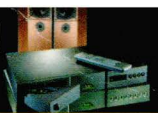


FREE CD! 11 SUPERBLY ATMOSPHERIC TRACKS FROM NAIM AUDIO'S MUSIC LABEL

WIN! A COMPLETE NAIM HI-FI SYSTEM WORTH A WHOPPING £3,000



HI-FI CHOICE

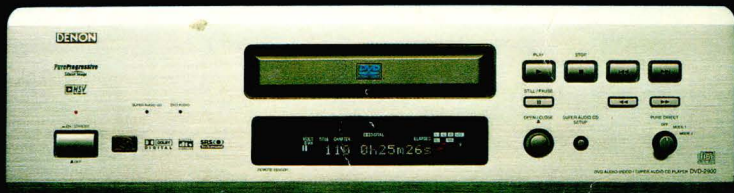
PASSION FOR SOUND WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK | OCTOBER 2003

NEW LOOK!

NEW AUDIO DYNAMITE

SHANLING SACD >> ARCAM DVD-AUDIO >> DENON UNIVERSAL >>

3 next generation disc players for forward thinking music fans



DEFINITIVE IN-DEPTH TEST

CATWALK CABINETS

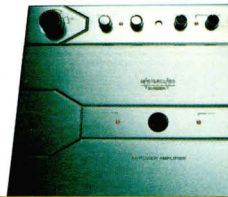
Sonic flair meets sumptuous Italian style with the Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor



Roksan's flagship turntable now it's even better!



Musical might from Sugden's sizzlin' two-box amp combo



MIKE OLDFIELD INTERVIEW FROM VINYL AND CD TO SACD AND NOW DVD-A – WHERE NEXT FOR TUBULAR BELLS?



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST CD PLAYERS

FEATURING...

- > Arcam FMJ CD33T
- > Rotel RCD-1072
- > Creek CD50
- > Talk Thunder 3.1
- > Exposure 3010
- > Thule CD-150B



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HI-FI CHOICE

OCTOBER 2003 ISSUE 246

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



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



ALVIN GOLD

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



RICHARD BLACK

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

We had a blast putting this issue together – there's just so much good stuff in it. There's the free CD for a start, a cauldron of museful moments captured by those sharp-eared rhythm kings at Naim and brought together exclusively by us, for you, for free. Never say we don't love you...

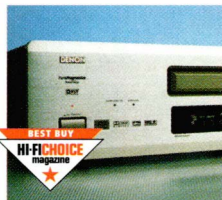
Then there's all the kit, the hi-fi buff's wonder stuff and manna to the music fan. We've unearthed an extraordinary amount of top quality gear for you this month – much of it aired for the first time within these pages. For the two-channel aficionado there are turntables, amps and speakers galore, some of which possess skills that place them at the very top of their class. Then there's the multichannel element – three new disc players and a bewitching high-end system for those with an interest in high-resolution surround sound music and high-quality multi-tasking AV. And in case you're wondering whether it's still worth considering a single-purpose dedicated CD player (for many of us the answer's yes) – see our *Ultimate Group Test* for evidence, starting on page 58.

All these elements are brought together under the *HFC* umbrella through a single ethos – the search for the most natural, vibrant and downright enjoyable sounds around, whatever the format, from vinyl to SACD and beyond. I love music, it's my passion – my soul food. That's why I love hi-fi, that's why I love editing this magazine and that's why we leave no stone unturned in our incomparably thorough reviews – so your soul may reap the benefits too. Until next time...



Tim Bownen **editor**

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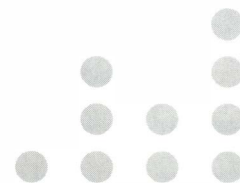
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Hi-Fi Choice is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 28 years, our unique tests have brought you the most thorough and reliable hi-fi journal around. And our mix of rigorous group tests and in-depth solo reviews continues to ensure that **HFC** is the magazine you can trust. Published 13 times a year, it's the *smarter* hi-fi read...



CAMBRIDGING THE GAP

CD PLAYERS AND AMPS INVIGORATE BUDGET SECTOR

Budget stalwart Cambridge Audio has given a boost to the entry-level hi-fi market with the new Azure range, set to provide a crucial stepping stone to new audiophiles everywhere. The range comprises two stereo amps, two CD players, a DAB tuner and two DVD players, one of which is DVD-Audio compatible. All are said to have been built from the ground up using "advanced circuitry" and "enhanced components", including 24-bit/192kHz DACs from renowned supplier Wolfson.

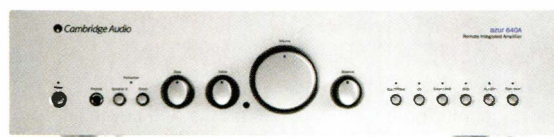
The 540A and 640A stereo amps are priced

at just £200 and £250 respectively and feature slimline remote controls, six line inputs and bypassable tone controls, plus an optional moving magnet phono stage. Pricing is identical for the 540C and 640C CD players, which both feature proprietary data re-clocking technology, separate power supplies for digital and analogue sections and an acoustically damped chassis. Cambridge's DAB 604T tuner is priced at £200 and includes the latest chipsets from Texas

Instruments and an FM circuit, so you can receive both DAB and analogue transmissions. Finally, the flagship DVD640D DVD-A/V player with its six-channel Crystal DAC is due for launch at the end of the year.

☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 www.richersounds.com



BLU'S TACK

CHORD FINALLY REVEALS ITS LONG-AWAITED CD TRANSPORT

Chord plans to unveil its first ever CD transport later this month. Blu will make the perfect partner, both visually and sonically, to Chord's popular DAC64 and will complete the Choral system line-up. Blu has been designed to exploit the specialist WTA filtering algorithms used in the DAC64, by having its own WTA filter. A wide range of digital connections are available and Blu also boasts selectable output sampling frequencies from 44.1kHz to 176kHz. Pricing was unconfirmed at press time.

☎ 01622 721444 🌐 www.chordelectronics.co.uk

LAB REPORT

NEW LABORATORY SERIES CD PLAYER FROM AVI

Following the recent launch of AVI's impressive Laboratory Series integrated amp (reviewed in HFC 241), the matching Laboratory CD player has arrived. Based around a Cirrus Crystal 24-bit/192kHz DAC, which AVI claims is "the most musically rewarding", the new player also features dual power supplies, two digital outputs and chunky steel casework with an aluminium faceplate. AVI says that meticulous care has gone into the development of the PCB to get the best from the converter. It's priced at £1,299 and it's in the shops now.

☎ 01453 752656 🌐 www.avihifi.com





NADS OUT FOR AUTUMN

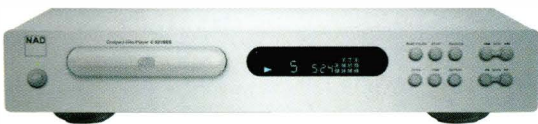
CD PLAYER AND AMP FOR REAL HI-FI ON A BUDGET

NAD has added BEE status to its acclaimed C521 CD player. The new player bears the mark of NAD's director of development, Bjorn Erik Edvardsen, who has been responsible for many NAD innovations over the last 25 years. Under the lid nestle a Burr-Brown 20-bit DAC and separate power

regulators for the digital and analogue sections. The C521 BEE is priced at £200 and is available in NAD's recently-introduced titanium finish.

Also new this month is an 80-watt stereo amp which replaces the C350. The C352 has an upgraded Pure Class A preamp, power supply and transformer giving a 25 per cent increase in power. Further features include seven line inputs, two preamp outputs and NAD's new SR 5 system remote control. It costs £350.

☎ 01908 319360 🌐 www.lenbrook.co.uk



WOODEN IT BE NICE?

NEW FLAGSHIP OPERA LOUDSPEAKER

At £2,200, Opera's new flagship V Quinta speaker offers all the trimmings including a solid hardwood 31kg cabinet. The three-way Quinta is the product of over a year's work and the design includes four drive units, an advanced crossover and audiophile components used throughout. Both 180mm bass drivers have their own reflex chambers, contributing to the

high 90dB sensitivity, and both these and the bass/mid units are custom-made for Opera. The crossover has been designed for wide dispersion and complements the sloping baffle design, splitting in two for the bass and bass/mid drivers. The Quinta comes in solid mahogany as standard with other hardwood options at a premium.

☎ 01908 612359

🌐 www.ukd.co.uk



ST ETIENNE'S CHORUS

NEW SPEAKER RANGE FROM FOCAL-JMLAB

Focal-Jmlab's new St Etienne factory has been busy producing nine new speakers which form the Chorus S range. Their key feature is a new tweeter material called 'version TNC'. Retaining the inverse dome style of the original Chorus range, the new 'Tweeter TC assembly' is formed from an aluminium/ magnesium alloy that's said to offer a flat response to 28kHz. There are three floorstanders, three standmounts, two centres and an active sub, starting at £200.

☎ 0121 616 5126

🌐 www.focal-jmlab.fr



audiofile
PRODUCT NEWS

Soundbites



DISCARRAY is a recently patented storage device for CDs that resembles a picture frame and allows users to display their favourite CD artwork within.

Constructed from a suede mount board with an aluminium frame, the makers claim discs can be easily swapped, emphasising the disc array's function as a storage unit as well as 'functional art'.

Prices start at £30.

☎ 020 8886 6933

🌐 www.discarray.com

TERRATEC has a new product aimed directly at the specialist home recording enthusiast. The sound card-based Phase 28 offers a wide range of inputs and outputs, including MIDI and digital coaxial. Phase 28 can also accept S/PDIF, AC3 and DTS data streams as well as sample frequencies up to 192kHz. It's available now at a cost of £205.

☎ 0208 418 0778

ECOSSE has unveiled a new high-end interconnect called the Legend SE MkII, based around a Monocrystal silver solidcore. Dressed in a vibration-absorbing jacket, Ecosse claims that there is "virtually zero microphony". Prices begin at £635 for a 0.5 metre pair.

☎ 0141 353 0509

APT is offering hi-fi manufacturers what it calls "the world's first digital audio wireless solution". Using Bluetooth-derived technology, it allows full bandwidth audio to be transferred wirelessly between components. Could be a boon for multi-room systems...

ERRATA: Gremlins in the system meant we printed two incorrect phone numbers last month. Apologies to Heart distributor Real Hi-Fi, whose real number is 0870 909 6777 and to AAD, who are distributed by Peach Amber on 01327 706560.

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S T Y L E S E R I E S



Marantz is thrilled to release the latest innovative addition to the Style series. The Eclipse '36 consists of a separate AV amplifier, radio and DVD player.

Combine this with the stunning LCD TV and it will bring you sophisticated good looks, ease of use and state of the art music and movie realism.

Eclipse '36: Elegant sophistication

Telephone: 01753 680868 www.marantz.com

because music matters

The AV32R processor – probably TMA's most acclaimed product to date



HARD TIMES

TAG McLaren Audio is pulling out of two-channel audio to concentrate on its AV range. Six years after its inception the company has just concluded a review of its position in the market and decided that its future lies in home cinema. A company spokesman said that the existing stereo range will continue to be sold but there is unlikely to be any new development in that area, though the company will continue its research in the AV arena, which already constitutes the bulk of the company's sales. TMA blames the world economy's effect on margins in the industry for the downsizing.

TMA isn't the only company to experience hard times this year. Both Denon and Marantz lost their independence, Yamaha

has made a loss for the first time in 100 years, and now Harman has had to shut down the Madrigal facility in Middleton, Connecticut, where Mark Levinson, Proceed and Revel have been produced. Proceed has been discontinued but electronics production moves to the Lexicon factory in Bedford, Massachusetts, with Revel speakers joining JBL in Northridge, California. Andrew Clarke at Harman says this consolidation "will phase out the Madrigal name", but as far as the Mark Levinson brand goes he is confident, claiming that "ML may now have the brightest future in the group". There was even a suggestion that a universal DVD player is in development in ML's R&D department.

'AVIN' IT ESOTERICA

Turntable specialist Avid has signed a deal with TEAC to produce both CD and multi-format disc players based on its Esoteric range. TEAC is Avid's Japanese distributor and the two companies have formed a joint venture which allows Avid to build its own disc players based on TEAC's Esoteric chassis. In the past, third-party rebuilds such as the Pioneer-based Eikos have been a result of one company buying complete players from a major and then modifying them. By taking this approach Avid is in the enviable position of being able to use the expertise of a much larger organisation.

Avid produced its new entry-level (£1,100) Diva turntable in response to demand from the Japanese market and according to founder Conrad Mas hopes to get the first Avid CD player into production by Christmas priced around £4,500. A universal SACD/ DVD-Audio player based on TEAC's recently released DV50 will follow in late 2004.

Avid Diva turntable – see next month for an exclusive review



SUPER AUDIO CD

GATHERING OF THE SUPER AUDIO CLAN

SACD now has its own industry forum thanks to ex-Philips SACD supremo Paul Reynolds. Paul organised the first music and hi-fi industry meeting in July where over 70 attendees got together to exchange information and discuss how to promote the format. According to Bob Charlton: "Rather than being a marketing operation, the SACD Forum is driven by content creators, a place where engineers, artists and record companies can get together".

The Forum will meet on a regular basis, essentially with the aim of producing more music on the SACD format through bringing those that know about the music together with people who have technological expertise. As yet there is no official body or committee behind the Forum and thus no website but these are in process.

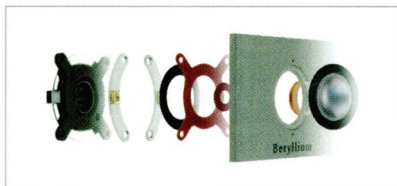
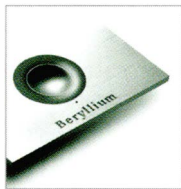


SURROUNDED BY TUBES

The world's first tube-powered surround sound processor goes into production this autumn. Jim Fosgate, the man who developed Dolby Pro-Logic II so he could hear his LP collection in surround, has put the Fosgate Audionics FAP V1 valve processor into production.

An all-analogue design, the FAP V1 has eight inputs for 7.1 channel operation and a bypass option for more conventional digital processors. Fosgate Audionics claims that this converts any stereo signal into a "natural and seamless" surround sound experience. If you want a slice of tubular surround you'll have to get an order in fast – the production run will be limited to 500 units and the price tag is \$13,000, so form an orderly queue please. For more info, go to www.fosgateaudionics.com

BERYLLIUM TWEETER



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

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

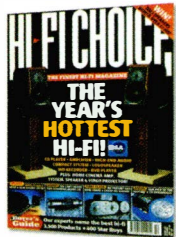
TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice
October 1998

It was EISA Awards time in October '98 with Arcam scooping amp of the year with the Alpha 10 and

Tanoy running away with the speaker gong for its Mercury M1. At the other end of the scale, Sonus Faber launched the beautiful Amati

Homage, ten grand's worth of speaker-cum-art, with its lush hand-finished wooden cabinet and exotic drivers. HFC took a long hard look into the undying British love for vinyl, finding we were a tactile lot who love both the feel of the ol' black stuff and the bountiful artwork that accompanies it.



TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice
October 1993

Meridian inspired a nation of readers to put their grannies up for sale with the release of the 500 Series – a comprehensive collection of eleven components designed

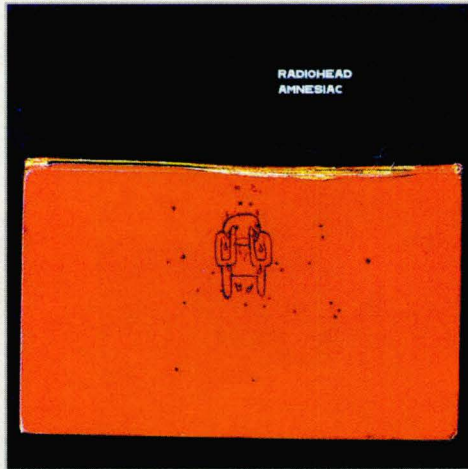
for both the AV and hi-fi markets that included the 500 CD transport, 506 and 508 CD players and 501 preamp. On the recording front,

DAT was still a viable if expensive option for home users and Pioneer's D-07 'super DAT' gave added appeal in the form of 96kHz sampling for analogue inputs bringing recordings that bit closer to the real thing. Meanwhile, Arcam's Alpha 5 came out of a comprehensive amp group test smelling of roses.



SYSTEM BUILDER

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

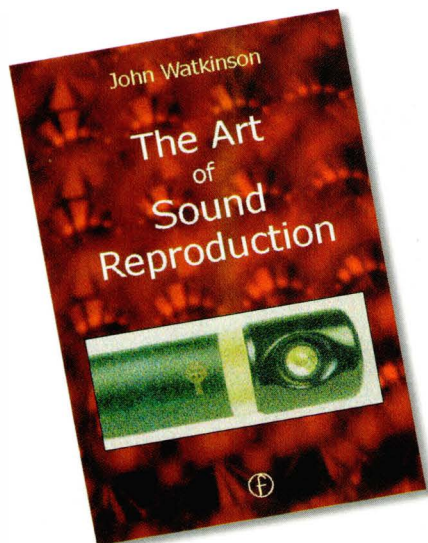


RADIOHEAD

Amnesiac Parlophone

With your preferred poison in hand, take the downward spiral towards the darkest catacombs of your mind with Radiohead's most controversial album. From The Smiths-inspired *Knives Out* to the computerised bass extravaganza of *Pulk/Pull Revolving Doors*, it's a marathon effort for any system and one that's capable of annihilating substandard kit.

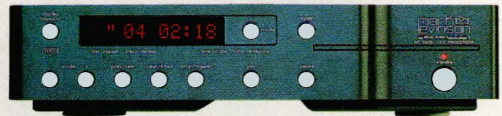
Thom Yorke's haunting vocals probe the soul and traumatise the tweeter, while the computerised effects combined with traditional instrumentation push and pull the audio bandwidth in every direction to its inevitable limit. We've pushed the boat out a little – but the competence of this audiophile set-up (right) is definitely worth it. Almost entirely devoid of coloration, this selection will reveal every pit and trough of the CD with brutal accuracy and to hell with the consequences.



CD PLAYER

MARK LEVINSON NO380S £6,495

Widely regarded in the inner circle of the audiophile club as 'a bit special', the Levinson is quite possibly your best bet for maximum resolution from CD, complete with a suitably substantial price tag.



AMPLIFIERS

ELECTROCOMPANIET
EC4.7/ 120DMB £3,448

A duo that's got the lot – transparency, dynamic range, musical tension and a big, muscular presence on your hi-fi rack – hail to the Norwegians.

SPEAKERS

PMC IB2 £6,150

With stunning levels of transparency and power, the IB2's competence in the studio as well as the home makes it the master of understated truth.



BOOK OF THE MONTH

The Art Of Sound Reproduction

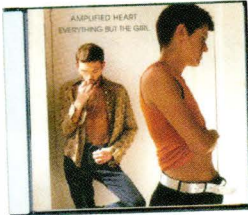
by John Watkinson

Focal Press £37.99

Few know more about audio than Watkinson, and even fewer are as adept at communicating it. In 550 fact-filled pages, this book covers everything from microphones to speakers to digital tape recorders to studio operations. Some of it is a bit specific and elaborate, but if you've even the slightest interest in audio *per se* then this book will make fascinating reading. It covers hi-fi and recording in one sweep, applying consistently high standards to both, and takes delight in demolishing myths along the way. Very well written too – readable and clear.

READERS' DEMO DISCS

YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL

Amplified Heart

"A couple of years before the flyweight musical duo churned out the chart-topping *Missing*, *Wrong* and *Walking Wounded*, came *Amplified Heart*, an acoustic album that awarded Ben and

Tracy some of the best critical acclaim of their careers. Its polished compositions featuring just voice and guitar are great for testing fine, intricate detail. Tracks such as *Rollercoaster* and *Walking To You* tug at the heartstrings while the 1995 reissue features the Todd Terry remix of *Missing*, so you can test gear with a strong dance track too."

Steve Morris via email

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

JIMMY'S TWEAKS #13

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



Selecting tracks on a CD player

Here's a strange one. For some reason which I've been as yet unable to fully fathom, virtually all CD players (irrespective of make, cost, or vintage) sound best when you select a track from 'Stop' and go straight to it. Using either forward or reverse Search, or pressing and releasing 'Pause', seems to take a little of

the brilliance and freshness from the sound.

Try this experiment. Choose a well-recorded CD – something with presence and lots of overtones – press 'Play' to start the music. Listen carefully, then press 'Pause' to stop the music. Now release 'Pause' and listen carefully again. The music should now sound fractionally quieter and less vibrant. Test again by pressing 'Stop', then 'Play' – the sound should improve. It doesn't matter which track you choose or how you select it, so long as you cue from 'Stop'.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

Lizz Wright Salt

Mike Oldfield Tubular Bells 2003

Neil Young Greendale

Bob Dylan Live 1966

Red Hot Chili Peppers By The Way

Herbaliser Band Session One

Gang Starr The Ownerz

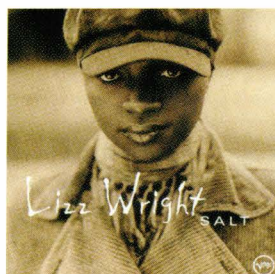
Kings Of Leon Youth And

Young Manhood

Grant Green Street Funk

& Jazz Grooves

Ulla Pirttijärvi In Our Foremothers' Arms



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

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

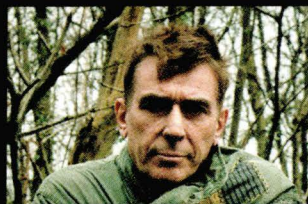


JOE STRUMMER & THE MESCALEROS

Title: *Streetcore*

Release date: October

The former Clash man was in the middle of recording a new album with his band the Mescaleros when he died aged of 50 last December. He'd been in the studio just a week before, and the unfinished tracks have since been completed by Martin Slattery and Scott Shields from the band. Eight new Strummer songs are complemented by a cover of Bob Marley's classic *Redemption Song*.



JOHN CALE

Title: *Hobosapiens*

Release date: October

The former Velvet Underground legend returns with his first full-length album in seven years, following his acclaimed performance at Glastonbury this summer. He's apparently been learning to use digital technology for the first time and production assistance comes from Nick Franglen, one half of the ultra-cool chill-out duo, Lemon Jelly.

BLONDIE

Title: *The Curse Of Blondie*

Release date: October

Debbie Harry and the band's new album has been four years in the making – and due to a series of

mishaps including losing the tapes, often seemed that it would never get made. The diverse palette of material ranges from rock to a Japanese folk tune via a brace of jazz ballads

FINLEY QUAYE

Title: *Much More Than Much Love*

Release date: 6 October

Finley Quaye's 1997 debut album, *Maverick A Strike*, was the best British reggae album in years. Then he lost his way, as the pressure of celebrity took its toll. His third album opens a new phase in his career, and finds him improbably adding country and folk influences to his reggae and hip-hop flavours. Guests include Beth Orton.

LENE MARLIN

Title: *Another Day*

Release date: October

The young Norwegian singer-songwriter went platinum in a dozen different countries with her 1999 debut *Playing My Game*. Still only 22, she returns with a second album, produced by Mike Hedges (Cure, U2, Travis). This time she's got a full band on board, but her intimate songs still mark her out as the Joni Mitchell of the text-messaging generation.

ALSO COMING SOON...

ROCK/ POP

Pimp Pimp (Oct), **Virgin Souls** Virgin Souls (Oct), **Willis** Come Get Some (Oct), **The Neptunes** The Clones (Oct)

JAZZ/ CLASSICAL

Gorbachev/ Loren/ Clinton Peter And The Wolf (Oct), **Michael Brecker Quintet** Wide Angles (Oct), **Dave Brubeck** Classical Brubeck (Oct)

"We're talking about a future classic"

July 2002 / VS55 / Hi Fi News Ken Kessler

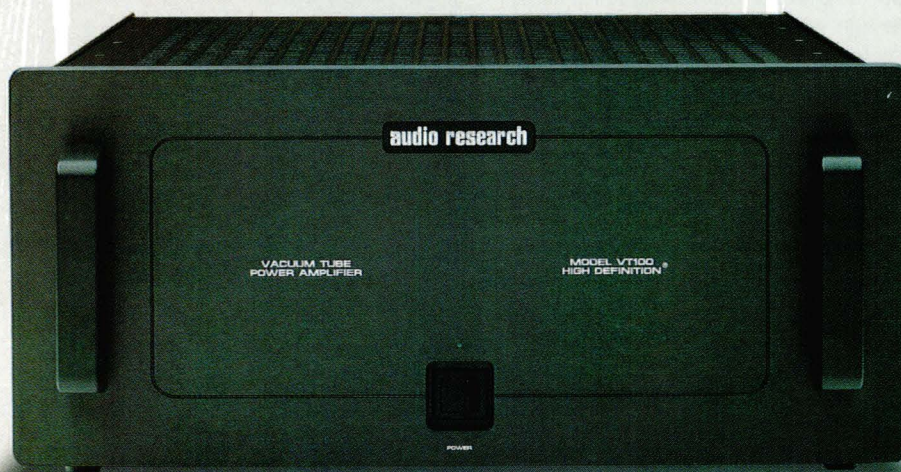
"More than any other CD player,
the CD3 is the machine that renews
my enthusiasm, wrapping me up
completely in the musical event"

November 2002 / CD3 / Suono Mario Berlinguer

ARC ANGELS

"Sets a new standard of quality"

December 2002 / SP16/VS55 / Suono Mario Berlinguer

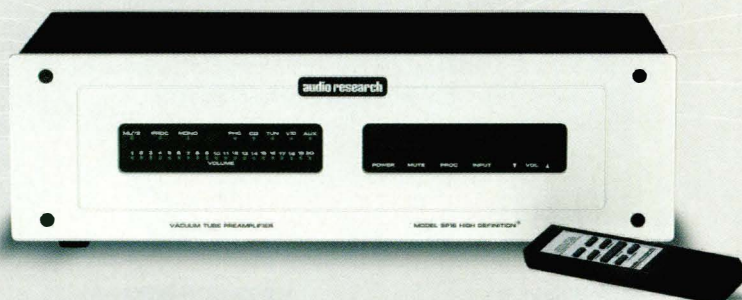


HI-FI CHOICE
EDITORS CHOICE AWARD

AUDIO RESEARCH
LS25 MKII/VT100 MKIII
PRE/POWER AMPLIFIER

"If you yearn for that intangible
'something' that many modern amps
miss, then you must hear the VS110"

March 2003 / VS110 / Hi Fi News Dave Berriman



Audio Research apply the technology gained from their Reference 2 preamplifier and Reference 600 series amplifiers to every model in their range, right down to the entry-level designs. The SP16 preamplifier, VS55 and VS110 power amplifiers and the new VSi55 integrated amplifier are not only packed with knowledge gained from the company's legendary flagship models, but herald a change in the way reasonably priced high end is perceived. Joining these classics are the state-of-the-art CD3 CD player and 150M multi-channel amplifier. For details of the full range and your nearest dealer, contact Absolute Sounds.

Audio Research: not a cautious choice, but a considered one.

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Maxim CD cleaner £2.50

▶ This generic disc cleaner, bought at a street market stall, is representative of many such products. The task is simple enough, so why spend six times as much on specialist cleaners if this one works? We had to find out!

To use it, you place the disc playing side up on the support table, spray some liquid from the bottle and polish with the synthetic chamois-faced puck. Results? The liquid seems rather watery and the puck is almost completely useless. But the support table is more than worth the asking price of the ensemble.

No other disc cleaner we've tried includes one of these, with the result that disc cleaning risks bending the disc, even introducing micro-cracks which can eventually cause playback problems, as researchers have found. This table holds the disc perfectly flat and stable, and fingerprint-free too. Used as an adjunct to Reveel, Allsop and so on, it's highly recommended.

🌐 www.sherwoodagencies.com



Terratec Vice Versa £50

▶ This tiny box converts an optical digital signal via Toslink to an electrical digital signal via RCA and – vice versa! It can do it one way (in which case the output appears on both Toslink and RCA) or both ways at once. Which is very neat. No power supply is included, so you'll need to add a wall-wart, or if you like you can draw power from a USB lead, though no actual data passes along the USB cable.

It does exactly what it says on the tin, and since the audio is passed bit-for-bit there's no problem with HDCD bitstreams, DTS and so on. Handy for those occasions where one wants to link, say, a coaxial-only CD player to an optical-only MD. It's also usable as an extender where very long digital leads are required. There's no beneficial effect on jitter, by the way, in fact slightly the reverse, but not worryingly so. And no, it doesn't strip copy-protection. You'll know if you need it: if you do, it's recommended.

☎ 08704 580011

🌐 www.terratec.com



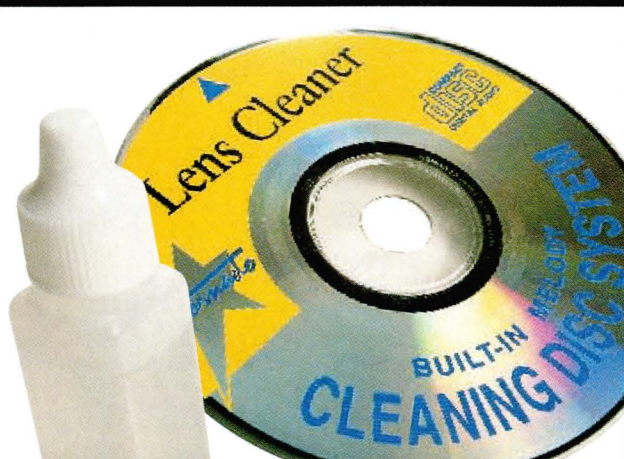
Onzow Zerodust stylus cleaner £30

▶ We approached this one with no small amount of trepidation – do you really fancy going near your precious stylus with a pad of tacky, gooey plastic? Can this really be the best way to remove extraneous matter from your vinyl/record player interface? Surely there's a high probability of ripping the cantilever from the body?

It turns out that that's nearly impossible, and in fact this does its job very well, grabbing on to dust and removing it from the stylus. All that's needed is a quick dab against the stylus, and because the plastic used in the Zerodust is so soft it will deform against the cartridge body and remove fibres stuck to that as well. To clean it after repeated use, simply wash with clean water. The lid of the box incorporates a magnifying lens to check the stylus for dirt (though it's not strong enough to tell you anything about damage). Brilliant.

☎ 0870 240 7228

🌐 www.choicebits.co.uk



Tornado CD player cleaner £2.50

▶ As with the Maxim disc cleaner, this is a generic product found in bargain stores and markets everywhere. The design is similar to the more expensive units from Allsop and others, with a soft brush on the playing side of the disc which gently wipes the laser as the disc plays. A few drops of the supplied alcohol-based fluid helps the cleaning process, which takes less than a minute and is accompanied by the usual terrible music and voice instructions in a choice of languages.

The good news is that it does actually work, but the bad news is that we have a few reservations. In the first place, there's only one brush so liquid may be left on the lens. Second, the liquid is distinctly watery and doesn't seem to have very good cleaning properties in general. Finally, the brush is not terribly secure and may end up dropping fibres on the lens after repeated use. Conclusion: £15 for a brand-name cleaner is probably justifiable.

☎ 020 7538 2824

All you need to know about your free Naim CD

WE WERE DELIGHTED when the folks at Naim Audio said they'd make us a compilation of their most precious recent musical moments. After all, Naim is a hi-fi manufacturer with a philosophy similar to our own – the hi-fi serves the music, not the other way round. Naim gear is famously adept at capturing the essence of musical timing and rhythm, at conveying music's spirit and energy. And, given that this is a hi-fi company with music at its core, it makes perfect sense that it should also run its own music label.

The Naim Label's catalogue currently boasts 30 artists and 60 albums spanning a variety of genres, all encompassing the twin themes of expert musicianship and high-quality sound. The free compilation CD attached to the cover of this issue samples 11 choice cuts from a selection of contemporary titles, brought to you exclusively by Naim and *Hi-Fi Choice*. Below you'll find more information on each of the featured artists... just load up your CD player and enjoy.



1 DOMINIC MILLER & NEIL STACEY
New Dawn Naim CD066
 Dominic Miller, guitarist with Sting's band for eighteen years, was so impressed when he saw Neil Stacey playing at a gig that he knew immediately he wanted to work with him. The title track from their self-penned album is a seamless tapestry of Neil and Dominic's superb guitar skills.
 Taken from the album *New Dawn*



2 JIM LAMPI
Jack's Naim CD071
 Jim Lampi plays the Chapman Stick, an amazing instrument with a five and a quarter octave range. Its unique sound has intrigued musicians including John Martyn, with whom Jim plays on a regular basis. The album is all original material, influenced by music that has affected Jim over the years.
 Taken from the album *Greasy*



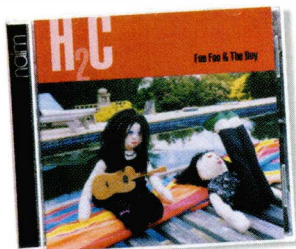
3 STEW CUTLER
Whisper Naim CD058
 Stew Cutler is a New York-based guitarist and his debut for The Naim Label offers a perfectly balanced blend of funk, melodic jazz and rock 'n' roll. Alternating between a myriad of styles, he employs a mellow approach with the result that even the crazy bits are dripping with cool.
 Taken from the album *Insignia*



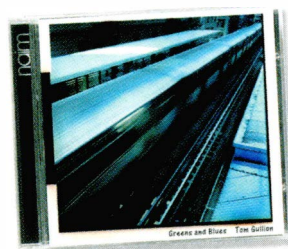
4 PATRICK NOLAND
Tones Naim CD065
Peace is a collection of beautiful music, a progression of contemplative and gently flowing sounds filled with strength and life. Patrick Noland is a hugely talented pianist who penned each track on the album, and also plays the windchimes and twelve-string guitar.
 Taken from the album *Peace*



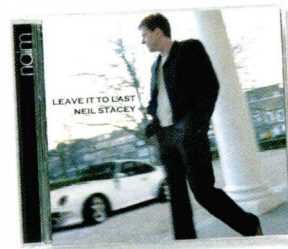
5 JOHN MOULDER & KEN HALL
La Fiesta Naim CD071
 This track tantalisingly combines guitar and vibes in the perfect vehicle to express John Moulder and Ken Hall's musical dialogue. The two instruments weave seamlessly together to create an intriguing and uplifting album.
 Taken from the album *Spirit Talk*



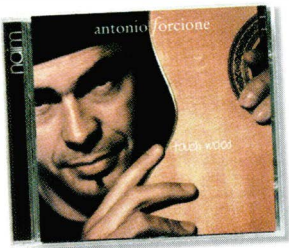
6 FOO FOO & THE BOY
Come Back Naim CD057
 Taken from the debut release by this vivacious, singing, songwriting, guitar-playing duo, reveal in the way, witty lyrics of Lisa Fitzgerald and Jan Ray, sung with passion and insight to tunes that will quickly have you singing along.
 Taken from the album *H₂C*



7 TOM GULLION
You Don't Know What Love Is Naim CD060
 This track from the album *Greens And Blues* by Chicago-based saxophonist Tom Gullion is a fine example of his sinuous melodic sax, combined with the guitar, double bass and drums quartet with which he plays regularly.
 Taken from the album *Greens And Blues*



8 NEIL STACEY GROUP
You'll See Naim CD062
 The Neil Stacey Group is an exciting new project by the hugely talented guitarist. Acoustic guitar-led groove jazz, with piano, drums, bass, percussion, saxophone, and all original tunes with beautiful and memorable melodies.
 Taken from the album *Leave It To Last*



9 ANTONIO FORCIONE
Mirror Mirror Naim CD069
 Featuring sublime singing by guest vocalist Sabina Sciubba, Antonio recorded this album after having perfected his set with his new quartet, which comprises cello, percussion and of course his own peerless acoustic guitar stylings.
 Taken from the album *Touch Wood*



10 RAMON RUIZ & ANITA 'LA MALTESA'
Alpujarra Naim CD055
 Recorded in Seville with musicians visiting the bi-annual Flamenco Festival, Ramon Ruiz has brewed a Latin melting pot of upbeat Spanish songs accompanied by dynamic Cuban percussion.
 Taken from the album *Flamenco Havana*



11 BENITO MADONIA & ANTONIO FORCIONE
Caruso Naim CD050
 The Italian language is synonymous with romance, and listening to Benito's deep chocolate voice accompanied by Antonio's sensitive guitar wizardry it's easy to understand why!
 Taken from the album *Vento Del Sud*

SAVE £5
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Show this page to any of the Naim retailers listed right and get £5 off every Naim CD you purchase, including all those featured on your free disc.

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HI-FI CHOICE COMPETITION

Win a complete Naim hi-fi system worth £3,000!

When it comes to delivering the true essence of a musical performance, few hi-fi brands can boast a reputation as strong as Naim. The Salisbury-based company has been dedicated to heightening the enjoyment of music since its inception in the 1970s, and has played a crucial role in engendering the perception of excellence enjoyed by British hi-fi worldwide.

To celebrate this month's free CD, we're giving away a complete Naim system to one lucky reader who picks up the phone and answers the question below. The first correct entry 'out of the hat' will win a CD5 CD player, Nait 5 amp and Intro 2 speakers, worth up to £3,000 – a system guaranteed to get your toes well and truly tappin' Naim-style. So get dialling... and good luck!



WIN!
 A NAIM CD5 CD PLAYER
 WORTH £1,195
 +
 A NAIM NAIT 5 AMPLIFIER
 WORTH £845
 +
 A PAIR OF NAIM
 INTRO 2 LOUDSPEAKERS
 WORTH £865

To enter just answer the following question and call the number below:

Q) WHERE IN ENGLAND IS NAIM AUDIO BASED?

A) Shrewsbury B) Salisbury C) Sainsbury's D) Staines

0906 700 6001

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Employees of Future Publishing (including freelancers) and their relatives and any agents involved are ineligible to enter competitions or polls. The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash. Closing date for entries is 7 October 2003. The winner will be selected at random from correct entries received by this date and informed within 28 days. Prizes will be sent out within 28 days of notification by the companies involved, not Future Publishing Ltd. Calls cost 50p per minute and should last no longer than 2.5 minutes. Please remember to get permission from the person who pays the bill before you dial. No purchase necessary. Postal entries are also accepted: send your name, address, telephone number and email address (if applicable) to: **Hi-Fi Choice: Naim Competition, PO Box 7943, London, SE1 9ZT**. Please also state if you do not wish to receive any communications from Naim Audio not directly relating to this competition. If you have any problems submitting your entry, please contact the service provider: Fusion, 15 Mark Lane, Leeds, LS1 8LB.

ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Shaun Marin, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman, Nigel Williamson



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

BACHMAN-TURNER OVERDRIVE

Not Fragile

Mercury/Universal 180g vinyl

Music: The term 'rocktastic!' doesn't begin to sum up this classic 1974 album from Canada's foremost pop rockers. As it turned out, protagonist Randy Bachman peaked with *Not Fragile* and never quite managed to reproduce the same combination of truckin' tunes and monster riffs.

Sophisticated it ain't but there are some excellent songs on here, including the hits *You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet* and *Roll On Down The Highway*. The standout is *Rock Is My Life And This Is My Song*, an autobiographical masterpiece worthy of the best in blue collar rock. ★★★★★

Sound: This is a decent pressing of a solid recording that has a lot more grunt and energy than you'll ever get from the CD – the bass guitar is especially beefy. If you want to hear down-home blues rock as it was intended, this is the place to start.

★★★★★ JK

YES

The Yes Album

Atlantic/Rhino 180g vinyl

Music: *The Yes Album* from 1972 was a turning point in the career of this most progalicious of groups. It marked the change from the pop-infused sixties sound of their previous two albums and introduced more substantial and ambitious material that marked Yes out as a force to be reckoned with. The lyrics may not make much sense but the playing from Howe, Bruford and Squire is exceptional – Tony Kaye is no slouch on keyboards either. This is rock music with folk rather than blues influences, exploratory in nature but always tuneful and played with precision and enthusiasm. ★★★★★

Sound: It's such a treat to have Yes on new vinyl once more that it genuinely pains me to point out the rolled off nature of higher frequencies which has the effect of reducing the overall image scale. On the other hand, the bass is great and the vocals much easier to hear than my non-original UK pressing. ★★★ JK

These and other audiophile LPs are available from Vivante: ☎ 01293 822186 @ www.vivante.co.uk

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



STARSAILOR

Silence Is Easy

EMI

Music: The sophomore album from Starsailor has been eagerly awaited as much for the contribution of Phil Spector as for the fact that their debut established them as one of the most musically gifted young British bands. Spector's two tracks aren't allowed to dominate, which is credit to the band's own growing self-confidence. While singer James Walsh's nasal whine may not be to everyone's taste, this is an album based on old-fashioned values of melodic songwriting and grown-up musicianship. And, heaven knows, we need that right now. ★★★

Sound: The big question is can you hear Spector's famous 'wall of sound'? And the answer is... not really. ★★★ NW



EMMYLOU HARRIS

Stumble Into Grace

Nonesuch

Music: The renaissance of Emmylou Harris is extraordinary. After a career spent performing covers and singing backing vocals for everyone from Gram Parsons to Bob Dylan, she left country music far behind on 2000's *Red Dirt Girl* to emerge unexpectedly as one of the most potent singer-songwriters of our times. *Stumble Into Grace* proves it was no fluke – haunting, evocative and mysterious, the songs constitute a personal quest through the contours of love, faith and loss. At 56, Harris has arguably made the finest album of her life. ★★★★★

Sound: Producer Malcolm Burn favours the same densely textured atmospherics as Daniel Lanois (Dylan/U2), although he ensures Harris's rich voice soars above all else. ★★★★★ NW



PAT METHENY

One Quiet Night

Warner Bros

Music: Famous for his guitar synthesisers, his lyrically beautiful instrumental music, his difficult work with Steve Reich and Ornette Coleman and colossal album sales, Metheny retreated from his band work to record this, his second acoustic solo album, in 2001. From the opening cadences of the title track to a truly astonishing version of the Norah Jones smash *Don't Know Why*, this is a masterclass in acoustic-jazz guitar. Metheny even includes a fine version of Gerry Marsden's *Ferry Across The Mersey!* ★★★★★

Sound: The 'Nashville' tuning used here (like a conventional guitar tuned down a fifth) allows for an increased dynamic range on the lower strings. Great music that also makes a great hi-fi test disc. ★★★★★ MP



BJÖRK

Live Box

One Little Indian

Music: Since Sugarcubes split in 1993, Björk has produced a consistently varied and entertaining body of work over the course of four albums proper, plus various remix and soundtrack works. Even if you've got everything this supremely talented artist has produced, this four CD live package is still worth your shekels on account of the diversity and innovation she has consistently put into her live performances – no mere reproduction of the record is sufficient for Ms Gortmundsdottir so the tunes are stretched, twisted, rearranged and revamped in all manner of ways, not necessarily better than the originals, but certainly on a par and often superior. ★★★★★

Sound: Live albums by their nature can often be patchy sonically, especially when the sources are as diverse as these, but the clarity of the reproduction here is superb throughout. ★★★★★ DO



BRAHMS

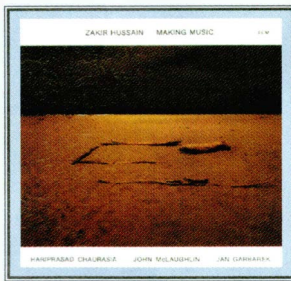
Ein Deutsche Requiem

Harolyn Blackwell (soprano), David Wilson-Johnson (baritone), LSC/LSO, Andre Previn (cond)

LSO Live LS000055CD

Music: Anyone who attended the recent Prom of the *Requiem* could hardly do better than this budget release. André Previn has recorded this work before, and with what at first seems like surprisingly quick tempi, the concentration and the passion that Brahms poured into the score is beautifully handled. The LSO and the chorus respond well to his direction, the two soloists adding colour and intimacy. ★★★★★

Sound: Made by Tony Faulkner, the live recording doesn't completely disguise the rather airless, shallow Barbican acoustic, but it sounds both dynamic and graceful. ★★★★★ AG



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "A classic East meets West talent explosion"

ZAKIR HUSSAIN Making Music ECM

Music: This collaboration from 1987 is one of the most successful on ECM's enviable roster. Founder and producer Manfred Eicher's speciality is gathering master musicians from disparate 'schools' and recording the fruits of their collaborations with rare skill. This is credited as a Hussain album because he wrote or co-wrote most of the pieces on it but it wouldn't have been so spectacular without the contributions of guitarist John McLaughlin, saxophonist Jan

Garbarek and flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia. It's a classic East meets West talent explosion where virtuosity is kept at bay in the name of musical integrity. It's an album of contrasts, with bursts of energy and subtle reflections, and truly magical playing throughout. ★★★★★
Sound: You can hear the digital clarity in the inky black background, but the instruments retain their tonal majesty and dynamic variety to powerful effect. ★★★★★ JK



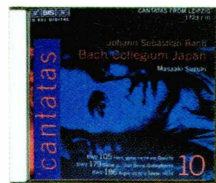
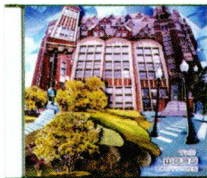
THE WEBB BROTHERS

The Webb Brothers

679 Recordings

Music: Now joined by little brother James, the offspring of legendary songsmith Jimmy Webb have made a leap of faith following the success of their breakthrough second album *Maroon* in 2001. The new album doesn't try to be so self-consciously clever and 'song-writery', preferring to give the songs room to breathe. There are still hooks and melodies aplenty in their bachelor pad of the imagination, but now they're tempered with a greater variety of styles and there are even some elements of groove. James brings a third harmony to Justin and Christiaan's practised crooning and they've also updated their tré sixties guitar and organ sound with elements of lo-fi modernism, clearly influenced by French art poppers Air. ★★★★★

Sound: Largely recorded at their own Chicago studio with long-time friend Neal Ostrovsky in the producer's chair, it's not an especially pristine recording but there's plenty of room for those three-part harmonies to soar. ★★★ DO



JS BACH

Cantatas from Leipzig 1723/III

Bach Coll. Japan, Masaaki Suzuki (cond)
 BIS CD-951 300951

Music: This disc is part of what will become a complete cycle of the *Bach Cantatas*. Aside from its biblical roots, these are prime examples of the best choral writing of the baroque, of which JS Bach was the master. The music flows with elegance and grace, but retains a compact chamber feel in which every voice tells. The Bach Collegium Japan is well supported by the orchestra and the soloists. Most of all, the performance is one in which the musicians appear to have invested real passion. ★★★★★

Sound: The BIS sound is clean and agile, and the recording preserves the almost chamber-like feel of the piece, due as much to the responsive singing as any other factor. ★★★★★ AG



STIFF LITTLE FINGERS

Guitar And Drum

EMI

Music: It's a quarter of a century since Jake Burns and co first blasted out their brand of harmonious, hi-energy punk. Only *Alternative Ulster* gave the charts much trouble but they continue to shift thousands of CDs and their gigs sell out in minutes. They've still got ex Jam-man Bruce Foxton pumping away on bass and, yes, they're still guitar burning after all these years. The title track and the Joe Strummer tribute *Strummerville* are the highlights but it all pretty much kicks like there's no tomorrow. ★★★★★

Sound: SLF produced this, with help from one Mark Thomas, and they've got their racket down pat now – every nuance of the distorted telecasters is cleanly caught and held, without excessive studio trickery. ★★★ PS

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

FLAMING LIPS

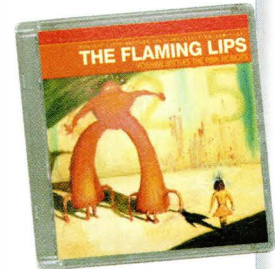
Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots

DVD-Audio (24/96 surround, 24/96 stereo, Dolby Digital 5.1 and 2.0)

Warner Music Vision

Music: The Flaming Lips and DVD-Audio have been waiting for each other. The format has been crying out for an artist to realise the potential of Advanced Resolution surround sound and the Lips are clearly up to the challenge, gleefully rejecting the confines of stereo in a way that only the odd experimental dance act has done so far. The sound is all over the place at times, but it works magnificently. We're not saying that all music should sound like this, just all Flaming Lips albums. ★★★★★

Sound: It's rammed with extras including six bonus audio tracks and ten video clips including a 'making of', which goes a long way to explaining exactly why the disc sounds like it does. Sonically it's highly impressive, with the 5.1 surround mix for once coming out on top. ★★★★★ SM



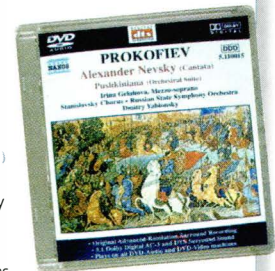
PROKOFIEV

Alexander Nevsky, Pushkiniana, Hamlet, Ivan the Terrible

Irina Gelahova (mezzo soprano), Stanislavsky Chorus, Russian State Symphony Orch, Dimitry Yablonsky (Cond)

DVD-Audio (24/96 surround, Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS 5.1)
 Naxos 5.110015

Music: Originally written as the score for Sergey Eisenstein's film about a historical battle that foreshadowed the coming conflict between Russia and Germany, Prokofiev's choral work was later rearranged as a seven-part cantata for concert use. It's flamboyant, patriotic and quintessentially Russian, making tremendous use of the sonorous voices of the Stanislavsky Chorus. ★★★★★
Sound: The surround channel is perhaps excessively used, making front/rear potentially beneficial. But the sound, from a 24-bit/48kHz master (why not 96kHz?) is excellent. The soundstage is expansive, immediate and breathes well. An exciting release, and a real bargain. ★★★★★ AG



ELEANOR MCEVOY

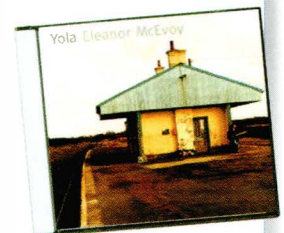
Yola

SACD (stereo SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Market Square

Music: Eleanor McEvoy's fourth album is also her first SACD. A singer/songwriter with a Celtic background, McEvoy's voice bears a slight resemblance to Tanita Tikaram, something reinforced by the simple arrangements on this album. But she is very much her own artist and Brian Connor on piano, Liam Bradley on drums and Eoghan O'Neill on bass have produced an album that could almost be called folk/jazz. The songwriting stands out as do the contributions of co-producer Connor and the co-writing of one Lloyd Cole. A grower. ★★★★★

Sound: With its phenomenal transparency and clean arrangements this will make superb demonstration fodder. Track two is just voice and drums with the fattest, juiciest kick drum I've heard for ages. Rich and dynamic, this is one of the best new SACD recordings in a while. ★★★★★ JK



Ringling the changes

Thirty years ago a wannabe recording artist persuaded a wannabe millionaire to let him make an album. The result made them both rich, but now he's recorded it all again in 5.1. Interview: Jason Kennedy

Mike Oldfield has spent the last nine months remaking the album that made both he and Richard Branson into millionaires some thirty years ago – the instrumental odyssey *Tubular Bells*. You might have expected Mike to have kicked back and frittered the money away in the great rock and roll tradition, but he is not your regular rock star and doesn't give the impression he has much time for frittering. Mike Oldfield has produced 24 albums since 1972, including a brace of reinterpretations of the original called *Tubular Bells II* and *III*, both of which, along with a DVD and the new *Tubular Bells 2003* have been released on CD as a box set simply entitled *The Complete Tubular Bells*.

