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HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK FEBRUARY 2004

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FIRST UK REVIEW



New Arcam A90 amp – superior sound in stereo... or multichannel

Radiant Hovland amplifiers light up our favourite music

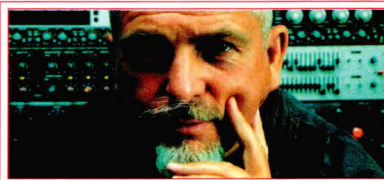


ULTIMATE GROUP TEST SPEAKERS

FEATURING...

- > AAD S-5
- > Dynaudio Audience 52
- > Focal-JMLab Chorus 716S
- > Infinity Kappa 200
- > Mission Volare V62
- > NHT SB3
- > Rega ELA
- > Tannoy Sensys DC2

250TH ISSUE!



PETER GABRIEL
WHY SACD IS THE FUTURE OF RECORDED SOUND...

+ BUYER'S BIBLE THE WORLD'S FINEST HI-FI BUYING GUIDE

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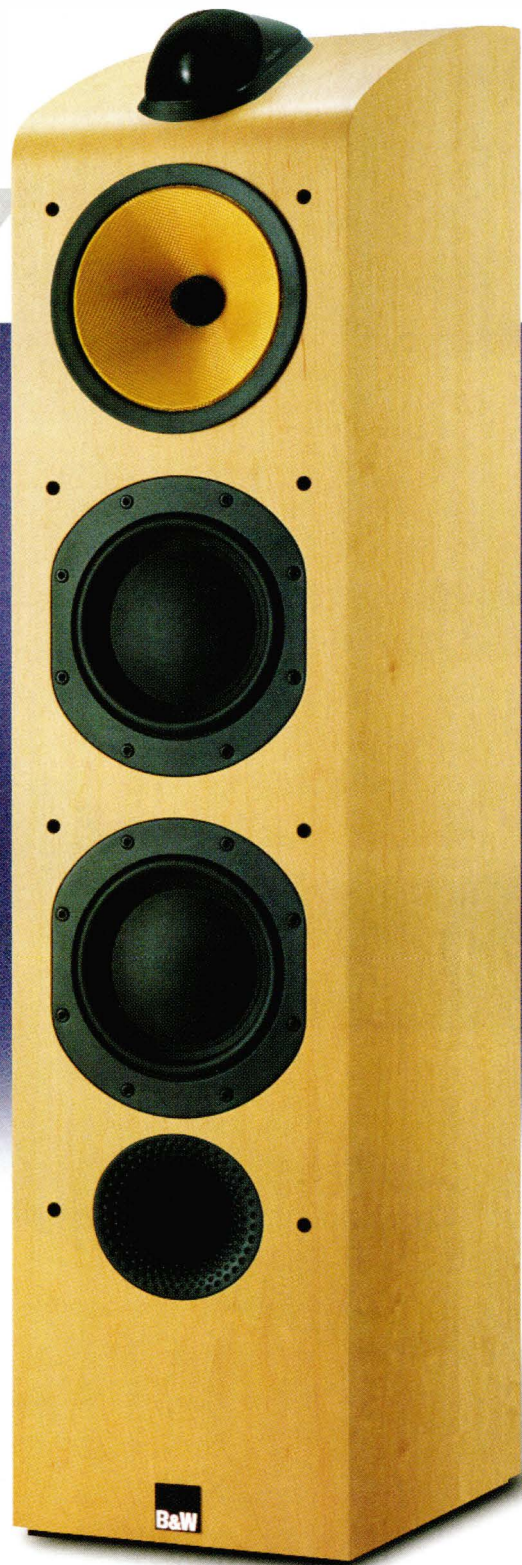
It's in my veins



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HI-FI CHOICE

FEBRUARY 2004 ISSUE 250

Future Publishing Ltd, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP
Tel: +44 (0)20 7317 2600 Fax: +44 (0)20 7317 2686

EDITORIAL

Tim Bownen **editor** tim.bownen@futurenet.co.uk
Dan George **reviews editor** dan.george@futurenet.co.uk
Howard Malone **art editor** howard.malone@futurenet.co.uk

CONTRIBUTORS

John Bamford, Marianne Bannister, Richard Black, Faz Choudhury, Simon Davies, Del Gentleman, Alvin Gold, Jimmy Hughes, Jason Kennedy, Paul Messenger, Paul Miller, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Alan Sircom, Phil Strongman, Stan Vincent, David Vivian, Nigel Williamson

PHOTOGRAPHY

Richard Apperly, Chris Foster

ADVERTISING

Debbie Maclaren **head of sales, London**
020 7317 2637 debbie.maclaren@futurenet.co.uk
Michelle Blackwell **senior advertising manager**
020 7317 2602 michelle.blackwell@futurenet.co.uk
Matt Dalton **key accounts manager**
020 7317 2622 matt.dalton@futurenet.co.uk
Tom Denning **senior sales executive**
020 7317 2683 tom.denning@futurenet.co.uk
Eloise Simpson **sales executive**
020 7317 2429 eloise.simpson@futurenet.co.uk
Stuart Harris **classified sales executive**
01225 442244 stuart.harris@futurenet.co.uk

HFC ONLINE

www.hifichoice.co.uk
Lucy Price-Lewis **online editor** lucy.price-lewis@futurenet.co.uk
Mark Phillips **online ad manager** mark.phillips@futurenet.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Tel: +44 (0)870 444 8650
Email: customerservice@futurenet.co.uk
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BACK ISSUES

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MARKETING & LICENSING

Philippa Montgomery **marketing manager**
philippa.montgomery@futurenet.co.uk
Simon Wear **licensing director**
simon.wear@futurenet.co.uk

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Matt Gregory **production manager**
Craig Broadbridge **senior production controller**
Helen Ramjuttan **ad coordinator**
Rob Brock **circulation manager**

PUBLISHING & MANAGEMENT

Simon Maxwell **publisher**
simon.maxwell@futurenet.co.uk
Aubrey Ganguly **editor-in-chief**
Andy Sutcliffe **editorial director, London**
Jacquie Duckworth **advertising director**

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John Bowman **group finance director**
Roger Parry **non-executive chairman**
Greg Ingham **chief executive**

Tel: +44 (0)1225 442244 www.thefuturenetwork.plc.uk
Bath • London • Milan • New York • Paris • San Francisco • Wrocław

CONTRIBUTORS

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



JASON KENNEDY

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



PAUL MESSENGER

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



PAUL MILLER

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



ALVIN GOLD

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



DAVID VIVIAN

An award-winning journalist of considerable experience, David's sharp ears and equally sharp powers of description are a valuable mix for *Hi-Fi Choice*. He also writes about cars, but who needs to take the latest Lotus for a spin when you've got the finest hi-fi to test drive?

When it comes to hi-fi magazines, you can't beat good breeding. After all, if ever one needs a little guidance in life, it pays to ask someone with experience. In the case of *Hi-Fi Choice*, ours dates back to 1975, when a group of hi-fi nuts decided the market deserved a better sort of hi-fi journal – a no-nonsense guide to the finest products, packed front to back with tests of unique depth and clarity.

Since that time a host of other hi-fi titles have come and gone, but *HFC* has stood firm as the champion of the hi-fi aficionado. We now publish 13 editions a year, each one a varied feast of the sonic arts that aims to bring sanity to the complex, sprawling world in which modern audio is entwined. The technology of recorded sound has seen a seismic shift since the magazine's inception 250 issues ago, with the birth of digital audio, domestic integration of the PC and the unstoppable surge of home cinema reshaping products and the market they serve. Yet despite the pace of change, *HFC's* core ethos remains. From vinyl and valves to hi-res digital formats, we sort the best from the rest with rigorous test processes and a highly experienced team of reviewers – a dedicated, no-nonsense guide for those who demand supreme fidelity.

Each year, this quest for excellence culminates in the *HFC Awards*, published last month in our January edition. It's the most comprehensive and reliable guide to the best the hi-fi scene has to offer, the only awards in which you can be sure every product has passed through *HFC's* test procedures – others may copy us but none come close. So here's to 2004, another gripping year for hi-fi and the next 13 sonic-soaked editions of *Hi-Fi Choice*. Issue 251 is just around the corner...



Tim Bownen **editor**

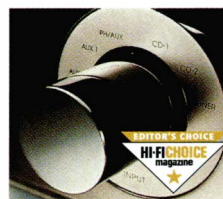
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EST. 1975
HI-FI CHOICE
magazine

Hi-Fi Choice is your essential guide to audio excellence in the home, from vinyl records to the latest digital music formats. For 29 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...

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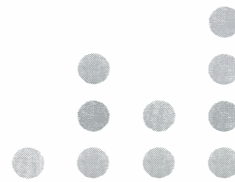
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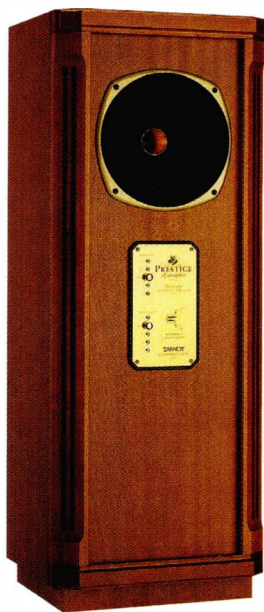
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A ROYAL DUTY

LUXURY MODELS JOIN TANNOY'S PRESTIGE



▶ Tannoy has added three new models to its upmarket and highly regarded Prestige range. Famed for bespoke cabinets, single dual-concentric drivers and retro looks, the Prestige models are adored by Far Eastern markets. The smallest new model is the horn-loaded Sandringham (£2,850), complete with a new eight-inch (200mm) dual concentric driver and van den Hul cabling throughout. Next up is the Kensington (£6,500), sporting a ten-inch (250mm) driver, 105-litre cabinet and claimed sensitivity of 93db.

The most impressive new model, however, is the £9,000 Yorkminster, boasting a whopping 15-inch (380mm) driver housed in a 200-litre cabinet. Bass extension reaches 23Hz, with an impressive 94dB sensitivity, it's claimed. The new models are available now.

☎ 01236 420199
 🌐 www.tannoy.com



CREEK TREATS

PROMISING NEW CD PLAYER AND TUNER

▶ News of two new Creek products has just reached us. There's a new FM tuner called the T50 and an almost all-new CD player, the CD50MkII (£850). Creek states, "Virtually everything about the CD50MkII is different to its predecessor". Among those things are a new ROM drive, the addition of a digital output and an RS232 bus system to allow future software updates. Jitter is kept low by using a digital bus and buffer circuit that stores the signal for a short time before it goes to the DAC.

The T50 AM/FM tuner (£500) includes a rotary tuning knob connected to a digital encoder to give an analogue feel to the front panel. A dual conversion method of retrieving radio signals is said to boost sensitivity and allow weak broadcasts to be received.

☎ 01442 260146 🌐 www.creekaudio.co.uk



HIGH ROLLER

HIGH-END AMP WITH PRICE TO MATCH

▶ German high-end company Accustic Arts has a new integrated amp priced to rival the Krells and Ayres of this world. At a cool £3,650, the Power 1 is part of an upmarket range including CD players, DACs and speakers distributed in the UK by Audio Reference. Rated at 130 watts into eight ohms, the Power 1 has four inputs (the fourth is balanced) plus both balanced and unbalanced preamp outputs.

It may look like an Exposure/Primare hybrid on the outside, but inside are high-quality MOSFET transistors on the outputs, exclusively Burr-Brown ICs and a huge transformer with separate windings for pre and power stages and left/right channels.

☎ 01252 702705 🌐 www.accusticarts.de



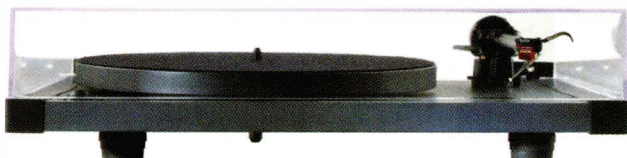
NEW BRITISH CLASSIC?

LATEST NAD STEREO AMP HAS 150 WATTS ON TAP

➤ NAD's long-awaited C372 integrated amp promises 150 watts continuous power, all for just £500. It replaces the popular C370 (Best Buy HFC 217), with many new upgrades, a new finish and remote control. A 20 per cent power gain over the C370 comes from a new transformer and capacitor set, plus distortion and noise has been reduced due to revisions to the PCB and tone control circuit.

The C372 can also be used as a preamp and features two pre-outs with an adjustable gain control on the second output, allowing the use of almost any power amp. Features include seven line inputs, a bridging option that gives 350 watts of mono power and bypassable tone controls that only operate at the frequency extremes. Expect a review soon.

☎ 01908 319360 🌐 www.NADelectronics.com

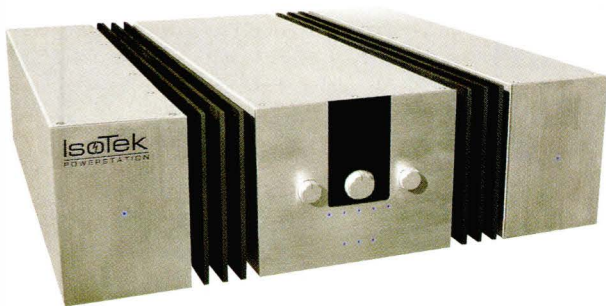


GOLDRUSH

FIRST GOLDRING TURNTABLE FOR 20 YEARS

➤ Goldring is back in the turntable market following an absence of almost 20 years. A new budget deck called the GR-1 (£140) has been made in response to what Goldring describes as "a resurgence in turntable sales". The GR-1 is a two-speed belt-driven model complete with an aluminium-tubed arm and a £35 Goldring Elektra cartridge. Features include a low-vibration motor, low resonance medite platter and a transparent hinged cover. Look out for the HFC review, coming soon...

☎ 01279 501111 🌐 www.goldring.co.uk



URBAN REGENERATION

MAINS CLEANING SOLUTION FROM ISOTEK

➤ For the ultimate in clean mains check out Isotek's PowerStation – a device that converts mains AC current to DC, before reconstructing it as a new pure AC waveform. The mains 'regeneration' is enabled through the use of a complex switch-mode power supply with a proprietary correction circuit. Four sockets are available, each powered by an independent amplifier. PowerStation is available now priced at a mighty powerful £2,795.

☎ 01635 291357 🌐 www.isoteksystems.com

WADIA EXPECT?

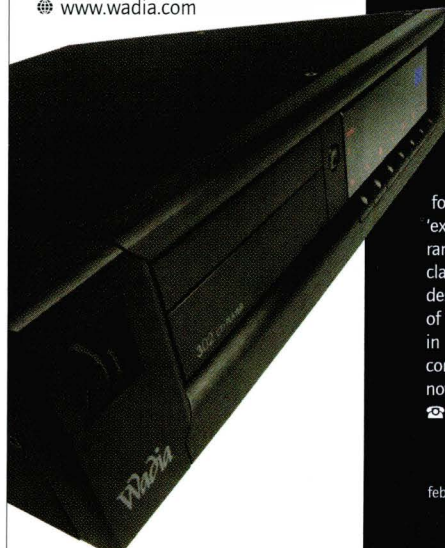
MORE FEATURES, MORE MONEY, MORE MUSIC

➤ The Wadia 302 has surpassed one of our all-time favourite CD players – the Wadia 301. Major changes for 2004 have been made in all key areas including the transport, DACs, power supplies and filtering technology.

A £350 price hike to £3,995 reflects developments such as improved DirectConnect technology that allows the player to be connected directly to a power amp when using the onboard digital volume control. There's also a new LED display, Philips VIE 1250 transport and ClockLink technology that's said to reduce jitter by relocating the master clock.

☎ 01992 573030

🌐 www.wadia.com



audiofile
PRODUCT NEWS

Soundbites



Q-STYLE is a newcomer to the hi-fi storage market with a range of hi-fi furniture made from flight cases. Case manufacturer Quentor has been making bespoke products for over 30 years and its Q-Style racks come with adjustable shelves and portholes for external cable management. The panels used are made from honeycomb with a laminate exterior surface, finished with high-end flight fittings. Prices for these extraordinary hi-fi stands start at a cool £998 and a bespoke service is also available.
☎ 01603 721604

DECCA has a new flagship cartridge, the London Reference, available for £2,000. It uses a two-piece body, a fine-line stylus and has been internally redesigned following customer feedback. The London Reference model can also be specially ordered for mono LPs and 78s.

☎ 01444 461611



TIVOLI is offering a hi-fi wake-up call from its new clock radio called Model Three (above). Priced at £200, it shares the same internals as the excellent Model One tabletop radio and sports the same inputs and outputs as the Model Two. There's also an analogue clock with quartz mechanical movement, sleep timer and thumbwheel to set the alarm. You can also add a matching speaker for stereo sound (£100), or even the forthcoming subwoofer if you need a real jump-start to your day.
☎ 01702 601 410

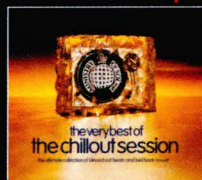
TAG MCLAREN has unveiled a new seven-channel power amp to form part of the brand's new 'exclusively home cinema' product range. Output from the new 700:7r is claimed to reach 120 watts per channel, despite a listed figure of 100wpc. Some of the amp modules can also be bridged in pairs to offer flexible power configurations. The amp is available now priced at £2,495.
☎ 01480 415600

AUDIOQUEST cables are back in the UK courtesy of new distributor Marantz. The range includes the new 'A' series for both audio and video applications, with prices starting at £11 for a one metre digital interconnect or £19 for an analogue pair. Despite the low prices, even the entry-level cables are made from silver-plated copper with gold-plated plugs. ☎ 01753 680868

LIMIT is a Belgian electronics company with a new Cyrus-tuned DVD player (£150). The brand has a 25-year history in the pro market and moved into consumer goods in 1996. The DVD800SE player is said to be the first in a new line of affordable AV kit that's been tweaked by Cyrus. The player has a good complement of inputs and outputs plus on-board decoding for Dolby Digital and DTS data streams. ☎ 0845 226 1619

CD GIVEAWAY!

Stick to your New Year's resolution and take it easy with the *Very Best Of Chillout Session* double CD. The album contains some of the chilliest classics of the last five years from Ministry Of Sound. Artists include Röyksopp, Groove Armada and Moby, among other downbeat doyens. We've got ten copies to give away – for your chance to win one send your name, address, and telephone number to: Positively Chilly, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date is 15 January 2004.



Hi-Fi diary

JANUARY

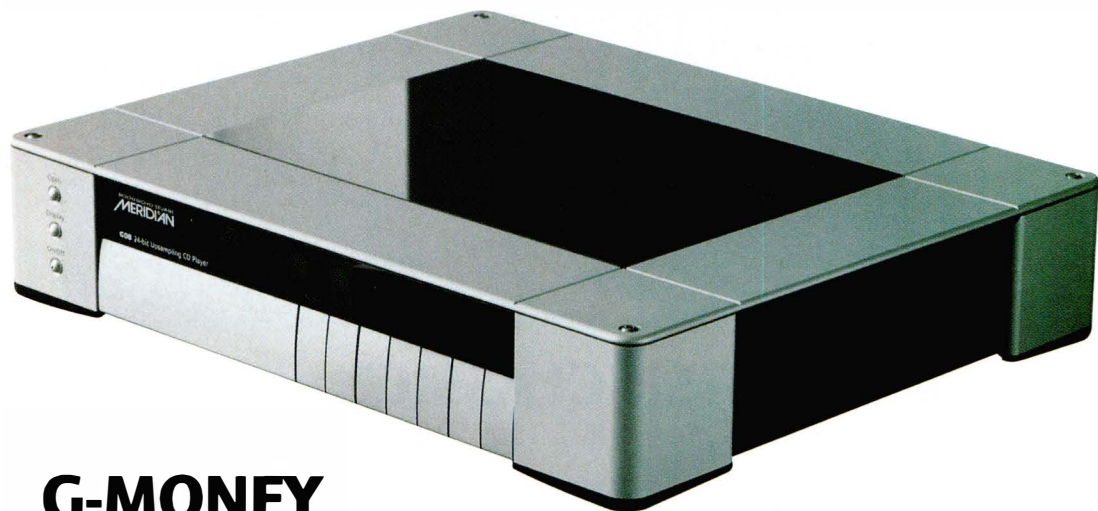
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MAY

20-23 High End 2004
 Munich, Germany
The dog's danglies at the former Frankfurt Show



G-MONEY

MERIDIAN'S NEW UPSAMPLING CD PLAYER

Meridian has announced details of its new upsampling CD player, the G08. It's the latest product to be announced from the new G-Series range, now confirmed to be in full production. As with other Meridian CD players the new G08, which retails for £2,250, uses a ROM drive for greater accuracy to feed the on-board DSPs.

These upsample CD's 16-bit/44.1kHz data streams to 24-bit/176.4kHz for conversion. It's claimed jitter is kept low by a triple buffering system and a new high-stability clocking system. Connections include balanced (XLR) and unbalanced analogue outputs, plus coaxial and optical digital outs.

☎ 01480 445678 ☎ www.meridian-audio.com



GALAXY QUEST

NEW MULTICHANNEL SPEAKER PACKAGE FROM TRIANGLE

French loudspeaker manufacturer Triangle is claiming audiophile sound from its new Galaxy sub/ sat multichannel system. With cabinets made from cast aluminium, the two-way speakers use Triangle's own 120mm driver with a respectable frequency response of 100Hz-20kHz. A neat little subwoofer with a 210mm aluminium driver offers 100 watts of power despite its tiny size (20x13x12cm). Galaxy can be bought as a 2.1 stereo system (£625), or as a complete 5.1 package (£995), with sub and satellite pairs available individually.

