pc board.

engaging advocate for well-recorded discs. Neither is it excessively analytical with those that are less than perfect – a common failing.

### CONCLUSION

An ambitious and well-appointed player, the CD53 marks a significant ramping up of Creek's ambitions both sonically and aesthetically. In many ways it's an impressive-sounding player, with a touch of star quality to boot. Not for everyone perhaps, but Recommended nonetheless.

**"THE CD53 MARKS A SIGNIFICANT RAMPING UP OF CREEK'S AMBITIONS BOTH SONICALLY AND AESTHETICALLY."**



### THE LAB REPORT

**THE PHILIPS-BASED** mechanism is no less clunky than that fitted to the AVI player, but Creek's choice of the new CS4396 DAC is rather more adventurous. This is a new 24-bit part from Crystal, capable of 192kHz replay but employing a mix of technologies (not unlike dCS's Ring DAC) to reduce ultrasonic noise, distortion and improve low-level resolution. All these it does – the A-wtd S/N is a fabulous 112.8dB, distortion hits a low 0.0006% at the 2.18V peak output (0.0035% at -30dBFs) and errors in

linearity fall within +0.0/-0.4dB over a full 100dB dynamic range. Creek's superior clock has a mere +1ppm error while jitter is very low indeed at just 155ps. There's no sign of any low-rate or noise-like jitter to disturb its stereo imagery and the slight +0.17dB treble boost from 10kHz-17kHz should not be audible. De-emphasis accuracy is a little wayward, however, with +0.2/-0.7dB 'wobbles' in its response, but the CD53 otherwise looks to be the very model of a modern, hi-tech CD player.





**EXCLUSIVE**  
**CYRUS CD7Q**

<b>SOUND</b> ☆☆☆☆☆	<b>VALUE</b> ☆☆☆☆☆	<b>£1,150.00</b>	<b>CONTACT</b> 01480 435577	<a href="http://www.cyrus.co.uk">www.cyrus.co.uk</a>	<b>GUARANTEE</b> 2 years
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**T**he Cyrus CD7Q is the promised enhancement to the basic CD7 which was previously reviewed favourably in these pages, and which remains available at a lower price point. The basics remain the same: the half-standard width case is made from non-magnetic alloy, which gives a clearly superior finish and an appearance that is as distinctive as ever, while also promoting low resonance. The MC system bus connectors allow the player to be fully integrated into an all-Cyrus system and users may upgrade by adding an external PSX-R power supply. The processor is also capable

of being upgraded, which is basically what happens when the standard CD7 becomes a CD7Q. Four 24-bit Burr Brown DACs are used in full differential balanced mode, which provides noise and distortion-cancelling properties, and the DAC itself is a higher spec, higher performance model than the one used in the plain CD7. A new remote control also includes amplifier source selection, along with level and balance controls. It is neater and more attractive than previous Cyrus handsets, but it would have been better still with some use of button shapes or colours for quick visual identification. The player is also

compatible with both CD-R and CD-RW varieties of recordable CD.

**SOUND QUALITY**

This ambitious new model has all the hallmarks of previous Cyrus players, which have consistently performed well in our tests. It is subtle and engaging, without the obviously electronic thumbprint of many CD players, though one listener complained of a degree of sibilance. The consensus however, which I fully agree with based on my own testing with a wider range of partnering equipment and music, is that the CD7Q is an “expressive” player, which is “easy on the ear”. But in contrast to lesser models in the Cyrus range, past and present, it is more physical sounding and has more gravitas. “It is smooth but has real punch” as one put it, and also impressively dynamic. Piano reproduction is particularly gratifying; the Ravel reproduced with an almost

Non-magnetic alloys used in the casing give the CD7Q a clearly superior finish.

bell-like percussiveness and ripeness. Its standout quality however is its imaging, which is unusually precise and well focused laterally and also in the depth plane, because subtle ambient cues are so well reproduced. This too was recognised by the panel, with comments praising the player’s ability to differentiate depth information – particularly obvious when listening to the Vaughan Williams symphonic recording, which had absorbing depth and texture.

**CONCLUSION**

This is a fine player – refined, expressive and articulate, as well as tonally neutral, and with build quality that cedes nothing to the heavy-weights in its class. It is a little more physical sounding than the CD7, with bolder tonal colours, and certainly well worth the extra cost.

**“ITS STANDOUT QUALITY IS ITS IMAGING, WHICH IS UNUSUALLY PRECISE AND WELL FOCUSED.”**



**THE LAB REPORT**

**THIS ‘Q’ VERSION OF THE**

established CD7 (HFC212), sees Burr-Brown’s PCM1716 DAC exchanged for a newer variant, the PCM1728 which offers the same 24bit/96kHz spec. Either way, the technical performance of the CD7Q is marginally superior. Jitter is reduced from 155psec to 145psec, which is within a few psec of the lowest value ever for a CD player, while the S/N ratio has widened from 103dB to 109.6dB. Low-level resolution is as impressive as ever with minimal errors of +0.0/-0.3dB

over a 100dB range. Changes to the analogue filter network give the CD7Q a slightly ‘sweeter’ treble that rolls off at -0.7dB/20kHz while the suppression of ultrasonic noise and other spurious is improved. On this sample, distortion is low but uniformly higher on the left than right channel – 0.003% vs 0.001% at 1kHz/0dBFs and 0.009% vs 0.007% at 20kHz/0dBFs, for example. IM distortion also registers 0.002% on the left, 0.0008% on the right. Otherwise, the CD7Q remains a compact and impressive package.



**EXCLUSIVE**

## DOCET-LECTOR CDP-05T

**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆☆**VALUE** ★★☆☆☆☆**£990.00****CONTACT** 01746 769156

www.eminentaudio.co.uk

**GUARANTEE** 1 year

**D**ocet-Lector is one of the legion of Italian specialist brands. The company leads a double life as a CE compliance testing lab and its first product twenty years ago was a phono tonearm. From a land where valves are a national obsession, this is another valve design – or rather a hybrid which uses ECC81 valves for Class A gain in the predriver and output driver stages. The power supply involves five independent stages of regulation from a well-rated toroidal transformer, and premium audio grade capacitors are specified for the audio circuits. Absolute phase can be changed internally (potentially useful if your amplifier is inverting), and although no digital output is fitted as standard, one can be added, as can wooden side cheeks to complement the classy black gloss front panel.

The CDP-05T is a minimalist player, with only basic facilities. Even the remote control's track select keys are

non-functional, in order to leave microprocessor code space for additional functions according to the maker, though it is not clear what these functions might be.

### SOUND QUALITY

Our first sample arrived in a clearly unlistenable condition and was replaced, but unfortunately too late for the panel listening tests. The lab tests had revealed certain problems, but there was nothing to indicate a fault and there is no way to know for certain whether the measurements would be similar for the sample we eventually auditioned.

Unsurprisingly, the replacement CDP-05T gave a much better account of itself than the original, but it could not be described as a high resolution player. In fact it has a rather dense quality which makes it hard to drill down to the fine detail, and which causes ambient cues to merge with the music. Dynamics are muted, and

stereo imagery is vague, especially around the straight ahead position. Nevertheless, the CDP-05T also turns out to be a quite likeable unit, which makes up for in euphony what it lacks in resolving power. Its unusually physical quality invests music with a sense of structure and substance that many players conspicuously lack, and in middle ranking systems this might just be enough to pull it through. In addition, the player clearly doesn't sound obviously 'digital' – or even digital enough, perhaps. But there were signs that the player's high frequency behaviour changed with different amplifiers, presumably

Functional looks are offset by a tendency to suffer from nasty attacks of the jitters.

because of the player's relatively high source impedance.

### CONCLUSION

Likeable it may be, but as it stands the CDP-05T doesn't meet the minimum criteria necessary for Recommendation. For the record there is a Croft modified version (£1,500) which includes power supply enhancements, but it is hard to see how it could be justified unless some of the more fundamental limitations are addressed first.

### THE LAB REPORT

**ALTHOUGH LECTOR SPECIFIES** a "24bit/96kHz" DAC, you'd never guess it from the technical performance of the CDP-05T which is smothered by both the ECC81 triodes in its analogue output stage and appalling levels of jitter incurred in the digital domain. From the -71dB stopband rejection, I'd guess the DAC is a PCM1716, but the 0.09% peak level distortion (1kHz at 2.1V), the poor 80.5dB S/N ratio and -63dB crosstalk are thoroughly uncharacteristic and probably stem from the valve stage. Noise

from the power supply and other distortions are sufficiently high to make a nonsense of any low-level resolution measurements (THD is already 1.5% at the musically important -30dBfs level, about 300x higher than normal). Data-induced jitter, however, sets a new record in the *Boys' Own Book of Technical Horrors* at over 15,000psec which cannot, under any circumstances, do the sound of this player any favours whatsoever. As supplied, the CDP-05T is a neat idea but poorly executed.

**"ITS UNUSUALLY PHYSICAL QUALITY INVESTS MUSIC WITH A SENSE OF STRUCTURE AND SUBSTANCE."**







# EXPOSURE 2010

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	<b>£599.00</b>	<b>CONTACT</b> 01273 423877	www.exposurehifi.com	<b>GUARANTEE</b> 1 year
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**T**raditionally – and few brands are more seeped in tradition than this one – Exposure components have had rather rough-hewn and uncompromising aesthetics. But this has recently changed to the less distinctive but arguably more attractive and house-friendly appearance you see here. Exposure components are no longer quite so iconoclastic under the skin either, and it turns out that the 2010 CD uses many of the same key components as a number of other models, in particular (from this group) the Talk Thunder 1.1.

At the core of the 2010 is a Burr Brown 24-bit/96kHz DAC and Sony

CD Text mechanism, built onto an aluminium chassis with an extruded aluminium fascia (in a choice of black or *au naturel*). There's a basic but adequate set of native controls and an attractive blue display which can be dimmed or switched off entirely.

Digital outputs are available in optical and electrical flavours. The only slightly disappointing feature is the old-fashioned and cluttered looking remote control, a throwback to an earlier time and surely past its retirement age.

### SOUND QUALITY

Overall, the Exposure has more dynamics and warmth than most of

the others in this test. The sound has "real body and presence" and "good vocal control", both comments referring to the Marc Cohn track, though the symphonic excerpt was deemed "thin" by one. Raw might be a better term; this player can appear to lack resolution and sound congested with some material, but the Ravel piano recording was generally liked. One panellist however voted consistently against the 2010 condemning it as "flat", "confused" and "unable to hang together". He was the only one to prefer the Talk Thunder 1.1 to the Exposure, but this was a decidedly minority view. Though they share many of the same key components, the Thunder is around £50 more expensive.

For my money, however, this is the superior player and while it lacks the range, neutrality and above all the resolution of the best in this group, it remains a thoroughly musical player at a very attractive price. Of all the

The 2010 is only let down by its cluttered-looking throwback remote control.

players this month it is probably the one that will have the greatest appeal to those who cut their audio teeth on analogue sources, and who dislike obviously digital-sounding components. The top end has more than the usual restraint, and the warm, rough physicality of the sound should make vinyl users especially feel at home.

### CONCLUSION

This is a player that gives every indication of working consistently well in a wide variety of systems. It never pushes the music to the raw and bleeding edge, but then that isn't really an appropriate quality for a model that may be asked to take up residence in systems of widely varying capabilities. At this price and given its impressive mix of strengths it's a firm Best Buy.

**"THE WARM, ROUGH PHYSICALITY OF THE SOUND SHOULD MAKE VINYL USERS ESPECIALLY FEEL AT HOME."**



## THE LAB REPORT

**HAVING JUST MENTIONED THE** Report, we find the very same chip in Exposure's new player, together with the CD-Text-compatible BD25 mechanism from Sony that's also used in the Arcam and Talk players. This is a tried-and-tested DAC that performs well in this application, offering a low 175psec jitter with a textbook 103dB S/N ratio and low 0.0015% distortion at its peak output of 2V. That's 2.0V, precisely! Distortion does increase slightly to 0.007% both at lower levels (1kHz/-

30dBfs) and at high frequencies (20kHz/0dBfs) but its low-level resolution is exceedingly good with minuscule errors of +0.0/-0.2dB over a full 100dB range. Exposure's +/-0.02dB response specification is a little optimistic, however (the decimal point is probably in the wrong place) because the 2010 has a very gentle -0.3dB treble roll-off. Overall, no major problems to report with this model, though a comparison with Talk's similar Thunder 1.1 player should prove interesting...



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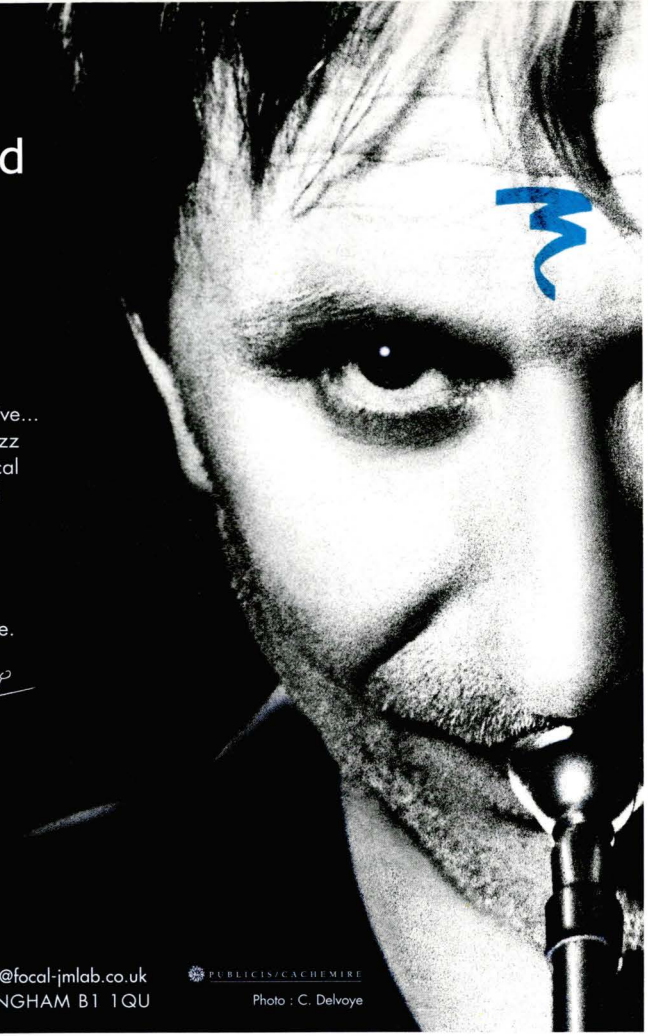
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# MARANTZ CD17 MKII KI SIGNATURE

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£1,199.90** **CONTACT** 01753 680868 [www.marantz.com](http://www.marantz.com) **GUARANTEE** 3 years

**T**he CD17 Mk II KI is the ultimate expression of the state of the art from Marantz. Reprising from our CD17 Mk II review, this is a “low slung visual delight, finished in a pale matt gold, with a sculpted front panel with just a minimum of controls”, (and it) “reeks of class”. Against the flow of prevailing fashion, it employs a dual differential implementation of the Philips Bitstream DAC7 – one wonders whether Marantz will continue with this processor in future models, now that it has gained its independence from the Philips mother ship. It also features the usual Marantz high slew rate (high speed)

HDAM discrete output amplifier and DSP (Digital Signal Processing) compensated analogue output filter. Marantz’s proprietary HDAM technology tends to be more expensive than the traditional integrated circuit approach but pays off with improved handling of transients. It’s a CD Text player, which will also play CD-R/RW media.

Changes for the breathed on KI Signature version include a new toroidal transformer, a copper-plated chassis, customised passive components and improved phono sockets. The build is unchanged and is simply unmatched by any other player at or near the price.

On test, the player suffered a curious problem which caused the partnering Arcam A85 amplifier to indicate the presence of DC offset at its input. It’s likely this is a fault with our individual review sample.

## SOUND QUALITY

The Marantz initially gave contradictory signals, with some complaints of mild midband coloration and of distinctive soundstaging, which appeared to concertina depth. But the Marc Cohn vocals were highly praised as the best so far – there was a real sense of a voice being reproduced by pressure from the singer’s chest cavity, not the disembodied presence you get with many players.

One panellist who started out negatively disposed later warmed to the Marantz. “There’s real emotion in the Vaughan Williams,” he noted, and although not the most exuberant player in the group, he felt it showed subtlety and was one of the few

Heavy and solid enough to look at, but perhaps a wee bit light in the bass.

players capable of resolving the varying pressure used to play the arpeggios in the Ravel recording. He felt the performance of the Marantz was full of great touches like this – I agree, and on the whole so did the rest of the panel. The only persistent criticism concerned what was interpreted as a touch of coloration and a lack of weight in the bass, which is a balance problem rather than a lack of bass extension.

## CONCLUSION

There was some scattering of scores for this model, but it quickly became apparent in *après* panel listening that this is a player that improves even after the normal running-in period allowed for in the test, and which despite some minor cosmetic blemishes successfully imbues music with the indefinable patina of life.

**“THERE WAS A REAL SENSE OF A VOICE BEING REPRODUCED BY PRESSURE FROM THE SINGER’S CHEST CAVITY.”**



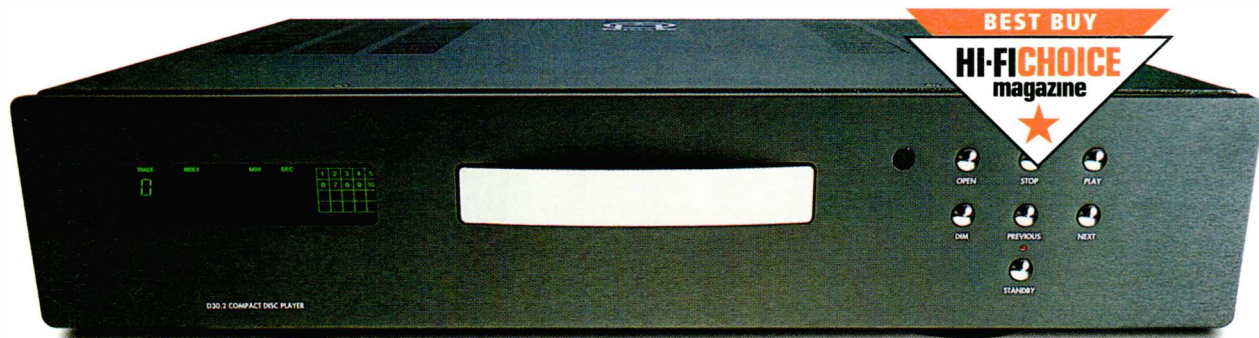
## THE LAB REPORT

### THE CD17 MKII KI IS AN

upgraded version of the standard CD17 MkII tested in *HFC* 206. It’s the only player in our survey to use Philips’ TDA1307 converter which offers the lowest distortion at mid signal levels (typically <0.0025% at -30dBfs) and a fabulously low 0.0006% at peak levels through the midrange. Almost inevitably, this increases at very high frequencies, though figures <0.0065% at 20kHz from 0dBfs to -30dBfs are still very creditable indeed. Jitter remains low at 170psec and the S/N ratio

sufficiently in excess of CD’s 16-bit standard at 103.8dB. The response is ruler flat with errors of just +/- 0.1dB with pre-emphasised discs. Low-level resolution continues to show a -1dB ‘glitch’ around -90dBfs/1kHz but this then improves to just -0.25dB at -90dBfs/20kHz and -0.5dB at -100dBfs/1kHz. A foible of more academic than subjective interest, but one that’s persisted with many of Philips’ DACs for at least ten years. Still, like the plain CD17 MkII the KI version is a solid performer.





## PRIMARE D30.2

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★☆ **£1,499.00** **CONTACT** 01423 359054 [www.primare.net](http://www.primare.net) **GUARANTEE** 2 years

**T**he top of the range Primare D30.2 CD player is an imposing product, with heavy gauge metal-work and well-endowed power supplies responsible for the 11kg weight, which is more typical of a power amplifier than a CD player.

The Primare uses a Sony mechanism and four (two per channel) selected high-precision versions of the Burr Brown PCM1704 24-bit/96kHz 8x oversampling DAC to drive a balanced analogue output. The audio appears on XLR connectors alongside conventional single-ended phono outputs.

In an unusually sophisticated and well-endowed power supply section, separate transformers are used for the digital and analogue circuits driving 13 regulated supplies and a number of additional passive filters. As usual with this marque, the front panel stand-off is not just a visual device, it is used internally as a screen

for the display electronics, to reduce RFI (Radio Frequency Interference). Additional jitter reduction strategies are applied to the Sony OEM parts, and all components are surface mount types, which reduces signal path lengths.

A simple button matrix on the front panel addresses most everyday functions, with the remote plugging the gaps, but Primare lists a full system remote, the C30, as an option. An electrical digital output is fitted, but there is no optical counterpart.

### SOUND QUALITY

Unequivocally the best performing model on test, as well as being the most expensive, the Primare attracted only minor criticism, with hints of coloration recalling the Marantz CD17 Mk II Kl. The piano recording was said to have "life and sparkle". "I found it exhilarating and exciting to listen to... this player has a strong sense of grip and is very musical"

noted one, who also said during the Marc Cohn disc that "this one rocks". Another listener wrote that the Vaughan Williams recording "has some bite in the crescendo: it builds and sustains the sense of power well", though he remarked on a "loss of definition" in the extreme bass.

Minor criticisms notwithstanding, none of the other models on test had a complete answer to the Primare, though the Marantz has a comparably exciting and physically potent quality. Here is a player that makes the most of the discs that it plays, and which can drive capable systems harder than most. It is not a

**Big and bulky maybe, but the D30.2 has plenty of quality packed in.**

player to sound at home in lesser systems, though the pricing provides a strong clue that such a match would be inappropriate anyway.

### CONCLUSION

Although expensive, this is a top class player with a sound that's characteristically powerful and authoritative, but also a subtle and engaging. Its ambitious performance works best in high grade, high resolution systems, and for its all-round high quality it earns itself a Best Buy tag.

**"NOT A PLAYER AT HOME IN LESSER SYSTEMS, THOUGH THE PRICING SUGGESTS THAT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE ANYWAY."**

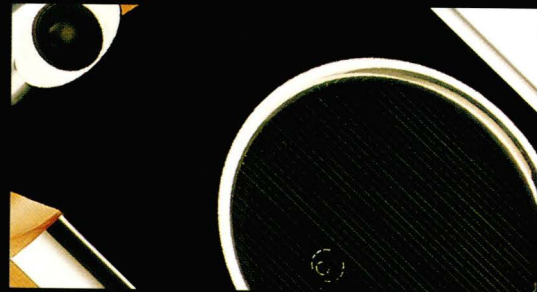
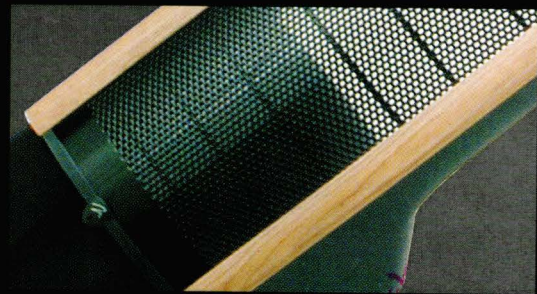


### THE LAB REPORT

**AS BEFITS PRIMARE, THIS** heavily-engineered player is based around a separate 24bit DAC (the PCM1704) and 8x oversampling filter (the DF1704), a traditional scheme brought bang up to date. The total correlated jitter of 250psec is not high but just a little disappointing if only for the general 'untidiness' of the spectrum. Otherwise, the D30.2 is a very 'tidy' CD player that offers a wide 110dB S/N ratio, low 0.0008% distortion (increasing to 0.029% at 20kHz) from a higher-than-average 2.3V

peak output. Just watch out for unmatched demos at your dealer where the D30.2 will sound louder than most. Ultrasonic noise and digital images are very well suppressed (>110dB) though stripping out the noise exposes a spray of odd-order harmonic distortions at lower signal levels (0.0075% at -30dBFs and 0.35% at -60dBFs). Furthermore, this player has a genuinely flat response with deviations of just +/-0.01dB over the full 20Hz-20kHz span, a feat even replicated with pre-emphasised CDs.





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**RECOMMENDED****HI-FI CHOICE**  
magazine

## ROTEL RCD-1070

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£525.00** **CONTACT** 01908 317707 [www.rotel.com](http://www.rotel.com) **GUARANTEE** 2 years

**T**he RCD-1070 is a companion piece to the RC-1090 preamplifier and RB-1090 power amplifier reviewed recently. It shares the same heavily engineered look and feel, with an unusually full front panel feature set to match. The player even has front panel handles, which reinforces the impression of bulk, even of professionalism.

Internal clockwork includes a Burr Brown Delta Sigma D/A converter with a claimed 18-bit precision and 8x oversampling, and the digital filter is the HDCD-compliant PMD 200 from Pacific Microsonics. A full suite of disc play and programming features is available, and the player has both optical and electrical digital outputs. It even boasts a 12V trigger input, which makes it suitable for multiroom systems. The mechanism is rather noisy in action, but disc handling is rapid, the display is informative and the controls have a good

operational feel. With a sophisticated power supply on board, it is hard to see where any corners have been cut.

### SOUND QUALITY

There are very few objective failings with this player, and the panel was unstinting in its praise. "Scale and dynamics are excellent, and clarity is fine", "separation and dynamics are there", "good image scale", "instruments are well positioned", are a representative selection from the panel's listening notes. In almost every case, however, their words of praise were followed by a caveat of one kind or another. The treble for example was described as "not over-bright, but scratchy", imagery was "precise but lacking depth", and the player as a whole "failed to involve", and this last was the point that recurred most frequently. There may be a clue to at least part of the reason for this in the lean bass balance, which certainly didn't suit

the panel test system, and which failed to mesh conspicuously better with the other systems either.

Consistently, the panel felt that the musical effect was "shallow" and "lacking in body and drive", but precision and general balance are hard to fault, especially at the price.

There is a good chance that in other systems the RCD-1070 will perform better. Indeed with very few obvious technical flaws to speak of, it has probably been voiced to work with a specific (presumably Rotel branded) system. But as it stands, and in the systems tried, this player is often more front than delivery.

The exceptionally full front panel provides plenty of remote-free options.

### CONCLUSION

This new Rotel is an impressively built and well-equipped player at a price that must have most of Rotel's competitors wondering how they do it. In many respects it sounds good too, but somehow it doesn't make music as convincingly or as fluidly as the best players in this extremely tight and hard-fought group. A Recommended flag is in order given the pricing and general 'performance standard, but it misses out on any higher accolade.

**"BUILD QUALITY AT THIS PRICE MUST HAVE MOST OF ROTEL'S COMPETITORS WONDERING HOW THEY DO IT."**



### THE LAB REPORT

**THIS PLAYER FEATURES A** combined PWM bitstream DAC and HDCD-compatible digital filter, facts reflected in the superb >110dB rejection of stopband images, excellent low-level resolution (+0.0/-0.4dB at -90dBFs) but slightly disappointing 99dB A-wtd S/N ratio (the old PMD-100 digital filter did likewise). Ultrasonic noise is also quite high, but no more so than the average SACD player and it doesn't appear to have done them any harm! Otherwise, the RCD-1070 offers a mix of low 0.001%

distortion at its high-ish 2.2V peak output, increasing slightly to 0.006% at -30dBFs and more significantly to 0.02% at 20kHz/0dBFs where the analogue stage is particularly stretched. The response is also slightly tailored with a gentle HF roll-off that reaches -0.75dB at 20kHz with both normal and pre-emphasised CD's. Stereo separation and balance are excellent at >100dB and 0.03dB, respectively, while the low 195psec of (mainly data-induced) jitter will have no audible impact.

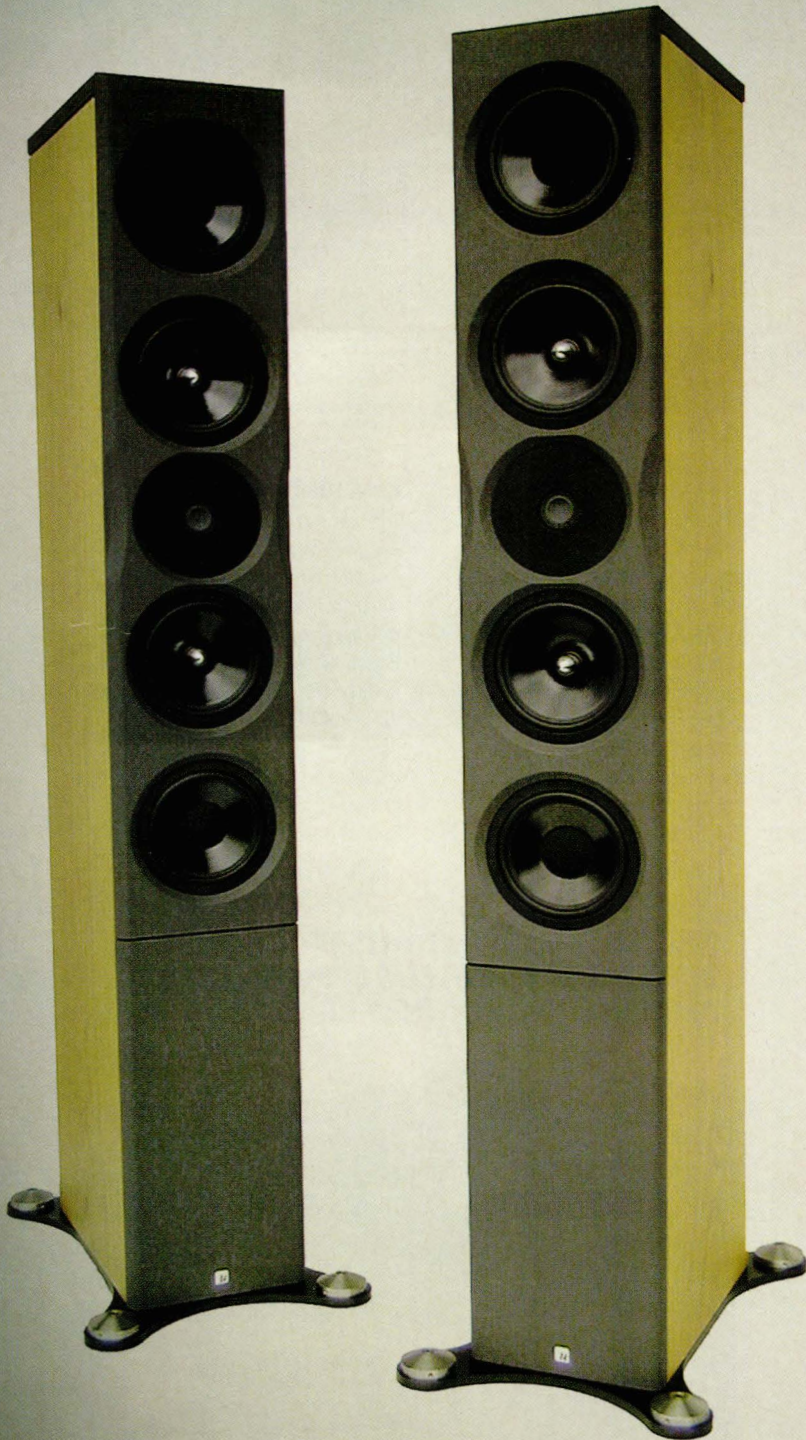


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**EXCLUSIVE**

## TALK ELECTRONICS THUNDER 1.1

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£649.00** **CONTACT** 01276 709966 [www.talkelectronics.com](http://www.talkelectronics.com) **GUARANTEE** 3 years

**T**he most affordable of a three-strong range, the Thunder 1.1 is a comprehensive redesign of the Thunder 1 – the two appear to share only the screws that hold them together. In effect this is a brand new player, with a 24-bit/96kHz Delta Sigma Burr Brown DAC replacing the earlier Crystal part, and there's a new CD Text-enabled Sony mechanism too, with new servo control firmware. Filter caps are quality polycarbonates.