Of more interest to the hi-fi fraternity is the fact that *TB 2003* is also about to be released on DVD-Audio in both stereo and multichannel forms. When *HFC* visited Mike's Buckinghamshire studio we were treated to a rendition of the first half of *TB 2003* through the monitoring system used to produce it. This impressive set-up consists of 5.1 channels of substantial Boxer speakers installed by Neil Grant, who has built systems for Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios and for Dave Stewart of Eurythmics fame. The front left/right channels in this passive system are bigger than most people's wardrobes and the other 3.1 would embarrass all but the most hardcore hi-fi nut. A nice touch are the blocks of wood used as speaker 'stands' and for that matter risers for the substantial Neve Capricorn mixing desk. The result is very impressive – level without distortion, high resolution and tight, deep bass. The fact that we were hearing the original source, a 24-bit/48kHz multichannel hard disk, undoubtedly helped, that and the fact that the studio is designed and treated to avoid the problems inherent with the majority of our listening rooms. Having enjoyed "electric guitar", "grand piano" and of course "tubular bells" being introduced by the voice of John Cleese (in place of Viv Stanshall on the original) we put a few questions to the godfather of instrumental rock.

HFC: The original *Tubular Bells* was remastered to good effect for SACD in 2001.

Why have you decided to choose DVD-Audio for the 2003 version?

MO: To be honest, I wasn't involved with the SACD remaster – that was the choice of the record company that owns the original (Virgin). The only connection between the two albums is the music. I wanted to remake it from scratch because the original has always irritated me – I hear its imperfections both technical and musical. I had to record the original *TB* in one week on to 16 tracks using submixing to fit all the instruments in. It was a rushed job using the best equipment and instruments I could get together – some of the guitars had to be hired and were not really as good as I would have liked.

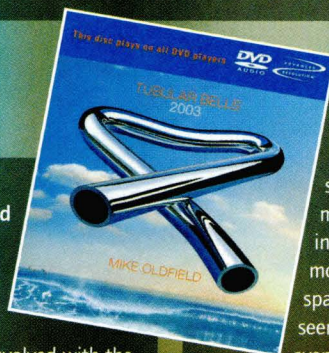
But to me the eventual commercial format is not the issue here, and I can't see the point in putting such high frequencies onto a disc – perhaps the bats enjoy it but there's really no need for it.

Why did you mix *TB 2003* in surround?

The project was originally intended as a stereo mix but the record company (WEA) suggested a 5.1 mix. I'd had a Quadraphonic studio in the seventies and the original was released on that format as a four-channel mix but I never liked the SQ system, it sounded crappy and nothing ever came of it.

Initially we were going to get Bob Clearmountain to do the 5.1 mix for this project but then I spoke to the people who made my mixing desk, Neve, and found that it could be converted to 5.1. So my assistant Ben (Darlow) and I decided to take the mix on ourselves.

I've heard surround mixes in the cinema and have always thought that more could be done with it – why not move the sound around your head and use the channels in a more creative way? All you normally get from surrounds is ambience and effects. With *TB 2003* I've tried to use the channels imaginatively. The



hornpipes move around the room and as John Cleese introduces the instruments standing stage left I've tried to make it so that each one comes in from that side and then moves around the room to make space for the next. The music seems to float in the room and even on a basic surround system it still sounds lovely.

Is that your point of reference then?

Yes, if I want to hear what things will sound like in the real world I use pretty cheap equipment so that I can hear the worst likely outcome. I've got a beatbox for stereo mixes.

When you have a studio you no longer need a proper hi-fi system; this studio is the best sound system I've got.

How does the 2003 version differ from the original of thirty years ago?

The fundamental difference is that I had the time to do it properly. Everything was done in one take in 1972 but this time around I've

Below: A freshly shorn Mike Oldfield in his home studio. Note the huge plasma editing screen behind.





been able to edit all the best bits together to produce a more polished final result. I also used better sounding guitars and effects boxes that have evolved from those on the original, and I occasionally replaced the original organs with a synth to get a better sound.

Why did you choose this particular moment to re-record the work?

Contractually I wasn't allowed to re-do it until 25 years after the original, which was 1998, and I decided to do it for the 30th anniversary. The original sounded so bad in terms of performance and sound and I've learned a lot about making things gel and blend harmonically since then. Listening to the original for me was like biting on a sour lemon – I wanted to *enjoy* listening to it.

What equipment did you use to record this version of the album?

I used a Logic Audio Platinum 24-bit/48kHz sampling system – it's the first 24-bit recording I've ever done and you notice how much extra disc space it takes up. I've listened to both Dolby Digital and DTS versions of the disc and while the Dolby can be a little thin, DTS sounds to me like the original.

What was the last hi-fi system you bought?

Twenty years ago I bought a system in Switzerland. It had a McIntosh preamp and Klipsch horn speakers, and it was great for acoustic music. The hi-fi scene was getting ridiculous though, people arguing about gold wires and what have you! Nowadays if I want a valve sound I can use software plug-ins to get whatever sound I want. You can select between alternative guitar amps and effects boxes with the click of a mouse. I love the flexibility and variety of effects available on the computer.

At this point Mike showed us the myriad effects plug-ins on his Apple Mac, each with its own graphic of what the original device would have looked like with functioning rotary controls and switches – you can get hold of almost any sound effect that has ever been built as software these days. He uses an Apple Macintosh G4 hooked up to a 42-inch plasma screen so that you can see what's going on for each track as it's playing.

So are you interested in the hi-fi world at all these days?

I'd like *TB 2003* to become a demonstration disc for multichannel in the same way that *Tubular Bells* was a hi-fi demonstration album in the seventies. **HFC**

Mike Oldfield's Tubular Bells 2003 is released on DVD-Audio by Warner Music Vision on 13 October 2003.

ChoiceMail



Write to: Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP



Above: Our Top 40 Test Discs feature provoked lots of reaction – just as intended!



Above: Paul Miller's in-depth technical review of the Linn Kivor Index sound server

“I found two reviews of the same product with different ratings – how can this happen?”

STARS IN THEIR EYES

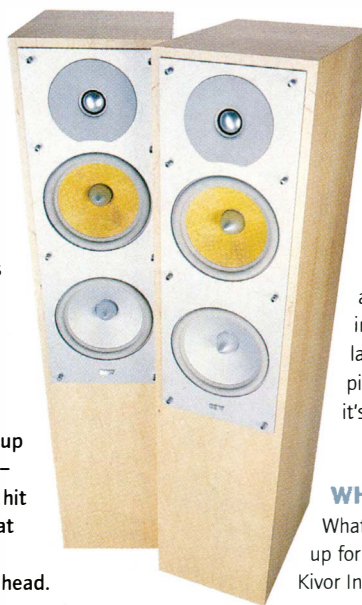
I'm looking for new speakers and thought I'd check your reviews of the B&W CM4. I found two reviews – one, a solo review from the *First Impressions* section and another from a group test, both with differing ratings, four and five stars. I'd say this was a bit strange. I know you have a variety of reviewers that test speakers but how can this discrepancy happen?

Jonas via email

HFC: Hi-fi is by its very nature subjective – it's all a matter of taste and opinions do vary.

In this case, the five star review was in our now-defunct *First Impressions* section. These reviews were in nature relatively quick impressions, while the group test which followed was more in-depth, with a blind listening panel and full lab testing. The conclusions from these reviews are not really so different, but the group test result is the one to go with – the CM4 (pictured right) is a great-looking speaker and sonically it's safe, but also a touch dull. Not B&W's best.

In general, if a product is tested more than once, the most recent group test result will be the one to rely on – as time moves on and new products hit the street, sometimes previously great products become also-rans as the competition catches up and forges ahead.



POP IDOL

I was flicking through your July issue's *Top 40 H-Fi Test Discs Of All Time* feature and what I feared before I checked your choices turned out to be true. Almost all the music was pop studio constructed. It took me a while to find the three classical pieces and even they seemed to be chosen to test the ability of a system to handle odd sounds and large scales – not how accurate the system is as a reproducer of sound.

I don't believe you shouldn't use pop music – some very respected audio reviewers use it to check certain aspects of audio gear. Transients, clarity, separation of individual sources and so on can be tested with studio sound. But since it is not 'real' it offers no comparison with live sound and therefore no way to tell if the system is not enhancing certain frequencies. Include studio sources in your tests, but if you want to check relationships to live sound reviewers need to include much more acoustical source material, from individual voices and instruments to large scale instrumental and voice pieces. If it can't handle voice and cello, it's for show not for go.

Allen Edelstein via email

WHAT'S THE POINT?

What a great July issue – it almost makes up for issue 204 and the review of the Linn Kivor Index. The review was up to Paul Miller's

LETTER OF THE MONTH

AURAL EXAMINATION

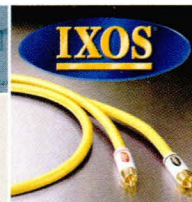
I have a Sony DVD-S9000ES DVD/SACD player and I've never heard any CD player capture the correct harmonic structure of a recording so well. I'm left with the impression that it's not what CD players do wrong, but rather what they cannot do at all. Full harmonics are obviously not possible with 16-bit/44.1kHz, and SACD makes this all too clear.

This also makes me rethink the role of amplification and speakers. Prior to SACD, many of us attempted to use these products to offset what CD failed to deliver. With SACD, this approach would constitute an unnecessary introduction of colour to the product, more so than any improvement. Speed and resolution now take precedence with SACD. There's no longer a need to 'add' something that is missing.

I am in the process of re-examining what a hi-fi should do and this is all because we now have a superior method of recording information. I know now that I would never have been happy with CD, no matter what I might have spent.

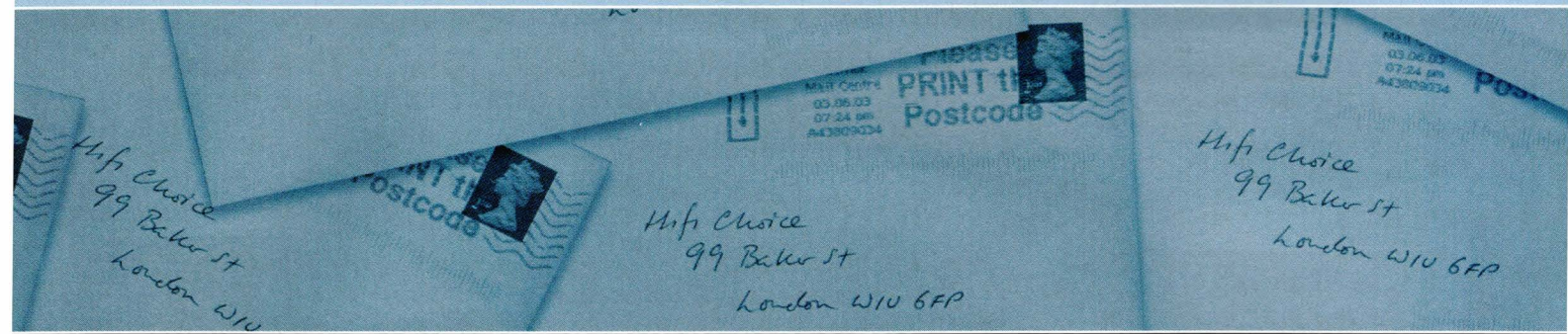
Joe Mudry, via email

HFC: We agree that, at its best, SACD is superior. It has considerably greater sonic potential than regular CD... But remember that basic studio techniques can have an even greater influence than the format used to record/store music – a good CD can sound better than a bad SACD. As for amps/speakers, choose them to produce a musically coherent package, whatever formats you're using.



WIN IXOS INTERCONNECTS!

The author of our letter of the month receives a free pair of Ixos XHA606 interconnects worth £60, featuring Gamma Geometry and silver plated OFC conductors for superior sound. So get writing! (250 words max please...)



Or email your letters to dan.george@futurenet.co.uk

You have mail



usual standard, but £4,500 pounds sterling for what is a Pentium 4 in a fancy box is frankly embarrassing. The piece on the *Top 40 Test Discs* was brilliant but begs a question – what are people listening to? I mean that is the point isn't it? All this hi-fi stuff is just a means to listen to the music that moves you, that helps you get up in the morning, that brings you up when you are down. I think a piece on what people listen to and why would be amazing and more representative.

Sean Engel via email

HFC: The *Top 40 Test Discs* feature was a way of getting some of our favourite music into the mag in a format that would be useful to hi-fi readers! All the featured albums make great discs for auditioning hi-fi, for reasons given in the piece, but fundamentally it's all great music too – it would be completely contrary to our philosophy to suggest otherwise!

The feature was assembled by asking all our experts to vote for their favourites – that way we got an eclectic mix and gave some insight into our esteemed reviewers' listening habits. Classical wasn't terribly well represented as it happened, a little strange seeing as the likes of Alvin Gold, Richard Black and Jimmy Hughes are highly knowledgeable in that area, but rest assured that we always use a range of music to test kit, classical included, to cover all the bases whatever a particular reader's music taste might be.

WINNING WIRES

I've been looking for a new interconnect for quite some time now but I don't want to waste my hard-earned on expensive, flashy looking but crap sounding wires. I am currently using van den Hul's 'Thunderline', which has tremendous bass weight but sounds a bit too warm and congested for my tastes. Do you have any suggestions? My budget is up to £150.

Ultrasonic via email

HFC: A recent favourite is the Ecosse Baton, which will set you back just £80. It produces a light and agile sound with solid bass that won't get out of hand. Another option worth investigating is the Townshend DCT100 for £100 – considerably less costly than the original Isolda 'Deep Cryogenic Treatment' interconnect, yet it retains the speed and balance of it's pricier sister cable.



ONLINE FORUM

A few choice comments plucked from our online forum. Join in the fun at www.hifichoice.co.uk



I heard on the radio that the business in downloaded ringtones for mobiles was £45m last year and is expected to be £70m this year – larger than the predicted sales for CDs. Apparently when releasing Sugababes *Round Round*, the record company spent as much on advertising the ringtone as the single. **MikeHit**

Barry White. You're my first, my last, my everything. A giant of a soul singer, producer and writer. You'll be sadly missed. He made his mark on popular music and gave enjoyment to millions. RIP. **SCIDB**

Who in popular music makes you laugh for all the wrong reasons? Who shall be crowned the King or Queen of Cheesiness? Nominations please! First nominee, Brian May – For his poodle hair that went out with Kiss 20 years ago and the way he lifts his guitar and grimaces when performing his guitar solos. **Space Cadet**

HI-FI CHOICE AWARDS 2003 VOTING FORM

The build-up has begun. In just three issues' time, we'll be publishing the most vital, comprehensive and considered *real* hi-fi awards in the UK. We'll reveal the best components of 2003, as voted by our exceptionally experienced band of reviewers. What's more, we're giving you the chance to have your say too.

The *Hi-Fi Choice* 2003 Awards Issue will also feature a special *Readers' Awards* section, giving you the chance to cast your votes for your own personal highlights of the year. Simply send us the voting form below – don't worry if you don't have a favourite for every category, just fill out the ones that are relevant to you. And remember to buy the special Awards Issue to check out the results – on the shelves 28 November.

1. Best CD player
2. Best DVD or SACD player
3. Best turntable
4. Best radio tuner
5. Best digital audio recorder
6. Best stereo amplifier
7. Best multichannel/AV amplifier
8. Best stereo speakers
9. Best multichannel speakers
10. Best hi-fi accessory
11. Hi-fi innovation of the year
12. Hi-fi brand of the year
13. Hi-fi dealer of the year
14. Album of the year (CD or vinyl)
15. Best SACD or DVD-Audio music disc
16. *Hi-Fi Choice* reviewer of the year

CUT OUT OR PHOTOCOPY AND SEND TO: Hi-Fi Choice Readers' Awards, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.





DENON DVD-2900 UNIVERSAL PLAYER | CHORD DSP8000 7.1 AV PROCESSOR/SMP1900 POWER AMP

The Full Monty

High-resolution multichannel music at its breathtaking best

All right then. Denon's first universal player, the DVD-2900, will do everything short of save my place in the queue at Sainsbury's while I pop back to the grocery aisle for an iceberg lettuce. Am I impressed? Uh, not that bothered to be honest. It's nice (great picture and all, instruction manual makes a fine doorstep) but not really why we're here.

No, the most exciting thing about Denon's new universal player from HFC's point of view, as you may already have read on page 30, is that it does the multichannel music thing like Quentin Tarrantino does dialogue. Indeed, it seems to do it with the kind of conviction and rightness that rocks purist two-channel conceits to their very foundations and smacks strongly of hardcore 'high end'. Yet it costs a comparatively piffling £850. That would be good going for a modestly tasty CD player. And the multi-faceted Denon is to a plain CD player what Mission Control is to the box of matches that lights the blue touch paper on 5 November.

The Denon, you see, is nothing less than the catalyst for this month's beautiful system. Now and then a product comes along that rewrites the rules to startling effect. The DVD-2900 (arguably the first machine to warrant the description 'the only front-end you'll ever need') is just such a product – not just amazing value, but amazingly good, period.

And that opens up possibilities. Let's say you buy a DVD-2900 now and put it at the heart of a good AV system. It will perform splendidly, no question. So well that you will ask more of it; you'll want it to form the basis of a top-flight audiophile-quality music system,

capable of delivering spellbinding results with both stereo (naturally) and multichannel to indulge the expansion of your DVD-Audio and SACD collection. Will the Denon have the legs, will it possess the sonic gifts? That's what we're about to find out. Frankly, I'm not interested how many 'DTS-ES, Dolby Digital-EX' flags light up on the display when I press the appropriate buttons; I want the Denon to show me what it's got under the bonnet – I want to gauge the reach of its musical talent. And have we got the system to test its mettle.

STEREOPHILE

Multichannel processor/amp combos don't come much more daunting, for a prospective source, than Chord's £9,995 DSP 8000 7.1 processor and £4,670 SMP1900 five-channel power amp. Yes, it does state-of-the-art home cinema until the pips squeak but, more importantly, Chord immodestly describes its musical performance, whether stereo or multichannel, as "incredible". And, knowing Chord products as we do, that means, among other things, frighteningly high-grade internals and a forensic level of transparency and detail. Any incoming signal that isn't up to snuff will be mercilessly revealed for what it is.

Even in a market where monster specs are the norm, the Chord combo out-monsters most but, thanks to the use of high-efficiency switch-mode power supplies and stunning all-aluminium construction, circumvents the usual Hulk-like dimensions and weight. The Dolby processing suite is present in its entirety; likewise DTS. And as well as the familiar music processing modes (Concert, Party etc), Chord has its

"Even in a market where monster specs are the norm, the Chord combo out-monsters most, but avoids the usual Hulk-like dimensions."



Denon DVD-2900 universal player £850

Denon's first universal player is an exceptional all-rounder, covering all the digital bases with technology, engineering and awesome build.



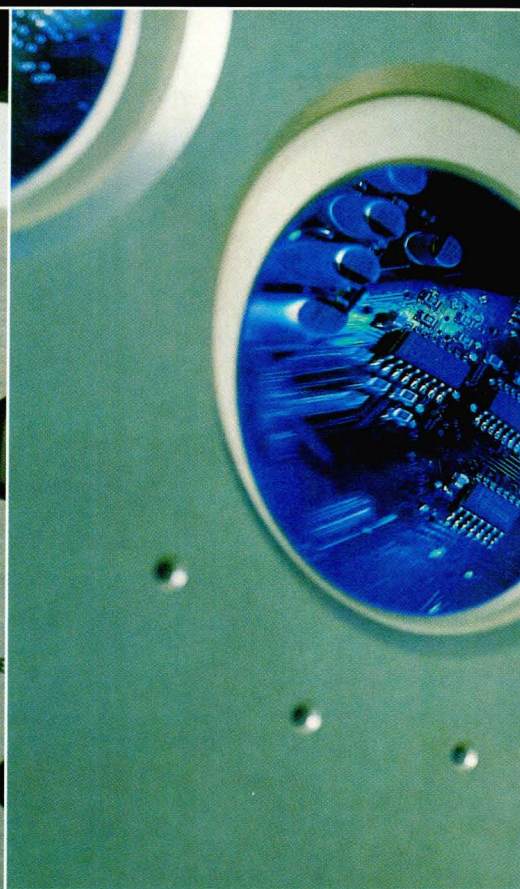
Chord DSP8000 7.1 AV processor/SMP1900 five-channel power amplifier £9,995/£4,670

Premiership multi-channel processing and amplification from the Brit-Fi high-enders.



Wilson Benesch Arc speakers (x4)/Arc Centre £4,800/£1,570

WB's entry-level standmounts make a very special five-channel surround speaker system.



own cinema equalisation software and bass management.

The sheen of sophistication is further buffed by the adjustable lip synch and auto calibration functions and an RS232 port for software upgrades and connectivity with home entertainment control systems. Full 7.1 with all the trimmings is there for the listening if you've got enough interconnects – there are even balanced XLR outputs for serious performance optimists – though you'll have to plumb in an additional Chord stereo power amp to drive all the speakers.

Pass on that – 7.1 might be the ultimate cinematic option but 5.1 is more than ample for a stubborn 'stereophile' like me. It looks better, too. The SMP1900 power amp stacks sexily with the processor and is its perfect aesthetic match. Four of its five power amps pump out 120 watts each into eight ohms while the centre channel gets an extra beefy 160 watts in line with its more arduous workload and dynamic responsibilities – extraordinary firepower for a unit that weighs just 17kg. Included in the box is Chord's new programmable and learning remote control with its touchscreen LCD, blue automatic backlight, built-in battery charger and ability to control up to ten devices. It's considerably lighter

than the old jumbo alloy Weetabix affair and much easier to use.

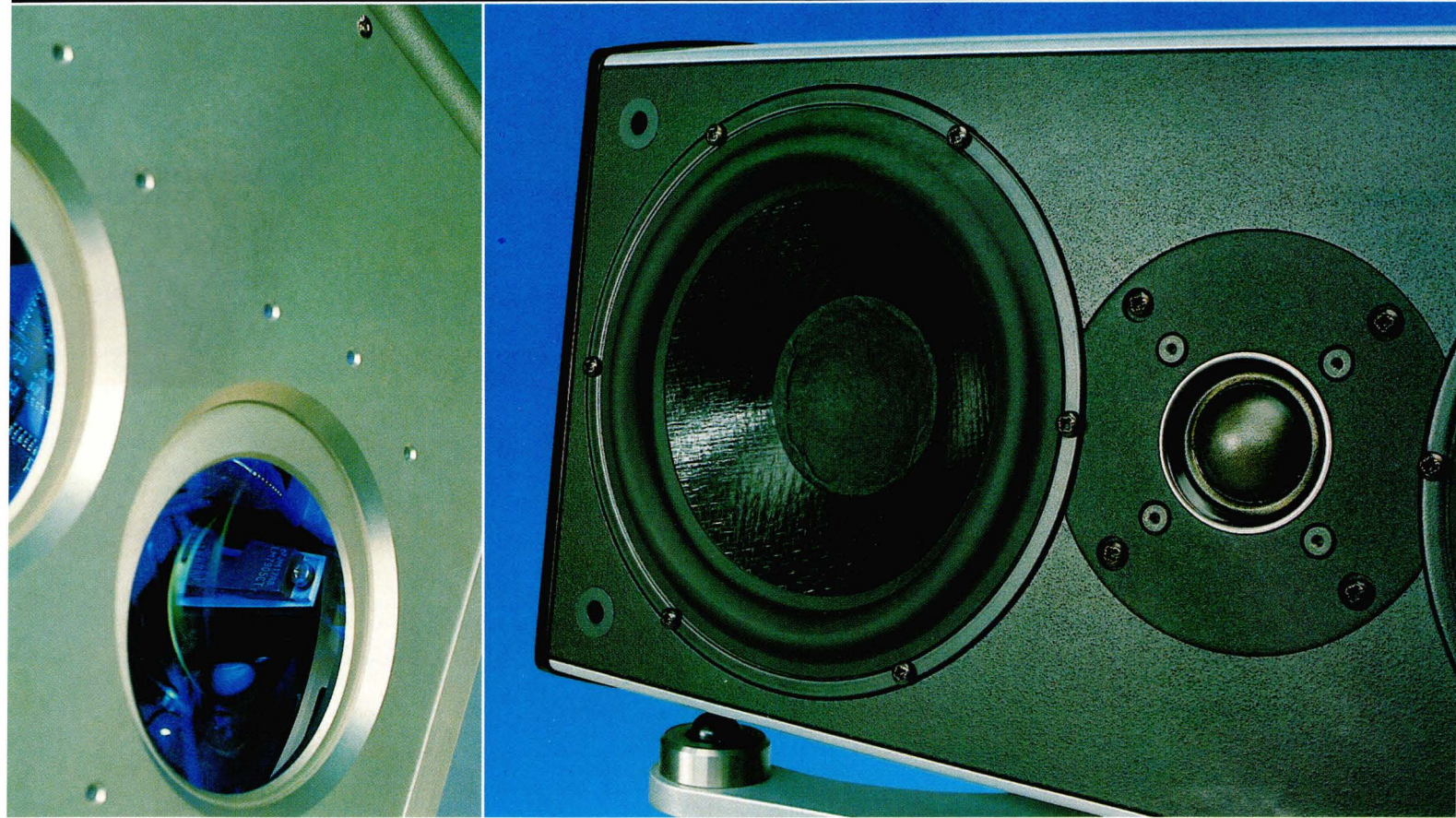
Running with the idea that big performance doesn't have to mean barn door-sized kit, the five bijou Wilson Benesch Arc speakers are on a promise to deliver cavernous surround sound of the highest quality and, well, as with the Chord electronics, best hang the cost. Four Arcs plus the driver-matched centre speaker adds a hefty £6,370 to the burgeoning total or about the same as you might expect to pay for a classy floorstanding surround speaker package. But one look at the Arc/Centre ensemble with its curved-backed carbon fibre enclosures, and I guarantee you'll be solid-gone sold on the space-efficient approach. As well as using extremely high quality soft dome tweeter and seven-inch Tactic bass-mid drivers, the baby WBs espouse a holistic design initiative that includes dedicated bolted-on metal stands for the Arcs with strategically-shaped top plates to accommodate each enclosure's twin downward firing ports.

I've loved the Arcs since their introduction, especially their penchant for tuneful and extended bass. They could quite comfortably carry the show without the assistance of a sub in a small-to-medium sized room but, in the interests of letting the system breathe, I

went for a much larger listening room (about 35x20ft) and adding still more extension and subtle weight to the Arcs' low frequency output with REL's superb Stadium III, said to be capable of rummaging around in the 12Hz region at -6dB. This means, of course, that there really is no hiding place for the Denon player: every last scrap of its bandwidth will be subjected to Hutton Inquiry-like scrutiny. If it shines, it will shine.

There doesn't seem to be much standing in its way. To call the Denon cutting edge wouldn't be stretching the truth by much. For an in-depth account of just what's packed in under the lid, refer to the full review on page 30. Maybe what matters most here is attention to detail in the audio circuitry and Denon doesn't seem to have held back. An alloy fronted three-way shielded box construction with five block internal layout isolates analogue, digital and video circuits from each other. High quality Silmic capacitors are used in the audio chain and the 5.1 analogue outputs are driven from the latest Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz DACs. Even the disc loader features a special hybrid construction of moulded plastic and metal that claims to absorb vibration for completely stable and judder-free disc playback.





“It’s exquisitely human-sounding – it plays tunes beautifully, keeps immaculate time and gives crass hi-fi artefacts a wide berth.”

KEEP IT EASY

And as it purrs almost silently back into the belly of the DVD-2900 with Steely Dan’s *Everything Must Go* multichannel DVD-Audio disc on board, expectations are sky high. Within seconds, the wonderful strengths and potential pitfalls of multichannel music are starkly exposed. On the one hand, and encouragingly for the Denon, there’s clarity, drive, rhythmic integrity, textural colour and sheer musical honesty – a sound that’s more natural than electronic. On the other there’s the surround mix created by Becker and Fagen which makes liberal use of the rear channels for both instruments and backing vocals. Some people like this, others find it unbearably phoney. I’m one of those, though I guess it might be fun at parties. Fortunately, the disc also plays in 24-bit/192kHz stereo which seems to squeeze even more quality out of the immaculate production and, of course, dumps the rear channel gimmicks.

But it doesn’t have to be like that. Joni Mitchell’s *Both Sides Now* has become something of *cause celebre* for

DVD-Audio with a much more natural-sounding front-to-rear mix and a thoroughly seductive combination of majestic orchestral arrangements and intimate, tactile, closely-miked vocals. Playing this, the Denon/Chord/Wilson Benesch combo becomes an exquisitely human sounding system. It plays tunes beautifully, keeps immaculate time and gives crass hi-fi artefacts a wide berth. It invites you to listen to music for long stretches at a time.

But seductive hardly scratches the surface of how this system sounds with a good multichannel SACD loaded up, and there are few better than James Taylor’s 1997 classic *Hourglass*. The sound is large, sumptuous and relaxed with deep, full-bodied bass and a warm balance. It’s a colourful, expansive presentation that does the music justice.

When the system is performing to its full potential, it has the capacity to make speakers disappear from the room, leaving just a seamless wraparound soundscape. Whatever their degree of dimensionality, the sonics are essentially smooth and musical across all the formats on offer, though CD

struggles to compete with the unforced, almost understated, way DVD-Audio presents detail and falls way behind the altogether bigger, lusher and more transparent sound of SACD.

This system doesn’t romanticise, yet nor does it underplay the life in music. Particularly with SACD, the bass is as solid and reassuring as the earth beneath your feet, effortlessly underpinning the music without drawing attention to itself. The foundation it provides allows everything above it to fall into place convincingly.

It’s truly startling how vivid, alive, tactile and dynamic this system can sound. It’s subtle but colourful, powerful but not pushy. Even at attack volume, the power amp comes up smiling, delivering world class clarity without a hint of hardness or glare. It wrings a wealth of intelligibility from dense material, but also enhances the sense of realism that a great recording can generate. The sound is uncontrived, fresh and dynamic. Even at £21,885, it more than passes muster. Oh, and did I mention it plays movies, too? **HFC**

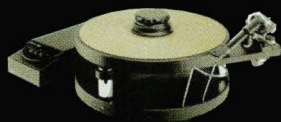
David Vivian



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Arms: Rega 300/600/900; SME Series IV and V; Kuzma Stogi; Triplanar.
Cartridges: VanDenHul Grasshopper and Colibri; Kuzma KC Ref; EMT; Reson Recca and Elite; Cartridge Man Musicmaker; Benz-Micro including Ruby Open Air; Kondo lo J.
Amplifiers: Border Patrol; Canary; Sugden; Art Audio; Monarchy; Western Electric; Icon; Tom Evans Audio Designs; SJS.
CD Players: Wadla; Sugden; Primare; Resolution.
Loudspeakers: Living Voice; Vitavox; Lowther.
Cables and Tables by Living Voice.

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

	Sale	New
Clearaudio Insider Wood Reference - only 10 hours use - a very unusual opportunity to acquire this high end cartridge	£4900	£7500
EAR MC3 moving coil transformer 4/12/40 ohm switchable - as new	£500	£750
Sugden Masterclass CD player - ex-demonstration	£2200	£2700
Sugden Headmaster pre-amplifier - new	£450	£600
Sugden Musicmaster power amplifier - new	£1000	£1300
Monarchy M33 DAC - fabulous processor with class A pre-amp output	£1000	£1595
Monarchy SM70 pro - power amp 25 watts class A - juicy mini beefcake	£600	£900
Wadla 830 CD player - fully serviced, new laser - warranty	£1600	£3000
Tom Evans Groove - mc phono stage - 500 ohms, 0.2mV - as new	£1400	£1850
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn - Mahogany - new PM6As (alnico)	£1400	£3800
Canary Audio CA 301 - 300B - 22 watts - juicy and fabulous - new valves	£3000	£5400
Canary Audio CA 300 - single ended monos - valve rect. - 8 watts	£1900	£3500
Jamo Concert 8 - 2½ years old - beautiful maple finish - spotless	£600	£1365
Townshend Seismic - speaker stands - ugly, bouncy and rather good	£400	£695
Townshend Rock Mk III turntable (acrylic platter) super rare - super good	£500	
Linn LP12 + Lingo - black - Alphason HR100 - Music Maker - tidy	£700	
Audio Innovations Series 700 - line integrated 25 watt class A classic	£650	
Audio Innovations P2 phono stage - serviced, saucy and sought after	£700	
Revolver R45 funky floorstanding loudspeaker - brand spanking new	£600	£900
Revolver R33 funkier standmount loudspeaker - brand spanking new too	£300	£450
Nottingham Analogue - Mentor with Reference PSU + LV Mystic Mat	£1950	£3580
Nottingham Analogue - Dais turntable with LV Mystic Mat - lovely	£2500	£3500
Nottingham Analogue - Interspace turntable + RB300 - scratch and dink	£500	£768
Nottingham Analogue - Horizon turntable - RB250 - new	£400	£590
Tube Technology Unisis integrated amplifier EL84 Class A - shiney	£1500	
AudioNote Soro - phono integrated - serviced/new valves - smooth & sweet	£500	£1900
SME 309 tonearm - with AudioNote silver internal wiring harness	£600	£950
B&W DM603 S3 - black - very good condition - unboxed	£350	£600
Avid Acutus turntable - 10 hours use if that, perfect.	£4000	£5000
Avid Volvere Sequel turntable - sealed box new	£3000	£3500
Avid Volvere turntable - sealed box new	£1500	£2000
AudioNote ANJ-D - walnut - Huygens high mass stands	£500	£1400

LIVING VOICE



Hi-Fi Plus
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Hi-Fi Plus
EDITOR'S CHOICE

EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE magazine

Auditorium Avatar

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

"The Avatar is a near perfect balance of size, bandwidth, efficiency and tonal refinement. Its slim lines and small footprint deliver a genuine 94db sensitivity, and excel when it comes to delivering the scale, vibrance and colour of the music. Its unobtrusive quality allows it to cut straight to the heart of a performance, unlocking the music trapped in the recording, whilst its refinement makes it equally at home with both basic and surprisingly expensive amplification."

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REVIEWS



Welcome to the HFC hardware reviews section – the only place for definitive tests of the latest hi-fi components. Our unique combination of extensive listening, unsighted comparisons and scientific lab reports, conducted by the UK's most experienced set of reviewers, ensures you're holding the most comprehensive and reliable guide to high performance hi-fi in the world.

SOLO REVIEWS

- 30 Denon DVD-2900 universal DVD player
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- 42 Shanling SCD-S200 SACD player
- 44 Roksan TMS2 turntable
- 49 Mission Volare V61 loudspeaker
- 50 Arcam FMJ DV27A DVD-Audio/Video player
- 55 B&W ASW850 active subwoofer



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST CD PLAYERS £500-£2,000

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- 61 Creek CD50
- 62 Exposure 3010
- 63 Rotel RCD-1072
- 64 Talk Electronics Thunder 3.1
- 65 Thule CD150B

OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Percentage ratings for various different criteria, like sound quality and value for money

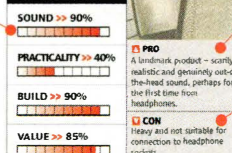
Visual sense that the detail is being injected into the brain. It's all very red, very natural, very flowing. Bass is also quite distinctly by having a physical, less ethereal feeling than tends to come across with loudspeakers and other headphones, and in particular it is completely devoid of the tub-thumping excess that is avoided by some.

Our overall conclusion

Sound as good as electrostatics like the former is not as spacious and out of the head, and the tonal balance is rather coloured. More conventional models can match the AKG and arguably better for resolving ability, but not

facsimile available at the headphone socket. What seems at first a disadvantage in fact works in the AKG's favour. **HFC** Alvin Gold

VERDICT



CONCLUSION
Only added to the proposition that electrostatics are unfulfilled when push comes to shove. But out-of-the-head experience is unmatched by other headphones, while the immediately analytical sound puts it at the head of the class.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 85%

The things we like most about the product

The things we think could be better

The product's final score. All criteria are taken into account but the emphasis is on performance. Components scoring more than 85% may qualify for an HFC Award Badge

OUR AWARD BADGES EXPLAINED



Best Buy

A component receiving the coveted Hi-Fi Choice Best Buy Badge has been judged to deliver excellent performance at its price point, thereby offering outstanding value for money.



Editor's Choice

This Badge is awarded only to those components that are judged to deliver reference-standard performance, regardless of cost. These products may be considered among the very best of their kind.

Turn the page for the most rigorous tests of serious hi-fi in the business...



DO-IT-ALL DENON

Pioneer was first. Now Denon is unleashing three universal DVD-A/SACD players, starting with this...

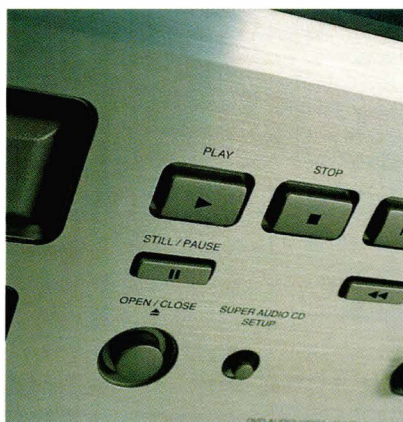
PRODUCT Denon DVD-2900

TYPE Universal DVD-Audio/Video/SACD/CD player

PRICE £850

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x13x34cm • PAL and NTSC Progressive Scan • 12-bit/108MHz video DACs • 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs • DD/DTS decoding

CONTACT ☎ 01753 888447 🌐 www.denon.co.uk



Denon has cornered the market for dreadnought-class DVD players. If it's big and gold coloured and makes your equipment table groan, it's most likely a Denon. The brand has been at the forefront of making very high-quality DVD-Audio/Video players like the DVD-A1, so it was just a matter of time before it produced a true 'universal' player that also handles SACD alongside DVD-Audio, DVD-Video, CD and all the other disc formats that modern DVD playing entails.

Enter the Denon DVD-2900, which has all the above and looks, feels and performs like a fine upgrade for the DVD-A1. That's the first surprise; it costs £850, not £2,850. We find this very hard to believe – it's a bit like those VW adverts where guilty Polo owners want to pay more for their car. There are small markers to show why the more expensive (non-SACD playing) machines like the DVD-A1 have the edge – Denon's sophisticated AL24 processing isn't here, for example, but regardless, the DVD-2900 gives the

impression of being considerably more expensive than it really is.

This 8.1kg player is insanely well specified and would be regardless of cost. Alongside DVD-Video, the DVD-2900 also supports DVD-Audio, DVD-R, DVD-RW, SACD, Video CD, CD-Audio, CD-R, CD-RW, Kodak Picture CD and Fujicolor CD. It also plays JPEG picture files and MP3 sound files stored on CD-R/RW discs. There are limits, though – SVCD, DVD-RAM and DVD+R/+RW cannot be played, CD-G discs will only play the sound content and some early DVD-R/RW and CD-R/RW discs may not be playable. As it stands, the player is Region Two DVD-Video compatible, but most Denon dealers worth their salt will unlock the region coding (so the player can deal with US discs, for example) by playing an upgrade CD-ROM. This method of 'de-regioning' the player highlights another bonus of the Denon DVD-2900 – the player's operating system is flash-programmable, so there is some provision for future-proofing.



“Right now, the Denon DVD-2900 is the disc player *du jour* and as a universal player, it simply has no equal.”

The back panel bristles with sockets – composite, S-Video and component video connections, a Scart socket, eight channel phono outputs, an optical and coaxial digital audio outputs, even a pair of Denon remote control links and an RS232 port for well-heeled owners of Crestron-style multi-room controllers. An extra Scart would be useful, but not vital. Perhaps more of note is the lack of a wideband digital audio output, allowing DVD-Audio or SACD data to be transmitted digitally to a suitably equipped same-brand amp. Pioneer’s similarly-priced DV-747Ai universal player has one, as does Denon’s own flagship DVD-A1 (for DVD-A, not SACD). It’s a technological omission, but not a crucial one, as here the sound quality through the analogue outputs is the best yet heard from a sub-£1,000 universal disc solution (see over).

For videophiles, this is one of the first players to support true PAL Progressive Scan pictures. It uses the Silicon Image SiL504 Progressive Scan converter that turns the interlaced (conventional line-by-line TV) picture into a progressive (frame-by-frame, like that of a PC) picture. This makes a lot of sense from a cinematic aspect, as cinema images are displayed one frame at a time, like a progressive scan picture. Traditionally, progressive scan pictures were restricted to NTSC images from American DVDs. But the back room legal wrangling was finally laid to

rest this year and now we Europeans can get progressive too. Naturally, you need a progressive scan-equipped display screen, too. This includes the latest home cinema-chummy TV sets, plasma screens, projectors and the rest. The progressive scan output is aided by the use of a high-end 12-bit/108MHz video DAC, a mark of high-level DVD video performance (the majority of DVD players sport ten-bit DACs). But again, this shows where the DVD-A1 has the edge, as it boasts twin 14-bit video DACs for even better picture performance. It also has a special sub-alias filter, which prevents video noise of 6.75MHz or more from breaking through and mangling audio or video signals.

A tell-tail sign of this player’s audiophile sensibilities is the ‘pure direct’ button on the front panel. Set up via the on-screen menu, this can disable the video stages, display or digital output (either singly or in combination), and features two user-definable

modes depending on what you perceive to be the most important features to knobble.

Similar to the video performance, with its 12-bit/108MHz video DACs, the audiophile has a high-quality Burr-Brown 24-bit/192kHz audio DAC for decoding. It also has clever bass management options that become vital for handling DVD-Audio and SACD. It has a fixed 80Hz crossover point, but has 12dB high and 24dB low-pass filter slopes.

As you might expect, with such a profusion of formats and options, the DVD-2900 has a rather complex menu system, divided into initial set-up and day-to-day onscreen menus. Yes, it’s possible to get the player up and running in ten minutes but to really get the most out of it, you need to play with the picture and sound settings – such as the clever picture adjust menu, which allows you to adjust the brightness of the picture output at different aspects in graphical form. This is important because the black level of the ▶





“The DVD-2900 retains all the excellent detail potential of SACD, but brings a whole new set of beefy strengths to the party.”

video output is exceptionally good and needs to be adjusted to prevent overawing your own display device. The more you experiment, in the main, the better the performance. And if you experiment too far, the factory presets are a button click away.

SOUND QUALITY

The early buzz about the Denon DVD-2900 suggests that it is a wonderful machine, and for once, you can believe the hype – it’s little short of fantastic.

Take DVD-Audio, for example. Typically, though multichannel DVD-A releases are often impressive at first play, once you get past the surround element the sound is not as

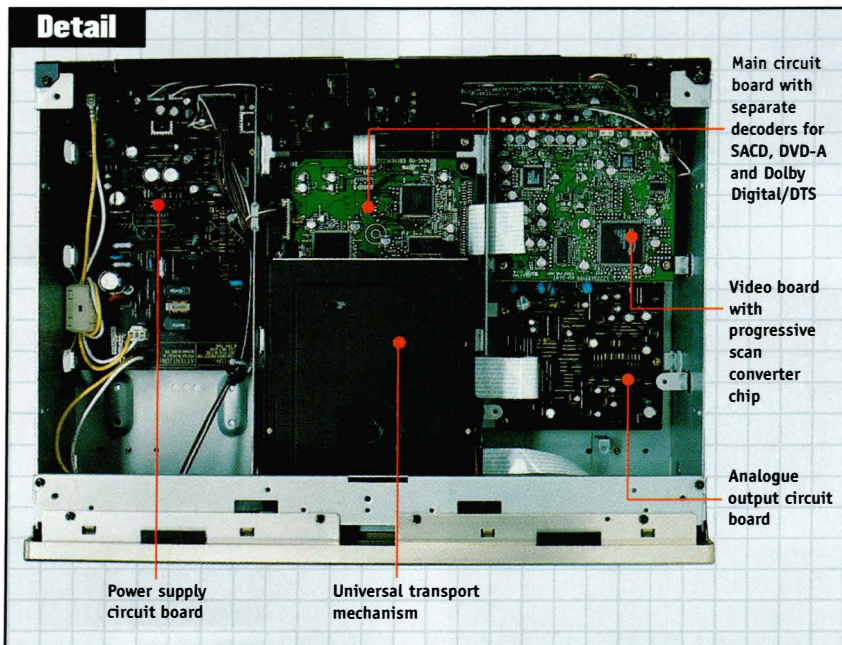
solid or as dynamic as you can get from a good CD player when played through a proper hi-fi system. Pretty soon, you begin dismissing the whole DVD-Audio format as being not as good as it’s cracked up to be.

Then you hear DVD-Audio through the Denon DVD-2900 and all bets are off. Suddenly, the thrash energy of Linkin Park, the solidity of the wall of guitars from The Eagles and the ping-pong, almost glottal dynamic starts and stops in Missy Elliott take on a more musical approach. In the case of the latter’s *Get Ur Freak On*, the speed of attack produces a disturbing, powerful atmosphere. Yet, for all that power, it’s also very natural and quite a bit richer than usual. The moment you play the first track from any DVD-A, the Denon makes you reconsider how the format sounds. At least, it does for those of us not well-heeled enough to afford Meridian 800 class DVD-Audio players.

A similar format-affirming occasion affords the replay of the first SACD recording. The DVD-2900 manages to retain all the excellent

detail potential of SACD, but brings a whole new set of beefy strengths to the party. Those lean and smoothed-over qualities that sometimes seem endemic to SACD fall away here, displaying a heretofore unexpected solidity and richness. In fact, in many respects the Denon finally realises multichannel SACD’s potential – it retains the detail and clarity, but now adds a naturalistic weight and dynamic solidity to the performance. This makes most sense with old analogue recordings remastered onto SACD, where the alternative brightness just accents the tape hiss. *Sympathy for the Devil* from the Rolling Stones’ *Beggars Banquet* finally sounds stormy and malevolent on SACD, as it really should. The hiss is there, but backgrounded.

Unsurprisingly, the depth and richness of an audio-only machine like Musical Fidelity’s Tri-Vista SACD player deliver a successful challenge to the Denon’s sound. But no matter how good the MF makes stereo CDs/SACDs sound, it has no multichannel element, leaving the Denon ahead in that



Q & A

Denon's Marketing and Training Officer Roger Batchelor discusses the DVD-2900 and the significance of universal players



HFC: Why make a universal player?

RB: Denon has been a signatory to SACD and DVD-Audio right from the outset. Although we've not produced an SACD player until now, we've kept a close eye on the market round the world and it looks like there's no clear winner – SACD's versatility and DVD-Audio's extra features both offer clear advantages. Making a universal player is the obvious way to go.

Was this a reworking of an existing model?

No. It has elements of the DVD-2800 MkII and the DVD-3800, but these are more family resemblances in the chassis design and overall look of the player. The engineers took a fresh approach for this model and people are generally amazed at just how much 'new Denon' there is inside the DVD-2900.

What needs addressing to make a good universal player?

SACD's the key! We felt that SACD replay from other SACD players is very clean but lacks the punch and dynamics of DVD-Audio. Denon's engineers have looked into that, especially as it relates to power supply and circuit topology. Also, engineering the 24-bit/192kHz DACs to sit comfortably with CD is a serious challenge to engineers. Even the Pure Direct mode (originally from the DVD-A1) has a notable effect on the sound.

Was there a strong UK influence in the design of the DVD-2900?

In the past, we have had many 'UK design' projects, such as amps and CDs. Over several generations of these products, our engineers realised that developing products to make a totally analytical sound is not the right approach. We try to get a balance across the board with all types of music. The UK ethos, and naturally that of other Europeans and Americans, has shaped the way players like the DVD-2900 evolved on a fundamental level.

Will every DVD player in 2005 be a universal player?

Almost certainly, yes. Except for the most affordable models, all Denon players will be universal models in the foreseeable future. I would imagine other manufacturers will be doing the same thing.

respect. And there's the trifling matter of the price – you could buy four and a half DVD-2900s for the cost of a Tri-Vista.

Even CD gets a decent make-over. Well, almost. Multi-format players have rarely scored that highly as CD players, at least when compared to dedicated CD-only players. The problem has almost always been a listless, lacklustre performance, low in dynamic drive or rhythmic integrity. Once again, the DVD-2900 moves up a gear. Sounds are fast-paced, full of drive with plenty of welly; even the complex rhythms of *Chrono* from Kraftwerk's new *Tour De France* album are well handled. It also produces a good soundstage – wide and deep, with only limited height information betraying the universal, multi-format nature of the player. Thus far, top-notch soundstage height on CD is restricted to dedicated CD players, and expensive ones to boot.