☎ 01753 652669

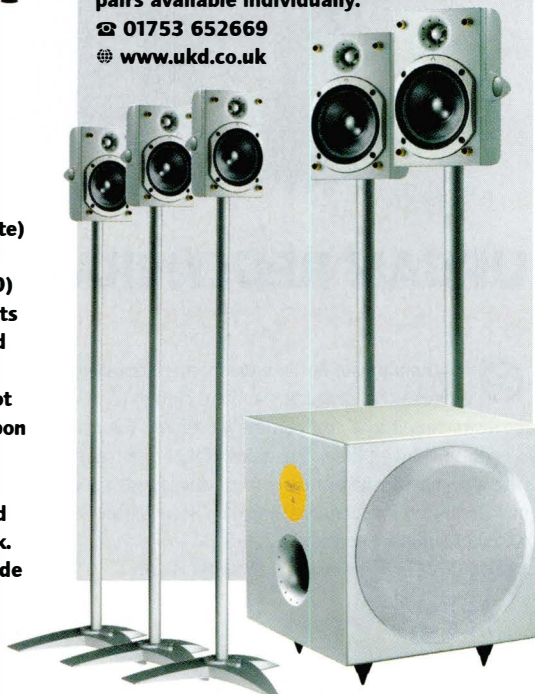
☎ www.ukd.co.uk

CLEVER COMPOUNDS

FUNKY CLEARLIGHT RDC SPEAKER

Clearlight Audio, inventor of the RDC compound (a resonance-free composite) is the first company to make a loudspeaker from the stuff. The new Symphony (£12,000) claims the lowest possible coloration from its manipulated cabinet. The design is expected to cancel standing waves and give wide dispersion characteristics that eliminate 'hot spot' syndrome. Treble output is from a ribbon tweeter that extends to 40kHz and bass is provided by a large 305mm driver, said to reach 35kHz. Efficiency is high at 90dB, and you can have any colour as long as it's black.

☎ 01635 291357 ☎ www.clearlight-audio.de



X-TUBE™

AIRCORE™ TECHNOLOGY SPEAKER CABLE



RESOLUTION

X-TUBE™ is a genuine breakthrough in loudspeaker cable design, the result of intensive research and development. All 3 models in the X-TUBE™ range utilise QEDs' unique, high resolution 'tubular conductor geometry' and are designed with one simple aim – to produce the very best performance possible from your hi-fi or home cinema system.

X-TUBE by QED, NATURALLY.



QED Audio Products Ltd.

† 01483 747474 e info@qed.co.uk w www.qed.co.uk



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

SONY BMG MERGER PLANS



BMG and Sony, two of the world's largest record labels are to merge, thus reducing music industry domination from five to four major companies. The media giants announced plans to combine in a fifty-fifty merger called Sony BMG, the resulting company to be jointly run by Sony's

Andrew Lack and BMG's Rolf Schmithdt-Holtz. Industry sources have speculated that this could be the last of the big record company mergers, as the monopolies and mergers commissions in the US and EU are likely to block attempts by the other three companies to follow suit. How the move will affect BMG's attitude to hi-res formats remains to be seen – thus far it has shown support for DVD-Audio with titles from contemporary acts such as the Foo Fighters and Outkast (left), but Sony will no doubt be keen to persuade it of the benefits of SACD.

Meanwhile former Seagram CEO Edgar Bronfman is heading a conglomerate that has made a strong bid for the Warner Music Group, thus competing head-on with EMI which had already made an offer.

THE ULTIMATE HYBRID?

The possibility of a CD/ DVD dual-sided disc has come another step closer with the EnXnet DVDPlus format. The disc is said to offer either DVD-Video or Audio on one side with a CD-compatible layer on the other. If it proves practical and playable in the full gamut of hardware, such a format could prove a powerful rival to SACD/ CD hybrid discs. EnXnet's Ryan Corley has stated that it has delivered samples to "several potential customers" for evaluation. Technical barriers to

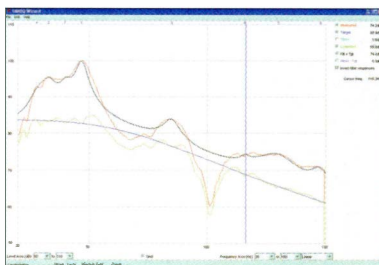
the success of this hybrid include problems of compatibility with slot-loading CD players where disc thickness can be an issue and not least licensing issues.

Whether record companies will be able to get the go ahead for such a format when the original CD patents are owned by Sony and Philips remains to be seen. EnXnet has its own DStag security technology to overcome piracy issues and has said that it anticipates DVD Plus discs to be available early in 2004.

ROOM EQ FROM AV32R

TAG McLaren's multichannel processor the AV32R now has the ability to apply room correction filtering thanks to new TMREQ V2 software. By importing room measurement information from ETF Acoustics the TMREQ Wizard software can calculate the peaks in the response and configure filters to remove them. This tailoring only occurs up to 300Hz because this is where room-induced problems are worst – removing peaks rather than filling in troughs is considered the more reliable of the two options.

Filters can be set to an accuracy of one Hertz and the system works by producing a



response that is the inverse of the peaks, thus cancelling them out. You can set up the filters on the AV32R or via a computer, the latter approach involving a £30 licence fee but making the job a lot easier.

ANOTHER BULLET?

High-end connector specialist WBT has produced a new variant on the RCA phono plug it's calling Nextgen. Looking not unlike the Eichmann Bullet plug, the Nextgen uses a pin for the negative connector rather than the more conventional collar and achieves a significant reduction in conductor mass as a result. Another advantage of the design is that it offers a true 75ohm impedance which is highly desirable for digital connections. Of course this is only true when it's used in conjunction with the Nextgen socket which has a similarly reduced metal element.

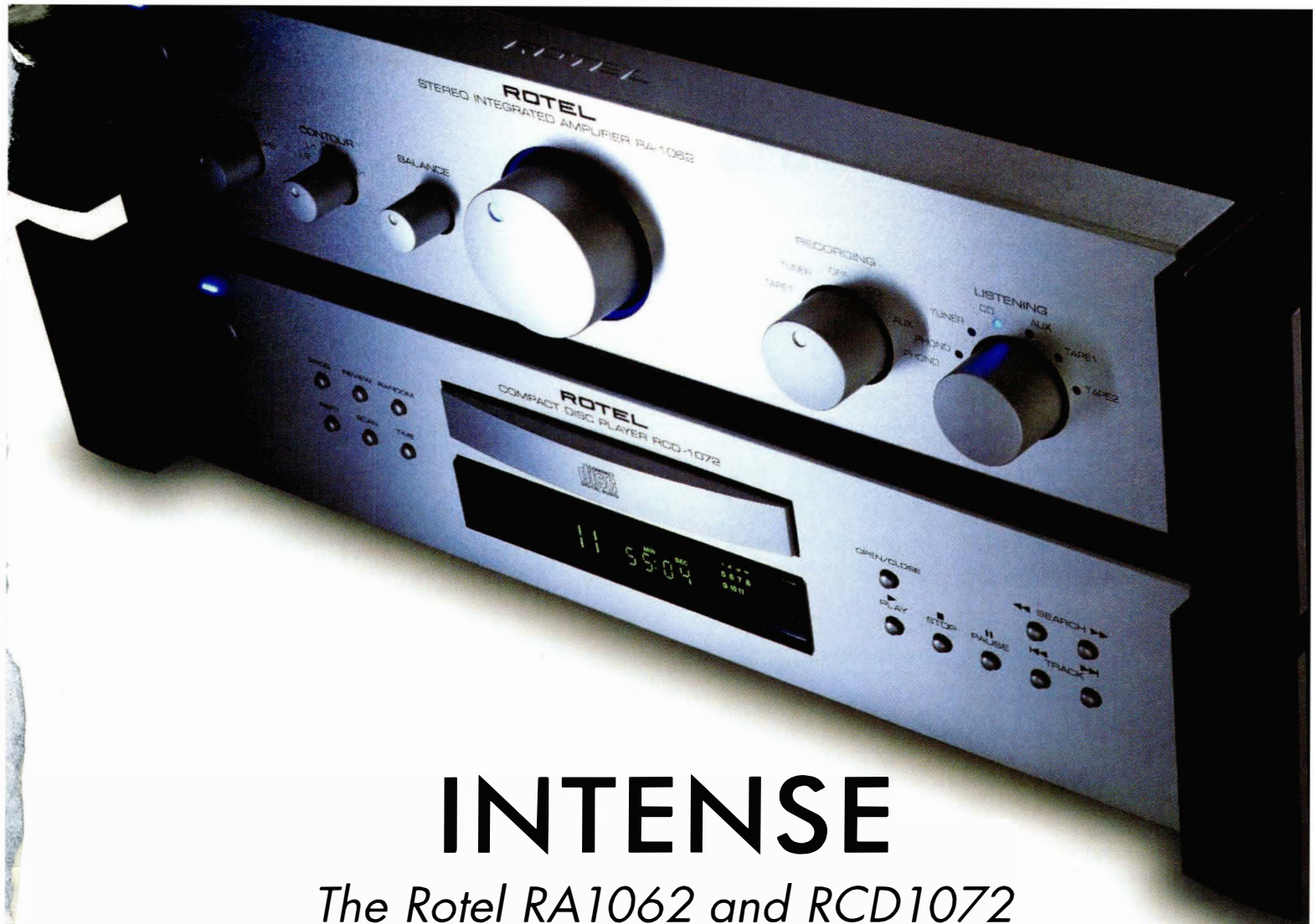
The combination of these two is claimed to have superior conductivity, reduced interference and to offer wider bandwidth than conventional RCA interfaces. Both plug and socket are compatible with conventional designs such as are found in the rest of WBT's catalogue. Materials used include pure copper conductors, Ultramid and magnesium.



JOHN MICHELL RIP

Turntable maker John Michell passed away last month. In the early seventies, John took over manufacture of the Hydraulic Reference turntable from Transcriptors, a design he had supplied as a prop for the film *A Clockwork Orange* when working at Pinewood studios. He went on to create the Electronic Reference Prisma, Focus One and Syncro decks before launching the all-aluminium Gyrodec in 1981.

Despite chronic ill-health, John continued to design in semi retirement creating the TecnoDec and TecnoArm. Michell the company is now being run by John's daughter Julie and her husband Steve Rowland.



INTENSE

The Rotel RA1062 and RCD1072

Individually, Rotel's latest CD player and amplifier will make a striking difference to the way you hear music. When they hook up with each other, though, it's a match made in hifi heaven. The chemistry is instant, thanks to a shared pedigree of meticulous component selection, painstaking refinement and balanced design by Rotel's award-winning team of engineers. It's an intense relationship, and a powerful listening experience. Get them connected.

To find out more about this perfect partnership, call B&W Loudspeakers UK on 01903 221500.



TIME MACHINE FIVE YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice

Jan/Feb 1999

B&W's Nautilus 801 made its HFC debut to considerable enthusiasm – this 104kg beast remains a world-class design to this day and it still likes to play loud! Hard to imagine now but this behemoth was part of a high-end speaker



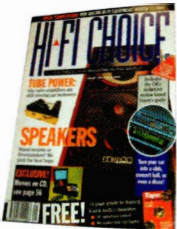
test alongside the Focal-JMLab Mezzo Utopia and Ruark Excalibur. The SME Model 20.2A turntable and arm was also very well liked for its ability to let the music shine through. The battle lines for SACD vs DVD-A were being drawn up, this being a long time before universal players, and it seemed likely back then that a winner might emerge in a year or so!

TEN YEARS AGO

Hi-Fi Choice

Jan/Feb 1994

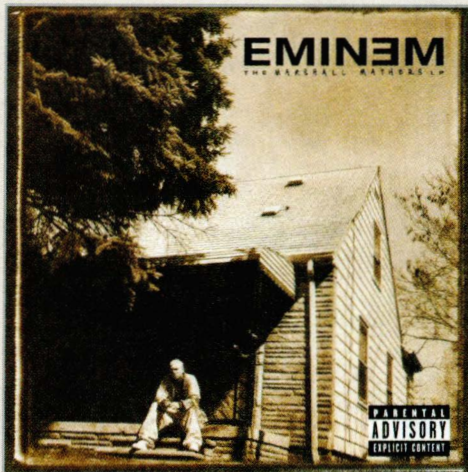
Paul Messenger got to grips with the massive Townshend Sir Galahad, bristling with drive units set into a cabinet made from plaster of Paris and steel. It redefined bass power, depth and slam, not too mention bulk.



We visited an audiophile and sculptor at his Swedish home and we sampled the delights of interactive movies on CD-I – whatever happened to that format?! Free with the issue was a guide to cassette tape with 38 brands tested – in those days copy protection consisted of a logo on LPs stating that home taping was killing music.

SYSTEM BUILDER

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



EMINEM

The Marshall Mathers LP Interscope

Love him or hate him, you have to respect Eminem's ability to stay ahead of the game. Since his Slim Shady debut in 1999 he has rarely been out of the charts and this, his second album from 2000, is arguably the best so far. It contains the hits, *The Real Slim Shady* and the Dido-backed *Stan*, both of which sound superb when reproduced by a capable system. This is a dark journey through the mind of a man who has seen a side of life that most audiophiles know little of, yet he manages to create original and revealing material that is both disconcerting and sometimes plain funny. The lyrics on *The Real Slim Shady* are ingenious and the musical contributions of producer Dr Dre a joy to hear. This is a high quality recording that rewards upgrades in equipment with snappier timing and clearer lyrics – it's a killer for revealing timing skills.

CD PLAYER RESOLUTION AUDIO OPUS 21 £2,850

This neat player places transport and DAC in one case with power supplies and display in the other.

The result is cracking timing and dynamic finesse that will embarrass many more expensive CD spinning alternatives.



AMPLIFIER

ATC SIA2-150 £2,375

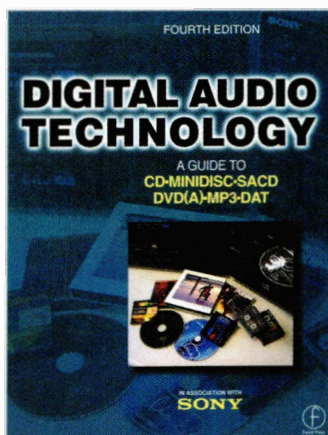
Muscular and dynamic in no uncertain terms, this is a heavyweight integrated that can deliver the power and resolve to make the most of any music but revels in the elastic beats of Dre and Mathers.



LOUDSPEAKERS

PMC IB2 £6,150

Heavyweight standmount with bass to die for – deep, full, round and juicy. It's just the sort of speaker that this album will have been mastered on, and combines power with a high degree of sonic sophistication.



BOOK OF THE MONTH

DIGITAL AUDIO TECHNOLOGY (4TH EDITION)

A guide to CD, MD, SACD, DVD-A, MP3 & DAT Focal Press E31

Originally produced by the Sony Centre Europe and revised for this fourth edition by the same guys, this is a comprehensive guide to all the digital audio technologies which Sony has been involved with and a couple which it hasn't. It now contains a section on SACD including details of the DST (Direct Stream Transfer) compression system used for multichannel recordings. The DVD-Audio section is notably shorter but offers a good technical grounding nonetheless.

As with earlier editions there is extensive coverage of tape-based recording systems including non-tracking (NT) DAT. There is also plenty of depth on subjects such as A/D and D/A conversion, quantisation and oversampling, while the Compression chapter explains the ins and outs of MP3 and ATRAC. This authoritative book will be of great interest to those of a technical bent.

READERS' DEMO DISCS

YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC FOR HI-FI AUDITIONS



JONI MITCHELL

Mingus Asylum

In 1978 Mitchell and Mingus got together to work on a rather ambitious project to transcribe TS Eliot's *Four Quartets* but when that fell apart the jazz bass player/composer wrote music to which Joni wrote lyrics. She then gathered the

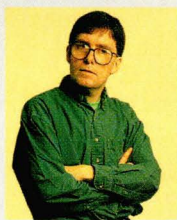
likes of Herbie Hancock, Peter Erskine and Don Alias among others to record tunes such as *Dry Cleaner From Des Moines* and *God Must Be A Boogie Man*. This is a quality record in all respects and has depth and subtlety enough for the finest hi-fi systems, yet still sounds great on relatively affordable kit.

Ian Underwood 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 #16

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



Speaker Grilles

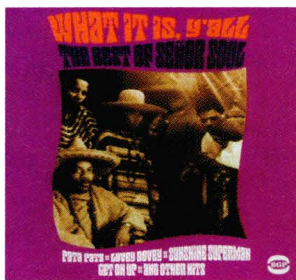
Nearly everyone assumes speaker grilles are sonically a 'Bad Thing' – they may make the speaker look more stylish and attractive, but always make the sound worse. It's certainly true that most speakers sound sharper and more open with the grilles removed, but is that necessarily a good thing?

Many hi-fi systems sound so sharp, you almost risk cutting your ears when you listen. A well-designed speaker grille can help create a more homogenous and integrated sound, with better balance between bass and treble extremes. If you always listen to your speakers minus their grilles, try digging them out and reinstating them. Spend an evening listening to music (avoid making A/B comparisons!) and see if things sound more enjoyable and easier to assimilate with the grilles in place.

ON THE OFFICE STEREO

MUSIC THAT AMUSED US WHILE CREATING THIS ISSUE

- Señor Soul What It Is Y'All
- Missy Elliott This Is Not A Test
- Laika Wherever I Am...
- Scott Walker Five Easy Pieces
- Bubba Sparxxx Deliverance
- Willard Grant Conspiracy Regard The End
- Joey & Norman Jay Good Times 3
- DJ Spinna & Bobbito The Wonder Of Stevie
- Misia Canto
- E.S.T. Seven Days Of Falling



NEW MUSIC IN THE STUDIO

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



NORAH JONES

Title: tbc

Release date: Feb 2004

Has tighter security ever surrounded an album than the follow-up to *Come Away With Me*? Her debut is the best-selling album of the last two years, with a sack full of Grammy awards and eight million copies shifted in America alone. Her much-anticipated follow-up includes guests Dolly Parton and former members of The Band, and it's produced by Arif Mardin.

PRODIGY

Title: *Always Outnumbered, Never Outgunned*

Release date: Spring 2004

Prodigy appeared to have the world at their feet when 1997's *The Fat Of The Land* entered the charts at number one and saw them win a BRIT award. Now main man Liam Howlett has revealed that work, which did not begin until this summer, is "heavily underway" and the album should be finished soon.

VOODOO CHILD

Title: *Baby Monkey*

Release date: 2 Feb 2004

Who? None other than Moby hiding under another name. "It was the last night of my European tour, and to celebrate we went to a club where they were playing hard, sexy, straightforward dance music. When I arrived home the next day I decided to make not an experimental record or an avant-garde record, but a straightforward, underground, electronic dance record."

PAUL WELLER

Title: tbc

Release date: Spring 2004

Paul Weller is currently in nostalgic mood for his first release for new label



V2 is to be an album of covers. The selection includes songs first recorded by artists as diverse as Muddy Waters, Sister Sledge and Tim Hardin and follows the recent release of *Under The Influence*, a compilation by Weller of some of his favourite tracks by artists ranging from Little Richard to John Coltrane.

HANSON

Title: *Underneath*

Release date: Spring 2004

Stop sniggering at the back. One-time *MmmBop* teen-pop stars Hanson are now a grown-up alternative rock band. Collaborators include such cred names as Matthew Sweet and the New Radicals' Gregg Alexander. An early four-track sampler reveals great three-part harmonies and tough guitar work.

ALSO COMING SOON

ROCK/POP

Zero 7 When it Falls (Feb), **Ben Watt** Replenishing Music For The Modern Soul (Mar), **U2** tbc (2004), **Fatboy Slim** Fatboy 4 (2004)

CLASSICAL/ JAZZ

Arcadi Voloso Plays Tchaikovsky (Feb), **Murray Perhia** Bach Italian Concerto (Feb), **George Benson** Irreplaceable (Mar), **Diana Krall** The Girl In The Other Room (Apr)



Caig R5 Power Booster £20

⊕ The R5 (recently rebranded as 'DeoxIT Power Booster') is one of a number of Caig products which are intended to improve conductivity at metal-to-metal contacts. The clue's in the name – as this one implies, the Power Booster is intended primarily for contacts which carry power rather than smaller signals. The retail package includes both a spray canister and a small tube, but in essence it appears to be basically the same stuff.

Incredibly, it really does work, and the results on audio (and indeed non-audio) contacts are near-miraculous. Sonically, there's a very noticeable cleaning up of the sound and a general reduction in 'hash'. You'll soon become addicted, cleaning every contact in your house to a fine polish on a regular basis – effects seem to last months rather than years. Do look at Caig's website for other product details and hints too. But most importantly, buy it and use it!

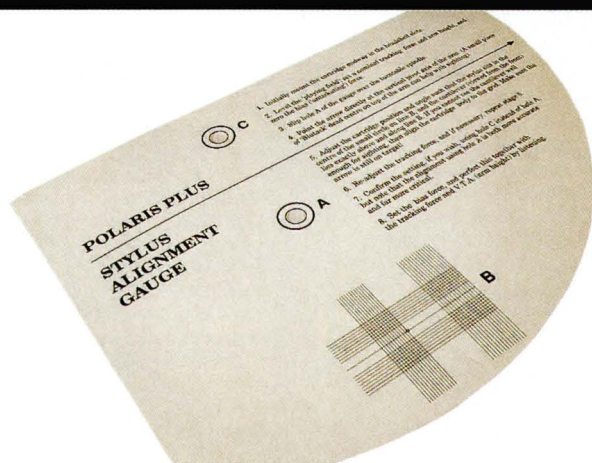
ⓞ Russ Andrews 0800 373467 ⓞ www.caig.com

Milty Zerostat 3 £38

⊕ This true veteran of audio may have been slightly restyled down the years but it's still the same in essence – a piezo-electric generator which produces a stream of ions, the aim being to neutralise static charges on LPs. Squeeze the trigger, and positive ions are emitted, release it and negative ions appear. It's certainly not snake oil and indeed the device finds applications in laboratories and all sorts of places where static charges are a nuisance.