The old models had no digital output as standard, but this one sports an optical output, perhaps directed at the MiniDisc community. But in what appears to be a retrograde step, the case is made from steel – previously it was aluminium and non-magnetic. Other key features will be familiar, including the attractive crescent-shaped control layout, and a Whirlwind power supply can be connected externally at extra cost to upgrade the player's performance.

### SOUND QUALITY

With an output significantly higher than most, there is likely to be a disparity in levels when changing inputs, unless there is a means of normalising levels between inputs, as for example with some Arcam amps. But even when the levels were matched for the panel sessions, the Talk player has a 'louder' balance – often the case when the sound has a rougher quality as it does here. Compared back to back with the Exposure 2010 (there are clear parallels under the skin), the Talk Electronics model has a similar warmth and weight, but in the hands-on tests it lacked resolution and imagery was a tad vague, which is often the case where the jitter numbers are high. Timing also seems below par, deep bass sounds a little woolly and as one of the panellists pointed out, "rhythmically it just doesn't hang together well, especially in the Marc Cohn recording". He also

placed a question mark against the leading edges in the Ravel piano excerpt, whose sound he described as "clangy". Another remarked that the Talk player reduced the sense of musical scale and architecture.

But there were some positive comments here too. Although clearly not very dynamic, the player was praised for its pleasing "clarity and precision" and a "good sense of air and space" by one, and its "clean" quality by another. One of the three listeners actually preferred the Talk to the Exposure, again pointing to its superior sense of space and scale,

**Thunder by name perhaps, but not, unfortunately, by bass delivery.**

though he too identified a "weak" bass and "poor timing".

### CONCLUSION

Not for the first time with this marque, the slightly confusing set of listening results add up to a picture of a player with uneven qualities. On the whole it is more likeable than not, but it is a classic example of a curate's egg that is good in parts, but which lacks the consistency to be a safe overall bet.

**"A CURATE'S EGG WHICH IS GOOD IN PARTS, BUT LACKS THE CONSISTENCY TO BE A SAFE OVERALL BET."**

### THE LAB REPORT

#### THE BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS

of the Thunder 1.1 – the Sony BD25 mechanism and Burr-Brown PCM1716 DAC – are shared by Exposure's 2010, but differences in implementation and analogue filtering result in two very different sounds. We tested an early Thunder 1.1 in *HFC 219*, but this sample shows greater differences between left and right channels and was generally less proficient. The output level remains very high at 2.68V (+2.5dB above the standard 2V) – more than sufficient to bias any

unmatched A/B demonstrations. Distortion increases from 0.002% through bass and midrange to 0.025% at 20kHz (high treble). Sadly, jitter is agitated by a plethora of data-induced and other, non-specific, forms of jitter amounting to a disappointingly high 1,985psec. Otherwise, the 103dB S/N ratio is textbook stuff for the PCM1716 and the -0.45dB treble loss perfectly acceptable. Similarly, the +0.0/-0.5dB errors in low-level linearity across a 100dB range are all par for the course.







## CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	ARCAM FMJ CD23T	AVI Series 21 MC4	CREEK CD53	CYRUS CD7Q	DOCET-LECTOR CDP-05T
PRICE	£1,149.90	£999.00	£1,199.00	£1,150.00	£990.00
SOUND VALUE	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
CONCLUSION	Refined and elegant FMJ series player now boasts CD-RW and CD Text compatibility.	Solid, if not stolid player designed for a long lifetime, and musically proficient, if lacking in airs and graces.	Fine, assured and well-built player – balanced outputs too.	Refined and expressive addition to the top of the Cyrus range, builds on the qualities of the lesser models.	Valve-powered CD player lacks resolving power, though it musters considerable physical presence.
GUARANTEE	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years	1 year

THE LAB REPORT					
LOW DISTORTION	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■
LOW JITTER	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■
WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■
EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FILTER	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■
OVERALL RATING	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■	■■■■■■■■■



# CONCLUSIONS

ALVIN GOLD FINDS MUCH TO PRAISE IN DEDICATED CD LAND.

**T**en players, four Recommended and three Best Buys. On the whole you get what you pay for in this group. The more expensive models sound best, the cheapest offer the least, and for the most part musical standards are roughly proportional to their selling prices.

Of course, there are peaks and troughs. In the second category, the oddball in the group is the valve-powered Docet-Lector CDP-05T (£999) which fails the resolution test, though it is far from unpleasant to listen to. The AVI Series 21 MC4 (also £999 – who thinks of these names?) is essentially an update of the S2000, but at a significantly lower price, at least for now. But nothing has been done to update the frankly dour aesthetics, and although musically it is smooth and laid-back, it leaves too much unsaid.

Of the more affordable models, the Talk Electronics Thunder 1.1 (£599) looks like previous namesakes, though it has been comprehensively redesigned internally, but musically it fails to build convincingly on the shoulders of its direct predecessor, the Thunder 1. The Exposure 2010 offers a similar technological package and is even priced the same, but although the verdict wasn't completely unanimous, the consensus view, and the one to which I subscribe, is

that it is the more consistent player, and a welcome return to form for a famous and respected marque. It also pips the ostensibly better endowed Rotel RCD-1070 (£525) to the post.

The Arcam FMJ CD23T (£1,150) is a chip off the old block, with all the refinement, clarity and control that was associated with its predecessor in a mildly updated and better equipped form. The obvious foils for the Arcam are the Cyrus CD7Q (also £1,150), which is a super refined version of an already successful generic model, and the Marantz CD17 Mk II KIS, which has build quality to die for, and is fundamentally musical, though it sounds slightly more coloured and less transparent than the Arcam FMJ. The Creek CD53 is priced similarly (£1,200), and suffers only slightly from the sheer strength of the opposition.

Higher up the food chain, the sonic winner of this test in absolute terms is the Primare D30.2 (£1,499), confirming the reputation that preceded it. This is a powerful and effective communicator that treads the sometimes blurred line between euphony and resolving ability with real aplomb. Its margin of advantage is such that it clearly qualifies as a Best Buy despite its pricing, which is almost as ambitious as the player itself.

**“THE MORE EXPENSIVE MODELS SOUND BEST, THE CHEAPEST OFFER THE LEAST, AND FOR THE MOST PART MUSICAL STANDARDS ARE ROUGHLY PROPORTIONAL TO THEIR PRICES.”**

## CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE

EXPOSURE 2010	MARANTZ CD17 MkII KI Signature	PRIMARE D30.2	ROTEL RCD-1070	TALK ELECTRONICS Thunder 1.1	MAKE MODEL
£599.00	£1,199.90	£1,499.00	£525.00	£649.00	PRICE
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	SOUND VALUE
Smooth, restrained but warm and physical balance from this well turned out and well priced player.	Fabulously built player adds musical integrity to an already impressive basic model (the CD17 Mk II).	Superb high resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality.	Technically sound and well equipped, the Rotel sounds clear and well-scaled but failed to generate real excitement on test.	Attractively turned out, with bare bones features (though the power supply can be augmented), but the Thunder 1.1 gave equivocal results.	CONCLUSIONS
1 year	3 years	2 years	2 years	3 years	GUARANTEE
					THE LAB REPORT
					LOW DISTORTION
					LOW JITTER
					WIDE DYNAMIC RANGE
					EFFECTIVE DIGITAL FILTER
					OVERALL RATING



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# IT JUST SOUNDS BETTER

PAUL MILLER LOOKS AT WHY STANDALONE CD PLAYERS ARE STILL IMPORTANT.

## CD V DVD

These ten machines are testament to a trend that has seen multi-format DVD players *falling* in price while specialist, single-format CD players have polarised towards the upper end of the market. Few manufacturers have launched budget CD players this season, preferring to offer CD compatibility on the back of new, budget DVD players. Similarly, multichannel SACD players have also plunged way below £1,000 to offer a taste of one possible musical future without ditching the old, two-channel favourite.

In many respects, it's these cheaper, multi-channel SACD players that have proved to be the real sonic rival to purist CD players. DVD players, on the other hand, are aimed at the broader 'home theatre' market and offer backwards compatibility with CD by way of convenience rather than any serious attempt to woo the audiophile. It would be fair to say that the best of the CD players in this issue clearly outperform the best DVD players reviewed recently, including the group from HFC 221.

The reasons for this are various but not unreasonable, bearing in mind the conflicting roles expected of a DVD player. For example, virtually all DVD players are equipped with high-speed, lightweight (and typically low-cost) switch-mode power supplies which are ideally suited to the demands of a DVD transport mechanism. However, considering the additional burden of electromagnetic and RF noise loosed into the DVD player's local environment, is it any surprise that just about every CD player is fed from a conventional, linear power supply?

MPEG video processing generates its own interference that may impact on audio. In reality, while audio is the sole preserve of a CD player, it's a mere fraction of what's taking place. It's unrealistic to imagine a DVD

player will sound as 'pure' as a comparable CD player. On the whole, less local interference means better sound quality, giving the conventional CD player the edge.

## HOW IT'S DONE

If audio plays second fiddle to video in a DVD player, then this is especially apparent where the unit includes 5.1 channel Dolby Digital and DTS decoding, requiring a total of no less than six channels of DACs to feed the analogue output. Typically, the designer quite simply does not have the budget to optimise two, let alone six, analogue channels in a DVD player. Which is why a two-channel CD player will often enjoy better standards of digital *and* analogue filtering than a comparably-priced DVD player. Figure (1) shows how the 'rippled' digital images (2), produced in response to musical signals in the 20Hz-20kHz audioband (1), are incompletely erased by the digital filter from a Denon DVD player. Other, spurious, patterns of interference are also visible (3).

Figure (2) demonstrates the superior digital and analogue filtering of the Creek CD53 CD player. This improves not only the audible dynamic range (4) but also ensures that little or no ultrasonic 'rubbish' (5) escapes to cause further distortion in the partnering amplifier. Of course, *before* D/A conversion, the digital data, whether audio or video, must be 'clocked' from one part of the player to another with reference to a fixed, typically crystal, oscillator of some sort. However, while the clock frequencies for audio and video data are different from one another, it's becoming increasingly common for DVD players to derive their audio (CD) clock from the 27MHz MPEG video clock.

There are even audio DACs available, specifically designed for use in DVD players, that will run off this MPEG clock despite it bearing no relationship to the 11.3MHz and 16.9MHz references which are normally used in the majority of CD players. As ever, of course, there's no such thing as a free lunch and these solutions often suffer from higher levels both of uncorrelated, or noise-like, jitter in addition to data-related jitter than a comparable, single-clock CD player. All of which adds more weight to the argument that CD players offer a 'purer' route to two-channel music reproduction than their DVD cousins.



## CONCLUSIONS FROM THE LAB

DENON DVD-2800 DISTORTION & SPURIAE re 30dBFS

© MILLER AUDIO RESEARCH

Increased levels of interference and poorer digital filtering are more common in DVD players.

CREEK CD53 DISTORTION & SPURIAE re 30dBFS

© MILLER AUDIO RESEARCH

Optimised CD player technology promises a wider dynamic range and very low levels of ultrasonic noise and distortion.

# “DVD PLAYERS OFFER COMPATIBILITY WITH CD BY WAY OF CONVENIENCE RATHER THAN ANY SERIOUS ATTEMPT TO WOO THE AUDIOPHILE”





BRITAIN HAS LONG LED THE WORLD  
IN HIGH QUALITY, LOW COST SPEAKERS.  
PAUL MESSENGERS FLIES THE FLAG.

# BRITISH BUDGET

**B**ritain's hi-fi speaker brands are well known for their consummate mastery of the budget bookshelf speaker – a format which has long been popular here in the UK for a number of pretty good reasons. They're refreshingly inexpensive, and seem well suited to typical small-but-solidly-built British rooms. Furthermore, the 'source first' philosophy which emerged in the 1970s – based on the tenet that the speaker can only be as good as the signals it is fed – shifted the emphasis away from speakers and towards source and amplification components. As a consequence, the

credibility of small and inexpensive speakers was given a significant boost.

Admittedly such speakers have modest bass weight and loudness capabilities, but they often perform rather well within those limitations, aided by their essential simplicity and modest box dimensions. Down the years, these small loudspeakers have formed the main commercial battleground for the leading British brands.

During the 1980s £100/pair was the key price point for small seven-litre 'miniatures', and the speakers were built in the UK. That price ceiling was shattered in the early 1990s, so now anything





# LOUDSPEAKERS

up to £200/pair is on the cards, while globalisation has meant that the speakers themselves are now made all round the world, and only occasionally in Britain. "Product of more than one country" is very much the scenario today.

The group of six budget bookshelf models assembled here all range from £120 to £180 per pair. All have a mid/bass cone drive unit, a smaller tweeter for high frequencies and a port to help out in the bass region.

However, it's in the differences rather than the similarities, especially in main driver and box size, that the various models distinguish themselves.

#### EQUIPMENT USED

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

#### MUSIC USED

Christy Moore - Live At The Point  
Strauss/LSO/Georgiadis - Sangerlust  
Tom Waits - Rain Dogs  
Wyclef Jean - Carnival  
Mari Boine - Eallin  
Grateful Dead - Reckoning  
Cambridge Singers/Rutter -  
There Is Sweet Music  
BBC Radios 3 & 4

#### ON TEST

Acoustic Energy	
Aegis Evo One	£179.95
B&W DM303	£179.95
JPW 201	£149.00
Mission M71	£129.90
Tannoy mX1	£119.90
Wharfedale Diamond 8.2	£149.95



EXCLUSIVE

## ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO ONE

SOUND ★★★★★

VALUE ★★★★★

£179.95

CONTACT 01285 654432

www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

G'TEE 1 year



**“STEREO IMAGING IS PARTICULARLY IMPRESSIVE, WITH GOOD DEPTH PERSPECTIVES AND FINE FOCUS.”**

**A**coustic Energy might have built its reputation on the tiny upmarket AE1 mini-monitor with its metal diaphragm main driver, but has in recent years turned its attention much more towards the mass market end of things. Replacing the original £150 Aegis One, this new £180 Evo version might be one of the more expensive examples in this particular review group, but it's still very much a budget loudspeaker in an overall market context. Thanks no doubt to manufacture in Malaysia, it includes a surprisingly high level of serious engineering content, and also looks a lot prettier too, the vinyl woodprint now covering a front panel with a nicely bevelled edge.

There are elements in common with the original Aegis One, which was particularly noteworthy for setting a new low price for a metal cone main driver. But the extra £30 also seems to have been very well spent here, on upgrading both the engineering and the presentation of the package. While it's one of the larger examples, it's also the heaviest model in the test group at 6.6kg, a testament to the solidity of its build, with a 25mm-thick front panel.

The main driver has a pukka-looking AE metal alloy cone, matt-silver finished along with the pointy little black metal dust dome that has become an AE trademark. Furthermore, uniquely in the test group and this sub-£200 price bracket, said metal cone main driver now has a classy cast alloy chassis.

Though one of the larger speakers in the group, (internal volume around ten litres), it has a small 130mm frame main driver, with just a 100mm diameter cone. Sourced from a new Vifa factory in China, the tweeter has a 25mm soft dome and a metal faceplate. The rear carries twin terminals and a port.

In-room measurement unequivocally indicates free space siting here. While the amplifier load is an easy 6+ ohms throughout, sensitivity is modest at around 86dB/2.83V, and will sound even less, as the balance is rich and warm through the lower registers, and decidedly laid-back through the upper midband. There's a pronounced presence dip centred on 2.2kHz, above which the treble proper is quite strong, relatively speaking.

**SOUND QUALITY**

The Evo One sounds quite distinct from the other speakers assembled here, in part because it's designed to be kept well clear of walls, but also because it has a much richer, warmer balance than the budget norm. The result is a big and very solid sound, with a laid-back balance, low coloration, a wide dynamic range and an exceptional freedom from boxiness.

Stereo imaging is particularly impressive, with good depth perspectives and fine focus and coherence, and the top end is clean and clear, if arguably a little obvious (especially if used with low-cost components). However, the heavy bass lines on Wyclef Jean's *Carnival* didn't really suit the Evo One that well, and it seemed altogether happier with delicate acoustic material than hammering out the block rocking beats.

**CONCLUSION**

The Aegis Evo One is very different from the other models in this group test, both in its ingredients and in the way it performs. The only model intended for free space siting, it stands comfortably ahead of the pack in stereo imaging precision and low midband coloration, offering a level of refinement rare in something so inexpensive.





# B&W DM303

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£179.95** **CONTACT** 01903 750750 [www.bwspeakers.com](http://www.bwspeakers.com) **G'TEE** 5 years

**W**orthing-based B&W might be the biggest name in hi-fi speakers on the planet, but it hasn't got there by maximising budget bookshelf sales.

Although the company hasn't entirely ignored the budget sector, it has never been a major priority. Its last real contender was the miniature DM302, which was launched back in 1996, and it has taken until 2001 for B&W to come up with this DM303 successor.

It's an entirely different design from the 302, more conventional in some ways perhaps, but also significantly larger in both box and main driver size, and priced at £180 instead of the £150 of its predecessor. That puts it at the top of our test group on price, though this is partly justified because it's also among the larger and heavier models. Interestingly, it's the only example in our group of speakers by British brands that's actually built in Britain, at B&W's plant in Bradford, although the main driver is bought in from a Far Eastern source.

It's a chunky looking little speaker, nearly as wide as it is deep, largely because that's the obvious way to accommodate its relatively large diameter main driver. Although the wrap and back are conventionally finished in vinyl woodprint (maple or black ash), the front panel is a precision plastic moulding in charcoal grey, decorated by little dimples that match those in the rear-panel Flowport, and with nicely radiused edges.

The main driver here has a 160mm moulded plastic frame, combining good rigidity with little impediment to rearward radiation, a modest magnet and a flared 120mm woven fibreglass cone. The tweeter has a 26mm metal diaphragm, tube-loaded behind the dome, Nautilus fashion. A single pair of terminals feeds a crossover network using air-cored inductors and plastic film capacitors.

Far-field room measurement confirms B&W's claimed 88dB/2.83V sensitivity, and definitely indicates these speakers should be mounted fairly close to a wall. The amplifier load is quite easy, only drifting below six ohms above 7kHz. And because the port is tuned to a lowish 40Hz, bass extension is very impressive indeed (-6dB @25Hz in-room). The overall balance is a little lean, with a smooth but slightly projected upper midband (300Hz-1kHz), a quite pronounced presence dip (2.5-5kHz) and a somewhat uneven treble.

## SOUND QUALITY

The 303's impressive midband exudes confidence. Despite the rather 'shut in' effect created by its restrained presence band, it still delivers bags of coherent detail, bringing fine expression to both singing voices and spoken word.

There's a touch of boxiness here too, and the midband strength can get a shade wearing when playing the system loud. I dare say some might prefer a warmer, richer sound, yet it handled the heavy bass riffing on Wyclef Jean's *Carnival* with considerable aplomb and a good measure of genuine authority, and actually generated the highest loudness levels of all the models in the group.

## CONCLUSION

Not the most neutral speaker around, the 303 has a cleverly contrived balance nonetheless. The bass is weighty yet impressively dry and free from 'thump'; the mid is even and expressive, if a tad projected, while the top is notably – and probably sensibly – restrained. In all, it's a very tempting recipe for a budget loudspeaker and clearly deserving of a Best Buy tag for its accomplished all-round performance.



**“IT HANDLED HEAVY BASS WITH APLOMB AND GENERATED THE HIGHEST LOUDNESS LEVELS IN THE GROUP.”**



It's been a long wait for B&W to come up with another budget speaker since the DM302 – but it's been worth it.



**CCL Chesterfield Communications Ltd**

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email: roy@chestergroup.fsnet.co.uk.  
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Dear Readers.

It's always very nice to give good news. There is so much of the opposite these days isn't there? London is to get a brand new high quality Hi-Fi show this year - and no you won't have to wait several months to appreciate it! Less than a couple to be precise.

The 6/7 April

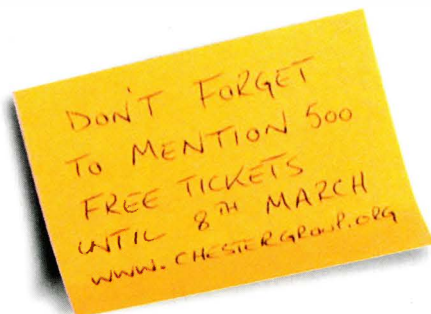
Conceived, created and commenced entirely in January this year, it's only through real zest from the trade that it's been possible to achieve it. The Organisers, who already have a successful and established event in the North have compressed 12 months work into three and come up with an ambitious and fresh event. London of course has had it's own show in the Autumn for some time but future plans for this event have become confused and it's for this reason that many felt it essential that our calender was assured of a major show for the Capital.

The venue will be the **Renaissance Hotel at Heathrow** which many of you will remember as the birthplace of Hi-fi shows added to which the Renaissance has just undergone a major and expensive refit. Already backed by four of your favourite magazines 'Hi-Fi Choice', 'Home Entertainment', 'T3' and 'Plus sales of stands are well advanced and by the time you read this advertisement we should have our website fully operational so tune in for the latest details at [www.chestergroup.org](http://www.chestergroup.org). Deliberately capped at 55 exhibitors for this year (although brands will exceed a 100) our entire focus is to ensure you get value for money, top quality presentation and a jolly good day out.

We very much look forward to meeting you all at what promises to be a fresh and thoroughly enjoyable weekend for all those interested in top quality sound and vision.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Roy Bird  
Organiser  
For Chesterfield Communications Ltd.





# JPW 201

SOUND     VALUE     

£149.00

CONTACT 01367 253295

Website pending

G'TEE 5 years

**G**lobalisation has had a considerable impact on the hi-fi speaker business, and Devon-based JPW – long a budget price specialist – is the latest brand to go through far-reaching changes.

Some while back driver manufacturer Peerless India (itself now quite independent of the Danish Peerless) took a controlling interest in JPW's parent company Audio Group International, and more recently, with the launch of this very new range, the actual manufacturing operation was transferred to India. The main design and engineering resources are still located in Devon, though UK marketing (and hence the quoted phone number) is now carried out through an office located more centrally in Swindon.

JPW's new 200-series comprises no fewer than eight stereo pairs as well as a clutch of subwoofers and centre speakers. This 201 is the middle one among three standmounts, and also the smallest speaker in this test group by an obvious margin – even though, at £150 a pair, it's by no means the cheapest.

Small is beautiful in many consumers' books and the smaller the enclosure, the better its inherent stiffness. And if the 201 has an enclosure of just six litres or so, it balances that out by using the smallest main driver in the group, a magnetically shielded, plastic frame device with a tiny 80mm woven glass fibre cone. The tweeter has a 25mm soft fabric dome and power is applied through a single pair of cable terminals, placed just below the rear panel reflex port.

The styling is very neatly executed: an elaborate and shiny silver moulding covers most of the front baffle, leaving visible the attractively post-formed box edges, and of course the drive unit orifices – incidentally introducing significant horn-loading for the tweeter. The grille treatment is particularly stylish and original too.

One wouldn't expect deep bass from something so small, especially since the port here is tuned to around 63Hz. But when mounted fairly close to a wall, a pair of 201s will deliver decent bass output down to around 50Hz on our far-field in-room measurement, which is respectable enough.

Sensitivity is a modest 86dB/2.83V, alongside an amplifier load that dips to around 4.5 ohms. The overall in-room frequency balance holds within quite modest limits across the audio band as a whole, though it's not particularly smooth, showing peaks at around 800-900Hz, 4-6kHz and 13kHz.

## SOUND QUALITY

The 201 proved a little disappointing on audition, sounding rather small especially in dynamic terms, a bit 'shut in' too and also a little 'cuppy' and pinched on speech. There's a certain lack of sonic freedom, with the sound somewhat constrained, and the top end is slightly spitty and obvious.

The sound quality isn't unpleasant as such, but it did suffer somewhat by comparison with its peers in this group test, with a lack of warmth and weight, and little authority or drive. Not too surprisingly, maximum loudness with the heavyweight Wyclef Jean *Carnival* CD was limited, falling some 10dB short of the maximum recorded by the best in the test group.

## CONCLUSION

Small size and stylish appearance are two key strengths of this tiny loudspeaker, though ultimately those diminutive dimensions are also its main sonic limitation. The very small main driver used here will inevitably limit the attainable sound level, which might or might not be a problem depending on your taste and circumstances, but it also seems to affect the dynamic expression, which is relatively weak.



**"SOUND QUALITY ISN'T UNPLEASANT AS SUCH, BUT IT DID SUFFER A LACK OF WARMTH AND WEIGHT, WITH LITTLE AUTHORITY OR DRIVE."**



Rabbit hutch-friendly dimensions may also be the tiny 201's main sonic disadvantage.



## MISSION M71

SOUND ★★★★★	VALUE ★★★★★	£129.90	CONTACT 01480 423700	www.mission.co.uk	G'TEE 2 years
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**B**aby brother to the M73 which scored a Best Buy rating in our recent group tests (*HFC* issues 215 and 224), Mission's M71 shares a number of the same ideas and ingredients, albeit scaled down to a considerable degree.

There are actually four stereo pairs in the Malaysian-built M-series: the standmount £130 M71 and £170 M72, plus the floorstanding £200 M73 and £300 M74. Looked at dispassionately, and given the need to support the standmounts properly, it's pretty clear that the M73 is likely to be the pick of the bunch on sheer value for money grounds, though this much smaller M71 looks decent enough value in the context of our test group.

Turning the scales to a respectable 4.7kg, the vinyl 'beech' woodprint enclosure is slim but quite deep, giving a total volume of around nine litres. The M71 follows a longstanding Mission tradition of placing the bass/mid driver above the tweeter, and an elegant plastic moulding covers up the driver mounting hardware and provides fixing holes for the shield-shaped grille. The front is gently curved, while the rear panel has twin terminal pairs, plus a generous port tuned to 58Hz, with optional damping/blocking bungs.

The magnetically shielded main driver here has a 130mm plastic frame and a 95mm woven glass fibre cone, while the tweeter has a 25mm soft fabric dome. The crossover network uses silicon steel inductors and polyester capacitors.

In-room far-field measurements confirm the claimed 88dB/2.83V sensitivity, alongside an impedance minimum of 4.6 ohms. The bass alignment is a little ambiguous, so take time to experiment, both with positioning and those bungs, to get best results. Some wall reinforcement is likely to prove advantageous, especially if the bungs are used, though the

unblocked port output was a little too enthusiastic under our conditions. Elsewhere the frequency balance looks very well judged indeed, with just a hint of mid forwardness.

**SOUND QUALITY**

Get the positioning and the consequent bass tuning right here, and the reward is a speaker which has an impressive knack of 'disappearing', sonically speaking. No other speakers in this group are as discreet, or as capable at delivering the stereo soundstage without in any way drawing attention to the actual sound sources.

It also has a superbly judged overall balance through the midband and treble. The mid might be just a little bit forward, but it doesn't push too far; the presence is just slightly restrained, which makes sense for any budget speaker. However, the treble, as Goldilocks might have put it, is "just right". The whole is quite transparent, with a good freedom from boxiness and colorations in general. It could probably do with a bit more dynamic grip, drive, purpose and expression, but it's very easy on the ears.

The modest size main driver does have its limitations when faced with playing very bass-rich material. The Wyclef Jean *Carnival* CD is one such example, which can quickly overload almost any speaker. The M71 didn't fare too badly here, but still fell several decibels short of the level attained by the models with larger 6.5-inch main drivers.

**CONCLUSION**

A fine all-round compromise at a very realistic price, the M71 might not be such obviously good material value as the M73, but it still makes plenty of sense, especially if physical and sonic discretion are a major priority.



**"THE MID MIGHT BE A BIT FORWARD, THE PRESENCE SLIGHTLY RESTRAINED, BUT THE TREBLE, AS GOLDBLOCKS MIGHT HAVE PUT IT, IS 'JUST RIGHT'."**



Looks pretty good for an 'invisible' speaker.



# TANNOY MX1

**SOUND** ★★☆☆☆ **VALUE** ★★☆☆☆ **£119.90** **CONTACT** 01236 420199 [www.tannoy.com](http://www.tannoy.com) **G'TEE** 5 years

**T**annoy's mX-series of budget loudspeakers have done very well in a series of *Hi-Fi Choice* reviews, the mX2 standmount and the mX3 floorstander both picking up Best Buy ratings, as did the five-channel mXAV4 surround sound package (which combined pairs of mX1s and mX4s with an mXC).

Our experience of the mX1 on that occasion was only as surround speaker, a role for which it is fundamentally well suited, save for the fitting of a port through the rear panel, which makes wall-bracket mounting a little tricky. Tannoy subsequently forestalled such criticism by introducing an even smaller, front-ported mXR.

This is therefore the first time we've had a chance to try the £120 mX1 on its own in a group context. And if it's no longer the smallest of the mXs, it's still a very small speaker by any standards, enclosing an air volume of just 6.5 litres: only the JPW takes up less room space in this review group. Like all the mX speakers, it's actually built for Tannoy in Taiwan using exclusive drive units built by a Japanese company in Thailand.

Styling is attractively modern and restrained, with a nicely chamfered edge to the glued 'n' screwed front baffle. Our review samples' enclosures are finished in the increasingly ubiquitous 'maple' vinyl woodprint (dark oak is also available), and the drive units are nicely rebated into the front panel. The most distinguished features are the white cone of the main driver – a ceramic-skimmed paper diaphragm, 100mm in diameter – and a silvery-coloured grille cloth.

An apparent lack of bass on first acquaintance was soon resolved by the discovery that the mX1s had been supplied with port-blocking foam bungs already fitted – hardly appropriate for one so small, one would think. Bungs removed, the in-room traces show a fair bass alignment for close-to-wall

siting, though there's some ambiguity here so experimentation in situ is advised to get the very best results.

The traces confirm the rated 87dB sensitivity, achieved with reasonable bass extension and a load which stays above 4.5 ohms throughout. The midband is quite smooth and even and the treble is a model of restraint – 'dull' is one adjective that readily springs to mind. That said, the transition from mid to treble is unusually smooth and seamless.

## SOUND QUALITY

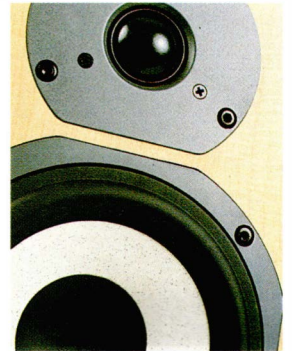
A finely drawn, delicate and even midband, with good freedom from boxiness, are two of the mX1's core strengths, ensuring well structured stereo images with both precision and depth. But the downside is a sound that seemed weak in dynamic expression, that lacked any serious authority at the bottom end, and perhaps most significantly seemed short of 'air' and 'sparkle' at the top.

The net result is polite enough but a bit too constrained, giving the impression that the speaker isn't perhaps trying quite hard enough. Though invariably well behaved, the sound is just a bit 'small', lacking in both scale and drama.

The mX1 performed adequately enough when faced with the heavyweight bass of Wyyclef Jean's *Carnival* CD, though the small size of its main driver naturally and inevitably acted as a constraint on the maximum loudness available.

## CONCLUSION

This is a difficult speaker to criticise, yet also one for which we found it difficult to raise a great deal of enthusiasm. It does little wrong, remaining unfailingly polite, but ultimately fails to generate the sort of excitement that makes listening to music fun. Perhaps the forthcoming mX-M1 will fare better.



**"THE RESULT IS POLITE, BUT A BIT TOO CONSTRAINED, GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE SPEAKER ISN'T TRYING QUITE HARD ENOUGH."**



Polite, inoffensive, dull – it's the Enrique Iglesias of budget speakers.