Sonic downsides are mild, unless you are nit-picky enough to compare the Denon to products costing many times more. The smooth, rich sound with CD is not quite as 'expressive' as some dedicated CD players of £500+, for example, and in the scheme of things it's the Denon's multichannel performance that is most impressive. But consider the range of talents on offer and the quality is little short of remarkable.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

Though of less importance to the die-hard audiophile, the DV-2900's performance with DVD-Video will be a primary concern for most potential purchasers. It produces a vivid, colourful and extremely sharp picture, and the Progressive Scan output adds to the flavour if you have a suitably-equipped TV or display. It's infinitely flexible – play the ethereal yet often drab, muted visual tones of *Solaris* and

the sparkly, fast-moving brilliance of *Spider-Man* back to back and both are handled with aplomb. Compared to some of the more 'Technicolor' DVD player pictures on hand, this is more watchable – you can sit in front of film upon film without eye-strain.

Your ears won't be troubled, either, whether or not you employ the on-board Dolby Digital and DTS processing. Sound is smooth and detailed, and seamlessly spreads across the speakers, filling the room with a warm, solidly bolted-down performance which reaches far beyond the boundaries of each speaker.

Right now, this is the multi-format disc player *du jour*. It may lack a wideband digital output, but good internal bass management and great sound through analogue connections mean it doesn't really matter. It's more than a match for most dedicated DVD-Video, DVD-Audio or SACD players, and it plays CDs well, too. All for £850... Denon's DVD-2900 is nothing less than a bargain on stilts. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%*

VISION >> 89%

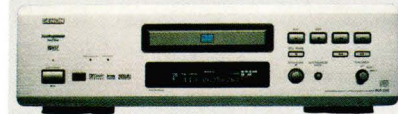
FEATURES >> 94%

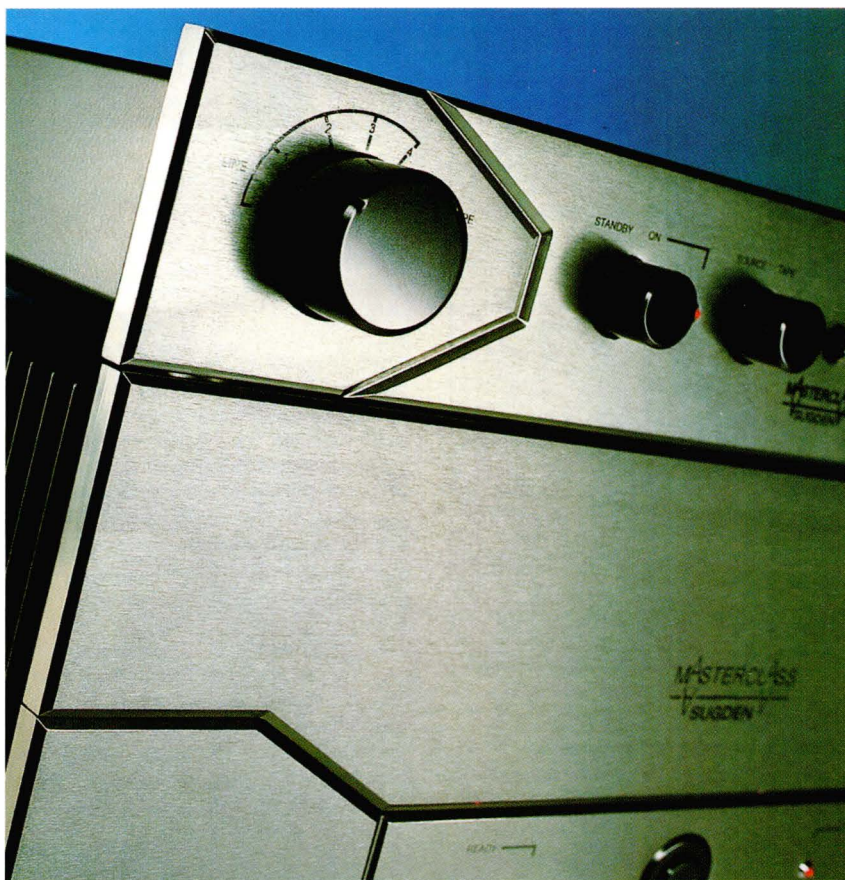
VALUE >> 95%

*CD 80% SACD 89% DVD-A 86%

CONCLUSION
This Denon is the audiophile's convergence dream come true – it'll play your CDs to a high standard while showing how good multichannel music can be. And it's great with movies too!

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%





CLASS MASTER

Sugden's A21A integrated is justifiably famous, but this pre/power combo is the best they make

PRODUCT Sugden Masterclass AA

TYPE Stereo preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE £2,300 (pre), £3,300 (power)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): pre 43x7.5x32cm, power 43x25.8x31.7cm • Weight: pre 5kg, power 20kg • Class A power output 50W/8ohm • Inputs: 4 line, 1 bal, 2 tape • Outputs: single-ended and balanced

CONTACT ☎ 01924 406016 @ www.jesugden.co.uk

Founded in 1963, Sugden is the longest running privately owned hi-fi electronics business in the country, yet you have to be a committed enthusiast to even know the brand. It's heartening to think that a quality-first company like Sugden can outlive many of the biggest names in the industry without spending a penny on advertising or PR.

One reason that it has been able to weather the lean years in the industry is that it makes almost every element of its components in-house. This keeps costs down and allows Sugden to make as many parts as it actually needs, rather than having to buy 1,000 units because it's 'cheaper' that way.

Sugden's A21A integrated amp is something of a legend among those in the

know – it costs less than a grand but delivers a class A sound that will charm the socks off even the most hard-bitten reviewer. The more costly Masterclass range is the best that Sugden makes and consists of CD player, phono stage, integrated amp, preamp and three power amps. Here we have the AA-designated Pre-Amplifier and stereo Power Amplifier, so called because they both operate largely in class A, the operating mode preferred by valve amp manufacturers and brands like Musical Fidelity for its dynamic and tonal qualities. As a result the Masterclass AA Power Amplifier, despite its unusually large casework, only puts forth 50 watts yet emits as much heat as a traditional class AB design of nearly ten times the power. This is the trade-off with class A designs – they are 'always on' and produce lots of heat, hence the unusually tall nature of the heatsinks on the AA.

Preamps don't need so much power and therefore don't get so hot but there's a standby mode on this one to keep your electricity bills down. The preamp has what you might call Heckmondwike ergonomics – 'like it or lump it' about sums it up, though

the solid casework and hefty front plate with their titanium anodised finish are definite plus points. The inputs are numbered rather than named, with one marked B (for balanced), and three of the front panel knobs are dedicated to tape recording/monitoring purposes. The remote control only covers the volume setting and does so in rather big steps – this is mostly because the pre/power combination as a whole has a lot of gain and you tend to use the volume pot at the bottom of its range if your speakers are anything other than plain inefficient.

The existence on the back panel of both single-ended and balanced in and outputs is much less valve-like and positively helpful. The AA power amp has a matching pair of inputs with switching between them and some reassuringly hefty multi-way binding posts for the speaker cable.

On the inside, Masterclass components use gold-plated PCBs with silver soldered connections and silver signal wires, balanced circuits, current feedback line stages, relay switching and low impedance power supplies. These are all good things where sound quality



is concerned and account for much of the substantial cost of the finished units. The only grumble with the power amp is its height – at 25.8cm including feet it is too high for many standard racks.

SOUND QUALITY

The Masterclass AA pre/power is one of the most organic and dynamic transistor amplifiers you can buy, and the similarities to (good) valve amps are uncanny. The strong biasing into class A is clearly a major factor here, and is almost certainly the reason for the uncanny dynamic transparency on offer. Another reason might be the fullness of the bass – this could be where the earthiness comes from, as it adds a certain richness that makes wooden instruments sound more real. In fact, all instruments (and voices for that matter) are more convincing than usual with this pairing. When it comes to tonal rendering they are distinctly unlike most trannie amps, which on the whole tend toward a dry balance, delivering bone-crunching bass at the expense of texture and body.

We used the Sugdens with Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2 and Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia Be speakers, as tested last month, and both pairings worked well. We expected the Avatar, which also excels in the dynamic and tonal departments, to be a good match but were quite surprised at how the Micro Utopia Be literally sprang into life in the Sugden's company. In fact, the first impression this amp pairing gives is of liveliness – it has a

remarkable ability to reveal the energy in the music, opening up even the most dense recordings to tremendous effect. Not all recordings are equal of course, and you notice this much more than usual, the dynamic transparency in effect revealing the degree of vigour in each track. The acoustic material on *Led Zeppelin III* worked particularly well off old vinyl, Page's guitar delivering that new string zing in a way that even 200g audiophile pressings struggle to reproduce.

Likewise, imaging is linked directly to the quality of the source yet the power amp

doesn't have quite the depth resolution available from the likes of a Gamut D200 (at a similar price). This comparison is very interesting. In fact, the Sugden scores in terms of richness of tone while the Gamut reveals more space and seems to be more transparent but leaves you wondering if it's not putting a sheen over the textures that the Sugden paints so vividly. What is obvious is that the bass on the Yorkshire-born design is fuller and not so deep, a balance which suits something like the Micro Utopia Be down to the ground but might not be appropriate with bigger ▶



Q & A

We asked Sugden's design director Patrick Miller about the thinking behind the Masterclass



HFC: Why make such a massive 50-watt amplifier?

PM: The size of the power amp is not optional I'm afraid – it is ruled by the laws of physics. Because it is class A, the design is very inefficient and produces a lot of heat. This is the smallest we can make it without using alternative cooling techniques such as a fan. The running temperature also effects the sound, and keeping the output devices at a certain temperature ensures they are at their most linear.

What is it about class A that is so appealing to you, and what are its advantages?

Class A has a unique sound with very different distortion characteristics to other classes of amplification. It is predominantly even harmonic in nature and is more sympathetic to music. Efficient Class B or AB designs require a different output configuration and develop a degree of crossover distortion. Odd harmonic distortion is not a natural phenomenon and you can clearly hear it in music reproduction.

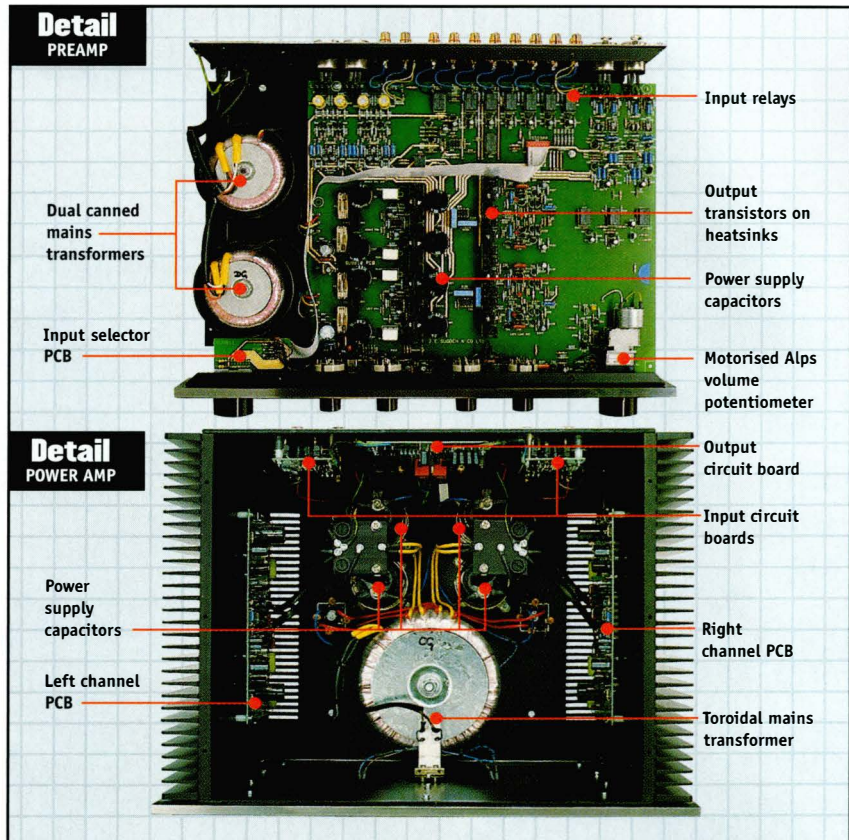
What type of speakers and music did you use to evaluate this design?

I have just counted the speakers outside our sound room and we have twelve pairs in all and these include Heil, Quad electrostatics, Harbeth P3s and ProAc. On the music side we have a lot of master tapes we use as references for critical listening. For the most part these are mainly classical and jazz with limited compression. You will however often hear *Led Zep II* blasting through the factory and at the moment the White Stripes are very popular.

In an increasingly digital age with regard to recording, the preamp seems overly well equipped when it comes to tape facilities. Why? If somebody is looking for a new preamp it is better to offer as many useful facilities as possible – after all, it is a control unit. The Masterclass preamp has a very logical topology using quality switching and precision relays. This reduces signal path lengths and allows lots of facilities without degrading the sound. A lot of our Masterclass series components are used by music enthusiasts who do like making and replaying high quality analogue recordings.

Do you prefer the balanced or single-ended pre/ power connection and which cables do you use?

Balanced cables are our preference for demonstrations and evaluation. We normally use professional microphone cable due to its low loss and low noise.



or more current-hungry loudspeakers.

Timing is also a strong point. There's no undue emphasis on leading edges but the music seems to flow particularly well and you find yourself involuntarily nodding along (well, some of us do). Put on some Esbjorn Svenson Trio piano-led jazz and you'll get straight into the groove while marvelling at the lovely sound of the instruments. The piano almost literally shines while you can hear right into the double bass and fully appreciate the drummer's brushwork. This is due to the Sugden pairing's very strong harmonic resolution, very much a tube trait and one at which the better tube designs are slightly more adept (but only slightly). Listen to the way notes decay on these amps and you'll wonder why on earth more transistor amp designers can't do the same thing, as very few, if any, of them can.

When looking to partner these amps, look for a source that can feed their strengths – the Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player for instance, or a Classé CDP-10. For vinyl, consider the best works from the likes of

Michell, Avid and SME. And for comparisons, try to track down a Border Patrol P20 power amp or a Pathos TT RR, another class A trannie design. Some of the midrange Classé amps would also be interesting to compare.

But it's unlikely that any of those above will have quite the same combination of dynamic expression, tonal richness and musical engagement on offer from the Masterclass AA pairing. These amps combine the strengths of trannies and valves in a way that is rarely encountered, which makes for highly distracting entertainment. If you haven't heard your favourite albums through an amplifier like this, then you just haven't heard them. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 92%

FEATURES >> 80%

BUILD >> 87%

VALUE >> 90%

PRO
Uncanny dynamic resolution combined with superb tone colour and tip-top timing. Comprehensive recorder monitoring/dubbing facility.

CON
Inconveniently lofty and hot-running power amp. Unsubtle remote volume control, source selection won't be clear to all.

CONCLUSION
This is a well-built and lovely-sounding pre/power combo that will reveal the best in all but the most insensitive speakers. If you want the best assets of valves and transistors combined, this Sugden duo will be very hard to beat at the price.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%

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1



2



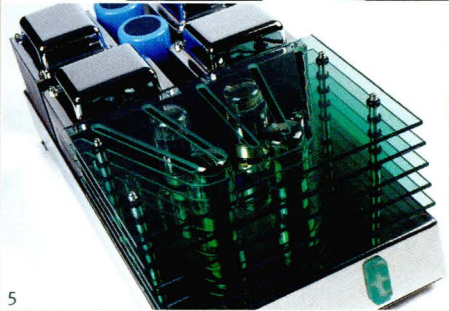
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7



5



6



8

4. Moon CD player and amplifier

An exceptionally smooth and powerful sound from nicely compact units. Nova CD £2950. I-5 integrated amplifier (shown) £2500. I-3 amplifier £1550.

5. Hot Tubes JD 1 valve amplifier

This British made dual mono amplifier in one chassis has impressed us with its sheer musicality. A wonderful, open, sound that needs to be heard. 100wpc £8000.

6. Unico Pre and DM amplifiers

A valve hybrid design within both units. The 150 wpc dual mono amplifier can be bridged to give 500wpc. Very transparent, amazing value. Pre – £1250. DM – £1250.

7. Pathos New Classic One

This valve hybrid amplifier has many of the qualities of the Logos but at an affordable price £1275.

8. Acoustic Arts amplification

Very elegant looks and sound from this German manufacturer. An open, accurate sound with no hint of glare. Pre Amp 1 £2350. Amp 1: 100wpc – £2850. Amp 2: 200wpc – £5375. CD Player 1: 24/96 (not shown) – £3750

Amphion • A.R.T. loudspeakers • Avalon Acoustics • BCD Racks • Benz-Micro • Cardas • Clearaudio • Clearlight Audio RDC conrad-johnson • EAR/Yoshino • Gamut • IsoTek • Kuzma • Lavardin • Lehmann • Lyra • Magnum Dynalab • Moon • Nordost Nottingham Analogue • Opera • Pagode Equipment Supports • Pathos • Resolution Audio • Rogue Audio • SME Shanling • Shun Mook • Sugden • Transfiguration • Triangle • Trinity Audio • Tri-Planar • Unison Research • VPI • Wadia



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CREAM OF CREMONA

Does Sonus Faber's Cremona Auditor loudspeaker have the sound to match those gorgeous looks?

PRODUCT Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £2,149 per pair (stands £399)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 19x35x32cm

• Weight: 9kg • Single-wire, rear-ported bass reflex design • 150mm paper mid/bass driver • 29mm tweeter • Sensitivity: 88dB • Impedance: 4 ohms

CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com

The Lombardy town of Cremona in northern Italy is best known for its classic instrument makers. If it's made of wood and uses strings to make music, the craftsmen of Cremona did it better than anyone. Amati, Guarneri, Stradivari were all Cremonese violin and lute makers, and Sonus Faber has produced products respecting all these names (barring Stradivari... for now). But it's not simply name-checking the greats, there are other commonalities between a classic violin and the design of speakers like the Cremona Auditor.

That tear-drop shaped body of the Cremona Auditor is constructed more like a very solid lute than a loudspeaker, using solid wood pieces, curved into a shape that helps to overcome internal standing waves better than the rectangular box designs that predominate.

The 9kg Cremona Auditor is a two-way, rear-ported bass reflex design, with sensitivity claimed at 88dB and a nominal impedance of four ohms. Sonus Faber suggests the frequency response runs from 46Hz right up to 40kHz, and the speakers are single-wired with deliciously-made Sonus Faber custom multi-way terminals. Its drive units are distinctive too, with a 29mm ring tweeter that sports a solid centre phase plug and a 150mm bass unit with slices carved in the paper cone, tangential from the soft dome centre. Magnetic shielding is less of an issue for high-end speakers – in an AV setting they're more likely to be used with plasma or projector screens, neither of which are susceptible to the magnet-induced distortion that can affect ordinary CRT TVs – but these speakers are strongly shielded against magnetic nasties anyway.

Ideally, the speakers need to be around a metre from the rear wall and need a small amount of toe-in. But there are no hard and fast rules, experimentation is key and – best of all – the Cremona Auditors are far less position-sensitive than most high-end speakers. They do need a lot of running in, however – at least 200 hours is about right. Of course, the longer the better; but as soon

as you bolt them to those stands, you get a good performance, and the only way, generally, is up.

People choose loudspeakers by the way they look and the way they sound. As such, Sonus Faber's Cremona Auditor 'bookshelf' speakers and stands have already done half the job. They look wonderful, even better in the flesh than any picture can recreate. The boat-tail finish and the use of cords (held together top and bottom) instead of a more conventional grille give it a really sophisticated look as a speaker on its own.



Factor in the swept-back wood and metal stands and the speaker looks cool beyond compare. It's not going to be for everyone – if your house is too cluttered, too chintzy or just too English, the powerful styling looks as out of place as driving around in an open-top Ferrari with a knotted handkerchief as sun protection – but those who like it, love it.

Even that backwards-leaning stand is smarter than it seems – not only does it make the speakers look even cooler and prevent your pride and joy from becoming plant-pot holders, it time aligns the speakers perfectly. And, given that this speaker has an extended frequency range up into the bat-radar part of SACD replay, that time alignment helps to make the treble and bass drive units integrate beautifully. Of course, with a quartet of wood screws top and bottom on each of the metal plates, the stand might not take easily to endless building and rebuilding. But once it's put together it's very solid and locks the speakers down well.

SOUND QUALITY

There is supposed to be a family sound to Sonus Faber and their ilk – lovely finish, soft and squidgy sound (especially for the treble, which should be slugged as if socks are over the tweeter). If that's what you expect from the Cremona Auditor, you'll be happily disappointed. This is a clean, quicksilver, dynamic sound with plenty of insight into treble detail. Almost too much detail – zingy solid-state amplifiers and forward sounding Nordost cables might push the Cremona Auditor into brightness.

One of the more uncanny parts to the sound is the almost holographic soundstage. This almost creeps up on you, especially in places where you don't expect to hear this sort of soundstaging. For example, the speakers were on test as Wimbledon was on TV; the Cremona Auditor gave the Centre Court depth, scale and height, and you could even hear where in the Court that inappropriate clapping came from. Moving over to musical material, the soundstage is stunning – three-dimensional and far larger than the speaker might suggest. Our trusty *Rare On Air* album of obscure US radio sessions made the speakers effectively vanish, removing us to a studio in California without need for a passport or airport taxes.

High-end speakers often have an inherent problem. Although sumptuously detailed, keenly dynamic and faithful across the frequency range, many are just a bit... boring. There are times when you have to set aside Mahler and reach for the Insane Clown Posse discs. And when you do, the Sonus Faber Cremona Auditors will still be there for you. They go surprisingly loud and keep the fun quotient high – high enough to play AC/DC at silly levels. This facility, if nothing else, places the speaker above many of its peers.



“It has a wonderfully big, three-dimensional sound with fine dynamics and detail.”

There is a caveat or two. First, Sonus Faber tries to push the boundaries of physics by getting a deeper than expected sound from a small speaker, but there comes a point where those physical boundaries become virtually impossible to overcome without spoiling the sound in the process. Ultimately, the speaker is not a bass-hound, when compared to bigger floorstanding designs. However, that slightly tailored bottom end makes this one of the more practical high-end speakers in British-sized small to medium rooms, where cavernous bass spells boom and overhang.

Perhaps more importantly, the small speaker needs a serious amplifier to give its best. It is a remarkably amp-chummy speaker in the main; we used it with an entirely inappropriate £450 Audio Analogue Puccini integrated amp and the sound was extremely fine. But, to grab hold of the bass properly, you need an amplifier that can dish out a hefty portion of amplification, preferably from the valve side of the church. While it's a combination that is unlikely to be easy to find in the UK, the Cremona Auditors matched the Conrad-Johnson PV10BL/MV60SE pre/power combination (reviewed soon) almost perfectly, but the likes of Audio Research will also make a more readily available system.

Two and a half grand isn't too expensive for a pair of high-end speakers, especially ones as pretty as the Sonus Faber Cremona Auditors.

But instead of the half-hearted speaker in a pretty case you might expect, you get a wonderfully big, three-dimensional sound, with plenty of decent dynamics and oodles of detail. You also get a speaker that has all the keen speed and fun of smaller, cheaper speakers. This is not simply a cut-down version of the Cremona floorstander for those who can't afford one – the Cremona Auditor is one of the best small speakers you can buy, up there with the likes of B&W's Signature 805 and Focal-JMLab's Micro Utopia Be. **HFC**

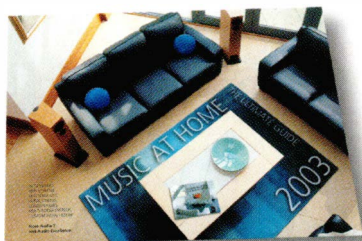
Alan Sircom

VERDICT	
SOUND >>> 86% [Progress bar]	PRO Beautifully made and every inch the class act, it creates big speaker sound from a fantastic looking compact speaker design.
EASE OF DRIVE >>> 72% [Progress bar]	CON Needs a serious (possibly valve) amp to make it sound its best. Bass is good for a small speaker, but don't expect to loosen any fillings.
BUILD >>> 92% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >>> 82% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION Not so much a hi-fi component, more a musical instrument, Sonus Faber has made one of the most accomplished speakers for the small room. It has a soundstage you could get lost in, plenty of detail and still manages to stay fun.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 84%	

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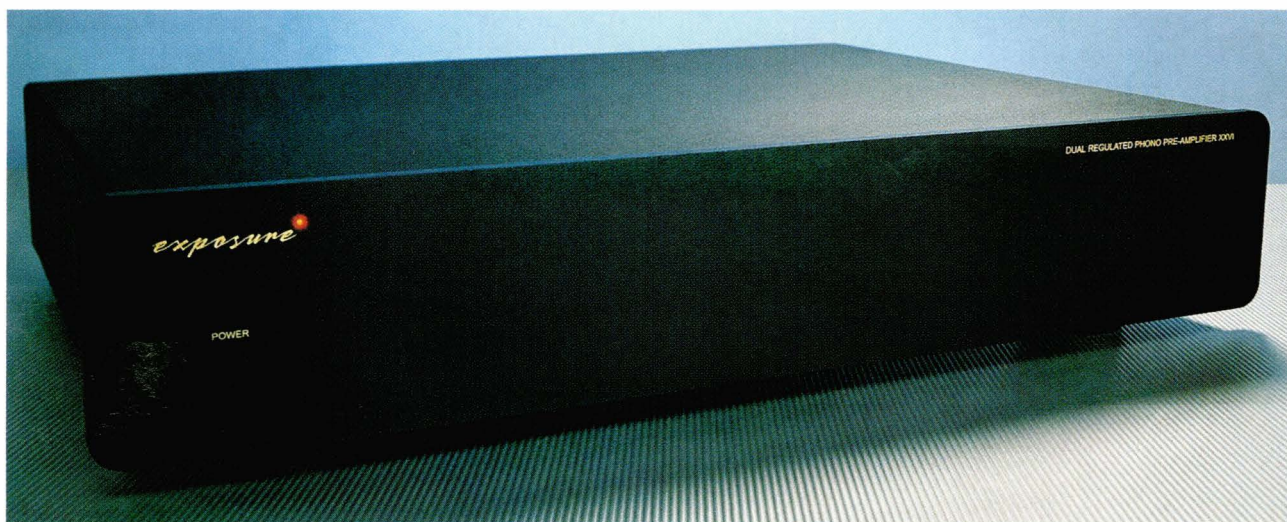
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Exposure has revamped a classic phono stage design for the 21st century

PRODUCT Exposure XXVI

TYPE Moving coil phono stage

PRICE £999

CONTACT ☎ 01273 423877

🌐 www.exposurehifi.com

It's called XXVI, or 26 for ease of use, because that's two times 13. You see, 13 was the name of the last Exposure phono stage, a component produced by the original owner John Farlow in the none blacker than black casework beloved of the marque. That was three years ago and the new version is still black, but silver is an option. It owes a lot to that original and is effectively a refinement that's available in moving coil and moving magnet varieties, albeit not both together.

If you already own an Exposure XXIII preamp it's possible to have the XXVI's MC or MM board installed for £200, which seems a bargain when you look at the just-under-a-grand price tag attached to this unit. But you get a lot more than just a phono board. For a start, you get the most expensive bit of most components – a case – and by phono stage standards quite a large one. This is so that it can support a meaty toroidal mains transformer and a substantial dual-regulated power supply. John Farlow obviously didn't like to skimp on this critical element of any amplifier and Tony Brady, who turned the XIII into the XXVI, has stuck with this approach.

The decision to supply as *either* moving magnet or moving coil seems a little strange, but it's probably fair to assume that few if any purchasers are likely to want MM as there are so few high-end varieties available. With the MC board reviewed here, you can use supplied

jumpers to achieve the best match with your cartridge. There are three gain levels: 250µV, 500µV and 1mV, plus eight impedance loadings from 100ohms to 1,500ohms, a pretty comprehensive selection for the latter if not quite the range offered elsewhere for gain. Connections on the rear are simple in and out phonos with an earthing point.

SOUND QUALITY

In the company of a van den Hul Grasshopper III cartridge, the XXVI turned in an unusually laid-back performance. Even though this needle delivers a healthy output and likes high impedance loads such as the 470µV option on offer here, there didn't seem to be enough gain and energy coming out of the phono stage. It has decent resolution and reveals what's going on in all the nooks and crannies of the music but does so in a rather lethargic fashion.

We thought that maybe our sights were set too high – our reference Tom Evans Groove phono stage is nearly twice the price after all, so we hooked up a £1,200 Trichord Delphini. This brought back the life in the music and rather confirmed the initial impression of the Exposure. We tried a different power lead, a conventional one in fact, which added a bit of daylight in the bass to good effect, bringing out the double bass more clearly on Miles Davis's *So What*. We also tried Exposure's own interconnect but that didn't change much.

But perhaps that's too negative. Indeed, there are elements on every platter you play through it that are made impressively clear – the string section on Elbow's *Powder Blue*, for instance, and the distinctive character of

verb on Sly and Robbie's *A Dub Experience*. This plus the fact that the smooth, bass-heavy balance of the XXVI allows the volume to be jacked up in complete comfort. It also has an unusually organic character that's not always expected with solid state components.

Comparing vinyl and CD with the XXVI in line revealed the black stuff in a darker light than usual, albeit denser and richer than CD and with decent transparency to certain details. Timing could be snappier but put something intense on, Robert Fripp for instance, and there's an irresistible beat alongside his hallmark biting guitar sound.

After the success of recent Exposure CD and amp products this is a disappointing result – it's not a bad phono stage *per se*, but it's just not that good for the money. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 63%	
FEATURES >> 80%	
BUILD >> 85%	
VALUE >> 55%	
CONCLUSION It may have an impressive heritage but the XXVI is something of a disappointment, particularly as other recent Exposure products have tended to be so good. It'll have its benefits with bright-sounding turntables, but we want more for the money.	
HI-FI CHOICE >> 63% OVERALL SCORE	



SHANLING A LANG

This Chinese stereo-only SACD player might just put the cat among the high resolution pigeons

PRODUCT Shanling SCD-S200

TYPE Stereo SACD/CD player

PRICE £1,150

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x10x37cm ▶ Two-channel, audio-only SACD/CD player ▶ Aluminium system remote ▶ Machined aluminium frame chassis

CONTACT ☎ 0870 909 6777 # www.shanling.com

Shanling spectacularly burst onto the hi-fi scene at the Las Vegas CES show in January with one of the most outrageous looking CD players to hit the affordable market for some time. A top-loader with blazing valves inside shiny cages, it was impossible to miss. Since then this gung-ho company has produced disc players of most persuasions, with another spectacular valve player (the SCD-T200) for SACD, two more conventional CD players, a DVD player and this – its entry level SACD spinner. Oh, and some tube power amps for good measure.

Given that China is the earth's electronics factory these days, with up to 90 per cent of affordable AV components made there, it's surprising that it has taken so long for an indigenous brand to make an impression on the Western world.

The SCD-S200 is a heavyweight component housed in machined aluminium and bearing a strong physical similarity to Sony's SCD-XA333ES, albeit in a more conventional

colour. The biggest difference between the two is that the Shanling eschews the contemporary vogue for multichannel and is a stereo-only player like Sony's discontinued '555ES. The fit and finish, though high, is not quite up to Japanese standards and the push buttons are unusual but nicely made and easy enough to use. The remote is also aluminium, an extrusion with end caps that is a lot fancier than you usually find at the price, but it is a system remote for the Shanling range, and thus has a number of redundant buttons.

The display is quite deeply set and is unconventional in style so identifying tracks is not so easy, but if the player manages to read the disc, you know things are looking up. We experienced not a little difficulty getting the SCD-S200 to read some of our SACDs, specifically those with both multi and two-channel tracks. It regularly spent some time 'READING' a disc only to come up with the error message 'UN READ'. I found that with perseverance, and opening and closing the drawer (not a remote option), it was usually possible to get a result but there were several discs, such as *Dark Side Of The Moon*, which it couldn't crack. I reported this to Shanling and its reply effectively blamed the chip supplier,

Sony, for the problem. It went on to say that in two to three months it should have obtained new software that will let the player read any disc without trouble.

If you look at the specs on the SCD-S200 you can see that the transport mechanism and DSD decoder are Sony components and it's the latter, described as 'top grade', which is said to require a software upgrade. I wonder if this problem exists with the Shanling valve SACD player, the SCD-T200, which features the R version of the same decoder? The DAC here is a PCM1738 SACD model from Burr-Brown and the output stage a regular solid state affair – there are no vacuum tubes burning inside this box.

Outputs consist of the bare minimum analogue and digital RCA phono sockets, the latter restricted to a CD-quality bitstream. The digital DSD link found on the latest Sony SACD player and matching amplifier (XA/TA-DA9000ES) is not surprisingly absent in this instance, and given Shanling's taste for the purist approach, not likely to be an option in future.





SOUND QUALITY

Once you realise that you have to press 'play' once to close the drawer and again to initiate actual disc play the resulting sound is gratifying, with the live *Whole Lotta Love* on Zeppelin's *How The West Was Won* CD delivering much of its phenomenal energy and grunt, if not quite all the scale that more expensive players reveal. The Shanling's interpretation of the *23rd Psalm* reading on the Red Rose Music SACD sampler had a lot in common with the Sony SCD-XA333ES. In fact, the two are tonally quite similar until you play some interesting bass notes such as the kick drum on Eleanor McEvoy's *Yola*. With this the Sony sounded positively dry compared to the lovely round, deep thump from the Shanling. We put the same track on the Eikos CD player to see which version was the best match and it certainly wasn't the Sony.

Another critical performance factor where the Shanling scores is timing. It is distinctly above par in this respect and will have you subconsciously nodding away to the beat on anything vaguely rhythmic – EST's jazz grooves are a good example which the Shanling insists you thoroughly enjoy. It also delves into the lower levels, pulling out Esbjorn's strange Jarrett-esque 'singing' while he tickles the ivories so effectively. This CD also revealed some fulsome bass and even suggested a degree of excess, but it has to be said that this is by the high (read expensive) standard set by the Eikos.

Imaging is good but about par for the price – a little more contained than is desirable but by no means compressed. Indeed, the track *Stan* from Eminem's *Marshall Mathers LP* fills out nicely as the rain comes down, but it is Dido's voice that stands out as the transistor

“The player’s timing makes its mark by reproducing the vibes with a considerably greater degree of naturalness and shimmer than most.”

radio compression effect is gradually reduced. You can hear right into the mix to remarkable effect. With another CD, from the Bobby Hughes Combination, the SCD-S200 emphasised percussion over the bass and delivered another compulsive Latin tinged groove from the Scandinavian musicians.

Moving back to the SACD challenge with McCoy Tyner's *Land Of Giants*, the player's strong timing made its mark by reproducing the vibes with considerably greater naturalness and shimmer than most. In fact it thoroughly changes the sound of the instrument from 'not my cup of tea' to 'really quite nice'. I won't be investing in the Bobby Hutcherson back catalogue just yet but my aversion to the instrument is dwindling. With SACD discs the Shanling turns in a fuller and richer performance than both the Eikos (with CD) and the Sony '333ES (be it CD or SACD). You'd have to put it up against something more up to date from the SACD camp, such as the Marantz SA-17S1, to find its peer – it's doubtful that any of the sub-£2K universal players would outperform it in two-channel.

The Shanling SCD-S200 represents great value for money in many respects. It's a good CD player, as good as most at the price, and as a dedicated two-channel SACD player it's peerless for the money. One can forgive most of its idiosyncrasies save the disc reading

issue, but when that's sorted out (as promised) this looks like a pretty good bet. Assuming, that is, that multichannel isn't likely to be a requirement for you in the foreseeable future.

I'm told by the music merchants at Vivante that SACD discs are outselling DVD-Audio by a significant margin, which would suggest that this, if any, is likely to be the high-end disc format of the future. If you want to hear what that future sounds like, in a few month's time this could be a tempting way to find out. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 86%*	
FEATURES >> 58%	
BUILD >> 78%	
VALUE >> 78%	
*CD 82% SACD 90%	
CONCLUSION	
A potentially great player that (as reviewed) is let down by a not insignificant functional problem. Once that's fixed it'll be a genuine high-resolution contender for stereo lovers.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE	>> 74%



“The original TMS was intended as a statement, one which would define the state of the art, more or less irrespective of cost.”

SONIC SIGNATURE

Roksan's new flagship turntable refines the art of analogue replay

PRODUCT Roksan Xerxes TMS2

TYPE Vinyl turntable

PRICE £7,500 (plus tonearm and cartridge)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxDxH): 45x37x13.5cm

⊕ Weight: 18kg ⊕ Belt drive turntable with interchangeable armboard and outboard power supply

CONTACT ☎ 01235 511166 🌐 www.roksan.co.uk

The story so far... Roksan first surfaced in 1985 with the Xerxes, arguably the first turntable to give the previously all-conquering Linn Sondek LP12 a real run for its money. Loudspeakers (now long

forgotten), two arms, cartridges

and a lower cost

turntable (the

Radius) followed,

along with a wide

range of electronics

components. Finally,

in 1990, the TMS

was launched. It was

a signature product –

literally, as TM is Touraj

Moghaddam, the

company's founder (with

partner Tufan Hashemi) and

chief engineer. The TMS was

intended as a statement, one which would

define the state of the art, more or less

irrespective of cost. Unlike some high-end

turntables, it was always much more than just

another exotic juxtaposition of shapes that

can be turned on a lathe, or assembled from

sheets of Perspex or glass.

Now Roksan has decided the time is right to

refine its masterpiece and launch the TMS2.

At first glance, its chassis appears to be made

from three sheets of material with gaps

between them. In fact there are four layers (as

with the original TMS), with the top section

divided into two. The inner section, revealed

by removing the outer platter, supports the

main player bearing and the armboard bolted

to it. Armboards are interchangeable, and

available for Roksan, the Naim Aro and SME.

Other arms can be accommodated with a

blank, uncut armboard. Surprisingly there is

no Linn armboard listed, which according to

the manufacturer is due to lack of demand –

certainly there is no technical reason why any

Linn arm should not be very happy on this

player. The adjustability of the suspension

along with the limited vertical compliance of

the suspension and the space around the arm

base area signals that that the TMS2 will also

work well with more difficult tonearms,

heavyweights, parallel trackers and other oddballs of the tonearm world.

Most of the other chassis sections are made

from the material described separately in our

interview with Moghaddam overleaf. Each

section is decoupled from the others and from

ground using complex adjustable suspension

pillars which define compliance settings in

both planes in a predetermined way. The

electronic speed control is on board, and in

the case of the Artemiz fitted to the test

player, so is a pair of phono outputs and an

earth terminal, which allows free choice of

cables from the armbase through to the amp.

Another major change introduced with the

TMS2, but which is also retrofittable to the

less costly Xerxes, is the main bearing – a

self-aligning, self-centring, true single-point

design. The new bearing employs a tungsten

carbide spindle and ball bearing that sits at

the bottom of the bearing well, which is made

in-house to very tight tolerances from solid

phosphor bronze. The two tungsten carbide

components are made by a company that

supplies bearings for satellite gyroscopes, and

is well used to working to levels of precision

that are beyond the ability of most suppliers

to even measure, let alone manufacture.

The surface finish is much better, and

harder too, reducing noise and wear. The

platter itself is the same as the one used in

the Xerxes, and consists of two aluminium

components (not the more porous Masak

often chosen for ease of machining). Here the

outer platter is an interference fit on the

subplatter, the discontinuity serving to damp

out resonances in both parts. A thin felt mat

is the immediate platform for the record.

The motor drive and speed change are on

board the deck, driven by an outboard power

supply, the DX2, which is built into a Caspian-

style case (which for the test was placed on a

shelf below the turntable). As with previous

Roksan turntables, the outer section of the

centre spindle is removable once the record is

in place, and a storage point is available on

the player's top surface. But the noise from

the new bearing is so low that there is no

audible benefit to be gained from this.

SOUND QUALITY

The review sample was equipped with a

Roksan Artemiz arm and Shiraz cartridge,

which put the package price up by £1,000

and £995 respectively. It's worth noting here

that the turntable looks the part – the TMS2

has real presence, but avoids the common

mistake of looking gaudy or overblown.

The last time we sampled the TMS2 was in

the context of a review of the JMLab Grande

Utopia Beryllium, where Roksan supplied one

to help in the assessment of the speaker, and

later the new Halcro dm10 preamp (with the

dm68 power amp). It acquitted itself more

than just well, and a formal review was

organised. This time there was no Halcro to

test it with, but instead we used a Krell KPE

phono stage, a precision instrument in the

TMS2/Artemiz/Shiraz mould, along with

Musical Fidelity's excellent new X-LPS^{v3}. The

main test bed for the player was Krell's new

KAV-400xi integrated amplifier (reviewed

next month) and Triangle Magellan speakers.

Many will be approaching a turntable like

this from the direction of the Xerxes, which

has sold in much greater numbers over the

years. The Xerxes was remarkable when

launched for sounding in certain specific ▶



Q & A

We talked to Touraj Moghaddam, the company's founder (with partner Tufan Hashemi) and chief engineer, about the genesis of Roksan's latest flagship record player



HFC: How does the TMS2 fit in the Roksan turntable range?

TM: TMS2 is Roksan's reference record player. Utilising a four-plinth grounded system design, it incorporates five layers of isolation, three different plinth materials, a super precision bearing assembly and individually selected motor and motor drive power supply. TMS2 is designed and constructed to achieve unparalleled vinyl replay and it is aesthetically designed to be every bit as desirable.

Can you explain the ethos of the original TMS, and how that grew out of the Xerxes project?

Xerxes was a two-plinth grounded system and hence it was a little fussy about the type of support it sat on. The original TMS was designed as a three-plinth floating system which enhanced environmental isolation, reduced internal noise and utilised the top-of-the-range motor drive power supply individually matched to its motor for optimum performance.

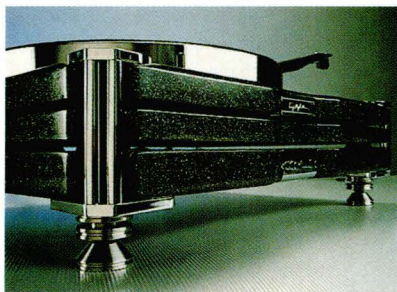
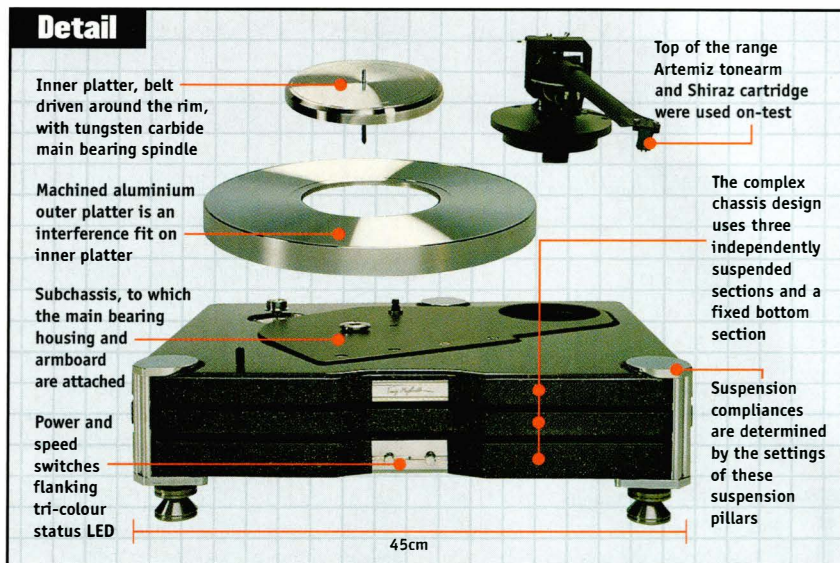
The new plinths have been redesigned from the original TMS. Can you explain the thinking behind the changes?

The TMS2 builds on the timeless aesthetics of the original TMS, keeping its form very similar, but it is really a totally different beast underneath. The main three plinths are made from a composite of polymers and fillers with a hard outer coat. This was chosen and fine-tuned since our original choice, Corian, turned out to be too damped, resulting in a sluggish overall sound.

The TMS2's four-tier grounded system design meant that we could absolutely minimise both internal and external noise. This, combined with the new and virtually silent running bearing and the ultra-low-noise motor drive, ensured the dynamic range of the player was increased to a new standard.

How did you decide on the extraordinary flecked plinth finish?

Because we started out with a clean sheet plinth material, the finish was up to us, and we used the material that is added to some paints to give a metallic appearance. We then added flecks of metal to give the distinctive finish you see – we felt a plain finish would look rather dated. The finish is hand-applied, so no two record players are completely identical. Although we match the three plinths of each TMS2, in this limited sense every TMS2 is still a one-off.



☑ respects more CD-like than its competition.

This is not a qualitative judgement, simply an identification with the leaner, more precisely articulated quality of compact disc (then and now), especially in the lowest octave or so. It's not always easy pinning effects to cause, but what appears to have been the root of this identification is superior control over unwanted low-frequency noise in the Roksan. The player is very tightly constructed, with relatively few mechanical compliances, and then only in areas that don't, or only peripherally affect sound quality, such as the unique motor bearing. The TMS2 has many of the same Roksan house qualities. It too has a taut, well-contained sound. It lacks the slightly heavy, almost bell-like warmth of some other turntables, and its very literal balance may make it seem a touch antiseptic, even clinical by some standards.

But the Roksan flagship is rather different to the Xerxes. It still has the same supreme control and ability to 'switch off' after a note has passed, and it retains the controlled, slightly dry and cool presentation of the lesser model. And there is no analogue 'glow' – a very good thing too as this is simple distortion. But the TMS2 gains in two specific areas. First, and arguably less important, its environmental isolation is much improved over the Xerxes. Footfall noise is much better suppressed, and the sound of the turntable is less dependent on the support it stands on (though a solid stable, support remains a

prerequisite to optimise performance).

The more important gain compared to the Xerxes is that the sound of the TMS2 is bigger and broader, more physical and (if you like) architectural. But it manages this without sounding slow, or lacking in life and vitality. Maintaining a balance between these conflicting parameters is a difficult trick, but it has always been an area where Roksan has been particularly adept over the years.

Speed stability is another strength. There is no suggestion that the extra drag imposed on a record during crescendi has any effect on pitch, and low-rate variations – or 'wow' – are simply not apparent. This kind of very subtle speed variation is rarely noticed directly, but is sometimes manifest subliminally, almost as an edge-of-the-cliff feeling.

This is not a warm, lush or 'agreeable' sounding turntable except in the sense that surface noise is handled very gently, and rumble and low-frequency noise are lower than you're likely to hear elsewhere. A true precision instrument then, and one of the best source components money can buy. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 94%

FEATURES >>> 87%

BUILD >>> 96%

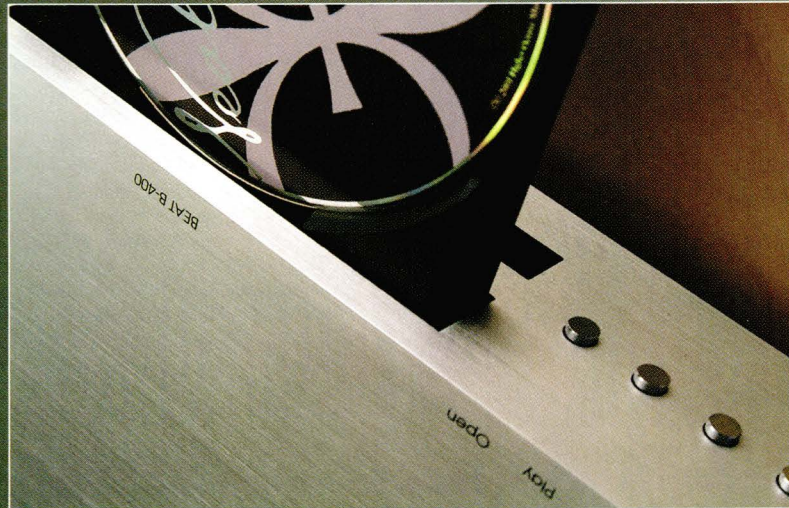
VALUE >>> 77%

CONCLUSION
Roksan describes a turntable as a precision instrument for measuring the position of the groove with respect to time. If this reinforces the idea that this is a turntable that provides an open window on the music, then you're getting the idea.

PRO
An engineer's conception of what record replay is about at the highest level.

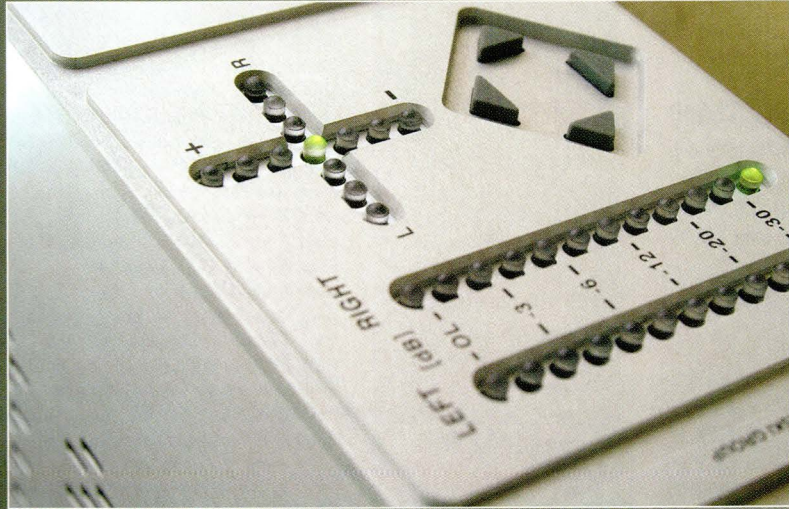
CON
The problem with this turntable is entirely related to one issue – price. It's worth every penny, but it's still completely out of reach for most of us.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 90%



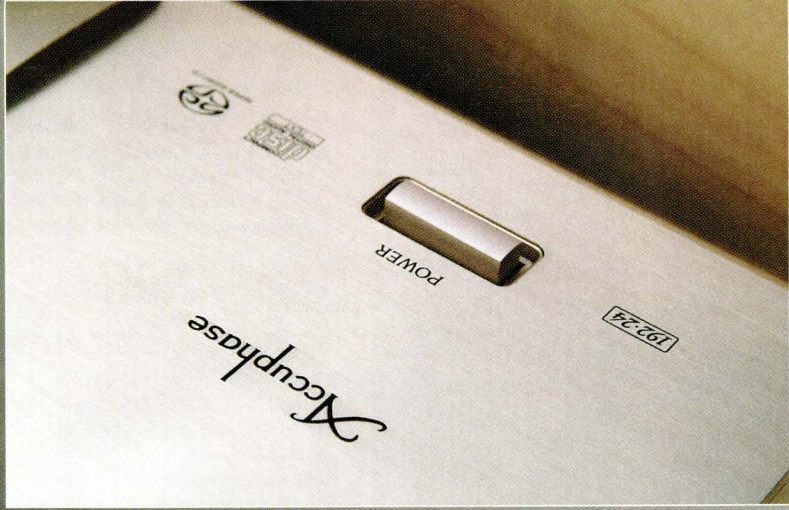
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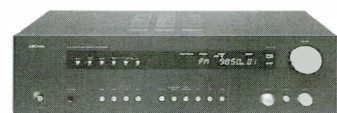
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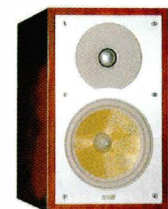
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PRODUCT Mission Volare v61
TYPE Standmount loudspeaker
PRICE £330 per pair
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Huntingdon-based Mission is one of the most successful speaker brands in the UK, specialising in the affordable end of the market and well known for delivering some of the most stylish models around.