Remove your disc from its sleeve, hold it a foot or so from the Zerostat, gently squeeze and release the trigger. The disc loses its charge, though on some decks cleaning with a carbon fibre brush may recharge it to some extent. All the same, the main aim is accomplished, which is to make dust much easier to remove. It's well worth the cost and trouble – and enables you to test the much more tenuous claims regarding static charge on CDs and cables.

ⓞ Veda 01284 701101 ⓞ www.veda-uk.co.uk



Polaris Plus Stylus Alignment Gauge £6

⊕ Stylus alignment is the most important thing to adjust on most LP decks. When it is optimised, distortion is minimised across the record, but errors in adjustment of just 1mm can more than double worst-case distortion. This simple gauge, thoughtfully printed complete with instructions on soft, tear-resistant plastic, allows the job to be done quite easily.

It seems ungracious to carp, but the instructions are perhaps not quite as clear or as detailed as they might have been. And there's the problem, common to all 'two-point gauges' like this one, that the interaction between offset angle and overhang is hard to comprehend. All the same, with care and repeated measurements (engineering rule no1: *always repeat any tricky measurement*) you will get the cartridge properly set up in not many minutes. This is a cheap and handy way of doing an important job.

ⓞ hifforsale 0870 241 2469 ⓞ www.audiophilecandy.com



Soundcare Spike 2 £30 (set of 3)

⊕ Here's a nice bit of lateral thinking. How to solve the problem of spikes digging holes in floors, feet and equipment, in a simple and universally retrofittable package, with nothing to adjust and no bits to lose? Soundcare has machined some spikes and matching cups, paired them inside a loose plastic housing which serves merely to keep them together during handling, and put smooth faces on each which can optionally be stuck to equipment and/or stands.

Whatever you think of the sonic effect of spikes as such, these are very useful. For a start, there's an intrinsic tolerance of surface imperfections in both equipment and support surface, because each spike can tilt a little. And since there are three of them, they pretty much guarantee stable support (carefully positioned) for anything. What's more, you can move them around to optimise damping of resonances. A clever and highly practical solution.

ⓞ Black Rhodium 01332 361390 ⓞ www.soundcare.no

ABRACADABRA



The magic of TEAC DAB radio

Following on from the award winning Reference 300 system, TEAC is proud to announce the World's first mini component Hi-Fi system tuner with Digital Audio Broadcasting. Fully matching the Reference 300 series, the T-H300DAB offers amazing audio quality, not just from the many new digital stations now available, but also the existing FM stations. This, coupled with the exciting information display and easy to use DAB channel selection, makes it the ultimate upgrade for your system. The Reference 300 DAB tuner has the same stunning good looks, style and build quality you have come to expect from TEAC. As if by magic, digital radio has now arrived in a mini format.



The Award Wining
Reference 300 System

What Hi-Fi? Best Buy 2001 and 2002



Digital Audio Broadcast from TEAC, the future of radio has arrived

TEAC

250 not out!

Hi-Fi Choice is a thoroughbred among hi-fi mags. Its history dates back 29 years, when a determined group of hi-fi nuts decided we deserved a better sort of hi-fi journal – a no-nonsense guide to the finest products available, packed front to back with tests of unique depth and clarity. *HFC* was a small, A5-sized book back then, each issue published quarterly and containing a multitude of tests of a single product type. Cassette decks came first, followed in time by receivers, speakers, turntables and cartridges. Then, in 1987, the decision was made to change format and go monthly.

Now published 13 times a year, the *Hi-Fi Choice* of today is rather different. As befits a modern magazine, we've sharpened up our 'visuals' and fashioned a more vibrant and varied monthly read which reflects the hi-fi scene of today, yet at the magazine's core remains the same beating heart that gave birth to the title all those years ago. Our unique mix of lab, subjective and blind listening tests, extensive hi-fi product coverage, passion and experience continues to make *HFC* the finest hi-fi magazine in the world – richly detailed yet crisp, clear and easy to use. Just like a good hi-fi system, in fact.

This, then, is our 250th issue. To celebrate, we've spoken to some of *HFC's* key reviewers, editors and publishers from the past, many of whom are still writing for the magazine today, and asked them how the market and the magazine have changed during their own particular tenure. Here's what they had to say.



PAUL MESSENGER

Key reviewer: 1978 to present
(Editor: 1978-1982, 1986-1988)

Back in the 1970s, *HFC* was a little 'pocket-size' quarterly publication, each edition devoted to the comparative assessment of maybe 50 examples of a specific hi-fi component. It was controversial too, as manufacturers didn't like the 'winners-and-losers' outcomes. Receivers and cassette decks were prime products in those days, in an era when amps were all reckoned to sound the same!

KEY PRODUCT: KEF R104 speaker

This important speaker offered superior control over directivity, giving outstandingly good listening test results that vindicated KEF's radical separate mid/treble head approach.



STAN VINCENT

Editor: 1994-1998

By the time I hung up my red pen at *HFC*, the increasing affordability and power of digital signal processing were already rapidly changing hi-fi. Analogue will never die. There'll always be ardent enthusiasts – and equally fervent small manufacturers – asserting that unsullied waves are sonically unsurpassable. But as CD foretold a decade earlier, the usability, robustness and sonic 'hygiene' of digital systems will always win out.

KEY PRODUCT: NXT flat panel loudspeaker technology

It may not yet be hi-fi in the traditional sense, but British success story NXT has the potential to make speakers smaller and flatter until they disappear altogether into displays and structures.



ALVIN GOLD

Key reviewer: 1987 to present

With early issues covering up to 50 items of one type, hi-fi was undeniably richer and more vital in the early days of *Hi-Fi Choice*. Key changes have been the arrival of compact disc, and later other forms of digital audio, leading to the present situation in which personal audio is increasingly being driven by low-grade data reduced codecs (MP3, WMA), the personal computer and a retail sector that long ago lost the plot.

KEY PRODUCT: Linn Sondek LP12 turntable (pictured)

Aspirational, crusading, steeped in the black set-up arts plus demonstrable superiority – you name it, the LP12 had (has) it.

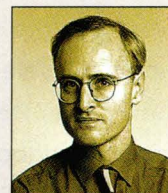


RICHARD BLACK

Key reviewer: 1989 to present

I started off reviewing a huge batch of turntables for *Hi-Fi Choice*. Then, I and many others believed that analogue was forever – so far it looks as if we were right. But digital has also come on apace – audio electronics too (speakers? Not so sure). Technologically, audio has never looked so rosy. Sadly, the whole recorded music edifice looks shaky as the 'something for nothing' brigade argue that music should be free. Try telling that to musicians with a mortgage. A little re-evaluation is surely in order!

KEY PRODUCT: Pink Triangle Anniversary turntable
It showed just what can be achieved by a detailed understanding of the science behind the sound.



JOHN BAMFORD

Editor: 1988-1991

It's 12 years since I hung up my journalist's hat to become a product manager at Pioneer. The first *HFC* I edited was a luxurious high-end *Collection* edition that included the gorgeous Kiseki Lapis Lazuli cartridge costing a staggering £3,500. We were serious about vinyl replay back then, bemoaning the fact that CD was clearly taking over from LPs.

KEY PRODUCT: Townshend Audio Rock Reference turntable (pictured)

"This has been keeping me awake at nights," I reported in 1989, referring to previously unheard details buried in the grooves of my record collection. It still does...



ALAN SIRCOM

Key reviewer: 1992 to present

(Reviews Editor: 1992-1998)

When I started writing for *HFC*, LP was about to die and a raft of digital recorders were about to replace cassettes. Now, LP's still going strong and digital recording systems like DCC have gone the way of the dodo. Some anticipated the rise of home cinema (Dolby Pro-Logic had arrived and LaserDisc was to undergo a bit of a comeback), but no-one imagined the rise in multichannel music.

We all thought that lay buried in Quadraphonic's grave.

KEY PRODUCT: Marantz CD-63II K1-S CD player

Marantz's CD-63 (and the players that followed) broke new ground in bringing exciting, refined CD replay to the masses. The upgraded K1 Signature version of CD-63II is a landmark in CD history.



JASON KENNEDY

Key reviewer: 1987 to present

(Editor: 1998-2001)

A lot happened in the 14 years I was at *HFC*. MD fought off DCC just in time to take on its current foes MP3 and CD-R. CD players evolved from being frankly unpleasant to very impressive and both SACD and DVD-A took the stage in an attempt to increase both the quality and scope of digital audio. The highlight of the era for me was the resurgence of vinyl, a format that contrary to all expectations is thriving ten years after it was reported dead.

KEY PRODUCT: SME Model 20A turntable

This turntable revealed that there was more to life than springy suspensions and that mass is the only avenue if great bass is to be achieved.



JIMMY HUGHES

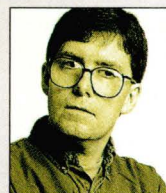
Key contributor: 1995 to present

In recent years, *HFC* has become noticeably more up-market, less hair-shirt tweaky. It looks vastly better – more colour, improved layout. The past decade has seen the hi-fi industry polarise

into surround/AV, or purist two-channel valves/vinyl/horns specialists. Only our writing has maintained any sort of consistency – against incredible odds, we're still the same lovable bunch of biased, self-opinionated, ignorant, arrogant tossers!

KEY PRODUCT: Chord DAC64 (pictured)

With the DAC64 D/A converter, CD finally came of age – it was the product I'd waited twenty years for.



MARIANNE BANNISTER (NÉE MCNICHOLAS)

Publisher: 1983-1992

I can still remember the joyous silence that greeted my suggestion to the Dennis Publishing board back in 1987 that we turn the famous little A5 hi-fi bible into an A4 monthly. I left the meeting checking for the white coats. Despite initial misgivings, the grown-up *Hi-Fi Choice* was born – and it became the hi-fi bible – and I hope it still is. Good luck with the next 250 issues!

KEY PRODUCT: Meridian Pro MCD CD player

Meridian's Pro MCD proved the specialist hi-fi manufacturer could still compete with big multinationals, bringing superior sound quality to the then new CD medium.



PAUL MILLER

Technical reviewer: 1988 to present

I joined the *Hi-Fi Choice* team during a fascinating and dynamic period in hi-fi's evolution, with the industry propelled forward by the momentum of CD. This digital technology evolved from raw PCM to higher speed (bitstream) processing and provided the building blocks of recordable CD, Sony's MiniDisc, true digital amplification and the DVD, SACD and AV products we know today. *HFC* reflected this evolution with the first technical articles on all these new and emerging digital technologies.

KEY PRODUCT: TACT Millennium digital amplifier

A truly innovative product from the last millennium whose underlying technology has yet to really blossom in this millennium.



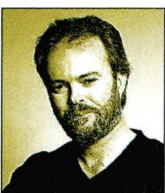
DAVID VIVIAN

Key contributor: 1990 to present

The Japanese were coming, taking on British hi-fi specialists at their own audiophile game and, often, winning. The Pioneer A-400 amp changed everything, paving the way for a whole new generation of 'tweaked-for-the-UK' budget esoterica. Of course, it was the best thing that could have happened. Not only were the Japanese specials mostly excellent, it gave Brit-fi a much-needed kick up the backside. The hi-fi consumer couldn't lose.

KEY PRODUCT: Marantz CD-63II K1-S CD player (pictured)

This classic was actually put together over here with a copper chassis, bottom plate for rigidity, a toroidal transformer and up-graded output stages. Musically, it flew.



SIMON DAVIES

Editor: 1993-1994, Publisher: 1995-2001

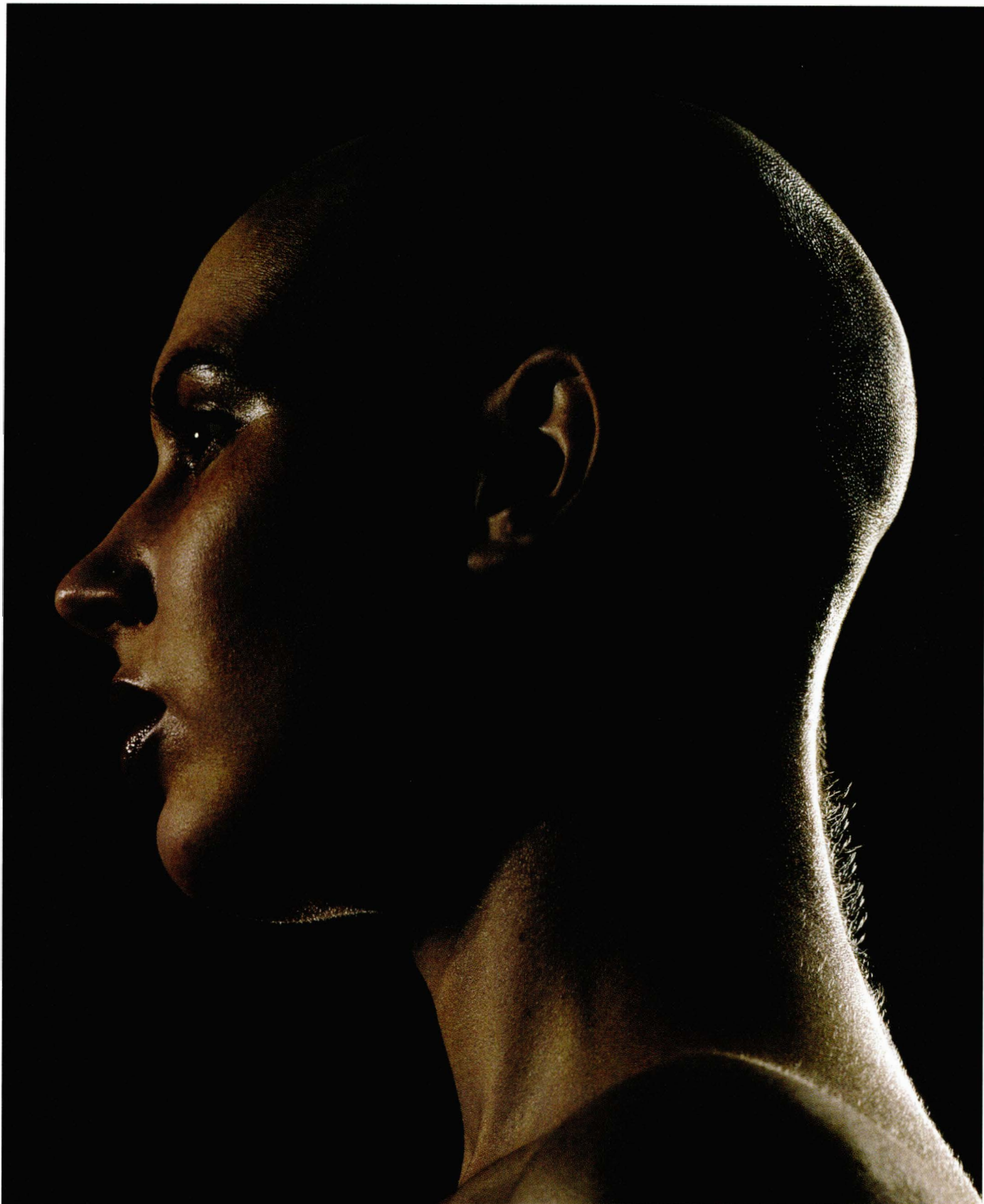
In 1993, digital technologies such as DCC and MiniDisc were calling into question the very *raison d'être* of *HFC*. What the doubters failed to realise was the fact that the pursuit of audio excellence did not end simply because new formats were introducing better sound quality to a wider audience. *HFC* embraced the digital revolution, and re-invented itself to provide new benchmarks for the testing and evaluation of digital technology.

KEY PRODUCT: Pioneer A-300X amplifier

Pioneer's budget 'super' amp used improved output devices, better reservoir capacitors and dispensed with the headphone socket to simplify the signal path.

Rarely has hi-fi aroused such passions!





The Arcam DiVA range has always been about the performance. Pure emotion from pure sound. Experience the power of music at your DiVA dealer - it could make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck.

ARCAM
DiVA

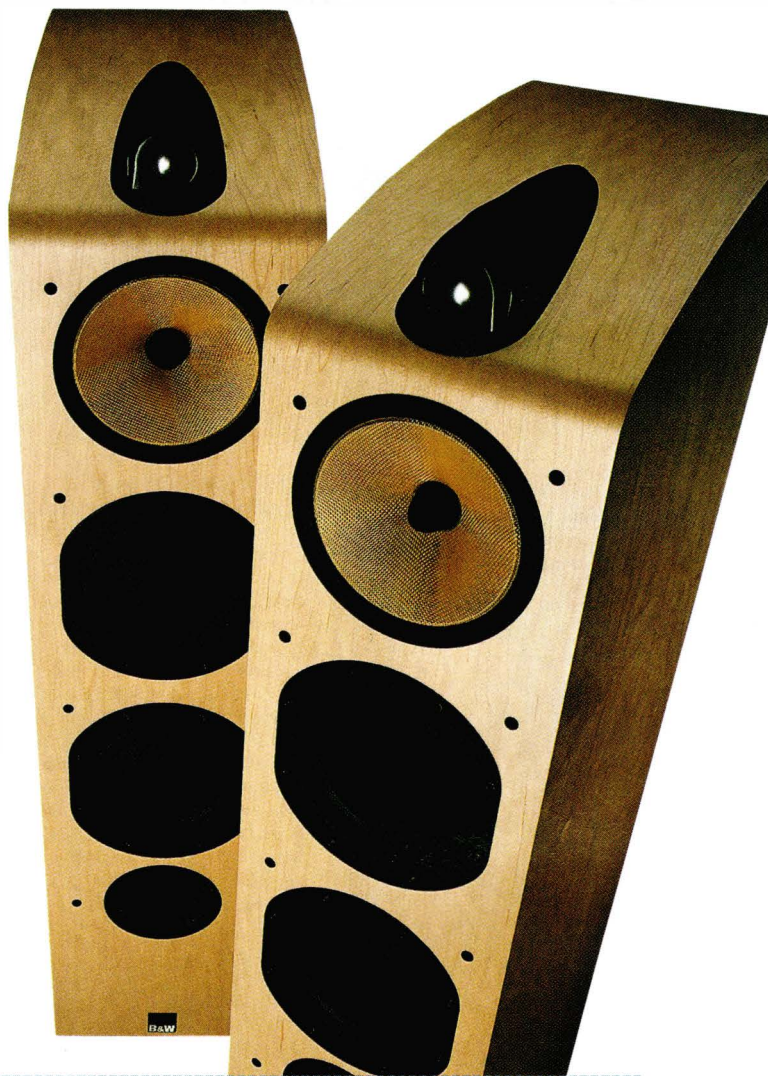
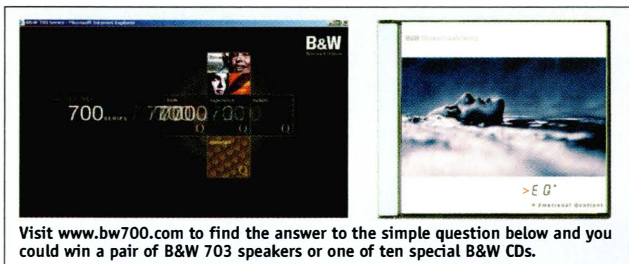
Tel: 01223 203200 www.arcam.co.uk

HI-FI CHOICE COMPETITION

Win a super pair of B&W 703 speakers worth £2,000!

Fresh from its success in the *HFC Awards* comes B&W's superb new 703 floorstander, our prize in this month's competition. Using advanced drive unit technology developed for the range-topping Nautilus series, the 703 sets an enviable standard for £2,000 three-way speakers. Clad in a classy real wood veneer, the front and top of the cabinet are formed from a single piece which confers tremendous structural integrity and minimises resonance. The high-class drivers consist of a 140mm version of B&W's groundbreaking surroundless midrange with a Kevlar cone, a pair of balanced drive bass drivers using 120mm paper cones and an externally mounted 25mm tweeter with an aluminium dome.

If you miss out on the speakers, don't fret – the first 10 runners-up will receive B&W's 'EQ' CD, which harnesses a collection of moods by artists as varied as Eric Satie, Michael Nyman and Grandmaster Flash.



HOW TO ENTER

Visit B&W's 700-series website at www.bw700.com and answer the question below by circling the correct answer, then fill in your name, address and day-time telephone number below. Please also take the time to fill in our small questionnaire – we want to make *Hi-Fi Choice* as good as you deserve, dear reader.

QUESTION

Which Frank Sinatra song features in the 'experience' section of B&W's 700-series website?