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#### Digital

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#### Analogue

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

£700 £1100

Helius Cyalene - beefcake tonearm, Victoria sponge sound.

£500 £1350

#### Loudspeakers

Living Voice Auditorium - walnut.

£900 £1500

Cadence DS - rosewood - give away.

£600 £1750

Klipsh LaScala - black - zippy horn.

£1750 £3500

Quad ELS63 - untidy bargain.

£390 £3000

#### Amplifiers

Border Patrol 300B SE - with new Western Electric valves - light oak - the best SE available - New - excess stock.

£4000 £4500

Art Audio VPS - valve line pre-amp.

£600 £1400

Art Audio Diavolo - with 320B valves - chrome + gold - line integrated - juicy.

£3500 £4700

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

£1500 £2650

Art Audio Concerto - 40w power amp.

£1350 £2250

Joule Electra - 2 box phono pre-amp.

£800 £2000

Linn Classic - CD, amp, tuner, thing.

£500 £1000

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

£850 -

Cary 5500 - line pre-amp. 1992

£550 -

Unison Mystery One PR+

£950 £1750

Tube Technology MAC - phono pre-amp - fully refurbished by manufacturer - including Hovland film and foil capacitors.

£900 £1400

Tube Technology line pre-amp with separate power supply - fully refurbished by manufacturer - including Hovland film and foil capacitors and a stepped attenuator.

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# WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 8.2

**SOUND** ★★★★★ **VALUE** ★★★★★ **£149.95** **CONTACT** 01480 447700 [www.wharfedale.co.uk](http://www.wharfedale.co.uk) **G'TEE** 1 year

**W**harfedale's Diamond models have roots that go back some twenty-odd years, but what started out as a radical little sub-miniature design way back in the 1980s has since evolved into a generic term which covers Wharfedale's complete range of 'budget' models.

There are three Diamond 8s in total, consisting of two standmounts and a floorstander. All are two-way designs, this Diamond 8.2 sitting in the middle of the three, combining a good-size standmount enclosure with a generous 6.5-inch frame main driver – both of which make its £150 price tag look modest enough in the context of the group as a whole. It's comfortably the largest of the six speakers assembled for this group, with an internal enclosure volume of around 13 litres, and the second heaviest too at 6kg, so material value for money looks promising.

The box wrap and back are in the usual rather anonymous and innocuous vinyl woodprint, while the front panel has a painted champagne finish, a slightly curved profile, and a central groove that runs top to bottom.

Port-loaded in the front panel, the main driver here has a pressed steel frame, a modest magnet, and a yellow 125mm diameter Kevlar cone. The tweeter has a 28mm soft fabric dome, and the rear panel carries twin terminal pairs, permitting bi-wiring.

The multi-lingual instruction leaflet includes a section on 'room positioning' – which might have been a good idea, were it not riddled with contradictions. One sentence talks about leaving a gap of 0.7-1m behind the speakers, while the next talks of shelf-mounting and wall-brackets. Our in-room measurements, meanwhile, strongly suggest the Diamond 8.2 in close-to-wall siting. Indeed, the traces show a serious (c8dB)

loss of output below 100Hz when free-space sited, an alignment which is beautifully filled in when close to the wall. Sensitivity is a modest 86dB/2.83V over the broad midband, yet the load is a fairly demanding four ohms through the low frequency region. The frequency balance is a little unusual: it holds within good limits across the band, though the extreme top and bottom are rolled off, the central midband is a little too restrained (250Hz-1kHz), while the presence (1.5-3kHz) is relatively strong.

## SOUND QUALITY

A bit of a mixed bag, the 8.2 might be a little crude and middly but it's also dynamically quite expressive and engaging, with good basic communication skills that make speech notably clear and intelligible. But the top end lacks air, the midband could be smoother and the whole thing can sound a little too forced and strong, especially when pumping up the volume.

That said, the main driver comes into its own when dealing with the heavy bass modulations on Wyyclef Jean's *Carnival*. While it wasn't quite the loudest, it still hung in well, showing the advantage of this good-size driver, while also avoiding any unwelcome 'thumpy' tendencies. There is some midband hollowness and boxiness here, but on balance colorations seem pretty well controlled.

## CONCLUSION

To describe the Diamond 8.2 as cheap'n'cheerful would be to sell it short, though both adjectives seem highly appropriate here. It isn't the smoothest or the most discreet loudspeaker around, sonically or aesthetically, but it is a good basic communicator with a lively openness that's very persuasive in the light of its modest price tag.



**“THE 8.2 IS EXPRESSIVE AND ENGAGING, WITH GOOD BASIC COMMUNICATION SKILLS THAT MAKE SPEECH CLEAR AND INTELLIGIBLE.”**



Both kinds of budget speaker in one package – cheap and cheerful.



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# CONCLUSIONS

PAUL MESSENGER PONDER'S 'GREAT' BRITAIN

**T**his sub-£200/pair loudspeaker group test encompasses many of the least expensive alternatives facing today's speaker buyer.

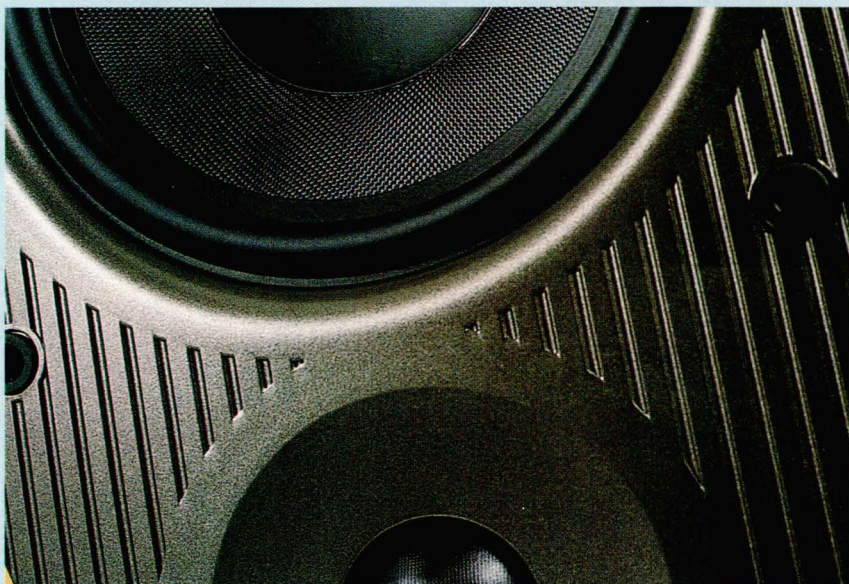
Inevitably the most competitive sector of the marketplace, these models effectively define a 'lowest common denominator' standard of performance, below which it would be foolish to stray.

Just where the defining line for genuine hi-fi speakers should be drawn remains a perennial topic of debate. Almost by definition, all those tested here represent good value for money, but with obvious limitations by absolute standards.

It's probably no coincidence that our two Best Buys are also the two most expensive models in the group: both the B&W DM303 and the Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One cost £180/pair. And although they sound conspicuously different from each other in numerous ways, both show significant advantages over the less expensive competition.

Dropping below this price point undoubtedly introduces more engineering and hence sonic compromises. Nevertheless, both the £130 Mission M71 and the £150 Wharfedale Diamond 8.2 have ample merit for Recommendation. Once again, the differences between these speakers tend to be greater than their similarities.

Bass alignment is especially important



in small loudspeakers, as close-to-wall placement significantly boosts the mid-bass octave (50-100Hz) compared to free-space siting. Although the latter will normally give a smoother midband with superior imaging, because small loudspeakers tend to suffer from bass limitations, some designers choose an alignment that takes advantage of close-to-wall bass reinforcement.

Of our half dozen, the Acoustic Energy is clearly destined for free-space siting, well clear of walls. The B&W, JPW and Wharfedale will all benefit significantly from the mid-bass reinforcement provided by a nearby wall. The Mission and Tannoy are altogether more ambivalent and difficult to pin down: experimentation *in situ* seems the best advice here.

**"IT'S NO COINCIDENCE THAT OUR TWO BEST BUYS ARE THE MOST EXPENSIVE MODELS IN THE GROUP."**

## BUDGET SPEAKERS AT A GLANCE

						
<b>MAKE MODEL</b>	ACOUSTIC ENERGY AEGIS EVO ONE	B&W DM303	JPW 201	MISSION M71	TANNOY MX1	WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 8.2
<b>PRICE</b>	£179.95	£179.95	£149.00	£129.90	£119.90	£149.95
<b>SOUND VALUE</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too.	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end.	Looks very sharp with shiny silver front and clever grille, but sound is a bit small and midband coloured.	Neat looking and very discreet sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement.	Smooth and very well behaved but a bit dull and unexciting; makes a good surround speaker.	Sonically a bit crude and in yer face, but neat styling and plenty of speaker for your money.
<b>GUARANTEE</b>	1 YEAR	5 YEARS	5 YEARS	2 YEARS	5 YEARS	1 YEAR
<b>SIZE (WXHXD, CMS)</b>	19X36X24 CMS	20X33X23CMS	15.5X26X24 CMS	17X29X28 CMS	16.5X30X22CMS	21X36.5X25 CMS
<b>SENSITIVITY (1M, 2.83V)</b>	86DB	88DB	86DB	88DB	87DB	86DB
<b>IMPEDANCE (MIN OHMS)</b>	6 OHMS	4 OHMS	4.5 OHMS	4.6 OHMS	4.5 OHMS	4 OHMS



# STEREO AMPS

AN AMPLIFIER IS THE BEATING HEART THAT DRIVES YOUR HI-FI SYSTEM. JASON KENNEDY GUIDES YOU THROUGH THE INS AND OUTS OF CHOOSING THE RIGHT AMP AND TAKES A FRESH LOOK AT SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE MODELS.

**A**mplifiers: love 'em or hate 'em, we've all gotta have one. In many respects the amplifier is the heart of a system, the part that drives the music along and allows us to control the way it sounds. To amplify is to increase in volume or size, thus the primary purpose of an amp is to increase low level signals to a point where they are powerful enough to produce sound when fed to a pair of speakers. And put simply the more powerful the amplifier the louder you can play your music

without distortion, speakers permitting.

Amps come in two basic parts: the preamplifier and power amplifier. The former accepts inputs from various sources such as a CD player or turntable and allows you to select between them, and sometimes also adjust balance and tone. The preamp also contains the volume control or potentiometer, a component that has a significant bearing on eventual sound quality. The power amp takes the output from the preamp and amplifies it to a level that will drive loudspeakers.

## TYPES OF AMPLIFIER

Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamp/power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box, and it's this type that makes up the majority of sub-£1,000 designs. But there are definite advantages to separating the relatively low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, therefore most of the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases.

There are various reasons for using more than two boxes, the most common being the separation of the two power amplification channels (left and right) into individual units called monoblocks. This approach removes any potential for the left and right signals to affect one another and improves stereo solidity or imaging as a result. The other respect in which amps are broken down is the separation of the power supply from the signal handling parts, for much the same reason as preamps are separated from power amps.

A variation on the pre/power theme that has been growing in popularity is the combination of an integrated amp with a separate power amp. This is called bi-amplification and it involves driving the two halves of a loudspeaker with two different power amps – the one inside the integrated amp powering the mid/bass cone(s) and the standalone power amp driving the tweeter (usually the best arrangement). This approach allows you to upgrade your system without having to change your existing amplifier and although it doesn't actually increase the power on



tap it does reduce distortion, and if both amps have identical characteristics you get a marked increase in sound quality. That 'if' is pretty crucial though and ill-matched pairings won't do you any favours.

Amplifiers typically use one of two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are by far the most popular because of their myriad practical and technical advantages, but their predecessors – valves or 'tubes' – live on due to aspects of sound quality that transistors struggle to replicate. In broad terms transistor-based amps are a lot more powerful, much quieter and last considerably longer than valves. In sonic terms they are phase linear, which translates into better imaging and more solid bass, they have a flat response across a wide bandwidth and their relatively high power means that the better ones can drive the most difficult of loudspeakers. But valve amps have greater transparency in the midband and are more sensitive to dynamics: level variations between notes. They are usually also cited as having far greater timbral accuracy – instruments and voices sound more real. On paper, valve amps could be considered a disaster – power can often be measured in single figures and harmonic distortion is excessive by the standards of transistor amps. But, partnered with high sensitivity speakers they make a very convincing sonic case for themselves and should not be ruled out by those seeking sonic enlightenment.



## HOW TO CHOOSE

The sonic differences between amps tend to be different to those you find with source components or speakers. To a large extent you can listen through the tonal variations of speakers – you get used to the balance and are able to filter it out. The same is not true for the characteristics of amps, so it is important to know what to listen for when selecting one.

■ **Timing** is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely, and amps that are strong in this respect have a snap and coherence that is highly appealing with rhythmically strong music.

■ **Dynamics** is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is slightly different to dynamic range, which indicates the difference between the loudest and softest notes a component can produce. Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

■ **Stereo imaging** is how solid or three dimensional an instrument or voice sounds. The point of having two speakers rather than one is that they make it possible to recreate the soundstage of the original recording, thus amps that have strong imaging skills can create a sonic space that appears to extend the boundaries of the room.

■ **Transparency** is perhaps the most obvious difference between amps. One will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail over the other factors mentioned. You might feel you're





hearing *everything*, but the edge of your seat factor will eventually wear you out.

When auditioning, try not to go for the most immediate and exciting amp you hear but listen for at the sort of volume you use at home, ideally with the same speakers. You may find that a less obvious amp is more rewarding overall.

### SYSTEM MATCHING

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high sensitivity speaker with a 10 watt valve amp but it takes a 200 watt behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule you can't have too much power and today's amplifiers are often extremely powerful, even the affordable ones.

The other consideration is balance. Some speakers are laid-back while others are a bit forward. Try to pick an amp that complements your speakers – ideally both should be neutral but that's pretty rare so a degree of compensation should be used to achieve an even result.



### MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR AMP

If you really want to get the best possible performance from an amplifier there are a few factors you'll have to bear in mind.

- 

● **Support.** Place your amp on a dedicated equipment support or platform, preferably one that will isolate it from vibrations created by the speakers. Avoid placing components on top of an amp – they need plenty of ventilation. If you have to stack components put the amp at the top.
- 

● **Connections.** Use the best interconnect and speaker cables you can afford. Speaker cables can significantly affect the way an amp and speaker interact (see the Directory for recommendations).
- 

● **Warm up.** All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up and this is particularly true of amplifiers. If you can't leave it on all the time try to switch on at least 15 minutes before listening.

### CONCLUSION

Amplifiers are marvellous things – we'd be in big trouble without them. Fortunately most of them are pretty good and so long as you follow our advice on specific models you can't go wrong. Over the following pages we have selected a dozen of our favourite examples from recent tests and presented them in bite-size form so that you can form a shortlist to audition. They are all excellent amplifiers and the simple advice would to buy the most expensive one you can afford. But that would take the fun out of it, so go listen to them and find out why that seventies maxim "all amplifiers sound the same" just ain't so.



**NAD C370**

**£449.95 Integrated amp** ★★★★★

The C370 is NAD's biggest C Series integrated. It's a tremendously powerful beast, pumping out a continuous 185 watts a side and capable of driving just about any loudspeaker you care to throw it at. Features include seven line inputs, two tape circuits and an MM phono stage plus remote control and defeatable tone adjustment.

This grunt means that it has great attack and soundstaging with a real 'out of the box' feel. In other respects it can be a little larger than life and is not the most sophisticated-sounding amp around, but there's no denying its effortlessness. It could perhaps be more colourful; tonally there is a degree of smoothing but detail is there aplenty. At this price you'll be hard pressed to find a better combination of grunt and finesse. Like the man said, "too much power is an oxymoron – surely you can never have too much?".

Lenbrook UK ☎ 01908 319360



**Arcam DiVA A75 Plus**

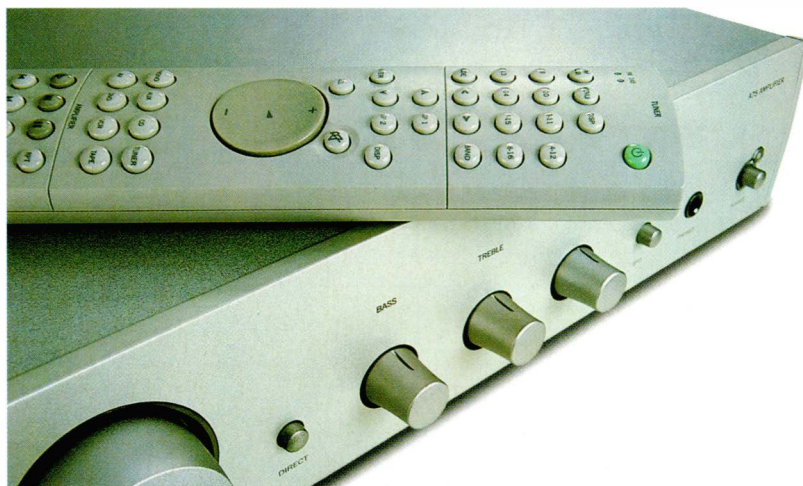
**£449.90 Integrated amp** ★★★★★

When originally launched, the A75 didn't hit the mark in the same way as the more upmarket A85 and it has subsequently been upgraded to Plus status, a process which seems to have imbued it with more of the appeal associated with Arcam amps. The Plus process involved only minor internal reworking but has given the A75 an extra 10 watts, bringing output up to 60 watts per channel.

This is a well-equipped integrated with defeatable tone controls, five line (including optional MM phono) inputs and a tape loop that doubles as an AV processor link. A full system remote is included.

The original A75 had a rather technicolor quality that lacked realism but the A75 Plus is much more integrated with sharp and powerful detail and a more tuneful bass. It is particularly sensitive to subtle nuances, works hard to bring out the excitement of the music and has good clarity and precision. Let's hear it for another great amp from Arcam.

Arcam ☎ 01223 203200



**Denon PMA-255UK**

**£139.99 Integrated amp** ★★★★★

Denon has a reputation for making great budget amps and the PMA-255UK is one of the reasons why. It's straightforward enough with its tone controls and headphone output but it packs more punch than you'd expect for the money, delivering a good 50 watts per channel across the board with up to 250 watts for dynamic peaks. It also incorporates some decent components inside such as ELNA audiophile capacitors and short signal paths.

In use the Denon has a consistent, capable and solid character which does favours for its bass performance and gives real weight to the music. It's slightly sharp and has a preference for bass and treble over the midrange but there's no shortage of articulation. Combine this with a mid-strong speaker and you'll have a starter set-up guaranteed to keep you up at night.

Denon ☎ 01234 741200





### Creek 5350SE

**£799.00 Integrated amp** ★★★★★

The 5350SE marked a great improvement on the styling front for Creek, its thick alloy fascia and silver finish looking very plush by the standards of earlier models. Controls include listen and record selectors and switching for two sets of speaker outputs, the amp can also be operated remotely. Power is rated at 85 watts a side but under dynamic, real-world conditions it'll deliver 110 watts per channel, so don't let its size fool you.

The 5350SE deals very nicely with high frequencies but less swiftly with the lower ones. Treble is clean and clear and imbues the music with good detail and harmonic structure; bass on the other hand is a little slow. But the amp can produce considerable depth and range with an almost liquid quality that will lift the complete system. If you prefer acoustic to electric music and don't need a powerhouse this is a very worthwhile alternative to the big names. Creek ☎ 020 8361 4133



### Sugden A21A

**£999.00 (line-only)**  
**Integrated amp** ★★★★★

The A21 is by any definition of the word a classic. First introduced in 1968, it continues to spread the Class A word for Sugden today and with just as much enthusiasm as ever. Producing 25 watts at the best of times, in many ways it could be compared to a valve amp – it certainly produces as much heat. It's available as a six input line-only design or with MM/MC phono support and is a compact, basic and highly entertaining box of tricks.

It has a glorious midband with superb articulation and a physical presence that you usually have to pay much more for. Its texturing and harmonic complexity is engrossing, so much so that you think you are hearing live music. Much like a valve amp it looks a bit weak on the test bench and system matching will be more crucial than usual, but get it right and you've got a musical marvel for under a grand. Sugden ☎ 01924 406016

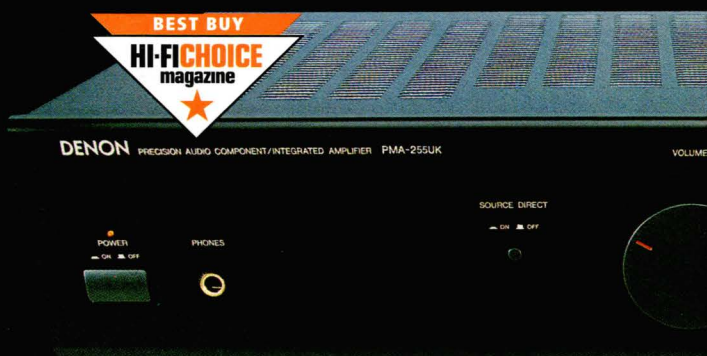


### Rotel RA-971 MkII

**£275.00 Integrated amp** ★★★★★

It may look like just about every other Rotel integrated but there are 38 component changes over the MkI and surely black is the new silver by now? Features are plentiful: defeatable tone controls, separate listen and record selectors for six line inputs including two tape loops, headphone socket and preamp out sockets for those wishing to add a separate power amp in future. Power is readily available as well – a full 100 watts a side with no difficulty, and do so across a broad 100kHz bandwidth for the benefit of high definition sources like SACD and DVD-Audio.

On audition it produced a controlled and lucid sound with life and vigour. Piano seems particularly well served by its crisp, clear and dynamic balance. The power reserves give it a sublime indifference to the speaker load and window rattling levels can be achieved with ease. All in all it amounts to superb value for money. Rotel ☎ 01908 317707





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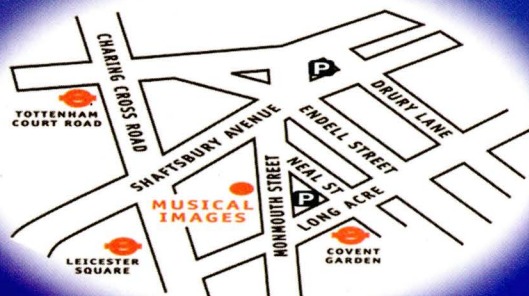
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**Arcam FMJ-A22**

**£999.90 Integrated amp ★★★★★**

The FMJ range represents the pinnacle of Arcam's achievements and its most desirable metalwork to date. The A22 is a 100 watts per channel amp with extraordinary flexibility for an integrated, most apparent in its ability to accept modules that allow it to become the centre of multi-room and home cinema systems. As it comes, this is a five line input design that's devoid of tone controls and features an infinitely spinnable volume control and a headphone output.

A much more refined and capable animal than its Alpha 10 predecessor, the A22 has a relaxed yet open and realistic sound which while not quite as vivid as some is stable and consistent. Dynamically it's a little polite but there's plenty of expression and no shortage of power. A good-looking amp that offers future proofing and real listenability.

Arcam ☎ 01223 203200



**Electrocompaniet**

**EC 4.7/AW-120DMB ★★★★★**

**£1,099.00/£2,349.00 Pre and power amp**

A well-established Norwegian brand, Electrocompaniet distinguishes its products with Perspex fascias and large cabinets – in this case only the width of the fascias remains the same for both units. Neither amp features a conventional knob, instead there are cryptically labelled push buttons and a pleasingly simple remote handset. It has six line-only inputs including a balanced XLR affair, and the outputs to the power amp are also balanced. The AW-120DMB power amp is rated at 120 watts per channel.

This pre/power pairing makes quite a delightful sounding amplifier with a highly neutral balance and no shortage of delicacy. While not quite as transparent in the midband as some valve competition it shows fine consistency and time coherence across a wide bandwidth. Dynamics might have more vigour and the bass could be more assertive but on the whole this pairing's sound is simply outstanding.

Castle Acoustics ☎ 01756 795333

**Arcam A85/P85**

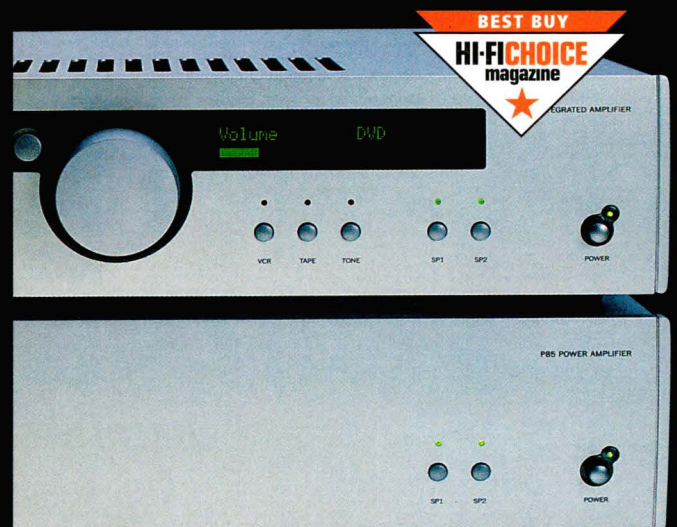
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**Integrated + power amp ★★★★★**

In critical terms, the A85 has been the most successful integrated amp in the DiVA range and it was designed from the start to operate with various plug-in modules and ancillaries such as the P85 power amplifier. Both amps produce identical 105 watt per channel outputs so using them to drive the treble and mid/bass sections of a bi-amped speaker will not result in a tonal imbalance.

On test this combo fared considerably better with B&W DM602 S3 speakers than it did with the much more costly Tannoy Dimension TD12s used for the blind listening, the latter producing complaints about a lack of dynamics but praise for the smoothness of treble and attractive level of detail. With the B&Ws however, there was punch, verve and fine articulation of detail. These speakers also served to reveal the benefits of adding the P85 power amp to a solo A85, the system producing greater instrumental separation and stronger, more three-dimensional imaging. Proof that bi-amping really works.

Arcam ☎ 01223 203200





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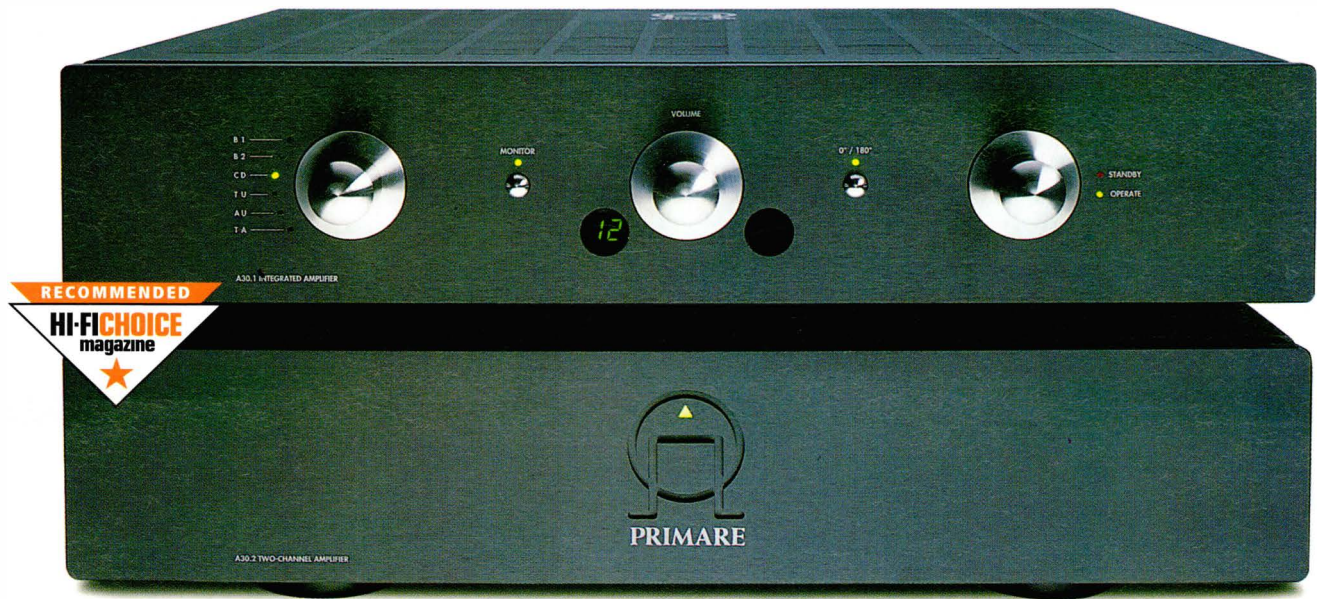
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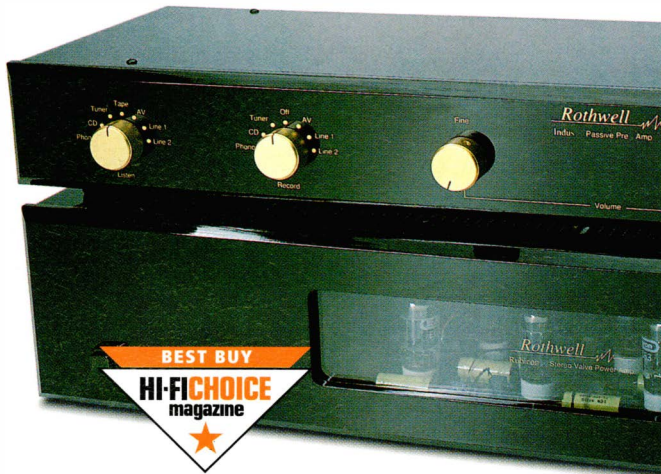


**Primare A30.1/A30.2**

**£1,499.99/£1,199.99 Integrated + power amp** ★★★★★

Swedish audio electronics specialist Primare uses extensive surface-mount technology in its base model integrated and matching power amp. Both units are superbly built and produce a steady 120 watts per channel, but the lack of a balanced input on the A30.2 to match the output on the A30.1 would suggest that this is not an entirely natural pairing. But their performance is

very enjoyable if not entirely consistent. There's plenty of grip and control and a strong sense of image focus but also slight congestion and muffling. With easier speaker loads there's an improved sense of gravitas and there's no doubt this combination has real benefits to offer the genuine music lover. Primare ☎ 01423 359054



**Rothwell Indus/Rubicon**

**£499.00/£949.00 Valve pre and power amp** ★★★★★

One of many small British electronics companies, Rothwell is distinguished by the fact that it builds both valve and transistor amplifiers. In this instance it's the Indus passive preamp combined with the Rubicon valve power amp, the latter using eight EL84 tubes to produce ten watts per side – not a lot of power but sufficient for reasonably sensitive speakers.

The Indus has six line inputs and uses discrete resistors instead of conventional potentiometers for volume control, hence the 'coarse' and 'fine' knobs on its fascia.

Initially this seems to be a rather laid-back combo but listen a little longer and you'll appreciate that its accuracy and neutrality allows a lot of fine detail to come through. It's extremely honest and transparent in a low-key way and will keep you entertained even at quiet playback levels. If you want to hear what's really going on give these discreet devices a spin. Rothwell ☎ 01204 654614

**Croft Vitali SC/Series 5C**

**£750.00/£1,250.00 Valve pre and power amp** ★★★★★

Croft is a valve specialist with a distinctive approach to casework design, but if you like retro chic you'll hard pressed to find better – at least not from a genuine hi-fi hermit with a penchant for twin volume pots! This pre/power combo is competitively priced by valve standards and incorporates three line inputs alongside a MM phono stage but without the luxury of remote control. Power is rated at 30 watts a side which will require reasonably efficient speakers but is quite sufficient for most situations.

This Croft pairing is a marked change to the Rothwell in this group, offering an immediate and astonishingly tangible sound that brings voices to life with eerie realism. It's fundamentally mid-strong, but combine it with most speakers and you'll get an even response with tremendous transparency. The vinyl input is pretty special too. All-in-all, an idiosyncratic pairing that's worth close attention... if you can handle the ergonomics!