Both those characteristics are fully evident in this cute little standmount. Baby brother to the v63 floorstander reviewed last month, this v61 is the second-smallest model in the new Volare range and is sharply priced at £330 a pair, especially considering four faces are covered in a real-wood veneer – the base and back are finished in textured black. The veneer here is not the most attractively figured – it looks a little bland and the section around the front panel doesn't quite match the wrap. But the fact that it's the real thing is what matters.

The enclosure is very substantially built in a mixture of 25mm and 38mm MDF. It's cleverly constructed, using Mission's transverse folding technique, with heavy post-forming around the extra-thick front panel to aid dispersion. The front is slim, thanks to a main driver that's a little smaller than the 165mm norm, with very neat 'wraparound' trim to integrate the main driver, while the speaker is also unusually deep, perhaps in compensation. Following a Mission tradition, the main driver is mounted above the tweeter, for superior time alignment.

The magnetically shielded main driver has a 150mm frame and an aramid/pulp-fibre sandwich cone. The 25mm fabric dome tweeter is decoupled from box vibrations by a damped suspension arrangement within the moulded front plate. Below a generous port, twin terminal pairs feed a crossover with silicon-iron inductors and polypropylene capacitors. The partnering stand, known as Standard, costs £150 per pair.

SOUND QUALITY

In-room far-field measurements look promising – marginally more so than for the v63 because the bass end is smoother and only fractionally less extended, and the upper midband rather better maintained up to the

crossover. Indeed, the bass alignment looks very good with the speakers clear of walls, so if close-to-wall siting is required, it would be worth considering blocking the ports.

Elsewhere there's some leanness through the lower midband and a quite obvious downward 'step' of 3dB at the 1.5kHz crossover. The sensitivity is similar to the v63, but the amp load is rather more, demanding five ohms through much of the bass region.

The in-room measurements predict a good overall tonal balance with fine neutrality and decent smoothness, and all those factors were evident enough during the listening tests. However, a good balance is only part of what makes a good speaker, and in other respects this little Mission doesn't really transcend its relatively modest price tag.

Colorations are not severe, but speech does sound a little 'shut in', with a distinct touch of nasality. Sibilants are a trifle obvious and slightly detached, and there's a mild but



generalised boxiness through the lower registers. Stereo images are attractively spacious, with no tendency to cluster around each speaker, though it could have greater precision and transparency, and tighter focus.

The most serious criticism concerns the dynamic behaviour, which is a little limp and lacking in grip and tension. Although this speaker does a basically very satisfactory job, it somehow doesn't really grab the attention.

It seems to be going through the motions rather than dragging you forcibly into the music, so after a while the attention has a tendency to wander, especially when listening to unfamiliar material.

Taking the modest price, classy styling and real-wood finish into account, the v61 looks like very solid value for money. It's not the last word in sound quality, especially in the way it handles dynamic contrasts, but it is basically neutral, well balanced and discreet. **HFC**

Paul Messenger



VERDICT

SOUND >> 64%



PRO

High-class industrial design makes a very elegant package in a real-wood finish at a very sharp price. Sounds neutral with fine bass alignment.

EASE OF DRIVE >> 78%



CON

Lacks some dynamic drive, tension and drama, and also a little transparency, so it's not the most effective communicator with unfamiliar musical material.

BUILD >> 80%



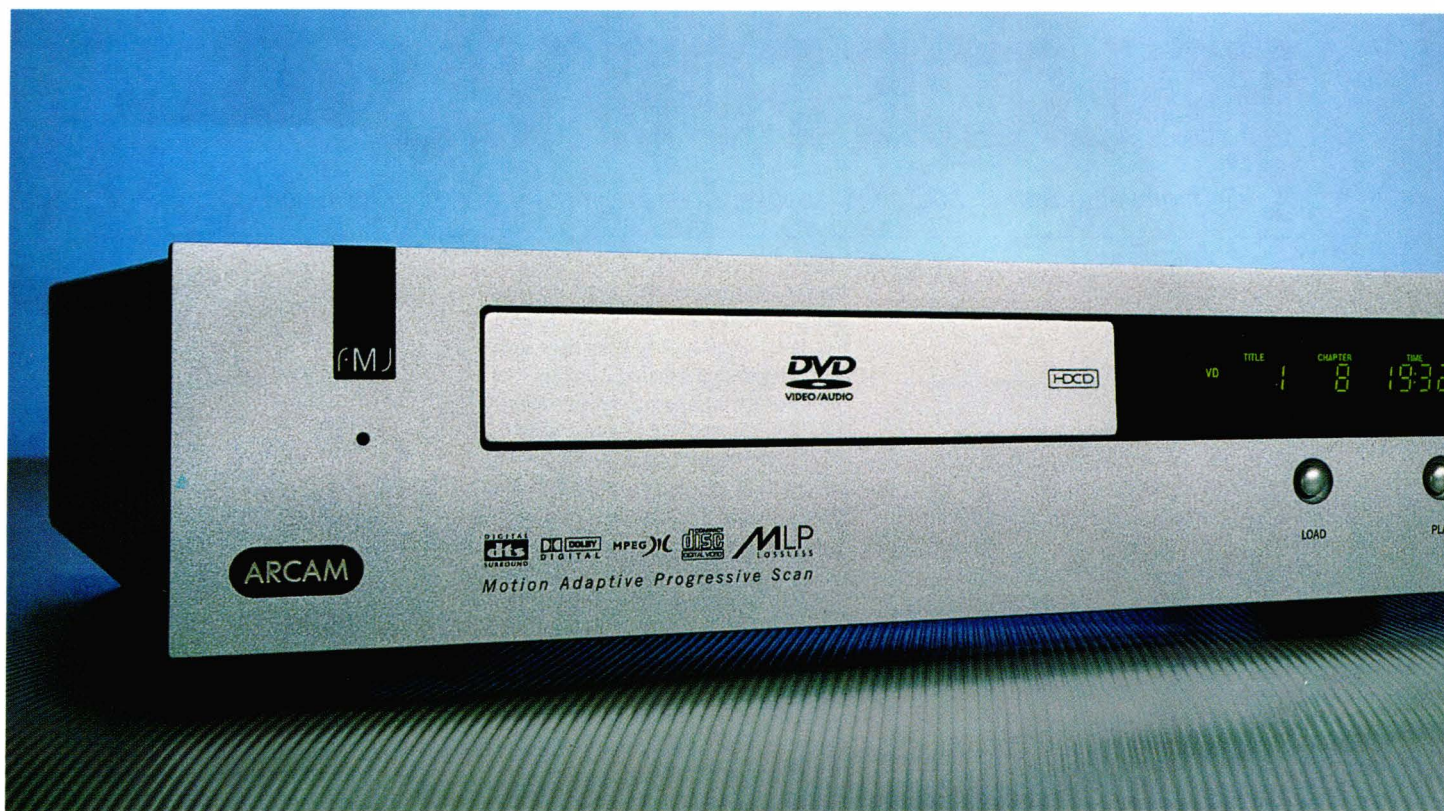
VALUE >> 80%



CONCLUSION

A beautiful looking package for the money, neatly styled with a real-wood finish. Sonically it's a little dull, especially dynamically, but its relatively soft demeanour will suit bright partnering gear and flatter aggressive recordings.

HI-FI CHOICE >> **75%**
OVERALL SCORE



STATEMENT OF INTENT

With the launch of its flagship DVD-A player, Arcam's new digital groundplan is finally taking shape

PRODUCT Arcam FMJ DV27A

TYPE DVD-Audio/Video/CD player

PRICE £1,900

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x9x28cm

◉ Compatible with: DVD-Video; DVD-Audio; DVD-R/RW; DVD+R/+RW; CD-Video; SVCD; CD/CD-R/CD-RW; CD with WMA or MP3 ◉ PAL/NTSC progressive scan

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The DV27A is a development of the DV27 DVD-Video player, which adds DVD-Audio support, internal Dolby Digital and DTS decoders, plus full bass management for all multichannel formats. Owners of the DV27 can upgrade – at a price – and the DV27A itself will continue to be continuously updated with new firmware, distributed on CD-ROMs. There have been at least two such updates to date, combining bug fixes (so far mostly relating to obscure speaker combinations in the bass management set-up) and implementing new or updated features, including workarounds for certain copy protected audio CDs and the addition of two-channel WMA decoding.

This is a sophisticated player that's specifically designed to perform to a high standard with CDs, an area where DVD

players traditionally fall flat. The player can output progressive and interlaced video simultaneously, the latter typically for a second TV in a second room.

Control is exercised by a version of the remote handset that Arcam has bundled with most of its recent products, which suffers from poor ergonomics, thanks in part to poor labelling of the control buttons. Supplying a version of the AV8 processor's handset would be a good move. But the player's on-screen displays are a model of clarity, assisted by well-formed graphics. Fascia controls are straightforward and understandable, and the back panel is well-endowed.

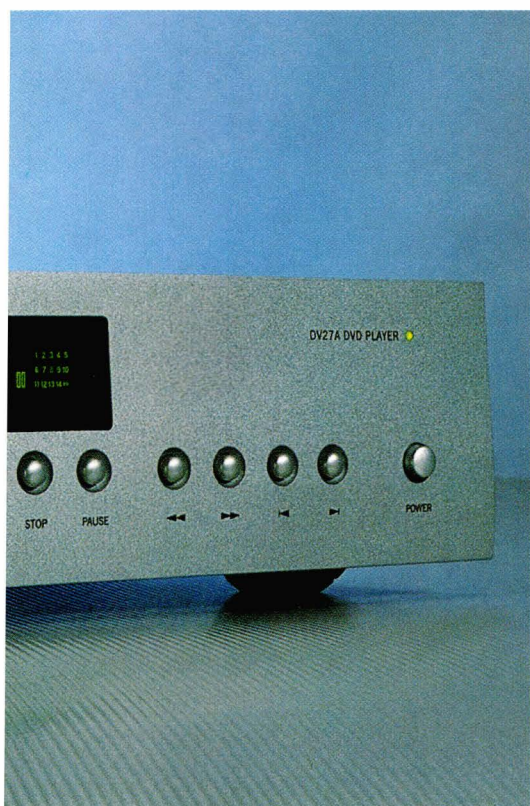
Bass management goes well beyond the rather rudimentary adjustment range available from some lesser players, partly as a counterweight for the lack of a wideband digital audio output (S/PDIF is available for passing CD, Dolby and DTS data, of course). It includes user-selectable crossover frequencies from 50-150Hz, but it doesn't support the increasingly popular Dolby Digital EX and DTS ES extended 6.1 channel modes.

Digital audio conversion is based on Arcam's currently favoured Wolfson 24/192 audio DACs, in differential mode for the main front

channels. Appropriate attention has also been paid to the audio and video clocks – audio jitter is not dictated by the need to slave all the clocks from the one used to run the video.

Progressive video processing uses the well-regarded and powerful Silicon Image SiI503 processor (essentially identical to the better-known SiI504). Much of the heavy-duty internal digital processing is handled by a Zoran Vaddis 5 chip which performs MPEG decoding and video processing, handling of watermark data (CSS and Macrovision copy protection) and all the number crunching associated with DVD-Audio. It also performs the bass management functions. All this processing is based around a DVS DVD-ROM mechanism with an ATAPI interface, which is optimised for AV replay rather than computer use. The player's firmware will recognise and counter anti-copying strategies like Cactus and Key2Audio which target ROM drives.

One of two DVD-Audio players introduced within a short timespan by Arcam, this is the senior model and is part of the FMJ range. Its physical packaging is similar to other FMJ components, with highlights including an 8mm thick aluminium front panel extrusion, and a chassis made from a laminated,



low-resonance material developed for automotive use in Lexus cars. The other key point of identification with the FMJ range is the power supply design, which is more elaborate and sophisticated than its counterpart in the less costly DIVA DV89, currently Arcam's entry-level DVD-Audio player.

SOUND QUALITY

The central question – why not SACD as well as DVD-Audio? – is addressed by John Dawson in the accompanying interview (left), but was also alluded to by another spokesman in conversation, who compared it to designing a car with both a diesel and a petrol engine, guaranteeing that the final outcome won't do justice to either. A DVD player is a complex beast which must perform many internal functions in parallel, and it is inevitably tricky for any such jack of all trades to be master of them all (though Denon's DVD-2900 comes very, very close – see p30). Adding SACD would have multiplied the complexities, as well as increasing the cost out of proportion. As JD put it, if Arcam was to design such a player, it would not have started out where it did.

Given this background, it is remarkable how well the Arcam actually performs. As a CD player it is nearly (but not quite) in the same class as the best dedicated CD players at the price. It is muscular and agile. Piano sounds percussive and bold, female voice expressive. Well-recorded orchestral material retains much of the articulation of a really fine player, like the superb (but costly) Mark Levinson 390S available for comparison through the test, and it also scores well on dynamics, and more



“It’s a free-breathing, open-sounding player capable of producing a large image scale without smothering the finer detail.”

specifically in its ability to retain expressiveness at both ends of the dynamic range spectrum. It is detailed and clean-sounding too, but there are some losses, a mild lack of agility and air, when judged by the strictest standards.

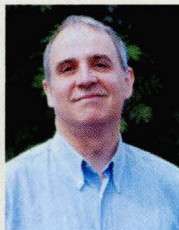
Laying hands on worthwhile contemporary multichannel recordings on DVD-Audio is a persistent problem. Indeed, the higher resolution 24-bit/192kHz stereo standard that is a part of the format appears to be all but a dead duck, except for historical material that cannot or will not be remastered for multichannel. But there have been slow signs of improvement, and I have recently received a rather excellent version of Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky* on Naxos (see *Choice Cuts*

on p19), which through the Arcam reproduced with a gloriously rich abandon combined with real discipline and power, every bit the equal of the better SACDs now available.

With this and other good recordings, the picture painted by the Arcam is of a free-breathing, open-sounding player capable of producing a large image scale without smothering the finer detail. On this showing, DVD-A has the clear performance edge over compact disc which has always been asserted by its protagonists, but all too rarely realised in practice. More than that, the Arcam sounds easy and relaxed while doing so, which means that without an electronic mask to hide what's going on, the music itself sounds more expressive and it communicates better. ▶

Q & A

We asked John Dawson, chairman and founder of Arcam, about the thinking that led to the development of the FMJ DV27A



HFC: Why has there been such a long wait

for DVD-Audio to gather a head of steam, and why such a long wait for Arcam's DVD-A players to arrive?

JD: It takes a long time for minority formats to get off the ground. What really hurts of course is having two competing formats. It's ridiculous. One of the main delays in our case was because we wanted comprehensive bass management in our player. Achieving this took longer than any of us thought.

So why didn't you take the SACD route or go for a universal player?

Whilst in the long term we aim to align our products to the market, the engineering issues involved here are not in any way trivial. Today's universal player solutions have plenty of their own compromises, and we wanted our player to be as good as possible in terms of the core requirements of playing CDs, DVDs and DVD-Audio discs.

What are the issues surrounding wideband digital interfaces with DVD players?

Arcam's current view is that it would be really cool to distribute both full resolution video and audio on one digital interface. This will only become possible when version two of the wideband HDMI (High-Definition Digital Multimedia Interface) system arrives. Unfortunately, useable silicon is some time away.

It seems to me that this is the most fruitful approach, and the only one that will win approval from all the relevant licensing groups. There are proprietary audio-only solutions available today, such as those used by Meridian and Denon, but we don't believe they will ever be approved for use outside those companies.

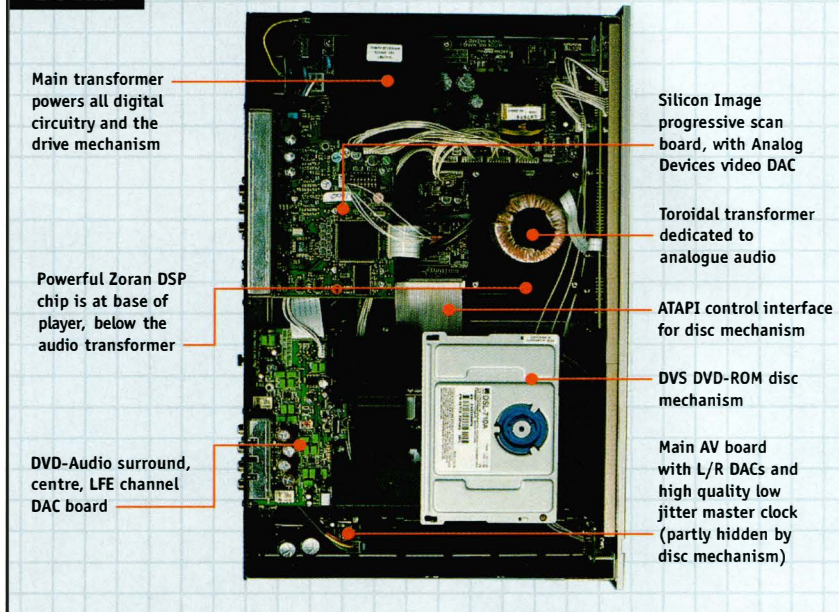
What we can do and have done is to reduce the need for a high-resolution digital interface in the first place by putting a lot of energy into developing a decent bass management system. A great deal of the functionality of a decent receiver is reproduced in the DV27A.

Why not include a DVI interface on your players which would at least give digital video in a simple way with existing hardware?

The simple reason behind that is that we believe that it is effectively an obsolescent solution which will soon be superseded by the more flexible HDMI.



Detail



Main transformer powers all digital circuitry and the drive mechanism

Powerful Zoran DSP chip is at base of player, below the audio transformer

DVD-Audio surround, centre, LFE channel DAC board

Silicon Image progressive scan board, with Analog Devices video DAC

Toroidal transformer dedicated to analogue audio

ATAPI control interface for disc mechanism

DVS DVD-ROM disc mechanism

Main AV board with L/R DACs and high quality low jitter master clock (partly hidden by disc mechanism)



VIDEO PERFORMANCE

As a video player, the DV27A is equally impressive. The scaling from DVD native resolution to the XGA (1024 x 768) of a good display device like the Marantz VP12 DLP projector used for our test is seamless, and the deinterlacing is much better behaved than the rather clunky (or simply poorly optimised) circuits fitted to most plasmas, and many of the lower cost projectors too, which jerk the motion across the screen, or smudge the detail so that it is difficult to recognise. The Marantz happens to behave very well in this respect, so there is comparatively little to gain from the Arcam's deinterlacing, but it does its job very well. It produces a picture with no discernable loss of detail, despite the extra processing overhead. Picture quality is stable and solid, with little smearing of moving elements in-screen, or 'staircasing' or other artefacts relating to contrasting diagonals, and this irrespective of whether the programme material was film or video derived. Generally, the Arcam is capable of solid shadows with good detail and no bleaching out of brightly-lit areas. Indeed, it produces the kind of picture quality with difficult source material that inevitably eludes low-cost DVD players.

Good as it is, the player's built-in Dolby Digital and DTS surround processing is palpably not up to the standards of Arcam's excellent AV8 processor. But with a really strong DTS soundtrack like Insane Clown Posse's *Juggalo Homies* it's good enough to

highlight just how much better digital audio compression has become. Good DTS, in particular, sounds much more lively and three-dimensional than of old – in fact, impressively close to linear PCM.

Overall, the DV27A is a little more down to earth sounding than the best CD players at this price level, but DVD-A takes advantage of the resolving power of the Arcam's electronics, and really shines. But for an audio-first producer, it is surprising how well designed the DV27A is as a video player, even to the extent of coping with the differential delays involved with progressive processing, and its seamless handling of hybrid discs. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%*

VISION >> 92%

FEATURES >> 80%

VALUE >> 80%

*CD 82% DVD-A 90%

CONCLUSION

There's no getting around the fact that the DV27A doesn't play SACD, and it's expensive to boot. But few other DVD-Audio/Video players couple comparable video quality to such a strong sonic showing with both DVD-Audio and CD.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 85%

PRO
Accomplished DVD-Audio player with good bass management and strong CD replay, and the promise of a long product lifetime thanks to upgradeable firmware.

CON
Poor remote control, and it suffers from the inherent weaknesses to the universal player argument – no SACD!

what do you want?

Buy
this



Buy
& this



Buy
& this



Kandy

- DVD
- Integrated amplifier
- Stereo amplifier



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Unit 11, Moorbrook, Southmead Industrial Park
Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7HP
Tel: 01235 511166 | Email: sales@henleydesigns.co.uk
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 WD6 4SE

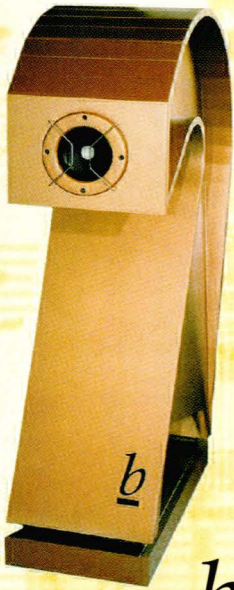
the B2.2 Revelation - 'effective and convincing'

What do you want from your system? To hear the music, as if at the original recording session, sounding real and alive? Then, the B2.2 Revelation (a package of speakers and performance enhancing VibraPlinths) were designed for you. The transparency, the dynamics, the superb sound stage and image focus produce an illusion which is just remarkably believable. Visit the website or contact us now for more information.



True to the classical allusion in their name, the Beauhorn Virtuosos are unambiguously and unapologetically great classical music reproducers - and they're at least very good at most everything else. Art Dudley, Listener
But it's also one of the most effective and convincing music speakers you're ever likely to hear. It doesn't take long to

forget about the hi-fi and simply get deeply involved in the musical content, thanks to the astonishing sense of realism that comes courtesy of tight midband time-coherence alongside dynamic contrasts that simply sound more 'right' and 'real' than those heard with more conventional speakers. Paul Messenger, Hi-Fi Choice [B2.2 Revelation review]



Beauhorn™

b



B&W'S BIG BASS BOX

B&W adds a subwoofer to its flagship 800 range and creates one of the world's best 'bass engines'

PRODUCT B&W ASW850

TYPE Active subwoofer

PRICE £2,000

CONTACT ☎ 01903 221800

🌐 www.bwspeakers.com

B&W's Nautilus 800 speaker was introduced as the flagship of the top-end 800 series, with a brief, among other things, to atone for the 801's over-the-top bass – described by some as 'undriveable'. In fact, though the 800 is superior to the otherwise excellent 801, the designers played safe by opting for a balance that, while not lacking extension, is certainly dry and lean. Clearly a matching high-end subwoofer was a good idea in principle, and the new ASW850 is it.

It employs all the relevant high-end technologies that B&W has developed over recent years – or in the case of Matrix cabinet control, technology from much further back. Matrix is a series of interlocking braces on intersecting planes which define a series of sub-enclosures open to each other so that the driver 'sees' the whole internal volume. Resonance control is further enhanced by the inherent stiffness of the curved cabinet walls, which must have been a nightmare to production engineer. The built-in amp is a 1,000-watt monster, sealed in its own sub-enclosure at the back, though how effective any such sealing can be at these frequencies is moot. The amp is Class D, but unusually it is a full frequency range design.

The massive driver has a Kevlar/paper mix cone with a centre cap attached using B&W's 'mushroom' construction to resist deformation

under drive. The double suspension keeps the voice coil centred, and measures are taken to reduce non-linear distortion (or compression) by careful design of the flux in the gap, and by adding an aluminium flux ring around the pole piece. A massive magnet is fitted, and special attention has been paid to air flow at high volume levels.

SOUND QUALITY

The ASW850 is simply one of the finest subwoofers we've ever used, in part because it manages to blend in without being obvious in its own right. It works particularly well with top-class, wide bandwidth stereo (main) speakers – the stiffest qualitative test – like the matching B&W Nautilus 800 and also the Triangle Magellan, respectively £12,000 and £20,000's worth of leading-edge loudspeaker. In each case the ASW850 adds the best part of an octave of extension, but with absolutely no fuss or drama. The sub can be run up the power range, and down the frequency band, usually without any trace of the unwanted aharmonic noises and cabinet resonances that plague subwoofers. It sounds very tight, very controlled and in the optimum 'A' equalisation setting (the alternative 'B' allows higher level working at the expense of depth) the extra extension is added seamlessly. There is no way to tell that it comes from a different source.

This is also a tuneful subwoofer, and a surprisingly quick one that if anything (compared to a 'naked' B&W Nautilus 800 for example) adds to, rather than detracts from the system's sense of propulsive, ball-of-the-foot timing. It does all the obvious things too.

Orchestral sound is larger in scale, and rock simply rocks harder, though paradoxically the aural effect is of a system that appears to work less hard, and more within its limits. Given that bass swallows up most of the power in any system, and that the subwoofer's prodigious internal resources assume much of the load, this is probably literally true.

Just as important is the way that adding the ASW850 helps the system develop a richer palate of tonal colours. Female voice is more rounded and has more range and depth, apparently without drawing on the resources of the subwoofer appreciably at all, and image depth appears to be more fully developed, with a more obvious gap between the front and back of the soundstage. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 94% [Progress bar]	PRO Capable of showing the benefits of adding a dedicated bass speaker to even top-level full-range speakers like the B&W 800 – more than just added power and extension.
FEATURES >> 86% [Progress bar]	
BUILD >> 96% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 85% [Progress bar]	
CON Only a single line-level input, which could make set-up tricky in some mixed music-cum-home cinema systems.	
CONCLUSION The secret of the ASW850 is a ruthless pursuit of excellent mechanical control of the driver and the enclosure. This is a sub that can add to the musical qualities of many good high-end speakers, and will adapt equally well to home cinema.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 92%	

audio of a true hi-fi heritage salon



"Welcome to the audio salon, the only place where you will find a wonderful range of selected products from around the world. Horns, valves, electrostatics, and a host of other technologies bring your music to life as you have never heard it before. Complemented by excellent long-term customer service from myself and the people at the Salon, what more could you ask for?"

By the time you read this the salon will have opened in its new premises. Why you may ask? Simply because we are of the largest growing Audio Specialists in the UK and we needed more space! Larger and more luxurious demonstration rooms, more displays, new product ranges, Audiophile CD shop and many other surprises to follow in the coming months.

If you are looking for a bargain or two then on page 3 you will find our selection of second hand and ex-demonstration equipment. Do you have equipment that you would like to part exchange for that new item that you have always dreamed of owning? Please give us a call and we will be more than happy to discuss this with you. Alternatively we can sell your products on your behalf. Our adverts and web site attract a lot of people from all over the world and in most cases we have a very quick turnaround rate on second hand and ex-demonstration equipment.

Choosing the right cable is a minefield? It doesn't have to be if you buy **JPS-Labs** cables. The range caters for all budgets and system requirements. No other cable in our experience seems to work as happily in every system and offers such an exceptional performance. **Simple!**

Thank you to everybody who entered our 'Win a Stratos Cable Competition'. Congratulations to the following people, each of whom will receive a **free £125 Stratos Interconnect** with our compliments:

*Col Wicox, South Queensferry
Mr Holden, Cheshire
Mr Standing, Tonbridge*

Their will be more exciting competitions to come so watch this space!

Friends, families and people from all over the world, call or visit the salon time and time again, shouldn't you give us a call and find out why?"

Happy listening

Jack Lawson

new products

atc scm-35 floorstanding speakers - features the acclaimed ATC mid-range driver	£1999
ayre cx-7 cd player - wadia and mark levinson watch out! this is an astonishing CD player and with recent changes, nothing near the price gets close!	£2950
ayre acoustics: k5 pre-amplifier	£2950
ayre acoustics: v-5x power amplifier	£4495
gryphon: cantata loudspeakers - inc room correction module	£12300
mark levinson 431 (200wpc) - grace, power, dynamics - it has it all!	£5995
mark levinson 432 (400wpc) - destined to become a classic!	£7995
michell technodec	from £575
shanling sp-80 valve monoblock amplifiers - built in volume control - very musical	£2000
sugden musicmaster power amplifier - class A, single-ended, solid-state	£1290

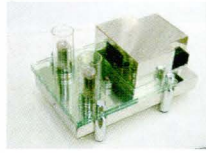
cables & tables

	valve	solid state	digital	speaker	tunable/arm	cartridge	phono amp	home cinema
art audio	•			•			•	
art loudspeakers				•				•
atc		•		•				•
audiostatic				•				
ayre acoustics		•	•					
bow		•	•					
ear / yoshino	•	•					•	
gryphon		•	•	•			•	
heart audio	•		•					
lyra						•		
mark levinson		•	•					•
michell					•		•	
parasound		•	•					•
pathos	•	•						
proac				•				•
proceed		•	•					•
revel				•				•
shanling	•	•	•					
simon yorke					•			
sme					•	•		
sugden		•	•					
sumiko						•		
trichord	•	•	•				•	
unison research	•	•	•					•
yamaha		•	•	•				•
zingali				•				•
	analogue	av	digital	power cords	power cond	speaker	tables	stands
cables								
audio note japan	•		•					
audiosource	•	•	•	•	•			
furman sound					•			
jps labs	•	•	•	•	•	•		
kemp elektroniks					•			
stands & tables								
bcd							•	
cd								•
grandprix audio							•	
obelisk							•	•
st nds unique							•	•
townshend							•	•



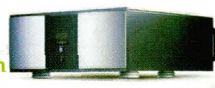
valve

Valve Amplifiers continue to have a wide following through-out the world. **Single-ended, push-pull, 845, 300B, EL34** - we have something for all tastes and budgets ! The **Art Audio Diavolo (£4450)** continues to entice all those that hear it. Its sheer ability to drive real word speakers with such grip is astonishing. **Shanling** proudly introduce their **SP-80 Valve monoblocks (£1999)** with built in digital volume control. 50wpc, built to the same high standard as their CD Range and offers exceptional musicality. **Unison Research** merge valve finesse with beautiful hand crafted Italian wood to create products that are as distinct and as beautiful as the sonic signature they deliver to your speakers.



transistor

We offer a wide range of transistor products from manufacturers such as **Ayre, Gryphon, Mark Levinson, Pathos, Sugden and Unison Research**. The new **Ayre AX-7** integrated amplifier and **CX-7** CD Player at **£2,950** each offer a performance that is rarely found in equipment at this price. Exceptional build and performance ensure that any **Ayre** component will be the pride of your system. **Mark Levinson** have been causing waves with their new Power Amplifiers, the **431 (£5,995)** and **432 (£7,995)**. High current delivery and sheer power fuse to create a sonic signal that raises the performance versus price bar several notches higher ! **Sugden** who continue to offer true high end products at reasonable prices introduce the **MusicMaster** power amplifier (**£1,290**), a very wonderful addition to the popular **Bijou** range.



digital

New Digital formats such as **SACD and DVD-Audio** may be on the horizon but their is no clear sign as to which is likely to be the standard for the future, if any ! Manufactures continue to build players pushing existing CD technology further to produce a sound that is truly breathtaking. The **Ayre CX-7 (£2,950)** is one such CD player, which peels away layer after layer of music from CD to create a beautifully three dimensional soundstage and enticing sound. **Shanling** introduced a valve CD Player the **CD-T100 (£1,650)**, which has fast become a popular choice for Vinyl fans looking for that ultimate Digital Player. The **No. 390s (£6,495)** from **Mark Levinson** continues to set the standards for high-end and reference CD players to beat. Listen to the **No. 390s** connected to the **No. 432** Power Amplifier - you will be convinced !



analogue

Like so many of our customers, the Audio Salon is still very much committed to Vinyl replay systems and will be for many years to come. We demonstrate some of the finest turntables in the world from **Michell, SME and Simon Yorke**. Prices start from **£575 (michell technodec)**, up to **£10,459 (SME 30/2)**. We stock a range of superb cartridges from **Lyra and Sumiko**. Prices start from **£149 (Sumiko Blue Point)**, up to the **£2,995 (Lyra Titan)**. Keeping your stylus clean is very important and using **Lyra SPT (£29.00)** will keep your stylus clean offering you the best sound from your vinyl replay. A good Phono Stage and support under your turntable are also very important too. We are more than happy to discuss the different options available. Why not let the Salon help you to re-discover your vinyl collection.



loudspeakers

No matter how good your amplifier, CD player, vinyl equipment and cables are, you will only hear them at their best if you have speakers that will faithfully reproduce the signal it receives ! Here at the Salon we offer a diverse range of speakers from Manufacturers all over the world, each using a different approach and technology but the goal is always the same. To bring you as close to the performance as physically and sonically possible. How are the approaches different? Moving Coil, Electrostatic and Horn are three of the different technologies used to produce outstanding speaker products ! The new **Pre-lude** range from **Zingali** start at **£999 (stand mount)**, up to **£2000** and use their **patented Compression Horn Driver**. Unheard of for a speaker starting at this price ! You should place your order soon as we think that demand will be very high ! The new **ATC SCM-35 (£2000)** has been receiving a lot of attention and uses the famous and much admired **ATC** mid-range driver !



home cinema

Home Cinema Technology evolves at almost the same rate as Computer Technology. With this in mind the Salon choose **Yamaha and Parasound** Home Cinema Products. **Parasound** offer superb products at reasonable prices, products that keep up with the latest technology and are way ahead in film reproduction in the home. Battleship construction and a 10 year warranty, what more could you ask for? **Speakers** are just important and at the Salon we have a huge choice from **ATC, Proac, Revel and Zingali**. Two dedicated Cinema rooms will immerse you in the movie so that once you sit down you won't want to get up ! The only thing we don't supply is the popcorn.....



headphones

Electrostatics are not only renowned for their speed and lack of colouration, but their ability to retrieve even the smallest of details in any piece of music. **Stax** bring electrostatic technology to headphones, which treat your ears to a three dimensional field of music that no loudspeaker can match. Unlike a loudspeaker, the **Stax** headphone will reproduce music faithfully and accurately because speaker positioning and room acoustics are no longer a problem. There is simply nothing between your ears and the music. **Stax** offer a large range of different models, prices range from **£349.00 to £2995.00** for the **Omega Reference** with balanced and s/e input triode amplifier. Not expensive considering their direct rivals are priced at **£6000 - £8000.00**.



An alternative is the **Ergo Headphone** (formerly **Jecklin Float**) which produces a sound that will truly delight the ears with a wide detailed soundstage ensuring that no part of a performance escapes your ears. The **Model Two** costs only **£149.00**.

cables

Choosing the right cable can be a real minefield, right ? Not if you buy **JPS-Labs**. In our long and vast experience no other cable works as well in nearly every system regardless of the components you are using ! A bold claim, yes, but very true ! Using a **JPS-Labs Cable**, alumiloy wire will simply allow the components in your system and most of all your speakers, to breathe. Your music will be reproduced as faithfully to the original as possible. **JPS-Labs Cables** offer a wide range of interconnect, speaker and mains cables for all systems and budgets. Call for more information, you will be glad you did !



audiosource

AudioSource Stratos offer interconnects of the highest performance at prices that break the market norms based on high costs of distribution. By direct mail order, a **28-day trial assures no mistakes**, and affords the opportunity to compare with much more costly cables. Priced at just **£125 for 1.2 metres** per stereo pair (**£99 for 0.6 metres**), they are rated by customers as the rivals of the highly acclaimed ... and highly priced alternatives.

The **E4/2** is a power filter for an astonishingly low price of **£129** as an introductory offer; featuring exactly the same mains filter as the acclaimed six and eight outlet boxes (**£349 and £389**), what you gain here is substantial reduction of **EMI and RFI** mains borne pollution. Top of the range is an all-new **E4/12**. At **£659**, the twelve outlet power source requiring a double wall socket and separating digital and analogue apparatus with separate and buffered power. Designed for AV and multi-channel, it is equally suited to the audio purist with digital equipment



support

Quite often good supports for equipment and stand mounted speakers are overlooked or thought of as a waste of money. Excellent support and isolation can mean the difference between an average and a superb system, **its that simple !** We stock a wide range of specialist equipment tables from **BCD, Stands Unique, Townshend, CD and Grand Prix Audio**. Catering for all taste and budgets. We ourselves use stands from these companies so you will be able to see many of them by visiting the **Salon** or alternatively you are more than welcome to call and discuss your requirements.



GROUP TEST & LAB REPORTS: PAUL MILLER

CD PLAYERS

With all the talk about SACD, DVD-Audio and universal disc playing solutions, is it still worth considering a dedicated single-format CD player?

Most music fans will have amassed a sizeable CD collection over the last 20 years. But the 16-bit/44.1 kHz core of the format is almost archaic compared to the potential resolution, bandwidth and dynamic range, not to mention additional channels, available to the SACD and DVD-Audio formats of today. But while these new formats are driving the technology forward, there's still some doubt as to whether the latest SACD and DVD-A players are necessarily the best vehicle for CD replay.

At present, it's still fair to say that the very best and most refined single-purpose CD players are better able to extract that last drop of performance from the original silver disc than current multi-purpose DVD-based hardware. And with CD set to remain the dominant carrier for most music for some years yet, a high-level dedicated player remains money well spent if the investment in hundreds or thousands of those little discs is to be fully realised.

The fact that the six players recruited for this *Ultimate Group Test* do not come from truly mass manufacturers is an indication that the pond for CD hardware is fast drying up. It does

mean that almost every surviving player is necessarily from a 'specialist' brand and, with a following wind, capable of delivering a superior performance than the feature-orientated players of the boom years. Nevertheless, there's far less variety in their architecture. Four out of these six players use a CDM14/BD25 mechanism and display from Sony, for example.

The fact that the Arcam display looks different from the Exposure, Talk and Thule models simply boils down to the use of different coloured filters! Of course, the BD25 kit does offer full compatibility with CD-R and RW discs and provides the decoder for CD Text, where available. It's a well-proven solution, but with Sony no longer supporting third-party hardware producers, one that will not last into the next generation unless a Chinese 'equivalent' becomes available.

Meanwhile, the choice of DACs, analogue filters and output stages is still very much under the control of the individual manufacturers themselves, so the *sound* of the players should remain as diverse as ever. Which is where our unsighted listening panel picks up the story... **HFC**

EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊕ Arcam AV8 processor/preamp and P7 power amplifier
- ⊕ B&W Nautilus 802 loudspeakers
- ⊕ Townshend Isolda DCT interconnect & QED X-Tube 400 speaker cable
- ⊕ Denon DVD-2900 universal DVD player (for CD/SACD/DVD-Audio comparisons)

MUSIC USED

- ⊕ Ryan Adams *Gold* CD
- ⊕ Solomon Burke *Don't Give Up On Me* CD
- ⊕ Steely Dan *Everything Must Go* CD
- ⊕ Lucinda Williams *World Without Tears* CD
- ⊕ Dvorak *Symphony No9 From The New World* (Harmoncourt, Concertebouw) CD and DVD-Audio
- ⊕ Eleanor McEvoy *Yala* hybrid SACD/CD
- ⊕ Mahler *Symphony No9 From The New World* (Benjamin Zander, Philharmonia) hybrid SACD/CD

EARS USED

Our thanks go to the panellists for their experience and diligence in facilitating our unsighted listening tests:
 John Bamford (Pioneer)
 Roger Batchelor (Hayden Labs)
 Mark Hocky (Harman International)

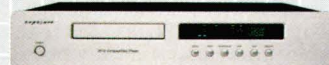
ON TEST



ARCAM FMJ CD33T
£1,300



CREEK CD50
£699



EXPOSURE 3010
£1,195



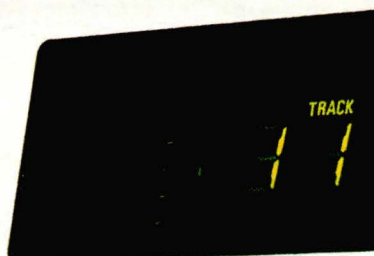
ROTEL RCD-1072
£595



TALK ELECTRONICS THUNDER 3.1
£1,900



THULE CD-150B
£775



ROTEL
COMPACT DISC PLAYER RCD-1072

ROTEL

27

STRUCTURED LAB & LISTENING TESTS

Each of these CD players was subject to a penetrating series of lab and listening tests which provide a unique insight into their performance and compatibility. The latest QC Suite Functional Testing Station was used to probe every crevice of the player's performance including their response with standard and pre-emphasised CDs, low-level resolution, trends of distortion versus frequency and digital level, plus the bane of all digital systems – jitter. These, together with standard noise, crosstalk and digital filter measurements leave no stone unturned in our quest to get under the skin of these products.

Our comprehensive listening tests were no less rigorous, being conducted under blind, level-matched conditions with the assistance of some of the industry's most experienced hi-fi panellists. Levels were electrically, rather than acoustically, matched for greatest precision. This means any perceived difference in level between one CD player and another was not 'real' but provided an important clue to the product's sonic character and long-term suitability.

No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

LAB REPORTS: THE BAR GRAPH

Our 3D bar graphs are a simple way of showing how the products compare across five technical parameters. In each case, a percentage is given that falls above or below the group average. In this test, the five parameters are:

1] Harmonic Distortion: Not derived not from a single '1kHz figure' but from multiple measurements of distortion from 20Hz to 20kHz and 0dBfs to -100dBfs.

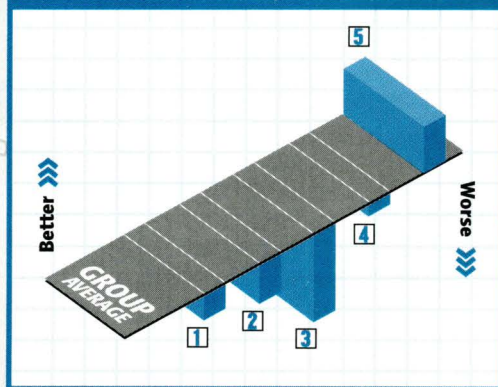
2] Jitter: Any uncertainty or modulation in the timing of data as it passes through the player causes a particular form of distortion to arise during D-to-A conversion. Above-average bar graphs mean low jitter.

3] Linearity: This is a measure of the player's low-level resolution. If a very quiet (say, -80dBfs) digital signal is decoded at -79.5dB, for example, then it'll sound 0.5dB louder than it should. And vice-versa.

4] Practical Dynamic range: A measure of the player's A-wtd S/N ratio, distortion and noise when reproducing a low-level (-60dBfs) signal and any noise modulation caused by non-monotonic behaviour in D/A conversion.

5] Digital Filtering: All CD players employ an oversampling filter and its effectiveness in suppressing 'images' of the desired signal without affecting the (audioband) response is represented here.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



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ARCAM FMJ CD33T

Arcam's latest high-end CD spinner is a technical whizz

Having ploughed resources into the development of AV and DVD-A products, it's not surprising that Arcam's latest top-end CD player should 'borrow' from this effort. So it's out with the acclaimed Ring DAC technology of the CD92 and in with multiple pairs of the same Wolfson DACs used in its DVD-A players. Otherwise, the CD33 is clearly part of the FMJ range, benefiting from its sleek but rugged styling while retaining the same Sony mechanism and chassis as the older CD23.

Arcam has also retained its familiar remote, which shares functionality across all its players, provided you remember the CD/DVD button. Under the bonnet, Arcam has loaded pairs of WM8740 DACs, yielding four differential lines per channel which are summed, thereby reducing noise, even-distortions and improving low-level linearity.

But the technical overkill does not end here, for the CD player also features an asynchronous upsampler from Analog Devices. This elevates the 44.1kHz data to 192kHz where it can make full use of the digital filtering provided by the AD1896 chip. In theory, it allows Arcam to implement a far less invasive analogue filter for a less intrusive impact on its sound. Add to this a rock-solid, third-overtone crystal clock (normally used in mobile phone base stations) and the CD33 looks to be the very essence of the latest – if not the last – generation CD player.

While the CD33 is evidently a weighty performer, it can give the Mr Sheen treatment to naturally gruff-sounding vocals like those of Solomon Burke. Here, a low, gravelly vocal can end up sounding a little lame – very articulate and proficient but not especially inspiring. Even the already very polished production values of Steely Dan's CD cannot prevent the player from sounding a little too contained, a little too safe and secure.

We hate the use the word 'competent' but it's a description that sums up a player that



uses power with a calculated reticence, never sounding hard, fierce or aggressive but, equally, subduing the colour and resonance of different instruments. The wild, cavernous acoustic of Lucinda Williams' CD sounded as if someone had turned the reverb control way down low, for however weighty the sound it never travelled into the room with the flourish we know to be possible.

Mahler's classical onslaught was equally well controlled and finely detailed, but there's a lack of commitment and energy that, in turn, failed to command the attention of our listeners. Imagine, for a moment, a 'conservative Mahler' reproduced with limited dynamic presence, then you have the measure of the CD33 – a precise but not especially colourful or spacious sounding product.

While Arcam's alignment of its CD and DVD technology makes sense from an R&D and production standpoint, we cannot help but wonder if the older Ring DAC-based players simply sounded that much more involving. The end result is a high tech player with a clean, straight-down-the-line sound that'll not get caught out by difficult or plain duff discs. But neither will it command your attention with a truly arresting or focused musical performance. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 74%	Having abandoned its Ring DAC technology, Arcam's top-end CD player is brought firmly into line with its DVD range, rewriting the technical rulebooks but losing a little of the music <i>en route</i> .
FEATURES >> 70%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 70%	
HI-FI CHOICE 75% OVERALL SCORE >>	

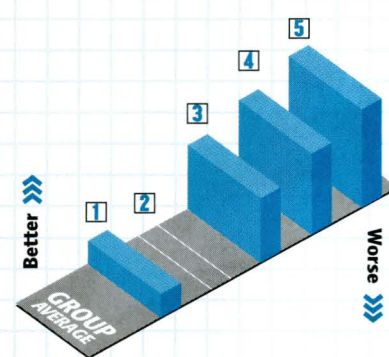


LAB REPORT

Jitter and noise are extremely low, the former including just 120psec of supply-related sidebands. Arcam's multiple-differential DAC arrangement has stretched the A-wtd S/N ratio to a record-breaking 116.9dB. Of course, whether opening the window this wide on 96dB-worth of CD data is necessarily a good thing remains open to question.

Distortion is very low, though not quite the lowest here at 0.0008% at its 2.2V peak, falling to 0.0004% at -10dBFs and increasing, barely, to 0.002% at 20kHz/0dBFs. The latter test places the highest degree of stress on any player and so represents a 'worse case' scenario at its peak output. Otherwise, its low-level resolution is no better than expected for a player in this class, with THD of 2.6% at -90dBFs and errors in linearity of ~0.3dB at 1kHz and -3.0dB at 20kHz/-90dBFs. The response is flat to -0.15dB/20kHz, image rejection excellent at >120dB and the superb suppression of ultrasonic noise bodes well for its compatibility with many types of amp.

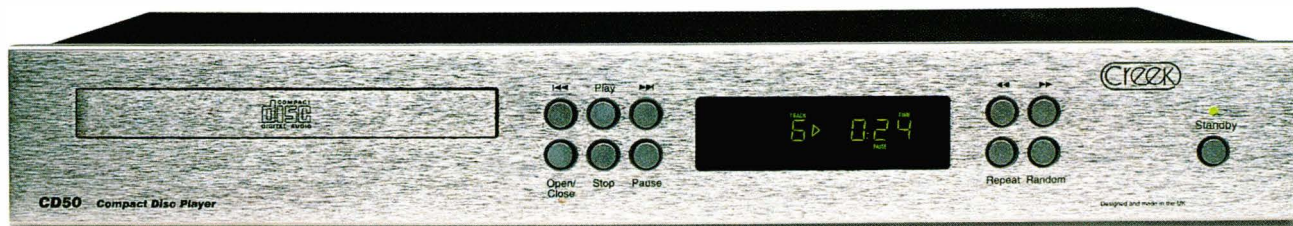
HOW IT COMPARES



- 1) Distortion >> 20%
- 2) Jitter >> 0%
- 3) Linearity >> 55%
- 4) Dynamic Range >> 70%
- 5) Digital Filter >> 85%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum Output Level	2.2V	2.19V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBFs)	<0.003%	0.0008%
Signal-To-Noise Ratio	113dB	116.9dB



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CREEK CD50

Good performance in the lab doesn't guarantee the best sound

At first glance, the CD50 looks little different from the CD53 (HFC 226), although there's a benefit in the lower £699 asking price. Both players use the same 10mm alloy fascia, but only the CD53 has an embossed logo, while both the onboard functions and offboard remote control remain a shared resource. Indeed, the SRC1 handset provides system-wide control over Creek's other separates including input selection and volume adjustment for the amps and tuning, band and mode selections on the tuner. Track access, program, random and repeat play modes are offered for the CD players.