- a) My Way
- b) Fly Me To The Moon
- c) It's Impossible

YOUR DETAILS (BLOCK CAPITALS)

Title _____ Initials _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Date of Birth _____ Day time tel number _____

What type of hi-fi product you intend to buy next? _____

What brands would you most like to read about? _____

Would you like to see more expensive or less expensive kit reviewed? _____

What would you like to see more of in *Hi-Fi Choice*? _____

Please tell us if there's anything you don't like. _____

COMPETITION RULES

The closing date for this competition is 25 January 2004. Winners of the B&W competition will be judged from all correct entries submitted, and drawn at random after the closing date. Winners will be notified by post. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. The Exposure competition is not open to employees of B&W Loudspeakers, Future Publishing Ltd, nor their suppliers, agents or associates. We regret this competition is only open to UK residents. No cash alternatives will be offered. By entering the competition you will be bound by the rules. We reserve the right to substitute alternative prizes with equivalent value to those shown, in the unlikely event of stock being temporarily unavailable. All entries must be on this official coupon, but photocopies are acceptable. Only one entry per household.

Send your entry to:

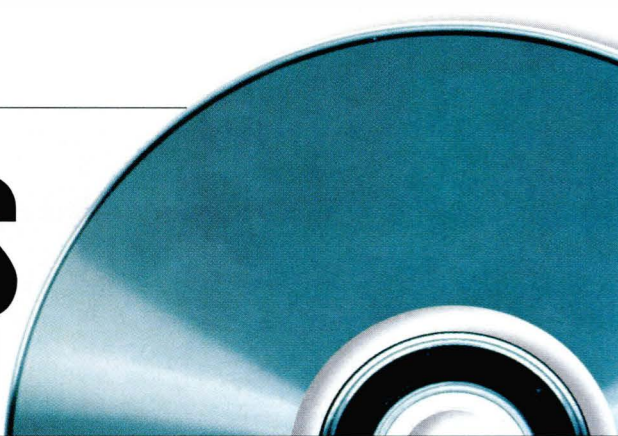
**B&W Competition, Hi-Fi Choice, Future Publishing,
99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6PP.**

ChoiceCuts



This month's varied musical morsels

Reviews by Dan George, Alvin Gold, Jason Kennedy, Dave Oliver, Mark Prendergast, Phil Strongman, Nigel Williamson



AUDIOPHILE VINYL

NICK DRAKE

Pink Moon

Island/Simply Vinyl 180g

Music: Nick Drake was a tragic character with a beautiful voice and a lyrical style that is rare. 1972's *Pink Moon* is a collection of 11 simple songs that last less than half an hour in total yet have more depth and understated passion than most epic dramas. This was the final album of Drake's career, cut short by suicide and unlike the orchestrated cuts on the previous two albums here we find him alone with an acoustic guitar. This is the album that more than any other created the Drake legend, and tracks such as *Place To Be* and *Which Will* stand out from a collection of near perfect songs, they encapsulate melancholy with a beauty that's quintessentially English. ★★★★★
Sound: Our pressing wasn't the flattest you'll find but it's good, quiet vinyl with a lot more body and depth than the CD. It also comes in the original gatefold sleeve and does justice to the quality of material recorded on it. ★★★★★ JK

JEFF BUCKLEY

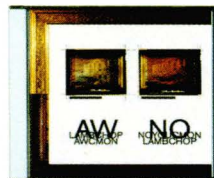
Mystery White Boy

Columbia 2x180g

Music: Rather like Nick Drake, Jeff Buckley was the great white hope of his generation. His only fully formed studio album, *Grace*, is arguably the most powerful rock album of the nineties, and the tragic curtailing of his life in a bizarre drowning accident a loss to music as a whole. This double LP brings together twelve live tracks recorded on tour in 1995-96. It includes his best songs including *Mojo Pin*, *Last Goodbye* and the raucous *Eternal Life*. If you've only heard *Grace*, the energy and extra rocking out of the live material might come as a shock, the studio material seeming very restrained by comparison. ★★★★★
Sound: Recorded in a variety of venues the quality reflects the changes but can be atmospheric at one extreme and intense, if compressed, at others. This vinyl pressing is a little soft at high frequencies but delivers the power of the moment well. ★★★★★ JK

These and other audiophile LPs are available from Simply Vinyl ☎ 0208 545 8580
www.simplyvinyl.com

COMPACT DISC & VINYL



LAMBCHOP

Aw C'mon & No You C'mon

City Slang

Music: Two discs, but not a double album, according to Kurt Wagner of Nashville's splendidly eclectic alt-country heroes. Each is intended to be heard as entirely separate records that just happen to share the same slip-case. Well, sorry, Kurt. It's a glorious sound, but any significant difference between the two albums is utterly imperceptible to this reviewer. *Aw C'mon* combines wispily elusive tunes sung in Wagner's trademark baritone with understated but potentially soulful string arrangements. And guess what? *No You C'mon* does exactly the same. But with the two albums for the price of one, who's complaining? ★★★★★
Sound: Lloyd Barry's strings and new guitarist William Tyler add depth and dynamism to Wagner's quiet, desperate songs. ★★★★★ NW



SCOTT WALKER

Five Easy Pieces

Universal

Music: The mystical Mr Walker hasn't produced any new tracks for this 'best of', which attempts to package his eclectic back catalogue across five CDs, grouped according to genre. The divergent range of styles would be impressive across a major label's roster, let alone from one man, spanning sixties orchestral pop, through intimate love songs, film scores, chansons and his later, difficult experimental works. Through it all that voice, rich, velvet and fearlessly expressive is a joyful, if endlessly sad thing. ★★★★★
Sound: Collating Walker's varied career was never going to make for an easy mix, sonically speaking. Some fare better than others, with a few of the orchestral pieces in particular sounding as though they could have used a bit more space. ★★★ DO



NIRVANA

To Markos III

Universal Island

Music: Alongside The Nice and Procol Harum, the psychedelic sixties staple of baroque-pop reached its zenith with the original Nirvana, a curious Irish/Greek duo who spiced up their arrangements with cellos, harpsichords and phasing. Signed by Chris Blackwell and pushed by studio-whiz Mickie Most, the song *Rainbow Chaser* became their defining moment in 1968. This, their third album, is something of a curio as it was a self-financed parting shot which contained the delicate harp/horn/vibraphone nugget *Love Suite* which turned up on DJ Shadow's sample classic *Endroducing...* in 1996. ★★★★★
Sound: Like the group's first two albums, *To Markos III* has been nicely remastered for the digital era. In a word, lush. ★★★ MP



MISSY ELLIOTT

This Is Not A Test

Elektra

Music: The divine Miss E's fifth long player sees her and long-time collaborator Timbaland cutting a marriage of convenience between the experimental future hop of their early records and the back to basics old-school sound of their last, *Under Construction*. It may not be their hardest working album, but it's still head and shoulders above most of the rap/pop crew. There may be too many collaborations – the track with Elephant Man sounds like a weak attempt to tap into the ragga market, though the elastic funk of *Is This Our Last Time* with Fabolous is a standout. ★★★★★
Sound: You won't have much need to crank up the volume, as Timbaland's crystal clear production ensures every element gets its due attention. The album proves his inventiveness in the studio is still intact with quality beats and rhythms along with a few of his usual playful signatures intact. ★★★★★ DO



VARIOUS

Flying High

Castle

Music: The sleeve's sticker – 'the modern end of Northern Soul!' – tells it like it is. For, though the genre's hey-day was the late sixties, there were still gems being laid down in the seventies including The Street People's *You're My One Weakness Girl* with its rich, casually-stated basslines, The Duprees' *Check Yourself*, a classic soul rocker, and JJ Barnes' *Can't See Me Leaving You* which shows why Motown feared him as a rival to Marvin Gaye. The Festivals, 8th Day, Chuck Jackson and the Exciters more than make up the numbers. ★★★★★
Sound: Producers like Jerry Ross went for vibe more than 'cleanliness' but most of these cuts are way more than sweet enough, luxuriating in the 'new' eight and 16 track formats. ★★★ PS



THIS MONTH'S CLASSIC HI-FI TEST DISC "The result is as natural as you will find."

STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN & DOUBLE TROUBLE Couldn't Stand The Weather Epic 120g vinyl

Music: Vaughan's second album in 1984 proved an accelerator to the emerging blues revival of the period. His distinctive style reveals the influence of Muddy Waters, Kenny Burrell and Jimi Hendrix, yet the result is as natural as you will find. Simple arrangements performed largely as a trio include a superb rendition of *Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)* and the track that the hi-fi world couldn't get

enough of, *Tin Pan Alley*, a sparse, down-tempo number that combines lovely fat bass with SRV's fluid, soulful and edgy guitar. ★★★★★

Sound: There are several pressings of this LP, and of those we know, our Epic original sounds far more dynamic and clear than an Absolute Analogue 180g reissue – not all audiophile pressings are an improvement! ★★★★★ JK



AIR Talkie Walkie

Virgin

Music: With their elegant mix of lounge and retro-electronica, Air made one of the most immediately distinctive and influential albums of recent years with 1998's *Moon Safari*. Then the French duo seemed to lose their way and started taking themselves far too seriously. *Talkie Walkie* is a conscious attempt to return to the fluff 'n' fun of that classic. For that album's *Sexy Boy*, here read *Cherry Blossom Girl*. In place of *Kelly Watch The Stars*, we now have *Surfin' On A Rocket*. The reality, of course, is that once innocence has been tainted by experience, you can never really reclaim it – and the best moments here are born of that collision. ★★★

Sound: As you might expect from a production by Messrs Godin et Dunckel, *Talkie Walkie* is a sonic delight all the way from the 10cc-style multi-tracked voices on *Run* to the haunting strings courtesy of Serge Gainsbourg's arranger Michel Colombier on *Biological*. ★★★★★ NW

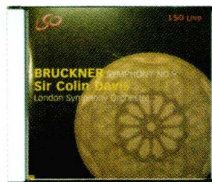


TORU TAKEMITSU How Slow The Wind

Christian Lindberg (trombone), Tadaaki Otaka (cond), Kioi Sinfonietta Tokyo BIS CD-1078

Music: Most of the short works here are from Takemitsu's mature period, and are characteristic pieces which have the feel of static scenes, painted in exquisite detail with precise care of timbre and texture. Some of the juxtapositions are curious, the trombone solo in *Fantasma/Cantos II* for example, but the constant twists always intrigue, and the music is in a direct line of descent from the western classical tradition. ★★★★

Sound: The BIS engineers have done an excellent job of capturing this live performance. Recorded onto DAT, the sound is pungent, with the space and air necessary for the music to breathe naturally. ★★★★★ AG



BRUCKNER Symphony No 9

Sir Colin Davis (conductor), LSO LSO Live 00023

Music: The curse of being able to complete only nine symphonies dogged the middle period of classical music history, and this unfinished work is another in the line. Sometimes described as 'Gothic cathedrals in sound', Bruckner's symphonies have a solemn, grandiose style. The ninth, which was meant as valedictory, comes across as a monumental, rather magnificent edifice. This interpretation is an excellent one – Sir Colin Davis has a natural affinity, and extracts a beautifully articulated and measured reading. ★★★★★

Sound: It is no easy matter achieving a good sound in the Barbican, but this Tony Faulkner recording gets closer than most. ★★★ AG

DVD-AUDIO & SACD

GREGORIO PANIAGUA

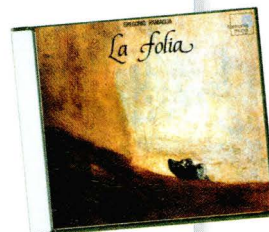
La Folia

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Harmonia Mundi HMC 901050

Music: This record was made in 1982 and became something of a favourite with certain elements in the hi-fi industry thanks to its impressive dynamic range and wide bandwidth, the boxed LP set being highly sought after. The full title is *La Folia De La Spagna* or *The Madness Of Spain*, and this baroque dance music lives up to its name. It kicks off with a string piece played on original instruments but before too long a qawalli singer and tabla join in to curious and entertaining effect. From there on the musical madness ebbs and flows with contributions from chainsaws, flutes, car horns *et al*. Remarkably enough it remains musical and enjoyable throughout but may prove a little eclectic for some. ★★★★★

Sound: This is an excellent analogue recording that translates well to SACD, its alarming dynamic excursions and remarkable breadth and quality of tone are preserved, as is the depth of soundstage. ★★★★★ JK



BEETHOVEN

The Last Three Sonatas

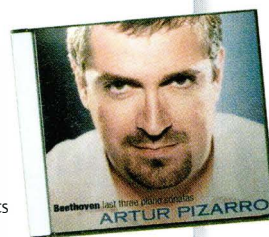
Artur Pizarro

SACD (stereo/multichannel SACD plus stereo CD layer)

Linn Records CKD 225

Music: The three final Beethoven piano sonatas are from the very summit of his achievement. The first movement of Opus 111 is a tortured, abrasive piece full of stark and brutal contrasts, but there are also moments of poetry and serenity in these works. This is the second disc of Beethoven sonatas from Artur Pizarro on Linn Records, and while the interpretations are perhaps not quite as convincing as the earlier release of the famous named sonatas, there is no lack of virtuosity, and the playing is notable for its boundless energy, expression and power. Great stuff. ★★★★★

Sound: The very realistic sounding piano has a bell-like purity, but the recording has far too much energy in the surround channels, and doesn't always sound properly anchored to the front of the soundstage unless the front/rear balance is adjusted to suit. ★★★ AG



TIPPER

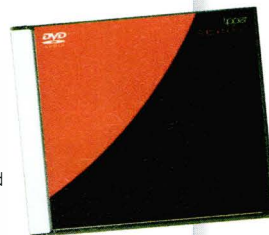
Surrounded

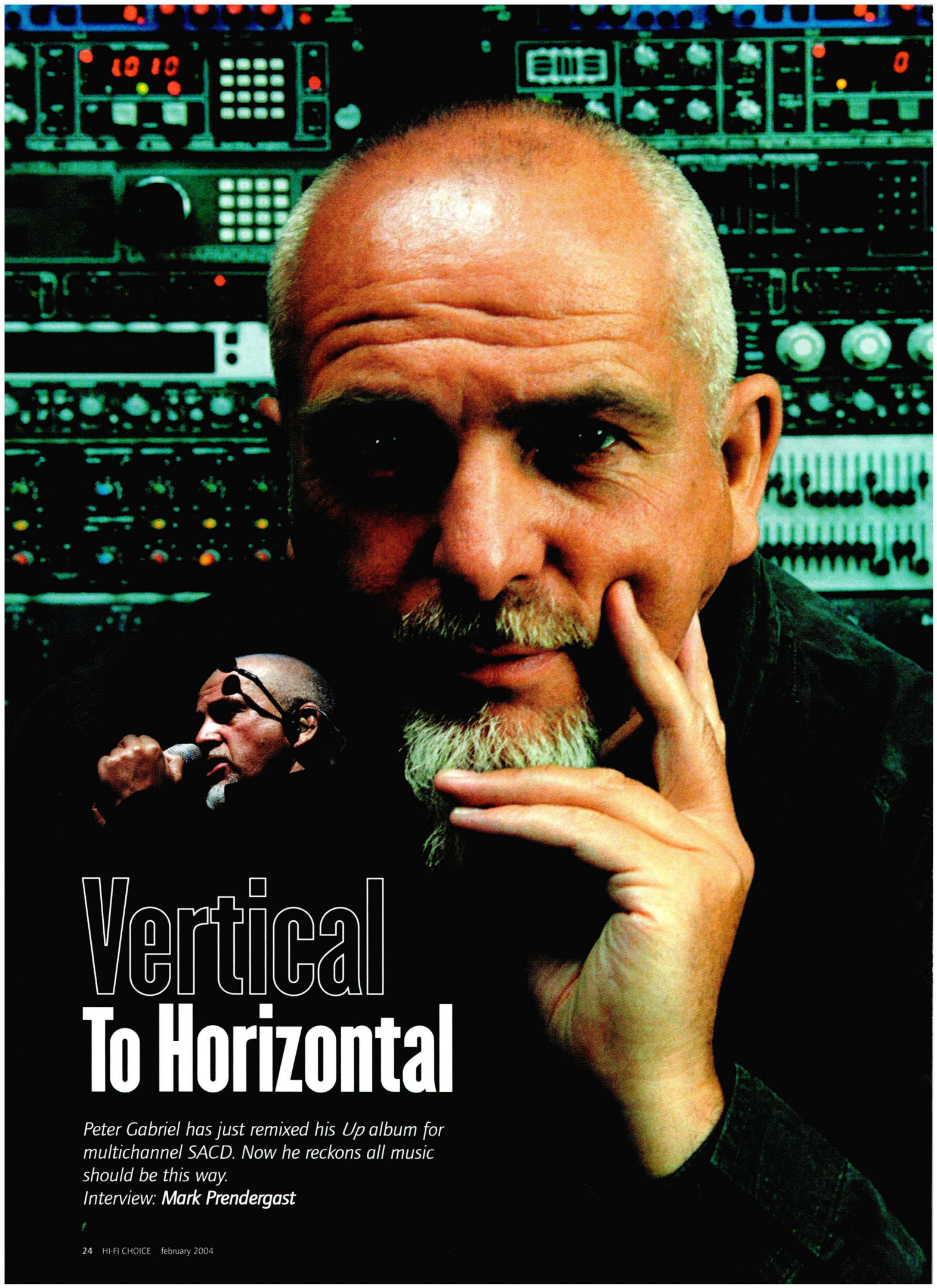
DVD-Audio (24/96 surround, Dolby Digital 5.1 and 2.0)

Mytopia Recordings

Music: Tipper's latest album shows the young Drum and Bass artist in a totally different light. In a move towards ambient moods this disc is said to be the first album specifically recorded for multichannel sound. And it shows. The genre is ideal for surround, Tipper's fusion of Future Sound Of London and The Orb is a pleasure, with quirky samples and sounds used to often stunning effect. *Surrounded* could easily be to DVD-Audio what *Tubular Bells* was to hi-fi in the seventies. Play the two-channel mix and it just feels wrong. Tipper's maturing into ambient territories should be celebrated by anyone with a high-resolution 5.1 channel set-up. ★★★★★

Sound: Few albums match *Surrounded* for sheer spatiality. Computer generated sound on this dedicated 5.1 album gives an incredibly clean, dynamic and highly engaging audio experience. Buy it as a superb DVD-Audio test disc. ★★★★★ DG





Vertical To Horizontal

*Peter Gabriel has just remixed his *Up* album for multichannel SACD. Now he reckons all music should be this way.*

Interview: Mark Prendergast

Peter Gabriel's music is dense. So dense in fact, that two channels simply aren't enough to fully render the sound in his head. So it's for that reason, more than any concerns about what may or may not be fashionable in audiophile circles, which has prompted the 5.1 SACD release of his 2002 album, *Up*. Even with the extra channels, it's still an album that often sounds filled to bursting with ideas. Take for example the first track, *Darkness*, which is so disquieteningly crowded and metallic that it's a relief when Gabriel's burring voice appears. According to Mike Large, manager at Gabriel's Real World organisation, "the record company tried to convince Peter to put that track further into the record, afraid that it would put people off. A bit of a red rag to a bull as that was the statement he wanted to make. Now that it's in 5.1 surround sound it still has that dramatic opening but you can hear a lot more of what's going on because interesting little things that Peter and (engineer) Tchad Blake put in the mix are now suddenly coming out of one of the rear speakers and you can hear them whereas before they were in maybe the right-hand speaker competing with the kick drum."

How dense Gabriel likes to work is confirmed by Large when he talks about mixdowns. "When you get into Peter's stuff we're often mixing from 96 tracks on the mixdown and those 96 tracks have been selected out of a palette of three or four times that. It's the way Peter works, you've got to find places for all those sounds to go." Gabriel himself confirms, "we are learning about 5.1

Sonoma Workstation which Sony loaned to Peter – along with a technician to handle it! "We wanted to make the highest quality copies", says Large, "because Peter knew that we had to do absolutely the best job we possibly could on the back catalogue because we knew we'd probably never do it again. So we spent an awful long time, about a week per album. The whole process was spread out over six months from 2001 to 2002. We did a lot of work here on restoring the tapes and then we went up to Metropolis in London where we actually did the mastering."

With its extensive investment in SACD's multichannel DSD (Direct Stream Digital) coding technology, Metropolis was the natural home for Gabriel's remastering ambitions. Engineer Tony Cousins is keen to point out that Gabriel took the SACD mastering very seriously. "Yes, you've got to remember that a certain amount of SACDs are just



"I tend to use a lot of different elements and in stereo, there's not enough space."

all the time and until SACD is superseded it's just great to be able to spread stuff around, because I tend to use a lot of different elements in the arrangements and often in stereo there's not enough space to put it out there. Sometimes you want to strip it right back but suddenly when you can move it around the room you seem to have a lot more space to place things in."

MAMMOTH TASK

Peter Gabriel has never been an option limiter – he likes to explore all the possibilities. Since 2001 he has been increasingly excited by the possibilities of SACD and 5.1, so much so that he is returning to individual albums to re-mix them for the new medium. Gabriel made the momentous decision to remaster all his albums back in 2001, and with a back catalogue as extensive as his, it's not surprising that it's still ongoing. Mike Large remembers baking original master tapes to make sure the oxide was kept intact and then transferring these to DSD using a Sony

number-crunched down from high-resolution digital audio. They are not done straight in from the original master tapes through prioritised converters, in this case converters of our choice from dCS. I could have done these at 96K and crunched it to DSD but that's sampling numbers and not using the medium of SACD as it was intended, a medium which maintains the warmth of the original analogue sound."

Large agrees that once Gabriel heard the early results of SACD he knew he wouldn't be going back to conventional CD. "It was a huge leap forward. As an electronics engineer who used to work for Solid State Logic I can confirm that DSD is much closer to the purity of analogue and when we started to produce the SACDs I said 'hmmm, this is going to be better!', because it also gives you the option to work in 5.1 which is something Peter finds very exciting. Once you add another three speakers you get an awful lot more places to start putting things to separate them out and Peter finds that thrilling. The SACD of *Up*

sounds better than any other format and that's just down to being able to hear what's really going on."