Croft ☎ 01746 769156





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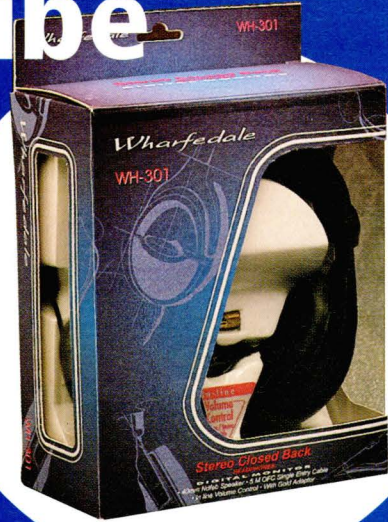


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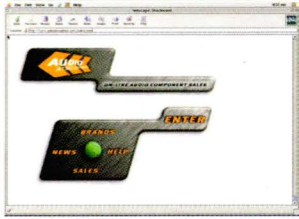
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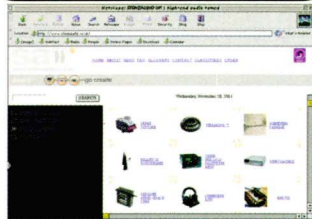
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Buying second-hand can be a great way to pick up a bargain. A formerly expensive second-hand component might well prove a better long-term bet than a brand-new product engineered down to a price. Do some research on which brands and products have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a second-hand hi-fi dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty. So it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy. Products such as speakers should be less prone to breakdown than amplifiers, and amps should be more reliable than CD players. But any abused component could be troublesome – have a proper dem, and judge the seller as well as the goods!



# THE DIRECTORY

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

## THE ART OF SYSTEM BUILDING

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

**W**hen it comes to putting together a great separates system, identifying decent individual components is fundamental, but it isn't the whole story. There is the business of system synergy to consider, which put simply means how well your components

gel as a whole. The degree to which this can affect the end result tends to increase with price, thus budget components are relatively immune (a competitively priced Best Buy disc player, amp and loudspeaker pairing of almost any hue will combine to make a good system). When considering a purchase it's always good practice to listen to alternatives. It's the only way you can learn what different components sound like and find out which ones appeal to you.

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

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

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

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

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

## AWARD TAGS

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

A third award, the Editor's Choice, is reserved for those products reviewed solo, such as you see in the First Impressions or High Performance sections. An EC is awarded where the Editor is convinced that a product offers exceptional quality for the price.





# GLOSSARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**NETWORK:** see Crossover.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**TWEETER:** Treble driver.

**TWO/THREE-WAY:** Loudspeaker crossovers split the signal into two or three frequency bands, a 2-way speaker can have more than two drive units.

**WATTS (PER CHANNEL):** the watt is the unit of electrical power and the WPC rating is the maximum average undistorted power that an amp can deliver to a typical speaker. However, speaker sensitivity variations can make more difference than amplifier output.

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# AMPLIFIERS

## STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED



### SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
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STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Affordable Valve Co. EL34	650	A real bargain on the face of it, but the sound is oh so soft, warm and old-valve. Too much of a good thing	4					40	202
	Arcam Diva A65	380	Easy on the ear remote control amp, but not especially powerful	5			●	●	40	217
BB	Arcam Diva A75 Plus	450	Quick, lively and well presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●		●	●	50	224
BB	Arcam Diva A85	750	Much enhanced design topology give a more hard hitting, engaging sound than previous Arcams	7			●	●	85	214
BB	Arcam FMJ A22	1,000	Powerful, articulate, and expandable into a home cinema or multiroom amp/controller	7			●	●	100	201
EC	ATC SIA2-150	1,984	An impressive sounding integrated amp with a dynamic, open and detailed sound	4			●		150	192
	Aria S2	1,000	Glamorously packaged valve amp produces a real eyes closed, feet up kind of sound	4					12	190
BB	Audio Analogue Puccini	450	Superbly finished, the entry-level Audio Analogue performs way out of its class	5	●	●			40	175
	Audio Analogue Puccini SE	595	Upgraded, more powerful Puccini is disappointingly sluggish and curiously lacking in musical vitality	5	●	●			40	181
R	AVI S2000MI	999	Fine, detailed amplifier with excellent timing and strong control of a wide range of loudspeaker loads	5			●		100	175
	Bryston B60R	1,249	Great build, but the lazy bass and opaque treble bracket an articulate midband. Comes with 20 year guarantee	5			●	●	60	175
R	Cambridge Audio A500RC	200	Solid value, decent build and a surfeit of watts make this an attractive proposition, but it can sound slightly loose	6			●		50	196
R	Canary Audio CA-608	1,495	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4					24	202
	Chord CPM 3300	5,495	Very powerful yet compact amp with rather complex ergonomics and transparent sound. Oh, and a lovely blue glow	5			●		220	214
R	Copland CSA 28	1,249	Elegant Scandinavian cool, abundantly detailed if somewhat system dependent	5	●		●		60	189
	Copland CTA 402	1,698	A unusually flexible valve amp with an attractive and textured sound	5	●		●		35	193
	CR Developments CR324	569	Solid and capable on paper, this is a bit of a blunt instrument when let loose on the music	5					150	181
	Symbol CA1	499	Lacklustre amplifier tends to underperform with complex material. Best with straightforward compact loudspeakers	6					40	178
R	Creek 4330	279	Diminutive but classy amp will drive anything, and can be specified in various configurations	4	●				40	192
	Creek 4330SE	499	Somewhat perplexing, though always interesting, miniature audiophile amplifier, needs careful system matching	5			●		50	208
	Creek 5350SE	799	Smooth, open and articulate sound and quality build, but bass is a tad heavy handed	6			●	●	85	214
R	Cyrus 5	500	A enjoyable amp that is assured and unflappable, although detail is unremarkable	7			●	●	45	205
R	Cyrus 7	700	Welcome return to form for the Cyrus stable: this is the best sounding audio brick around	6			●	●	60	196
BB	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high fidelity operation	5				●	30	208
	Denon PMA-355UK	230	Detailed, but rather inexpressive sound which doesn't quite live up to the claims.	5	●		●	●	50	217
R	Denon PMA-1500R	500	Recommended for its outrageous power, especially with problem speakers	5	●	●	●	●	70	181
R	Densen Beat B-100 MkII	650	High 'air guitar' factor, and can punch above its weight, but check it will complement your system	5					60	175
	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned out amplifier, with mainstream appeal but bland with it	6			●		50	214
	Electrocompaniet EC1-3	1,000	Basically good, but too many rough edges to warrant recommendation	6			●		75	201
	Ezo Aria HE	449	Quick, detailed but aggressive and sometimes coarse sounding amp. Beautifully turned out, though	5				●	40	208
	Graaf Venticinque	1,790	Smart and practical, but it just never seems to shine sonically	6					25	202
	Hofli Audis Signature	750	A 'no-feedback' circuit giving outstanding resolution, but significant load dependency	4	●				65	181
	Kenwood KAF-3010R	180	Plenty of twiddly bits yet weak on inputs, and basically good, but somewhat uneven sound quality	4	●		●	●	70	186
R	Kenwood KAF-3030R	250	Kenwood's best amplifier for some years has a lean bass but excellent mid and treble.	5	●		●	●	50	217
	Krell KAV-500i	5,000	More at home in background listening/home cinema applications than out-and-out audio maniac set-ups	5			●		250	192
	Linn Majik	845	Slightly rough and ready power amp modules, but capable preamp that can be expanded into a multiroom system	5	●		●	●	33	214
	Lundahl Mag Amp	1,735	Unusual valve/magnetic amp hybrid with relaxed balance and good timbre	5					23	196
	Marantz PM-6010 OSE	229	Good starter amplifier, with characteristic smooth, low key delivery	5	●		●	●	50	196
	Marantz PM7000	300	Lots of power for the price, but detail and subtlety seem to have been sacrificed	6	●		●	●	115	205
	Marantz PM6010 OSE KI Sig	400	Well-made, but somewhat ill-balanced amplifier that doesn't slot into most systems comfortably	6	●		●	●	50	208
R	Marantz PM8200	599	Warm, solid and likeable sound, with the occasional flash of steel when under pressure	5	●		●	●	60	224
	Marantz PM-17 Mk II	999	Big, bold, but over-fruity balance – the 'fat uncontroller' as one put it	6	●	●	●	●	60	214
	Marantz PM-17 KI-Signature	1,300	Full feature audiophile amp where the end results don't quite justify the fantastic ingredients	6	●	●	●	●	60	189
	Mark Levinson No3B3	5,500	Extremely versatile design that thinks and acts like a serious pre/power. Sounds superb	5			●		100	212
	Monrio Asty	400	Engaging, but ill-disciplined, even OTT amplifier with unpredictable system compatibility	5					55	178
R	Musical Fidelity X-A2	500	A chip off the old block; sounds very similar to the X-A1 and XA-100R	6					75	208
	Musical Fidelity A3	849	Similar to the XA-100R internally, and a little too relaxed for some	5	●	●	●		85	196
	MVL A2	970	Curiously designed, and curious sounding amplifier with Sound Sentinel circuits to address perceived weaknesses	9				●	100	201
	Myrrad T-40	400	The T-40 is a well built and sensible, but needs more dynamics and finesse	6	●		●	●	50	192
R	Myrrad MI120	600	Well styled, well built: a good, even-tempered amplifier, although it can sound rather brittle	6			●	●	60	175
	Myrrad MI 240	1,500	Big and powerful integrated amp sounds clean and neutral if a bit short on musical tautness and dynamic tension	8	OPT	OPT			120	216
BB	NAD C320	200	Excellent budget amp from the maker of the seminal 3020 offers better clarity and neutrality and good build	6			●	●	40	186
R	NAD C340	270	A classic NAD amplifier copes with any speaker, delivers plenty of power, and does so with calm decorum	6	●		●		50	192
BB	NAD C350	300	A typical NAD: refined, warm tonality, adequate detail, and a strong power yield	7			●	●	60	208
BB	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra-high power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse.	6	●		●	●	120	217
	NAD S300	1,900	Substantial integrated with loads of power and some finesse, slightly bass-strong	5			●		100	189
R	Naim Nait 5	800	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	5			●		30	214
	Opera Aida	795	Low power (in practice) minimalist integrated amp, but the mahogany wings don't help it to fly	5	●	●			60	201
	Pathos Classic One	995	Unusual looks and even more unusual electronic design, but compromised musical potential	5			●		55	202
R	Pioneer A-407R	230	Clean, consistent, finely detailed sound, good finish and (mainly) good build	5	●		●	●	45	186
R	Pioneer A-607R	300	Lively, articulate amp with plenty of drive and a hint of brightness	5	●		●	●	60	192
	Plinius 8100	1,450	Slightly rough and ready, but plenty of balls from this stripped down antipodean.	6			●		100	214
R	Pracisa Acustica Sonoro	1,800	It is not often that transistor amplifiers are made to sound so palpably valve-like	5			●		100	189
R	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed or dynamic, is well organised musically	6			●		50	208
R	Primare A20 MkII	799	Everything except packaging has changed in Mk II version: but balsier model has lost none of its refinement	5			●		70	181
BB	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance, and healthy power yield	6			●		100	214
	Red Rose Music M5	8,000	Sophisticated integrated valve amp with powerful, refined sound and beautiful build	4					45	219
	Restek Fantasy II	1,499	Muscular, but ultimately rather strident amplifier which needs careful system matching	4			●		100	189
R	Roksan Kandy KA-1	475	Power with control, barely compromised by a small degree of dryness	6	●		●	●	120	205
R	Roksan Caspian	795	Mainstream Roksan line level amp works well under most circumstances	6			●	●	70	201
BB	Rotel RA-931 MKII	189	Simple, non-remote amp majors on clarity and transparency, without sounding over-analytical	4	●			●	35	208
BB	Rotel RA-971 MkII	275	Improved RA971 is a chip off the old block: bags of power, but with added precision and clarity	6			●	●	60	196
	Rotel RA-972	400	Better in the treble than the bass, which is a little too rounded and woolly	6			●	●	90	205
	Rotel RA-1070	1,000	Well equipped powerhouse has features designed to support multiroom operation, but sonically it lacks subtlety	7	●		●	●	100	224
	Sharp SM-SX1	3,300	Jewel-like 1-bit digital amplifier with limited power reserves but offering glimpses of sonic magic	5					50	211
	Sharp SM-SX100	10,000	The world's first stable, 1-bit digital amplifier is a technological milestone that should go from strength to strength	n/a					110	200
	Sony TA-FB940R	300	Technically innovative amplifier fails to cut the mustard with complex material	5	●	●	●	●	70	208



## STEREO AMPLIFIERS – INTEGRATED (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	<b>Sugden A21a</b>	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5	●	●			25	224
	<b>T+A PA-1220R</b>	1,445	Unique presentation and feature set, but sometimes rather relentless sound quality	7			●	●	100	189
	<b>Tact Millennium MkII</b>	7,000	This digital class D amplifier represents a bold declaration on the future expansion of digital audio in the home	n/a			●	●	150	194
	<b>TAG McLaren 60i</b>	500	Clean, slightly antiseptic sound from this beautifully turned out entry level Audiolab 8000LX replacement	6				●	60	189
	<b>TAG McLaren 60iRv</b>	1,000	Looks, feels and sounds better than the Audiolab it supersedes. Smooth, open, refined but lacks body and drive	6			●	●	60	184
	<b>Talk Electronics Cyclone 1</b>	550	Much improved build quality and silver finish, but the sound lacks physicality and can sound strained	6			●	●	65	196
R	<b>Talk Electronics Storm 2</b>	650	Crisp, clean, well defined sound, arguably lacking warmth, but a good midrange purchase overall	6			●	●	50	175
	<b>Talk Electronics Cyclone 2.1</b>	850	Not as clear or as lively as some, but essentially musical, and upgradeable for multichannel audio purposes	6			●	●	100	224
	<b>Teac A-E2000</b>	180	Has the potential to cause significant damage in the budget amp sector once the wrinkles are ironed out	6					50	195
	<b>Technics SU-A808</b>	300	Intriguing amplifier, with abundant detail but dynamically rather flat	6	●		●	●	55	196
	<b>Thule IA60B</b>	700	Dry, edgy and glassy sounding amplifier, though the balanced input may appeal to some	6			●		60	214
R	<b>Token Audio K50</b>	350	Stainless steel finish, others available. Sound is warm and attractive, though a little undynamic	5					50	186
	<b>Tube Technology Unisis Sig</b>	2,400	A very attractive product which combines many classic valve attributes to good effect	5	●				30	202
	<b>Unison Research Aria SR1</b>	1,250	Drop dead gorgeous looks from this valve/MOS hybrid, but sonically it is lumpy and awkward, with poor definition, albeit with good image scale	5			●		80	224
	<b>Yamaha AX-496</b>	240	Lacklustre, if well equipped and powerful, amplifier shows some improvements over previous amps, but not enough	6			●	●	85	208
	<b>Yamaha AX-596</b>	300	Clean, agile and lean this amplifier isn't. Bold and powerful, however, it certainly is	5	●		●	●	100	217
R	<b>YBA Intégré</b>	1,550	Careful system matching is essential, but this is definitely one of the good guys	6			●		50	214

## STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Amp Flux System 2</b>	3,000	Three-box affair with a clean, spacious sound and plenty of slam. A touch steely, but undeniably potent	5			●	●	50	187
	<b>Alchemist Kraken APD7A/8A II</b>	1,098	Unusual looks and unusual sound too, rather rough and lacking detail	6					55	187
R	<b>Arcam Alpha 9C/10P</b>	1,000	Well specified and flexible preamp with sound only just lacking in greatness	6			●	●	100	187
BB	<b>Arcam Alpha 9P</b>	400	Clear, colourful and well-disciplined, the Arcam is a strong all-rounder that can compete with conviction	1					60	165
BB	<b>Arcam A85 int &amp; P85 pwr</b>	1249	Well thought through integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A-85 virtues with others, plus extra gravitas and range	7			●	●	85	225
EC	<b>ATC CA2</b>	750	Stripped down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	5			●			221
	<b>Audio Analogue Bellini/Donizetti</b>	1,155	Curious pre/power amplifier has a number of objective and subjective character traits that make it difficult to recommend	5	●	●			60	225
	<b>Audio Note M Zero/P Zero</b>	998	Neat shoe box-size components. Able to impart music with real life and soul when partnered with P Zero power amps	5					8	191
R	<b>AudioNote M2Phono/P2SE</b>	3,198	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	4	●				18	216
EC	<b>Audio Research LS25 MT100</b>	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MKII/MT100 MKII)	6	●		●		100	216
EC	<b>AVI S2000M</b>	2,348	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	5			●		150	221
EC	<b>Border Patrol 300B SE</b>	3,995	Single ended valve power amp with passion, grace and fire, and plenty of grunt to boot	1					8.5	186
	<b>Bow Technologies Warlock/Walrus</b>	6,490	Heavyweight dual mono pairing with superb build and rich, refined sound	5			●		150	216
R	<b>Bryston BP20/3B-ST</b>	2,850	Recommended for pretty much any demanding application	8			●	●	120	212
	<b>Cary CAD 2A3SE</b>	1,575	Monoblock valve power amp. Low power but gives delightful speed, coherence and transparency	1					5	196
	<b>Chord SPM-4000</b>	8,500	Sound is as stylish as its appearance is bold. Probably one of the best amps you are likely to hear	1					410	202
BB	<b>Creek P43R/A52SE</b>	949	Excellent sound, remote control operation and upgrade options from fine value preamp	6			●	●	100	187
BB	<b>Creek P43R/A43</b>	1,050	Great value and a podium performance earning a best buy	6			●	●	140	212
	<b>Crimson 610C/620D</b>	775	Limited in what it does, the Crimson combo has real precision, verve and timing within those limits. Preamp is due to be replaced shortly	4	●	●			55	225
	<b>Crimson 620C</b>	875	Not entirely satisfactory power amp which has dynamic strengths, but underachieves when the volume is raised	1					50	181
R	<b>Crimson CS610/CS630</b>	1,250	Good, clear sound, including a decent phono stage, but flexibility is limited. Slimline monoblocks with grunt and finesse	3	●	●			100	187
BB	<b>Croft Vitali/Series 5C</b>	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	3	●				30	216
	<b>Cyrus Power</b>	498	Detail and midband clarity and stand-out qualities. Smooth and refined with most types of music but bass-soft	1					50	183
R	<b>Cyrus aCA7.5/Smart Power</b>	1,250	Great for classical, jazz, and existing Cyrus owners	7				●	60	212
	<b>Cyrus aCA7.5/PSX-R/aPA7</b>	2950	Very stylish four-box modular system, slight forwardness delivers oodles of clarity and detail	7			●	●	150	216
	<b>Densen Beat B-200</b>	1,000	A versatile preamp with a high 'air-guitar' factor and Densen's characteristic styling	6	●	●				191
R	<b>Densen B-300</b>	800	Expensive but highly musical. Colourful and warm sound with strong timing and listener involvement	1					100	183
R	<b>Densen Beat 200/300</b>	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remotes E300 extra)	6	OPT		OPT		100	216
BB	<b>Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB</b>	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful broad-band transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	6			●		120	216
	<b>Exposure 2010 I/2010 P</b>	1,098	Interesting match of integrated and more powerful power amp is not as sure footed or as dynamically consistent as some rivals	6			●		75	225
EC	<b>Gamut D200</b>	2,995	Single MOSFET pair per side gives tremendous resolution and dynamics (balanced inputs). Formerly Sirius	1					200	183
EC	<b>Levinson No380/No334</b>	9,490	Preamp/monoblock pairing combines precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	6			●		125	195
	<b>LFD Mistral Linstage/Power</b>	898	Strong ergonomics, generally decent sound, but a little lacking in detail	6					60	165
	<b>Linn Kolektor/LK85</b>	990	Beautifully turned out machine, yet slightly bland, aimed at an all-Linn system	9	●	●			62	212
	<b>Marantz PM-17 Mk II/SM-17</b>	1,699	Flexible, beautifully made and as smooth as silk, but ultimately the combination fails to build on the unaided PM-17 II in biamp mode	6	●	●	●	●	60	225
	<b>Michell Orca/Alecto mono</b>	3,600	Line-level design with a gorgeous remote and focused, spacious sound	6			●		100	187
R	<b>Moth 30 Series Monoblocks</b>	879	Demonstrated solid balance and proved adept at delivering vital musical qualities	1					100	155
	<b>Moth 30 Active LS/60 Stereo</b>	948	Excellent-sounding ultra-simple miniature preamp, power amp lacks finesse and control, however	4					60	165
	<b>Muse Model Three</b>	1,990	Natural sounding tranny preamp with useful audiophile features. Works beautifully with 160W power amp	5			●			166
R	<b>Musical Fidelity X-P100</b>	800	Good long-term listening prospects; detailed and a little fruitiness	6	●	●				200
	<b>Musical Fidelity NuVista 300</b>	3,300	Powerful smooth sound with tremendous bass extension. Capacity to fulfil the demands of the most dynamic material	1					350	199
	<b>Myryad MA120</b>	450	Based on MI120 integrated – see latter for comments, but sounds significantly better when bi-amped with MI120	1					60	165
R	<b>Myryad MP100/MA240</b>	1,600	Smart finish and impeccable manners, smooth, clean performance	6			●	●	120	212
R	<b>NAD Silverline S100/S200</b>	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks with heaps of power	7			●		200	20
EC	<b>Naim NAC112/NAP150</b>	1,375	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	6			●		50	213
	<b>Naim NAC112/NAP150/FLATCAP 2</b>	1,850	Adding a FLATCAP 2 brings a very worthwhile sonic upgrade to the basic NAC112/NAP150 combo	6			●		50	213
	<b>Naim NAC102/NAP180</b>	2,122	More of a 'character act' than a neutral reproduction system, majors on excitement at the expense of subtlety	6			●		60	200
EC	<b>Naim NAP500</b>	10,000	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading edge definition	1					140	208
R	<b>Primare A30.1/A30.2</b>	2,699	Powerful, smooth, but slightly uneven performance in some combinations, but excellent control and separation in others	7			●		100	225
	<b>Quad QC-twenty four/II-forty</b>	4,000	A classic valve amplifier in circuitry and sound, but with modern ingredients and gorgeous retro styling	7					40	213
R	<b>Roksan Caspian Power</b>	595	Excels musically and in conventional hi-fi terms. A power amp for people with long-term satisfaction in mind	1					70	183
	<b>Rotel RC-971</b>	150	Low price is offset by rather coarse sound quality with certain types of music	5				●		178
	<b>Rotel RC-1090/RB-1090</b>	2,650	Prodigious powerful pre/power combination with a wide range of inputs, but not ideally subtle or uncoloured	7	●	●	●	●	380	225
BB	<b>Rothwell Indus/Rubicon</b>	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	6					10	216
	<b>Samuel Johnson pca100</b>	1,800	Stylish wood and metal fascia – precise, clean sound with an emphasis on leading edges	6			●	●		201
	<b>TAG McLaren PA20R/125M</b>	1,500	Clean, detailed sound but limited thrill power	6			●	●	145	184



LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
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STEREO AMPLIFIERS – PRE/POWER AMPLIFIERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	TAG McLaren PA20R/100P	1,699	A blast from TAG McLaren's past highlights how far the brand has developed	6			●	●	100	225
	Talk Hurricane 2L/Tornado 2	1,249	Design of integrity which gets to the heart, if not the soul, of the music	6					65	165
	Technics SU-C3000	2,997	Price includes SE-A3000. Supremely clean and even sounding combo, though it could be more musically involving	5	●					188
	Technics SU-C1010	300	Although the sound's basically all there, it's arguable that a good integrated offers more, for less	6	●		●			200
	Thule Spirit PA100	600	More successful than matching preamp: sound is gutsy and lively, and generally clean	1					100	187
	Thule Spirit PR150B/PA150B	1,600	The limitations in the sonic performance mean that the competition has more to offer	6					150	212
	Unison Research S8	2,950	Outrageous Italian styling and an equally melodramatic sound, with splendid voice projection and tension	5			VOL		24	216

PHONO STAGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Clearaudio Symphono	740	Slightly inconsistent balance mars the performance of this lively performer			●				201
R	Creek OBH-9	160	A neat little unit with an essentially neutral and listenable character			●				189
	Cyrus aEQ7/PSX-R	826	Very hi-tech product which tends too much towards smoothness except at climaxes, which can be rough		●	●				189
	Densen DP-Drive/DP-02	350	Quite unusual design in many ways: sound is mostly good but never quite shakes off a 'synthetic' quality			●				189
R	Electrocompaniet ECP-1	495	An excellent phono amp that combines well-rounded balance with detail and low noise		●	●				189
BB	Moth 30 Series Phono	249	Fine sound all round, with any kind of music, from this bargain phono stage		●	●				189
	NAD PP-1	40	A basic phono stage that does its job rather coarsely: a bit bass-shy too		●					189
R	Pass Labs X0no	2,995	Not absolutely neutral, but the overall result is so beguiling it's hard to resist			●				201
	Primare R-20	500	Fights a little shy of densely scored music, but generally an enjoyable and neutral performer		●	●				201
R	Pro-Ject Phono Box	40	Moving-coil compatibility is a dubious extra in a way, but MM performance is acceptable at this giveaway price		●	●				201
R	QED Discaver DS-1	35	It's cheap, it's cheerful, it's OK – perfectly adequate for use with a phono-less integrated, though not very refined		●	●				189
	Roksan Artaxerxes X/DS1.5	1,150	Delicate and well balanced, slightly congested at climaxes. Power supply expensive, but runs two Roksan components		●	●				189
R	Tom Evans The Groove	1,800	Plenty of detail, excellent imaging and almost flawlessly neutral: a good choice for information retrieval off any LP			●				201

AMPLIFIERS



SPECIFICATIONS

LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
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MULTICHANNEL AMPLIFIERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	LINE INPUTS	MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Arcam AVR100	800	A solid sounding and well-engineered A/V amp with an affordable price tag. Good with music and well suited to smaller rooms	6			●	●	70	215
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DAVE/10P	2,500	Packed with a diversity of electronics that against engineering odds sounds extremely good	5			●	●	110	198
BB	Arcam FMJ A22 DAVE/P25	2,850	Powerful, authoritative, great stereo, excellent home cinema – what more could you want?	7			●	●	100	210
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights. Currently lacks 5.1 input for DVD-A/SACD	6			●		120	219
	Cyrus AV5	1,000	Few processors are as adept with music. An effective multichannel solution for music fans	4			●		N/A	201
	Cyrus AV5/SmartPower	2,650	Refined, detailed and attractive, but ultimately lacking in balls	3			●		60	210
	Denon AVR-1602	350	Low-cost home cinema amplifiers don't usually set out to excite, and this one is no exception. Listenable, but dull	6			●	●	80	223
R	Denon AVR-3300	800	Not as powerful as Denon claims, but nonetheless capable of impressive high-fidelity multichannel sound	4			●	●	75	198
BB	Denon AVC-A15E	2,500	A powerful, articulate 7.1-channel integrated amp, loaded with features and equally at home with music and film soundtracks	12	●		●	●	170	215
BB	Harman/Kardon AVR5000	600	Complex and capable home cinema receiver features automatic setup, HDCD and excellent interconnection possibilities	8			●	●	70	223
	JVC-RX-8012R	400	Undistinguished home cinema receiver with USB in, and modestly satisfying sound at lowish power levels	9	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-X9050D	399	There are some benefits from THX Select processing in home cinema mode, but musically this is a rather mechanical, unengaging performer	7	●		●	●	100	223
	Kenwood KRF-V7773D	800	Bold, detailed presentation, but there are some technical limitations and a slightly mannered quality, especially with music	10	●		●	●	120	210
	Kenwood KRF-V9993D	1,300	Complex amp that rocks with home cinema but loses out with music	7	●		●	●	110	215
R	Marantz SR5200	400	Marantz provides undemanding but broadly satisfying listening from a well engineered, near budget home cinema receiver	8			●	●	90	223
BB	Marantz SR-5000	500	Something of a rough diamond, but a powerful and entertaining package	5			●	●	105	198
BB	Marantz SR-7000	700	Excellent at the price, and almost equally effective with two-channel music and multichannel AV	9			●	●	100	210
	Marantz SR-14EX Mk2	3,250	A weighty beast, with 7.1 processing but only five channels of amplification as standard. Highly capable with both music and movies, but rather costly all-in-all	8			●	●	140	215
R	Myrad MDP500/MA240/MA360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel A/V amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music	9			●	●	120	215
BB	NAD T761	650	First rate home cinema amplifier that sounds more powerful than its specifications imply, and competes with specialist stereo amplifiers	9			●	●	80	223
	NAD S170/S250	5,700	Flexible and fine sounding THX Ultra processor/five-channel power amp combo with great timing	9			●		125	225
	Nakamichi AV-10	1,000	A very powerful AV receiver that's easy to install and set-up with a civilised and subtle performance	4			●	●	140	198
R	Onkyo TX-D5595	450	Unexciting but generally competent home cinema amplifier has some strong ergonomic features	7	●		●	●	70	223
	Onkyo TX-DS787	900	Obstructive ergonomics and messy sound undermine basically well-equipped receiver	7	●		●	●	100	217
R	Onkyo TX-D5989	2,500	Authority personified, excellent AV signal processing, but sound quality a tad subtle	9	●		●	●	160	210
	Pioneer VSX-D8105	450	Thin, raw sounding AV receiver fails to stir the right nerve endings, but is materially fair value	7			●	●	100	223
	Pioneer VSA-E08	1,300	THX circuitry gives home cinema material a boost, but this is not an obvious first choice for music	10	●		●	●	100	210
	Primare P30/A30.5	3,700	No 5.1 channel input for DVD-A/SACD but capable of almost uncomfortable realism with real solidity and drive	8			●	●	120	210
R	Roksan DSP/5 ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels	4			●		80	210
	Rotel R5X-972	1,000	Not the brightest tool in the Rotel toolbox, and pricing is surely rather optimistic too	8			●	●	75	217
R	Rotel RSP-976/RMB-1075	1,700	A potent and enjoyable two-box beast that gets to the heart of both music and movie sound	8			●	●	120	215
	Rotel RSP-985/RPB-985 MkII	2,400	The hugely versatile processor is the weaker subjective link in this otherwise impressive combo	3			●		130	198
R	Sony STR-B1070	600	Technical intriguing AV receiver which succeeds in extracting detail and space from recordings that sounded coarse and unexpansive elsewhere	10	●		●	●	100	223
	Sony TA-E9000ES/N9000ES	2,300	Big, gold, powerful and remarkably versatile but fails to cut the sonic mustard	5			●	●	110	198
R	Sony VA777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all rounder	9			●	●	100	210
EC	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,749	A flexible A/V processor, unusually good with music. Would form the heart of a top-class multichannel system in standard or 7-channel 'EX' form	6			●			215
	Technics DX-950	279	Ultra-low cost home cinema receiver is impressively equipped for the price, but musically it lacks grace and air	5	●		●	●	100	223
	Technics SA-DA10	500	Lower mid-market AV amp has all the right ingredients, but fails to stir the soul	5	●		●	●	80	210
	Technics SE-A1010/SU-C1010 x3	1,350	A preamp plus three stereo amps provide a six-channel AV solution without complex processing. Visually stunning but low on grunt and detail	6	●		●	●	70	215
	Yamaha RX-V1000RDS	800	Solid mainstream performer is more convincing as home cinema amplifier than for multichannel music	8	●		●	●	100	217
	Yamaha DSP-AX1	2,000	An anorak's delight, and one of the most flexible and effective soundfield creators ever conceived	11	●		●	●	110	210