Use of Philips' CDM12 transport and CD7 decoder solution comes with a fairly simple display panel. Like the Sony mechanisms used elsewhere, supplies of the CDM12 have all but dried up, so Creek's player could represent one of the last outings for this famous drive. Future players from this brand will probably utilise a DVD-ROM drive of some description – but will they also offer DVD functionality?

Back in the present, the CD50 even uses the same 24-bit/192kHz CS4396 DAC as the CD53, albeit with a simplified buffered output driving a pair of standard, single-ended outputs. The CD53, by contrast, has a more refined analogue stage with balanced outputs – a key feature for the US market. The CD50 also has a single, rather than dual, transformer power supply and folded steel rather than alloy casework. But with the CD53 costing £1,200, the CD50 is a positive bargain despite its lack of a balanced output.

The cuddly demeanour of the CD50 was reflected in the smooth and warm quality of Solomon Burke's voice throughout *Fast Train*. The sound was described as a "simple and uncluttered", a sound that cuts to the chase of the music, painting with broad strokes at the expense of some dynamic expression.

In this instance, what you don't hear isn't really missed, because the mid-dominated performance still sounds deceptively



complete. It still reveals the heavily-produced Steely Dan album for what it is, and while the perceived lack of extension reduces its vigour and pizzazz, the end result is still pleasant enough. Nevertheless, our listeners were keen to point out that for all its 'listenability', the music was still no match for the multichannel equivalent released on DVD-Audio.

Otherwise, the CD50 had a fair stab at reproducing the deeper, cavernous bass on Lucinda Williams' CD without suffering any boomy or hollow coloration, her voice sailing clear of the (electronic) tremolo effect to build some modest sense of atmosphere. But it was the Mahler disc that finally revealed the slightly tame and squashed sound of this player which really struggled with the power and thrill of the horns and strings. There's no sense of aggression about the sound, but neither were the musical dynamics delivered in a realistic fashion.

If you are looking for spontaneity then look elsewhere, for the CD50 has a very 'captive' sound, one that's very friendly but also unchallenging in a musical context. Judged purely in the light of its low distortion and wide S/N ratio, the CD50 might emerge as an unqualified success, but as a final statement on CD replay it suffers at the hands of the mixed-media competition. **HFC**

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 58%	For the loss of balanced outputs and slightly simplified topology, the CD50 offers a considerable saving on the CD53. But the musical baby may also have been thrown out with the bath water.
FEATURES >> 65%	
BUILD >> 77%	
VALUE >> 62%	
HI-FI CHOICE 64% OVERALL SCORE >>	

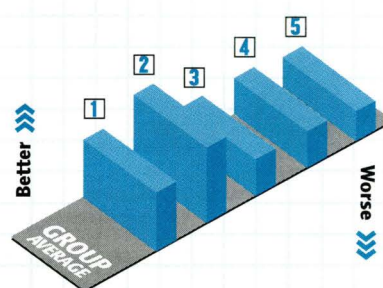


LAB REPORT

Creek makes bold but justifiable claims for its proprietary 'low jitter' master clock. In practice, the CD50 suffers just 65psec of data-induced distortion and zero power-supply or noise-like components. Noise, too, is very low and contributes to a wide 108dB S/N ratio while distortion is just 0.0005% at its 2.2V peak output right across the audio band. To achieve this low distortion at 20kHz/OdBfs is quite remarkable, although the top-notch Burr-Brown op-amps clearly have a role to play here.

If Creek was attempting to push at the boundaries of 'specmanship', then the CD50 certainly succeeds in many areas, but the impact on its sound quality remains uncertain. Some parameters, including the 110dB rejection of digital images, are 'fixed' by the choice of Crystal DAC while others, like the late treble roll-off beyond 17kHz or so, are just as likely a feature of the analogue circuitry. The wide >105dB separation suggests that Creek has also put plenty of thought into its board layout.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> 50%
- 2] Jitter >> 65%
- 3] Linearity >> 30%
- 4] Dynamic Range >> 30%
- 5] Digital Filter >> 25%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum Output Level	2.2V	2.22V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	<0.0015%	0.0005%
Signal-To-Noise Ratio	>96dB	108.0dB



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ROTEL RCD-1072

Can Rotel's new CD player match its excellent RA-1062 amp?

The new RCD-1072 CD player, itself a derivation of the RCD-1070, has a revised fascia layout with a centralised drawer mechanism and upgrades to some 60 internal components as part of Rotel's rolling development policy. Broadly speaking, the building blocks of the RCD-1072 are the same as those in the RCD-1070, although it benefits from a new Burr-Brown op-amp, which offers lower noise and distortion.

The drawer, mechanism and display are not immediately recognisable as Sony but they've been modified to Rotel's specification. Unlike the BD25 used elsewhere, this mechanism does not reliably handle CD-RW discs and nor does it support CD Text. On the other hand, the RCD-1072 offers more on-board functionality than its peers with program (including review), repeat and random play joined by a ten-second intro scan feature.

The choice of Burr-Brown's PCM1732 DAC is unusual, particularly as this IC is far from the highest performer in BB's range (and also far from the cheapest). It seems that Rotel's retention of this part boils down to one factor: its on-board HDCD decoder. Rotel has been a supporter of Pacific Microsonics' encoding scheme for CD, although any advantage it once offered in stretching the performance of the 16-bit format was blunted once SACD and 24-bit DVD-Audio arrived.

One of the benefits of blind panel testing is our freedom from becoming 'brand victims'. I was certainly expecting great things of the RCD-1072 on the back of Rotel's recent successes, but our panel was to turn any such preconception on its head. There is a bit of a 'live' performance about the player's sound, realistic but also potentially challenging. Vocals, for example, were described as both articulate and authoritative although intense sections could seem hard and oppressive.

The slightly dry mastering of Steely Dan's latest CD is given a lift by the player which delivers a real crack to percussion and energy



to the voice while bringing an encouraging 'bounce' to the music as a whole. This is not always particularly relaxing, but then the RCD-1072 brings the music to you rather than inviting you to come listen to it. Oddly enough, the naturally open and live acoustics from Lucinda Williams sounded forward in terms of positioning and dynamics while failing to realise the subtle spaciousness normally provoked by the reverb.

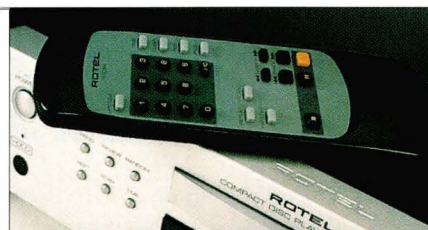
While our listeners appreciated both the extended balance and dynamics of this player they found its overall performance uninspiring – all gloss but with a restricted sense of light and shade. So *Mahler's 5th* was offered with detail and control but, once again, a very restricted sense of atmosphere and involvement. "All the ingredients but lack of imagination" suggested one listener. "Top orchestra with a dull conductor", said another.

The sad fact is that early, pre-production samples were technically and subjectively superior to the final production sample reviewed here. As a result, the RCD-1072 sticks out as a rather sore thumb in a range populated by some of the best sounding DVD players, amplifiers and AV receivers available. If there's a chink in Rotel's seemingly impenetrable armour, this must be it. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 68%	A player that has everything from great looks to a generous price and the company of some very impressive partnering separates but that stumbles, ever so slightly, at the final hurdle.
FEATURES >> 75%	
BUILD >> 85%	
VALUE >> 77%	

HI-FI CHOICE **74%**
OVERALL SCORE >>

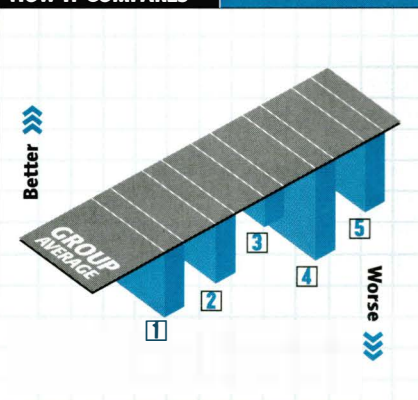


LAB REPORT

If the RCD-1072 was a surprise under-performer in our (level matched) listening tests, some of the reasons for that result became clearer on the lab bench. The 88.7dB A-wtd S/N, for example, is around 10dB short of what's acceptable while distortion is consistent but higher than average at ~0.003% through bass and midrange. The increase to 0.12% at 20kHz, however, is very considerable. At lower levels, distortion increases still further (0.02% at -10dBfs is 100x higher than the best players) but it's the harmonic complement (3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th etc) that does the subjective damage.

Odd-order IM distortion is also high at 0.1% but other parameters, like the consistently wide 106dB channel separation, point to a considered board layout. The player not only correctly decodes HDCD-encrypted software but also handles pre-emphasised material perfectly. In all cases, the 1072's response has a gently declining treble, falling to -0.75dB at 20kHz which may be audible in some systems.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -55%
- 2] Jitter >> -50%
- 3] Linearity >> -25%
- 4] Dynamic Range >> -80%
- 5] Digital Filter >> -60%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum Output Level	2V	2.25V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	0.0045%	0.003%
Signal-To-Noise Ratio	>100dB	88.7dB



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TALK THUNDER 3.1

Talk's flagship player climbs to the top of the class

By far the costliest player here, Talk's flagship is also the most substantially constructed. Once again, Sony's BD25 transport mechanism is here, conferring full compatibility with CD-R/RW and CD-Text in addition to offering both single-ended and balanced analogue outputs. Canada and the US form the lion's share of Talk's export market, countries where the XLR connector is king in high-end audio. Standard track access, repeat and program play modes are provided, but the up/down volume keys are only 'activated' on the remote if you plump for Talk's £100 variable output upgrade.

Nevertheless, it's what's hidden within the 3mm extruded alloy sideplates and 10mm milled alloy fascia that lends the Thunder 3.1 its real edge. By teaming up with Anagram Technologies of Geneva, Talk makes best use of the idealised 192kHz sample rate offered by its choice of AD1853 DACs. How? Because Anagram offers some very sophisticated DSP, based around a SHARC processor, that provides adaptive, asynchronous upsampling.

This ATF24/192 processing block allows Talk the luxury of implementing a potentially less invasive, two-pole analogue filter way above the audioband. On the other hand, asynchronous upsampling, by its very nature, is vastly more complex to execute than synchronous upsampling (say from 48kHz to 192kHz) and prone to jitter and other distortions. None of which is evident in day-to-day use, because this feature is an integral part of the Thunder 3.1 and not defeatable.

By all accounts, the Thunder 3.1's essential character falls almost directly midway between the subtly colourful Exposure and technically proficient but less 'interesting' Arcam. It delivers a sound that "knows where it's going", a sound with direction and some stature, a sound that was described as both "progressive and fun". It was the one player that expressed Fagen's vocals with their characteristic lilt while unpeeling the various



layers of the Steely Dan track to reveal a complex but 'organic' piece of music.

Our listeners felt the Exposure was occasionally more captivating, but that the Talk was more neutral, with solid bass, greater treble extension and bite. It certainly built a grander acoustic with the tremolo effect from Lucinda Williams' expressive repertoire, allowing her voice and the rasp of harmonica to lift into the room with impressive effect. "The bass line, while quite dominating, is not intrusive" remarked one listener.

Only when the music got really tough, did the Thunder 3.1 show its mettle by keeping cool under fire. *Mahler's 5th* was reproduced with a scale unmatched in this test, as both the weight of the orchestra and subtlety of individual performers was realised with a deftness lost to less sophisticated designs. We could hear the lift of bowed strings and the delicate ring of the gong – ordinarily buried – now washed delicately into the broad, deep and wonderfully uncluttered soundstage.

The Thunder 3.1 justifies its price by successfully outperforming its cohorts in this group test. If you're seeking a high-end player to wring the best from your CD collection, perhaps the last dedicated player you will ever buy, then this should top your shortlist. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 92%	An example of a substantial technological sledgehammer used to crack a fairly basic digital nut with great success. Great sound, build and looks but offered at an equally substantial price.
FEATURES >> 80%	
BUILD >> 90%	
VALUE >> 80%	

HI-FI CHOICE **88%**
OVERALL SCORE >>

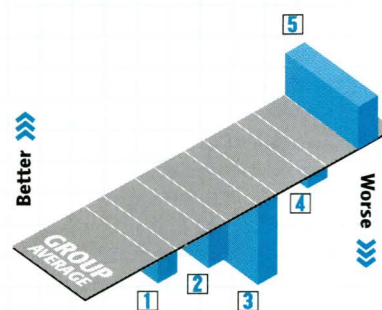


LAB REPORT

The use of Anagram's upsampler is measurable. The 104.8dB S/N ratio, for example, is possibly reduced by the added dither because an AD1853 DAC alone would stretch this further. There's also a clear modification of low-level data (not unlike that of Denon's AL24 'enhancement' scheme), which actually *increases* distortion to around 10% at the -90dBfs level. Errors in low-level linearity are also compounded, probably through the same mechanism. This player also has the most untidy jitter spectrum, but the mix of extensive PSU, hum and data-related sidebands still only add up to a mere 200psec!

Otherwise, all is very well indeed. Distortion falls to 0.00075% via the single-ended outputs (slightly higher via the balanced feed) while the rejection of digital images is typically better than 110dB. Ultrasonic noise is well suppressed without the need for intrusive analogue filtering. Nevertheless, Talk's own output stage introduces a gentle -0.5dB treble roll-off along with an unusual -0.05dB bass shelf.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -20%
- 2] Jitter >> -30%
- 3] Linearity >> -70%
- 4] Dynamic Range >> -10%
- 5] Digital Filter >> 35%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum Output Level	2V	2.23V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	<0.005%	0.00075%
Signal-To-Noise Ratio	104dB	104.8dB



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THULE CD150B

Minimalist aesthetics but a detailed and engaging sound

In the true spirit of minimalism, Thule has placed a single, unmarked button on the gently curved, black fascia of its CD150B. Hold it in for a couple of seconds and the CD tray opens, press again and the disc is loaded and play begins. Subsequent presses act as a track skip command, though to stop the disc, skip backwards or utilise the repeat and program play modes, you'll need to use Thule's unbranded remote.

The Thule CD150B also demonstrates why there are so few players with displays mounted *underneath* the loader these days because, once it's open, the tray can block IR commands from the handset.

Most of the real action takes place under the bonnet where Sony's CD-Text compatible mechanism is partnered with twin Burr-Brown PCM1716 DACs. Separate power supplies feed the various digital and analogue sections of the player while the balanced outputs that distinguish the CD150B from the cheaper CD100 confer a direct compatibility with Thule's other separates. The CD150B, along with Thule's DVD250B DVD player, may also be equipped with a 'Digit II' asynchronous upsampling board (£1,200, or an extra £525 to retro-fit it) that operates up to 24-bit/192kHz. As the existing PCM1716 will only operate with a maximum 96kHz input, this upgrade may also include new DACs.

This player has all the 'comfort' of Creek's CD50, for example, but with a flourish to both strings and vocals that helps bring out the music's naturally rich character. Solomon Burke certainly sounded more articulate and while there's a loss in bass weight, there's no apparent restriction in either the depth or width of the soundstage. So this is a big and open-sounding player but not excessively ballsy – "it's shaved at least ten stone off Solomon Burke" remarked one listener.

Another quipped that it was "the sort of player that will excel with stereotypical plinky-plonky hi-fi jazz", as the subtle but



edgy detailing to strings and percussion drifted by from Steely Dan's latest CD. There is a tautness to the sound, not sufficient to bring stress or fatigue to the music but certainly enough to keep us perched closer to the edge of our seats. On a practical level, it's the sort of sound that can be enjoyed at lower listening levels, for there's always plenty of detail on offer. And if it excels with jazz, it's equally adept with other music too.

The player delivers a very expansive soundstage, ideal for the cavernous acoustic of Lucinda Williams' charged and atmospheric brand of country music. Sure, her voice sounds like it's splashed all over the front of the room, but the phrasing is very articulate and the performance as a whole very engaging. This open acoustic really benefited the deep and complex recording of *Mahler's 5th*, revealing much of the light and shade of the various instruments, making the dramatic and sweeping theme as accessible as possible without really hitting the deepest bass.

This is a taut, open but also slightly dry-sounding player that might require careful speaker matching if only to avoid too light or bright an overall presentation. Stick to boxes with a warmer balance and the CD150B will provide the perfect complement. **HFC**

VERDICT

SOUND >> 85%

FEATURES >> 70%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 89%

This distinctive looking player with its quirky user interface turns out to be something of a CD star. Detailed and engaging (if a little lean at times), it offers useful upgradeability and is keenly priced.

HI-FI CHOICE 85%
OVERALL SCORE >>

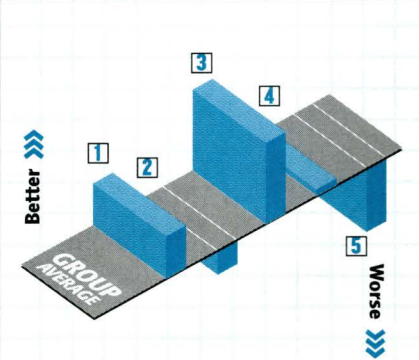


LAB REPORT

Thule uses two PCM1716 DACs in differential mode which explains why it achieves an S/N ratio of 107dB when single chip applications typically achieved about 103-4dB. Distortion too is far lower than expected from a typical implementation of this DAC. In practice, Thule smashes its own specification with a THD of just 0.00025% at 1kHz/0dBfs, increasing to just 0.0004% at 1kHz/-10dBfs and 0.0025% at 20kHz/0dBfs. Errors in low-level linearity are also squashed to -0.2dB over a full 100dB dynamic range.

Other parameters, like the ~80dB rejection of digital images and modest output of ultrasonic noise are unavoidable features of the PCM1716, but it does look as if Thule has implemented a more aggressive analogue filter. The player's response has the same -0.75dB roll-off at 20kHz as the Rotel, for example, but its rate of roll-off is steeper and this will exert a subjective influence all its own. Jitter, meanwhile, is dominated by PSU-related artefacts, although at just 180psec this is of minor consequence.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> 35%
- 2] Jitter >> 20%
- 3] Linearity >> 70%
- 4] Dynamic Range >> 5%
- 5] Digital Filter >> 55%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum Output Level	2.2V	2.15V
Distortion (1kHz @ 0dBfs)	<0.003%	0.00025%
Signal-To-Noise Ratio	98dB	107.0dB

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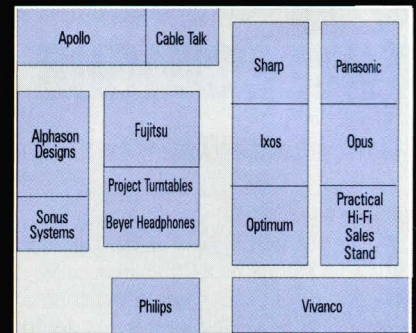
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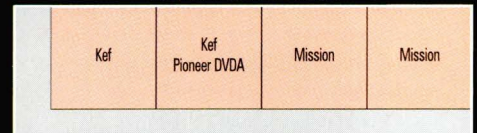
TOTAL DVD

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Choice

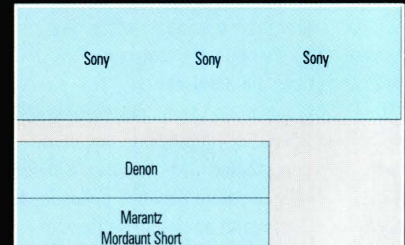
GRAND BALLROOM



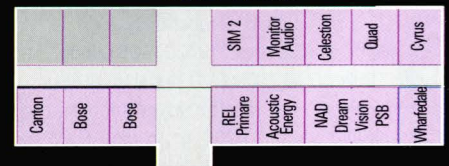
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CONCLUSIONS

On this evidence, CD players still have a role to play for the audiophile – but for how much longer?

The high cost of these players reflects the difference between multiformat DVD, SACD and universal player technology which continues to fall in price while single-format CD hardware gravitates upward. While the mass manufacturers now offer CD replay as part-and-parcel of the backwards compatibility offered by SACD and DVD solutions, any 'purist' intentions they once maintained have been conveniently forgotten.

The cheaper players, if the £699 Creek CD50 or £595 Rotel RCD-

1072 can be described as such, failed to make a convincing case for the survival of the single-format player. The CD50 has much technical merit but sounds a little dated while the RCD-1072 simply fails to achieve the potential of its parts. The Arcam CD33T leverages off technology developed for its companion DVD players, but we cannot help but wonder if the older Ring DAC-based CD players would have had the musical edge.

Exposure has no DVD player program and so can put all its

eggs in the CD basket, even if the 3010 can be seen as a reworking of the XXII model. Thule, too, is addressing an existing fan base with the minimalist styling and balanced connections of its CD-150B, but its superior sound and sharp pricing deserve greater success with a far wider audience. Then there's Talk's Thunder 3.1, a specialist flagship worthy of that final single-purpose CD purchase.

Keeping pace with the latest technology is what drives the development of the silicon inside today's players. But the latest

technology is 24-bit and 192kHz, not the 16-bit/44.1kHz standard set 20 years ago by CD. So can the best of today's CD players really be the best we have ever seen? Instead, perhaps today's CD players are simply making best use of a technology more ideally suited to newer and more progressive digital formats like SACD and DVD-Audio. So while players like the Thunder 3.1 still have an edge, can it be long before CD players are swept up by new DVD hardware for which the technology was intended? **HFC**

TRY THEM WITH THESE

AMPLIFIERS

ROTEL RA-1062 £595

Fabulous sound, useful features and it can drive almost any speaker.

EXPOSURE 3010 £1,000

Great power and tolerance of tricky speakers with an enthralling sound.

SPEAKERS

B&W DM603 S3 £600

Great bass and mid but the top end is better suited to 'sweeter' players.

CASTLE CONWAY 3 £930

Best suits bubbly-sounding CD players, like the Exposure 3010.

HINTS AND TIPS

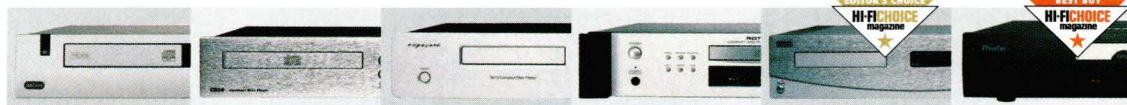
⊕ Give the CD player a good 30 minutes or so to warm up before making a critical judgement.

⊕ If using your CD player with a passive (rather than active) preamp, then check that its output impedance is 100 ohms or less.

Higher output impedances may cause audible changes in response.

⊕ CD players are now far less microphonic than the original 16-bit models, but many still benefit from being sited on a proprietary shelf or table.

CD PLAYERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	Arcam FMJ CD33T	Creek CD50	Exposure 3010	Rotel RCD-1072	Talk Electronics 3.1	Thule CD-150B
PRICE	£1,300	£699	£1,195	£595	£1,900	£775
SOUND	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
FEATURES	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
BUILD	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
VALUE	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
OVERALL	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■
CONCLUSION	Arcam's top-end CD player is brought into line with its DVD range, rewriting the technical rulebooks but losing a little of the music <i>en route</i> .	The CD50 offers a considerable saving on the CD53, but the musical baby may also have been thrown out with the bath water.	Very similar to the more costly range-topping Classic XXII. Not the most precise-sounding player, but undeniably captivating.	Great looks, a generous price and the company of some very impressive, partnering separates but stumbles, ever so slightly, at the final hurdle.	A technological sledgehammer used to crack a basic digital egg with great success. Great sound, build and looks but equally substantial price.	A sound that's detailed and engaging, if a little lean at times. Useful upgradeability and keen pricing make it a CD winner.
KEY FEATURES						
COAXIAL DIGITAL OUT	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
OPTICAL DIGITAL OUT	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
CD-RW COMPATIBLE	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
CD TEXT COMPATIBLE	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
BAL. ANALOGUE OUT	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR						
DISTORTION	0.0008-0.002% E	0.0004-0.0005% E	0.002-0.017 A	0.003-0.12% P	0.0008-0.0045% G	0.00025-0.003% E
JITTER	160psec G	65psec E	120psec E	220psec G	200psec G	180psec G
LINEARITY	+0.0/-0.3dB G	+0.0/-0.4dB G	+0.0/-0.6dB A	+0.0/-0.9dB A	+0.0/-1.4dB P	+0.0/-0.2dB E
S/N RATIO	116.9dB E	108.0dB G	111.2dB E	88.6dB P	104.8dB A	107.0dB G
STOPBAND REJECTION	>120dB E	110dB E	115dB E	75dB A	112dB E	80dB G

Editing and mixing

The second part of our series on making music concentrates on what happens to the music after it's been recorded – the essential, but often misunderstood art of mixing. Feature: Richard Black

Last month, we looked at some of the ways in which recordings are made – that's the 'raw' recording, the first version actually imprinted on tape or disc. But what happens next?

The answer to that can vary widely depending on what kind of recording it is. 'Minimalist' recordings made from two microphones direct to two channels (or from five microphones direct to five channels for surround purposes) obviously don't need any mixing as such, since there's nothing to mix.

But in contrast, multitrack recordings (which may be on as many as 48 separate tracks of some suitable format) most certainly need mixing so as to be playable on any realistic number of speakers but often need little or no editing. Many producers in multitrack studios effectively edit 'on the fly' while recording, getting performers to drop in 'patches' which go straight into the right place on the multitrack. This works because with musicians performing in time with a click track or drum track there's no problem with synchronisation, whereas in a

two-channel environment there's no way of synchronising with anything.

It's often said that 'the camera doesn't lie'. Anyone who's ever used a camera at all creatively knows that this is blatantly untrue, and the same is true of the microphone. However, any lies that the solitary microphone can tell are as nothing compared with the king-size fabrications that are possible thanks to editing and mixing. Take it from us – in all musical fields there are people who dare not perform live to any significant extent because they know they can never perform as well as their recordings.

EDITING

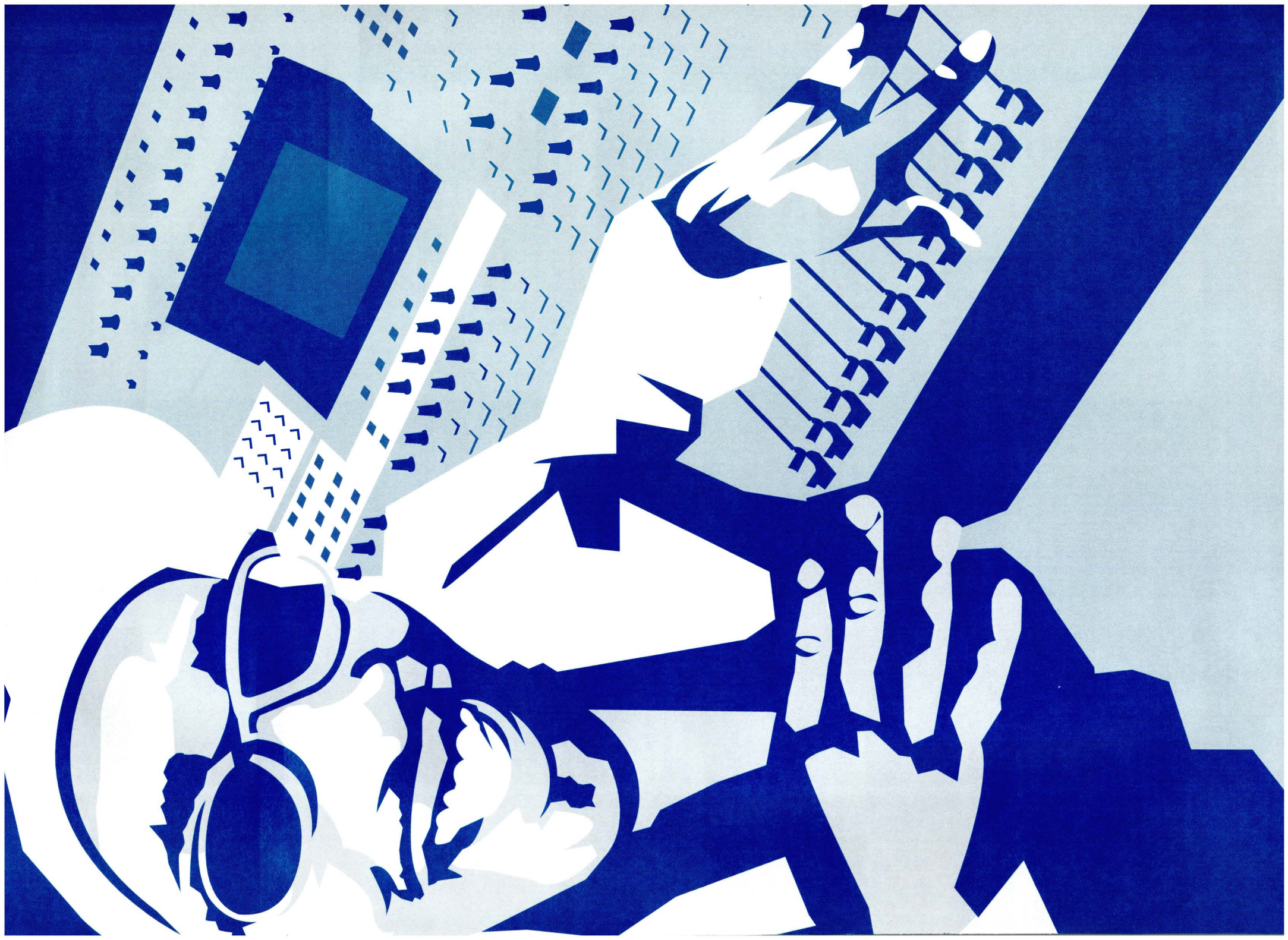
In the days of the 78rpm disc, none of this was possible. A 'take' was as long as a side and if it was interrupted it meant scrapping it and starting again. Likewise there was no multi-track option. With the advent of tape, it suddenly became possible to record something twice, select the best bits of each and stick them together. That's quite literally 'stick', by the way: to this

day, editing analogue tape is a process based on scissors and adhesive tape. It's a surprisingly refined art, given that, but it's essentially crude.

Nowadays, digital recordings are edited on a computer using suitable software, but the basic principle of cutting and pasting is maintained, albeit with subtleties such as the 'cross-fade' which allows a more gradual blending between one take and another, reducing the chance of audible bumps at the edit point.

The number of edits on a CD varies enormously. Some performers and producers take pride in minimising the number of edits (with the best will in the world, recordings may be interrupted by outside events from passing helicopters to power cuts, in which case an edit or two can be a life-saver), while others seize on the opportunity to make a completely blemish-free end product, editing copiously. It really is true that some artists will ask for a single note to be used from one take: at the other extreme, there are certainly ▣

“There are people who dare not perform live because they know they can never perform as well as their recordings.”





EFFECTS AND CHARACTER

In the hi-fi world, where we are generally in pursuit of perfect reproduction, the concept of equipment 'character' is not always a positive one, and the same is largely true in the classical recording business. In studio recording, however, the equipment is unashamedly part of how the music sounds and it's thus no surprise that most engineers have pet favourites among their racks of gear that offer some specific detail, such as a particular kind of EQ slope, or contribute some looked-for quality over and above the basic function. One equaliser may do much the same job as another but have a particularly 'warm' sound, even when set to 'flat'. Then of course there are really weird effects such as flangers and chorusers, which in hi-fi terms offer nearly 100% distortion, but distortion of a particularly sought-after kind. Almost every kind of analogue effects unit has now been duplicated in digital.

❑ orchestral recordings in which an entire movement is one take, unedited. In some musical forms, particularly jazz with its high degree of improvisation, there are generally very few edits.

To understand editing, we must backtrack briefly to the recording session. After the performer, the most important person artistically is the producer, often also a musician, who sits in the 'control room' following the music carefully and listening not only for mundane events like wrong notes or 'noises off' but also for a musically coherent and effective performance. Any fluffs or dud sections will be

marked in the score and rerecorded until at least one good version of everything is 'in the can'. It is essential that the artist trust the producer, since the alternatives are either an inadequate final result or much wasted time chasing fluffs that really aren't audible.

After the session, the editor (quite often the producer in person) sits down with the producer's marked-up score and the complete set of takes. Since the editing will almost invariably be digital, the takes are loaded into whatever workstation is in use (PC or Mac) and edited together a bit at a time until the 'perfect' performance has been assembled. Sometimes the artist is present when this is done, though most editors have horror stories about that!

What makes editing interesting and challenging is that although there will be two or more takes of the 'same' bit of music, they won't be quite the same musically and of course anything but identical technically. This places restrictions on where one can edit. Whether the editing is analogue or digital, one must first find a recognisable point which can be positively identified in each take, so that the first take runs to exactly that point and the second from exactly after it. When there's a pause followed by a sound it's easy, but in the middle of a bit of music it can cause much head-scratching, especially if the volume is markedly different between takes, say, making the edit unworkable.

One learns a variety of tricks. One of my own favourites in vocal music is to find a nice strong sibilant and edit in the middle of that. The noise-like nature of the letters S and F masks a multitude of sins and allows edits that 'shouldn't' work to be completely inaudible. Audible edits give themselves away as a click, a thump, or a sudden change in texture and/or reverb.

The one thing editing can't do is inject musical life into a performance. If it didn't swing in the session, it never will. In the end, the editor is merely trying to bring together the most swinging takes with an acceptable minimum of technical fluffs along the way. The odd wrong note is fine – if the performance is good enough, no-one will notice. Similarly for extraneous noises and engineering mistakes. I once had an over-zealous mastering engineer tell me my edited recording was unissuable because of 'all the clicks'. Actually the clicks were the pianist's (my own!) fingernails on the keyboard – regrettable, but perfectly natural.

MIXING

Mixing is in a very real way more a part of the creative process than editing. A raw multitrack tape is indeed an artistic endeavour in its own right but whether it's of a symphony orchestra or a pop band it's not a listenable entity. The mix engineer must use skill and experience to balance it all together, creating a coherent sonic canvas in which everything contributes but nothing dominates unnecessarily.

Apart from the actual mixing together, there is a multitude of effects that can be applied. The general practice is to record most tracks 'dry', with little or no reverb (a variable echo effect) – it's much easier to add artificial acoustics later, rather than try to take them out if they're found to be not required. Other common effects include equalisation and dynamics processing, and when you consider that there may be three or four dozen audio tracks, each requiring slightly different treatment, you'll soon see why there is no substitute for a keen ear allied to years of practice. Even when groups of tracks are pre-mixed to form 'stems', the mix engineer still needs to have a clear idea of where the overall mix is heading since in the final context what seemed well balanced within the stem might be seriously under or over-done.

On a modern mixing desk, many of these effects are already integrated. EQ will typically have three or four frequencies to adjust as 'parametric' settings where you adjust centre frequency, sharpness and amount of boost or cut – this is a very flexible approach. Compression turns up on upmarket mixers, but reverb is usually performed by outboard equipment. Despite the integration, many engineers prefer to use outboard processors for effects on specific instruments, either because they are more flexible or simply because they may sound better (see the box on 'Effects and Character').

At present, most multitrack studios operate in a part-analogue, part-digital fashion. The multitrack itself may be analogue or digital, but in either case may then proceed through an analogue mixer with filters made up of real resistors and capacitors, real faders, and so on. Even so, some outboard effects may be digital, particularly reverberators and anything involving delay. The mix may then be routed to an analogue or digital 'master recorder'.

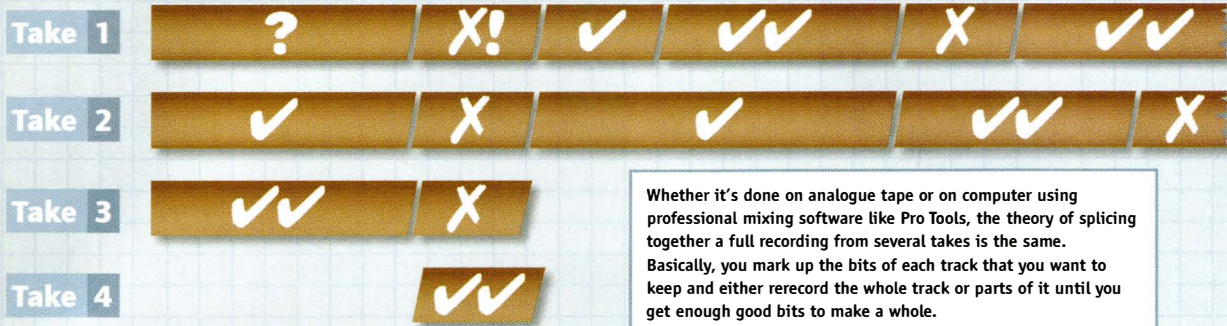
So, using the armoury of analogue and digital equalisers, compressors, reverberators, special effects and the good ol' fader, the mix engineer sets to

DODGY EDITS

Sometimes, the editor finds that in a fit of optimism, despair or plain forgetfulness the producer has not obtained enough good takes. In such a situation one often finds oneself trying ridiculously tight edits to cover a difficult passage, or robbing another part of the same piece of music to plug a gap. This is so much easier on a computer than in analogue. Completely impossible in analogue are some of the fiddles editors can use on digital systems to mask certain kinds of fluff. I've personally corrected the pitch of a singer without noticeably altering the piano accompaniment and removed a wrong note from the middle of a chord and a barking dog from a decay tail.



THE EDITING PROCESS



Whether it's done on analogue tape or on computer using professional mixing software like Pro Tools, the theory of splicing together a full recording from several takes is the same. Basically, you mark up the bits of each track that you want to keep and either rerecord the whole track or parts of it until you get enough good bits to make a whole.

THE EDITED VERSION - COMPILED FROM THE RECORDING SESSION ABOVE



Key	
✓✓	Excellent - accurate and lots of 'feel'
✓	Pretty good
?	Usable if we have to
X	Major upset
X!	Let's pretend we never heard that
<i>In general, longer takes tend to give best continuity</i>	



Pro Tools digital mixing software



Pro Tools computerised mixing desk

“Automation allows the perfect mix to be restored just in case the drummer sweeps the faders aside to lay out a line of coke.”

work. Vocals may need a bit of a lift in the midrange to warm up the tone. Drums may need some compression and perhaps a hint of high frequency boost to give them the requisite 'snap'. Woodwinds may need a dose of reverb to produce a nicely spacious effect. And talking of spaciousness, everything must not only be voiced but also placed in a stereo (or surround) image. The term 'panpot stereo' is often used in a derogatory sense, but careful use of the panpot (essentially a balance control for

each audio track) to place instruments in a particular space within the recording can create good, clear images.

With really big mixdowns, more than one person is generally involved – the engineer, assistants, even the band. It's a bit of an iterative process involving much fine fiddling, and an extra pair of ears is no bad thing. Luckily, most modern mixers incorporate automation whereby control settings are stored for future recall (via motorised controls or voltage-controlled amps) so that the perfect mix can be restored when, after hours of tweaking, the band's drummer sweeps the faders aside to lay out a line of coke. Don't laugh – a colleague in the States swears he's seen that one.

Mixing of classical multitracks is generally simpler because there's a definite end in view – a reproduction of a single acoustic event. This means less outboard processing, less artistic input and hence less time adjusting.

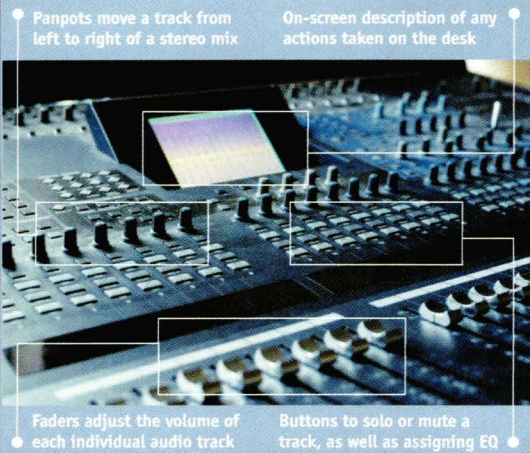
In any case, the end product will be a stereo or surround mix on a suitable disc or tape format which can be sent off to the mastering house for final preparation. In our next article we'll have a look at what that entails. **HFC**

STEREO OR SURROUND?

Many projects are now mixed to both surround and stereo, for current or future release. Two completely separate mixes may be prepared, sometimes the stereo is mixed down from the surround, or sometimes the surround is simply modified a bit for stereo. One good thing about multitrack recordings is that they are inherently future-proof – when a new format comes along, just drag out the multitrack and remix!

COUNT THE KNOBS

Part of the complexity of modern mixers rises from the fact that they have to be all things to all engineers. Apart from record-time duties, they must in mixdown mode accept inputs from all tracks, process some internally, route others to outboard processors, take the results back in, and mix the whole lot together in one go or in groups... To give some idea, the current K-series analogue mixing console from Solid State Logic, one of the top names in the field, features 32 rotary controls, 95 switches and two faders on each of its 96 channels. (Yes, nearly 10,000 switches. Headache tablets, anyone?)

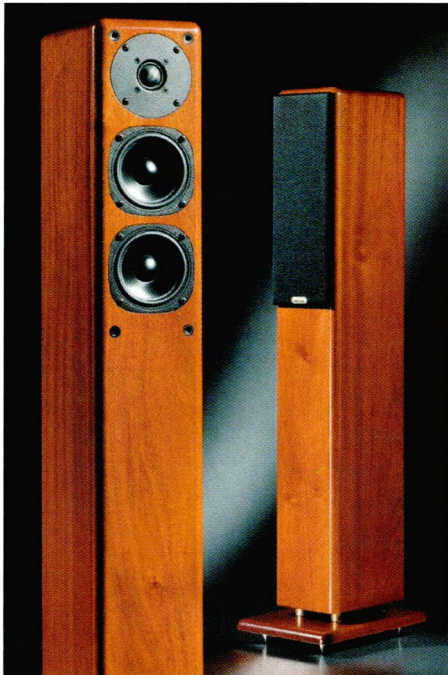


Panpots move a track from left to right of a stereo mix

On-screen description of any actions taken on the desk

Faders adjust the volume of each individual audio track

Buttons to solo or mute a track, as well as assigning EQ



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RETRO

INCATECH CLAYMORE AMPLIFIER



Incatech was one of those iconic names from the heyday of the hi-fi boom, the early to mid-eighties, which burned brightly for a while, selling an unfeasible quantity of products – a claimed 22,000 plus – before finally disappearing.

The Claymore was the progeny of Colin Wonfor, once of Plessey, where he worked in the power supply section and elsewhere. Before that he had ignited an enthusiasm for constructing simple circuits, initially radios for his personal use, and later sound-to-light equipment and amps professionally.

His first projects were constructed on 'beds of nails' consisting of panel pins hammered into planks of wood by his granddad, as Vero and other PC boards were not readily available at the time. Both his father and his grandfather were involved with telecommunications in various capacities, and encouraged his interest. Latterly the power outputs and design sophistication went up, and after meeting Tony Relph (ex-Rega) he formed AC Magnum. Subsequently the partnership was dissolved, but the company continues under Tony's leadership as Magnum Audio.

The Claymore appears to have had an eventful gestation. With encouragement from the late Brian O'Rourke (Ruark) and his family, and also from one Roy Hall of US importer Music Hall, Colin was encouraged to produce an integrated amplifier, initially for the US market. The first sample of what was to be the 50 watts per channel Claymore was produced in 1979 in fluorescent orange, and it was sent to the US with four others, which were promptly lost by DHL. The remaining five amps sat on Colin's desk for a year, during which time Hitachi discontinued the MOSFET that was specified for the output stage, rendering the original design obsolete.

But somehow Colin recovered the initiative, and the amplifier went into production, though not entirely without further mishaps. Sometime during its lifecycle, a complete batch of 100 units managed to all blow up. The transformer supplier had changed to using either Chinese-made transformers or ones that used Chinese-made wire. Apparently the dielectric on the wire was not heat-proof and as soon as it became warm, it duly

“The first sample of the Claymore was produced in 1979 in fluorescent orange, and sent to the US with four others, which were promptly lost by DHL.”

melted, resulting in catastrophic transformer meltdown.

The Incatech originally sold for £345 – relatively upmarket in those days. But then it was quite an upmarket design, featuring a big toroidal transformer, Elna reservoir caps and an ALPs volume pot, though the rated power output has disappeared along with most of the other circuit details. But it was still quite an amp, and well capable of giving the Naim Nait, the fashionable alternative of the day, a run for its money. Unsurprisingly, it was a lot more muscular than the Nait and somewhat more sophisticated sonically. Just as well, as it was hardly well endowed otherwise. The input selection was meagre, though it did include an excellent MM/MC phono stage.

Externally it was all too British, in the days before the Brits learned how to build products with the svelte finesse of modern designs of the kind made by Arcam, Musical Fidelity and others. It was a crude lump of an amp, pictured here in its special edition gold finish, a classic case of mutton dressed as lamb. The switchgear looks like a Radio Shack reject, and apparently felt like it too. Some Claymores even shipped with blanked-off non-functional headphone sockets on the rear panel. But physical construction did eventually improve, and if its reputation was solidly based, it was a thoroughly desirable amplifier in practice. Much better than it looked, anyway.

There is a potentially positive end to this story, as Colin Wonfor has been floating the idea of reintroducing the Claymore, presumably with more up to date production engineering and aesthetics. There may even be an early sample at one of the autumn hi-fi shows. Now that could be one to watch... **HFC**

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MUSO

SPACEMEN 3
THE PERFECT PRESCRIPTION



It crawls up on you with a burring hazy sound, an ocean of tones with strings and echoing guitars. You feel yourself slipping into another state, another time, another place. You are listening to the almighty *Ecstasy Symphony/Transparent Radiation* (flashback), as timeless a piece of art as any group has ever put to tape. The year was 1987, the location was Rugby, the band was Spacemen 3 and the album was *The Perfect Prescription*.

One-time punk bible the NME described it as “freefalling through time, turning galaxies into chocolate bars, forging a different course through the badly fried brains of the 1980s”. And that’s because with Thatcher’s Britain parting at the seams, Spacemen 3’s sonic pioneers were offering hope of a different kind, the hope of the imagination to create reality.

Formed at Rugby Art College in the early 1980s, Sonic Boom (Pete Kember really) and Jason Pierce shared everything including the same birthday (19 Nov 1965). During the mid-eighties they set up the Reverberation Club in Rugby and played fuzz-tone/noise/feedback music. They were honest about their lack of musical training and were one of the first rock groups to embrace Ecstasy. According to Boom: “Our music was picking up on where people in blues, R&B and early American psychedelia left off. It was a mixture of that and the one-chord minimalism inspired by The Velvet Underground, John Cale and John Cage.”

By early 1987, Spacemen 3 – Boom and Pierce alongside Pete Bassman and percussionist Rosco Roswell had secured unlimited time in Rugby’s VHF Studios in return for £3,000 contributed to a 16-track mixing console. Equipment was ‘classic’ Fender and Vox including a Farfisa Organ and a Vox Starstream guitar, Boom’s favourite – “like the one Brian Jones played with built-in tuner, wah-wah, fuzz-tone, treble, bass booster and repeater”. Obsessed with sound envelopes, drones and “playing guitar in an open-tuned kinda way”, the group altered their consciousness for days on end with Thai grass. *Ecstasy Symphony* was done on a Farfisa Organ, one note taped down and layered on eight separate tracks. Then each track received a different effect – phaser, tremelo, fast auto pan and so forth. It took three days to

“NME described it as ‘freefalling through time, turning galaxies into chocolate bars, forging a different course through the badly fried brains of the 1980s’.”

accomplish and its shimmering beauty was first heard on the *Transparent Radiation* EP (GLAEP 108) in July of 1987.

The album also featured Alex Green on sax, Mick Manning on trumpet and Owen John on violin, which when multi-tracked made the shimmering haze of *Ecstasy Symphony/Transparent Radiation* all the more arresting. Sonic: “I just loved making drones, cello drones, violin drones. We used sampling in the way Laurie Anderson did, not like to get the bass drum from *Led Zepp II* but sampling ourselves to get impossible sustains.”

During the album’s six-month creation, the group installed their psychedelic light show replete with mirror ball in the studio to get the right feel. The album’s release (Glass GLALP 026) in September 1987 wasn’t greeted with much enthusiasm by the press and it wasn’t until *Playing With Fire* in 1989 that the acclaim began to come. TV appearances followed and the re-issue of *The Perfect Prescription* on CD with two additional tracks finally confirmed the album as a hi/lo-fi classic.

In the US, Genius records released the album (from 1988 onwards) in purple/white sleeves and die-cut sleeves on purple ‘pyramid’ vinyl. Their CD versions had extra tracks in various colours. A CD on Taang! (1996) with a yellow sleeve and four bonus tracks should be avoided as it’s bootlegged from vinyl! The original Glass album in gold/silver, bronze/silver sleeve is now a collector’s item and after years of fan demand, Pierce and Boom (having parted ways in 1990) settled their differences to release *Forged Prescriptions* (Space Age Orbit 006 CD), an 18-track cornucopia of ‘full guitar laden versions’, variations and unreleased out-takes from *The Perfect Prescription* sessions. **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

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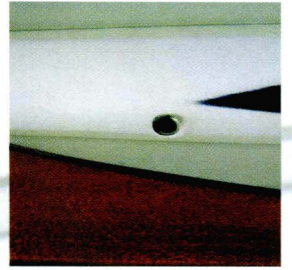
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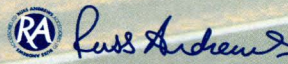


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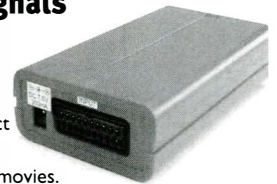
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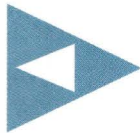


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DIGITALIA

BLU-RAY MEDIA AND
THE FUTURE OF AUDIO

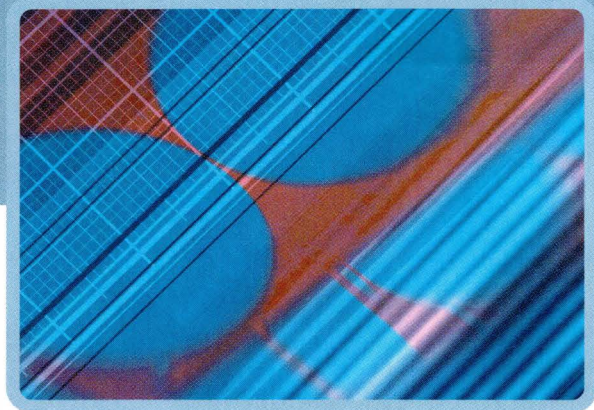


Regular *HFC* readers will know that I am keen to promote high-resolution, multichannel audio of all flavours, which is why the slow but steady release of new universal players represents a very positive trend. However, a big question mark hangs over the next step for this technology. Will the development of Blu-Ray media have any real impact on the audiophile community, for example?