HEADACHES

In the past, Gabriel has talked about a "sense of excitement" with 5.1, how his "many textures that create pictures in sound" are difficult to decipher acoustically." Now he contends: "It is sort of a new vocabulary and as work progresses we are learning about its capacity to shift sound around more. As good sound systems and screens find their way into people's living rooms we've got a chance to do a lot more, come in from behind and start playing with the same toys and using them a little differently."

But Mike Large confirms that mixing in 5.1 has its headaches. "When we started we didn't really know how to do it because it was all new. If you give yourself a 360 degree sound stage and put stuff anywhere it becomes a real headache which I think goes back to psycho-acoustic evolution in that our ears 'face forward'. An example of that is ambience, so if you have a piano mixed centre, if you put the ambience behind you it just makes it sound more real in front of you."

Which brings us the idea of Gabriel working with multichannel SACD as a whole new horizontal concept of sound in music. Large concurs: "Yes, you still have the vertical, that depth from top to bottom, but Peter is now dealing with a sound stage which is more dramatic. As we mixed *Up* in 5.1 we kept experimenting. Tchad would keep mixing and Peter would continually say let's try this and this and this. He'd say 'let's try these drums or this guitar fill out of the rear.' In the end it was about getting this whole horizontal positioning of sound in that new three-dimensional sound space. You have to remember that if Peter's music doesn't sound right, it doesn't work. Because there's so much going on, because it's so dense, because he builds sound pictures and the way he has layer after layer after layer and so many things that are important to him on a track."

So for now Gabriel is totally committed to 5.1 and SACD. With his 1986 smash *So* next on the multichannel production line, Gabriel sees no problem in other members of his back catalogue going the same route. "With sound improvements and people getting better quality audio it does make for a convincing medium," he says.

As ever, Gabriel is thinking of the future and envisages new hybrid media, downloadable music and other forms. For now he wants to return to his studio and make another album. "There's quite a lot of stuff we've recorded already and I'd also like to try something very empty... I tend to always fill up my arrangements." **HFC**

Thanks to Rosalee Rich and Caroline Turner at Hyperactive for their help with this feature.

Choice Mail



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



Above: David Vivian's examination of the enigma of the Shakti Stones, among other 'fringe-fi' benefits, from HFC 247

"All shopkeepers say their cable is the best, so I'm not sure who to trust."

UP AGAINST THE ODDS

Any chance of a review of the new AVI Lab series CD player? Should I stick with a high-quality CD player or switch to an SACD machine that plays my CDs to a high standard as well? To date few SACD machines seem capable of getting the best from CD (apart from the £4K and £5K crowd) in terms of equalling the technical performance of the best £1K to £2K CD players.

Chris Lloyd Nottingham

HFC: We'll review the AVI as soon as possible, and expectations are high. As for whether an affordable SACD player can match a dedicated CD player, pretty well all the SACD/CD audio players we have reviewed have been good CD players and close to the CD-only machines at their price points. But there aren't many to choose from and the sheer variety of CD players at £1K-£2K means that you will probably be able to find one that suits your system better than an SACD player.

INFECTED

David Vivian's 'Fringe-fi' in November was symptomatic of the cowardice of hi-fi journals in never properly testing such things as the Shakti Stones under the conditions they do other equipment – and *Hi-Fi Choice* has been noble in its advancement of group and blind testing – and illustrative of how the industry has driven itself into a cul-de-sac. Why not take the bull by the horns and bring in group testing of Shakti, Russ Andrews, Max Townshend, and, of course, Peter Belt products, properly conducted, and end the either 'faint praise' or mocking attitudes to these areas?

Richard Graham via email

BEAT BOX

I've just bought new pair of B&W 601s3 speakers replacing my old 302 model. I have Denon mini separates (amp, CD player and tuner), connected with and Ixos speaker cable and Tara labs interconnect. This old cable worked well with my 302 speakers, but with the 601s bass isn't defined well and doesn't have the solidity I want. I'd like new bi-wire speaker cable up to £10/m but I'm not sure which. In Croatia, there is no home testing, and all shopkeepers say that their cable is the best, so I'm not sure who to trust. Please recommend a few cables that will work well with my new B&Ws.

Damir Croatia

HFC: Given your budget it would be more sensible to go for a good quality single wire cable to begin with and add a second bi-wiring run when funds allow. QED XT300 at £10/m is an excellent all-round cable that will supply the solidity you crave.

CD TO BLAME

I have an Audio Note TT1 turntable/IQ2 cartridge, Sugden A21 amp, Sugden CD21 CD player, Proac Response 1SC loudspeakers, PHY-HP silver-plated copper interconnects and Proac Response loudspeaker cable.

The system is quite enjoyable, very musical and sweet, but when it comes to foot tapping, I recognise that it lacks pace. I guess that one reason is the low-ish sensitivity of the speakers together with the low output of the amp, but I think the CD player is the main problem because with vinyl, things get more interesting. With a budget of £1,000 what would you recommend?

Borja L via email

LETTER OF THE MONTH

AN EDUCATION

As a Krell KAV-300iL user, I, like Alvin Gold and other reviewers thought that Krell and bass were synonymous until my eyes and ears were opened by Chord Electronics. Comparing the Chord integrated SPM 2600 at an equivalent price point to the KAV-300iL, the Krell's bass was noticeably weaker or to put it another way, the Chord's was much better – deeper and far more punchy.

The KAV-300iL is a good amp as no doubt is the KAV-400xi (as Alvin confirms in his review), especially at



this price point, but following my latest upgrade (hopefully my last for a long time) I concluded that:

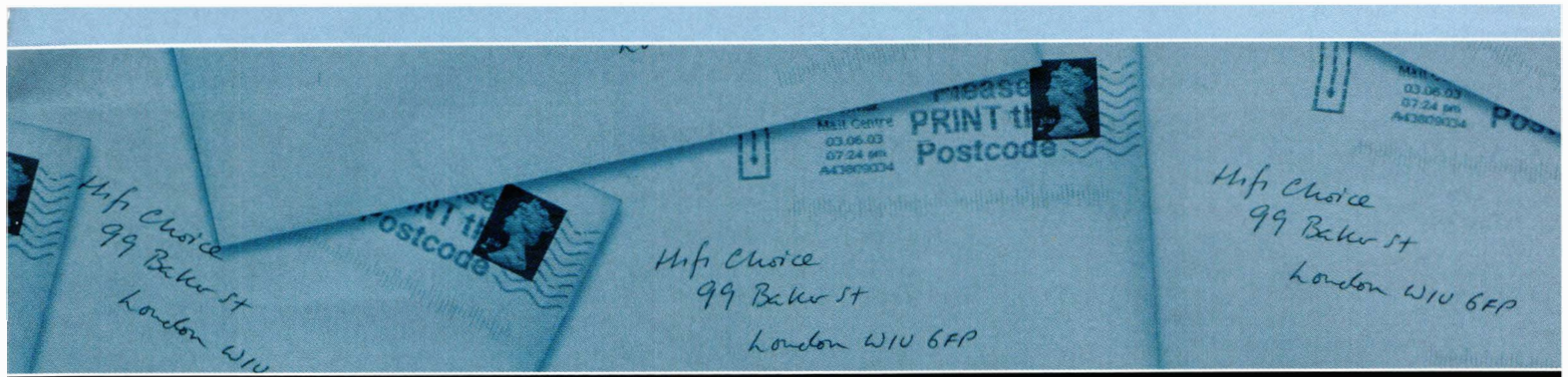
1. Marketing raises the profile of certain equipment but this ultimately says nothing of the quality (and possibly can have a knock-on effect on the product price).
2. Reviews are a useful starting point but they can't tell the full story.
3. The traditional advice of "listen with your own ears" is the only basis for buying hi-fi over the long term.

Ian Brunt via email



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



HFC: A Sugden amp with Proac speakers is a traditional pairing that usually works well, therefore it seems likely that you are correct in assuming the CD player to be the limiting factor. The Sugden CD21 is not a bad player but it may be a little relaxed for your tastes. We suggest you consider the new Arcam CD93T (£950) which is an extremely capable player with excellent transparency. A more obviously pacy choice would be Marantz's CD-17 MkIII (£800).

CHILL OUT

My current system is: Micromega Stage 6 CD player, Audiolab 8000S integrated amp and Ruark Sceptre speakers on Atacama SE24 stands. I'm using Nordost Blue Heaven interconnect and Sonic Link AST 200 speaker cable bi-wired. I've bought a TAG McLaren 60P power amp which I understand I can use to bi-amp speakers with. Now I need a new CD player, speakers and cables etc. I've a budget of around £3,000. I mostly listen to rock music, of the heavy kind, but also like classical music when I'm feeling 'mellow'.

Brian Wadforth via email

HFC: Bi-amping first, then changing the rest of the system is a slightly odd way to upgrade – you would have been better off looking at the system as a whole before getting the power amp. As it stands we would encourage you to try a Classé CDP10 CD player and PMC FB1 speakers. Preferred cabling would be van den Hul D102 MkIII interconnect and Townshend Isolda DCT speaker cable.

MF OR GAMUT?

I have to choose between the Musical Fidelity A308CR and the GamuT C2R/D200 Mk3 pre/power combo. The MF is an intuitional choice (helped by your Editor's Choice label), while the Gamut is a suggestion of my Belgian dealer... and you gave it an Editor's Choice label too. I was also impressed by the Krell KAV-400xi which has a very affordable price. (Well, compared to the MF and Gamut). With the rest of my system consisting of CEC TL2X transport and MSB Link II DAC and Thiel CS3.6 speakers, which amp would be the best replacement for my Cairn Nanda/K3 pre/power amp?

Pascal Antoine via email

HFC: Your speakers are not the easiest things to drive and you'll need plenty of grunt from your amp to get energy from the system, something that the Gamut D200 Mk3 can certainly deliver. It doubles its 200 watt output into a four-ohm load and thus has what it takes to keep the Thiels under control – it would be our first choice. As for the matching preamp, that is

ONLINE FORUM

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



I need some opinions about NAD C521 BEE CD player, because I am about to buy it. But I would like to know if Marantz CD players at the same price range offer a better performance and sound. Is there any other player better than both of them?

Sydney Honi

HFC: The NAD delivers very impressive sonic detail for a £200 player, though mid and treble are favoured over the bass. If you can stretch a little further the £250 Cambridge Audio Azur 640C offers a slightly more refined balance, while the latest comparably-priced Marantz players give a punchy alternative for your auditions.

I want new speakers to go with my Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista CD player and amp. I have drawn up the following shortlist: Harbeth Super HL5, PMC OB1, ProAc Response D15, Wilson Benesh Arc. My budget is around £2.5K. Any comments?

MarkB

HFC: From your list we'd be most tempted by the PMC with your kit, though the Harbeth should sound pretty fine too. We would also listen to B&W's Signature 805 standmount and 703 floorstander, the Totem Forest and the ATC SCM35 (see p42).

an excellent device too. One other preamp we've tried that makes a worthy partner for the D200 is Sugden's Masterclass AA, but at £2,300 it's not going to cut costs.

FLOATING VOTER

Having moved house to a 1930s bungalow with suspended wooden floors my system sounds poor – it seems the sub floor is acting as a boom box.

A friend recommended air platforms, but I'm struggling with the concept of placing speakers on them since conventional wisdom says only the cones should move and not the speaker cabinet. Surely if sat on a base filled with air the cabinets will move?

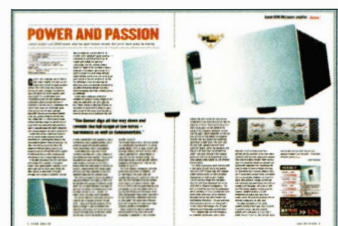
Rondo via email

HFC: The laws of physics dictate that the pistonic motion of the driver will also result in cabinet movement, resisted only by the mass of the stand coupled to the floor. Unfortunately, the stand is likely to bend as will the floor, further allowing the cabinets to move due to resonances in the stand.

An air chamber under the speaker means that the resistance to the drivers' pistonic motion is just the suspended mass, not stand plus the floor. This inertia is far more linear than a stand coupled to a wooden floor and should tighten bass considerably, while minimising reflections from the floor.

“The sub floor in my flat is acting as a boom box.”

Below: The GamuT D200 Mk3 power amplifier review from HFC 247





ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES CD PLAYER | ROKSAN RADIUS 5 TURNTABLE AND ARM
ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES INTEGRATED AMP | VIENNA ACOUSTICS BEETHOVEN SPEAKERS | £5,450

Better by Design

Stunning design doesn't always equal stunning sound, but this system delivers a visual and aural TKO

If the true art of design has more to do with how good you can make an affordable product than how expensive you can make a good one, Brit-fi stalwart Roksan has a better eye for its subject than some of its 'high-end' rivals, would-be or otherwise.

Roksan is good and it knows it. People who understand hi-fi know it too. Which means that the Middlesex based company doesn't have to try too hard to get noticed. Granted, there's nothing particularly modest about the new, upgraded 'M Series' versions of the long-running Caspian CD player and integrated amp that anchor this month's Beautiful System. Subtly self-effacing maybe, but quietly confident. Eschewing slabby, sheer-surfaced minimalism, Caspians have always gone for soft industrial chic – chunky fascias, masculine 'stamp-pressed' badge plates, exposed hex-head bolts, a deft blend of svelte and substance, just the right number of ergonomically-sussed knobs and buttons. And the latest editions are the neatest yet.

It's kit that simply has the look of being serious, of not wanting to waste your time. And should you ever feel inclined to peep inside you'd see that the impression isn't misplaced. The £1,000 microprocessor-controlled integrated amp's circuit design is based on that of Roksan's considerably more expensive monoblock power amplifier and preamp. The only thing that's held it back up to now, says Roksan's founder and chief engineer Touraj Moghaddam, is the quality of the components used and the power supply. So the Caspian M Series amp keeps the original (excellent) circuit and gets improved components, including a

new circuit board where the speakers connect, high-quality relays, a superior main input filter, a quieter transformer, new high-frequency, low-impedance reservoir caps and there's thicker copper plating for the main PC board. Power is up from 70 to 85 watts per channel.

It's a similar tale with the £1,100 CD player – the basic specification is unchanged (Sanyo transport, Philips TD1305T hybrid DAC) but there are numerous tweaks and refinements, mostly to the motherboard, which is now a double-sided, plated-through component, while the D/A board has been equipped with a high-tolerance crystal oscillator. Laser focusing and tracking are improved, too, through the use of closer tolerance components in the servo motor. This, of course, squares with the notion that the most important element of CD reproduction is really no different to that of analogue replay – extracting maximum information from the disc. For that to happen, the disc and the laser must be held in a constant relationship, isolated from mechanical interference. The CD player's sturdy platform undoubtedly helps here. The well-damped feel of the casing inspires confidence, too. Hardcore hi-fi, yes, but operationally these components are plug 'n' play and completely intuitive. All the display information on both units is boldly presented, as are the graphics on the slim, stylish remote controls. Formidable electronics, simple stylish wrappers – just the way we like it.

FEARFUL SYMMETRY

But this is a dual source system and, as far as sexy design goes, it's Roksan's stunning Radius 5 turntable and



Roksan Radius 5 turntable and arm £850

Design statement vinyl spinner balances ease of set-up, euphony and clarity into a near ideal package at a competitive price.



Roksan Caspian M CD player £1,100

Fine build and disc handling from a euphonic player that generally punches above its weight. Latest changes have subtly improved focus and resolution.



Roksan Caspian M integrated amp £1,000

A fine, expressive, powerful and punchy integrated amplifier with a clear performance edge over the previous incarnation.



Vienna Acoustics Beethoven speakers £2,500

Heavyweight floorstander with beautifully smooth presentation but serious slam and speed when required.

“The true art of design has more to do with how good you can make an affordable product than how expensive you can make a good one.”



✦ Nima arm that takes the centre stage spotlight. Let's put it this way. It's the most exotic looking vinyl-spinner Roksan makes (the £7,500 TMS2 flagship is impressively massive but straight-laced by comparison). It's one of the best looking turntables that anyone makes (and that includes your Michels, Avids and Clearaudios). Beyond any shadow of a doubt, it has the style and presence of a four-figure product with a '2' in pole position but, at £850, it doesn't get close.

Even by the standards of other decks that use transparent acrylic as a build material, the Radius 5's appearance is special with exquisite detailing that includes a transparent arm bearing and headshell. The wonderfully elegant dual-layer circular plinth is even more arresting. And the way the suspended sub-plinth extends at the back to provide support for both the unipivot Nima arm and the custom mains-locked synchronous motor (itself resiliently decoupled from the sub-plinth) is beautifully simple and gives the deck an extremely pleasing symmetry. The rim-driven belt drive platter is machined from a frosty-looking matt acrylic while the main bearing – closely based on the TMS2's long, narrow design with captive ball and ultra-fine tolerance – is

pre-assembled.

Indeed, ease of set-up is much more straightforward than the presence of a unipivot arm would lead you to assume. The only thing remotely fiddly is the task of rotating the arm's eccentric counterweight on its gasket to align the azimuth of the cartridge in the groove and setting the vertical tracking angle with the supplied allen key. Arm height is factory set for Roksan's own Corus Black moving magnet cartridge, though we opted for the somewhat richer and more expansive combination of Grado's Prestige Gold (also MM) and the Monrio ADN-N phono stage from Italy.

Levelled on its three adjustable spiked metal feet, perhaps the most amazing thing about the Radius 5 is that, despite the distracting beauty of its design, it looks so unobtrusive and light. The final components in this month's system, Vienna Acoustics' Beethoven speakers, could hardly provide a more thumping contrast. Imported by Roksan's distributor, Henley Designs Limited, this is a lot of speaker in every sense except for the amount of floorspace it consumes. The sensationally well-finished, rear-ported floorstanding cabinets stand tall and deep but gracefully narrow. And, um, very heavy. Once you've wrestled the

massively-built and braced cabinets into position and removed the grilles, it's easier to understand why. In pursuit of a broad bandwidth (VA quotes 30Hz to 22kHz), there are no fewer than five drive units in each – two seven-inch (178mm) woofers, two 5.5-inch (140mm) midrange drivers and a 25mm silk dome tweeter.

The woofers use VA's Spider Cones which have radial reinforcement ribs to reduce secondary vibrations, while the cones of the dual midrange drivers are made from an optically transparent synthetic material called 'XPP' which is claimed to combine the "precision and transparency" of hard cones with the "smoothness and musicality" of softer materials. Vienna Acoustics has even gone to the trouble of producing proprietary terminal blocks that make a direct connection to the speaker terminals. The resulting elimination of resistance is said to improve transparency and microdynamics. Neither is the Caspian M amp's 85 watts likely to be taxed by the 91dB sensitivity.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

We kick off with solo grand piano on CD and one of my favourite two-fisted jazz ivory thumpers, Julian Joseph. And this is good. What we have here – right





“What we have here – right now, in the listening room – is a Steinway grand piano. Not a baby grand, not an upright, not an electronic Yamaha but a big, acoustic piano locked in space just to the right of centre.”

now, in the listening room – is a Steinway grand piano. Not a baby grand, not an upright, not an electronic Yamaha but a big, acoustic piano locked in space just to the right of centre rather than spread across the room like a railway track as is sometimes the case. Excellent attack, good tempo and feel – the boy can play. Dynamics, expression – brilliant. Baby-faced crooner Jamie Cullum should cock an ear. Better still, the piano's extraordinary timbre, its acoustic signature, is faithfully resolved. It sounds convincingly rich and woody, giving a real sense of size and presence. Joseph's playing is frequently fast, but always lucid. With this system, his command of rhythm isn't just tight but has a metronomic certainty, yet expression and inflection are laid bare with equal ease.

Moving a little closer to the west coast, Eric Marienthal's often quite synthetic-sounding alto sax has acquired edge, depth and complexity,

Dave Weckl's show-off drumming gains extra degrees of precision, along with greater snap and weight. No doubt about it, this component combo has bass that isn't just well extended and powerful but displays that propulsive quality you only get with large speakers that are being driven by an amplifier of real authority and grip.

Yet suspicions of a slightly manipulative, 'easy listening' tonal balance are hard to ignore with classical music. Here, especially on massed strings, there's a tendency towards honeyed sweetness, most notably from the speakers. Arguably, it's no bad thing, making the music especially easy to relax into. Transparency and resolving power aren't always paramount – the openness of the system, the sense of flow and coherence it can conjure are just as important and, in this case, deeply impressive.

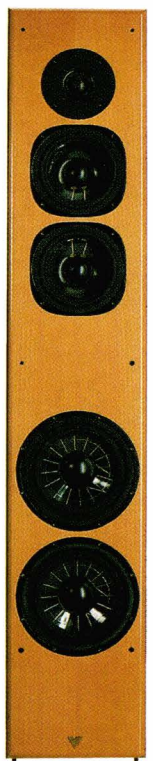
And with the Radius 5 spinning the discs, this innate musicality grows even stronger. The Joseph tracks, which we

span on vinyl, are more palpable and rhythmically exact still though, interestingly, the piano itself appears to have shrunk to about three-quarters its CD size and is located in a slightly smaller room.

Don't go getting the impression that the Radius 5 is all about a tight, fast, rhythmically explicit, leading-edge sound. It can do that but it also does transparent and tangible where ambience, depth and timbral shading are as portrayed with as much conviction as transient attack and timbral resolution.