# CABLES

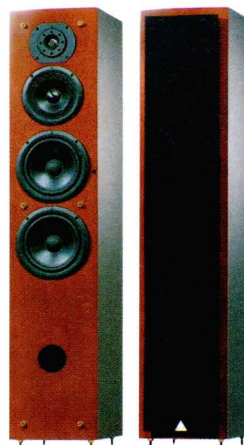
## ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Precision Eikos	89	Not entirely neutral: probably best suited to upbeat music. Very stiff construction								188
R	Acoustic Research Master	70	Decent performance all round and good interference rejection								224
	Audioquest Sidewinder	40	Suppresses the sound. At this price it's a disappointment								211
R	Audioquest Coral	99	Slightly forward imaging hardly detracts from its excellent tonal qualities and detail								200
R	Cable Talk Advanced 3	35	Good sound and great detail, but a slight brashness in the treble								211
	Cable Talk Professional 3	75	Plenty of bass, but suffers rather from congestion								224
	Cambridge Pacific	30	Lacks subtlety and bass impact but is otherwise quite serviceable for the price								176
	Cambridge Silver Spirit 60	100	Good bass but a lack of detail and differentiation of instruments								188
R	Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price								211
	Chord Cobra 2	50	Good, strong sound with full-bodied music, less happy with smaller forces								176
	Chord Chameleon 2	90	Deep bass is fine but despite that the sound can be a bit hard and lacking body and resonance								188
	Chord Silver Siren	75	Dry and undynamic, though tonal balance is good								224
R	DNM Reson	40	Seemed a little harsh in the test system, but can work well and should be tried								200
BB	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price								211
R	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass								224
	Goertz M1 Interconnect	145	Soft sound lacking in bite, with excessive and plummy bass (NB sample used in review was only 0.5m)								176
	Insert Audio IC100 MkII	47	Mostly good sound is let down by pervasive dryness								176
R	Insert Audio Image 5.1	85	Very good detail and imaging: perhaps a touch bass-light								200
BB	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness								211
	Ixos Gamma 1001	70	Nice and dynamic, and bass is good, but treble disappoints and it can become rough								224
	Ixos Gamma 1002	39	Lumpy bass, grainy treble, and poor integration. Nice colour, though								176
	Ixos 1000	90	Nothing badly wrong, just a little bit bland and outshone by others at the price								200
	Kimber Crystal-Cu	5	Disappointing beside other Kimber products: great bass, but suffers from dryness								224
BB	Kimber PBJ	68	Assured sound, solid and natural bass and clear treble — excellent performance all round								188
R	Kimber Hero	110	Slight roughness detracts from some music; seems well suited to rock and jazz. Lively and detailed								176
BB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound								224
	Neotech NA11085	100	Balance is OK, but detail could and should be better								224
R	Nordost Solar Wind	85	Good tone and dynamics, with just occasionally a touch of bass-lightness in busy music								188
R	Nordost Blue Heaven	145	Very good bass and only slightly grainy treble add up to a well integrated, natural-sounding cable								176
	Precious Metals 5S35	50	Extended bass, but dry character suits electronic music better than acoustic								188
	Profigold PGA301 MkII	40	Mellow and well rounded, but can seem a little heavy								211
R	Profigold PGA4201	5	No pretensions, but sound is perfectly listenable with fair detail and extension								211
R	Prowire VHQ	10	This crisp cable lacks a little refinement, but it's great for the price								211
R	Prowire Silver	60	A good cable in every way, with just the occasional hint of coloration and coarseness								176
R	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced, and easily rivals more expensive cables								211
BB	QED Qnect 2	30	Very well balanced, refined and detailed, this is everything a good cable should be, and excellent value								176
R	QED Qnect 4S	70	Some coloration and roughness in the midrange and treble, but bass is gratifyingly solid								188
R	QED Qnex Silver Spiral	90	A great cable for lovers of big sounds								200
	Reference CS1	75	A moderate performer, with a little coloration and a tendency to lose bass at climaxes								188
R	SonicLink Black	49	Nickel-plated copper with a slight dryness in the bass and a hint of treble roll-off don't compromise integration								176
R	SonicLink Message (Lilac)	60	Some dryness can affect transient sounds, though tone is generally good, especially in the bass								188
	SonicLink SG Voices	95	Bass reach is splendid, though there's some coloration: scores highly for emotional impact								224
	SonicLink Violet	95	Better bass than treble — a little dry in the upper octaves								200
R	Straight Wire Chorus	40	A very confident cable with good bass, though perhaps a shade of treble loss								176
R	Straight Wire Sonata	80	Tonal balance favours lower frequencies but despite this it's a very listenable cable								188
	Straight Wire Encore II	100	Slightly variable bass performance is a weakness in this otherwise capable cable								200
BB	Supra EFF-1SL	80	Excellent sound in all areas — nothing to criticise								188
R	Tara Labs Prism 22	64	Mild tendency to plumminess offsets some hardness in complex music with mixed results								188
	Tara Labs Prism 55-i	195	Good with laid-back music, but seems lazy with more exciting material								200
BB	TCI Viper	55	Fine performance in all areas: just the smallest hint of sibilance. Very good value								200
BB	van den Hul The Bay C5	39	Terrific detail, nice balance — a great cable								224
BB	van den Hul PB5	50	A highly neutral cable with fine dynamic and rhythmic performance too — excellent								188
R	van den Hul D102 MkIII HB	80	A fine cable, but the competition has crept up and it no longer leads the pack								200
R	Vivanco Prowire SHQ	30	Good performance all round with just a hint of bass congestion — very good value								224

# TRIANGLE

## Loudspeakers that love music

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**DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS (PRICES PER TERMINATED METRE PAIR)**

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound		●		●	●		E	207
	Chord OptiLink	40	Beautifully made, but performance is practically indistinguishable from other, cheaper, Toslink leads							O	207
	Ixos 1051-100	39.95	Plenty of bass, and detail seems good, but there's a loss of involvement		●		●	●		E	207
BB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced		●		●	●		E	207
R	Ross OP004	19.99	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value							O	207
	SonicLink Digital Optical	30	Possibly slightly more detailed than other opticals, but still no match for a decent electrical digital link							O	207
	Straight Wire Info-Link	300	A good cable, but bass seems a little light and detail suffers a little at climaxes		●		●		●	E	207
R	van den Hul Optocoupler	49.95	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types							O	207

**LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (PRICES PER METRE LENGTH)**

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIG CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	ALR Jordan QMM	5	Generally neutral, if sometimes bass-shy, but not very communicative	●		●			●		183
R	Audio Note AN-B	16.50	Well suited to valve systems, elastic bass, methodical but unintrusive and musical	●		●		●			133
R	Audio Note AN-L	29.50	Fruity bass and expressive vocal rendition was appreciated by the panel, which was happy to accept its foibles	●		●		●	●		133
R	Audioquest Slate	15	Capable across the board, with just the smallest degree of dryness, but very listenable	●			●	●			203
R	Bandridge LC7409	4	Detailed and up-beat cable. A bit too steely for classical strings	●		●		●			157
R	Cable Talk Talk 3.1	2.25	Quite well-balanced but tends to lose bass lines in complex music	●				●	●		168
	Cable Talk Talk 4.1	4.25	Smooth and cultured sound that lacks fine detail and is a bit too restrained	●		●		●			157
	Cable Talk Flat 2	5	Rather unexciting sound, with variable bass and dry voices	●		●		●			203
	Cable Talk Concert 2.1	8	Can make stereo images recede, and favours the upper bass	●		●		●			192
	DNM LSC350	6.95	Majors on midband and lower treble lucidity at the expense of bass and extreme treble extension	●			●	●			168
R	Chord Company Odyssey	17	Relatively vice-free cable with good detail throughout the range and generally neutral bass	●		●		●			192
	Chord Company Rumour 2	10	Performance is listenable enough but fails to excel in any area	●		●		●			203
BB	DNM LSCB500	12	High impedance can influence the treble response, but this was a winner on sound per pound. Bi-wire	●			●	●			133
	Ecosse Reference CS-2.15	5.75	Stereo and rhythm are good, but persistent dryness detracts significantly	●			●	●			215
R	Electrofluidics Monolith 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best cables available all round	●			●	●			203
	Gale XL189	1	Slightly bright and not too subtle, but a perfectly acceptable cable for any starter system	●		●		●			168
BB	Gale XL315	2	A little lacking in detail but plenty of life and excellent value	●		●		●			157
R	Gale XL160-2	2.50	Rhythmic and bouncy-sounding bi-wire cable. Can be slightly manipulative	●		●		●			157
R	Goertz M2	32	Remarkably detailed, smooth, neutral and with excellent bass; check amplifier compatibility	●			●	●			168
BB	Ixos Gamma 6003	2.99	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price, strong and consistent	●		●		●			203
	Ixos Gamma 6006	5	Bass is better than treble, which can become spitty and sibilant – though only slightly	●		●		●			192
BB	Kimber 4PR	4.90	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●	●		●				192
R	Kimber 4V5	8.50	A good mix of virtues including particularly fine bass	●		●		●			183
R	Kimber 4TC	18.80	A well-balanced cable with good performance in all areas	●		●		●			168
BB	Kimber 8TC	348	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●		●			203
	Linn K20	4	Seems to work best with lively, unobtrusive music – can be dry and edgy	●		●		●			183
	Monster Cable Z1	12.50	Slightly bass-rich balance, and could do with a bit more detail	●		●		●			215
	Nordost Flatline Gold II	9.50	Exciting sound but a bit too 'in-yr-face', and bass is not always even	●			●	●			192
	Ortofon SPK100	3	Grey-sounding — strips instruments of their natural richness and resonance. A bit bass-shy, too	●		●		●			133
R	Ortofon SPK200	4.99	Good strong bass and fair detail, only slightly marred by a little dryness	●		●		●			183
R	Ortofon SPK300	8	Tremendously open and atmospheric, with robust, full-blooded bass – if slightly bright at times	●		●		●			133
	Precious Metals SL102	10	Unusual construction gives rather strained sound, only really cheering up with simple musical textures	●		●		●			183
	Profigold Silverflex LC8258	4	A pretty-looking cable that does little to offend but is let down by some congestion	●		●		●			203
	Prowire Out of Sight	1.99	Special-purpose cable for laying under carpets etc. Fair sound across the board	●			●	●			203
	Puresonic 7845	1.95	Big, weighty sound – but too messy and bloated for its own good	●		●		●			183
	Puresonic 7891	2.85	Chunky cable design; shame about the sound quality	●		●		●			157



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## LOUDSPEAKER CABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	CABLE TYPE						ISSUE NUMBER	
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER		DIG CABLE TYPE
	QED Qudos	2.25	Despite high-tech design and excellent Air-Loc plugs, its music-making failed to gel								157
BB	QED Qudos Silver	5	A few minor flaws but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●		●			192
	QED Profile 4x4	9	Good midrange and treble balance, but bass is rather slack and detail not outstanding								168
R	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid-back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●		●		●			215
	QED Genesis Silver Spiral	30	Commendable bass, with a little dryness and mildly compromised imaging: good, but not the best at its price	●		●		●			203
	SonicLink S300	18	Happiest with simple music; tends to smudge detail in complex pieces	●		●		●			168
R	SonicLink AST50	1.95	It may look like bell-wire, but AST50 sounds detailed, ordered and balanced			●		●			157
R	SonicLink AST75	2.95	Unusual materials and rather unusual performance too, strong on excitement and with plenty of bass	●		●		●			203
R	SonicLink AST150	3.95	Slightly plummy bass and a useful way of holding musical strands together			●		●			157
	SonicLink AST200x2	5.95	At its best with exciting music, this cable seems shy of subtler details	●		●		●			192
BB	SonicLink Rebel	7.50	Plenty of bass, but without sacrificing upper frequency clarity or dynamics			●		●			215
	Straight Wire Duo	3	Not so subtle and lacking some detail, but sound is consistent with level and musical style	●		●		●			203
	Straight Wire Rhythm	6	Its major flaw seems to be woolly and indistinct bass, which pervades most types of music	●		●		●			192
BB	Straight Wire Quartet	8	A good all-rounder with full tone, clear detail and natural ambience	●		●		●			183
	Supra Classic 6.0	4.95	It's all there, but a persistent lack of detail seriously mars the view	●		●		●			215
R	Supra Ply 3.4	6.95	Clean sound which stays together well at high levels, with full bass – perhaps a touch of treble restriction	●		●		●			183
R	Supra Ply 3.4/5	7.95	Good in all areas with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●		●			203
R	Tara Labs Klara	2.95	A good budget cable with an even spread of virtues – and very minor vices – across the board	●		●		●			183
R	Tara Labs Prism Nexa	9.95	Slight tonal softness affects both bass and treble, but the overall sound is very listenable	●		●		●			215
	Tara Labs RSC Prime 500	36	More suited to melodious music than anything with bite and drive, with only moderate detail	●		●		●			203
	TCI Python	7.99	No single major sin, but detail is not outstanding and rhythm isn't always completely solid	●		●		●			203
R	Townshend Isolda	50	Superb sound all round, and amplifier compatibility enhanced by included stabilising inductor	●		●		●			203
R	van den Hul The Snowline	5.49	A hint of high-end civilisation with a few rough edges and a slightly warm balance	●		●		●			215
	van den Hul Royal Jade	10.99	Lots of technology, but sound suffers from dryness and woolly bass	●		●		●			203
	XLO Pro 600	16.50	Decent bass and good treble, but sounds confused with densely-scored music	●		●		●			215

## MAINS CABLES AND CONDITIONERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	CABLE TYPE						ISSUE NUMBER	
				SYMMETRICAL	COAXIAL	STRANDED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER		DIG CABLE TYPE
R	Audiolinx Blue Max	100	Expensive, but good value considering the improvement offered						●	PLT	218
	Audio Note AN-MP	99	A noticeable improvement on standard mains cable, but not as great as others						●	●	218
	Audiosource bbc	48	Very good value, extremely sharp detailing – maybe too sharp						●	●	218
BB	Audusa Eupen CSA	48	Reasonable cost, outstanding performance and a strong recommendation						●	●	218
	Clearaudio Accurate Power Gen	1,090	Compact and beautifully finished unit that offers positive sonic benefits that justify the price								206
	GTA PHY-HP board	299	Oozing style and quality, the board generates an extremely natural and truthful sound								206
R	LAT AC-2	99	Excellent clarity, music sounds clean and easy to follow – enthusiastic recommendation			●		●			218
R	Lynwood Electronics Mega Power	295	Reasonable price model that improves focus while producing a sweet, tight and clean bass								206
	Maplin Bowthorpe ASC 431	50	Excellent mains purifying abilities – including other equipment used elsewhere in the house (Maplin code BJ84F)						●		218
	Olson Sound Fantastic	80	Reasonable price, superior build quality – all in all, a bit of a bargain						●		218
R	PS Audio Power Plant	1,200	Power Plant improves the cleanness and separation of individual voices and instruments, giving an impressive 3-D quality								206
R	Russ Andrews Kimber Power Kord	50	Impressively detailed and crisp, choice of connectors can make even more difference						●	●	218
BB	Russ Andrews Kimber Power Block	350	Improved version that elevates music to a cleaner and more three-dimensional experience with greater stereo imagery						●	●	206
	Russ Andrews The Purifier	250	More ambitious version of the Silencer that gives a cleaner, quieter background, allowing more low level detail								206
BB	Russ Andrews Silencer	40	A cost effect solution to noise-free mains supply that reduces 'hash' without losing brilliance and immediacy								206
	SonicLink SG Power	80	Bright, open and detailed with sweet and natural treble frequencies						●	●	218
	SonicLink S-Gold mains	225	Delivers a clean incisive sound with excellent detail, clarity and with no increase in noise							PLT	206
R	Synergistic Res. Master Coupler	238	Absolutely outstanding performance, but extremely expensive						●	●	218
R	Trichord Research Powerblock500	300	Isolation transformer that bolsters clarity, openness and gives an increased refinement making for a purer and natural sound								206

# CASSETTE DECKS

## SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							ISSUE NUMBER	
				DOLBY C	DOLBY S	DOLBY HX PRO	3-HEAD	TWIN DECK	AUTO REVERSE	AUTO CALIBRATION		ADJUSTABLE BIAS
BB	JVC TD-R472	200	Excellent auto-reverse deck which doesn't suffer the usual disadvantages and is very sharply priced			●					●	158
R	Kenwood KX-W6080	200	Modestly decent-sounding twin deck, with some transport instability and ragged bass	●		●		●	●		●	171
	Marantz SD455	170	Works well as a single deck, especially on replay, but dubbing at high/low speed compromises sound	●		●		●	●			184
	NAD 613	230	Rough and ready, but enjoyable sound, though marred by mechanical motor noise			●					●	158
	NAD 616	300	Twin deck with basic features. No Dolby setting memory, transport is too unstable for audiophile use			●		●	●			171
	Nakamichi DR-10	800	An ergonomic oddity, but one of the last of the great cassette decks. Worth considering against MD	●		●					●	195
R	Onkyo K-611	460	Cute drawer-loading mini-size component with three heads and dual capstan transport			●					●	146
R	Pioneer CT-S550S	250	Great features, good with cheap low bias tapes, but slightly synthetic sound quality	●	●	●		●	●			164
	Pioneer CT-W806DR	300	Had it not been for the iffy transport quality, this sophisticated twin would have been Recommended	●	●	●		●	●			171
	Teac V-1050	180	One of the cheapest three-head machines around, but it shows in very 'thick' sound	●	●	●		●	●			184
BB	Technics RS-AZ6	200	For those who can't afford the RS-AZ7; clarity over the widest bandwidth thanks to AZ thin-film head	●	●	●					●	164
BB	Technics RS-AZ7	270	Thin-film head gives a solid, almost CD-like bass and midrange. A clear advance in state-of-the-art	●	●	●					●	158
R	Yamaha KX-580SE	250	Subtle, engaging and transparent deck, with a lightweight tonality, but stability and strong detail	●	●	●					●	171



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# CD PLAYERS



## ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS

### SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUT	ASSEMBY ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Advantage CD15</b>	3,995	A CD player of some stature – what it lacks in dynamics it makes up for in subtlety and flow	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	193
	<b>Alchemist Kraken</b>	1,249	Distinctive looking player likely to suit a Alchemist system, but will result in variable results elsewhere	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	190
R	<b>Alchemist Nexus APD32A</b>	597	Refined treble, constrained yet capable bass and attractive all-round presentation	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	169
	<b>Anthem CD1</b>	1,595	Unusual combination of high-end player, complete with HDCD, and changer. Good, but noisy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	178
BB	<b>Arcam Alpha 7SE</b>	300	Sharper, clearer Alpha 7 SE, and more affordable than before	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
	<b>Arcam CD72</b>	400	Easy going, slightly soft-centred reworking of Alpha 7 in new, sleeker DIVA clothing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	<b>Arcam Alpha MCD</b>	450	Excellent bass and natural midband, but just a touch of treble dryness, from this very listenable changer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	178
BB	<b>Arcam Alpha 8SE</b>	600	Excellent (and very reasonably priced) HDCD-compatible player is a strong all-rounder	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
R	<b>Arcam Alpha 9</b>	800	Refined, articulate player which employs new DAC technology to great effect	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
R	<b>Arcam CD92</b>	850	High resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	<b>Arcam FMJ CD23</b>	1,100	World class presentation allied with innovative technology to deliver an engaging standard of music making	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	206
	<b>Audio Analogue Paganini</b>	750	Basically good, but sometimes heavy-handed player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
	<b>Audio Note AN-CD1</b>	600	Easy on the ear, and for a valve player, easy on the pocket, but a bit Radio 2-flavoured	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
	<b>Audio Note AN-CD2</b>	999	High output impedance makes performance unduly system-fussy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	195
	<b>AVI S2000MC2</b>	899	A chip off the old block. This model's in-fer-face balance obstructs an otherwise finely detailed sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
R	<b>AVI S2000MC Reference</b>	1,399	Lean, dry, high resolution player, built to outlast most of us. A fine performer in a sympathetic system	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	169
	<b>Balanced Audio Tech VK-D5</b>	3,995	A valve-infused player with a big and engaging sound. Lacks a little subtlety	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
	<b>Cambridge Audio D1 0</b>	120	Hard, clanky and coloured sounding, and with suspect control logic	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
BB	<b>Cambridge Audio D500</b>	200	Clean and highly articulate player wears well in extended use	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
R	<b>Cambridge Audio D500 SE</b>	200	A really lively sounding player with good detail but just a hint of dryness	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
R	<b>Copland CDA 266</b>	1,199	Simple yet elegant design is unexpectedly sophisticated under the skin, and effective in execution	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
	<b>Copland CDA 289</b>	1,898	Beautifully built and musically enjoyable. Lacks some precision, but still among the best below £2,000	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
R	<b>Cymbol CDP12</b>	1,299	Clean, detailed and airy HDCD-equipped player with minimalist trappings	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
R	<b>Cyrus dAD1.5</b>	395	Improved dAD 1 variant has improved digital filter for a more natural, easy on the ear quality	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
R	<b>Cyrus CD7</b>	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	<b>Cyrus dAD3 Q24</b>	900	Bold, lean and lively player demands sympathetic system matching	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
R	<b>Denon DCD-435</b>	130	Good low cost player, and a step up from the DCD-425, its predecessor	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
R	<b>Denon DCD-655</b>	180	Fine, slightly soft-edged budget player, and a good ameliorative for aggressive, edgy systems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
R	<b>Denon DCD-835</b>	230	Refined sound with terrific bass extension. Some slight coloration	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
	<b>Denon DCD-1550AR</b>	350	Disappointing bland and ploddy sound from an immaculately constructed, high-tech player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	179
	<b>Densen B-400</b>	1,280	Bold, purposeful sound, but lacks subtlety, and has some ergonomic flaws	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	<b>EZO Fog Stage 3</b>	1,170	Curious player is difficult to drive, and has sound quality that both enchants and sometimes confounds	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	<b>Kenwood DVF-3030</b>	180	Solid CD player with straightforward features	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
BB	<b>Kenwood DP-4090</b>	250	Focuses a clear, wide aperture lens on the music — and has CD Text too	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	172
	<b>Kenwood DVF-R9030</b>	800	Kenwood's first DVD-A player suffers from a mild compression of dynamics resulting in a polite yet matter of fact sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	206
R	<b>Linn Genki</b>	995	Explicit, rather bright sounding player with strong multi-room appeal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
	<b>Marantz CD5000</b>	150	Well equipped budget player sounds thin and rough at times	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
	<b>Marantz CC3000</b>	150	Ragged sounding multidisc player, but it is cheap and well-equipped	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
BB	<b>Marantz CD6000</b>	250	Great package with all mod cons, and eminently listenable too	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
BB	<b>Marantz CD6000 OSE LE</b>	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context — a real bargain	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
BB	<b>Marantz CD6000 KI Signature</b>	500	Excellent all rounder, a well-appointed, good-value package	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
R	<b>Marantz CD-17 MkII</b>	800	Sophisticated player with a short but attractive feature set, and a new-found bounce in its step	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	206
R	<b>Marantz CD-17KI Sig</b>	1,100	Minor QC problems aside, this is a superbly turned-out machine, but ultimately a little bland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
R	<b>Marantz CD-7</b>	3,500	A superbly designed CD player, both inside and out. Precise and dramatic in equal measure	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	194
	<b>Marantz SA1251</b>	3,500	Highly refined and beautifully built multichannel SA & DVD-V player that doesn't quite match Sony's best	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	223
EC	<b>Marantz SA-1</b>	5,000	The brand's first SACD player is a stunning machine that's equally as strong with conventional CD	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	208
	<b>Meracus Tanto</b>	1,295	Believable tonal colours and textures, refinement takes preference over dynamics — but it's not cheap	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	169
BB	<b>Meridian 506</b>	1,100	Revised 506 includes MSR remote and a new D/A chip, which makes it livelier and more detailed	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	176
	<b>Meridian 588</b>	2,100	Not the most immediately striking CD player, but its neutrality and timing prove beguiling	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	225
	<b>Monrio Asty</b>	695	Well built player has solid, propulsive sound quality that deteriorates towards HF	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	<b>Musical Fidelity X-RAY</b>	799	Brilliantly packaged and clean but slightly antiseptic sounding player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
BB	<b>Musical Fidelity A3 CD</b>	800	Excellent player has few faults apart from a slight loss of EHF detail	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	<b>Myryad T-10</b>	400	Rather ordinary player fails to shine with good music recordings	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
	<b>Myryad T-20</b>	600	Matter of fact styling and sound quality, a tad bright for some systems	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	195
	<b>Myryad MCD 600</b>	1,299	Abundance of detail and resolution from this 'Super DAC' CD player	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
R	<b>NAD C520</b>	170	Significantly improved entry level NAD is smooth and dynamic, if slightly dull	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	202
	<b>NAD C521</b>	200	Good timing and excitement, but not good at holding the listener's attention	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	217
	<b>NAD 523</b>	250	Lacklustre musical presentation was disappointing on test, so was the absence of a digital output	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
	<b>NAD C540</b>	330	Not cheap, and disc handling is pedestrian at best, but the C540 is smooth & elegant with just a hint of aggression	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
R	<b>NAD Silverline S500</b>	1,100	It sounds as good as it looks, which is notably refined and easy on the ear	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	195
R	<b>Naim Audio CD5</b>	1,125	Recommended subject to audition, a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212
EC	<b>Naim NACDS11/XPS</b>	5,625	Brings you the Naim sound, but for once doesn't have to rely on Naim ancillaries to get the results	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
R	<b>Nakamichi MB-10</b>	400	Jewel of a multi-disc player, with crisp sound and superb fuss-free compact packaging	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	204
R	<b>Onkyo DX-7222</b>	150	Competitive following recent price cut, and on the whole a strong performer musically	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	<b>Onkyo DX-7511</b>	300	Earthbound mid-price CD player fails to excite	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	207
	<b>Parasound C/DP-1000</b>	499	Comes on like a high end player, but ultimately sounds a bit weak and soft-centred	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	184
	<b>Philips CD751</b>	150	Inconsistent and occasionally opaque and scrawny sounding cheapie	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	172
BB	<b>Philips SACD-1000</b>	1,300	Not quite a universal disc player, but it does SACD multi-channel, DVD-Video and CD to a universally high standard	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	220
	<b>Pioneer PD-5507</b>	200	Low cost Legato Link implementation sounds gentle but slightly muddled	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	191
	<b>Primare D20</b>	799	Well presented player doesn't quite cut the mustard, though it performs promisingly	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	188
	<b>Revox Exception E426</b>	2,250	Very stylish with a light, agile sound that extends superbly and has fine timing	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	182
	<b>Roksan Kandy</b>	475	Slightly old-fashioned sound quality player available in various colour schemes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	200
	<b>Roksan Caspian</b>	895	Improved Caspian (retested for 2001) is still a bold, dynamic player, but rather more subtle and expressive	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	212



ISSUE NUMBER  
SACD COMPATIBILITY  
MULTI-DISC  
VARIABLE OUTPUT  
HEADPHONE SOCKET  
BAL ANALOGUE OUT  
ST OPT DIG OUT  
OPT DIG OUT  
AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT  
ELEC DIG OUTPUT

ONE-BOX CD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Rotel RCD-951</b>	300	Disappointing chopped-down RCD-971 – buy the original	●									191
BB	<b>Rotel RCD-971</b>	450	Odd disc handling logic, but bold, detailed and refined sound make this a must	●									184
R	<b>Rotel RCD-991</b>	825	Strong midrange player with switchable dither levels to provide some system tweaking ability	●	●								212
	<b>Sherwood CD1</b>	1,100	A very neutral, even-handed sounding player with a rather flat, lifeless sound. Beautiful construction	●		●							163
	<b>Sharp DX-SX1</b>	2,700	Stylish player with a slightly forward but extremely nimble sound. Connects to matching digital amp via dedicated umbilical	●		●			●	●	●		211
R	<b>Sony CDP-XE330</b>	100	Unrefined, but lively, detailed and highly affordable	●		●				●			202
	<b>Sony CDP-XE530</b>	140	Well-equipped, but raw, scrappy sounding player lacks depth and weight	●		●			●	●			200
EC	<b>Sony CDP-XB930E</b>	300	Yet another first rate UK optimised player with all the bells and whistles	●		●							195
R	<b>Sony DVP-NS700V</b>	400	Outrageously good value for money DVD-VISA player, though SACD replay quality trails the audio-only Sony SCD-XB770ES	●		●						●	220
BB	<b>Sony SCD-XB770UK</b>	400	Expressive and expansive player in the best SACD tradition, but CD replay is disappointingly lacklustre	●		●							220
EC	<b>Sony SCD-333ES</b>	1,200	Entry-level high-end multichannel SA player is excellent with both CD and the new format, but particularly impressive in surround	●		●							224
BB	<b>Sony SCD-555ES</b>	1,200	Fabulously built with superb sound using both CD and Super Audio software, you'll be hard pressed to find a better CD player at the price	●		●							213
EC	<b>Sony SCD-XA777ES</b>	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch	●		●							223
EC	<b>Sony SCD-1</b>	3,500	The first SACD player sounds fabulous but it's a slow operator and doesn't support multichannel	●		●			●				194
	<b>T+A CD1210R</b>	1,185	Intriguing player with rather pushy basic sound, but has switchable digital filters	●		●							188
	<b>Talk Electronics Thunder 1</b>	550	Entry level upgradeable Talk Electronics player sounds slightly muted	●									200
	<b>Talk Electronics Thunder 2</b>	699	Fine player, slightly lacking in dynamics, but readily, if expensively upgradeable in various ways	●									191
R	<b>Talk Electronics Thunder 3</b>	1,000	Clean, fast, and the availability of a complete upgrade path makes this a good long term proposition	●									195
R	<b>TAG McLaren CD20R</b>	1,249	Dry and unatmospheric, but plenty of presence – recommended with caution	●									188
	<b>Teac VRDS-9</b>	700	Well-presented. This Teac is crisp, yet shallow, and inconsistent in sound quality and partnering skills	●		●				●			176
	<b>Teac VRDS-25x</b>	1,000	Excellent, individualistic player with bold, colourful sound, but test sample had iffy CD-R compatibility	●		●			●	●			195
	<b>Technics SL-PG390</b>	90	It's very cheap. Very, very cheap	●		●							202
	<b>Technics SL-P57</b>	200	Strong, but ultimately rather opaque and hard-sounding, high tech CD player	●		●			●				207
R	<b>Technics SL-MC7</b>	300	Maximum storage capacity for a minimum price, and presentable sound too (multidisc)	●		●				●	●		204
	<b>Thule Spirit CD100</b>	600	Definitely a try before you buy machine, but the bass and mid are excellent	●									188
	<b>Trichord Genesis</b>	549	Breathed-on Pioneer is warm and mellifluous, but ultimately lacks drive and authority	●					●	●			169
	<b>Trichord Revelation</b>	799	Well-ordered and clean sound that may be a little too refined for some, images well	●					●				166
	<b>Tube Technology Fusion MkII</b>	1,350	Improvements over the original model but still remains too inconsistent for its own good	●		●		●					206
	<b>Tube Technology Fulcrum</b>	2,800	An imaginative two-box player with a smooth sound that lacks some lustre	●		●							194
	<b>Yamaha CDX-596</b>	230	Well-priced and attractive-sounding, this player can read CD-RW	●					●	●			207
	<b>Yamaha CDX-496</b>	180	A rather splashy and approximate sound, further hampered by mechanical noise	●					●	●			217
	<b>Yamaha CD-X993</b>	400	A bit of a lush, though the sound is singularly free of grain, and equipment levels are strong	●					●	●			184
	<b>YBA Spécial</b>	695	There is nothing here to justify the pricing or the high-end parentage. Avoid	●									195