To read some columnists, you'd think that Blu-Ray will replace DVD-Audio as a next generation, super-high resolution medium. But a brief overview of the format suggests that this is an unlikely outcome. Importantly, the Blu-Ray format was conceived to enable not only playback but also the re-writable *recording* of High Definition Video (HDTV) on a 27GB disc. The disc's physical dimensions match the established CD/DVD standard but the track pitch is squeezed and minimum pit size reduced to just 0.14µm which, when read by a reduced wavelength violet-blue laser, yields a significant boost in data density. Dual layer discs would accommodate ~50GB – more than enough for over 24 hours of Standard Definition/VHS quality video, for example.

With a 36Mbps data rate and the same MPEG2 compression standard used for digital broadcasting, Blu-Ray clearly hopes to leverage off any 'consumer boom' in domestic HDTV hardware. The emphasis here is on Blu-Ray as a next generation *video* recording format, a venture supported by nine leading consumer electronics companies, including Sony, Philips, Pioneer and Panasonic. Blu-Ray received a boost when its main competitor, the AOD (Advanced Optical Disc) backed by NEC and Toshiba, was rejected by the DVD Forum, even though Blu-Ray itself has not been formally ratified.

From a commercial perspective, it's the high quality copyright protection scheme offered by Blu-Ray that's its strongest suit and looks likely to win support from Hollywood. By migrating as soon as possible to an HD version of DVD with superior copy protection, the movie industry feels that it will avoid many of the issues suffered by their counterparts in the music business. The prospect of a greater channel count for audio with increased resolution and bandwidth is not one uppermost in the minds of



“If DVD-AR is to make it out of the starting blocks, then the industry will need to be convinced of its security.”

the organisations driving this format forward.

If you are an audiophile, then the most exciting parallel technology comes in the form of Recordable DVD-Audio, or DVD-AR. This format is based on standards that already exist with DVD-A, including support for Dolby and DTS compressed audio plus MLP and non-MLP LPCM. Two channels at 192kHz and six at 96kHz are accommodated up to a maximum data rate of 9.6Mbps, just as it is with DVD-Audio. The format will allow the user to edit track and index positions and supports Text and still video. The potential for small recording studios is incalculable while audiophiles can choose between uncompressed track selections for serious listening or, perhaps, many, many hours of compressed audio for less critical applications.

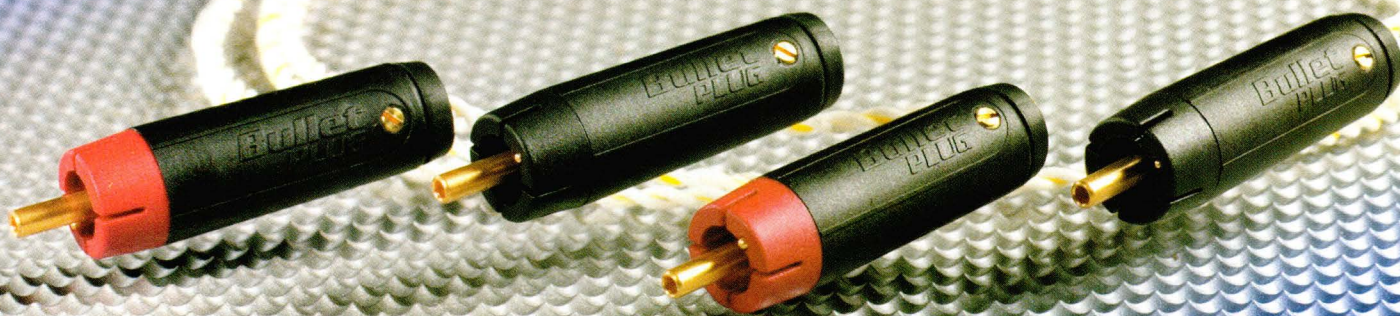
Furthermore, as both LPCM and MLP or PPCM (Packed PCM) decoders form a mandatory part of the DVD-A specification, then DVD-AR media should be compatible with today's hardware, transport issues notwithstanding. Most players include Dolby and DTS decoders, so this base is also covered. Other compression standards like ATRAC-3, MP3 Pro and AAC, which are included in the DVD-AR specification will not all be happily decoded by today's DVD-A and universal players, however.

But if DVD-AR is to make it out of the starting blocks, then the music industry and DVD Forum will need to be convinced of its security. Which brings us right back around to the rash of recent universal players and their proprietary digital links and, in particular, Pioneer's implementation of the FireWire i-Link. As this link already includes CPPM (Content Protection for Pre-recorded Media) then the secure transmission of digital, multichannel audio to a recorder looks like becoming a very real possibility. Now, all we have to do is wait. **HFC**

Paul Miller

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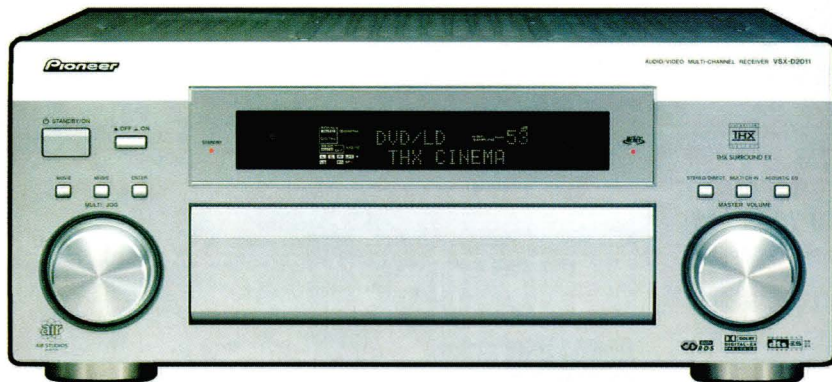
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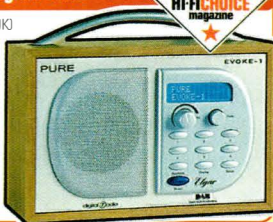
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Our test results are the most reliable in the business. We employ the most experienced reviewers and use the most thorough techniques to ensure our ratings are the ones you can trust. All the equipment we rate most highly is contained within these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

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

Products that score more than 80% overall are automatically featured in the *Hi-Fi Choice Buyer's Bible*. Any Best Buy or Editor's Choice Badges awarded are also displayed.

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CD PLAYERS

Audio disc players for music only



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

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

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



again before being amplified and sent to the output sockets.

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

SUPER AUDIO CD



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

Q&A

WHAT'S A DAC?

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

WHY HAVE SEPARATE TRANSPORTS & DACS?

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

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

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

DO I NEED DIGITAL CABLES FOR A CD PLAYER?

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

WHAT IS OVERSAMPLING/UPSAMPLING?

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

CAN I PLAY SACDS ON A NORMAL CD PLAYER?

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

CAN I PLAY DVDS ON A CD PLAYER?

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

TOP BUYS



Marantz CD6000 KI Signature £500

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



Meridian 507 £1,195

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

Our favourite CD PLAYERS

BEST BUY
 EDITOR'S CHOICE

Audio-only CD and SACD players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	CD-RW COMPATIBLE	CD TEXT	BAL ANALOGUE OUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	VARIABLE OUTPUT	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000												
	Arcam CD92	900	High-resolution player needs a touch of spit and polish to be completely convincing		●	●		●				212
EC	Copland CDA 822	1,598	Well built and carefully thought out, if you go for the more sophisticated musical forms it is superb value		●		●		●			241
	Cyrus CD7	800	New Cyrus player has strong all-round attributes to match its good looks		●							212
	Exposure 2010	600	Undistinguished in the final analysis, but the 2010 nevertheless is a return to form for this famous marque			●	●	●				231
	Linn Genki	995	Explicit, rather bright-sounding player with strong multiroom appeal								●	212
	Heart CD6000 OSE LE	750	Valved-up Marantz makes an entertaining and colourful player that will inspire you to listen longer		●	●	●	●		●	●	245
MB	Marantz CD6000 OSE LE	300	Detailed, well rounded, at home in any musical context – a real bargain		●	●			●	●	●	217
MB	Marantz CD6000 KI Sig	500	Impressive mid-market player is an unusually accomplished all-rounder, and is also well built		●	●	●	●		●	●	231
	Marantz CD-17 MkII M	800	Insight, detail and rhythmic precision make the modified CD-17 MkII M a top-draw player at the price		●	●	●	●				243
MB	NAD C541i	330	High-octane player has the occasional rough edge, but is remarkable value for money		●	●	●					231
	Rotel RCD-02	375	Against some strong competition in the same price area, the new Rotel generally holds up well		●		●					231
	Rotel RCD-1070	495	Technically sound and well equipped, this player lacks a little excitement but shows excellent precision		●							226
ABOVE £1,000												
EC	Audionet ART V2	2,300	Built to last forever, this CD has a dark natural sound with excellent bass and would be cheap at twice the price!		●		●					231
MB	Classé CDP-10	1,599	Very natural yet capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner		●		●		●			238
	Exposure XXII	1,395	Natural sounding player, great with voices and acoustic instruments and makes for engaging listening		●	●	●					238
EC	Gamut CD1R	2,350	Natural, precise and impressively 3D sound that marries precision with emotional communication		●		●		●			240
EC	Krell KPS 25sc	24,998	One of the finest CD players available, this is also a state of the art preamplifier with Cast interface technology		●	●	●		●		●	236
EC	Mark Levinson No390S	6,495	Superbly built and comprehensively equipped with genuinely high-resolution sound		●	●	●		●		●	231
MB	Meridian 507	1,195	Unusually precise and considered performer that sounds as different as the discs you stick in the drawer		●	●	●					238
	Musical Fidelity CD-PRE ²⁴	2,000	Substantial player incorporates upsampling and extensive analogue and digital preamplification facilities		●	●					●	229
EC	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista	4,000	Limited edition stereo-only SACD/CD player that is simply the best player MF has ever made	●	●	●	●	●				237
	NAD S500i	1,200	A beautifully built machine that treads the fine line between precision and musicality with aplomb		●	●	●		●			238
	Naim Audio CD5	1,150	Recommended subject to audition – a dynamic machine, yet some physical minuses									212
EC	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via outboard XPS supply				●					238
MB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●				●			226
MB	Resolution Audio Opus 21	2,850	Dynamic, well timed and 3D performance with an analogue volume control and digital input for a second source				●		●		●	244
EC	Sony SCD-XA333ES	1,200	High-end multichannel SACD player is excellent with CD, impressive in surround		●	●	●		●			224
EC	Sony SCD-XA777ES	2,300	Superb multichannel player that set the benchmark for the format at its launch		●	●	●		●			223
EC	TEAC D-70/P-70	13,000	This two-box solution is one of the best CD replay systems available, with a fantastic range of facilities		●	●	●		●			239
EC	Wadia 301	3,650	Insightful player with digital preamp options and good onboard volume control. Try it direct for maximum effect		●	●			●		●	228

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



Copland CDA822 £1,598

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



Naim CDX2 £2,650

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

DVD PLAYERS

Disc players for audio and video



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

The great advantage of DVD is that it offers sufficient capacity to hold a feature length movie or music concert *and* discrete multichannel sound on a disc the size of a CD. In the case of plain DVD-Video discs, the audio is encoded in either the Dolby Digital or DTS format, both of which use 'lossy' compression to fit the audio onto the disc alongside the video data. You can



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

Q&A

WHICH AUDIO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

WHICH VIDEO OUTPUTS GIVE THE BEST QUALITY?

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

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

Only if you want to hear music and movie soundtracks in multichannel surround. DVD players can be used with stereo amps and just two speakers to great effect, but you'll only get stereo, not surround sound.

DO I NEED PROGRESSIVE SCAN VIDEO?

It's worthwhile for the very best picture quality, but make sure your DVD player and display device support PAL progressive.

DVD-AUDIO

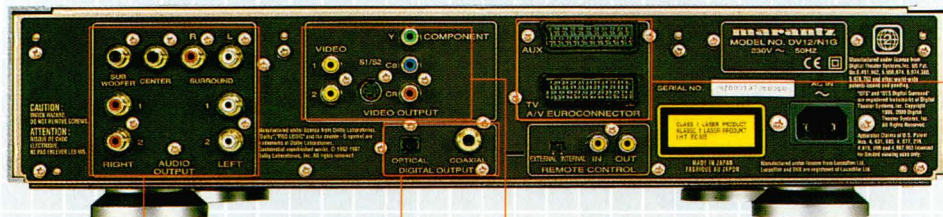
DVD-Audio is a high-resolution format that offers multichannel, stereo and Dolby Digital tracks on dedicated DVD-A discs.

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

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



CONNECTIONS



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

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

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

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

Our favourite DVD PLAYERS

BEST BUY **EDITOR'S CHOICE**

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
EC	Arcam DiVA DV88 Plus	1,000	The first DVD player (just) enabled to deliver progressive scan with UK-spec PAL discs. Superb picture and good sound			●	●		238
	Cambridge Audio DVD57	200	DVD-Audio replay, progressive scan pictures and a good performance at a silly-low price. Fantastic value for money.	●		●	●		243
	Cyrus DVD 7+	1,000	Typical Cyrus style – open, vivid and bouncy sound, with moderate picture quality to match						237
HC	Denon DVD-2800 MkII	750	Excellent Silicon Graphics processing, a wide range of features and sharp pricing make this a winner			●	●		237
EC	Denon DVD-3800	1,000	High and progressive DVD-Video player with good CD and DVD-Audio capabilities, priced below its station	●		●	●		234
	Pioneer DV-656A	400	Do-it-all 'universal' player is a decent performer with all disc types, and superb value for money considering its range		●	●	●		240
HC	Pioneer DV-757Ai	800	State of the art universal player with iLink digital interface provides performance stretch currently unavailable to others	●	●	●	●		240
	Primare V25	1,000	Bold pictures on screen are matched to easy, likeable sound quality and a huge range of outputs	●		●	●		237
HC	Sony DVP-NS905V	400	DVD-Video and SACD is a distinctly superior package, with above average performance	●	●			●	234
ABOVE £1,000									
	Cyrus DVD8	1,200	An impressive step up from the DVD7+, which includes component video outputs			●	●		238
EC	Denon DVD-A1	2,500	A convincing case for the DVD-A format, battleship construction combined with sonic and visual finesse	●		●	●		230
EC	Marantz DV-12S1	2,500	THX Ultra-progressive DVD-A player is a classy all-rounder, and absolutely top notch in legacy CD mode	●		●	●		229
EC	Meridian DVD596	2,485	Very classy player with DVD-A upgrade potential, one of the few that is also a superb CD player			●			218
EC	Meridian 800	10,805	The ultimate in DVD replay, modular construction, buffered ROM drive, upsampling and high-res digital outputs	●		●		●	230
	Roksan Caspian DVD	1,195	A good all-rounder – a solid and propulsive sounding DVD player which is also a surprisingly capable picture-making machine			●	●		237
EC	TAG McLaren DVD32R	3,995	An engineering <i>tour de force</i> . It's pricey and plays neither DVD-A nor SACD, but performance – especially video – is top notch			●	●		212
EC	Townshend DV-747A	2,899	Major upgrade to Pioneer machine turns it into a giant slayer of a disc player, available as an upgrade to existing owners	●	●	●	●		232

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

TOP BUYS



Sony DVP-NS905V £400

SACD-compatible DVD-Video player offers excellent audio and video performance.



Denon DVD-3800 £1,000

This DVD-Audio compatible player is excellent with music and equally sharp with video.



Pioneer DV-757Ai £800

Pioneer's latest 'universal' disc player - strong with CD, SACD, DVD-V and DVD-A alike.



Marantz DV-12S1 £2,500

A superb DVD-Audio/Video player – great with DVDs and unusually fine with CDs too.

AVID

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

ACUTUS

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HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

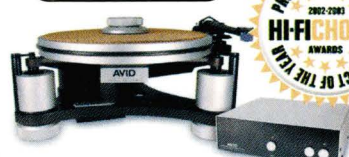
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VINYL

Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



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

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

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



TURNTABLE SET-UP

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

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

TOP BUYS



Rega P3 £298

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



Audio Note TT1/ARM1 £594

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



Michell Orbe SE £1,825

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



Avid Volvere Sequel £3,500

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

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

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
 	Audio Technica AT110E	29	Excellent performance for the price, with little more than some mild coloration and a touch of hardness at high levels	●		●	214
	Clearaudio Aurum Beta S	270	Clear improvement over cheaper Alpha, and good sound all round by any standards	●			223
	Clearaudio Sigma	580	A nimble and revealing cartridge that is more at home in lower mass arms		●		235
	Goldring Elite	250	A remarkably subtle and persuasive design that should tempt anyone		●		235
	Grado Prestige Black	40	Offers admirable detail and treble extension, with good bass and ambience too	●		●	214
 	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
 EC	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
	Reson Recca	250	If you're after a high-quality moving magnet cartridge, they don't get much better than this	●		●	192
	Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
 	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
 	Van den Hul MC One Special	699	A gorgeous cartridge that's worth the price every time you hear a familiar track in a whole new light		●		235
 EC	van den Hul Colibri XGP	2,699	Phenomenal resolution, custom building to suit hard and software, but needs 500 ohm loading and is vulnerable to damage		●		244

Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

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

TURNTABLE SPECS KEY SPEEDS Speeds offered in rpm. **SUSP SUBCHASSIS** Turntables with a sprung or suspended support for the platter and arm. **SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE** Some decks require manual lifting of the belt from one pulley to another to change speed, but not these ones. **SUPPLIED WITH ARM** Deck is supplied complete with tonearm – some require a separate purchase in this department, but the dealer will fit it for you.

SUPPLIED WITH CARTRIDGE Some decks are supplied with a starter cartridge and this is included in the price shown.

CARTRIDGE SPECS KEY MM Moving magnet cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type. MC Moving coil cartridge – see amp and phono stage features to match this type.

REPLACEABLE STYLUS Some cartridges have separate styli for ease of replacement, but it compromises sound quality.

Panasonic

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- DOLBY PRO-LOGIC 2

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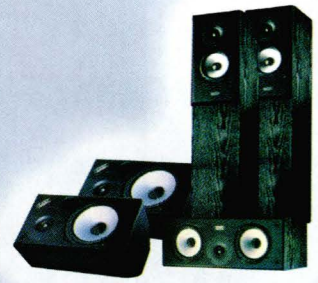
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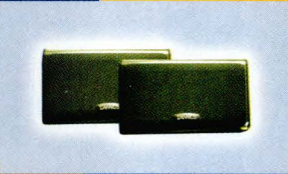
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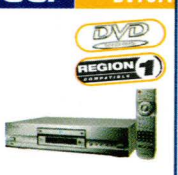
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Panasonic DMR-E50EBS

- DVD-RAM, DVD-R, CD-R/RW, MP3
- 12HRS RECORD IN EP MODE
- TIMESLIP TECHNOLOGY



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Panasonic DVD-F6585

- DVD-RAM, DVD-R, CD-R/RW, SVCD, VCD, JPEG, MP3, WMA
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RADIO TUNERS

FM and DAB hi-fi separates



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

DAB or FM?

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

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

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

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

RECEPTION

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

TOP BUYS



Denon TU260L II £130

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



Cambridge DAB300 £150

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



Rega Radio 3 £374

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



Magnum Dynalab MD102 £2,200

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

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVE BANDS	PRESETS	RDS	REMOTE CONTROL	SIG. STRENGTH METER	ROT. TUNING KNOB	ISSUE NUMBER
FM TUNERS										
	Cambridge T500	180	Very capable tuner suited to good and less good reception conditions	FM,M,L	64					193
	Creek T43	399	Quality UK-made tuner offering classy sound in all areas at a very fair price	FM,M,L	64					193
	Denon TU-260L II	130	The return of the all-time favourite, now enhanced with RDS and sounding as fine as ever	FM,M,L	40					193
EC	Magnum Dynalab MD102	2,200	Unique remote control analogue FM tuner delivers a superbly transparent sound that makes radio fun	FM	5					241
	Marantz ST6000	180	Another budget killer from Marantz, with sound well above its class and useful features	FM, M, L	90					211
	Myryad T-30	400	Attractive product that produces attractive sounds too: capable of very musical performance with a good aerial	FM	29					193
	NAD S400	600	One of the best around – bass and treble are both well extended and detail is excellent	FM	30					230
	Primare T21	600	Identical to NAD S400 and likewise a very fine tuner	FM	30					230
	Rega Radio 3	374	Unpretentious unit which does what it claims, very well. Unusually fine FM sound in all areas	FM,M	20					242
	Rotel RT-02	279	A highly competent tuner which always sounds appealing and fuss-free	FM,M	30					242
DAB TUNERS										
	Arcam DT-81	650	A very smart and polished DAB performer	DAB	16					221
	Cambridge Audio DAB300	150	Simple unit with limited features (no RDI) but decent sound – a very near match for more expensive models	DAB	10					242
	Pure DRX-701ES	250	An excellent introduction to DAB, fine value, simple to use and feature loaded	DAB	99					234
	Pure Digital DRX-702ES	330	Very flexible DAB (inc L-band) and FM tuner. DAB is good, FM a touch disappointing	DAB,FM,M	99					242
	TAG McLaren T32R+DAB	2,290	Classy hi-fi at its best: top sounds on FM and DAB, and a joy to own and use	DAB,FM,M,L	99					230

SPECS KEY **WAVEBANDS** Which bands are supported: FM, M – medium wave, L – long wave, DAB – digital audio broadcasting. **PRESETS** How many stations can be stored in memory. **RDS** Radio Data System – station names and program titles can be displayed among other facilities (FM only, DAB has more comprehensive display potential). **REMOTE CONTROL** For the couch potato. **SIGNAL STRENGTH METER** Useful for setting up an aerial. **ROTARY TUNING KNOB** An ergonomic alternative to buttons.

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS

CD, MiniDisc and hard drive recorders



MiniDisc

MD's strength is versatility. You can record and then re-record many times over. Editing facilities are second to none – you can erase mistakes, name tracks and re-order a disc's contents with a few simple button pushes, making it ideal for building compilations. They're pretty robust too.

Sound quality is below that of CD-R/CD-RW. The format uses a Sony-developed compression technology called ATRAC, which discards part of the data in order to squeeze it on the disc. If you're copying from CD to MD, the result tends to sound a little cold in comparison, lacking a degree of detail and ambience. But to most people it still sounds light years ahead of cassette – clean and hiss-free.

Recordable CD

With recordable CD you have a choice of two disc types: CD-R discs are the cheapest, but you can only record once; and CD-RW discs are a little more costly, but you can re-record on them *ad infinitum*.

Though the latest machines incorporate some useful editing facilities, CD-R/RW is not as flexible as MD. However, sound

quality is higher – if you're recording from a CD, the best models will give you a copy that is very close to the original. In terms of compatibility, most CD players will play back a CD-R disc, but older models might have trouble with CD-RW (though you can, of course, play the disc back on your own recorder). If you want to play a CD-R/RW on a DVD player, check for compatibility.

Hard drive

The latest contender on the digital recording scene is also the most flexible. Some HDD (hard disk drive) recorders can store whole music collections if you use a compression format such as MP3. HDD recorders are taking over from multidisc CD changers as sound servers in multiroom installations, where their ability to play more than one piece of music at a time is a great boon. HDD also offers impressive editing facilities on a par with MD, and they can also record from CD (or to CD-R/RW) at high speed.

At present, sound quality isn't the driving force behind the format – flexibility and storage capacity being bigger issues – and a plain CD-R/RW machine will outperform an HDD recorder in fidelity terms.

TOP BUYS



Philips CDR802 £300

Multidisc recorder that's slick and accomplished, albeit with a slightly flaky build.



Marantz DR6000 £400

Quality in a box – it eschews gimmickry, but it does a simple job very well.



Yamaha CDR-HD1300 £600

Combining hard disk with CD-R makes CD recording a whole lot more flexible.



Imerge S2000 £1,599

Impressively flexible hard disk music server for multi-room applications.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE DIGITAL RECORDERS

CD-R/RW, MD and HDD recorders

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				DECKS	HD CAPACITY (GB)	OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS	ELEC IN/OUTPUTS
CD-R/RW RECORDERS							
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some midband congestion was noted when recording	1		● ●	218
■	Marantz DR6000	400	No frills, but in its fundamentals this is one of the finest CD recorders on the market	1		● ●	233
	NAD C660	500	Audiophile twin deck offering high-speed copying, HDCD replay and notably fine recording from analogue	2		● ●	243
■	Philips CDR802	300	Tacky looks and build notwithstanding, this is a well-equipped and technically sound 3-to-1 autochanger/recorder at a good price	2		● ●	233
■	Philips CDR951	380	An improvement on previous models, it delivers the musical goods in some style	1		● ●	205
■	Pioneer PDR-609	270	Classic CD recorder with outstandingly good sound for the money on both record and replay	1		● ●	243
	Pioneer PDR-W839	350	Good-quality twin CD burner makes recordings that can be hard to distinguish from the original. Good value too	1		● ●	218
MD RECORDERS							
	Pioneer MJ-D508	200	Well equipped, but musically sleep-inducing player that receives its Recommendation owing to the price	1		● ●	205
	Sony MDS-JE480	130	Straightforward and effective, but the three real killer features are price, price and price	1		●	233
HDD RECORDERS							
	Imerge S2000	1,599	Intended as the centrepiece of a multi-room installation, this three-output server combines flexibility with good sound	2	80	● ● ●	243
■	Yamaha CDR-HD1300	600	Superb combination of high-speed CD-RW drive and hard disk, adding editing flexibility to CD recording	2	80	● ● ●	243

SPECS KEY **DECKS** Amount of drive mechanisms on board – twin-deck recorders use one to play while the other records. **HD CAPACITY** Amount of gigabytes of storage capacity, for HD only. **OPTICAL IN/OUTPUTS** Optical Toslink in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC. **ELEC IN/OUTPUTS** Electrical coaxial in and outputs for digital connection to a CD player or DAC.

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MusicCAST

Music All Around The Home Introducing Yamaha's Innovative New MusicCAST Wireless System

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Featuring an 80GB hard-disk, the MusicCAST can store up to 1000 hours of music in compressed MP3 format or 100 hours of uncompressed, CD quality PCM stereo. Copying music to the hard-disk takes



MCX-1000 'Digital Server' (BELOW)
MCX-A10 'Client' (RIGHT)

around 3 minutes. Once recorded music can be played back in PCM quality from the central server and one client unit in another room, and in MP3 quality to an additional six clients. The whole system can send different music to each of the clients and allows you to create playlists for different rooms.

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Subject to legal completion, we are opening new stores in the following locations:
Ealing (North London), **Staines** (Middlesex) and **Wilmslow** (Cheshire).

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- BRIGHTON
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- CHELTHENHAM
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- LEEDS
- LINCOLN
- LIVERPOOL
- MAIDSTONE
- MANCHESTER
- NEWCASTLE
- NORWICH
- NOTTINGHAM
- OXFORD
- PETERBOROUGH
- PLYMOUTH
- POOLE
- PRESTON
- READING
- SEVENOAKS
- SHEFFIELD
- SOLIHULL
- SOUTHAMPTON
- SOUTHGATE
- SWANSEA
- SWINDON
- SWISS COTTAGE
- TUNBRIDGE WELLS
- WATFORD
- WEYBRIDGE **NEW**
- WITHAM (ESSEX)
- WOLVERHAMPTON

Please see Page 7
for address and telephone
number details



FREE ortofon CARTRIDGE
With selected Turntables - Ask in-store for details

PRO-JECT

RPM4 Turntable £349.95

Turntables & Tuners

Arcam DVA T61 Tuner.....	£249.95
Cyrus FM X Tuner.....	£499.95
Denon TU260L MKII Tuner.....	£119.95
Marantz ST4000 Tuner.....	£109.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 Turntable.....	£1049.95
Michell TecnoDec Turntable.....	£599.95
Project Debut Phono SB Turntable.....	£169.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Black).....	£119.95
Project Debut II Turntable (Colours).....	£134.95
Project 1 Xpression Turntable.....	£209.95
Pure Evoke 1 DAB Radio.....	£99.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB Tuner.....	£329.95
Sony STD777ES FM/DAB Tuner.....	£549.95

"If you want severe turntable styling on a budget, you need look no further than this. The shape of the main plinth here follows the outline of the record platter and arm to give a cut away look to the deck, and while it looks a bit like a cakestand with the dustcover in place, in use the RPM4 looks much more the business.

The RPM4 soon impresses with the quality feel of its arm and the screw-down clamp to hold and flatten records, and as soon as the stylus settles into the groove it's clear this is a superior player. There's much less surface noise than with the Debut, and the music has much greater scale and power, allied to closer detailing. That lovely organic feel you only seem to get from great vinyl playback is apparent... This is a very grown-up record player for reasonable CD player money: it's well worth exploring."

WHAT HI-FI? August 2002

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



Michell Gyro SE/RB300
£1049.95

STARTER SYSTEM

marantz®

CD4000 (Black) CD Player
PM4200 (Black) Amplifier

MISSION

m71i Speakers

List Price £420

£299.95 • SAVE £120

Includes Speaker Cable Worth £20 FOC

PURE DIGITAL DRX-701ES Digital Tuner £229.95

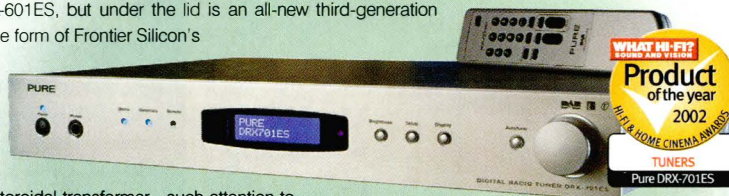
"This new tuner from the recently renamed Pure is based on the 2001 Award winning Videologic DRX-601ES, but under the lid is an all-new third-generation digital radio engine, in the form of Frontier Silicon's Chorus FS1010.

The tuner uses 24-bit/192kHz conversion with 4x upsampling and data interpolation, and is

powered by a low-noise toroidal transformer - such attention to

sonic detail pays off. Digital outputs are provided on electrical and optical feed, but most people will use the analogue out, and these sound very good indeed. As usual the tuner is subject to the signal quality off-air, but when it's fed from a high-quality outdoor aerial and a good signal it's capable of a crisp, powerful and detailed presentation. Even more populist music stations like Radio 6 benefit from the mix of a neutral balance and fine weight, while speech is also neutral and easy to follow... If you want a quality home tuner for digital radio, you need look no further."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ October 2002



WHAT HI-FI?
Product of the year 2002
WINNER OF THE HOME CINEMA AWARDS
TUNERS
Pure DRX-701ES

SAVE £20

CD Players

Arcam DIVA CD73T.....	£399.95
Arcam DIVA CD82T.....	£599.95
Arcam DIVA CD93T.....	£949.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T.....	£1299.95
Cyrus CD6.....	£599.95
Cyrus CD8.....	£999.95
Denon DCD485.....	£129.95
Linn Genki.....	£994.95
Linn Ikemi.....	£1949.95
Marantz CD4000.....	£99.95
Marantz CD5400.....	£149.95
Marantz CD17/II M.....	£799.95
Meridian 507.....	£1194.95
Musical Fidelity A308 ^{SR}	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD.....	£3994.95
Quad 99 CD-P.....	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII.....	£544.95
Roksan Caspian.....	£994.95
Rotel RCD1072.....	£594.95
Sony CDPXE570.....	£99.95

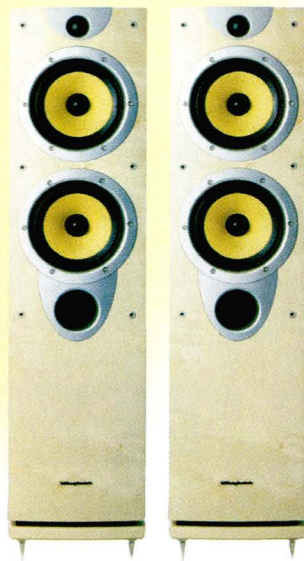
PLEASE NOTE:

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Advertisement valid until at least 25th September 2003. E&OE.

Wharfedale

Pacific Evolution 30 £649.95



"Evolution? This is more like a revolution: Wharfedale's new range is more than just an upgrade of its Pacific series. The changes are radical, but the most obvious transformation is the removal of the original's unattractive tweeter module, which was situated on top of the speaker. The tweeter housing is now sunk into the Evo 30 cabinet, the intention being to improve dispersion and benefit from the improved rigidity of the strongest point of the cabinet.

Listen to the Evolution 30s and the sonic changes leap out at you. Sitting on their chunky spikes and situated in free space, the speakers sound wonderful: low frequencies delve deep and delivery is punchy and fast...

You'll have gathered by now that we love these speakers. They're beautifully made and are great all-rounders."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ March 2003



Also Available
Monitor Audio
Silver S6 • £599.95

FREE
SPEAKER CABLE*
WORTH £65
WHEN YOU PURCHASE
WHARFEDALE PACIFIC
EVOLUTION 30 SPEAKERS

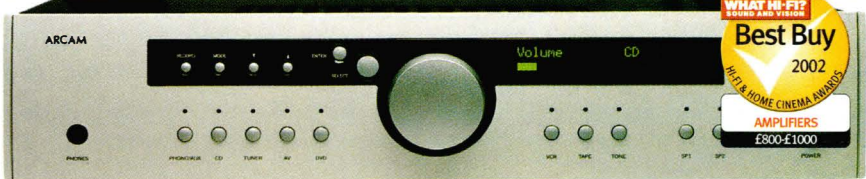


experience **more**



Amplifier Selection

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus Amplifier	£369.95
Arcam DIVA A80 Amplifier	£599.95
Arcam DIVA A85 Amplifier	£799.95
Arcam FMJ A32 Amplifier	£1149.95
Cyrus 6 Amplifier	£599.95
Cyrus 8 Amplifier	£799.95
Cyrus Pre X Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Cyrus Mono X Power Amplifier	(Each) £1199.95
Denon PMA355 Amplifier	£199.95
Harman Kardon HK670	£299.95
Linn Kolektor Pre Amplifier	£494.95
Linn LK85 Power Amplifier	£494.95
Marantz PM4200 Amplifier (Black)	£149.95
Marantz PM7200 Amplifier (Black)	£329.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power Amplifier	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308 Amplifier	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300 Amplifier	£3994.95
Quad 99 Power Amplifier	£549.95
Roksan Caspian Amplifier	£894.95
Rotel RA-01 Amplifier	£249.95
Rotel RA-1062 Amplifier	£594.95



ARCAM

SOUND & VISION

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £60
WHEN ANY DIVA CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

DiVA CD82T CD Player

£599.95

DiVA A85 Integrated Amplifier

£799.95

DiVA CD82T "Arcam's latest sounds like a more mature version of its little brother. On an initial listen the increased solidity and refinement are obvious, but over time the subtler dynamic shading and more assured handling of transients come to the fore... The Arcam CD82T is one of the best CD players available at this price point." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ Sept 2002

DiVA A85 "You'll have realised by now that we rather like this amp. It took us completely by surprise, and further strengthens Arcam's already impressive product range... The A85 is superb, and we can't wait to put it up against its peer in a group test." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ March 2001



B&W Bowers & Wilkins

DM602S3 Speakers £299.95

FREE SPEAKER CABLE* WORTH 10% OF THE
SPEAKER VALUE WITH ANY 600 S3 OR CDM NT SERIES SPEAKERS

"But the B&W 602 S3 are our winners. They're big and not particularly beautiful, yet if it were our money they're what we would buy. No rival can match the wide ranging dynamics or low frequency performance of these not so compact standmounters. Add all-round sonic excellence and the choice is easy. Give them sufficient space to breathe, then sit back and enjoy the music."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ Supertest Winner August 2002

Also Available (Pictured Right)
B&W CDM NT Series • Prices start from £749.95



ROTEL RCD-02 CD Player

RA-02 Amplifier

£379.95
£349.95

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £60
WHEN ANY ROTEL CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

RCD-02 CD Player "Whether it's the raw, and sometimes just plain barking vocals of Tom Waits, or the stinging guitar stabs of Pete Townsend on some old Who tracks, the Rotel is one of those players that can't help but bring a smile to the face - it's a breath of fresh air." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ Sept 2002

RA-02 Amplifier "The amp has a fast, detailed and yet satisfyingly full presentation. That allows it to make a fine job of the beats of Groove Armada's *Goodbye Century* set without losing sight of the fine details of the mix, and also husking out Marianne Faithfull's deliciously smutty vocals on *Kissing Time* with real relish. Add in decent levels of equipment - and the convenience of remote control, and we reckon Rotel has a winner on its hands." **WHAT HI-FI?** ★★★★★ August 2002





CYRUS

CD8 CD Player £999.95
8 Integrated Amplifier £799.95

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for nearly 20 years. Today their upgradeable, modular product range includes multi-room systems, home cinema and some of the world's finest hi-fi systems. Cyrus products are hand finished, half size die-cast enclosures and include a hidden digital command system that allows simple operation of any size system.

Joining the new Cyrus 8 amplifier is the stunning new high performance, upgradeable CD player, the CD8. Other new models in the 8 series include the AV8 digital AV processor and a new disc player, DVD8, featuring specially tuned video and audio circuitry.

Cyrus 8 Amplifier "The 8 is a large step forward from older generations of Cyrus amplifiers, and takes the company back into the leading pack in the sub-£1000 integrated amp sector.. The Cyrus 8 is a must-audition product."

★★★★★ January 2003



ROKSAN

Kandy KA1 MKIII Amplifier £544.95

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £60
 WHEN KANDY CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

"When we last reviewed Roksan's Kandy integrated amp in February it fought off serious competition to come top in a *Supertest*. This is its replacement, the MkIII.



Internal changes include an updated power supply for the preamp section and identical mono modules for the left and right power amp sections. Roksan also claims 50 percent lower distortion on line-level inputs and a whopping 150 percent less on the phono input. The rated power output is an impressive 120 watts per channel into 8 ohms, and this amp has a confident, muscular way with music that bears this out. But don't be fooled into thinking this amp is raw but unrefined. With Van Morrison's *Down the*

Road the Kandy has the guts to render the performance exciting and dynamic, but also the guile to deliver subtle details.



The upgraded Kandy MkIII is an excellent amp; the MkII version was impressive, but MkIII is a stunner. It betters all the amps here in the timing department, and has a wonderfully robust character that works well with all types of music. It manages to retain the good points of the MkII while adding extra resolution and subtlety. All the amps here have a place in the market. It's just that at £550 the Kandy really does set the pace."

★★★★★ October 2002

Speaker Selection

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One.....	£179.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three.....	£349.95
Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII (From).....	£1699.95
B&W CDM 1NT.....	£749.95
B&W CDM 7NT.....	£1249.95
B&W DM303.....	£179.95
B&W DM601 S3.....	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3.....	£299.95
KEF Q1.....	£249.95
KEF Q3.....	£399.95
KEF XQ1.....	£999.95
Linn Katan (Cherry/Maple).....	£634.95
Linn Ninka (Cherry/Maple).....	£1044.95
Mission m31.....	£129.95
Mission 780SE.....	£349.95
Mission 782SE.....	£899.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2.....	£199.95
Monitor Audio Silver S1.....	£299.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10.....	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20.....	£1499.95
Quad 22L.....	£894.95
Ruark Epilogue II.....	£344.95
Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30.....	£649.95

QUAD

11L Speakers £379.95

"Quad is best known for its superlative electrostatic designs, which start at £3500. So any £379 pair of speakers that carries the company's name has to be going some to avoid tarnishing the family reputation. The first surprise is that the 11Ls come in real-wood veneers covered with piano-gloss lacquer. This type of finish is almost unheard of at the £1000 mark, let alone at this price. Has anything been sacrificed for such a luxury finish? Here's the second surprise: apparently not.

The final surprise? Well, saving the best for the last, the sound quality of the 11Ls is phenomenally good. These are small speakers at just 33cm tall, but the scale and authority of



Also Available
Kef Q1 • £249.95

their performance is terrific. The laws of physics dictate bass extension limitations, but thanks to a clever dual rear firing port arrangement the 11Ls plumb the depths with the determination of a rottweiler, even when placed in free space.

If you're in the market for a pair of top quality standmounters these Quads are a must listen. Quite simply, they're good enough to scare the competition big time."

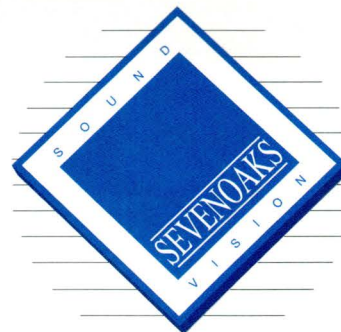
★★★★★ August 2002



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MUSICAL FIDELITY A3.2 Series

A3.2 CD Player £999.95

A3.2 Amplifier £979.95

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £100
WHEN ANY MF CD & AMPLIFIER PURCHASED TOGETHER

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



Special Edition



To celebrate twenty five years of high performance loudspeaker design and manufacture, Mission is proud to present special edition models of its highly acclaimed 780 and 782 loudspeakers. The 'SE' is more than just a 'go-faster' suffix. A selected version of Mission's unique microfibre treble unit is fitted and audiophile grade crossover components have been used. To reflect the special status of the 780se and 782se, these models in are finished in finely grained, Alder wood veneer.

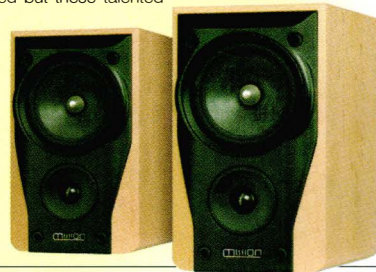
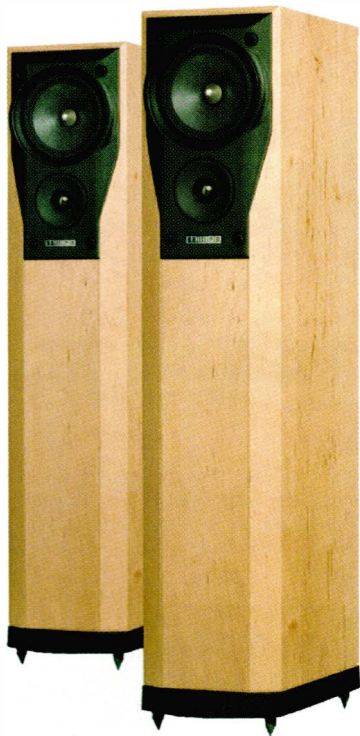
782 SE Speakers (Pictured Left) £899.95

"Well, with the exception of the alderwood-veneer finish, these floorstanders look identical to the standard model, although there's a new tweeter and crossover design. One of the advantages of the three-way configuration is that each driver deals with only a narrow section of the frequency range, and the designers optimise each unit to perform its respective task. Mission's engineers have excelled in this area: these elegant floorstanders sound beautifully balanced and few rivals under £1000 can match their wonderful levels of clarity. The 'special edition' tag is overused but these talented floorstanders are bona fide sonic stars." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ April 2003**

780 SE Speakers £349.95

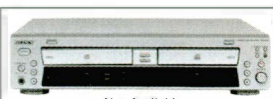
"The revamped Mission 780s are hugely enjoyable: anyone with up to £400 to spend should consider these standmounters. Mission's clever move has paid off." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ February 2003**

FREE SPEAKER CABLE* WORTH 10%
OF THE SPEAKER VALUE WITH ANY MISSION SE SPEAKERS



Pioneer

PDR609 CD-RW Recorder £169.95



Also Available
Sony CDR-W3
CD-RW Recorder • **£219.95**

"While it looks simple, the Pioneer has an impressive array of features, including the handy double-speed disc finalization and CD-Text compatibility. Internally, the PDR609 is a big step up from the Award-winning PDR-509 it replaced: the DAC is now a 24-bit/96kHz number, aided and abetted by Pioneer's Legato Link conversion technology, and it has 24-bit A-to-D conversion, which is ideal for copying your vinyl onto CD. If this is your plan, you'll appreciate that the Pioneer makes it easy to create first-rate copies from any source, helped by the manual recording-level controls. It was hard to tell our copy of Jim White's *No Such Place* from the original.

While the Pioneer's replay quality can't match the Marantz, it costs £120 less, which would buy you a lot of blank discs. If you've already got a dedicated CD player, we'd go with this recorder." **WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ August 2001**

Recorder Selection

- Harman Kardon** CD-R30 CD-RW **£499.95**
- Sony** RCDW3 CD-RW **£219.95**
- Yamaha** KX393 Cassette Deck **£119.95**
- Yamaha** KX580SE Cassette Deck **£199.95**
- Yamaha** CDR-HD1300 CD-RW **£529.95**



Product of the year 2002
Hi-Fi & Home Cinema Awards
RECORDERS
Pioneer PDR-609

pricing policy

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.



DENON

DVD-2900 Universal DVD
Region 2 **£799.95**
Multi Region **£849.95**

Marking one of most significant product introductions in the company's history, Denon has introduced the DVD-2900 player, the company's first-ever all-format universal disc player. Offering both DVD-Audio and Super Audio Compact Disc playback, it includes a host of leading-edge technologies and features to offer ultimate-performance multichannel audio and PAL progressive scan video playback.

Consistent with Denon's philosophy that a DVD player is a high-end audio component as much as it is a video playback device, the DVD-2900 is designed for unsurpassed sound quality. It incorporates leading edge Burr-Brown 24-bit, 192kHz audio D/A converters for the highest possible resolution and fidelity along with maximum surround sound separation and dynamic range. The DVD-2900 also offers full digital bass management for DVD-Audio and Super Audio CD, with selectable crossover slopes to optimise sonic performance with any loudspeakers and room environment. In addition, the player includes built-in Dolby Digital and DTS decoding with 5.1-channel outputs, plus built-in MP3 decoding that provides up to 10 hours of music playback from a single MP3-encoded CD-R or CD-RW disc. The video performance of the DVD-2900 is equally exceptional. The player incorporates precision Analogue Devices 12-bit, 108MHz video D/A converters, and Denon's PureProgressive Scan™ technology featuring the Silicon Image SiI504 decoding engine. The processor is capable of real-time computation at more than 6 billion operations per second-massive computing power that assures seamless, artifact-free image quality.



XQ One
Speakers **£999.95**



By combining technologies from its Reference and Q Series, KEF has introduced the new XQ speaker range.

Featuring KEF Uni-Q® 'point source' arrays for unrivalled off-axis performance and 'super audio' Hypertweeters™, the XQ range fully exploits the wide bandwidth of digital formats like SACD and DVD-A. The range comprises the XQ One and Three stand mounters, the XQ Five floorstanders and XQ Two c centre speaker. All XQ models are available in a variety of finishes.

When tested in a group test, the **XQ Ones** received top honours - "KEF's new XQ Ones really are in a class of their own. With a depth of insight that is unmatched, plus a sense of cohesion that is rare - the XQ Ones are startling" concludes Hi-Fi World - April 2003.

Please Note Price Excludes Stands



19mm Titanium Dome Hypertweeter™

Developed directly from the Reference Series and time-aligned with the main array in its own low diffraction steel pod, KEF's new 19mm titanium dome Hypertweeter™ has the same wide dispersion characteristics at 'super audio' frequencies. With a flat response to 55kHz, it provides the high frequency extension needed to take full advantage of SACD and DVD Audio.

ACOUSTICS
REL

FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE* WORTH £100
WHEN YOU PURCHASE ANY REL SUBWOOFER OVER £700

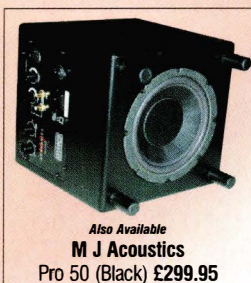
Strata III Subwoofer (Wood) £699.95

REL is an audiophile company who take great pride in designing and building their highly acclaimed subwoofers. Because of their total commitment to performance, REL sometimes adopt unusual solutions to otherwise straight-forward problems.

"The aggression of Rage Against The Machine's Take The Power Back is near-tangible, the midrange a spitting, spiteful companion for the tight, deep, air-agitating bassline. As for the more deft creations of Chick Corea, the REL's articulate nature serves subtly to underpin basslines, rather than swamp them. The adaptability makes the Strata III a highly recommended subwoofer - it's a very versatile, musical piece of kit, and it doesn't cost the earth."