So we're left with a rather remarkable system. One that can sound beguilingly lucid and lyrical yet punch out a Prince track with fulsome, tactile bass while exerting an iron grip on tempo. One that has quicksilver timing, emotional clarity and an ability to communicate that touches a chord on an emotional level. When all is said and done, you can't ask for much more than that. **HFC**

David Vivian



intensify stimulate yearn
 crave sound arouse inspire
 excite envy electrify move
 desire lust sensation thrill
 embrace fire ambition love

The new HD650's from Sennheiser are not simply headphones – they are a philosophy. And for fans of high-end audio equipment, they are the ultimate in listening pleasure. Every detail is suddenly crystal clear, and the sound is intensified with pure emotion. The HD650's are more than just sensational sound – they are headphones with a soul.

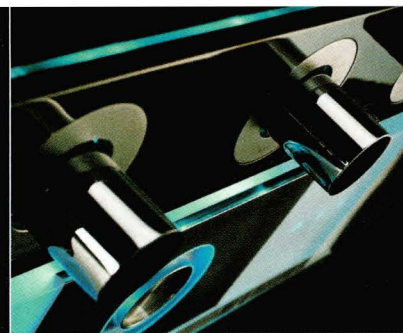


Technical Data

Nominal impedance 300 Ohm
 Contact pressure approx 2.5 N
 Weight w/o cable 260g
 Jack plug 6.3/3.5mm stereo
 Transducer principle open, dynamic
 Ear coupling circumaural
 Cable length 3 m
 Frequency response 10 – 39,500 Hz
 Sound pressure level (SPL) 103 dB (1 Vrms)
 THD, total harmonic distortion 0.05%



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.

EQUIPMENT REVIEWS

- 34** Denon DVD-A11 universal DVD player
- 38** Arcam A90 integrated amp (plus 7.1 module & P90/3 power amp)
- 42** ATC SCM35 loudspeaker
- 45** Marantz CD7300 CD player
- 46** Hovland HP-100 Line preamp and RADIA power amplifier
- 50** Hegel CDP2A CD player
- 53** NAD C422 AM/FM radio tuner



- 54** Conrad-Johnson PV10BL preamp and MV60SE power amplifier
- 56** Cambridge Audio Azur 640A integrated amp

ULTIMATE GROUP TEST LOUDSPEAKERS £500-£750

- 60** AAD S-5
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- 63** Focal-JMLab Chorus 716S
- 64** Infinity Kappa 200
- 65** Mission Volare V62
- 67** NHT SB3
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- 69** Tannoy Sensys DC2



OUR RATINGS EXPLAINED

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

Our overall conclusion

...nor an... we liked point here is... to the job of... recommend you... this with Marantz's £800 player, the 17 MkII M, which has excellent build and a very good impression in HFC 243. At same price there's also the Cyrus 7, a ng all-rounder in a compact case. After trying the Heart with the standard s we switched ov r to the Siemens grade, a comparison somewhat muddled by the fact that it was a cold for hot swap – the player had been on for several days with the after a livelier w tubes shone through. The Siemens equipped player has an snappier sound with better timing that es with dense material with remarkable dence and ease. It even seems to be

You can find more civilised players for the money. But few combine dynamics with fine timing skills as effectively as this. **HFC** Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%

FEATURES >> 85%

BUILD >> 85%

VALUE >> 85%

CONCLUSION

This is a highly entertaining and colourful player at a competitive price. The build quality is good and the feature list strong. It's not the most subtle 1750 player but if you're looking for a quipier to inspire you it could prove a bargain.

HI-FI CHOICE >> 84%

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...



UNIVERSAL MAGIC

Denon's flagship universal machine delivers object lesson in multi-standard DVD player technology

PRODUCT Denon DVD-A11

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

PRICE £1,700

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x14x43cm
 • Weight: 12.8kg • Plays CD, SACD, DVD-V and DVD-A • Extensive range of 'next gen' digital outputs – Denon Link and FireWire for audio, DVI for video – plus regular analogue and coaxial/optical digital outs

CONTACT ☎ 01234 741200 # www.denon.co.uk

Denon's fourth 'universal' DVD player is more than just a worthy addition to an already impressive range. It is a true shoot-for-the-stars model aimed squarely at the audiophile *and* videophile community. There are two Denon players that it most closely resembles. One is the THX-Ultra and

DVD-Audio-compliant DVD-A1, which with the introduction of this model is beginning to look its age. The other is the *HFC* Product Of The Year-winning DVD-2900, which is comparable to the newcomer to the extent that it also plays DVD-V, DVD-A and SACD discs. There is some similarity in their internal architecture too, but the DVD-A11 has some key additions which directly impact on performance.

The rich range of interfaces is the key to understanding the DVD-A11. Most digital audio signals are available from the proprietary Denon Link, currently in Second Edition form. The original First Edition, which was premiered on the top-end DVD-A1 player, was unable to

stream encrypted DVD-Audio data. The current version handles digital audio including DVD-A, but excluding the DSD data format used by SACD, though there is talk that the upcoming Third Edition will do so, if agreement can be reached with the copyright holders involved. The roadmap also includes Genloc clock synchronisation at some time in the future.

Although technically less sophisticated in certain respects, Pioneer and Sony have opted for the alternative FireWire (i.Link) digital audio interface which is DSD/SACD compatible. With the DVD-A11, Denon has opted to hedge its bets with an inclusive approach, which means that it has both Denon Link *and* FireWire, though the latter is



pull-down (the ordering of video fields to give a smooth output) required for telecine transfer of film to 60Hz NTSC. But PAL Region 2 territories like the UK use 2:2 pull-down which is technically easier – it involves converting from 24 frames/second to 50Hz video, which gives few artefacts if you're willing to accept a +4% speed error. Where the Faroudja scores is with problematic animated and video camera-based material, arguably more relevant to the UK. The player even includes five preset progressive video settings, which allow the picture to be fine-tuned to the source material.

There are parallels between the increasing sophistication of video processing in players like this, and the similar step-change that has been going on in the world of computer graphics. The video sub-system centres on a high-spec video converter consisting of six 12-bit/216MHz DACs. There is plenty of picture adjustment available including various resolution scaling options from DVD (up to 1,080 lines interlace and 720 progressive with NTSC, or 576 progressive in PAL), plus user control of chroma delay, black levels, white levels and more besides.

The audio side of the Denon is no less well-endowed – almost half the land area inside the player is given over to sophisticated digital and analogue power supplies. The digital audio hardware includes customised Burr-Brown 24-bit/19kHz PCM/DSD hybrid DACs, along with Denon's proprietary AL24 curve-smoothing algorithm. For DVD-Video material, on-board Dolby and DTS conversion is available, with a surprisingly full set of bass management options for DVD-Audio, DVD-Video and SACD. However, SACD bass management involves conversion from DSD to PCM, with inevitable translation losses.

The rear panel is truly something to behold, and includes twin Scarts, BNC and phono-based progressive outputs, the Denon Link socket, two FireWire outputs, plus doubled-up S-Video and composite video outs – oh, and standard optical and coaxial digital outputs for good measure. In addition, the Denon is equipped with RS232 and system control sockets compatible with industry standard AMX and Crestron system controllers.

SOUND QUALITY

DVD-Audio reproduction is smooth, organic and clean. Even with old material like ▶

not the same implementation as Pioneer's (which for example has a clock link feature). It should still be interoperable with Pioneer and Sony, but without any of the proprietary features used elsewhere.

On the video side, as well as offering DVI digital video output (see side bar), the DVD-A11 marks a shift of allegiance from Silicon Image video processing to the Faroudja FL2310 DCDi processor, complete with PAL and NTSC progressive scan. The Silicon Image solution is generally thought to be a particularly strong option with the 3:2

NEXT GENERATION DIGITAL CONNECTIONS

Digital transmission of high-bit-rate audio and video has become a hot topic. Fears about pirating have slowed their introduction, but pressure for higher sound and video quality are pulling in the opposite direction. The generic solution is the use of encrypted interfaces that keep the signal digital, but which offer copyright protection of premium content.

IEEE1394 (aka FireWire and i.Link): Pioneer and Sony, and now Denon, have opted for this 400MB (max) standard which can carry DSD (SACD) audio data as well as full-bandwidth DVD-Audio. Although the FireWire standard is agreed industry-wide, Pioneer uses proprietary extensions, for example a clock link as part of its jitter reduction strategy. Interoperability is yet to be demonstrated in the field.

DVI (Digital Video Interface): Originally designed to carry computer video data in analogue form, and later as a digital stream. Purely for video as the name suggests, DVI sockets have started appearing on high-end video projectors. The HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection) interface is designed to offer secure encryption.

HDMI (aka 'digital Scart'): Can be regarded as a more sophisticated alternative to DVI with a wide bandwidth (up to 5GB) and is currently becoming available for digital video in Version One form. Version Two, due in 2004/5, will handle full bandwidth DVD-A and SACD digital audio as well as digital video, with encryption handled by HDCP. Although not featured on the DVD-A11 (Pioneer's DV-668AV and DV-868AVi universal DVD players will be the first), HDMI is backwards compatible with DVI using appropriate adaptor cables.

Denon Link: This audio-only connection is a proprietary, high-speed (over 1GB) serial interface which uses standard CAT 5/RJ45 connectors and cabling, with Denon's own 'handshake' protocol and digital encryption. It passes CD and DVD-A data but has yet to be mandated for DSD (SACD).

PLAYBACK COMPATIBILITY

CD ✓	HDCP ✓
CD-R ✓	MP3 ✓
CD-RW ✓	WMA ✓
SACD Stereo/Multi ✓	AAC ✓
DVD-Video ✓	Video CD ✓
DVD-Audio ✓	VCD ✗
DVD-R ✓	CDV Audio part only
DVD-RW ✓	CD-G Audio part only
DVD-RAM ✗	Kodak Picture CD ✓
DVD+R Not guaranteed	Fujicolor CD ✓
DVD-ROM ✗	Photo CD ✗





“With digitally sourced material the clarity and precision of the sound is remarkable.”

❑ Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, which has been skillfully remastered, the improved multichannel performance through the Denon Link (DLink) compared to the analogue outputs (using a Denon AVC-A1SR amp equipped with the current Second Edition DLink) was very obvious. The former had a smoother, more organic feel – the instruments and voices swelled and ebbed in a more progressive way, with a greater sense of expression.

With more modern digitally sourced material including recordings of Mahler's *Tenth* with Simon Rattle/BPO (EMI) and Shostakovich's *Jazz Suites* (Naxos) the difference was equally apparent, but in both cases the sheer clarity and precision of the sound was remarkable. There is no easy way to tell whether the AVC-A1SR's D/A converters are intrinsically superior to those of the player, but the much shorter analogue signal path via the DLink would be enough to explain its better showing.

SACD was auditioned without an amplifier capable of accepting a FireWire input (Denon is currently working on appropriately equipped models apparently with a starting point in four-figure territory), so no direct 'digital link versus analogue connection' comparison was available. However, comparison was possible

with a Krell Standard SACD player (also used along with a Mark Levinson 390S for CD comparisons), with mixed results. In reality, the two SACD players are rather different in character, the Denon sounding a little warmer and fuller in balance and less overtly detailed. The Denon paints SACD music in broader strokes than it does with DVD-Audio, or for that matter SACD through the Krell, but the sense of a breathing group of musicians playing in a real acoustic space on recordings like Grainger's *The Warriors* was a revelation.

Repeating the pattern set by DVD-Audio, CD worked particularly well over the Denon Link and the sound was characteristically more disciplined and stable. Tonal colouring appeared more subtle and expressive, with the same organic, less overtly digital feel, which in many ways is more like a good vinyl record, but with all the side benefits of digital processing. CD via the DLink was rather like changing from a mid-price CD player to a better one in the same manufacturer's range. But there's no point in pretending that the

Denon's CD performance can match that of SACD when comparing CD to the SACD stereo track in a range of multichannel recordings. The majority of SACDs sound as if they come from the same masters, which makes such comparisons possible, but in some cases the recordings clearly have a different origin. Both the Krell, with its characteristically leaner and exquisitely detailed quality, and the extremely refined Mark Levinson 390S, offer superior musical articulation and separation. Overall they're simply on a different plane, which shouldn't be a surprise given the price differential (the Krell SACD player and ML CD player retail for around £4K and £6.5K respectively). It simply goes to show that there are important differences between players even at these elevated prices, and that it's still the case that DVD players are almost never *totally* convincing as high-end CD players.

The Denon is equipped with a very effective bypass which turns off all video processing when playing audio discs, and which was



used in these tests. It is now rare for the on-screen menus to be required to play DVD-Audio discs, and SACD and CD don't have them in the first place, which makes these bypass features of particular value.

VIDEO PERFORMANCE

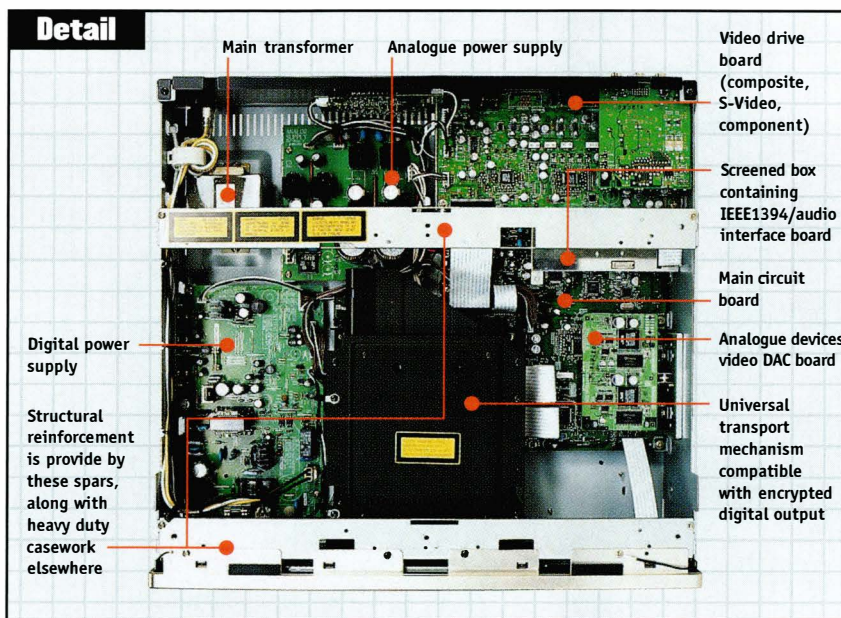
The benefits of the Denon's standard of video processing will be lost in the noise and digital artefacts of even the best traditional TVs. You'll need a plasma, LCD or (better) a projector such as the DVI-equipped Marantz VP12S2 used in this test.

Video quality is top rank. The Faroudja DCDi processing is responsible for a marked reduction in 'jaggles' – serrated edges on moving diagonals. Film-based material played with the proper progressive video setting is rich and colourful, with excellent control over deeply saturated reds, which can 'flicker' with some players. Animations in *Monsters Inc* were particularly smooth and fluid, and the snow scenes in *The Fellowship Of The Ring* and *Ice Age* provide superb examples of myriad shades of near-white.

Dolby and DTS sound quality straddles the dividing line between other DVD players and good AV amplifiers. It sounds clean and expansive, and is capable of sustaining a complex, enveloping soundfield, but external processing is still preferred, especially if you have an amplifier of Denon AVC-A1SR calibre or similar. Video processing of this kind is sometimes experienced in the cinema, but is far too subtle for broadcast TV, and rare even with DVD. Even paused video pictures or DVD-Audio stills on a seven-foot screen looked like hung photographs.

The big picture then is of a player which offers close to state-of-the-art video and audio performance, certainly better than any other universal player to date and notably superior to the DVD-2900. What's more, its extensive range of digital audio and video outputs give it more potential performance stretch than any currently available alternative. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



LAB REPORT

TEST RESULTS

	EXCELLENT	GOOD	AVERAGE	POOR
AUDIO (analogue output) Audio Band Distortion (THD + N) CD 0.002% (0-22kHz) DVD-A 0.0008% (0-22kHz) SACD 0.02% (0-22kHz)	✓	✓		
Frequency Response (to -3dB) CD >20kHz DVD-A 41kHz (96kHz sampling) DVD-A 41kHz (192kHz sampling) SACD 57kHz	✓	Fault	✓	
VIDEO (component PAL output) Frequency Response Chrominance/mono 5.75MHz (Y) Luminance/colour 2.75MHz (Pb), 2.75MHz (Pr)		✓	✓	
Noise Chrominance/mono 77.5dB (Y) Luminance/colour 78.8dB (Pb), 78.5dB (Pr)		✓	✓	
Video level (brightness) 708 (700 = ideal)	✓			

AUDIO

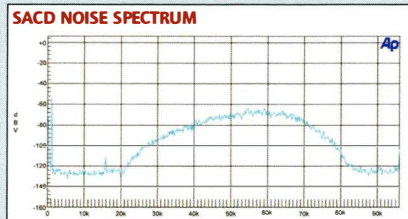
CD frequency response is excellent and DVD-A is similarly impressive, marred only by a mild boost in output which culminates in some untidy looking filter ripples above 2kHz. SACD frequency response is textbook, with an accurate, well extended output to 40kHz, dropping away sharply thereafter at 50kHz where the obligatory low pass filter operates.

One measured aberration came via DVD-A, where the measured responses are virtually identical with 96kHz and 192kHz sample-rate material – the latter's frequency response should extend to around 96kHz. The suspicion is that it's identifying 192kHz material wrongly – Denon has been informed and a fix should follow, but as it stands, two-channel 192kHz material (of which there is precious little) won't offer the expected bandwidth advantage.

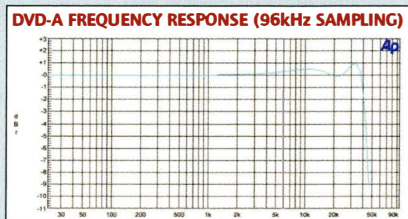
The SACD spectrum shows how noise is kept below 120dB in the audio band thanks to aggressive noise shaping which redistributes the noise energy above 20kHz. High overall noise does not adversely effect subjective results with SACD, but there is an apparent correlation between SACD's higher measured distortion and the slightly cleaner high frequency sound that emits from DVD-As played on the Denon. AG

VIDEO

The video tests failed to show any obvious problems, which is good news because as expected, picture quality shows a more obvious correlation to measured results than sound. The various tests indicate that the video has low enough noise levels for the actual figures to be all but academic, with a slight bias towards pale colour saturation, which in practice is probably responsible for making the picture look more rather than less filmic. The video responses are also well up to scratch, and the video level is close to ideal, with a just detectable brightening of the image under close scrutiny. AG



As usual with SACD, low noise floor in the audio band (below 20kHz) is ensured with aggressive noise shaping shunting most unwanted noise energy above 20kHz.



The response shape is slightly marred by the ripples above 2kHz indicative of filter ringing, which could have a mild effect on imaging and depth perception.

Audio measurements were conducted using an Audio Precision System One test system, and the video tests using a Tektronics VM700, both industry standard for the type of testing involved.

VERDICT

SOUND >> 88%

PRO

Takes the risk out of DVD buying – a great all-rounder which makes an excellent case for DVD-Audio and SACD music, and for high-end video display technology.

VISION >> 93%

CON

It's a fab all-rounder, but don't expect CD replay to match a top £1,700 dedicated player. Test sample showed a fault with 192kHz DVD-A.

FEATURES >> 95%

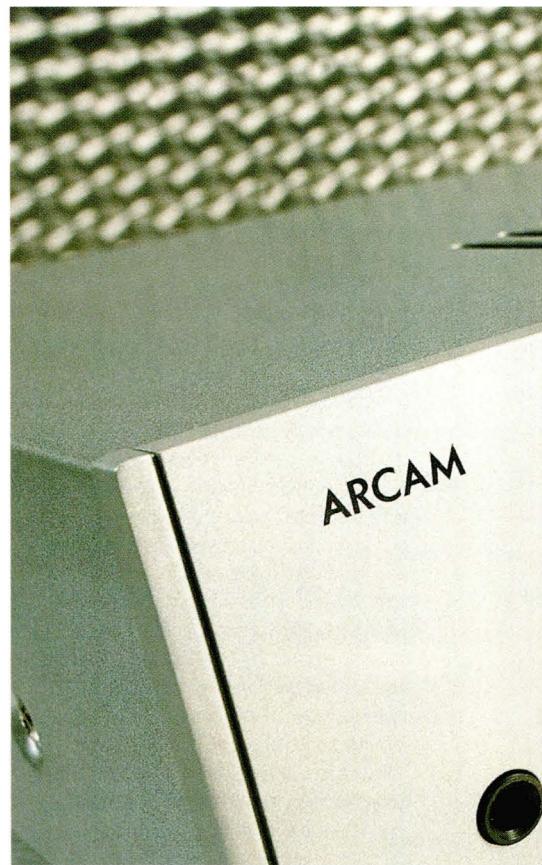
VALUE >> 91%

CONCLUSION

A first-rate DVD-Video player, a compelling performer with high-resolution music discs and a good CD player to boot. Digital interfaces give a big potential performance stretch with suitably equipped amps, plenty of which will emerge in time.