CD TRANSPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	<b>Audio Note CDT Zero</b>	550	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with DAC1)	●	●								212
	<b>Linn Karik</b>	1,850	Based on early Linn transport, the Karik is dry but very positive, detailed and engrossing	●		●							144
	<b>Roksan Attezza ATT-DP3</b>	1,295	Not the most detailed or refined but capable of sounding exciting with the right material	●		●							162
	<b>Theta Carmen</b>	3,299	A well equipped and extremely upgradeable CD/DVD transport. Right now, the finest of its type	●									203
	<b>Theta Data Basic II</b>	2,397	Uses a Philips CDM9 Pro mechanism and works a treat with more lively DACs	●									130
	<b>Thorens TCD2000</b>	999	Lively presentation not helped by rather loose bass and splashy treble. (Tested with TDA 2000 DAC)	●		●							162
R	<b>Trichord Digital Turntable</b>	699	Very detailed, precise, controlled yet involving; a first-rank performer	●		●							162

DACS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Alchemist TS-D-1</b>	300	24/96-equipped DAC sounds tidy but a little shut-in with both 16-bit CDs and 24-bit/96kHz DVDs	●									187
	<b>Audio Note DAC Zero</b>	369	Neat valve-equipped DAC sounds smooth and fluid in the right system. (Tested with CDT Zero transport)	●									191
R	<b>Audio Note DAC Zero1x</b>	750	Although ominously esoteric on paper, it's smooth, open and easy on the ear in practice (Tested with CDT Zero)	●									212
	<b>Audio Note DAC 5</b>	18,500	Astonishingly natural and realistic in the right system, the only problem being the extravagant price	●									203
	<b>Chord DAC 64</b>	1,900	Beautifully encased converter with variable input buffering but inconvenient input socketry and a sound that doesn't quite match the looks	●					●				225
EC	<b>dCS Delius</b>	5,000	State-of-the-art resolution with considerably greater flexibility than anything else, hard to beat	●	●				●	●			207
	<b>dCS Purcell</b>	3,500	The first upsampler on the market adds significant depth and increased bass resolve with a suitable DAC	●	●								207

# DVD PLAYERS



## SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AES/EBU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	SACD COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
R	<b>Arcam DiVA DV88</b>	1,000	A DVD-Video player built with non-obsolescence in mind, but picture quality exceeds musical quality as a CD player	●		●							213
	<b>Arcam FMJ DV27</b>	1,600	Spirited CD performance and a great DVD-V upgrade path	●		●							219
BB	<b>Denon DVD-1000</b>	300	Fine, stripped down player concentrates on the essentials, and scores a direct hit	●		●							216
R	<b>Denon DVD-1500</b>	400	Colourful and engaging (if lightweight) sound, with excellent picture quality	●		●				●			207
BB	<b>Denon DVD-2800</b>	750	First-rate all-rounder, this is a gimmick-free design that is well-built and offers good CD and DVD sound quality and finely resolved pictures	●		●							221
R	<b>Denon DVD-3300</b>	1,000	Sometimes slightly inconsistent and strident sounding in all modes of use, but it pulls a little more off disc too	●		●						●	213
R	<b>Encore DV-450</b>	200	Superb value for money, though mainly of interest to the videophile on a shoestring	●		●				●			207
	<b>Harman/Kardon DVD10</b>	299	Bulky DVD-Video player with unexciting picture quality, and promising but ultimately unexceptional CD replay performance	●		●							221
	<b>Hitachi DVP-705</b>	380	Mild mannered player works best with Radio 2 music, and gives clean, well-endowed picture quality to match, along with sharp pricing	●	●	●							216
	<b>Integra research RD-V1</b>	2,700	Refined in use and on audition, but a lack of resolving power and an unbalanced feature set militate against this model	●		●							220



DVD PLAYERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	AS/RS/BU ELEC DIG OUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	ST OPT DIG OUT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	MULTI-DISC	DVD-A COMPATIBILITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	JVC XV-542	250	Unprepossessing DVD-V player fails to excite with DVD material, or as a surrogate CD player	●	●								221
R	JVC XV-SA72SL	350	Fantastic value for money from a player which makes good music with DVD-Audio and CD alike	●	●							●	220
	JVC XV-D723GD	500	Convincing DVD-Audio player that is ultimately let down by poor CD performance	●	●	●	●						206
	Kenwood DVF-R9030	899	The first multi-disc DVD-Audio player is physically large and ergonomically obstructive, but it is a smooth, slick operator	●	●				●			●	213
	Marantz DV4100	399	The DV4100 is a DVD-Video player for videophiles, but don't put the CD player out to pasture just yet	●	●								221
EC	Meridian DVS96	2,350	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player	●	●								218
	NAD T-550	500	Soft-centred but likeable player in the classic NAD mould	●	●								202
	Nakamichi DVD-10s	600	Well engineered, but lacklustre specifications, moderate performance – and overpriced	●	●								216
	Onkyo DV-5939	1,999	Superb build, plenty of features, but more convincing as a video player than an audio one	●	●							●	220
	Panasonic DVD-RV41	300	Well presented DVD-Video player has an attractive, but far from high resolution sound, and picture quality also lacks definition	●	●								221
	Panasonic DVD-RA71	449	Well priced, but rather slack sounding with DVD-A material, but CD sounds OK, and DVD-V is excellent	●	●							●	220
	Panasonic DVD-A360E	580	Powerful equipment, and unthrottled digital output notwithstanding, sound quality is modest at best	●	●								198
	Panasonic DVD-A7EB	699	Chopped down Technics DVD-A10 retains most of the flagship's headline features with well balanced, but less refined and less articulate sound	●	●							●	213
R	Philips DVD-712	200	Rough and ready looking DVD-Video player turns out to be well equipped, and an unexpectedly vital performer on screen and via loudspeakers	●	●								221
R	Philips DVD957	400	Slightly ill-disciplined, but a bold, enthusiastic player which engages even if it doesn't always convince	●	●								216
	Philips DVD960	530	DVD-V player has strong sound quality and good, though slightly washed out, pictures	●	●								207
R	Pioneer DV-545	330	Stylish and well-equipped slimline DVD-Video player is an extremely attractive all rounder	●	●								221
BB	Pioneer DV-636D	400	Bold, dynamic and detailed sounding player, with slightly simplified video feature set, sharper pricing and A1 pictures to match	●	●								216
	Pioneer DV-646A	530	One of the first DVD-RW compatible DVD-Audio players is informative but not the sweetest sounding machine around	●	●							●	220
R	Pioneer DV-939A	1,200	Fine player with near state of the art video performance and attractive, easy on the ear music making, from CD and DVD-Audio alike	●	●				●				213
	Primare V10	700	Beautifully presented DVD-video player gives superb picture quality and so-so CD replay	●	●								221
R	Primare V20	1,000	Elegant and well built DVD performer that possesses a strong picture quality and decent CD player	●	●								206
	Rotel RDV-995	700	Bold, sometimes aggressive sounding player needs RGB output to bring picture quality up to scratch	●	●								216
	Sanyo DVD1500	219	Compact, low cost player is a quite strong video performer, but lacks the wherewithal to succeed as a surrogate CD player	●	●				●				216
BB	Sony DVP-NS400D	300	Midrange DVD-Video player has some interesting features that enhance picture quality and usability	●	●								221
	Sony Art Couture DVP-S435	350	Looks to die for and decent on-screen results, but sound is flat and grey	●	●								216
	Sony DVP-CX850D	600	Lacklustre sound quality is a disappointment, but the price is appealing for a 200-disc DVD player	●	●							●	204
	Sony DVD-S9000ES	1,200	First DVD machine to play SACD has a 'Lexus' sound style that never really gets its hands dirty	●	●								210
	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	A tour-de-force of engineering, albeit with matching price tag. But picture quality is second to none	●	●								212
	T+A DVD 1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-audio upgrade path	●	●								213
	Technics DVD-A10	899	Well built, early generation DVD-A player with full on-board DVD-Video decoding and a more than workmanlike sound	●	●							●	213
	Thompson DTH-4500	229	DVD-V player comes with an excellent multi-component remote control, but fails to deliver the goods, with bland sound to match the iffy visuals	●	●								221
	Theta DaViD	4,650	A top-notch CD transport, that also plays DVD-Video discs well. Pricey for a DVD transport, but worth it	●	●	●	●						191
	Toshiba SD500E	599	OK DVD-Video player, but lacklustre with music, especially when reproducing high resolution DVD-Audio material	●	●							●	213
	Toshiba SD9000	800	Costly, high tech player with stunning pictures and crisp, slightly lightweight sound	●	●								198
BB	Toshiba SD900E	1,299	Top class DVD-Audio player and also a superb DVD-Video player; in this context pricing is competitive	●	●								213
	T+A DVD-1210R	1,699	Ergonomically a mess, but detailed, dynamic and emphatic, though there is no guarantee of a DVD-Audio upgrade path	●	●								213

DIGITAL RECORDERS



CD RECORDERS (CD-R/RW), MINIDISC (MD), HARD DISC (HD)

SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DECKS	FORMAT	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Audio ReQuest ARQ1	568	Full size separate containing a CD player and hard disc recorder. Sign of things to come?	2	CD/HD		●	223
	Imerge M1000	3,300+	One-box hard disc solution for multi-room installations. Stores 100s of CDs with web-interface but sound is uninspiring. Single-room \$1000 also available	2	CD/HD		●	223
	JVC XM-448	220	A hidden keyboard is a great idea, but musically it sounds rather cool and strident	1	MD	●		205
	Kenwood DMF-5020	250	it may be high-tech but nothing conceals the caricatured sound	1	MD	●	●	205
R	Kenwood DMF-9020	500	One of the best MD decks yet for sound quality, and the first to make titling a practical proposition	1	MD	●	●	191
	Onkyo MD-121	450	Mini-sized deck that sounds slightly coloured at times, though immediate and lively	1	MD	●		177
R	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped but musically sleep inducing player that receives its Recommendation due to price	1	MD		●	205
BB	Sony MDS-JE770	260	Smartly attired, packed with features and capable of recordings closer in quality to CD-R than MD's detractors might think	1	MD	●	●	223
	Sony MXD-D40	330	One half CD player, the other half MD recorder. Functions well enough but CD playback is weak	2	CD/MD	●	●	223
R	Sony MDS-JA555ES	650	Powerful demonstration of Sony's proficiency, it delivers the best MD can offer	1	MD	●	●	205
	Sony MDS-JA333ES	650	Serious build, serious features, serious sound. Maybe high-end MD isn't such a peculiar idea after all – but would you pay £650?	1	MD	●	●	223
R	Denon CDR-1000	400	Straightforward but attractive single CD-R/RW deck is a respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Denon CDR-1500	449	Ultra high jitter takes the sparkle out of an otherwise attractive dual disc CD-R/RW burner	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR-20	499	High jitter player makes quite good recordings that sound less good when played back internally especially when using the internal record capable transport	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	Harman/Kardon CDR 30	590	Well built copier capable of good recordings but playback quality is indistinct and the asking price high	2	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
	Hitachi DV-W1E	520	Combination CD-R/RW and DVD player has excellent ergonomics, but tends to sound rather opaque	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
	JVC XL-R5000	450	Flexible, ratty build, and attractive sound, but it's a little expensive compared to other rivals	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	LG ADR-620	350	A powerfully equipped machine with useful multi-room capabilities, but sound quality is rough and ready	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
BB	Marantz DR6000	400	Classy CD-R/RW recorder is also a classy CD player, in contrast to most CD recorders	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Marantz DR-17	1,500	Highly recommended, but with a jitter problem that, resolved, would improve sound quality	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Philips CDR 600	230	Low cost Philips machine makes great recordings but playback is poor and the controls a mite fiddly	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	223
BB	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
R	Philips CDR785	350	Ragged play quality, but a good record performance from this well equipped, well priced CD-R/RW deck	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
BB	Pioneer PDR-609	280	Classy single deck CD-R/RW burner is also a good if characterful player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Pioneer PDR-W739	400	Flexible multi-disc that has everything including respectable sound and pricing	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	TEAC RW-800	350	Capable recording tool, but a little rough and ready as a player	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	205
	Yamaha CDR-D561	449	Twin CD-R/RW burner makes solid, believable discs, but is priced higher than equivalent models from elsewhere	1	CD-R(W)	●	●	218
R	Yamaha CDR-HD1000	£700	CD recorder and hard drive in one – save your music to hard disc, edit then dump to CD-R for MiniDisc style flexibility	2	CD-R(W)/HD	●	●	223a



# HEADPHONES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS									
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUM-AURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	MASS (g)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	3.5mm JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER	
BB	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain							190	32		219
	AKG K100	36	Leather clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price							190	100		205
R	AKG 301	70	Big 'phones with even and detailed sound but lacks sufficient bass weight							230	100		194
	AKG K 240 DF	100	Inoffensive 'phones that are very laid back, if lacking in grunt							240	600		186
R	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	100	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal							250	66		194
R	Audio Technica ATH-M40	120	Incredible detail and honesty from these classically designed studio 'phones							250	60		186
	Beyer DT331	65	Clear and extremely detailed sound with rather thin bass							210	40		194
	Beyer DT431	81	Nice looking 'phones that may not be the best players on the field, but will always give 100 per cent							210	40		186
	Beyer DT531	105	Average performer from an established player. Lacks punch and bite							245	250		205
R	Beyer DT511	106	Superb midband clarity and speed slightly at odds with soft bass. Even so, high tingle factor							200	250		172
BB	Beyer DT831	140	These provide silky, smooth textures in abundance and we're not just talking about the velvet ear pads				1/2			295	250		186
	Grado SR-40	45	Cheap and nasty appearance largely redeemed by cheerful, up-beat sound. Very comfortable							120	32		172
BB	Grado SR-60	79	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste							200	32		194
R	Grado SR-125	150	What these 'phones lack in style they make up for ten-fold in musical quality							200	32		186
R	Grado SR-225	200	Warm, darkly-coloured tonally and ultimately lacking in clarity, but true to the spirit of the music							200	32		163
	Grado SR-325	300	Elegant sound across the frequency spectrum; let down by old fashioned ear-piece design							200	32		205
	JVC HA-G77	40	Too coloured for general recommendation, and lacking detail							260	32		219
	JVC HA-W60	49	Remarkable lack of interference and hiss ameliorates adequate sound of this cordless design							165	I/R		172
R	JVC HA-W200RF	75	Distinct lack of hiss from these FM cordless 'phones ensures that detail and depth are easily heard							280	20,000		186
R	JVC HA-DX3	200	Great headphone with a rich bass, careful midrange and high comfort factor							340	90		205
	Koss TD/80	50	Oodles of bass but with a recessed midband; tiresome on the head with prolonged wearing							250	60		194
	Koss R/200	80	Basic sound is OK, but sensitivity is too low to be useful. Features stereo width control							210	60		219
	Koss R/100	100	Rather cheap looking 'phones that supply good detail but are severely lacking in midrange excitement							215	60		186
	Precide Ergo Model 2	140	Still has much of the spaciousness of the Float from which it is derived, but coarse mid/top							380	100		163
R	Philips HP890	66	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone							330	32		219
	Philips HP910	80	Ergonomically good but suffers from a muffled midrange and overexcited bass							247	32		205
	Sennheiser IS 380	55	As close as you'll get to real hi-fi with infrared phones at this price. Inevitable hiss spoils the illusion							192	I/R		172
	Sennheiser HD570 Symphony	90	A little lightweight in sound, and prone to sibilance – but detailed, and comfortable to wear							210	64		219
R	Sennheiser HD 545	125	Fine all-rounder that takes all styles of music in its stride. Ear-clamping headband							255	150		172
BB	Sennheiser HD 565 Ovation	150	Wide bandwidth design which is refined, expressive and extremely comfortable							255	150		157
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident player with very low colouration and great comfort							270	120		205
	Sennheiser HE 60/HEV70/UK	998	Very nearly a superb electrostatic, with a pure midband, but top end is sibilant and edgy							260	N/A		163
R	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed: comfortable too							250	40		219
	Sony MDR-V700DJ	100	Great looking fold-away 'phones with exceptional build quality. Kickin' bass							300	24		194
	Sony MDR-CD 2000	200	Large pads make for sweaty listening. Pure mid-tones, but weightless bass							300	32		205
	Technics RP-F500	40	Just too bright for general recommendation, though they play along with gusto							225	40		219
BB	Technics RP-F800	50	Comfortable budget model that sounds sublime with great dynamics							160	40		205
	Technics RP-DJ1200	130	Functional design with head-pulping bass and muggy tonal balance. Good job they're sweat-proof							230	32		172
R	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five star quality all the way							295	50		205
BB	Stax Lambda Nova Basic	395	Refined, articulate, yet with real presence – and a notable bargain by electrostatic standards							347	N/A		163
	Vivanco SR322	30	Weak design and uncomfortable, but redeems itself with substantial sound quality							248	32		205
R	Vivanco SR222S	30	Not that subtle, but high fun factor compensates							250	32		219
	Vivanco Cyberwave FMH3000	40	The only cordless 'phone to offer genuine walkabout freedom, but sounds like a cheap FM tuner							210	FM		172
	Vivanco IR5800	50	Consistently musical infrared design. Doesn't reach for sonic heights so hiss can be forgiven				1/2			226	I/R		172
R	Vivanco SR950	80	Cuddly feel and sound make these an enjoyable pair of 'phones							252	32		194
	Vivanco FM7980	80	A fair amount of whine and crackle detracts from 'phones which are otherwise very listenable							280	9,000		186
	Vivanco FM8180	99	Well thought-out features and a better than average sound are, at times, marred by intrusive hiss							280	9,000		186

# LOUDSPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS								
				SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER	
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 309	700	Real wood heavyweight with fine neutrality and dynamic range; could have more brio	21,98,30		90	5	23				224
	ALR Entry 2	250	Metal cone standmount has a generous performance envelope, but sound quality was controversial	20,33,29		90	4	22				201
	ALR Jordan Note 3	1,000	Very substantial, with tuneable ABR for better room matching. Sounds good but could be more neutral	24,5,37,32		89	5	30				211
	ALR Jordan Note 7	2,500	A beguiling Anglo-German collaboration delivers metal-cone precision with fine dynamic range	25,107,32		92	4	25				196
R	AR S20	150	Classic standmount might not have the most dynamic sound around, but it's an honest and effective musical communicator	20,37,28		90	4	28				215
	AR 15	275	Neat and chunky wall/standmount certainly knows how to rock and roll, less convincing on the delicate stuff	22,37,22		90	4	45				201
R	Arcadyis Concept 2	1,199	Solid oak floorstander is a little lazy sounding, but is well balanced and smooth with modest coloration	19,90,26		86	7	25				211
	ATC SCM10	1,000	A compact speaker with good transparency but lightweight bass	18,38,25,5		80	8	65				192
	ATC T16	1,750	Compact active 'home studio monitor' in colourful cast box, with considerable loudness potential	27,45,33		A	A	45				214
	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		84	5	65				219
EC	ATC SCM10A	1,299	Stylish, active power houses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	A	45				221
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,020	350 watts of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,71,6,48		A	A	38				218
	ATC SCM70A SL	10,500	Stylish aluminium casework disguises dynamic grip, tracking and precision that equals the very best	127,40,46		A	A	20				205
R	Audio Note AZ One	449	A fine partner for low power valve amps, it delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29		92	6	30				215



**STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)**

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		92	4	20	●		204
R	Audio Note AN-J/S e	1,675	Retro styling but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,58,5,24,5		90	5	38	●		219
R	Audiovector C2	799	Elegant two-and-a-half-way has a big, full bandwidth sound, but midband seemed a little underdeveloped	19,106,27	●	90	4	20	●		190
R	Audiovector M2	1,399	High-class, smooth and slightly laid-back performer has driving bass. It's upgradable, too	20,102,30	●	89	4	22	●		180
R	AVI NuNeutron	500	A smooth and subtle though pricey sub-miniature, albeit with the inevitable limitations of the breed	14,27,23		86	4	50		●	190
R	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	559	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30		88	7	30		●	211
R	AVI Positron	899	This 'mini-floorstander' is capable of great precision and delicacy, but in a rather small-scale way	17,5,74,24,5	●	85	6	40	●		174
R	B&W 601 S2	200	A smooth and sophisticated standmount combines good drive with fine neutrality	20,5,36,23		89	4	30	●		208
BB	B&W 602 S3	300	Large lively standmount with fine bass and low box colour, comprehensively vindicates a timeless formula	23,49,29		89	3	22	●		224
R	B&W 603 S2	550	Capable of being driven seriously loud, but the cautious balance seems less happy playing at low levels	23,5,87,29	●	91	4	22	●		193
R	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		89	7	30	●		208
R	B&W CM4	900	Beautifully styled trend-setting floorstander has a big but rather dull sound	20,91,29	●	91	3	35	●		219
R	B&W CDM-7NT	1,250	A very classy floorstander, in sound as well as looks, with fine bass drive, authority and overall neutrality	22,95,29	●	90	6	20	●		208
R	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		89	12	28	●		199
R	B&W Nautilus 803	3,500	Classy looking three-way with impressively deep bass, wide dynamic range and a laid-back balance	29,108,42	●	89	3	20	●		210
R	B&W Nautilus 804	2,500	The prettiest Nautilus has tremendous clarity and imaging but lacks the welly of bigger models	24,101,5,24,5	●	89	8	38	●		200
EC	B&W Nautilus 802	6,000	Outstanding example of the high-tech speaker builder's art, needs real power but gives real sound	39,111,55	●	91	8	34	●		183
R	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	●	91	8	34	●		186
R	Blueroom Minipod	£249	Blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17		91	4	50		●	225
R	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	●	94	3	40	●		204
R	Cabasse Farella 400	950	Exciting but very upfront-and-in-her-face sound. High sensitivity, fine build and good dynamic drive	26,92,32	●	92	5	28		●	180
R	Carlsson OA52.2	1,500	Ultra-discreet design integrates cleverly with the listening room. Impressively unboxy, but sounds a bit thin	41,54,37	●	90	8	20		●	195
R	Castle Richmond	250	Tiny real-wood miniature has a lightweight but very coherent sound, a bit in-her-face but plenty of fun	17,33,20		90	5	50	●		201
R	Castle Inversion 15	425	This striking looking standmount is a good all-rounder, commendably free from boxiness	22,42,25		91	4	30		●	193
R	Castle Stirling	730	Handsomely veneered compact floorstander with expressive dynamic vigour, but a little hard and unforgiving too	20,88,24	●	90	6	28		●	224
BB	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	●	89	6	50	●		219
R	Castle Inversion 100	1,975	Large semi-omni design with gorgeous Art Deco styling, sounds open but bass alignment is ill-tuned	26,5,111,45	●	91	8	20	●		195
R	Celestion A Compact	600	Provided the room isn't too large and your tastes not too heavy, this is a charming little number	17,24,21		90	3	45		●	193
BB	Celestion A1	899	Rich, warm and laid-back, but a true quality sound; lovely build	24,41,35		88	6	25	●		164
R	Celestion A2	1,500	Full-scale, big sound from ultra-elegant floorstander. Smooth and slightly laid back presentation	24,93,39	●	89	6	22	●		180
R	Chario Syntar 100	249	Pretty with a pleasantly easygoing balance, but not the most communicative or exciting sound around	18,32,27		87	6	45	●		170
R	Chario Hiper 1000	300	Classy-looking standmount has a sweet, easygoing sound with fine midband voicing	18,35,28		87	4	45	●		187
R	Chario Constellation Lynx	550	Beautiful near-miniature is let down by a midband too laid-back for its own good	20,36,26		87	3	40	●		190
R	Chario Academie Millennium 1	1,399	Pretty but pricey, with a smooth even balance but limited dynamic expression	21,37,31		87	4	42	●		219
EC	Chario Academie Millennium 2	2,100	Price includes stands. A showy speaker that lives up to its own hype	22,53,35		90	4	55	●		190
R	Cyrus CLS70	800	Wonderfully striking styling, but presence is very laid back; likes playing loud	22,33,32		87	8	40	●		211
R	Cyrus Icon	2,500	First high-end NXT speaker with huge omni-directional soundstage. But they have limited dynamics and unusual imaging	34,125,29	●	84	8	18	●		216
BB	Dali 606	400	A big bruiser at a tempting price. Sounds refined and polite, but also packs some punch	22,97,32	●	91	4	25	●		174
R	Dali Royal Menuet MkII	429	Classy sub-miniature with a beautiful box and fine ingredients, but a little lacking in subtlety and excitement	16,26,18		87	3	50		●	190
R	Dali 8008	540	Deep bass and high sensitivity from a large vinyl-clad floorstander which could have more transparency and tension	25,5,101,35	●	93	4	22	●		224
R	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	●	89	4	41		●	225
R	Dali Evidence 870	1,249	A real heavyweight, sonically and physically, and good for movies as well as music	24,5,106,36	●	93	2.5	20	●		204
R	Dali Grand Coupe	1,333	Big sounding standmount with laid-back but clean and informative sound	23,41,29		85	5	45	●		219
BB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	Expensive for a vinyl-covered miniature, but an aristocrat amongst the breed. Is there a better small speaker around for the price?	17,28,5,24		87	4	40	●		215
R	Dynaudio Audience 72	1,100	Very competent in most respects, but doesn't quite grab the attention; could be more communicative	20,97,26	●	89	3	20	●		211
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Stand-out performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		88	3.5	45	●		219
R	Dynaudio Contour 1.8 MkII	1,842	Wonderful voice-band delicacy and loads of deep bass from a very elegant and compact box	21,95,29	●	85	4	20	●		167
R	Elac CL102 II	599	Chunky floorstander with classy drivers has a neutral, slightly 'shiny' character, and could have more punch	20,95,28	●	88	9	23	●		199
R	Elac CL 310i Jet	800	It's pricey, and you can buy better performance for the money. Small speaker, good sound	12,20,8,28,2		86	4	42	●		191
R	Elac CL 330 Jet	2,500	Arguably the most 'technical'-looking speaker in the world. Design matched by an equally explicit and dynamic sound	18,28,35		88	4	40	●		225
R	Eltax Liberty 3+	150	Bright, bassy, laid-back and attractively evenhanded, but dynamically challenged. Big box for your dosh	20,5,38,34		86	4	25	●		187
R	Eltax Linear Response	249	A curiously dumpy shape, but smooth, laid-back performer is easy on the ears, with fine tonal accuracy	25,35,32		85	4	40	●		177
R	Eltax Chroma Front	300	Gorgeous shiny styling package at an ultra-competitive price, suffers from an excess of rather flabby bass	19,98,28	●	87	4	25	●		201
R	Energy e:XL 25	400	Neat slimline design delivers a fine all-round performance for the price, but could sound smoother	15,87,31	●	90	4	25	●		201