WHAT HI-FI? ★★★★★ July 1999

SAVE £100



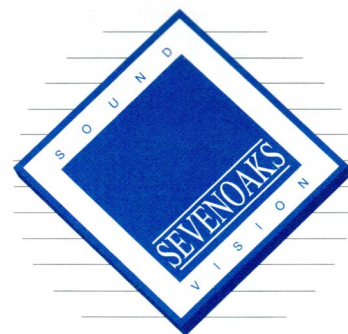
Also Available
M J Acoustics
Pro 50 (Black) **£299.95**



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experience **more**





outlets nationwide

- Bedford** 29-31 St Peters Street **01234 272779**
Birmingham Arch 12, Livery Street **0121 233 2977**
Brighton 57 Western Road, Hove **01273 733338**
Bristol 92b White Ladies Road, Clifton **0117 974 3727**
Cambridge 17 Burleigh Street **01223 304770**
Cardiff 104-106 Albany Road **029 2047 2899**
Cheltenham 14 Pitville Street **01242 241171**
Crawley 32 The Boulevard **01293 510777**
Edinburgh 5 The Grassmarket **0131 229 7267**
Exeter 28 Cowick Street **01392 218895**
Glasgow 88 Great Western Road **0141 332 9655**
Guildford 73b North Street **01483 536666**
Hull 1 Savile Row, Savile Street **01482 587171**
Ipswich 12-14 Dogs Head Street **01473 286977**
Leeds 62 North Street **0113 245 2775**
Leicester 10 Loseby Lane **0116 253 6567**
Lincoln 20-22 Corporation Street (off High Street) **01522 527397**
Liverpool 16 Lord Street **0151 707 8417**
Maidstone 96 Week Street **01622 686366** Open Sunday
Manchester 69 High Street, City Centre **0161 831 7969**
Newcastle 19 Newgate Street **0191 221 2320**
Norwich 29-29a St Giles Street **01603 767605**
Nottingham 597-599 Mansfield Road **0115 911 2121**
Oxford 41 St Clements Street **01865 241773**
Peterborough 36-38 Park Road **01733 897697** Open Sunday
Plymouth 107 Cornwall Street **01752 226011**
Poole Latimer House, 44-46 High Street **01202 671677**
Preston 40-41 Lune Street **01772 825777** Open Sunday
Reading 3-4 Kings Walk Shopping Centre **0118 959 7768**
Sevenoaks 109-113 London Road **01732 459555**
Sheffield 635 Queens Road, Heeley **0114 255 5861** Open Sunday
Solihull 149-151 Stratford Road **0121 733 3727**
Southampton 33 London Road **023 8033 7770**
Swansea 24 Mansel Street **01792 465777** Open Sunday
Swindon 8-9 Commercial Road **01793 610992**
Tunbridge Wells 28-30 St Johns Road **01892 531543**
NEW Weybridge 43 Church Street **01932 828525** (OPENING EARLY SEPTEMBER)
Witham (Essex) 1 The Grove Centre **01376 501733**
Wolverhampton Burdett House, 29-30 Cleveland St. **01902 312225**

within the M25

- Bromley** 39a East Street **020 8290 1988**
Chelsea 403 Kings Road **020 7352 9466**
Croydon 369-373 London Road **020 8665 1203** Open Sunday
Epsom 12 Upper High Street **01372 720720** Open Sunday
Holborn 144-148 Grays Inn Road **020 7837 7540**
Kingston 43 Fife Road **020 8547 0717** Open Sunday
Southgate 79-81 Chase Side **020 8886 2777**
Swiss Cottage 21 Northways Parade, Finchley Rd **020 7722 9777** Open Sunday
Watford 478 St Albans Road **01923 213533** Open Sunday

Please call to verify hours of business.

Contact our outlets via E-Mail outlet@sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

who are sevenoaks?

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

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

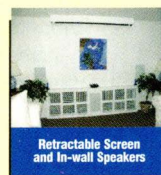
Friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle.

opening soon

Subject to legal completion, we are opening new stores in the following locations: **Ealing** (North London), **Staines** (Middlesex) and **Wilmslow** (Cheshire).

custom installation

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision's Custom Installation Service enables the integration of a home cinema or hi-fi system into your home as neatly and seamlessly as possible. All electronics can be hidden away, speakers discreetly mounted either in the wall or ceiling and the complete system operated via remote control.



Retractable Screen and In-wall Speakers

Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards in all areas and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for a multi-room system, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control or lighting system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has a diverse range of products available to cater for all your requirements.

sevenoaks online

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

For impartial advice and information, just click on sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

stock clearance

With 48 outlets nationwide, the Sevenoaks Sound & Vision group stock and display a wide range of products. As individual models and product ranges are changed or superseded, the preceding models are made available at a reduced price, for clearance. Visit our Website for an up-to-date list of the clearance stock, listed by outlet, within the Sevenoaks Sound and Vision group.

0% finance option†

Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock. †Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

product range

An outstanding selection of products are on display and available for demonstration at all Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores. However, some products may not be available in all outlets. Please call to check availability before travelling.

pricing policy

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

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

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

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

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPLING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

TOP BUYS



Arcam DiVA A65 Plus £370

Arcam's entry-level integrated is a terrific budget option. Its sound is both bold and articulate, making it a fine all-rounder at a highly tempting price.



Rotel RA-1062 £595

Rotel's latest is a true giant killer, packed with power and detail. It'll drive virtually any speaker and is capable of embarrassing a good many more costly designs.



AVI Type S21 MI £1,399

This AVI's full name is Lab Series Integrated Amplifier Type S21 MI – a lengthy moniker for such a neat little amp with a hugely accomplished sound.



Exposure XXIII/XXVIII £2,790

A beautifully natural and dynamic sounding pre/power amp combo – a transistor design with a touch of the valve amp sound.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO AMPLIFIERS**

Integrated amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	HEADPHONE SOCKET	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
	Arcam DIVA A80	600	Affordable integrated, with sophisticated control system, and crisp, detailed sound	5	●	●	●	85	245
	Arcam DIVA A85	800	Powerful, sophisticated and flexible – no longer quite the king of the sub-£1,000 crop but still a strong contender	7		●	●	105	244
	Cyrus 8	800	Impressive at low to medium volumes, and a clear improvement on its predecessor, but deteriorates at high power levels	7		●	●	70	239
	Denon PMA-255UK	140	Great beer-budget buy, with everything necessary for basic but decent high-fidelity operation	5			●	30	208
	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal, but a bit on the bland side	6		●		50	214
	Exposure 3010	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and entrancing sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
	Myriad Z140	450	Slimline beauty with genuine integrity and coherence, if relatively limited power	5	●	●	●	50	232
	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
	Naim Nait 5	825	As always with the Nait, less is more, and the Nait 5's 30 watts seem to go a lot further with some sources	6		●		30	214
	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
	Primare I20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
	Roksan Caspian MkII	895	An excellent all-rounder, with an articulate, assured delivery and excellent drive capability with a wide range of loudspeakers	6				70	239
	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
	Rotel RA-1062	595	The pick of this season's crop. Fabulous sound with the ability to drive almost any speaker in its path	5	opt	●	●	95	244
	Sugden A21a	899	This single-ended, Class A transistor amp has exquisite resolving ability and presence – an authentic classic	5				25	224
ABOVE £1,000									
	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
	AVI Lab Series S21 MI	1,399	Terrific power, control and resolution but effortlessly musical and fine value	6	opt	●		200	241
	Canary Audio CA-608	2,250	If you value the grand scheme of things and appreciate a bit of dynamic vigour this could be the amp for you	4				24	202
	Karan KA-i180	3,900	Lean, sharp and articulate, this impressively constructed heavyweight is almost up there with the audiophile pre/power elite	4		●		180	236
	Marantz PM-14 MkII KI	2,000	Highly sophisticated and well equipped, with a refined and relaxed sound quality that's hard to resist	7	●	●	●	100	228
	Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	3,999	If you audition one, you will want to be one of the handful of Tri-Vista owners	5	●	●	●	350	239
	Primare A30.1	1,500	Smooth, detailed singing quality, elegant appearance and healthy power yield	6		●		100	214

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO AMPLIFIERS**

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL	POWER OUTPUT (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £2,000										
	Arcam DIVA A85/P85	1,330	Integrated/power amp combo won't suit all systems, but delivers classic A85 virtues plus extra gravitas and range	●	●	7		●	85	225
	Arcam FMJ A32/P35	1,980	One of the few correctly matched integrated/power combinations, the sound has real gravitas and sophistication	●	●	7	●	●	100	227
	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5		●		221
	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●	●	6		●	140	212
	Croft Vitali/Series 5C	2,000	Oddball retro style and ergonomics, but truly magical voice coherence and projection, great transparency	●	●	3	●		30	216
	Densen Beat 200/300	1,985	Classy jet black cast boxes pack plenty of punch with good total musical coherence (remote £300 extra)	●	●	6	opt	opt	100	216
	Musical Fidelity A308CR	3,898	Bold-looking design with an absence of sonic signature that proves there is life after NuVista	●	●	4	●	●	250	231
	NAD Silver Series S100/S200	2,000	Beautifully built kit that sounds as good as it looks, with heaps of power	●	●	7		●	200	200
	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		●	50	213
	Rothwell Indus/Rubicon	1,488	Quirky valve combo with passive pre-amp has a lovely neutrality and consistency across a wide dynamic range	●	●	6			10	216
ABOVE £2,000										
	Audio Note M2Phono/P2SE	2,698	Wonderfully natural and inviting sound with great warmth and drama, but limited loudness capability	●	●	4	●		18	216
	Audio Research LS25/VT100	12,199	This is not so much a fine valve amp, as a fine amplifier, full stop (LS25 MkII/VT100 MkII)	●	●	6	●	●	100	216
	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		●	150	221
	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●				20	231

SPECS KEY **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **PHONO INPUT** Input sockets and onboard phono stage for a cartridge. Either MM (moving magnet) or MC (moving coil), occasionally both. **REMOTE CONTROL** A remote control is supplied with the amplifier. **HEADPHONE SOCKET** To drive your cans with. **POWER OUTPUT** Manufacturer's rated output in watts per channel.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO AMPLIFIERS** *continued*

Pre/power amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					ISSUE NUMBER	
				PREAMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL		POWER OUTPUT (W)
	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	●	300	241
EC	Classé CP-35/CA-101	2,797	Very classy Canadian pre/power combo with a natural, open and no-nonsense sound	●	●	4		●	100	237
EC	Electrocompaniet EC4.7/120DMB	3,448	Bulky Norwegian combo has wonderful transparency, wide dynamic range and fine musical tension	●	●	6		●	120	216
EC	Exposure XXIII/XXVIII	2,790	Highly natural and dynamic amplifier that offers the fluidity and energy of valves via transistors	●	●	6	opt	●	70	241
EC	Halcro dm10/dm68	75,900	Extravagant, extreme and massive amp combo will probably polarise opinions, but delivers stunning midrange clarity	●	●	5	●	●	225	243
EC	Krell FPB 700cx	14,998	Reference class amplifier may represent overkill in many systems, but when no compromise is called for, this is it	●	●				700	234
EC	Linn Klimax Kontrol	6,000	Beautifully executed example of Scots audio art, sounds as clean as it looks and is a lot more transparent than most	●	●	4		●		238
EC	Linn Klimax Twin	6,000	Super-slim stereo power amp uses advanced switch-mode power supplies to fast, engaging effect	●	●				125	230
EC	Mark Levinson No380/No334	9,490	Pre has precision and warmth with unusual configurability, power has refinement, authority and transparency to spare	●	●	6		●	125	195
	Naim NAC 202/NAP200	2,720	More sophisticated than its forebears with a fleet-footed sound that draws you into the music	●	●	8		●	70	241
EC	Naim NAP500	10,995	Wonderful neutrality, bandwidth and dynamic range, plus Naim's traditional leading-edge definition	●	●				140	208
EC	Naim NAC552	11,750	Extremely expensive preamp, but still solid value. Magnificent sound with fine flexibility and convenience	●	●	6		●		233
	Primare PRE30/A30.2	2,400	Beautifully built with great selection of features and serious power delivery	●	●	7		●	120	241
EC	Steinhart DVP 2XR/Fidelio 102 DD	7,440	Brilliantly musical, making even difficult material enjoyable, but gets hot and has ergonomic foibles	●	●	7	●	●	100	236
	TAG McLaren DPA32R/250MR	4,940	In a class of its own for extendibility and it's tremendously subtle, though it can sound constrained dynamically	●	●	6		●	250	230
EC	Unison Research Unico Pre/DM	2,590	Hybrid designs with a rich powerful performance that makes a fine balance between valve and solid state sound	●	●	3	●	●	150	242

AV AMPLIFIERS

Surround sound amps for music and movies

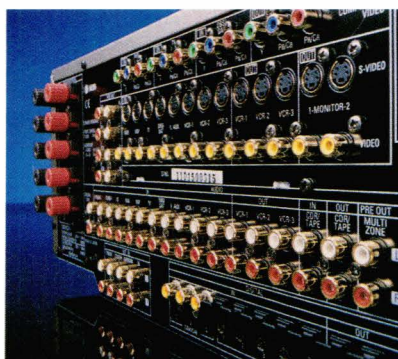


The multichannel, surround sound or AV amplifier is a popular option, thanks to the success of the DVD player and home cinema. Now you can buy five channels or more of amplification for the price of two. Now that multichannel music is also on the agenda, there's a lot to be said for a good AV amp or receiver (an amp with a radio tuner built in).

So if you fancy hearing what DVD-Audio, SACD or even music DVD-Video can do, then check out a multichannel amp and speaker set-up – they're stunning with movies and none too shabby with music.

AV amps are usually designed primarily for movies and come with digital processing for the various soundtrack formats – Dolby Pro-Logic (analogue), Dolby Digital and DTS, which offer discrete surround sound in 5.1 and 7.1 channel formats. More ambitious designs also offer THX post processing, designed to emulate the sound of the mixing theatre at home.

Processing in AV amps is needed because the surround formats on DVD-Vs are compressed, limiting their high-fidelity



potential. This is why new formats SACD and DVD-A, which don't use 'lossy' compression, were created for music.

All this processing power can take its toll on analogue formats. The best multichannel amps for music are often the simplest, but any that offer a complete bypass option with six-channel input are suitable. It's also worth looking at real power – five or seven channels of amplification are not easy to produce with a feeble power supply, and the cheaper amps in particular often fail to live up to the claims.

Q&A

HOW MANY CHANNELS?

Depends on how many speakers you want. Multichannel music discs come with six or 5.1 channels, but for new movies, 7.1 systems are where it's at. 7.1 set-ups also mean you have speakers directly behind you – preferable for music discs.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PROCESSOR AND AN AV AMP?

Processors don't have amplification on board and you need separate power amps. AV amps and receivers have processing and amps in the same box.

WHAT DOES THE .1 IN 5.1 STAND FOR?

This is the LFE (low frequency effects) or bass channel that is reproduced by a subwoofer.

HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

With DVD-Audio and SACD offering high-quality multichannel music, surround sound is no longer just a home cinema thing. An increasing number of people want to build a multichannel system that will do their music as well as

their movie DVDs justice, and the number of AV products delivering sufficient quality is on the increase. But most aren't cheap – building a top-quality system with five or more channels is inevitably more expensive than sticking with stereo.

There are some very decent integrated options below £1,000, though the best (and most costly) route is to buy a separate processor and power amp(s). Or you can add AV amplification to a stereo model you can't bear to part with.

TOP BUYS



Pioneer
VSX-D2011 £900
A feature-packed receiver, and a great sounding one to boot. Only Denon's AVR-3803 currently competes at the price.



Marantz
SR9200 £2,000
Few AV receivers manage to sound as musical as this one. A top all-rounder and an excellent multichannel solution.



Denon
AVC-A1SR £3,000
Denon's AV behemoth is arguably the best integrated multichannel amp to date – superbly cinematic and one of the very few with genuine 'hi-fi' music credentials.



Arcam
AV8/P7 £5,498
A fantastic achievement from this respected UK brand – an top-ranking AV processor and seven-channel power amp.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV AMPLIFIERS

Multichannel amplifiers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				RECEIVER	LINE INPUTS	7.1 COMPATIBLE	5-CHANNEL POWER (W)	ISSUE NUMBER
INTEGRATED AV AMPS								
	Arcam AVR200	800	Upgraded AVR100 with Dolby Pro-Logic II and some bass management. Great for stereo, a bit bass-light for multichannel	●	6	70	229	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Denon AVR-3803	899	Feature packed 7.1 channel AV receiver which needs a lot of studying but does everything well	●	11	110	239	
	Denon AVC-A11SR	1,800	Feature-packed with superb spatial processing, combined with powerful, though slightly opaque overall audio quality		11		235	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Denon AVC-A1SR	3,000	An AV amp with genuine high-res hi-fi credentials. Includes a ground-breaking 'wide bandwidth' digital audio link		8	170	232	
	Harman Kardon AVR 5550	850	The upgrade to the AVR 5500 comes with features that are actually of some use to the audiophile and a meaty sound to boot	●	9	85	240	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz SR9200	2,000	Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike	●	9		235	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pioneer VSX-D2011	900	Outstanding sonic performance for the price and a remarkable features list to boot	●	10	140	235	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Pioneer VSA-AX10i	2,700	Seven channel tour de force with automatic speaker set up and eq, excellent with music, movies and DVD-A/SACD		8	150	229	
	Sony VA-777ES	1,500	Smart circuitry gives this model unusual precision and transparency, and it is a fine all-rounder		9	100	210	
AV PROCESSORS AND POWER AMPS								
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Arcam AV8/P7	5,498	State-of-the-art processor (£2,999) and seven-channel power amp (£2,499). An excellent fusion of stereo and surround sound		7	180	235	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights		6	opt	120	219
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Copland CVA306/CVA535	3,748	Tube analogue six-channel pre transforms multichannel audio from a novelty into a genuine advance for the high fidelity art		5		125	236
	Cyrus AV8/3x Smartpower	2,900	Classic Cyrus sound translated to a multichannel arena, limited features and power, but civilised sound		3		105	238
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	EAD TheaterMaster 8000 Pro	5,200	Arguably the most 'musical' sounding AV processor to date – tested with the PowerMaster 8300 multichannel power amp		9		242	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PS-17/2 x SM-17	3,400	Classy and capable system, great steering, warm solid sound and high detail resolution, and some great gadgets		10	60	238	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6		230	
	Mynydd MDP500/MA240/360	3,799	Superb three-box, five-channel AV amplifier. Great with movies and beats most multichannel amps hands down with music		9	opt	120	215
	Naim AV2/NAPV175/NAP150	4,175	First truly credible multichannel system from Naim is idiosyncratic but offers excellent basic sound with modest spatial steering		5	50	238	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Parasound Halo C1/A51	8,500	Powerful and flexible processor/power amp combo with impressive sound. Excellent value – processor includes onboard screen		11	250	243	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare SP31.7/A30.5	4,200	Great all-round system which brings the qualities of good stereo high fidelity to a multichannel world		5	120	238	
	Roksan DSP/5ch amp/VSU	2,440	Clean, powerful stereo expanded seamlessly, if without distinction, to 5.1 channels		4	80	210	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	TAG McLaren AV32R EX	2,994	Flexible AV processor, unusually good with music. Excellent for multichannel system in standard or seven-channel 'EX' form		6		215	

SPECS KEY **RECEIVER** Integrated multichannel amp with built-in radio tuner. **LINE INPUTS** Input sockets for source components with a line level output: CD players, DVD players, tape decks, tuners, phono stages etc. **7.1 CHANNEL COMPATIBLE** The amp either has seven-channel in and outputs or in some instances is equipped with seven channels of amplification. **5-CHANNEL POWER (W)** Power output in watts per channel of all channels driven by the amp.



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Five Stars for Value

**Does the best price always mean the best deal?
Ask the UK's top twenty specialist hi-fi dealers.**

"I thought I had this buying hi-fi business sorted out. I bought all the hi-fi magazines and read them thoroughly, because I reckoned their experts knew exactly what they were talking about - at least a lot more than I did! It was reassuring to see the same product names cropping up regularly and I figured the writers' experience and guidance would steer me straight to the system of my dreams. The trouble is I've ended up more confused than when I started".

One reviewer said a product I fancied was absolutely brilliant but another said it was nothing special at all. How can that be? Surely one CD player is pretty much the same as another? And how can a loudspeaker that's one magazine's top recommendation not get so much as a mention in any of the others? I don't mind admitting it, I'm completely lost."

Plan B - I'm going for a deal

"So, I've decided to adopt plan B. I'm sure there can't be any really dramatic differences between all this gear and it's all bound to work together properly, so I'm going to check the price lists and the adverts and shop around for the best deal. I know getting the right hi-fi is important hey, I'm as mad about music as anyone but if I can get close to the mark and save a few quid, I'm sure I'll end up with a good system and be happy. I know there are specialist shops out there that do demonstrations and reckon they've got all the solutions but, to be honest, I'm a bit scared of going to one. I'd really welcome some advice and guidance but I don't know all the technical jargon and I'd feel daft sitting there trying to 'hear the differences' if I couldn't. Anyway, a friend told me that these shops only sell the really expensive gear and that they're not interested if you don't have loads of money to spend."

And so another hi-fi buyer starts his journey down the road to dissatisfaction, endless upgrades and a permanent overdraft.

There is only one way to buy a hi-fi system that will prove satisfying, reliable and

deliver true value for money, and that's through a specialist hi-fi dealer. Let's face it, you wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details and a photograph. Even if you're spending far less, say buying a jacket or a pair of shoes, you want to try them on to make sure they fit you.

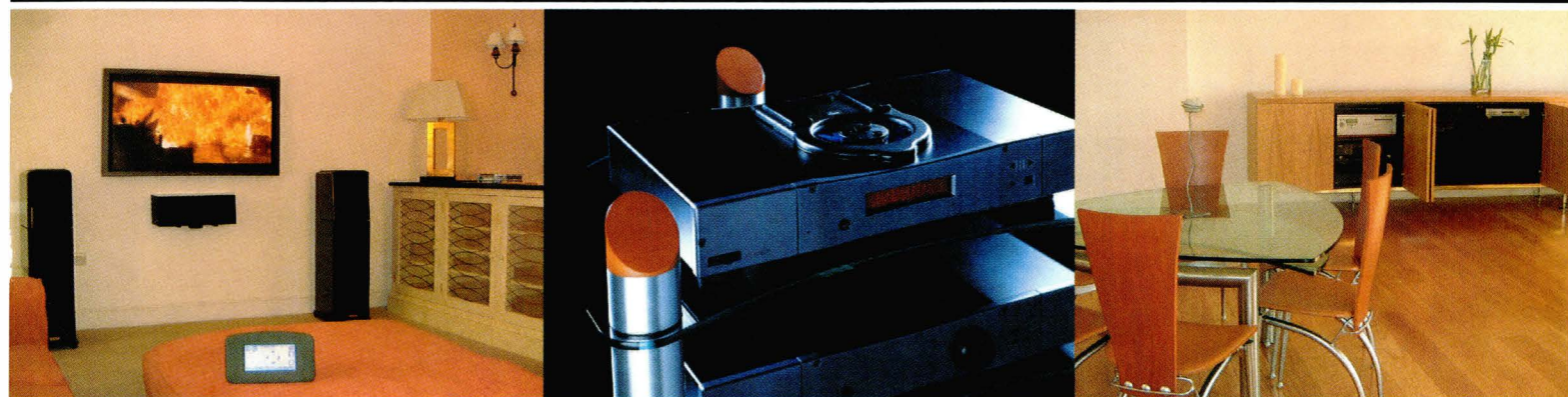
Buying a hi-fi system is no different. It doesn't matter what the specifications say or what the 'experts' think: if it doesn't measure up to what you want from a system, then it's not the right choice. Knowing that you've bought a room full of five-star favourites or best-buys is no consolation when you can't bear to listen to them for more than five minutes. Even that ten per cent discount on the price won't make them sound any better.

Buying or being sold to?

Mind you, most of us are easily suckered when it comes to buying hi-fi. Given the choice of venturing into the unknown territory of a specialist dealer's shop and exerting some influence over what we buy, or taking what looks like the easy route having adverts and magazine reviews push us along a path sweetened with discounts and special offers - we opt for the latter. We don't buy a system, we allow ourselves to be sold one. We side-line our own ideas about quality and personal satisfaction and buy someone else's opinion of what's good for us and good value for our money.

Take control!

Now there's a group of long-established, independent specialist dealers who are



“ You wouldn't think about buying a car if you couldn't take it for a test drive. You wouldn't buy a house solely on the strength of seeing the estate agent's details. ”

totally committed to putting the customer back in the driving seat. They're encouraging the buyer to take control with a little help and guidance provided where required. They know how difficult it can be to establish the true quality and worth of hi-fi and home cinema systems. They know that without experiencing the performance of the systems they offer, you can't possibly assess the value of them. That's why their idea of 'selling' is to play the systems for you and allow you to be the judge.

Listening to your choice of music in a peaceful, well organised demonstration room, you may be surprised and, almost

certainly, relieved to discover how easy it is to hear the differences between components and between systems. With the dealer's help and advice you will be able to make a clear and informed decision about what to buy. It comes down to trusting your own judgement rather than the opinion of a reviewer you've never met ... and who won't refund your money if you're not satisfied or be at the end of a phone to sort out any problems you might encounter.

The story doesn't end there. These shops won't abandon you once you've put your hand into your pocket. They won't leave you to set up the system you've selected as best you can. They'll install it in your home, make sure it sounds great, and make sure that you're entirely happy with the way it works.

Why bother?

There is, of course, one question that hasn't been answered: why should you and these dealers go to all this trouble? Well, from your point of view maybe it's because a good deal is about a great deal more than just price. unless you've got money to burn,

STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

you'll be living with your new system for years - years during which most of those five star products will probably stop shining quite so brightly. As far as the dealers are concerned, maybe they believe that taking care of their customers properly is a nicer way of doing business than just handing over boxes.

Listed below are 20 of the best hi-fi shops in the country. They all have lots of stars. You'll find them on the shop floor: they're the people waiting to guide customers towards hi-fi that will give them years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

TOP 20 UK SPECIALIST HI-FI DEALERS

LONDON

N1 GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road
020 7226 5500

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road, Battersea
020 7924 2040

W4 MARTIN-KLEISER
109 Chiswick High Road
020 8400 5555

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High St. 01233 624441

Beaconsfield **MARTIN-KLEISER**
9 London End
01494 681300

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
216 Moulsham Street
01245 265245

East Grinstead

AUDIO DESIGNS
26 High St. 01342 314569

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street Hampton Wick
020 8943 3530

Lakeside Retail Park

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
Dansk International
Furniture World
01708 680551

Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High St. 01268 779762

Ringwood, Hampshire

PHONOGRAPHY
Star Lane 01425 461230

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
132/4 London Road
01702 435255

Worthing PHASE 3 HI-FI

213-217 Tarring Road
01903 245577

MIDLANDS

Banbury OVERTURE
3 Church Lane
01295 272158

Birmingham

SOUND ACADEMY
152a High Street, Bloxwich
01922 493499

Leicester CYMBIOSIS

6 Hotel St. 0116 262 3754

Northampton LISTEN INN

32 Gold St. 01604 637871

Shrewsbury

CREATIVE AUDIO
9 Dogpole 01743 241924

NORTH

Cheadle THE AUDIO WORKS

14 Stockport Road
0161 428 7887

Oldham AUDIO COUNSEL

12/14 Shaw Road
0161 633 2602

Sheffield

MOORGATE ACOUSTICS
184 Fitzwilliam St
0114 275 6048

York SOUND ORGANISATION

2 Gillygate 01904 627108

SCOTLAND

Edinburgh

RUSS ANDREWS HI-FI
34 Northumberland Street
0131 557 1672

Glasgow STEREO STEREO

260 St. Vincent Street
0141 248 4079

N. IRELAND

Belfast LYRIC HI-FI

161 Stranmillis Road
028 90 381296

STEREO SPEAKERS

Speaker pairs for stereo sound



While loudspeakers are relatively straightforward in construction, they have one of the most difficult jobs in hi-fi – turning an electrical signal into an acoustic one. Most consist of two or more drive units in a box that usually has a port in it to make life easier for the cone in your mid and/or bass driver. Alternatives to this arrangement include panel speakers, which use electrostatic or ribbon technology, and horns, which use drive units in complex cabinets that greatly improve efficiency.

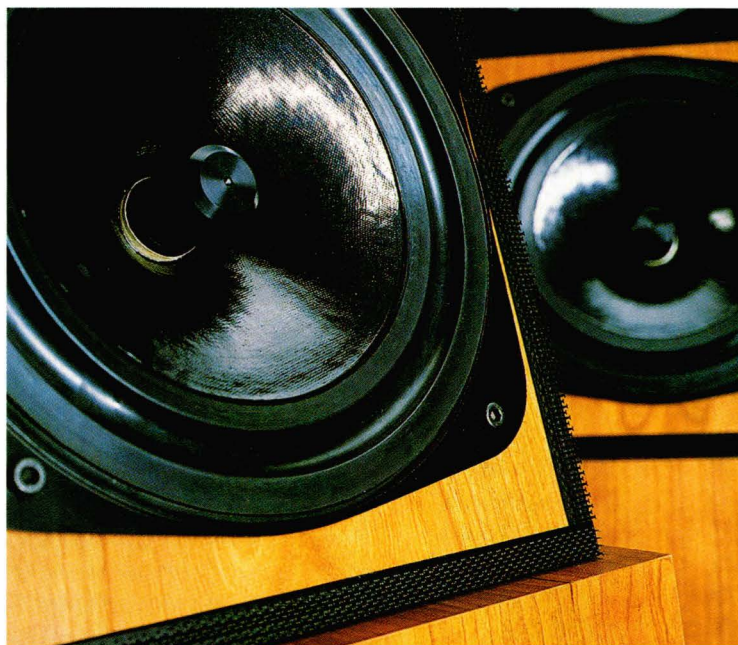
Box speakers are either designed to stand on the floor (floorstanders) or on a stand (stand or shelfmounts). Floorstanders have greater internal volume which can translate into greater efficiency and/or bass extension, but less substantial designs also introduce cabinet resonance and thus distortion. But they don't need stands and therefore have the aesthetic edge. Standmounts have less cabinet to vibrate and often score in terms of imaging and timing, but need good stands to work well.

Positioning

The closer the speaker is to a wall, the greater the reinforcement of bass. As all rooms differ, there's no simple formula for placement and experimentation will yield the best results. Altering the angle at which the speakers face the listener can also make a difference to balance and stereo image.

Going multichannel

Many stereo speakers can be augmented with centre and surround channels from the same brand to create a multichannel system. The most important element is a centre channel, which needs to match the stereo pair as closely as possible. For the best musical results, surrounds should be as per the front left and right channels, but if space or funds don't permit, smaller designs can be used quite effectively.



Choosing speakers

Because speakers and the rooms they are used in vary so much, choosing a pair tends to be quite subjective. To find some that will suit you, try to listen to a good variety to hear how they differ, and if possible, audition some at home. Tonal balance tends to vary the most, but is less important than more subtle factors such as timing and dynamics. Finally, listen with your ears not your eyes – great-looking speakers aren't necessarily great sounding.

Spikes

Floorstanding speakers and stands have threaded inserts for spikes that allow rigid coupling with the floor. These have the advantage of draining resonance from the speaker and giving tighter bass, but can result in more vibration getting back to the electronics and often cause the floor to resonate as well.

POWER

Though some speakers have a power rating, this isn't as informative as a rating for how difficult they are to drive, nor does it indicate wattage extremes for the partnering amp. In practice, an amplifier cannot be too powerful. Our listings quote ease of drive to indicate how much power

your amp needs to avoid a mismatch. An above-average (A+) speaker will work with amps rated at 25W plus, while an average (A) speaker will need 50W or more, and a below average (A-) speaker could require 100W plus to sound its best. These are guidelines rather than rules.

Q&A

IF SPEAKERS ARE RATED AT 75 WATTS, DOES THAT MEAN I NEED A 75 WATT AMP?

No, see the box on power for the full story.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR SMALL ROOMS?

Those designed to work close to the wall will be smoother in confined spaces. Speakers that have relatively dry, tight bass will also sound better.

WHICH SPEAKERS ARE BEST FOR BIG ROOMS?

Big, efficient, easy-to-drive designs are more likely to be able to fill a room better than compact models.

DO I NEED TO BUY CENTRE AND SURROUND CHANNELS FROM THE SAME BRAND AS MY STEREO SPEAKERS?

Yes, assuming that you're wanting to create a homogenous surround sound experience, where voices don't change when they move from one channel to another.

TOP BUYS



Tannoy
Sensys DC1 £449
A new dual-concentric main driver plus super-tweeter in a solid standmount box results in a neutral yet expressive speaker at a very tempting price.



Focal-JMLab
Cobalt 816 Sig S £999
One of the best all-round performers below £1,000, combining a lively and dynamic character with an unusually smooth and neutral balance.



B&W
Signature 805 £2,500
You won't get this degree of resolution out of a wider bandwidth speaker at anywhere near the price, and most of your music will sound considerably better through them.



Living Voice
Avatar OBX-R2 £4,000
Newly revised for 2003, the top model in Living Voice's Auditorium range is capable of delivering both the music's spirit and also its finest detail.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE STEREO SPEAKERS

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000										
	Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo 1	180	An unusually classy and sophisticated performer for the price; laid-back sound and good looks too	19,36,24		A	30	●		226
	ATC SCM12	999	Transparent, engaging and quick – a revealing, high-fidelity performer that's not afraid to bare all	22,39,25		A	62	●		237
	Audio Note AZ One	449	Delivers music with great gusto and enthusiasm, but also more than its fair share of coloration	23,83,29	●	A	30		●	215
	AVI Biggatron Red Spot	599	Good bass coherence and timing, but the lean and decidedly forward balance won't be to every taste	19,5,37,30		A	30		●	211
EB	B&W DM303	180	Chunky looking and lively sounding, with deep bass, a fine midband and a restrained top end	20,33,23		A	23		●	226
EB	B&W DM602 S3	300	Old-fashioned size/shape, but this timeless design has a rare combination of grip, authority and headroom	24,49,29		A	25	●		234
	B&W DM309	330	All the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●		235
EB	B&W DM603 S3	600	Excellent all-rounder, smooth for its price with fine bass and mid, though top might be more refined	20,91,29	●	A-	25	●		231
	B&W CDM-1NT	750	An uncommonly stylish and sonically self-effacing standmount that should be very easy to live with	22,40,29		A	30	●		208
	Blueroom Minipod	249	Wonderfully blobular styling aside, it's hard not to fall for the Minipod's openness, expression and detail	18,34,17		A	50		●	225
EB	Castle Conway 3	930	Lovely real wood finish and a beautifully balanced sound, fine dynamics and transients, but might have more 'air'	22,91,27	●	A+	30	●		237
	Castle Durham 3	399	A very attractive near-miniature wallmount with a lively and communicative disposition – lots of fun	19,37,22	●	A	45	●		227
	Dali Royal Tower	750	Cutely compact floorstander has a delightful liveliness and lightness of touch to match its luxury real wood finish	17,85,22	●	A	25		●	237
EB	Dynaudio Audience 42	400	An aristocrat of the vinyl-covered miniature breed. A terrific small speaker for the price	17,29,24		A	40	●		215
	Dynaudio Audience 62	729	Pricey but cute vinyl floorstander that is a class act sonically – lightweight, but clean and dextrous	20,86,26	●	A	30	●		231
	Elac JET 205	650	Sweet, smooth, clean and delicate tweeter justifies hefty price tag, but a little lacking in warmth and body overall	20,33,29		A	40	●		231
	Energy Connoisseur C-5	600	Has a marvellously even and neutral overall balance, if a little too laid-back with restrained dynamic expression	20,95,37	●	A+	23	●		240
EB	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19		A-	60	●		241
EB	Epos M12	499	Retains the beguiling midband coherence that made the ES12 such a favourite. A genuine class act	20,38,26		A	40	●		215
EB	Focal-JMLab Chorus 715	529	A fine all-rounder, this compact floorstander is lively and well balanced with good dynamic drive and grip	20,94,28	●	A-	22		●	227
	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 816	899	A little lean, cool and bright, but has righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	22,99,29	●	A	22	●		224
EB	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 816 S	999	Great all-rounder – lively and dynamic, smooth and neutral, marred only by a slight treble 'sting'	22,98,31	●	A-	25	●		242
	KEF Q1	250	Stylish if slightly small-sounding stand-mount with fine midband coherence; works well close to a wall	22,35,30		A	30		●	234
	Mission m71	129	Neat-looking and very discreet-sounding at a very nice price; experiment for best placement	17,29,28		A	40		●	226
EB	Mission m73	199	Good-looking floorstander. Dynamics are a little limp, but it has a good overall balance. Excellent value for money	20,88,31	●	A	25	●		215
	Mission 782SE	900	Definitely one of the prettiest speakers around. Very even balance but could sound more exciting	17,80,30	●	A	35	●		242
	Monitor Audio Bronze B2	200	A lively and entertaining speaker with tight controlled bass and pronounced midband	18,5,35,25		A	42		●	238
	Monitor Audio Silver S1	300	Super-quick sonics thanks to the C-CAM metalised drivers. Resolution and speed – a great value box	18,30,24		A	45		●	236
	Monitor Audio Silver S8	800	A thoroughly impressive all-rounder, notable for its wide dynamic range, excellent imaging and fine neutrality	19,90,27	●	A	20	●		237
	Monitor Audio Silver S10	1,000	Timing might be less than the best, but the full balance and fine dynamic range deliver plenty of detail.	20,100,27	●	A+	20	●		242
	MonoPulse 32	695	Very creative style and construction with an unusually vivid and communicative if less than smooth sound	21,98,23	●	A	30	●		245
	Neat Petite III	845	The treble is peaky, but this is still one of the most coherent and communicative miniatures around	20,31,20		A	30		●	211

SPECS KEY SIZE WXHXD (CM) Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **FLOORSTANDER** Speakers that don't require stands. **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively. **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus **ACT** Active – the speaker has its own in-built amplifier. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes – the smaller the number the deeper the bass. **FREE SPACE** The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

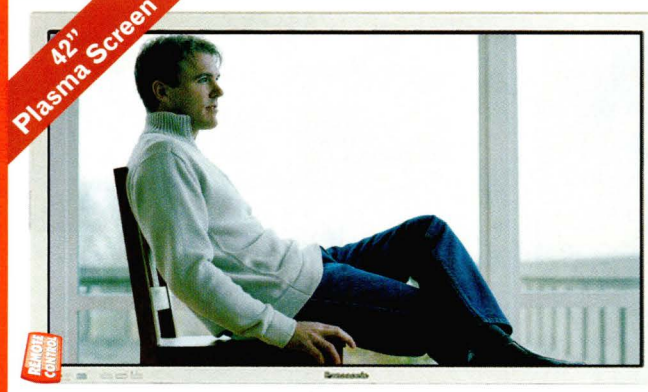
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- HI-FI CHOICE MAGAZINE

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

"Musical and controlled, but with good punch and drive... it sounds clean and controlled with the very low bass, while at the same time combining treble sweetness and openness to great effect..." said What Hi-Fi? SOUND AND Vision magazine. **TSP £139.95** **WERE £149.95 £99.95**

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

"The SD330E produces sharp edges, good blacks and decent contrast, all with minimal digital noise. It delivers a rich, highly watchable picture." said What Hi-Fi? SOUND AND VISION magazine. **TSP £139.95** **WERE £99.95**

Upgraded multi-region version available only £99.95

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£79⁹⁵
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SONY TAF-E570 **£50 OFF TSP**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

What Hi-Fi? SOUND AND VISION magazine commented that this amp is "as well suited to rock and dance as it is to classical or jazz... the kind of product Sony does so well - and a fine buy!" **TSP £169.95**

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LIFESTYLE STEREO SYSTEMS

DENON DM31 **£50 OFF TSP**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

What Hi-Fi? SOUND AND VISION magazine commented that this micro system "... produces a well-balanced and weighty performance." **TSP £229.95**

Matching speakers available from only £14.95 per pair

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED!

£179⁹⁵
BRAND NEW BOXED

UK'S CHEAPEST DVD PLAYERS!

SONY DVPNS905 **HALF PRICE FROM TSP**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

"The sound via the digital feeds is rich, detailed and at times amazingly powerful. And it plays music well, too, whether from CD or from a range of multichannel SACDs" - What Hi-Fi? SOUND AND VISION magazine. **TSP £399.95**

Upgraded multi-region version available only £199.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED!

£179⁹⁵
BRAND NEW BOXED

DVD/HOME CINEMA SYSTEMS

SONY DAVS550 **£150 OFF TSP**

Includes 5.1 AMP & DVD PLAYER

Also available Sony DAVS888 for £499.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

"Not only looks good, it performs brilliantly as well..." - What Hi-Fi? SOUND AND VISION magazine. **TSP £399.95** **WERE £299.95**

Upgraded multi-region version available only £279.95. R2 Stocks Ltd

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(NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER/PROMOTION)

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Panasonic DMR-E50 **220 OFF TSP**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

"The strength and depth of the colours makes movies jump out at you, while the precisely rendered detail provides startling clarity. We couldn't spot one untidy or bleeding edge... the DMR-E50 is unbeatable" - What Video magazine. **TSP £449.95**

Upgraded multi-region version available only £299.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED!

£279⁹⁵
BRAND NEW BOXED

HOME CINEMA RECEIVERS SALE!

marantz SR5300 **£100 OFF TSP**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION *****

"The Marantz SR5300 is stacked full of features and gives great performance. It's perfect for anyone looking for the best in both home cinema and hi-fi sound, and comes at an affordable price." **What Home Cinema magazine. TSP £399.95**

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED!

£299⁹⁵
BRAND NEW BOXED

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12-4PM
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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE **STEREO SPEAKERS** *continued*

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (WHD) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE-TO-WALL
	Opera SP-1	525	A strong case for serious hi-fi with curves. Sound is clear, crisp and detailed	16,29,23		A	50	●	225
EC	PMC DB1	555	Lacks a little weight and authority, but beautifully balanced, free from boxiness, and loads of fun for a tiny	16,29,24		A	50	●	240
EC	PMC TB2	700	A worthy successor to the TB1, which sets a high standard in its size/type for neutrality and transparency	20,41,31		A	30	●	211
	Sonus Faber Concerto Home	999	Looks good and sounds better. Great midband communication skills, well aligned for close-to-wall siting	24,36,34		A	40	●	233
	Spendor S3	600	Beautifully voiced, unboxy, lacks some dynamic and loudness capabilities. Best suited to small rooms	17,31,21		A-	30	●	223
	Spendor SR5	1,000	This wall-mount very cleverly avoids the usual colorations, delivering a very dynamic if rather dry sound	31,31,18		A+	50	●	240
	Tannoy Eyris 1	600	Pricy but very cute wallmount miniature; oddball, but has marvellous midband subtlety and delicacy	17,35,26		A+		●	227
	Tannoy Eyris 2	999	This super-slim and cutely different-looking floorstander is very communicative, despite weak treble	17,91,26	●	A	20	●	231
EC	Tannoy Mercury mX3-M	229	Beautifully balanced and voiced, with low coloration and good transparency, but could be more dynamic	19,87,25	●	A+	45	●	234
EC	Tannoy Sensys DC1	449	Modest sensitivity but beautifully balanced with fine authority at a very realistic price	21,41,29		A	40	●	245
EC	Tannoy Sensys DC2	649	A great-value speaker combining a super-tweeter and Dual Concentric drive unit at a real-world price	21,97,29	●	A	35	●	242
EC	Triangle Antal XS	875	Ugly duckling has a rather tasty sound, with plenty of vigour and excitement	22,108,30	●	A-	40	●	219
ABOVE £1,000									
EC	ATC Active 20	2,538	30k + 300W equals resolution and bass that most amp/speaker combinations dream about – a bargain	56,28,36		act	45	●	240
EC	ATC SCM10A	1,269	Stylish, active powerhouses with plenty of subtlety when required (balanced connection only)	23,39,31		A	45	●	221
	ATC SCM20 SL	2,051	Not too transparent, but has great dynamic grip and bass to die for. Needs a powerful amp	24,44,33		A-	65	●	219
EC	ATC SCM50A SL	7,255	350W of power combine with superb drive units and a 48kg cabinet to provide alarming resolution	35,72,48		A	38	●	218
	Audio Note AN-E/D	1,520	This classic large standmount might have throwback aesthetics, but it delivers an exceptional all-round sound	36,79,28		A+	20	●	204
	Audio Note AN-J/SPe	1,675	Retro styling, but a vigorous and dynamic performer that creates fine musical tension	33,59,25		A	38	●	219
	B&O Beolab 5	10,000	Radical, environmentally independent active speaker has exceptional bass, neutrality, and imaging	49,97,49		n/a	<20	●	244
	B&W Nautilus 805	1,400	A small-sounding loudspeaker dynamically, but very stylish, clean and 'unboxy', delivering loads of detail	24,42,31		A	28	●	199
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	●	A-	34	●	183
EC	B&W Nautilus 801	8,500	The 801 is a magnificent loudspeaker in nearly every respect, but it is one that likes to play loud	52,111,69	●	A-	34	●	186
EC	B&W Nautilus 800	11,000	Unequivocal challenge for world domination. One of the most revealing speakers around	45,120,65	●	A-	<20	●	231
EC	B&W Signature 805	2,500	Staggering transparency and resolution for the money, one of the best standmounts money can buy	24,42,34		A-	42	●	232
	BC Acoustique Araxe	1,300	Neat compact floorstander is a very lively communicator, if a little short on deep bass grunt	21,92,30	●	A-	40	●	204
	Beauhorn B2.2 Revelation	3,984	Magnificent midband and fine overall balance but limited bass is best with small-scale material	34,130,75	●	A+	80	●	244
EC	Castle Harlech S2	1,000	Improved Harlech is slightly aggressive, but lots of fun, and very good-looking too	20,96,33	●	A	50	●	219
	Castle Howard S3	1,350	A solid all-rounder with uniquely spacious imaging, bit pricy compared to some though	21,99,32	●	A+	38	●	229
	Dali Noble	1,059	Easy on the eye and the ear, but unerringly musical. Some might prefer harder-hitting dynamics and bass	18,117,23	●	A	41	●	225
EC	Dynaudio Audience 82	1,460	Bulky, with vinyl finish, but offers exceptional neutrality, bass extension, power handling and loudness potential	22,106,36	●	A	30	●	229
	Dynaudio Contour 1.3 MkII	1,198	Outstanding performer among compact standmounts; neutral, with fine punch and dynamic range	20,38,29		A-	45	●	219
EC	Ferguson Hill FH001	6,853	Looks and sounds wonderful, with realistic dynamic expression, but needs careful amp matching and sub(s)	90,166,80	●	A+	180	●	242
EC	Focal-JMLab Cobalt 826	1,279	Big three-way French floorstander is lively, informative and mostly neutral, if a tad bright	22,103,34	●	A-	35	●	219
EC	Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia	3,500	New 'Be' version is clearly an exceptional standmount, capable of revealing the innate quality of the music	25,42,5,38		A	50	●	245
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●	233
EC	Infinity Intermezzo 2.6	1,600	Bi-amp speaker sounds laid back and 'disappears' acoustically; highly enjoyable, looks and sounds great	25,38,29		A+	27	●	233
	KEF Reference Model 205	4,000	Great looking speaker with a smooth, neutral and slightly 'cool' sound that could be tauter and more exciting	29,116,43	●	A-	20	●	245
	Leema Xen	1,000	A true micro-mini-monitor with remarkable powers of analysis and great musical insight, if a touch forward	14,22,23		A-	50	●	245

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS						
				SIZE (WxH) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE OF DRIVE	BASS FROM (W)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
EC	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	New improved version even better than before. Beautifully natural and expressive – a real universal soldier	22,97,28	●	A+	35	●		239
EC	Living Voice Avatar	2,700	Dynamic and highly resolved, yet physically discreet design with a relaxed balance	22,104,27	●	A+	40	●		218
EC	Living Voice Avatar OBX-R2	4,000	Has Dynamics, tonal colour, detail, space and time resolution in spades. External crossovers require extra cabling	22,100,27	●	A+	35	●		244
	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	●	A-	46	●		245
BB	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22		act	45		●	214
	Naim Allae	1,990	Chunky little floorstander has a 'cold' overall balance, but remarkable powers of musical analysis	24,94,28	●	A	40	●		229
EC	Naim NBL	6,925	Elegant, large floorstander is exceptionally informative, with an awesome dynamic range and dry, forward balance	29,116,47	●	A-	20	●		200
EC	Naim SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	●	A-	20		●	232
EC	Neat Ultimatum MFS	2,995	Wonderful five-driver standmount sounds bigger than it looks. Very spacious and informative, if a little bright	22,38,37		A+	25	●		241
EC	Neat Ultimatum MF9	8,500	Superb musical communicator with splendidly deep and agile bass and fine open neutrality	22,150,40	●	A-	20	●		226
	PMC LB1	1,150	Still fully competitive eight years after our original review, this genuine compact monitor is now a modern classic	17,5,53,26		A-	40	●		199
BB	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	●	A	20	●		204
EC	PMC IB2	6,150	Stunning in an understated way, this speaker creeps up on you and hooks you with its transparency and power	33,74,47		A-	25	●		237
EC	Royd Revelation RR2	1,199	Pretty little floorstander delivers genuinely deep bass without 'thump'; lovely clean, open midband too	19,89,18	●	A-	20	●		221
	Ruark Prologue II	1,250	Attractive shape with a punchy and unusually open and neutral sound that's impressively free from harshness	22,5,96,24	●	A+	40		●	229
	Ruark CL20	1,650	This punchy rock'n'roller has plenty of drive and enthusiasm, but can sound aggressive	23,93,34	●	A	38	●		219
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	●	A	20	●		211
	Spendor SP2/3e	1,295	Large standmount is polite to a fault, but has beautiful 'hear-through' transparency – a genuine classic	28,55,33		A+	50	●		219
	Spendor S8	1,700	Classic midband neutrality and transparency, the S8 has great subtlety and fine bass grunt too	23,92,32	●	A+	40		●	229
EC	Spendor S9	2,500	Meaty three-way with superb bass and explicit mid – one for detail fans	24,99,8,38	●	A+	37	●		223
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD8	4,000	This stylish speaker is a splendid all-rounder, with fine dynamics, precise imaging and minimal coloration	30,5,85,5,30	●	A-	25	●		240
EC	Tannoy Dimension TD10	5,000	Extremely competent and rhythmic speaker, a futureproof supertweeter and detail to die for	35,101,37	●	A-	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	●	A-	23	●		225
	Triangle Zays 222	1,295	Wonderful freedom from time-smear gives invigorating and realistic dynamics, but colorations are also obvious	26,116,32	●	A	22	●		242
	Vandersteen 2Ce Sig	1,990	Very superior midband neutrality, impressive freedom from boxiness and splendid stereophony. A classic	41,109,26	●	A-	30		●	229
EC	Wilson Benesch Chimera	15,000	Elegant with lovely sonic delicacy and plenty of weight too. Works best at low levels, but a difficult load to drive	24,145,55	●	A-	20	●		234
EC	Wilson benesch Discovery	5,500	Innovative three-way with built-in stand, combines great subtlety with weight and headroom	23,47,38	●	A-	45	●		212

AV SPEAKERS

Speaker solutions for multichannel surround sound



Multichannel speaker systems have a front left/right (L/R) stereo pair, a centre or dialogue channel, two (5.1) or four (7.1) surround speakers and often a subwoofer. For best results, each of these speakers bar the sub should be identical. The problem is that few surround systems are dedicated to music and perform a home cinematic role as well, meaning the centre speaker has to sit above or below a

video monitor. Centre channels are usually wide and short for this reason.