HI-FI CHOICE

OVERALL SCORE >> 91%



2 PLUS 3 EQUALS 5.1

Arcam's new A90 is an audiophile-grade stereo amp that's also upgradeable to multichannel

PRODUCT Arcam DiVA A90 (plus P90/3)

TYPE Integrated stereo amp (plus 3-channel power amp)

PRICE A90 – £850, P90/3 – £770,
7.1 channel input board – £300

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): A90 44x10x34cm,
P90/3 44x10x32cm • A90's microprocessor control
system offers seamless extension to multichannel
• 6 inputs, inc. optional phono stage • 90W/8 ohms,
150W/4 ohms

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

The Arcam DiVA A90 integrated and P90 power amplifiers are developments of the highly successful A85 stereo integrated amplifier, and its stereo power amplifier derivative, the P85. The difference in the A90 is limited to an improved power supply section, and the power rating which has increased from 85 to 90 watts per channel. It turns out that the P85 already met the new 90-watt specification with ease, and a simple name change was all that was required to underline that it is the optimum partner for bi-amplified systems based on the A90. Each can drive two sets of loudspeakers with front panel switching, and the A90 has

stereo preamp level outputs and power amp inputs. Both units are equipped with rear panel wired remote control sensor inputs and trigger outputs, so that the P90 can be 'woken up' by the A90, and the A90 includes a full-function remote control. The A90 also includes a version of Arcam's microprocessor control system which provides different welcome and status messages, volume control resolution selection and tone control.

The control system provides something else too. The Hobson's choice faced by those who want to invest in multichannel audio has been mapped out by the industry in a rich array of home cinema amps and receivers, almost all of which conform to a basic 'everything bar the kitchen sink' blueprint. They offer 5.1 or more channels of pre and power amplification, surround sound decoding (Dolby, DTS etc) and a baffling array of in and outputs, switching and buffer amplifiers for analogue, digital and video sources. Many of them go on to add DSP, THX compliance, multi-room operation and more. The flexibility of the control system in the A90 provides another, more purist way of

going multichannel. Specifically, it has allowed Arcam to extend the basic two-channel stereo design to multichannel form.

With the A90, this is achieved with an internal add-in module which provides two 7.1 channel inputs and full multichannel level management (a posh word for volume control) in addition to the stereo amplifier's basic complement of six stereo inputs. The P90 can be also be augmented, in this case with a third power amplifier module (making the P90/3), which means that a fully loaded A90 plus P90/3 combination can drive a 5.1 channel speaker system. A second two-channel P90 can be used to bring this up to 7.1 channels, but for this test we stuck with the stereo A90 alone, then bi-amped stereo (A90, P90/3) and finally the augmented two-box 5.1 channel configuration already described. Note that the multichannel input module can also be added to other Arcam stereo amps, such as the A32, the (now discontinued) A85 and the C30 preamp, and there are various power amp options in both stereo and three-channel form.

The augmented 5.1 channel A90 plus P90/3 combo is designed for use by anyone



with the requisite loudspeakers, and who also has a DVD player with multichannel audio outputs. This could for example be Arcam's own DV88 Plus which has on-board Dolby Digital and DTS decoding, or a player with DVD-Audio compatibility like the DV89. These two Arcam players are an aesthetic match for the A90 and P90/3, but any non-Arcam player with similar functionality could be used instead. You might also be interested in SACD, but in this case you should bear in mind that neither SACD players generally nor the Arcam A90 in particular provide bass management or any signal processing other than volume and tone control. The only user adjustment available with the P90/3 7.1 are individual channel level trims.

The premium paid for multichannel operation is surprisingly modest. The three-channel P90/3 power amplifier costs just £220 more than the basic stereo version, while the 7.1 channel input board adds £300 to the price of an A90 if specified at the time of purchase, or £350 as a later upgrade. None of the functionality of either component is lost or significantly degraded in the upgrade, and what you're left with is a purist, straight-line multichannel amplifier with no Dolby or DTS decoding, and no digital or video inputs. This simplicity is the key to the overriding strength of this Arcam multichannel solution, which is that it should equal the performance of the basic stereo-configured models from which it is made.

“In multichannel form the quality of sound is essentially the same as in stereo – the treble is pure and fluid, the bass is warm and full.”

SOUND QUALITY

And we're delighted to report that they do. The amps sounded comfortable almost from cold and warmed up quickly. The basic voicing and tonality will be familiar to Arcam watchers – clean, disciplined and open. The older A85 can sound a little too bland and self-contained at times, but the A90 seems a little freer and more loose-limbed. Somehow listening to all channels working together with a well recorded multichannel audio disc brings out the best in the Arcam's make-up.

Using the Arcam pair in bi-amplified stereo mode, the sound is more commanding than with the A90 alone. The bass is a little bolder and more muscular, and mid and high-level dynamics are opened out. The amplifier seems more comfortable and relaxed, without losing any tension in the music. Curiously, low-level dynamics and imaging, which were obviously not constrained by any lack of power in our test, also improve in bi-amp form.

The A90 plus P90/3 combo does have some very real advantages over most dedicated home cinema amplifiers to counterbalance the limitations already outlined, and they boil down to one central fact – there are no video or digital circuits doing their best to gum up

the works. It's just a nice, simple, completely analogue multichannel amplifier, if you ignore the digital displays and stepped volume control. You can clearly hear the difference on audition in the measured, progressive way that the amplifier breathes, and in the expansive soundstage presence that mimics the performance of the stereo A90 alone.

The first disc played was a multichannel SACD opening with Grainger's *The Warriors* (Gardiner/Philharmonia on DGG), which sounded alive, tactile and immediate. Switching to stereo the sound remained much the same in many ways, but the spatial complexity that was so engaging in multichannel form dissipated, along with the overriding sense of presence. Sharing the load over five channels means that each power

Below: Arcam's A90 stereo integrated amp sits atop the three-channel P90/3 power amp



[Review] Arcam DiVA A90 integrated amplifier (plus 7.1 module and P90/3 power amp)

Q & A

HFC interviewed Arcam brand manager Geoff Meads about the A90, P90/3 and its multichannel upgrades



HFC: What are the physical differences between the A85 and A90?

GM: It's all down to the power supply, which has more capacity which means more power – and that's it. But the change has had a significant effect. We used a similar idea in the FMJ series, which were based on the DiVAs, though there are other differences too. The A85 is the oldest product left in our range that hadn't been upgraded, so it made sense to do something about it.

There is a difference in sound quality...

It becomes a bit more effortless. The A85 is one of those amplifiers that everyone tends to be very happy with because it doesn't seem to be doing anything wrong. It's not overly bright or dark, it's nicely detailed, but not excessively. But when you go the next step, which up till now has been the FMJ A32, it quickly becomes obvious what's missing in solidity and resolution. The A90 provides a new step in between the two.

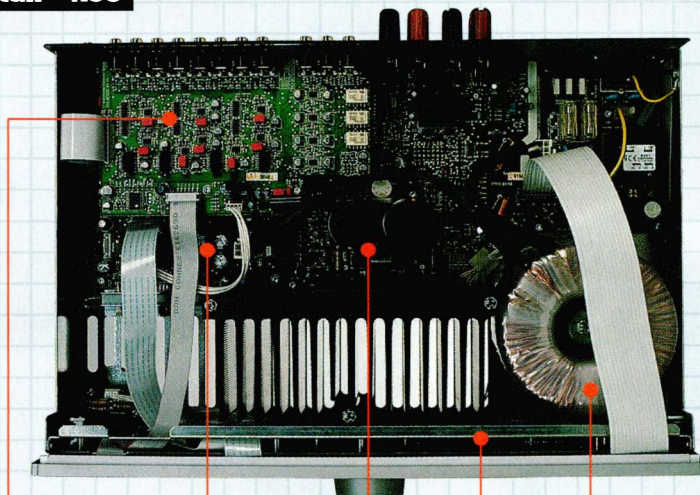
Have there been multichannel add-ins for previous models?

We did a multichannel add-in for the Alpha 10, and the same chassis became the FMJ A22, and it was used there too. But it was different as it had Dolby an DTS decoding and simple video switching too. We also produced a multiroom option. The intention was to produce a 7.1 option for the A85, but we never got around to it. But the 7.1 add-in board for the A90 is also available for the A85 as a factory upgrade,

How is the multichannel option achieved technically?

It's done with studio grade VCA (Voltage Control Amplifiers), so it's carried out in the analogue domain, without digital conversion. We use ICs for this, so there are no potentiometers in the signal path, nothing to wear out, and there's no need to run the signal from the back of the amplifier to the front. The volume control is tied to the existing logic elements in the stereo amplifier, and all channels are controlled in the same way and to the same specification. The VCAs are very low noise, so it's also possible to provide offsets (level trims) for each channel without noise problems.

Detail – A90



Add-in 5.1 channel PC board with volume control

Main stereo amplifier circuit board

Power supply, with twin reservoir capacitors

Screening for display and other panel electronics

Toroidal mains transformer

amplifier is working less hard than the stereo amplifier at the same volume, and the fact that the sound was being amplified by bona fide high-fidelity amps of some stature makes this a high-achieving combination. With the work that follows the Grainger, Holst's *Planets*, the system sounded little short of stunning. The complex swirling textures of *Saturn* work much better in multichannel than in plain stereo, and this disc sounded fresher and more alive, at least compared to a similarly priced home cinema amplifier.

Of course, the amplifier works adequately with DVD-Video material, and players like the Denon DVD-A11 (see p34) and Arcam's own have better than average surround decoders and adequate bass management for most situations. Nevertheless, full home cinema amplifiers are likely to offer better performance and set-up features, and the benefits of the A90 plus P90/3 approach are less obvious, especially as the source material is low-bit-rate and intrinsically not up to the standard of SACD or DVD-Audio. This was all too obvious in practice – the DTS surround recording of Bonnie Raitt's *Road Tested*, for example, sounded splashy and muddled, but over a range of Dolby Digital/DTS material the stable, open sound of the Arcam could still be sensed as a factor in the background.

Compared to the already impressive



two-channel A90 on its own, the bi-amplified A90 plus P90/3 combination offers good stereo resolving power and a high standard of transparency. The treble is particularly pure and fluid, while the bass is warm and full. In multichannel form the quality of sound remains essentially the same as in stereo, but the mere fact of adding extra channels serves to underscore the inherent quality of DVD-Audio and SACD source material, and plays to the Arcam's strengths, the extra channels compensating to an extent for the amp's minor limitations. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT – A90 stereo amp

SOUND >> 85%



FEATURES >> 91%



BUILD >> 82%



VALUE >> 85%



CONCLUSION

A very fine mid-market stereo amp, audibly better than its well-received predecessor. Upgrade options a real bonus.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE

>> 85%

VERDICT – A90+P90/3 5.1 amp

SOUND >> 93%



FEATURES >> 60%



BUILD >> 82%



VALUE >> 85%



CONCLUSION

In combination with the P90/3 and Arcam's 7.1 module, the A90 forms the basis of a highly effective purist surround solution.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE

>> 85%



Sonus faber®

look to the past to hear the future



Sonus Faber Cremona

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Sonus Faber Cremona Sub

Sonus Faber Guarneri

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

Sonus Faber loudspeakers have developed into three distinct ranges – all the better to address the needs of an increasingly sophisticated marketplace. After all, with maturity comes a clarity of vision and intent. At the time of Sonus Faber's birth, there was no home theatre to address, and digital audio was in its infancy. In 2003, the world of home entertainment encompasses discrete 5.1-through-7.1 channel surround sound, purist 2-channel analogue audio and the latest digital music-only technologies, SACD and DVD-Audio.

Sonus Faber welcomes the future, yet it shows respect for the past, the most vivid example being the award-winning, standards-setting *Homage* series. This luxurious range now consists of the stand-mounted two-way **GUARNERI** and the three-way floor standing **AMATI**, both embodying artisan skills of centuries past: the beauty and warmth of hand-fashioned cabinetry, wrapped around components which deliver sound worthy of the names of the greatest stringed instruments of all time. And the Guarneri itself has been responsible for changing the face of loudspeaker cabinetry, the first boat-tailed speaker and still the very best.

To accomplish the difficult task of satisfying both the audiophile and the movie-lover in you, Sonus Faber offers the full **CREMONA SYSTEM**. Able to provide the versatility to satisfy the demands of both movie scores and soundtracks, as well as the pure music of LP, CD, SACD and DVD-A, the original floor-standing **CREMONA**, the matching **CREMONA CENTRE**, the smaller **CREMONA AUDITOR** and the **CREMONA SUB** are milestones in both aesthetics and sound quality, a dream come true for the audiophile and the cineaste.

Also presented by Sonus Faber to serve a multitude of channels is the dazzling, ultra-modern **CONCERTO HOME** series. This handsome range contains everything from Concerto Home satellite speakers and the slim floor-standing **CONCERTO GRAND PIANO** main speakers to the **SOLO** centre channel and the rear "Wall" Loudspeakers and the **GRAVIS** subwoofer. True Sonus Faber elegance and expertise at surprisingly attainable prices. Above all, every model bears the stamp of Franco Serblin.



absolutesounds Ltd.

TRUE TO THE END

Clean, clear and beautifully transparent, this is a speaker for those who seek the whole musical truth

PRODUCT ATC SCM35

TYPE Floorstanding loudspeakers (3-way)

PRICE £1,999 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 23x88x30cm

Weight: 29kg • 25mm soft dome tweeter • 75mm soft dome midrange driver • 200mm doped paper cone bass driver • Sensitivity/impedance: 85dB/8 ohms

CONTACT ☎ 01285 760561 # www.atc.gb.net

AT C built its enviable reputation first on drive units for the professional audio world and then with its stunning active monitors, which you'll find in prestigious studios the world over. It makes active designs for the domestic market as well and we raved about its SCM20A not so long ago, its metal grille and aluminium heatsinking making a refreshing change to the usual run of standmount speakers. ATC isn't just about powered speakers though and makes a range of traditionally finished passive speakers of which the SCM35 is the latest example.

The SCM35, so-called because it features a

35-litre cabinet, is however the first passive floorstander from ATC. It is built in the old-school style with lovely real wood veneer and a modern rarity, the inset grille cloth, which is held by friction alone and fits superbly. You are discouraged from removing ATC grilles because the speakers are voiced with them in place, but if you want a marginally brighter sound, this is an option.

If you do so you'll find a purposeful three-way array of drive units. A soft-domed, neodymium magnet-driven tweeter takes care of high frequencies up to and beyond 20kHz and hands over to a classic ATC 75mm soft-dome for the vital midrange. Taking care of the bass is a meaty 200m (eight-inch) drive unit – you don't find these on many speakers nowadays because they tend to broaden the speaker's waistline rather unfashionably. However, the SCM35 is not inelegant and if it's music you're interested in then a decent bass driver is a luxury worth making a few concessions for. This particular unit was

developed by ATC specifically for this speaker and incorporates its preferred short voice coil/long magnetic gap for maximum control and thus linearity. A large dust cap is included to enhance both physical and sonic stiffness.

The SCM35 has another surprise up its sleeve in the hefty braced cabinet – for once this is not a reflex-loaded design, and so has no port. While reflex loading is popular because it increases sensitivity and fills out the bass there are advantages to the infinite baffle or sealed cabinet. Specifically bass goes down lower and in a more linear fashion. It's an old-school approach that works – just look at enduring classics like the LS3/5A. Given that amplifier power is more affordable than it's ever been there's a lot to be said for this classic approach.

Another unusual feature on this real cherry veneered cabinet is the presence of three sets of terminals, offering the option to tri-wire or even tri-amp should you feel the urge. At the base of each speaker is a so-called non-resonant plinth which is effectively a tripod that extends the compact footprint outwards and introduces greater stability. It also allows easy spike adjustment should you wish to pierce your flooring.

ATC's confidence in this, as with all its speakers, is backed by a six-year warranty – in other words, provided your amplifier is up to the job the speaker is bombproof. But a recommendation of amps with between 50 and 300 watts might be a little optimistic as few 50-watters have what it takes to control this sort of load at high levels, and we'd stick to 70 watts plus given the choice. For the purposes of this review we used a Gamut D200 with 200 watts on tap, and a Pioneer VSA-AX10i with a maximum of 150 watts. Both worked well but the former delivered the best results.

SOUND QUALITY

This, like other ATCs, is an extremely neutral, self-effacing loudspeaker, and puts the music first whatever your music might sound like. If you ever decide to audition a pair of ATCs make sure you take a variety of discs or LPs, because like the brand's other models the SCM35 reveals shortcomings just as effectively as it shows the best aspects of a recording. We played a good range of material to get a feel for the speaker and found some records surprisingly lacking. This was





you are hearing is the unadulterated truth, nothing more, nothing less. That truth being the sound of your software and hardware, so if what you are putting into these speakers has problems, they won't be disguised. Likewise, if you are after a sweet sound or an aggressive sound you will have to select source and amplification to achieve that effect. The ATCs are not completely devoid of character – no speaker is – but they have a lot less than most.

Then there's the bass. Tight, deep (though not floor-bending) and controlled, this is bass for connoisseurs, with the speed and coherence that you expect to get from the

“Tight, deep and controlled, this is bass for connoisseurs, with the speed and coherence that you expect to get from the all-revealing midrange.”

partly because the SCM35 needs a good amount of running in, starting quite starkly but becoming more forgiving with time. Jeff Beck's masterpiece *Wired*, for instance, came through in quite surprisingly compressed form, but put on a recent recording such as Richard Thompson's *Old Kit Bag* and the result is magnificent – full scale, rich and dynamic.

In past tests we've noticed that the more recent a recording, the better it tends to sound through ATCs, and while you can usually tell the approximate vintage of a recording with any decent speaker, ATCs do it better than most. Some speakers actually lean the other way and make older recordings sound better, for example, and this has a lot to do with the effects of compression from both speakers and recordings. ATCs are less compressive than most and therefore the degree and type of compression used in a recording is more apparent through them. Which makes this ATC as dynamically transparent as its stablemates, so you hear the limiting on the Jeff Beck recording and likewise you hear the lack of it on the Richard Thompson. But that's not all you hear, this is a highly transparent loudspeaker that lets an awful lot through in a clean, undistorted fashion. Voices are particularly well served – you can hear the full depth of expression and richness of tone whether the voice in question be high or low. Joni Mitchell is as faithfully reproduced as the drone of the Overtone Choir, whose sonorous voice resonates long and low.

The SCM35 gives the impression that what

all-revealing midrange.

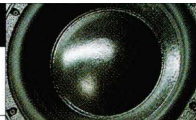




You don't think "Wow, great bass!", you just hear more of both the lower and the higher stuff. It doesn't muddy the mid but reinforces it, seamlessly enhancing voices and revealing the fundamentals of instruments such as the double bass, kick drum and synthesiser. It also remains consistent whatever level you play back at. Except everything sounds better if you play it at a higher level because the scale and pressure both increase but distortion does not. The gorgeous bass synth sounds of chillout gurus Momma Gravy take on a shape and life not previously encountered when experienced via a pair of these ATCs.

If you're looking for comparisons, seek out PMC's OBI, which doesn't have such a large bass driver but uses transmission line to reinforce the bottom end. B&W's new 703 doubles up the bass units and incorporates its surroundless Kevlar mid driver to superb effect, while Totem's Forest offers a more colourful sound with prodigious bass.

Despite the higher price of most of the above, the ATC undoubtedly holds its own. It has outstanding transparency in dynamic, tonal and detail terms that marks it out as a class-leading design. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT		
SOUND >> 91%		
EASE OF DRIVE >> 65%		PRO Ability to play loud, with low coloration, gorgeous bass, neutrality and tri-wirability.
BUILD >> 92%		CON Needs good quality, high-ish power for best results. Finishes other than cherry cost extra.
VALUE >> 87%		
CONCLUSION If you're after character in your speakers, turn the page now. If you want to hear the uncoloured truth about your record collection in all its glory and have decent amplification, this is a speaker to treasure.		
HI-FI CHOICE		>> 89%
OVERALL SCORE		

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DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

Marantz confirms its commitment to CD with one of the finest sub-£500 players we've ever heard

PRODUCT Marantz CD7300

TYPE CD player

PRICE £350

CONTACT ☎ 01753 680868 🌐 www.marantz.com

Between the cheap 'n' cheerful convenience of budget universal DVD players (down to this sort of price and falling fast) and the luxury of the all-singing, all-dancing high end is a legitimate and still hotly contested middle ground where a £350 CD-only player makes perfect sense. No one expects high-end CD replay from a cheap DVD player, so why not keep the video to itself and play that large collection of stereo discs as well as possible?

Marantz clearly believes in stereo's future and has brought out, in the CD7300, a sophisticated and highly specified machine that inspires confidence from the moment one unpacks it. It's very solidly built on a heavy and non-resonant chassis (would that the top cover were likewise non-resonant, but there's always Custom Design's 'acoustic steel' or similar to place on top) and the controls are solid and nicely tactile. Inside, it sports a high-performance DAC from Crystal and a pair of Marantz's 'HDAM' modules, and it interfaces to the world via the usual outputs including both flavours of digital – electrical and optical.

You get the usual range of features – track programming and so on – with a couple of neat additions. First, this deck plays not only CD-R and CD-RW discs but also unfinalised copies of both (because the transport's from a recorder, perhaps?), which comes in handy now and then. Second, it features pitch control, something generally confined to karaoke and commercial players. It's a feature we're delighted to see on an audiophile deck, however, since not all digital reissues of pre-1980 material have been copied at the right speed and speed error of only a couple of per cent can be quite dramatic in the tonal department. Speed adjustment is only to the nearest percentage point though, and there's a small quality hit in the jitter department, but it's well worth having. Oh, and importantly, this player is mechanically very quiet, unlike some recent models.

SOUND QUALITY

Having on the whole been quite impressed by the quality of mid-market CD players of late, we were pleasantly surprised to find the ante



upped by a significant margin with this svelte performer. Let's get the downside out of the way first – it's probably not the first choice for those seeking thrills and spills from a disc collection majoring on the upbeat, but in practically every other eventuality it's got rather a lot going for it.