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STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W/M)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Energy Veritas 2.2</b>	1,295	Luxury three-way standmount has unusual features, and a very clean, laid-back sound with good bass	46,22,33		88	4	25	●		223
R	<b>Excel 202A</b>	1,795	Very pro-styling, a compact active monitor in BBC tradition – neutral, unboxy and laid-back	15,21,5,36		A	A	25	●		214
BB	<b>Epos M12</b>	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act, sonically and aesthetically	20,38,26		86	7	40	●		215
	<b>Genelec HT206</b>	1,400	Baby active monitor goes very loud for its size. Very neutral but a tad boxy	20,31,24		A	A	40	●	●	214
R	<b>Heybrook Prima 2</b>	159	Great openness, speed and timing. Sounds fresh and vital, though sometimes lacks scale and weight	20,29,18		87	6	50	●		179
	<b>Heybrook HB1</b>	180	Good value but an uneven performer, the HB1 provides plenty of fun with the volume turned well up	21,38,25		88	3	50	●		207
BB	<b>Heybrook Heylette</b>	200	Attractive traditional-style near-miniature with classy main driver now has fine overall balance to match	19,5,30,22		88	4	45	●		187
BB	<b>Heybrook Optima</b>	259	A dumpy ugly duckling with a heart of gold. Deserves a better tweeter, but communicates well	22,88,29	●	94	4	30	●		193
BB	<b>Heybrook Heylios</b>	269	Classically styled standmount has a fine balance of smoothness and dynamics, plus real wood veneer	23,5,36,27		89	6	25	●		201
	<b>Heybrook Ultima</b>	649	Has the bass wallop to justify its dual hi-fi/home cinema roles, but doesn't excite	22,97,29	●	89	6	45	●		174
R	<b>Heybrook Duet</b>	750	Looks slightly old-fashioned, sounds a bit coloured but its fine timing and liveliness serve music well	23,43,30		88	11	27	●		199
	<b>Heybrook Octet</b>	1,800	Good-looking but pricey floorstander with novel drivers and a fine ceramic-enclosure midband	24,97,31	●	90	6	25	●		180
BB	<b>Infinity Alpha 30</b>	300	Some sharpness and nasality, but fine musical literacy plus a good measure of dynamic expression adds up to a great value floorstander	22,86,29	●	89	4	30	●		215
	<b>Infinity Alpha 40</b>	500	Cool hi-tech looks and drivers, but sounds closer to competent than emotionally engrossing	22,92,33	●	89	4	20	●		224
	<b>Jamo E800</b>	200	Nicely voiced, open midband but bottom end is a bit strong and amorphous	17,5,33,29		87	3	30	●		207
R	<b>Jamo E 850</b>	300	A tad bright perhaps, but a cleverly conceived and good-looking speaker at a very reasonable price	17,5,87,34	●	86	5	30	●		224
	<b>Jamo A410PDD</b>	£650	Clean-edged and space-efficient solution with neat wall-mount sub for anyone who wants to move into decent 5.1 channel sound	Various	●	N/A	5	35	●		225
	<b>Jamo D830</b>	1,400	Dynamically exciting and communicative, but lacks both smoothness and neutrality. Pricey too	24,5,38,32		88	5	30	●		211
BB	<b>JBL LX2</b>	250	Invigorating, if a touch crude, this good-hearted speaker reproduces music with enthusiasm	22,40,27		87	8	40	●		170
	<b>JBL Ti200</b>	400	Very substantial standmount knows how to rock and roll, but can sound uncouth on more delicate material	21,41,30		92	5	40	●		193
	<b>JBL SVA1500</b>	700	A distinctive Pro-style bi-radial horn tweeter, with a fun sound, enlivened by a juicy bass thump	17,5,51,31		86	8	40	●		174
R	<b>JBL SVA 2100</b>	1,250	Monstrously large and brutish styling, goes very loud as well as deep. Fine focus but some boxiness	37,114,52	●	91	8	<20	●		180
	<b>JBL LX70</b>	550	Bassmeister supreme, shame the rest doesn't match up. Fine sensitivity but an itchy, scratchy treble	26,5,94,30	●	91	4	33	●		183
BB	<b>JBL Xt140</b>	500	Real wood and a cute shape, with a punchy driving bass, and a restrained overall balance	23,82,31		88	6	40	●		210
R	<b>JMLab Cobalt 816</b>	860	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	90	3	22	●		224
	<b>JMLab Electra 905</b>	1,200	Compact but massively engineered, delivers a very classy sound with exceptional dynamic range	23,5,47,28		90	4	40	●		204
BB	<b>JBL JMLab Cobalt 826</b>	1,229	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	91	3	35	●		219
EC	<b>JMLab Micro Utopia</b>	2,749	Superb top-of-the-line standmount with magnificent powers of analysis and communication; no deep bass	26,43,41		89	3	50	●		220
R	<b>JMLab Mezzo Utopia</b>	7,250	Looks good and sounds even better. A genuinely big speaker with fantastic coherence	35,115,47	●	92	4	30	●		186
	<b>KEF Cresta 2</b>	149	A good-looking value package but sonically disappointing, and no match for the Q15	20,5,37,24		91	4	40	●		195
R	<b>KEF Reference One-Two</b>	1,200	Limited low bass but bags of headroom. Coherent and lively sound, but could be more transparent	22,5,87,35	●	89	3	40	●		211
	<b>KEF RDM Three</b>	1,500	Definitely a speaker aimed at long-term satisfaction rather than immediate impressiveness. Nice	24,100,27	●	90	4	40	●		189
	<b>KEF Reference Model 2</b>	1,599	Classy, large floorstander that has massive headroom and clean mid-to-treble, but limited deep bass	23,103,34	●	89	4	30	●		167
R	<b>Keswick Audio Torino</b>	999	Good value, lively contender with distinctive styling. Goes loud and deep but could be smoother	26,93,28		90	4	20	●		167
R	<b>Linn Kan</b>	295	Great bass discrimination from size, ensuring a very informative, if slightly shut-in experience	19,31,19		86	4	45	●		187
BB	<b>Linn Katan Aktiv/LK140</b>	2,325	Too small to have much grunt or loudness, but bright top is very sweet, clean and detailed	17,34,23		A	A	40	●		214
BB	<b>Living Voice Auditorium</b>	1,500	Pretty, compact floorstander has wonderful coherence, high sensitivity and fine dynamic integrity	21,5,98,29	●	91	4	25	●		180
EC	<b>Living Voice Avatar</b>	2,500	Dynamic and highly resolved yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	21,5,104,27	●	91	8	40	●		218
EC	<b>Living Voice Avatar OBX-R</b>	4,000	Discreet but extremely fine design with external crossover and an affinity with great amps and sources	21,5,104,27	●	89	8	45	●		196
	<b>Magnat Vintage 320</b>	350	Loads of speaker for your money, but the sound is thick, heavy and lacking in presence and authority	25,102,30	●	90	4	20	●		201
	<b>Magnat Vector 77</b>	450	Tall, dark and a lot of speaker for the money. Beautiful balance, but lacking in subtlety and transparency	22,115,29	●	89	5	30	●		183
	<b>Magnat Vintage 710</b>	800	Very competent but didn't particularly stand out; distinctive styling and slightly shiny sound	20,27,42,32		90	5	25	●		211
R	<b>Magnat Vintage 720</b>	1,200	Slightly crude in some respects but lots of heart, fine scale, decent dynamic coherence and integrity	29,113,32	●	88	4	20	●		180
	<b>Martin-Logan Prodigy</b>	8,967	Combines the finesse of an electrostatic with the grunt of cleverly engineered cone bass to good effect	42,179,71	●	91	4	28	●		204
BB	<b>Meridian M33</b>	1,495	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		A	A	45	●		214
	<b>Mirage FRX7</b>	550	Neat slim floorstander has a heavy, laid-back balance, probably better suited to movie than music reproduction	17,5,95,32	●	90	4	25	●		204
	<b>Mirage OM-5</b>	3,000	A meaty model that goes loud without distortion, digs deep with aplomb and creates plenty of depth of image	133,30,42	●	90	6	22	●		206
	<b>Mirage OM-10-1</b>	2,000	Tall black omni-bi-pole has plenty of bounce and dynamic vigour, but is more room sensitive than most	23,118,30	●	88	4	20	●		210
R	<b>Mission 700</b>	130	A lot of speaker for the money. Good bass weight and extension and goes loud with ease	18,34,26		87	8	40	●		179
R	<b>Mission 771e</b>	200	Beautifully styled miniature has a delightfully voiced midband, and real wood finish too	17,31,22		86	6	45	●		207
BB	<b>Mission m73</b>	200	Sharply priced and good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,87,5,31	●	88	3	25	●		215
	<b>Mission 780</b>	299	Gorgeous miniature has a fine midband and clean, bright treble, slightly odd bottom end	16,5,28,27		86	6	40	●		201
R	<b>Mission 773e</b>	400	Beautifully designed slim floorstander could be more neutral but still delivers an all-round entertaining sound	17,5,88,26	●	92	4	30	●		193
R	<b>Mission 774</b>	500	Gorgeous floorstander is an entertaining communicator, despite some balance oddities (bright treble)	18,95,31	●	90	4	40	●		183
R	<b>Mission 782</b>	699	Ultra-compact floorstander has a glorious midband and slightly odd bass. Good communication skills	16,5,82,28	●	86	9.5	25	●		199
R	<b>Mission 775e</b>	800	Lots of speaker for the money, and musically involving too, if a little short on serious weight and authority	23,115,30	●	93	3	25	●		204
	<b>Mission 783</b>	1,000	Plenty of bass weight, and a clean, articulate midrange, but the two don't quite seem to gel	20,5,97,33	●	87	5	20	●		211
BB	<b>Monitor Audio Bronze 2</b>	180	A real corker, which combines solid material value for money with a fine all-round sonic performance	18,5,35,27		89	3	30	●		207
R	<b>Monitor Audio Bronze 3</b>	270	Very similar to the Bronze 2, though not necessarily better. Good value with better dynamic expression than most of its ilk	18,5,87,24	●	90	3	30	●		215
	<b>Monitor Audio Silver 5i</b>	450	Great-looking, sharply-priced real wood floorstander, but bottom end lacks drive and tension	20,81,21	●	87	5	30	●		210
	<b>Monitor Audio GR20</b>	1,500	Solid and confident design with all metal drivers and neutral if slightly uninspiring sound	20,92,5,30	●	89	6	30	●		212
	<b>Mordaunt-Short MS902</b>	200	Gorgeous metal-finished budget standmount has a shiny sound to match its looks	18,31,25		87	4	45	●		207
BB	<b>Naim Intro</b>	660	Great dynamic range and info retrieval, but thin, lacks warmth	24,89,27	●	89	6	30	●		164
R	<b>Naim Credo</b>	1,060	Involving sound, but rather forward and cold. Good clarity, but some coloration and a lack of richness	24,89,30	●	88	8	28	●		180
EC	<b>Naim NBL</b>	6,648	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	89	4	20	●		200
R	<b>Neat Critique 2</b>	445	Contemporary standmount has a clean, crisp sound with lovely natural midband voicing	22,32,24		86	6	50	●		183
BB	<b>Neat Mystique Mk2</b>	575	This elegant package delivers a fine overall sound quality; some might find the top end too insistent	20,86,18	●	85	6	23	●		177
R	<b>Neat Neat Petite III</b>	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,30,5,20		86	5	30	●		211
R	<b>Neat Elite</b>	1,195	A highly entertaining all-rounder, has a planar tweeter that sounds sweet, if not particularly smooth	20,88,18	●	88.5	6	25	●		195
	<b>NHT Super Zero</b>	200	If tiny size is top priority, the Super Zero is worth considering. It looks nice and sounds articulate, but it definitely needs a subwoofer	14,23,14		84	8	100	●		215
BB	<b>NHT Super One</b>	250	A fine compromise between size and performance, sensitivity and hence loudness capability is modest	18,5,29,5,23		85	8	30	●		170
BB	<b>NHT 1.5</b>	400	This compact standmount sounds much bigger than it has any right to. Good timing and communication skills	18,42,26		85	6	40	●		177
R	<b>NHT Super Two</b>	550	Black and shiny compact three-way floorstander has marvellously even balance and good coherence	18,5,100,26	●	87	8.5	25	●		199
	<b>Opecha D2-Iso-5</b>	2,500	Radical aluminium pawn-shaped cabinets combine with multiple drivers to make a subtle and refined sound	37,94,37	●	89	8	30	●		217
	<b>Opera Prima</b>	495	Good-looking hardwood enclosure, plus fine mid and treble, but less satisfactory bass	19,34,31		90	4	40	●		190
R	<b>Opera SP-1</b>	525	SP1s make a strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. U-shaped back does wonders for the appearance, sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		86	8	50	●		225
	<b>Origin Live Conqueror</b>	1,650	Chunky floorstanding three-way has lovely cabinetwork and lively sound, but limited deep bass	24,94,27	●	88	8	30	●		167
R	<b>Orelle Swing</b>	1,200	A superb example of what an essentially small loudspeaker can do, with bags of brio and enthusiasm	18,101,28	●	87	8	45	●		195



STEREO SPEAKERS (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEADANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	PMC TB2	700	A worthy and prettier successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type class for neutrality and transparency	20,40,5,31	●	88	8	30	●	●	211
R	PMC LB1	999	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26	●	87	6.5	40	●	●	199
BB	PMC FB1	1,275	Handsome floorstander has the lively coherence of a simple two-way alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	88	6	20	●	●	204
R	PMCA ML1	3,700	Sparkling active Pro monitor with serious attitude: 'in yer face' balance, with great dynamics	20,40,32	●	A	A	25	●	●	214
	ProAc Tablette 2000 Sig.	899	Beautifully veneered compact standmount is classically balanced, if a little on the bright side of neutral	19,36,26	●	87	6	30	●	●	204
	ProAc Studio 125	1,000	Pretty if pricey compact floorstander with a beautifully natural and neutral midband, and some bass thump	20,94,28	●	87	8	28	●	●	192
	ProAc Reponse 1.5	1,790	Gorgeous but pricey floorstander has lovely midband voicing but limited bandwidth resolution	19,98,25	●	86	7	35	●	●	219
	QLN Signature	1,000	Attractive pyramidal standmount with heavy, laid-back balance but remarkably unboxy sound	27,37,36	●	83	4	25	●	●	167
	Quad ESL-989	4,600	A very 'different' speaker experience, with magnificent midband transparency and imaging, but limited loudness capability	67,134,32	●	83	3	38	●	●	213
	Red Rose Music R3	3,500	Compact two-way with lovely veneer and ribbon tweeter: probably the most sophisticated small speaker out there	20,40,5,26	●	87	4	46	●	●	219
R	Rega Jura	450	Beefy sounding, chunky floorstander sounds very 'direct coupled' to the music, if a touch 'boom'n'tizz'	22,5,92,5,26	●	90	5	25	●	●	193
R	Rega ELA Mk II	498	Pretty smooth, the latest incarnation has a superb midband and excellent communicative skills	30,80,20	●	87	8	40	●	●	139
	RMS Revelation Series 1	1,299	Innovative metal-box compact with integral port/stand – clean with good timing but very laid-back balance	20,99,24	●	81	8	22	●	●	167
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	85	4	20	●	●	221
R	Roksan Ojan 3X	995	Innovative low-line, two-way floorstander with decoupled tweeter; great bass and fine dynamic range	28,79,46	●	84	8	20	●	●	167
R	Ruark Epilogue	269	Beautifully finished miniature with a lively balance and plenty of charm; best suited to smaller rooms	17,29,23	●	87	8	47	●	●	183
	Ruark Sceptre	599	'Traditional' cabinetwork with classy veneer and shiny gilt fixings, harked by rather wayward sound balance	21,38,31	●	87	8	40	●	●	174
	Ruark Prologue One R	949	Strikingly contemporary compact floorstander is well voiced but a little lean in overall balance	17,5,93,28	●	88	5	25	●	●	204
R	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	90	5	38	●	●	219
R	Ruark Excalibur	7,000	A big, handsome speaker with a big, laid-back but open sound, rocking bass and loads of headroom	30,125,53	●	90	4	30	●	●	186
	Sequence 400	300	Very affordable pseudo panel offers flexible design options and consistent sonic neutrality. Limited bass, though, and doesn't like playing loud	25,100,7	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
	Snell K.5	795	Classy AV-ready standmount is very solidly engineered. Sound is neutral but lacks excitement	22,46,30	●	87	6	25	●	●	190
BB	Snell E.5 Mk2	1,520	Large floorstander has serious deep bass extension, and also a delicate midband with low coloration	22,109,30	●	89	4	20	●	●	211
	Snell XA75ps	4,500	Active bass floorstander with marvellous mid coherence, slightly suspect bass integration	28,117,50	●	91	6	25	●	●	194
	Soliloquy SM 2A3	1,095	Fine match in balance, coherence, transparency and speed. Intended for use with Cary CAD 2A3SE	35,5,19,30	●	91	8	45	●	●	196
	Sonus Faber Concertino	599	A beautifully neutral loudspeaker in a beautiful Italian suit of clothes. Classy, if quite pricey	21,32,29	●	87	5	30	●	●	193
	Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home	1,589	Classy walnut n'leather floorstander with fine engineering and lovely midband voicing	23,5,29,108	●	90	3	25	●	●	214
	Sony SS-LA500ED	340	Versatile metal minatures with integral stands. Given a little more bass and a slightly less excitable treble, they'd be hard to resist	17,25,19	●	89	4	55	●	●	225
	South Coast Speakers Lancelot	895	Pretty compact standmount has nice ribbon tweeter but sounds a bit soft and lacks dynamic vigour	19,36,26	●	84	8	45	●	●	199
R	Spendor 2030	599	Discreet slimline floorstander with delicately coherent, laid-back sound	18,89,27	●	87	8	30	●	●	160
	Spendor 53	600	Beautifully voiced and unboxy sub-miniature lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	16,5,30,5,21	●	82	6	30	●	●	224
R	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large stand-mount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33	●	88	8	50	●	●	219
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	90	8	37	●	●	223
	Syn Factory U-Vola	1,480	Hefty oval shaped speakers designed to be hung from the ceiling. Sound is tight and detailed but also a little flat	21,42,21	●	86	8	45	●	●	225
EC	TAG McLaren F1	15,000	Oddball aesthetics with accurate, unflappable, controlled and consistent sonic neutrality	40,127,48	●	87	8	25	●	●	202
BB	Tannoy mX2	150	Surprisingly refined considering its very modest price: very communicative with outstanding midband delicacy	18,5,33,25	●	89	4	45	●	●	207
	Tannoy Revolution 1	200	Pretty little mini-monitor is smooth, well mannered and polite to a fault, lacks dynamic expression	17,30,22	●	86	4	30	●	●	187
BB	Tannoy mX3	300	A great all-round compromise at a very modest price, combining good looks with fine midband voicing	18,5,87,26	●	90	5	40	●	●	201
	Tannoy mX4	350	Pretty 2.5-way has a clean and unboxy sound with respectable transparency, but lacks the dynamic grip and drive to make music really involving	18,5,96,26	●	89	3	20	●	●	215
BB	Tannoy Revolution R2	350	Bargain price real wood floorstander is beautifully voiced and very even-handed, if a tad laid-back	17,94,24	●	90	4	20	●	●	193
	Tannoy Revolution R3	550	Handsome real wood floorstander does a decent job, but lacks the evenness of its smaller R2 brother	18,5,103,28	●	89	8.5	28	●	●	199
R	Tannoy D300	999	Gorgeous-looking compact floorstander. And a fine all-round performer, too	24,85,23	●	87	6	26	●	●	167
	Tannoy ST-100	1,200	he supertweeter adds a subtle and delicate effect while also broadening the soundstage at a price	15,10,5,6	●	95	8	N/A	●	●	206
EC	Tannoy TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	91	6	38	●	●	215
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD12	6,500	Art Deco-inspired style plus magnificent headroom and genuine monitoring neutrality – a tour de force	42,126,41	●	92	2.5	23	●	●	225
	Tannoy Kingdom 12	6,000	Something of a throwback, but great fun, with fine dynamics and authority, but a tricky amp load	54,106,46	●	92	3	28	●	●	213
R	T+A Talis TL53	1,799	Super slim and beautifully engineered metal towers deliver effortlessly musical results with superb imaging. Great marriage of style and sonics	15,130,17	●	90	4	30	●	●	225
	Triangle Cometes	359	Communicative standmount has great midband dynamics, but the very bright top end might be intrusive	22,40,29	●	91	4	42	●	●	193
BB	Triangle Zephyr II	599	Loads of fun. Dramatic dynamics and righteous timing will give any hi-fi system a wake-up call	22,94,29	●	91	4	25	●	●	190
BB	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	92	3	40	●	●	219
EC	Veritas H3	6,000	Loads of fun with wonderful dynamic and temporal integrity from horn-loaded Lo ther drivers	30,110,47	●	104	4	50	●	●	191
R	Vienna Acoustics Mozart	1,500	Gorgeous slimline floorstander sounds very laid-back but very charming, and musically literate	17,97,30	●	88	7.5	25	●	●	199
R	Waterfall Victoria	1,500	Glass enclosures go with absolutely any decor. The Victorias make music in a confident and involving way, too, though bass is detached	21,100,21	●	90	4	45	●	●	225
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	●	6	45	●	●	212
EC	Wilson benesch Bishop	20,000	Deep and even bass sets new standards for cleanliness and clarity; lovely open midband too	23,161,561	●	89	4	520	●	●	189
	Wharfedale Diamond 7.2	140	A good-hearted, lively and up-front performer that's a little lacking in subtlety and smoothness	19,29,5,23	●	88	4	45	●	●	169
	Wdale Diamond 7.2 Anniversary	200	Lively and exuberant, but a tad untidy with it; can sound a bit cold and hard	19,29,5,24	●	88	4	40	●	●	187
	Wharfedale Pacific PI-20	350	Good material value and a decent fun factor, though a somewhat wayward balance compromises neutrality	22,95,28	●	87	4	25	●	●	224
	Wharfedale Pacific Pi40	500	A lot of speaker for the money, but bass is unruly, even in a large-sized room. The smaller Pi30 might give a better bottom-end balance	22,113,36	●	89	3	25	●	●	215
R	Zingali Overture 25	1,975	Gorgeous, pricey, imposing standmount has a horn tweeter of great delicacy. Impressively weighty	30,57,38	●	90	8	25	●	●	195

SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEADANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub which comes with handy infrared remote control	41,37,29,5	●	A	35	●	●	●	225
	Castle Classic 8	800	Adequate performance, but misses the mark at the price	●	●	A	20	●	●	●	225
	Jamo D8SUB	950	Pretty but pricey, the D8SUB packs plenty of punch (for movie fans), but doesn't delve deep enough for music replay	45,5,41,45,5	●	A	30	●	●	●	210
	M&K MX70	795	Cutely compact and entertaining too, but lacks the ultimate extension to justify its high price	37,32,30	●	A	25	●	●	●	210
	M&K MX700	1,595	Fine dynamic sound with music or movies. Compact unit but expensive and short on features	●	●	A	●	●	●	●	225
R	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	●	A	27	●	●	●	225
R	Paradigm PDR-10	150	Not much grip, drive or authority, but it doesn't get in the way and it is very cheap	34,5,36,42	●	A	25	●	●	●	210
	Polk PSW430	400	A lot of subwoofer for your money, but lacks deep grunt and is more music than music oriented	38,5,45,46	●	A	25	●	●	●	210
R	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	41,5,62,33	●	A	18	●	●	●	225
	REL Q400E	1,000	A class system, and good for movies, but has a tendency to thicken textures and add a bit too much 'thump' to music	39,42,43	●	A	16	●	●	●	217
EC	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	●	A	16	●	●	●	217
R	REL Strata III	800	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42,52,33	●	A	20	●	●	●	210





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## SUBWOOFERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	REL Q50	375	his good-looking if bulky sub does the business with impressive flexibility and sonic self-effacement	42,53,31	●	A		20			210
R	Ruark Log-Rhythm	775	Adds weight and scale with commendable discretion, making a positive contribution to the whole musical exposition	43,43,43	●	A		<20			210
BB	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	●	A					225
	Soliloquy S10	1,050	Pretty subwoofer, cosmetically matching SM 2A3 speakers, pricey and mid-bass a bit strong	51,30,5,46	●	A		25			196

## SATELLITE & SUBWOOFER SYSTEMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	AE Aego2	300	Not quite a serious hi-fi speaker system, but a seriously fun type product for all that (19x35x27cm sub)	7,10,9		A	n/a	45	●		218
R	Bandor Trident II	776	Loudness is limited, but overall sound is impressively homogeneous and coherent (31x46x31cm sub)	12,13,10-12		83	6	25	●		218
R	Boston Micro 90	650	Lacks warmth but the midband is smooth and impressively evenhanded (37x36x39cm sub)	10,17,14		88	4	28	●		218
R	Cabasse Jupiter/lo	1,230	A sub/sat combo that really competes with proper stereo speakers. Striking styling and stereo imaging (40x43x41cm sub)	15 diam		94	2	30	●		218
	KEF KMS2002	499	Looks the business, but lacks deep bass and the presence/treble is also too restrained (32x36x32cm sub)	13,23,14		85	3	45	●		218
	Mission FS2	450	Intriguing NXT speaker technology has minimal visual impact, and lacks dynamic precision (32x47x25cm sub)	13,5,28,4,5		86	6	40	●		218
	NHT Super Zero/Sub One	1,000	Decent enough, but not the prettiest nor the best value around for music replay – one for movie fans (40x41x42cm sub)	14,23,14		84	8	30	●		218
R	Ruark Vita 100	900	Not the cheapest sub/sat, but certainly one of the most accomplished, sonically and visually (30x42x30cm sub)	11,20,17		86	6	40	●		218

# LOUDSPEAKERS

## MULTICHANNEL SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

## SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Acoustic Energy Aegis Three	350	High value floorstander has deep and even bass and a smooth neutrality thereafter	19,90,25	●	90	5	22	●		198
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit pkg	1,230	Could sound more exciting, but imaging, solidity and neutrality all impressive. Poor centre magnetic shielding	var	var	90	5	23	var	var	224
R	B&W LCR6	349	Large, gutsy standmount intended for all-round AV use delivers fine performance as a stereo pair too	20,5,55,32		90	5	20	●		198
BB	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. Decent size, high quality drivers in standmount enclosures still make sense, whatever the prevailing fashion	var	N	89	3	22	●		224
	B&W Nautilus package	6,500	This classy, laid-back package is arguably too good for current programming. Very bulky centre speaker	var	var	n/a	3	20		●	210
R	Castle package	1,199	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	var	var	85-90	6	28		●	224
	Dali Blue system	1,007	Incorporates some interesting ideas, and decent value for money too, but a rather movie-oriented package	var	var	88-93	4	22	var	var	224
	Definitive Technology BP2X	595	Pricey but effective bi-polar surround speaker, with unusually high sensitivity	23,37,15		94	4	120		●	198
	Definitive Technology BP2004	1,700	Pricey bi-polar floorstander has a fine midband, let down by its built-in powered subwoofer	19,104,31	●	91	5	28	●		198
	Dynaudio LRC 120	439	Slim centre and front standmount, has an evenhanded but rather laid-back balance but lacks drive	16,5,57,31		89	5	25	●		198
	Infinity Alpha package	833	Distinctive high tech styling, fine build and advanced drivers. Sounds thoroughly competent, but didn't excel	var	var	84-89	4	20		●	224
	Jamo E8 package	775	A tad bright for some tastes, and without quite the grip and drive to make the most of multichannel material	var	var	86	5	30	●		224
	Jamo Concert package	2,500	Lovely main speakers sonically overshadow the centre, while surrounds are a bit obvious too	var	var	n/a	5	30		●	210
BB	JBL Xti-series package	1,190	Hexagonal boxes all round, this package has decent authority and all round tension	var	var	n/a	5	40		●	210
R	JMLab Cobalt package	1,707	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	var	var	88-90	3	22	●		224
	KEF Q-series package	880	Cleverly designed, vinyl-finished UniQ package packs a goodly thump but centre and surrounds stand out	var	var	n/a	3	25		●	210
	Mirage OM-series package	2,000	Big black and bouncy package with omni fronts has plenty of vigour but some coloration	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
R	Mission 77DS	199	Neat flush-mount surround speaker has no bass but a smooth midband and nicely restrained treble	34,26,12		92	4	120		●	198
	Mission M package	480	A very inexpensive and good looking system, but the surround bits are better suited to movies than music	var	var	88	4	25	var	var	224
	Mission Cinema 8 package	1,400	Beautifully styled and cleverly designed package, but could have more grunt and drive for the price	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
	Polk RTE 1000p	1,300	Tall elegant tower with built-in powered bass 'subwoofer' that needs using with discretion. Bright but engaging	20,110,35	●	91	4	25	●		198
	Monitor Audio Silver series	1,000	Great-looking conventionally styled package lacks something in dynamic drive and tension	var	var	n/a	4	30		●	210
R	Mordant-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority but must be 5.1-connected	var	n/a	n/a	3	25		●	210
R	PMC FB1/TB2 package	2,485	Classy if bulky and pricey package has good transparency, coherence and weight	var	var	n/a	6	20		●	210
	Rega Jura/Ara/Senta	938	Classy real wood package does a good all-round job, but sounds bright and might have more surround weight	var	var	n/a	4	25		●	210
R	Spendor package	1,630	Ultra-fines lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness; best suited to smaller rooms	var		82-86	6	30		●	224
BB	Tannoy mXAV4 package	500	Lacks grunt, grip and authority, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence	var	var	n/a	4	20		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6LCR	400	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	21,38,29		89	6	25		●	198
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6	500	Fine value vinyl floorstander offers plenty of genuine grunt and real dynamic tension	21,89,29	●	91	4	20	●		198
R	Wharfedale Pacific package	700	Plenty of loudspeaker for the money. Balance is somewhat wayward but unquestionably entertaining	var	var	87	3	25	●		224

## CENTRE CHANNEL SPEAKERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE WxHxD (cm)	FLOORSTANDER	SENSITIVITY (dB/W)	IMPEDANCE (Ω)	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Acoustic Energy Aegis Centre	140	Good value centre-front speaker but a tad shut in and with a slightly obvious top end (price per speaker)	46,17,20		89	5	50	●		198
	B&W Nautilus HTM1	1,500	Very bulky for a centre speaker, though very capable too – a little less laid back than its siblings	76,37,30		89	4	30		●	210
	Castle Keep	250	Substantial centre-front speaker based on Harlech drivers but with rather brighter voicing	48,17,29		88	8	45	●		198
R	Definitive Technology CLR2002	595	Pricey, but undoubtedly one of the better centre-front speakers around, with fine timing and open voicing	55,5,17,5,31		90	4	40	●		198
	Jamo Concert Center	550	A decent balance match but lacks the class and grip of the Concert 8s, and is bulky and pricey too	55,22,30		87	5	100		●	210
BB	JBL Xti10C	200	An elegant, cleverly designed centre and a good match for the 40s. Better value than most too	51,19,5,27		88	5	50		●	210
	KEF Q95C	200	This artfully designed UniQ centre looks much better than most on top of the TV set	40,17,17		89	3	120		●	210
	Mirage OM-C2	600	Large but discreet omni-bi-pole matches OM-10-1 well but lacks tight focus, and seems expensive	64,18,5,31		88	4	50		●	210
R	Mission 77C	199	A good centre-front match for 77-series, the triple tweeter might be a curiosity, but voicing is very good	42,17,21		91	4	100		●	198
	Mission 78C	350	Makes a good visual and sonic match for the 782, but quite pricey by comparison, given the ingredients	45,17,19		86	3	100		●	210
	Monitor Audio Silver Centre 10i	300	Neat and good-looking partner to the Silver 5i, but a little more forward, and quite expensive too	50,17,21		87	4	100		●	210
R	Mordant-Short MS 504	200	Smart yet discreet and a good match for the 502. Sounds clean and expressive, and is well priced	50,19,20		88	3	120		●	210
R	PMC TB2M/C	325	This bulky centre speaker is quite pricey, but it combines good transparency with some authority	40,20,31		87	6	50		●	210
	Polk CS 1000p	999	Monstrously large and heavy centre-front speaker, presumably for those with monstrous intentions	87,22,35		92	4	25	●		198
R	Rega Senta	185	The very compact Senta is sensibly priced, a bit bright maybe, but articulate and expressive	32,16,21		89	4	120		●	210
BB	Tannoy mXC	100	Could be more exciting, but a very impressive centre speaker at an unusually reasonable price	42,16,21		88	4	120		●	210
BB	Tannoy Saturn S6C	200	A punchy compact standmount based on a serious cast-frame, pro-style dual-concentric driver	38,21,29		89	6	25	●		198



# PERSONAL / INTERNET

## PERSONAL STEREOS

### SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE FORMAT	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Aiwa HS-PX307</b>	30	So-so sound but an impressive features roster. Decent value overall	Cassette		●				204
	<b>Aiwa AM-HX50</b>	180	Neat play-back only personal with an impressively full-bodied sound, though short on detail	MiniDisc		●				204
	<b>JVC XL-PG31</b>	60	'Challenging' looks and frankly unpleasant sound add up to a player that's best avoided	CD						216
	<b>JVC XM-R700SL</b>	250	The most expensive player here, but its in-ear-face sound and slab-like, heavy design make its value questionable	MiniDisc	●	●				216
	<b>Kenwood DPC-X517</b>	100	Clear, funky bass makes for an exciting sound; an attractive proposition, if you can stomach the looks	CD						216
	<b>Panasonic RQ-SX71</b>	70	A sleek aluminium body, decent sound and superb features	Cassette		●				204
	<b>Panasonic RQ-SX91</b>	80	A super-slick personal for well-heeled cassette users. Sound is rather bright	Cassette		●				204
	<b>Panasonic SJ-MR220</b>	180	The smallest MD recorder in the world, at the time of writing. Lacks some oomph but fully featured and good value	MiniDisc	●	●				223
	<b>Panasonic SJ-MR100</b>	250	Well built and nicely appointed, though performance is unremarkable at the price	MiniDisc	●	●				204
	<b>Philips ACT75B2</b>	115	A splash-proof body and an entertaining sound – the perfect CD personal for holiday japes	CD						204
	<b>Sharp MD-MT877H</b>	230	Pleasantly up-front sounding player in a sexy little package, well worth your attention if you like that kind of thing	MiniDisc	●	●				216
	<b>Sharp MD-MT888H</b>	230	An MD personal that's packed with features and delivers a powerful, involving sound	MiniDisc	●	●				223
	<b>Sony WM-EX404</b>	35	Super-stylish but sonically flawed, with particularly uncomfortable earphones	Cassette						204
	<b>Sony D-EJ925</b>	150	Beautiful design matched with a beguiling sound – a clear Best Buy	CD		●				216
	<b>Sony MZ-G750</b>	200	Light, simple to use, and with a relaxed and enjoyable sound, and with a tuner too!	MiniDisc	●	●				216
	<b>Sony MZ-R91</b>	250	A petite and sexy beast with good sound and excellent facilities	MiniDisc	●	●				204
	<b>Sony MZ-R900</b>	250	Gorgeous little MD personal with a well-balanced sound. Makes great recordings but lacks a little punch	MiniDisc	●	●				223