This should not be a barrier to great surround for music and movies however, as many brands make centre channels with a very close sound to their L/R designs.

Music vs movies

High-resolution SACD and DVD-A music recordings tend to be mastered with

surround speakers in the ITU standard position which is as far behind the listener as the front channels are in front. 5.1 movie soundtracks tend to place surround channels not so far behind and to the side of listeners. Usually, practical limitations will dictate a limited range of placement options, but if you are a dedicated music fan, check out the ITU set-up regulations in the booklet supplied with SACD discs.

SET-UP

Ideally you should set up surround speakers with as much care as you would stereo systems, but practical issues tend to have a significant bearing on surround and centre speaker placement. Surround channels can be floorstanding or wallmounted, and centres usually have to perch on the TV or underneath it. Given these limitations, adjust your L/R front

speakers to give the best tonal match with the centre. If there's more than just you listening, 'toe in' the speakers so that their axis crosses in front of the listening position – this gives a wider stereo image. And if there's a subwoofer it should be placed near the front speakers. Use a sound pressure metre (available from Tandy among others) to accurately set levels.

SUBWOOFERS

Subs start working where stereo speakers run out of steam at low frequencies. The idea is to create deeper, better-controlled bass rather than more of it. They usually have onboard amplification (active) and connect to either the LFE (Low Frequency Effects) channel in a home cinema set-up or the speaker terminals in a stereo set-up.

TOP BUYS



B&W
600 S3 package £900
Incorporates 602s, 601s and an LCR 600 centre speaker. Great in both stereo and multichannel surround modes.



KEF
Q AV7 £1,300
With the latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value.



Mission
m5 package £1,450
A five-speakers-plus-sub package giving a strong performance with both music and film soundtracks. Excellent value.



Mirage
Omni 2 £2,650
Dark tonality but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice for music and movies alike.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

AV SPEAKER PACKAGES

Multichannel speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				EASE OF DRIVE	NUMBER OF SPEAKERS	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL	ISSUE NUMBER
	B&W 300	900	An excellent compromise between the requirements of music and those of home cinema (inc. subwoofer)	A-	6	27	●		241
<input type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures (uses 602 S3s at the front)	A-	5	22	●		224
	Castle CAV Sterling	1,250	Lovely real wood veneers. Sound has fine dynamic drive and expression, but can sound a little hard	A	5	28		●	224
	Dynaudio Audience 42	1,142	AV package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	B-	5	53	●		241
	Focal-JMLab Cobalt	1,797	A little lean and bright, but with righteous dynamic expression and lively communication skills	A	5	22	●		224
	Focal-JMLab Electra	3,017	Bold, solid system, tremendous consistency and easy to expand with an added subwoofer	A	5	50	●		232
<input type="checkbox"/>	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●		232
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as does big bass for movie fans	B	6	28	●		241
	Mordaunt-Short Declaration 500	1,600	Good value vinyl THX Select package with Power Towers. Good authority, but must be 5.1-connected	A	5	25		●	210
	PMC FB1/TB2	2,485	Classy, if bulky and pricey, package has good transparency, coherence and weight	A	5	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	A	5	25		●	210
	Spendor S-Series	1,650	Ultra-tinies lack some dynamic and loudness capabilities, but beautiful voicing and freedom from boxiness	A	5	30		●	224
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy mXAV4	500	Lacks some grunt, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence. Excellent value	A	5	20		●	210

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s) **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

SUBWOOFERS

Bass speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			
				SIZE WxHxD (CM)	POWER (W)	BASS FROM (Hz)	ISSUE NUMBER
	Acoustic Energy Aesprit 308	650	Tuneful and dynamic sound with music or movies from this compact sub, which comes with a handy remote	41,37,30	200	35	225
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input type="checkbox"/>	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
	REL Strata III	700	A little more bottom octave might have been preferable, but in terms of agility and coherence, this is a fine hi-fi subwoofer	42,52,33	100	20	210
	REL Storm III	900	Excellent sub with powerful, detailed and deep bass. Comprehensive facilities, including flexible filter adjustment	42,62,33	150	18	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Stadium III	1,500	It's a bulky piece of furniture, but offers superior filtering as well as an ability to delve deep into the bass nether regions	59,56,39	200	16	217
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5.40	300	30	225
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72x48x72	200	20	239

SPECS KEY **SIZE WxHxD (CM)** Width, height and depth of one cabinet in centimetres. **POWER (W)** How many watts the onboard amplifier of active models delivers.
BASS FROM How low the sub goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass

CABLES



Wires to hook your system together



Hi-fi cables come in two varieties: interconnects and speaker cables.

Interconnects come in preset lengths, generally with RCA phono plugs attached, though some equipment uses XLR connectors for balanced connection. Speaker cable is sold by the metre and can be used without plugs or can be fitted with screw or solder-on types.

Choosing the best cables is not quite as

straightforward as it might seem. One problem is that components interact with the cables you use and this often results in audible effects, but there are few cables that are fundamentally incompatible with any components, and we recommend the advice of a good dealer. In any case, you should look to spend as much as you can afford.

Digital cables come in two flavours: electrical and optical. In most instances

electrical varieties sound better than optical, but if you are after a smoother sound the light carriers have the advantage, as they do if long lengths are needed (10m+). Optical outputs tend to have Toslink connectors (around 99 per cent), but some electrical digital outputs are of the superior BNC type, which uses a bayonet-type socket. Check which type your digital component has before buying a digital interconnect.

Our favourite CABLES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Interconnects and speaker cables

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS								
	Chord Calypso	30	Informative, clear sound at a decent price	●				211
	DNM TBB75	75	Bass not always completely consistent, but sound has great clarity and insight		●			241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ecosse The Composer	30	A high degree of realism and delicacy, and a fantastic price (0.8m)	●		●		211
	Ecosse Reference Diva	100	Very good performance in all areas, with particularly fine, tuneful, bass (0.8m)	●		●		224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ixos Gamma Audition II	30	Detailed and neutral, with just a hint of pleasant mellowness	●		●		211
	Kimber Silver Streak	242	Not the cheapest around, but more than justifies itself with terrific poise and balance of virtues	●		●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●		224
	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●		211
	Townshend Audio DCT100	99	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●		234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●		224
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul The Well	49	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul D102 Mk III	79	Hybrid conductors (carbon and copper) and intelligent construction give strong bass and excellent detail	●		●		234
DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS								
	Audioquest Digital One	35	A neutral and capable cable that adds little or no character to the sound			●		E 207
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E 207
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E 234
	Ross OP004	20	Sounds much like most other Toslink leads: slightly lacking detail, but good value					O 207
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E 241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	van den Hul Optocoupler II	49	Noticeably has the edge over other optical leads, but still second best to electrical types					O 234
SPEAKER CABLES PRICE PER METRE								
	Black Rhodium S130	20	Bi-wire cable with great kick in the bass, though the treble can sound dry and recessed	●		●		227
	Black Rhodium S300	18	Tight, precise and extended bass makes this a great cable for rock 'n' roll	●		●		241
	Ecosse Reference MS2.3	23	Favours excitement over refinement: can be slightly bass-shy, but plenty of life	●		●		227
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Electrofluidics 2020	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available	●	●	●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ixos Gamma 6003	3	A little midrange dryness, but bass is among the best at this price; strong and consistent	●		●		203
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●		192
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●		227
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●		203
	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●		241
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●		192
	QED XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●		234
	QED Profile Silver 12	15	Very slightly laid back, but good tone and detail – wears its achievements lightly	●		●		215
	Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●		203
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Townshend Isolda DCT	150	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●		241

SPECS KEY **STRAINED** Cable has a number of (usually) twisted strands to conduct the signal. **SOLID CORE** Cable has one or more individually insulated strands to conduct the signal. **COPPER** Material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **SILVER** Alternative material used to form the conducting element of the cable. **DIGITAL CABLE TYPE** E – electrical, O – optical. Cables are one metre length unless otherwise stated.

HEADPHONES

For your ears only



Headphones come in several varieties and some are designed for particular usage. The majority of 'cans' use dynamic cone and coil-type drive units and can be used with anything from a personal stereo to a dedicated amplifier. Other types also exist, most significantly electrostatics that use a charged panel membrane to produce a distinctly refined sound. These are supplied with their own dedicated amplifiers, which tends to increase the price.

Cans are split into several types. There are open and closed-back designs, the latter being best for noisy (or noise sensitive) environments as they minimise leakage and intrusion. Open-back types tend to have a more open, less 'in-head' sound. There are also three variants of earpad design: circumaurals enclose the ear and press on your head, supra-aurals press on the ear and intra-aurals sit in

the ear and are particularly popular with personal stereo users.

Getting the best from your cans

Getting a good result with headphones is not quite as straightforward as it should be. Merely plugging them into the output on your CD player or amp will not give particularly engaging results unless you are very lucky. If you are planning on serious listening, invest in a dedicated amp – the increase in dynamics is not in the least bit subtle. A variety of models are made and prices start at around £80 for a QED, a little more for designs from, say, Creek or Musical Fidelity. And if you're really into cans, look up the valve-powered Earmax.



Our favourite HEADPHONES

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo headphones

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS							
				ELECTROSTATIC	SUPRA-AURAL	CIRCUMAURAL	OPEN BACK	CLOSED BACK	WEIGHT (g)	3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR	ISSUE NUMBER
	AKG K44	20	Lively, enjoyable and remarkably detailed: a bargain		●			●	190	●	219
	AKG K100	36	Leather-clad groover with bags of power and clarity, for a respectable asking price	●				●	190	●	205
	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270	●	230
	AKG K1000	550	Neutral, analytical and completely out of the head sound, suitable for connection to speaker outputs only				●		270	●	244
	Audio Technica ATH-D40fs	105	Detailed and involving sound with a professional 'studio' quality appeal			●		●	250	●	194
	Beyerdynamic DT990	150	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●			●	200	●	194
	Grado SR80	110	Not perhaps as neutral as some but they communicate well and that's the point of the exercise		●			●	200	●	230
	Philips HP890	70	A remarkably sophisticated and very comfortable headphone			●	●		330	●	219
	Sennheiser HD590	160	Assured and confident headphone with very low coloration and great comfort			●	●		270	●	205
	Sony MDR-CD480	40	Generally neutral and nicely detailed – comfortable too			●	●		250	●	219
	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●					295	●	205

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** in grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc.

JULY 2003 / ISSUE 243

- Group Test: Digital audio recorders
- In-depth digital recording feature
- Arcam FMJ CD33 CD player
- PMC OB1 loudspeaker

AUGUST 2003 / ISSUE 244

- Ultimate Group Test: Stereo amps
- Group Test and Feature: Tonearms
- B&O Beolab 5 speaker
- Beauhorn B2.2 Revelation speaker

SEPTEMBER 2003 / ISSUE 245

- Ultimate Group Test: Loudspeakers
- The science of making music: Pt 1
- Focal-JMLab Micro Utopia Be speaker
- Arcam DVA A80 integrated amp

HI-FI CHOICE BACK ISSUES

Back issues from January 2000 onwards are available by mail order. They cost £4.00 (UK) or £6.95 (overseas). Both prices include p&p. You can order by phone on:

0870 444 8650

AUDUSA

AUDUSA - OOM Silverlink Mono Crystal balanced speaker cable - conductor of 3mm diameter (approx 8 gauge), stranded silver on OFHC, plus three strands of Mono Crystal Copper for improved bass performance. Mylar infill and with designed in protection against RF and EMI. Cable OD 14.72 mm Priced at £12.95 per meter



AUDUSA EUPEN CSA 2.5 MAINS CABLE - HI FI CHOICE SEPT 2001 BEST BUY

GNLM 05/04 and GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) Cable with FERRITE TECHNOLOGY - A polymer material mixed with a considerable quantity of homogeneously fine high quality ferrite powder. is extruded around the copper conductors. As a ferromagnetic material, it will go through hysteresis loops whenever it is under influence of an alternating magnetic field. Consecutively magnetizing and demagnetizing the material will cause considerable losses of high frequency energy. This energy is absorbed in the ferrite grains and converted into heat. This effect is more or less proportional to the field frequency; high frequencies will be strongly attenuated, because their energy will be absorbed by the ferrite powder. The GNLM cables which in addition to the above described ferrite technology is further protected with a foil shield and a drain wire and **specifically** manufactured for High End audio use. **Said by some to be the most neutral sounding mains cable on the market**



AUDUSA - Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) shown with Marincio IEC 320

Fitted with IEC (Martin Kayser) and MK Tough Cable can be supplied fitted to our all steel 4, 6 and 8 way distribution blocks. We can rewire the distribution blocks with Eupen cable as an extra cost option. Refer to our web site for details.



AUDUSA EUPEN GNLM 05/04

GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA2.5) £48 for 1.0m, £58 for 1.5m, £68 for 2.0m, Off the reel £30 for 1st meter, £20 per m thereafter. GNLM 05/04 £58 for 1m, £68 for 1.5m, £78 for 2.0m Also off the reel. Both GNLM cables available for export

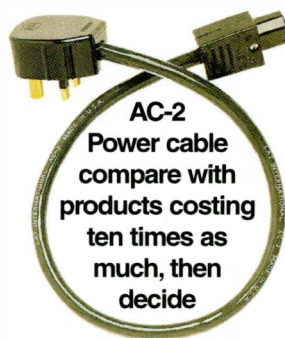
AUDUSA - Eupen and LAT AC-2 mains cable available with 16 amp IEC (for certain models of amps by Krell, MF, Levinson etc), Marincio 320 IEC, Figure of eight, Bulgin, USA Hubble, European Schuko, Australian, Swiss, Danish, and Neutrik plugs.

SILVER SILVER SILVER - Upgrade the cable with silver plated contacts on IEC and and MK plug for an extra £6. IEC's and MK plugs with silver plated contacts available seperately at £6, £8 and £9
Why Silver plated contacts? Simple, silver is THE BEST conductor of electricity.

LAT AC-2 HI-FI CHOICE - SEPT 2001 - RECOMMENDED MAINS CABLE

We have developed a cabling (weaving) pattern along with an unusual shielding/filtering system that gets rid of the garbage that contaminates your components. The difference you hear with our cord is astounding. Our power cord takes advantage of silver in its design through use of our proprietary Silverfuse conductors. The conductors are 10 gauge and with PTFE; the best insulation available. Fitted as standard with IEC / MK Toughplug. . 60cm £62, 90cm £75, 1.2m £88, 1.5m £101, 1.8m £112 etc Other lengths available and off the reel.

4,6 and 8 way all steel mains distribution blocks fitted with **UK, Schuko or USA sockets.** CE tested & approved mains distribution units manufactured of heavy gauge steel, finished in black and fitted with high quality 13amp sockets. It has no filters, circuit breakers, surge protection, transformers, resistors, capacitors, LED's, on/off switches, chokes, regulators, just fitted with 1m of AC-2 mains cable. From £166 for 4 way, £198 for 6 way, £229 for 8 way.



**AC-2
Power cable
compare with
products costing
ten times as
much, then
decide**



SILVERFUSE is a near alloy of silver and copper. IT IS NOT SILVER PLATED OR SILVER CLAD. Plating (or clad, which is the same thing as plating) causes a dioding effect when signal is passed through resulting in brightness and distortion. The Silverfuse process starts with seven nines OFHC copper wire with a diameter that is slightly larger than the required size. It is then pulled through a trough of molten silver. The wire with a silver deposit, is then forced through a compacting die where it is subject to tremendous pressure. The silver and the high purity copper are fused together into a near alloy. The compacting fusion also reduces the wire diameter to the desired size. No dioding subsequently occurs with this process. The result provides for the benefits of silver; which are excellent definition and clarity, with the high purity copper benefits of warmth and mellowness.

LAT INTERNATIONAL - Analogue, Digital and Video interconnects and Speaker cable- better than most others at double the price Refer to www.audusa.com for further details or ask for reviews



SUNFIRE CORPORATION - Snohomish USA

New for 2002 Sunfire True Sub Woofer MKIV - 11 inch cube. Signature True Sub-Woofer 13 inch cube and Junior Sub Woofer 9 inch cube -all with two drivers, to as low as 16hz, 116 SPL and 360 cu ins of air movement, 1200 or 2700 watt patented amp technology. Classic Tube Pre-amp, Solid state power amps 2 channel (300 x 2 or 600 x 2) and 5 channel (220 x 5 or 430 x 5 - yes total of 2150 watts into 8 ohms or 4300 watts into 4 ohms) patented amp technology (no heat sinks) and Theatre Grand II processor pre-amp.



WWW.AUDUSA.COM

Tel: 020 8241 9826, 020 8264 0249 Fax 020 8241 0999 Email: sales@audusa.com

STANDS AND SUPPORTS

Equipment racks and speaker stands



In hi-fi there are two types of stand. One is a rack that holds turntables, amps, CD players and so on and is described as an equipment support, and the other is a speaker stand. The latter comes in three basic varieties, two for standmount speakers: lightweight, multilegged types; and heavy designs with fewer legs and the ability to be mass-loaded for extra solidity. The lighter variety is

said to have a quicker sound, while heavyweights give deeper bass and a calmer sound. The third speaker stand type is a platform that sits under floorstanding speakers or speaker/stand combinations, the pneumatic Townshend Seismic Sink being an example.

There are two speaker-to-stand interfacing options: spikes or Blu Tak in each corner of the top plate. Try both and take your pick.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS

Equipment supports

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	WELDED	NUMBER OF SHELVES	SHELF TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
	Aavik Furniture A4	350	Good sound and stylish Scandinavian looks at an affordable price	80.5	47		4	MDF	193
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50,50	●	4	Glass	217
BEST BUY	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid Isoschelf	1,100	An enthusiast's equipment support stand free from coloration, if a little fiddly to set up	87.5	48		5	MDF	193
BEST BUY	Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt	550	Stunning neutrality and detail from a well-damped design. Its performance makes the price tag good value	75	53.5,45		4	MDF	217
	Custom Design Aspect 650	270	Smart looks and practical thanks to adjustable shelves. Sound is fair with some loss of detail	66	46	●	4	Glass	206
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricy but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45.34		5	Glass	232
	Quadraspire Q4	280	Simple, but modestly effective and very attractive	52	49		4	MDF	206
	Quadraspire Q4 Reference	480	Excellent performance from the school of wobbly racks. Natural sounding and plenty of detail	51.5	49,39.5		4	MDF	217
	Russ Andrews Torlyte Rack	988	Attractive modular system made of very light Torlyte: a touch of added warmth is its only vice	68	54, 49		4	Torlyte	240
BEST BUY	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50,40		5	Glass	217
BEST BUY	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Townshend Seismic Stand II	1,140	multi-shelf air-suspension support which isolates like few others. Recommended	92	58, 45		5	MDF	240

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE SPEAKER STANDS

Speaker stands

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				HEIGHT	TOP PLATE SIZE (CM)	FILLABLE	WELDED	NUMBER OF LEGS	ISSUE NUMBER
	Atacama Nexus 6	60	An excellent all-round performer and a genuine hi-fi bargain	60,50	14.5,18	●		3	202
	Cyrus CLS50 Stand	200	Unusual combination of style and performance, and a definite contender in the right environment	64	17,19			1	220
	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61,56,51	16.5,18	●		2	202
	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17,20	●		1	220
BEST BUY	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
	Partington ANSA 60	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18,15	●		4	232
BEST BUY	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17,15	●	●	5	202
EDITOR'S CHOICE	Partington Dreadnought Ult	99	Super heavyweight stand that is an open window to the speaker placed on it	63	21,24	●		1	220
	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		4	220
	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38,48			0	202

EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF SHELVES To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). SHELF TYPE Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. NUMBER OF LEGS That support the stand.

HI-FI CHOICE NEXT MONTH

All in the new-look *Hi-Fi Choice*
More kit, more features,
more in-depth reviews

Issue 247 on sale 7 October

REVIEWS

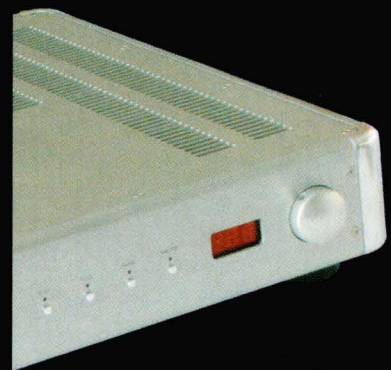
Avid's long-awaited new turntable is here, along with exclusive reviews of B&W's new 700 series floorstanders, Gamut's latest power amp, Arcam's CD93 CD player, Krell's new integrated amp and lots more!

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST

Seductive speakers from the likes of Jamo, Triangle, Mirage, Graves Audio, Totem and Canton compete for the HFC badges.

PLUS

News, views, and fantastic competitions...



Welcome to the Hi-Fi Choice accessories shop

Choice Bits is the easy way to buy the best audio accessories available today. Simply pick up the phone, order online, drop us an email or fill out the order form opposite and pop it in the post. Ordering couldn't be simpler!

This issue we've a selection of some of the best isolation products available. It is very easy to get carried away with hardware and neglect to site it properly on a dedicated rack. Side boards or shelving units seem like a cheap solution, but the fact remains that until you properly isolate your equipment with purpose-built supports, you'll never hear it at its best.

Vibration control is at the heart of good sounding audio. If you do not already own a dedicated support rack, you really should. Even if you already own a rack, introducing special support cones under your equipment can also increase performance.

SHOWCASE

Clearlight Audio Aspekt
High quality audio equipment rack

Key Features

- Award winning RDC compound
- Eliminates resonance to improve performance
- Tripod design for greater stability
- Neutral sound



Clearlight Audio Aspekt Rack

The Aspekt Rack has been universally acknowledged as one of the best racks available at its price and the preferred choice of many an audio

journalist. The Aspekt harnesses Clearlight's award-winning RDC compound to counteract resonance from within the listening environment. RDC features micro granules of various materials in equal proportion at opposite ends of the elasticity scale. This creates a compound that effectively deadens resonance across the whole audio spectrum. The outside dimensions of the rack are 65.5x75x57cm (WxHxD) and each shelf features a helix of RDC compound, while the top shelf forms a back to back helix in opposing directions.

From £549.95

Atacama Spike Shoes



Atacama Spike Shoes allow the use of spikes on laminated wooden floors as well as working very well under pointed cones. Each shoe has an indent to 'hold' the spike and rubber base.

Only £12.95 (Qty 4)

VooDoo Isolation AIRTEK Pneumatic Equipment Support Shelf



The AIRTEK is a pneumatic isolation platform which is constructed from three woods carefully selected for their acoustic properties and is designed to isolate all audio or audio/visual electronics from the effects of structural-borne vibrations and acoustic feedback, allowing them to release their full

potential. Placing the AIRTEK under electronics will greatly improve sound reproduction. The results achieved will be a tighter and more tuneful sound with extended bass, plus a more solid, stable and transparent image, as well as cleaner and more detailed higher frequencies. The AIRTEK is available in the following three oak-finished configurations: two-valve 43x36cm (20kg), three-valve 49x43cm (45kg) and four valve 51x 48cm (75kg).

(20kg) £199.95

(45kg) £249.95

(75kg) £299.95

Clearlight Audio RDC 2 Isolation Cone



The multi-award-winning RDC 2 cone does not add to or subtract information from the stereo picture but reveals what is already there – it does not get in the way of the music.

RDC 2 cones measure 27x30mm (HxW) and will support 25kg each.

Only £29.95 (Qty 4)

IXOS Sorbothane Isolation Feet



Sorbothane has been proven to be the most effective homogeneous vibration damping material ever developed. IXOS's Sorbothane feet make the ideal damping support material for your hi-fi equipment, isolating each component from all mechanical, loudspeaker induced and structurally transmitted vibrations. This effectively severs all microphonic feedback loops. Simply place the Sorbothane feet under your equipment, in place of its existing feet.

Only £19.95 (Qty 4)

Michell 'Tall' and 'Small' Tenderfeet



John Michell's Tenderfeet have been around since the dawn of component isolation, with thousands of audiophiles world-wide benefiting from their use. Machined from solid aluminium, Tenderfeet help prevent any unwanted vibration from entering components.

Small £12.95/ Tall £14.95

☎ **0870 240 7228** 🌐 **www.choicebits.co.uk**

FEATURED PRODUCTS

Atacama Spike Shoes (Qty 4)	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio Aspekt rack (black, four-shelf)	£549.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio RDC 2 Isolation Cones (Qty 4)	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
IXOS Sorbothane Feet (Qty 4)	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michell Tenderfeet Small (Qty 4)	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michell Tenderfeet Tall (Qty 3)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
VooDoo Isolation AIRTEK (20kg/oak finish)	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

ANALOGUE ACCESSORIES

A.R.T. Head Q-Damper	£16.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cardas 180g Frequency Sweep LP	£21.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio Record Puck	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Clever Record Clamp	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Deluxe Bubble Level	£21.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Exact Stylus Gauge	£265.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Record Clamp	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Stroboscopic Light	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Stroboscopic Test Record	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Electronic Needle Nose Pliers	£30.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Express Machining Rega Stub End	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Express Machining VTA For Rega	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goldring Strobe Disc	£3.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Graham Bearing Cap	£259.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gyrascope Electronic Stroboscope	£224.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
John Michell Techno Rega Heavyweight	£67.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lorcraft Stroboscopic Light	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michell Engineering Record Clamp	£22.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Michell Universal Dust Cover	£44.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opus3 4.1 Test Record	£17.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Origin Live Express Heavyweight	£89.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Origin Live Rega Tonearm Upgrade Kit	£74.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pebbles 'The Weight' Modification	£67.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polaris Plus Stylus Alignment Gauge	£5.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pro-Ject Bubble Level	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ringmat's Anniversary Ringmat	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ringmat Developments' The Ringmat	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ringmat's How To Set Up A Turntable	£7.50	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shure Stylus Force Gauge	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
T Force Ortofon Tracking Force Gauge	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Cartridge Man Digital Force Gauge	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Cartridge Man Digital Level Gauge	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
'The Producer's Cut' Hi-Fi Test LP	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Universal Tweezers	£6.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

DIGITAL ACCESSORIES

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

Ultra Burn-In CD3000	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
XLO Reference Test & Burn-In CD	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

CD STORAGE PRODUCTS

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

CARE/ CLEANING PRODUCTS

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

ISOLATION RACKS - CONES

A.R.T. Q-Dampers	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Atacama Audio Equinox Series	£139.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

Atacama Audio Nexus Series	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AudioPrism 2.5 Iso-Bearings	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
AudioPrism 3.3 Iso-Bearings	£84.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Spikes (Each)	£12.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
Black 4 Shelf Rack	£549.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
Black 4 Shelf Rack Cherry Legs	£599.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearlight Audio RDC Aspekt Rack		
Grey 4 Shelf Rack Beech Legs	£649.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foculpods Support Systems (4)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
IXOS Sorbothane Feet	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost Pulsar Points (Aluminium)	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nordost Pulsar Points (Titanium)	£294.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Polipods Support Systems (8)	£14.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 1 Cones (Qty 4)	£39.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 2 Cones (Qty 4)	£29.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC Cone Cups (Qty 4)	£17.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 3 Cones (Qty 4)	£44.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 4 Cones (Qty 3)	£119.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC 5 Cones (Qty 4)	£119.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDP Feet	£54.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ringmat Feet MkII	£74.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spikes M6/M8 (4x M6/M8)	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stands Unique Carbon Fibre Isolators	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Superpods Support Systems	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC SPP Platform	£109.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
RDC Super Position T	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
3D Seismic Isolation Platform	£234.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Townshend Audio Seismic Sink Rack Model One (530x400mm / Internal 430x400mm 3 Tier)	£670.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Townsend Audio Seismic Sink Rack Model One (530x400mm / Internal 430x400mm 4 Tier)	£810.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voodoo AIRTEK (430x360mm / 20kg)	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voodoo AIRTEK (490x430mm / 45kg)	£249.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Voodoo AIRTEK (510x480mm / 75kg)	£299.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

AUDIO BOOKS

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

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You'll love the sound of our great value hifis



JVC UXH33R

- CD/cassette/tuner
- 2x10W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW compatible

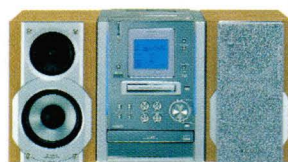
£117



Sharp XLHP700H

- CD/cassette/tuner
- 200W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW compatible
- X-Bass

£166



Panasonic SCPM37MD

- CD/cassette/tuner
- 2x18W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW compatible
- High density encoding system

£199



Technics SCHD560

- CD/cassette/tuner
- 120W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW Compatible
- Dolby B Noise Reduction

£298



Sharp CDDP2400E

- 3xCD/cassette/tuner
- 100W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW compatible
- Dolby Surround Pro Logic

£174



Philips FWC355

- 3xCD/cassette/tuner
- 2x40W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW compatible
- Dynamic bass boost

£127



Panasonic SCAK210

- 5xCD/double cassette/tuner
- 220W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW Compatible
- Super sound equaliser

£156



Technics SCEH790

- 5xCD/cassette/tuner
- 360W total stereo power
- CD-R/RW compatible
- Satellite speaker system

£421

All prices include VAT and FREE next working day delivery*

HIFIS

MICRO SYSTEMS

MAKE & MODEL	PRICE
JVC UXH33R	£117
JVC UXP30R	£120
JVC MXK50R	£176
JVC UXJ50R	£176
JVC UXJ60R	£180
JVC UXA52R	£184
JVC FSX3	£237
JVC UXA70MDR	£259
JVC VSDT2000R	£345
JVC NXHD10R	£447
Panasonic SCPM10	£109
Panasonic SCPM18	£148
Panasonic SCPM28	£160
Panasonic SCPM37MD	£199
Philips FWC399	£167
Philips MC90	£237
Philips MC500	£148
Philips MZ1000	£239
Philips MZ1100	£239
Philips MZ1200	£239
Sharp CDDP900E	£174
Sharp XLH550E	£136
Sharp XLHP500E	£135
Sharp XLHP700H	£166
Sony MHCRC220	£152

MAKE & MODEL	PRICE
Sony CMTM333NT	£256
Sony CMTCPX1	£174
Sony CMTCPQ1	£156
Sony CMTCP333	£217
Sony CMTM100MDS	£248
Sony CMTL1	£405
Sony CMTL7HD	£837
Technics SCDV290	£488
Technics SHD350	£222
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CYRUS CD7Q and PSX-R o.i.r.o. £950. Apollo hi-fi rack and speaker stands £50. All in excellent condition. Mark after 6:30pm 01924 491982. (Wakefield).

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IMPULSE LALI horn loudspeakers £800. 01625 434544 or email miked@nomail.fsworld.co.uk (Cheshire).

ION SYSTEMS OBELISK 3 integrated amp £125, Marantz CD52SE CD player £75, both boxed, mint condition. Steve 01327 353034, email steve_baumber@yahoo.co.uk (Towcester).

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NAIM CDX CD player with remote (£2,470) £1,500. Mint condition and boxed. 01246 232085 (Chesterfield).

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GRAAF GM20 valve power amps (pair) with GM 13.5b mkII preamp, £6,000. 01625 434544 or email miked@nomail.fsworld.co.uk (Macclesfield).

REVOX A77 suitcase model 7/10" tapes and spares, some attention needed. Available to anyone willing to collect. Ken 020 8697 2444 (SE London).

ROTEL RC-971 preamp (£150) £95, RQ-970BX phono amp (£160) £95, both mint boxed. Sony SLV-715 ncam video, SP REC needs attention (£500) £50. 020 8240 6336 (Croydon).

SONY amplifier, TA-FE230 (not Pro-Logic), CDP-XE330, TC-WE435 double tape deck, ST-SE200 tuner (lightly marked on top), pair of acoustic solutions floorstanding speakers, £350 ono. 07919 318252 or email sanford609@hotmail.com (Kent).

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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 if the price is right.

Do some research on which brands have a good service back-up, so if something does go wrong, you can get it fixed. Unless you purchase from a dealer, you're unlikely to get any warranty, so it's up to you to ensure the fitness of any gear that you buy.

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

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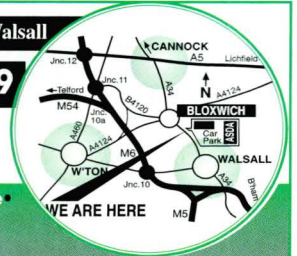
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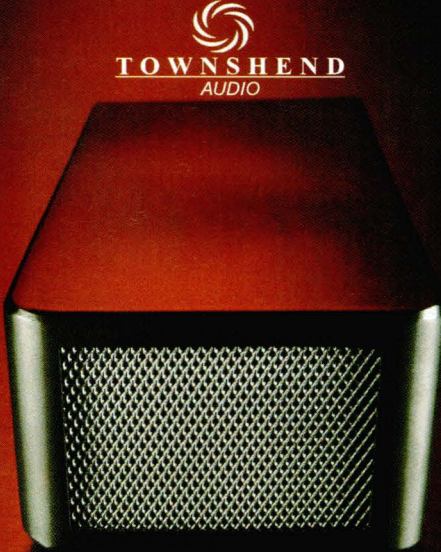
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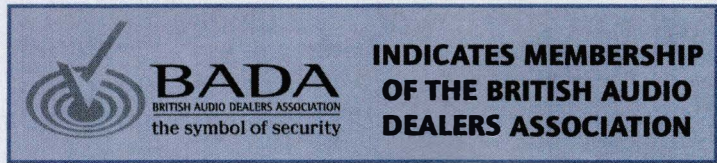
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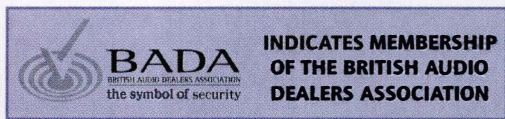
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- Wilson Audio
- Wilson Research
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H I - F I HOME CINEMA MULTIROOM INSTALL BUY / SELL

QUARTERLY sale items

Exposure VII pre + X11 psu	£450.00*	£1,200.00
Magnum Dynalab P 200 Pre	£695.00	£1,900.00
dpa Enlightenment DAC	£295.00*	£ -
Kenwood LI000C Pre	£295.00	£895.00
Kenwood LI000M Power	£395.00	£1,295.00
Michaelson Audio Odysseus	£495.00*	£1,500.00
Sunfire 300 Power Amp (110 volts)	£695.00*	£2,400.00
Arcam Delta 110 pre amp	£295.00	£750.00
McCormack Line Drive	£395.00	£995.00
Thule Spirit CD	£495.00	£900.00
Audio Refinement Pre 5 "new"	£395.00*	£895.00

New this month

POWER AMPLIFIERS		
Cello Performance 2 Monoblocks	£7,995.00	£20,000.00
Krell KSA 250	£2,750.00	£6,000.00
Bel Canto Evo 4	£On Dem	£3,895.00
Krell KSA 80B	£1,395.00	£3,600.00
Roksan Caspian Integrated	£On Dem	£895.00
Roksan Caspian Power	£On Dem	£645.00
Quad 33/ 303	£295.00	-
PRE AMPLIFIERS		
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YBA Za Line	£1,295.00	£1,995.00
LOUDSPEAKERS		
Martin Logan SL3	£1,795.00	£3,400.00
JM Lab Mini Utopia + Stds Rosewood	£2,495.00	£4,899.00
Dynaudio Audience 50	£395.00	£577.00
JM Lab Nova Utopia	£On Dem	£19,999.00
Heybrook Sextet (new drivers)	£495.00	£1,200.00
Revel Studio	£7,495.00	£13,000.00
ATC SCM 10 Passive Black	£495.00	£1,100.00

CD PLAYERS / DACS / DVD PLAYERS		
Krell KPS 25sc 24/96	£11,995.00	£23,498.00
Roksan Caspian CD	£On Dem	£995.00
TURNABLES, ANALOGUE, VARIOUS		
Project RPP16 "new"	£On Dem	£500.00
Musical Fidelity XLP Phono Stage	£75.00	£150.00
Project RPP19/ arm/ 25FL (Ex Dem)	£895.00	£1,350.00
VPI TNT mk IV/ Rockport 6000/ Flywheel/		
VPI Stand/ Clearaudio Accurate/ Pump etc. "new"	£8,500.00	£16,000.00
Roksan Radius (Acrylic) "new"	£On Dem	£850.00
Roksan Caspian Phono se	£On Dem	£950.00
Ortofon Rohman (2 hrs)	£850.00	£1,050.00
AV COMPONENTS / PROCESSORS		
Lexicon MCB Processor	£On Dem	£5,000.00
Lexicon RT10 DVD Player	£On Dem	£2,300.00

Power amplifiers

Krell FPB 600c	£6,500.00	£14,000.00
Krell FPB 700cx	£11,995.00	£15,000.00
Krell FPB 400 cx	£9,600.00	£12,000.00
Naim Nait 3	£475.00	£608.00
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Michell Alecco Monoblocks	£995.00*	£2,000.00
Cary 805 C Monoblocks "new"	£4995.00*	£8,250.00
E.S. Lab DX-58	£On Dem	£2,995.00
Plinius SA50	£1,795.00	£2,700.00
Plinius 8200P	£On Dem	£1,550.00
Krell FPB 200	£3,995.00	£8,000.00
Krell FPB 600	£5,995.00	£12,998.00
Plinius SA 102 "new"	£On Dem	£3,750.00
Musical Fidelity P180	£395.00	£900.00
Musical Fidelity CRPS	£395.00	£900.00
Bryston 4 BSST	£On Dem	£2,350.00
Jadis Defy 7 mk III	£2,750.00	£6,000.00
Mark Levinson No 27	£1,750.00	£6,000.00
Linn Bas Active Card	£69.00	£120.00
Gamut D200 "new"	£2,250.00	£3,250.00
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Krell MDA 300	£4,995.00	£12,000.00
Cary SLA 70 mk II Silver	£1,295.00	£2,250.00
Boulder 500 AE	£3,495.00	£5,500.00
Linn Klassik CD/Amp silver	£895.00	£1,030.00
Boulder 1060 Power "new"	£On Dem	£16,500.00
Primare 30.1 mk II Integrated	£1,350.00	£1,500.00
YBA Passion Stereo "new"	£3,995.00	£5,995.00
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Tom Evans The Vibe Pre	£On Dem	£2,700.00
Krell KRC	£2,495.00	£6,949.00
Graff 13.5 Pre	£1,495.00	£3,000.00
Chord DSC 1500E (dac/pre)	£3750.00*	£6,500.00
Audio Research LS7	£895.00*	£1,800.00
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Cary SLP98L Remote Pre x-dem	£1495.00*	£2,794.00
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YBA Passion Pre (inc Phono)	£3,995.00	£5,595.00
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“In 1991, Sennheiser didn’t so much lose the plot as take it for a long ride and abandon it in the woods.”

unveiled Orpheus, a pair of headphones costing £10,000, or as much as a well-equipped supermini. The beautifully built electrostatic headset and its dedicated tube amp/DAC didn’t just put headphone listening on a whole new level but in a whole new light. Even if they’d been five times better than the next best headphones ever made, the whole price versus performance graph would still have nose-dived into the sea. But although the Orpheuses soon earned the acclamation ‘best headphones in the world’, no-one could really make the experience add up to £10K.

The limited-edition, hand-made ensemble (just 300 of ‘em) really was exquisite – all lustrous wood, mirror-finish metal and seductively glowing valves. I was one of the thousands who squeezed into Sennheiser’s tiny headphone room at the following year’s Bristol Show to sample what would either be the zenith of hi-fi reproduction or some kind of Zen-like meditative state. By the time I lowered the excellently bulky, hair-flattening, instant geek HE90 headset onto my unworthy noggin, the shiny HEV90 amp had collected more fingerprints than a murder investigation. Two things occurred to me before the velvety doughnuts cupped my expectant ears. One, this fragile piece of art is about to break any second now. And two, with all this ambient noise, it’s going to sound just like all the other ‘phones in the room. But it didn’t and it didn’t. I can’t remember what I listened to but I do remember the room, the heat, the hubbub and the jostling melting away for a good two minutes. I was somewhere else entirely, transported by the magic of the world’s greatest headphones. If I’d had £10K in my back pocket I’d have handed it over there and then. So long as no-one unplugged me.

Now that’s the power of hi-fi. **HFC**

Do the can-can

David Vivian samples the most expensive earmuffs in the world

We know what we mean by headphones, don’t we? Not those hissing plastic cockroaches you put in your ears, but ‘cans’, ear warmers with attitude, miniature dome-shaped speakers you clamp to your cranium. It’s a fact – headphones that don’t make you look utterly ridiculous can’t be any good. Real headphones aren’t fashion accessories, they don’t come in two-tone translucent plastic mascara cases with spring-loaded cable recovery, they don’t have snap-on day-glo decorations. No. They’re serious.

Proper, big ‘get-it-off, it’s killing him’ headphones are hi-fi’s greatest secret. No one really wants to talk about them in public – headphone geeks thrash it out on the internet – but for the sake of a squashed hairdo and modicum of personal ridicule, headphone usage simply gets you closer to the music. You experience detail with fractal resolution, tonal and transient accuracy beyond the reach of all but a handful of the priciest high-end speakers.

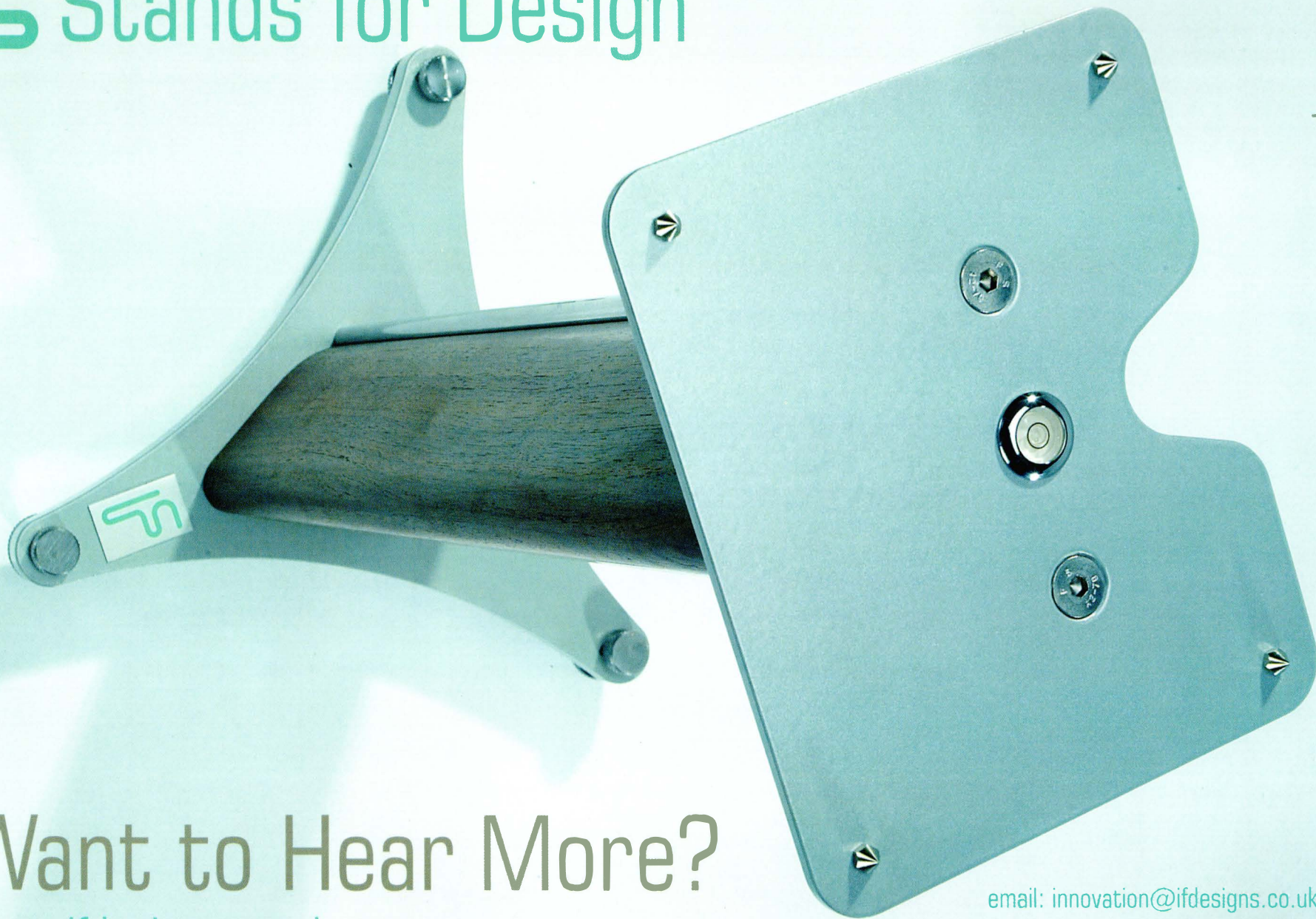
Pretty extreme already. Hell, headphones rock. They’re your very own acoustically optimised listening environment. No awkwardly placed sofas, no wobbly, boom-inducing floorboards, no irate neighbours thumping on the partition wall. Just you and your bulky ear housings delivering pure, unadulterated music directly into your shell-likes.

And all this for, well, a pocket of beans. Shop around and you can snap up Sennheiser’s just deposited flagship model, the HD600, for about £150. Its potential performance-per-pound ratio is completely off the scale. If it was a car it would be a Caterham R500. In fact, it probably wouldn’t be a car at all, but a bike; a Honda CBR600 RR. F1 acceleration for £8.5K. That’s how good the sumptuously built and totally undainty HD600s are. That’s why good headphones are such gems of hi-fi hardware.

But back in 1991, Sennheiser didn’t so much lose the plot as take it for a long ride and abandon it in the woods. This was the year it

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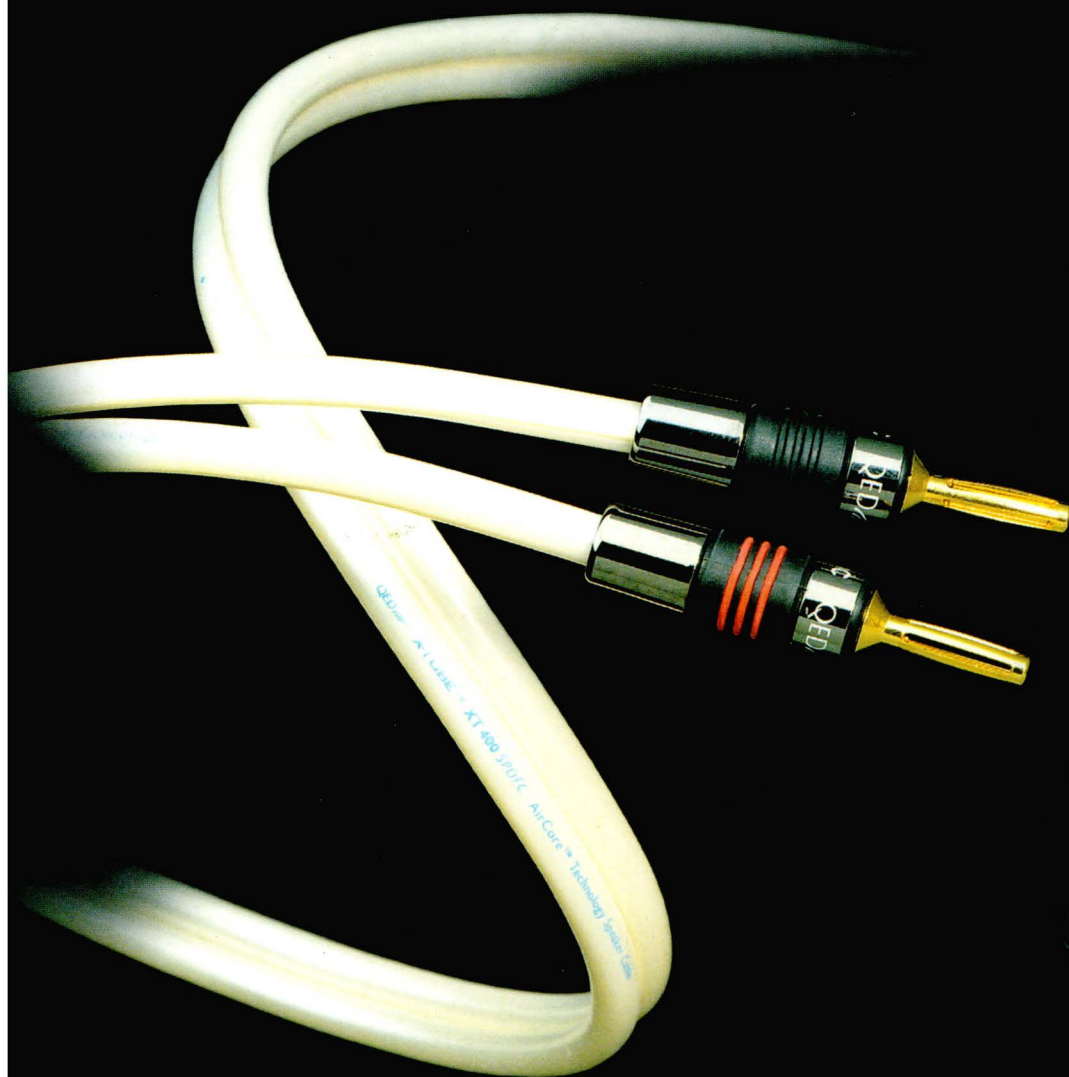
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