## INTERNET AUDIO

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	STORAGE	RECORDING	IN-LINE REMOTE	CODEC	PC CONNECTION	STANDARD CAPACITY	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Aiwa MM-VX100</b>	130	Aiwa's expertise in the personal stereo field is visible, but performance is only average	Solid State	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	<b>Creative Labs Digital Jukebox</b>	349	Smartly designed high-capacity portable with storage for over 1,000 tracks	Hard Drive	●		Agnostic	USB	5.7GB	208
	<b>DigMedia Music Store</b>	350	Innovative CD/hard drive combo with optional solid state portable. MP3 with or without a computer	CD/HD	●		MP3	USB	5.4GB	208
	<b>Intel Pocket Concert</b>	171	Big, substantial sound and large 128Mb built-in memory, but no expansion slots	Solid State	●		MP3/WMA	USB	128MB	223
	<b>JazPiper MV32P</b>	125	First wave player that looks good but sounds bright. Includes voice recording and phone book features	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	<b>LG MF-PD360</b>	130	Good-looking and temptingly affordable, but features and performance are nothing special	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	208
	<b>LG AHA-FD770</b>	200	Cassette and solid state personal in one – novel idea, poor execution	SS/Cass	●	●	MP3	PRL	32MB	204
	<b>Logix Evzone</b>	219	Novell MP3 player that uses omega Click! discs for storage. Chunky but quite effective, and discs are much cheaper than memory cards	Click! Discs	●		MP3/WMA	USB	40MB	213
	<b>Neo-25</b>	420	Sparsely equipped but efficient hard drive portable with an exceptionally high potential capacity. Average in the sound department	Hard Drive	●		MP3	USB	10GB	213
	<b>Philips eXpansion EXP401</b>	150	Neat little personal that plays 8cm CD-R discs, two-thirds the size of regular CDs. Use your computer's CD writer to burn on MP3s	Mini-CD		●	MP3/AAC	USB		223
	<b>Philips eXpansion EXP103</b>	190	The best MP3-CD personal, at least at the time of writing... An effective solution for MP3 on the move	CD			MP3			216
	<b>Philips Rush SA126</b>	250	Cute but pricey with limited supplied memory, but sound is good and it's one of the first to employ AAC coding	Solid State	●		MP3	USB/PRL	64MB	213
	<b>Pine D'Music</b>	120	Good build, solid sound and a voice recording mode make this a good first-time buy	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	<b>Pontis SP504</b>	158	Not the best aesthetically, but exceptionally good MP3 sound	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	32MB	204
	<b>Rio 500</b>	190	Well featured and a strong performer, though new generation Rios have now arrived	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	195
	<b>Rio 600</b>	169	Neat design, strong future-proofing, good features and sound. Only its memory lets it down	Solid State	●		Agnostic	USB	32MB	208
	<b>Rio 800</b>	300	If you're interested in solid state, this player's great sound and ease of use make it worth a look	Solid State	●	●	Agnostic	USB	64MB	216
	<b>Samsung Yepp YP-30S</b>	200	Tiny MP3 player with a solid, punchy sound. Some limitations but a cool design	Solid State	●		MP3	USB	64MB	223
	<b>Sanyo SSP-PD7</b>	250	Cute but pricey with limited supplied memory, but sound is good and it's one of the first to employ AAC coding	Solid State	●		MP3/AAC	USB	32MB	213
	<b>Schneider MPMan F20</b>	99	The world's first MP3 personal. Basic but still good value	Solid State	●		MP3	PRL	32MB	195
	<b>Smart Portable MP3 Disc Player</b>	119	CD personal that also plays MP3 tracks burnt onto CD-R discs	CD			MP3			208
	<b>Sony NW-MS7</b>	249	A gorgeous little personal using Sony's Memory Stick storage. Good but pricey	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	208
	<b>Sony NW-MS9</b>	300	It's got size and simplicity on its side, but it's up-front, boomy sound is significantly below par	Solid State	●		MP3/ATRAC3	USB	64MB	216
	<b>Sony MDC-PC3</b>	350	A MiniDisc deck which hooks to a PC. Introduces cheap and flexible MD media to the world of MP3	MiniDisc	●		MP3/ATRAC	USB		213
	<b>Thomson Lyra Personal Jukebox</b>	300	Neat portable with a big 10Gb capacity – enough for 1000s of MP3 tracks. Some control foibles but sounds good	Hard Disc	●		MP3/MP3Pro	USB	10GB	223

# RECORD PLAYERS

## TURNTABLES

### SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
	<b>Audio Note TT1/ARM1</b>	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	●		33/45	●	●	●		203
	<b>Avid Acutus</b>	4,995	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings, don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	●		33/45	●	●			194
	<b>Clearaudio Reference</b>	3,990	Opulent beast tested with Souther TQ-1 arm. Tends to gloss over detail, but can sound bold	●		33/45					144
	<b>DNM Rota 2</b>	5,600	Tonally slightly bleached, but extracts detail like few others. Works well on its own table	●		33/45	●		●	●	144
	<b>Dual CS415-2</b>	160	No denying it's cheap and cheerful, but it does what it's paid for happily enough		●	33/45			●	●	214
	<b>Dual CS 455.1</b>	220	Neat record player with automatic convenience (and 78rpm), but doesn't match simpler manual rivals sonically		●	33/45/78	●	●	●	●	203
	<b>Dual 505-4 UK</b>	250	Consistent sounding and well isolated turntable. It is slightly lacking in oomph		●	33/45			●	●	103
	<b>Kuzma Stabi/PS</b>	1,950	Solid oak plinth; sound is very clear, detailed and extended	●		33/45	●	●	●		91
	<b>Linn LP12 Basik</b>	1,100	Trails the full LP12 significantly, but pace, rhythm, timing etc. still top rank	●		33	●		●		103
	<b>Linn LP12 Lingo</b>	1,750	The classic reference is improved by the Lingo, but charming character remains	●		33/45	●	●			91
	<b>MothAlamo</b>	285	Basically a Rega P2 with a Perspex platter: doesn't seem to justify the price difference	●		33/45			●		214
	<b>Michell Orbe SE</b>	1,725	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price	●		33/45	●				192
	<b>NAD 533</b>	220	Sonically a little crude, but musically satisfying results at a very modest price	●		33/45			●	●	203
	<b>Notts Analogue Spacedeck/Arm</b>	750	No frills, just a first-rate, outstandingly natural-sounding deck that will last forever	●		33/45			●	●	159



## TURNABLES (CONTINUED)

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MANUAL	AUTO	SEMI-AUTO	SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	EXTERNAL PSU	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	SUPPLIED WITH CART	ISSUE NUMBER
BB	Pro-ject 2	300	Remarkably effective at the price, with decent timing and a generally well defined sound	●			33/45			●	●	164
	Pro-ject Classic Cherry	450	A great-looking turntable with a generous and dynamic sound, but lacks something in overall coherence	●			33/45		●	●		203
	Pro-ject Perspective	750	Flexible facilities and competitive package, but performance of turntable alone is behind the best				33/45	●		●	●	192
R	Pro-ject 6/Sumiko	850	Don't think of this as a deck with a good arm, but as a scaled-down Oracle Delphi — it's that good	●			33/45	●	●	●		138
BB	Rega P2	198	Updated Planar 2: just as much fun as ever and now even better value as the competition falls away	●			33/45			●		214
R	Rega P3	298	Updated Planar 3, building on the strengths of the P2 with added subtlety and detail	●			33/45			●		214
BB	Rega Planar 25	619	Great-looking turntable has a silky smooth sound with exceptional midband coherence	●			33/45		●	●		203
BB	Reson RS1	600	Supplied set up and ready-tuned, this unconventional deck is packed with midband detail	●			33/45		●	●		159
R	Roksan Radius 3/Tabriz zi	890	Elegant-looking turntable with a tidy, ordered sound. Bright and breezy if a shade lightweight				33/45	●	●	●		159
EC	SME Model 10A	3,333	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V309 hybrid arm, superbly built				33/45	●	●	●		195
EC	SME Model 20.2A	4,863	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	●			33/45/78		●	●		186
BB	Thorens TD166 VI/UK/RB	400	Refined, solid sound with well-focused imagery; suitable for use with good MM/MC budget cartridges	●			33/45	●	●	●	●	103
	Thorens TD146 VI	550	Tonearm not quite up to turntable's potential; this semi-auto is much pricier than manual TD166	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
	Thorens TD2001	700	Balances convenience and sound well, but deck lacks detail and bass could be better controlled			●	33/45	●	●	●		159
R	VPI HW19 Junior	650	A notably large and handsome turntable with good sound quality and considerable upgrade potential	●			33/45	●	●	●		203
R	Well Tempered Record Player	850	Intriguing and challenging. Musically not ideal, but its limpid quality and lack of artificiality set standards	●			33/45	●	●	●		136
EC	Well Tempered Reference	5,500	Superb mechanical stability and unflappability result in a clean reproduction	●			33/45	●	●	●		205

## CARTRIDGES

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	MM	MIC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	OUTPUT (mV)	MASS (g)	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Allaerts MC1B	1,295	Highly capable and entertaining Belgian cartridge that warrants the finest turntable and phono stage you can afford		●		0.5		203
BB	Audio Technica AT110E	28	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	4.5	6	214
	Audio Technica AT-OC9ML	330	A well-finished cartridge with a sound that's smoothly detailed, but also rather unexciting		●		0.4	8	192
BB	Clearaudio Signature	1,495	A great all-round performer with fine dynamic vitality and a seductive midband intimacy		●		0.55	11.5	175
	Denon DL103	100	Good performance in bass and good 'life', is seriously let down by its spherical stylus which kills subtle detail		●		0.1	6	103
BB	Denon DL304	200	Uncoloured, detailed, tracks superbly. Top notch altogether, and a bargain at the price		●				103
R	Dynavector DV-20X L	299	Articulate-sounding, with impressive treble resolve, though lightweight at times. Needs a high-quality turntable and arm		●		0.25	8.6	192
	Dynavector Karat 17D2 mk2	450	Clean and controlled sound with taut, tuneful bass. Detailed and musically cogent		●		0.15	5.3	158
R	Dynavector XX-1L	998	Very clear, very detailed; a response lift around 20kHz seems to do no harm		●		0.25	12	84
R	Dynavector Te-Kaitora	1,698	A real smoothie, but pricey. Worth checking out for its delicate laid-back transparency and low needle-talk		●		0.25	8.5	175
EC	Dynavector DRT XV-1	2,500	Capable of conjuring one of the most tactile, three dimensional sound stages on the vinyl planet. Extremely entertaining		●		0.3	13	208
	Goldring 1006	70	Disappointing sound, marred chiefly by persistent harshness which affects all but very quiet music	●		●	6.5	7	214
R	Goldring 1012GX	79	Slightly harsh but plenty of life and detail. Some high frequency coloration apparent	●		●	6.5	7	85
R	Goldring 1022GX	99	As with 1012, a touch harsh; detail and transient purity improved	●		●	6.5	7	85
R	Goldring Eroica LX	110	Not the most subtle cartridge in the world: can sound edgy at times, but lively and informative		●		0.5	8	84
	Goldring 1042	120	Not terribly subtle, and not such good value alongside 1012 and 1022. Quite lively, though	●		●	6.5	6	91
	Goldring Elite	220	The basics are right, and it will cheerfully tackle any source material, but its sound is not the cleanest		●		0.5	8	103
	Goldring Excel VX	525	Good bass drive but dull and imprecise higher up. An old-fashioned sound that falls short of the true high end		●		0.45	8	175
R	Grado Prestige Black	49	Capable of admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	4	6	214
BB	Grado Prestige Gold	149	Rich-sounding with an unusually refined top-end for a moving magnet-type cartridge	●		●	4	6	158
	Grado Reference	995	Loads of tracking headroom but treble is limited. A prospect for mid-oriented valve amp users	●			1.7	6.5	175
	London Decca S Gold	399	Immediate and detailed, but coloured and nonlinear, with a questionable effect on records	●			5.0	6	84
	Lyra Lydian Beta	599	A thoroughly enjoyable cartridge — smooth, agile and dynamic in character		●		0.5	8	192
R	Lyra Lydian	649	Superbly capable all-round musical performer that improves markedly when its body cover is removed		●		0.3	7	158
EC	Lyra Helikon	1095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			0.5	8	215
	Lyra Parnassus D.C.t	1,895	A real little jewel of a cartridge, with many good qualities, but handicapped by a rather too obvious treble peak	●	●		0.22	10.5	175
BB	Ortofon 510P	38	For the price, a good blend of virtues — weight, clarity and neutrality	●		●	3.0	5	85
R	Ortofon MC3 Turbo	130	Bright, cheerful and bouncy, but unsubtle — take it as it comes		●		3.3	4	103
BB	Ortofon MC15 Super II	130	A good all-rounder, with outstanding resolution, if slightly bright and close-up		●		0.35	7	103
	Ortofon MC25E	180	An excellent upgrade for a mid-price turntable		●		0.5	11	139
	Ortofon MC25FL	250	A bit too stark and honest, but faithful to what's on the LP		●		0.5	11	139
BB	Ortofon MC 10 Supreme	300	A full and cultured-sounding cartridge, with collective attributes far outweighing its shortcomings		●		0.5	10.7	192
	Ortofon MC30 Supreme	525	Highly detailed and even-sounding cartridge that has a special affinity with female vocal recordings		●		0.5	10.7	158
BB	Ortofon Rohmann	1,000	A class act in nearly every respect, with fine groove security and a very smooth and even-handed sound		●		0.25	8.5	175
R	Ortofon MC3000II	1,100	A real ear-opener. Nothing to criticise anywhere — one of the very best		●		0.12	10	84
	Ortofon MCS5000	1,500	Limited tracking ability, bright and forward sound, but good stereo		●		0.12	10	91
	Rega Bias	42	Can sound a little hard and lacking bloom, though often exciting	●			5	4	214
R	Rega Elys	85	Clearly superior to the Bias, the Elys is more detailed, accurate and convincing	●		●	5.0	5	67
R	Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	6.5	6.3	192
R	Roksan Corus Black	130	Recognisably related to the Corus Blue, but smoother and more civilised	●		●	6.5	5	91
BB	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties — one of the best around for less than £300		●		2.5	9	192
R	van den Hul MM-1	250	If woody midrange could be tamed, imaging and security would pull it through	●		●	5.5	6	103
	van den Hul DDT-II	600	Outstanding stereo imaging and neutral balance are appealing, but rhythmically the DDT-II is a bit lazy		●		0.35	7.6	158
R	van den Hul MC-10	750	A neutral, balanced performer, gives fine depth and focus and a firm, extended bass		●		0.4	6	60
	van den Hul MC-One	900	This extends all the positive qualities of the 10, but adds greater authority and scale — worth all the extra money		●		0.4	6	60
R	van den Hul MC-Two	1,200	MC-Two rewards with a highly detailed yet fluid and musically convincing portrayal		●		0.4	6	72
R	van den Hul Frog	1,500	Seems to control/suppress surface noise better than its rivals. This delicate and subtle performer has great charm		●		0.65	7	175
R	van den Hul G' hopper IIIGLA	2,800	Undoubtedly one of the finest cartridges available. It has tremendous bandwidth, energy and finesse		●		0.4	6	122
R	Wilson benesch Matrix	786	Extraordinarily well balanced cartridge: neutral and detailed yet lively and rhythmically assertive		●		0.58	6	158
R	Wilson benesch Carbon	1,573	Carbon fibre body contributes to a delightfully clean and open midrange, and a quick, lively and coherent sound		●		0.45	7	175



## TONEARMS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	EFFECTIVE MASS	PARALLEL TRACKING	PIVOTED	UNI-PIVOT	EFFECTIVE LENGTH (cm)	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Kuzma Stogi Ref	1,250	Large, solid and well made arm, gives exceptionally clear sound with just a hint of brightness	High		●			79
R	Linn Ekos	1,500	Superb, state-of-the-art design which builds significantly on predecessor's strengths	Med		●		229	67
BB	Rega RB250	109	The ultimate budget arm? Refined, sweet, detailed and natural	Low		●		237	60
BB	Rega RB300	174	Despite its modest price it sets exceptional standards and could be used on many high-end turntables	Low		●		237	60
R	Roksan Tabriz Basic	350	Targeted at the Xerxes, this is a good alternative to the Rega arm in many cases – a touch bright though	Low		●		240	91
R	SME Series IV	983	Superb engineering and finish with a finely balanced sound, impressive stereo focus and low coloration	Low		●		233	60
R	SME Series V	1,461	Excellent in all respects, this arm arguably sets the standards for pivoted arms, regardless of price	Low		●		233	60

# STANDS & SUPPORTS

## SPECIFICATIONS

## EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aavik C4	200	Attractive wood finish stand with a very large footprint but sound is a little coloured	77	47			4	MDF	206
R	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47			4	Wood	193
	Apollo Symphony	245	Simple steel and glass stand which majors in excitement factor but lacks precision	73	46.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Apollo Soprano	275	Uninspiring looks and sonic performance that can be beaten at this price	68.5	45.5			4	Glass	193
	Apollo Mezzo Soprano	340	Heavyweight contender packing a big sonic punch. Looks cool, but can contribute a bit of character	68.5	53.5,44			4	Glass	217
R	Atacama Europa	240	Stylish, expandable modular design with agreeable full-bodied sound – great value	67	48.6			4	Wood	193
R	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50		●	4	Glass	217
BB	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43			4	MDF	193
R	Avid Isoshelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48			5	MDF	193
BB	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well damped design. Its performance makes the price tag seem rather good value	75	53.5,45			4	MDF	217
	Custom design E'lite E4	250	Fairly laid back for a glass/steel rack. Just loses out sonically to the competition	51	62,51			4	Glass	217
R	Custom Design Aspect650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46		●	4	Glass	206
R	Elemental Audio Isotube X4	849	A hefty stand that demonstrates just how much difference a good support can make	90	49		●	4	Glass	193
	Kestrel Furniture Nightingale	495	Well engineered furniture quality rack with thoughtful extras. Large with pleasing but not winning performance	91	62.5,53.5			5	Wood	217
	Mana 4-tier	500	The ultimate statement in steel and glass; adds resonance in a way you'll love or hate	87	45		●	4	Glass	206
	Projekt Furniture A4	215	An elegant support stand that blends in to any home environment with a laid-back sound	56	48			4	Wood	193
R	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49			4	MDF	206
R	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5			4	Wood	217
	Sonus System Elite	330	Rather ugly and seems to offer little over and above cheaper steel and glass stands	68	50		●	4	Glass	206
	Sound Organisation Z545	160	Budget price and great looks make this a great value stand	73	46		●	4	Glass	193
R	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, 5 shelves too! Well balanced and under £200	92	50,40			5	Glass	217
	Soundstyle XS100	270	Less character than other similar strands, but sound is somewhat short on transparency	72.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	206
	Soundstyle Radius SR100	280	Stylish looks and a smooth sound	63.5	49.5		●	4	Glass	193
BB	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8		●	4	Glass	193
BB	Towshend Seismic Sink Stand	900	Serious resolution and stunning isolation from air decoupled self levelling design. If you have the cash, buy one	61	53,39.5			4	MDF	217

## SPEAKER STANDS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (cm)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Alphason Akros II 60D	79	Good-looking, well-equipped with decent ingredients. Evenhanded but lacks dynamic enthusiasm	62	16.5		●			220
	Alphason HDS	85	A reasonable stand with a smooth but rather bland sound balance. Good finish options	45-60	15.5,15.5		●			189
	Apollo Olympus	75	A popular stand and a decent performer, but unremarkable by today's standards	40-60	15,12.5		●			189
	Apollo A4/6	82	A pretty and robust design that sonically fails to stand out from the crowd	51,40,51	18		●			202
BB	Atacama Nexus 6	50	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18					202
R	Atacama R724	150	Atacama uses its market strength to deliver a superbly appointed product at a very reasonable price	60	15,17		●	●		189
	Atacama R724/Atabite	250	Good basic engineering plus plenty of mass results in a fine-sounding stand at its price	61	16, 21.5		●	●		220
R	Cyrus CLS50 stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17, 19					220
R	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18		●			202
R	Elemental Isotube SZse	599	Stands of distinction, able to free the speaker's sound from its box in a way budget stands simply can't	61	23,27		●	●		189
	Gale t60	70	Neither the least expensive nor the prettiest, and the sound is undistinguished too	63	16.5		●			220
	Green Apple Diamond Bevel	225	Sounds soft, gentle and somewhat dulled at the top, but takes top honours for style	61	15		●			220
R	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean, sweet and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20		●			220
R	JPW HS1	120	A purposeful stand, a touch dry-sounding but particularly strong with bass. Great for rock and dance music	61	19,21		●			189
BB	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20		●			220
R	Mana Sound Base	175	The Sound Base plinth simply improves the sound of every speaker placed on it	8	29,32					202
	Mission Stance	100	Detailed and open but needs a firm foundation to give its best	60	19,15		●			202
	Mission Stancette	60	Smart styling and finish combined with a very low price. Sounds OK considering	60	16.5, 22		●			220
	Mordant-Short Atlas	90	Shiny silver Atlas looks great, but sound doesn't transcend the very basic engineering	53	17.5		●			220
BB	Partington A-4	119	An oddball stand with a sound that's sheer class. More open and focused than most of the competition	50-100	19,22		●	●		189
R	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15		●	●		220
R	Partington Dreadnought Ult.	299	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	20.5,23.5		●			202
	Quadraspire QS speaker stand	150	Styled to match the company's equipment racks, a very decent sounding stand at a fair price	62	14					220
	Russ Andrews Torlyte	599	Subtle and musical-sounding stands, though a touch more 'pizzazz' is need for Recommendation at this price	61	33.5,24					189
	Sonus Systems Excel	110	Strong performance when filled with sand but design flaws let it down	65,45	20,22.5		●			202
R	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16		●			220
	Sound Organisation Z524	69	A coherent-sounding stand with particular strengths in the midband, though quality drops at the frequency extremes	61	16,17					189
	Sound Style Select	95	OK but not as good as its cheaper brother the Z522	59	16,17		●			202
	Target HM60	106	A solid and well-built stand laid-back to the point of coma	40-70	16.5,19		●			202
R	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works well with decent floorstanders as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48					202



# TUNERS

## ANALOGUE TUNERS



### SPECIFICATIONS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
R	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64			●	●	193
R	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64		●	●	●	193
R	Cyrus FM7.5	400	Beautifully made and presented, with sound that's a small but worthwhile advance over budget models	FM	7			●	●	211
BB	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FMM,L	40	●			●	193
R	Denon TU-1500RD	250	A well balanced and clean sound with good bass and treble extension	FM,M	40	●			●	184
	Magnum Dynalab FT11	499	All-analogue tuner: receives weak or tightly packed stations but loses out on noise and sonic neutrality	FM	3			●	●	184
BB	Harman Kardon TU940	179	Good sound and particularly good signal recovery under tricky reception conditions	FM, M	30	●			●	221
	Leak Trough Line - GTA	300	A renovated classic with a style all of its own coupled with an emotive and gutsy performance	FM	0			●	●	206
	Linn Pekin	545	Smart and high-tech tuner which integrates well with Linn systems but offers less appealing performance out of that context	FM, M	80		●	●		211
R	Linn Kremlin	2,600	Controversially good sound at a very high price	FM	80		●	●		142
	Marantz ST-17	600	Great looks, but sound let down by opaqueness due to pilot-tone breakthrough	FM, M, L	60	●			●	221
BB	Marantz ST-48	120	A classic budget model which manages a performance only just behind much more expensive models	FM,M	60	●				184
BB	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM,M,L	90	●		●		211
R	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29		●			193
	Myryad T-10	530	A very smart unit which works well and offers good rhythmic drive and vitality, albeit at a price	FM	20			●	●	184
	NAD C440	200	Rather polite sound, a little vague at times, that seldom offends but never excites	FM,M	30	●				193
	Pioneer F-504RDS	250	Cable-friendly with advanced RDS and excellent RF performance; slightly disappointing sound	FM,M	40	●		●	●	166
	Roksan Caspian	595	Neat fascia with great ergonomics, but sound is not really any better than models at half the price	FM	50		●		●	184
	Sony ST-SE500	140	A lot of features for the money, but sound lacks detail and has some coloration	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	193
	Roksan Kandy KT-1	375	Well made but sound is a bit lacklustre and lags behind some budget models	FM, M, L		●				211
	Rotel RT-935AX	160	Good ergonomics and sound quality at a realistic price, but limited features and RF selectivity	FM,M	20					166
R	Sony ST-SE570	130	Good honest budget tuner: loads of features, just a trifle bland	FM, M, L	30	●		●	●	221
	Sony ST-SA3ES	250	Clean, lean presentation but needs a quality aerial to perform at its best	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	157
R	Sony STS-B920S	180	A little hiss and image compression don't detract from the clean performance of this feature-packed tuner	FM,M,L	30	●		●	●	184
	Thorens TRT2000	499	Not exactly neutral sounding, but nonetheless makes listening fun	FM,M	59	●	●	●	●	157

## DIGITAL TUNERS

STATUS	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DAB	FM	M	L	ISSUE NUMBER	
R	Arcam Alpha 10 DRT	800	The first DAB tuner and arguably still the best, but the system's still not perfect	DAB	7	●	●	●	199
R	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16	●	●	●	221
	Arcam FMJ DT26	1,000	Metal-cased version of the Alpha 10 DAB, not so competitive now DAB prices are dropping	DAB	7	●	●	●	211
	Cymbol C-DAB 1	1,000	The first 'high-end' DAB tuner, although format is the ultimate limitation. Gorgeous finish	DAB	8	●	●	●	199
	Pison Wavefinder	299	Bizarre-looking DAB tuner that requires a powerful PC to operate - great gadget, sound variable	DAB		●	●	●	211
	Radi DAB-606	199	Nice price, odd product. Awful to use and sounds rather gutless	DAB	30	●	●	●	221
	Sony ST-D777ES	550	Smart and useful with DAB and FM in one box, but neither band really shines	DAB,FM,M,L	99	●	●	●	211
R	Technics ST-GT1000	500	Handy tuner that combines DAB, FM and AM in one unit and substantially lowers the price bar for DAB entry	DAB,FM,M	97	●	●	●	199
BB	VideoLogic DRX-601E	300	Cheapest DAB tuner to date, and concedes little if anything to dearer models	DAB	10	●	●	●	211
	VideoLogic DRX-601ES	349	Tweaked version of 601E with modified frequency response: a matter of taste	DAB	10	●	●	●	221

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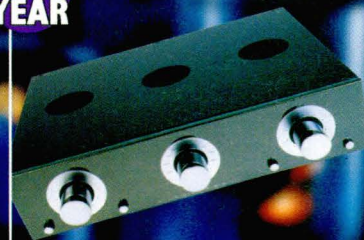


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# Outro

## Fly me to the croon

ROBBIE WILLIAMS? NEVER MIND THE WIDTH, DAVID VIVIAN RECKONS YOU SHOULD FEEL THE RECORDING QUALITY.

**I**t's probably fatuous to say that the big band sound is "back". The fact is that it never went away of course. But the residual cool of performers like Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jnr seems to have found a particular resonance right now with a youthful new audience.

No accident, of course. Robbie Williams made it happen. And probably for all the right reasons. I believe the bloke when he says that after walking into Los Angeles' Capitol Studios for the first time, "I just had to have a big cry up, 'cos I'm in the studio where Frank Sinatra recorded his songs, and I'm recording a big band album."

His remarkably authentic Brylcreem 'n' tux tour of songs made famous in the fifties and sixties by Francis Albert and co, *Swing When You're Winning*, has been, perhaps predictably, a whopping hit. Robbie's theory is that the parents of the kids that usually buy his music were naturally drawn to it and that had a sort of trickle-down effect. "I don't think people should be deprived of this kind of music," concluded the pop-tastic one.

Not that all the critics agreed. Most from the broadsheets gave it a cowardly kicking by heaping on the faint praise to damning effect. "Pleasant enough voice," they opined in unison, "but no Sinatra", as if this was in some way a uniquely valuable insight. No, not Sinatra. Just good old Robbie and a few buddies singing a collection of standards in front of a 112-piece orchestra. All right, there is a "duet" between Williams and Sinatra's recording of *It Was A Very Good Year* but Robbie doesn't suffer unduly from the closeness of the comparison. Fun all the way. It's a blast, and it's a great album. Period.

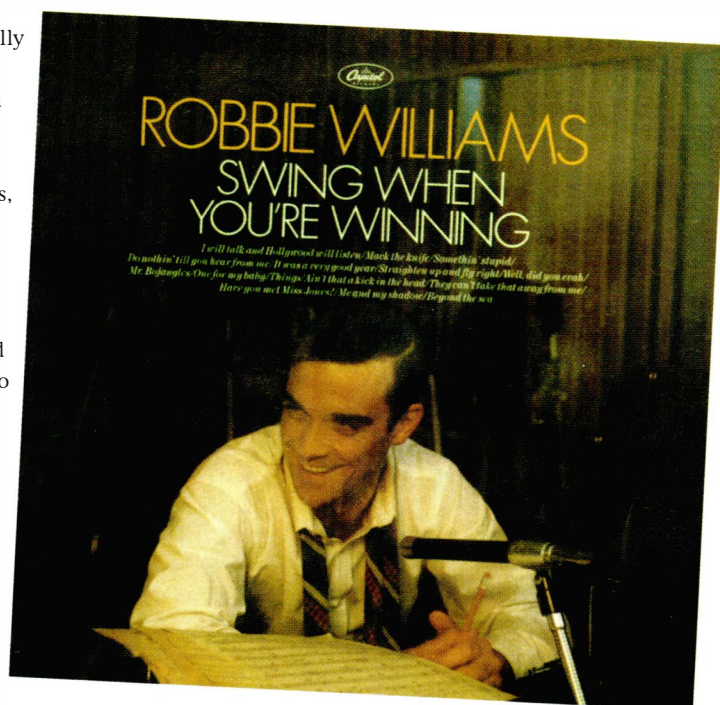
In fact, I'd defy anyone with a half decent hi-fi (something, possibly, of little concern to your typical broadsheet

music critic) to truthfully suggest otherwise. Because of the rich and contrasting textures – rasping brass, breathy woodwind, silky strings, tinkling ivories, bombastic bass, not to mention scale and dynamics – even averagely well recorded big band music tends to flatter any hardware that scrapes into the basic hi-fi category.

But *Swing When You're Winning* isn't averagely well recorded, it's a piece of work. The kind of CD that makes you glad you spent your last wedge of disposable on a new amplifier rather than that fancy espresso machine. Played on a suitably transparent and juicy system, my bet is it would blow away the prejudices of even the most jaundiced muso hack. Not just because of the scintillating fidelity of the highs, lows and in-betweens (startling in itself), but the vitality with which the musical event and the emotional energy of the performers and musicians are portrayed.

This is what hi-fi is meant to be all about. Williams' long-time producer and collaborator Guy Chambers confirms that the recording session was special in more ways than one: "Capitol Studios is a wood-paneled, octagonal high-ceilinged room. You can hear it – there's definitely a magic about the place. When you hear the record, that's pretty much how it sounded on the day. The first song we did was *Mack The Knife*, and I remember thinking, 'this is going to be amazing'."

It is. Almost as good as *One For My Baby*, on which the legendary 84-year-old Bill



**“ROBBIE DOESN'T SUFFER UNDULY FROM THE CLOSENESS OF THE COMPARISON (WITH FRANK SINATRA). IT'S A BLAST, AND IT'S A GREAT ALBUM. PERIOD.”**

Miller – Sinatra's pianist from 1951 until he died – plays with a subtlety and simplicity that puts many a modern jazzier to shame. Another great in attendance is Harold Jones, Count Basie's drummer. He perhaps sums up the phenomenon best: "I'm so glad to hear a young person out here doing the old music – there's all these great tunes that are just laying in the dust and I think it's going to take somebody to revitalise them and sing them."

Robbie Williams sings them well. For the time being, the big band era is back. And it's never sounded so good.

David Vivian was a serious jazz fusion fan until he discovered the joys of Robbie.

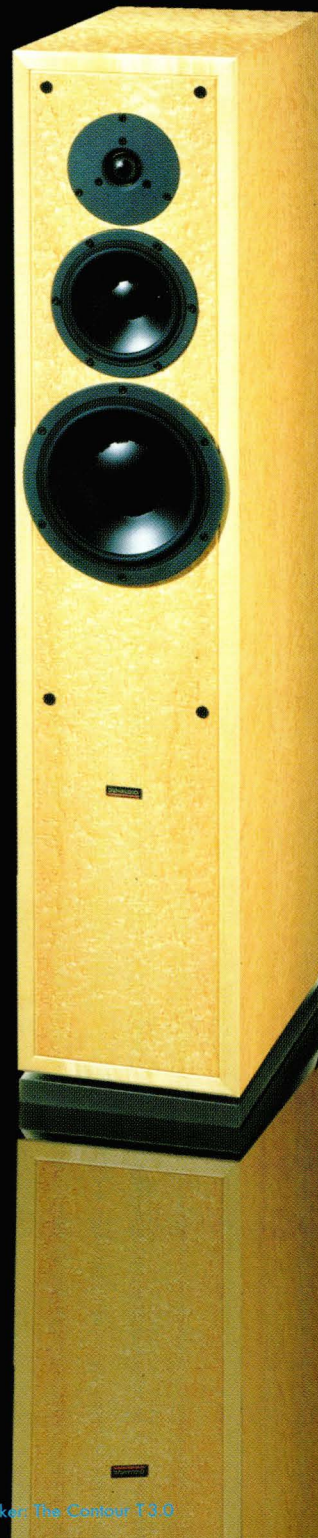




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