Starting at the top, treble is clean and free from roughness, especially with troublesome sounds such as cymbals and close-miked vocals. Even at noisy climaxes there is little or no constriction or harshness, and to establish just how good performance was in this department we had to perform some very careful comparisons with the excellent Chord DAC64 (£1,900), itself something a reference for cleanliness. Suffice to say that the Marantz only just lost out on the majority of recordings.

Midband is beautifully open and, in conjunction with the fine treble, presents one of the broadest, most palpable and most precise soundstages you'll hear short of the high end. Given that, you won't be surprised to learn that there is detail in abundance, and to crown it all, tonality is nearly impossible to fault. Just occasionally the odd bit of

saxophone or violin would sound a tiny bit 'cupped hands' but again it needs some careful listening to spot it.

Finally, the bass – effortless just about sums it up. Extended, for sure, but never overdone in the manner of too many cheap speakers, for instance. Rather, it vibrates your innards with almost casual ease, like a large church organ or orchestral bass drum. Indeed, throughout its performance envelope, ease characterises this player. Nothing troubles it – or, in turn, the listener, at least sonically. Emotionally, you are left that much more exposed to the troubling (or soothing!) contents of the best discs. Surely that's what it's all about. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 87%	 <p>PRO Excellent sound in every area and very nice to use, with plenty of useful features including pitch control.</p> <p>CON Very occasional hint of coloration. Technically, some aliasing distortion – could it be even better without?</p>
FEATURES >> 90%	
BUILD >> 88%	
VALUE >> 94%	
<p>CONCLUSION Clearly a superb product at the price which can show a thing or three to most DVD and/or SACD-capable players. It's an ideal partner for the equally excellent PM7200 amp, and for stereo replay should be auditioned both in and above its price range.</p>	
<p>HI-FI CHOICE >> 90% OVERALL SCORE</p>	

TURQUOISE HEAVEN

Hovland's high-end pre and power amp duo offers pellucid sonic purity and fabulous packaging

PRODUCT Hovland HP-100 Line and RADIA

TYPE Stereo preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE £4,750 (HP-100 Line), £7,995 (RADIA)

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): HP100 L 46x13x44cm, RADIA 46x18x42cm • Weight: HP100 L 12.3kg, RADIA 33.6kg • Nine line-level inputs inc. tape loop • Power output: 125W/8 ohms, 200W/4 ohms

Contact: ☎ 01892 539245

🌐 www.hovlandcompany.com

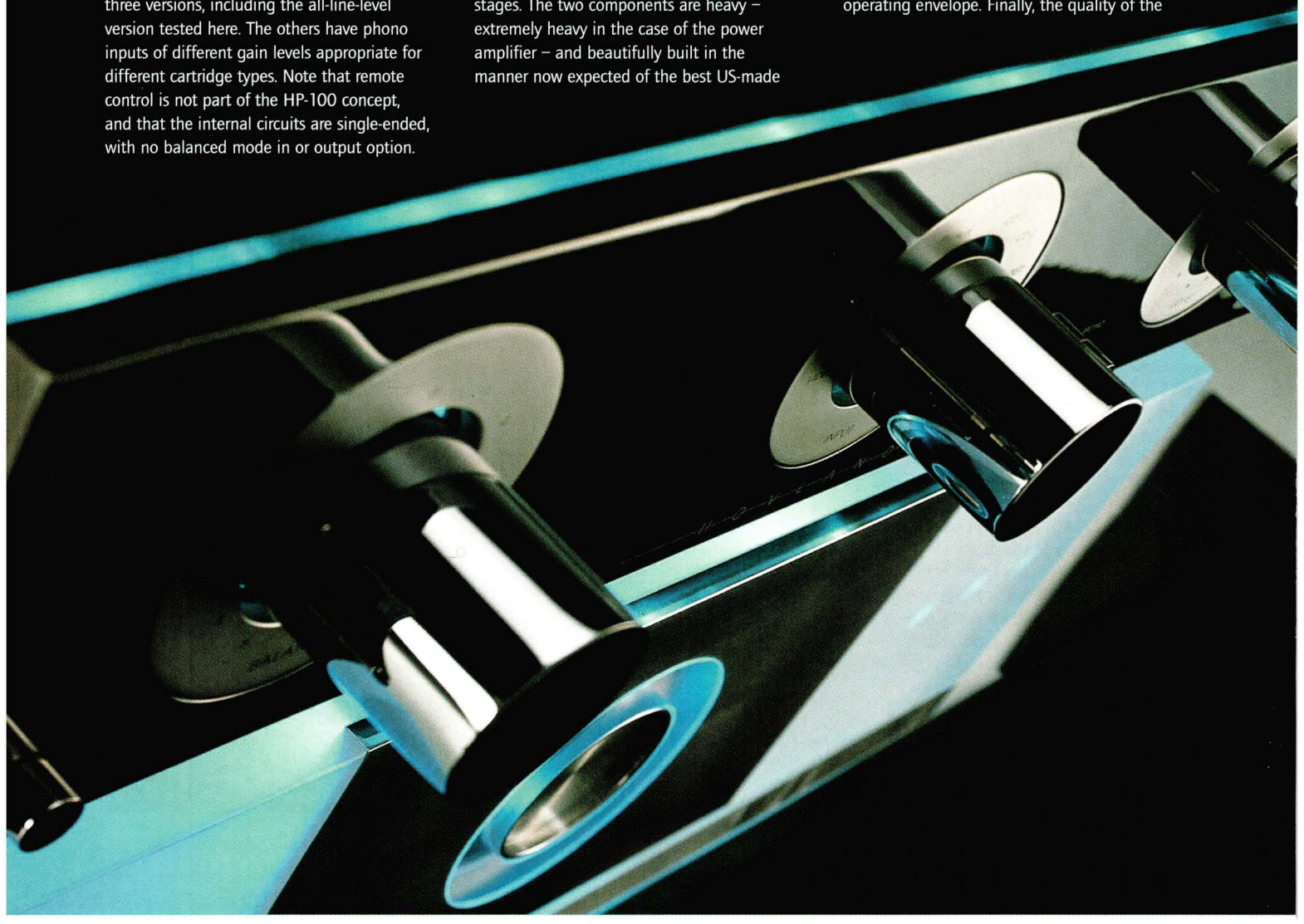
The two components that make up this sparkling Hovland combination are a line-level preamp, the HP-100 Line, and a 125-watts-per-channel power amp unaccountably called RADIA. The preamp, Hovland's first complete audio component, is well specified, with eight inputs plus a tape monitor loop, mono and mute switching. The volume control is a 31-step attenuator with 2dB steps plus full mute at the lowest setting, and the balance control limits itself to +/- 5dB in 1dB steps. The HP-100 is available in three versions, including the all-line-level version tested here. The others have phono inputs of different gain levels appropriate for different cartridge types. Note that remote control is not part of the HP-100 concept, and that the internal circuits are single-ended, with no balanced mode in or output option.

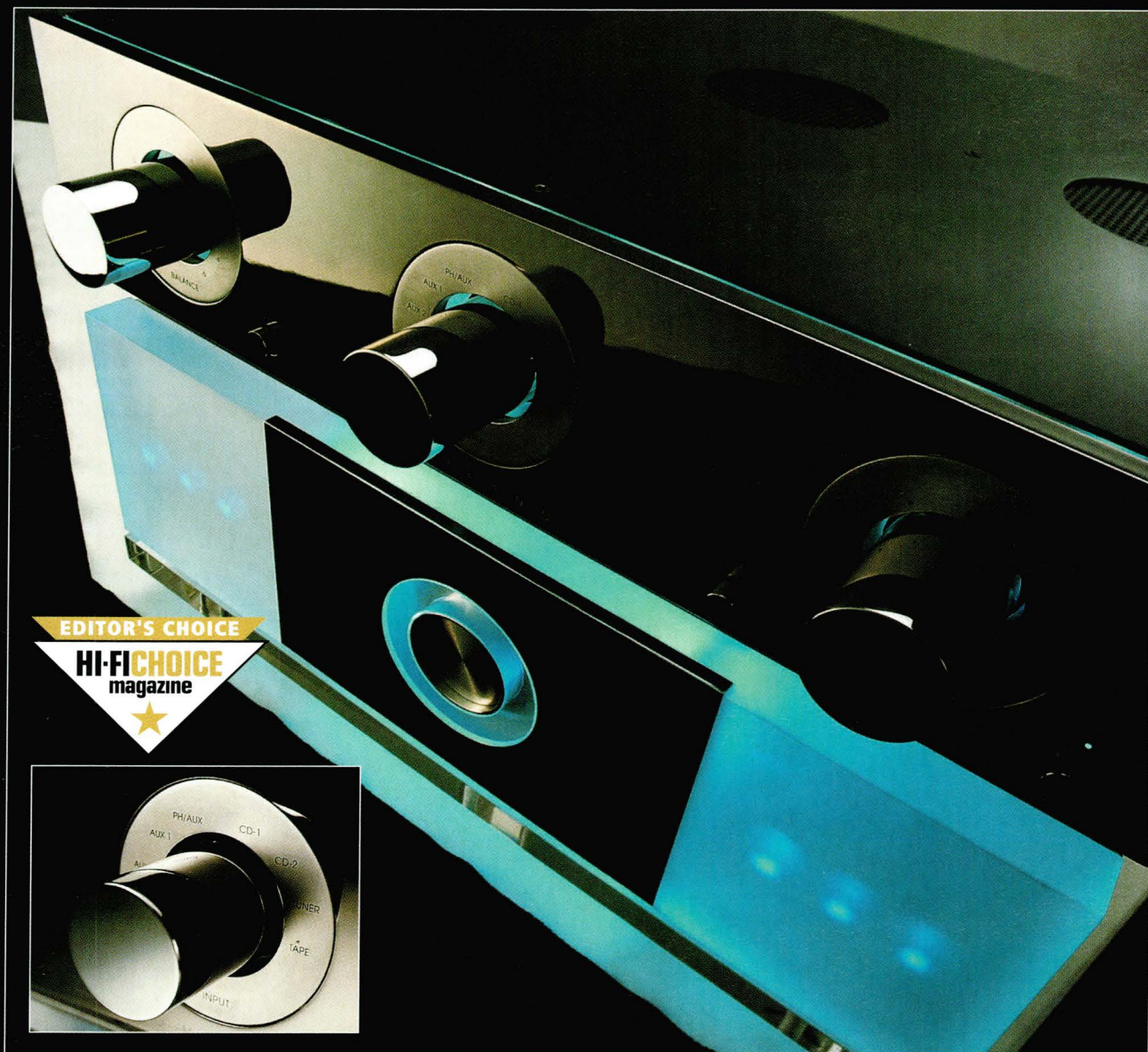
The RADIA power amp, Hovland's third and most recent audio component to date, is available with a balanced input to order, but was supplied in its standard single-ended form, which means that the rear panel is populated by a single pair of phono inputs and 4mm output terminals. Oh, and a switch on the back which controls the backlighting that illuminates the Perspex on the front panel in a turquoise glow. A similar arrangement is fitted to the preamplifier, this time highlighting just the edges of the front panel.

Apart from this minor and visually arresting little conceit, the two components are admirably purposeful. In the cause of reducing the amount of ferrous metal in the vicinity of the active circuits, the two components make extensive use of thick Perspex and acrylic panels over lightweight anodised aluminium plates which are bolted to a structural space frame, with extensive internal screening around various circuit stages. The two components are heavy – extremely heavy in the case of the power amplifier – and beautifully built in the manner now expected of the best US-made

esoterica. The lack of a remote control over volume is a pity, but control feel is smooth and clearly of high quality.

The HP-100 has valve-based circuits using Sovtek vacuum tubes (two 12AX7s and one 12AT7) plus a solid state power supply section, a decision made it seems for long-term freedom from drift. The power amplifier is a fully solid state dual mono design, whose only shared component is the mains input. It is a cool-running design, built around two independent custom-designed frame transformers, one for each channel. The input uses J-FETs to define a high-input impedance which allows it to be driven via long interconnects from the preamplifier. The driver stage uses FETs, but the output employs T-O3 metal can bipolar devices in a fully complementary configuration. Particular care has been taken over heat dissipation and in the active bias control circuitry, to ensure that bias current remains stable over the complete operating envelope. Finally, the quality of the





“It reproduces music with refinement and equanimity, transparency and passion.”

passive component and wiring used internally is extremely high, as befits a company that started out making and distributing high-grade audio cables and components after founder Robert Hovland left Marantz just before the takeover by the Japanese in the mid-seventies. The list includes Hovland's Generation 3 interconnects and MusiCap film and foil capacitors.

The power amp operates silently and consistently, and the preamp likewise for the most part except for some low-level residual background buzz, noise and some erratic (probably RFI induced) impulsive interference that was just about audible with the ear near the speaker drive units. This problem was controlled with the choice of cables and cable routing, which may require some experimentation for best results.

SOUND QUALITY

Despite being powered by glowing bottles, the HP-100 is one of the least 'valve-like' preamplifiers we have encountered (there is however a solid state preamp to match the RADIA due for launch shortly at a cost of £6,450 in a line-level form, and with remote control). There is none of the stereotypical softness or warmth, the constrained top end, the parsimonious sense of detail, the almost excessive plushness and refinement that ensures music never sounds uncomfortable even when it is supposed to. But at the same time the traditional signatures of a solid stage design are equally absent. There is nothing that could be categorised as hard or grainy – imagery was multilayered and the sound was very transparent. Remarkably so in fact.

Exactly the same remarks could be taken to

apply to the power amplifier. For part of this test, the two components were isolated by driving the preamp into a pair of Classé monoblocks, and by connecting the RADIA to the variable (preamp) output of the Mark Levinson 390S CD player, both components with well known and easily recognisable characteristics. In both cases, the two Hovland components came across as essentially neutral open windows on the source, and with similar qualities to each other.

The loudspeaker used for this test was the £11,000 Focal-JMLab Alto, which had initially failed to perform well with lesser electronics. The Hovland duo had the desired effect, restoring its natural transparency and helping it generate a stereo image of impressive depth and weight. Treble quality was particularly well judged, combining unusual resolving power with refinement and a smooth, open presentation that grew organically from the midband, and where detail emerged from a black background. There are few amps so lacking in artifice, so essentially natural. ▣

Q & A

HFC discussed Hovland past and some of the technical issues surrounding their designs with Alex J Crespi, Hovland's Vice President, Sales & Marketing



HFC: Where does Hovland come from?

AJC: The four founders, namely Bob Hovland (CEO), Michael Gargas (production), Jeffrey Tonkin (chief industrial designer) and myself have been friends for 28 years, with a shared passion for music and audio. Bob used to work with Saul Marantz when the company was American-owned, and then started repairing and modifying valve and solid state amplifiers and other components. This gave him a unique insight into their strengths and weaknesses.

How did the company start?

We spent years exploring the effects of materials and components on performance, and Hovland became a manufacturer of accessories, including cables and passive components. This continues, and to give one example, we now sell our MusiCap foil and film caps to more than 250 manufacturers world-wide.

Valves versus transistors?

Our interest in solid state predated that in valves by a couple of decades. Our valve products are not very valve-like – and vice versa. We have endeavoured to work with components and circuits that don't speak with an identifiable voice. Bipolars and J-FETs done with the right design choices and topology sound similar to one another and to valves – so that when done right they don't sound like anything at all. Most of what people like about valves are colorations. And the caricature of hard, steely-sounding transistor amps is related to poor design.

Some of your component choices are unusual.

Can you talk about the thinking involved? Every piece, every wire, capacitor and resistor is selected for the job, after being measured objectively and sonically, and experience comes in here too of course. We prefer iron cores (used in the RADIA) to toroids for technical and sonic reasons. A lot of effort went into the heat dissipation of both products to ensure that bias voltages respond quickly to temperature changes in the output stage, which helps give a much more consistent sound.

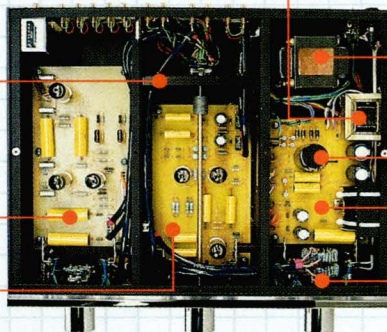


Detail – HP-100 Line

Source selector is connected to the switch near the inputs at the back by this rod to keep signal paths minimised

Hovland MusiCap film-and-foil polypropylene capacitors

Three-valve line stage



Specially designed transformer supplies power to the valve filaments

Main transformer

Special slit foil BHC/Aerovox built electrolytic capacitor designed by DNM

Power supply board

Hand-made 31-position coin-silver stepped volume attenuator switch

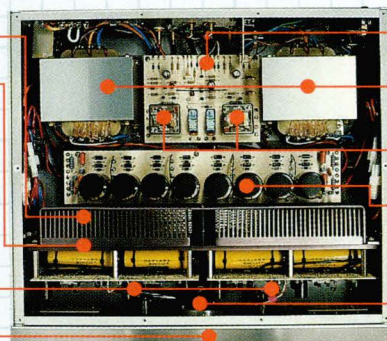
Detail – RADIA

Convection-cooled chimney heatsink

Output transistor stage

Output circuitry modules

Coated, one-inch cast acrylic plate with machined aluminium inset plate



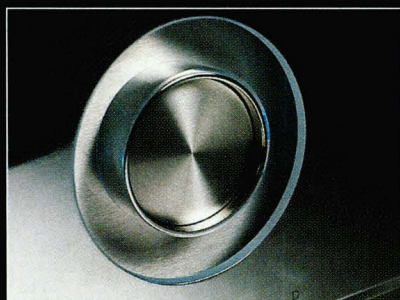
Low voltage turn-on and protection circuitry

Custom power transformers

Ultra high quality dual-contact speaker relays

High-speed power supply

Hovland G-3 interconnect



One of the notable qualities of the Hovland HP-100/RADIA duo is its consistency, a quality that is difficult to pin down, but which is obvious as a sense of fluid ease in music-making that arises because the signature of the amp is not being changed as the music signal changes. This sense of ease probably arises because the ear/brain doesn't have to make constant readjustments to the changing character of the reproduction chain, but it's a quality that is sensed rather than heard.

Overall this is an amp combo that reproduces music with an unusual refinement and equanimity, with transparency and with passion. It performed beautifully with a wide range of vocal, rock and orchestral material, though its qualities were particularly well displayed with acoustic material, which allowed it to reproduce a rich, broad range of tonal colours in a measured, articulate way, particularly at the darker end of the spectrum. Human voice, both solo and choral, was especially well handled, sounding expressive

and with real depth and meaning.

Offhand, it is difficult to think of a valve preamplifier that sounds less valve-like, (except for the low level of residual noise and hum – microphony however was not an issue) or a solid state power amplifier that is less 'transistory'. The combination is effortlessly powerful, with superb tonal and detail resolution, and an unusual ability to reproduce fine dynamic shadings, but it also has real clout and authority when the throttles are opened wide. In the pantheon of the high end, this makes this particular odd couple something of a bargain. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT

SOUND >> 95%



FEATURES >> 70%



BUILD >> 95%



VALUE >> 84%



PRO
Consistent, articulate and refined, with superb build and lovely controls.

CON
No balanced mode preamp output, low-level hum and noise from preamp.

CONCLUSION

Unusually musical combination has a very even spread of positive attributes and no noticeable nasties, but balanced mode operation and internal circuitry would have been advantageous, if only for compatibility with likely sources.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%

Kandy

It's not all
black and white.



Roksan, for those with a little more grey matter.



NORTHERN BEAUTY

Hegel's CD player may not fit the norm but it cuts the mustard where it counts

PRODUCT Hegel CDP2A

TYPE CD player

PRICE £1,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x8x29cm • Weight: 10kg • 24-bit/192kHz sigma/delta DAC • Balanced and single-ended outputs • Coaxial digital output

CONTACT ☎ 01785 711232 🌐 www.hegel.com

Bent Hegel set up his company in 1990 following an illustrious career in music, video and audio technology in the professional market, and he has some serious plans to put Norway firmly on the hi-fi map.

His philosophy is not so different to many in this field – “to preserve the analogue, clean organic sound as much as possible by using high-resolution technical solutions”. Yet he has done more than many in this quest. The ‘SoundEngine’ technology for blocks of amplification that he has developed is described as a “local error correction system”

and turns out to be a variation on a feed-forward loop that surrounds just one stage of amplification. It compares frequency, level and error content between in and output and adds an inverted correction signal if required. In other words it only acts when it needs to and because each loop is so short it works at very high speed compared to normal feed-forward/back systems.

The CDP2A is the more affordable of two CD players in the Hegel range, which contains amps of all the usual stereo varieties – integrated, preamps and power amps. This player has borrowed the amps’ high-current

power supply, described as having the same capacity as those of 100-watt amps. The theory is that this preserves dynamic range by keeping the noise floor down to -130dB.

Digital to analogue conversion is via a Crystal balanced sigma/delta 24-bit/192kHz DAC that is combined with synchronised upsampling and a low-jitter master clock – the signal remains fully balanced all the way from DAC to the balanced outputs. The player also has traditional single-ended phonos for amps without balanced inputs.

Unusually for a small company, Hegel has designed the CD-servo and laser front end



Anouar Brahem's *Thimar*, the sound at once clean and revealing. Ingabrigt Flaten's double bass on Bugge Wesseltoft's live album was also highly appealing. The Hegel is clearly rather comfortable with the nether regions, digging out the woody tone of this lovely instrument and relaying its sense of time in an effortless and fluent fashion. Sensitivity to timing is better than average, the player reflecting the way pace varies throughout a given track in a particularly natural manner.

Reverb is also well served, and the sense of scale/shape in the music is always clearly presented. Likewise, if there's not much of it you get a smaller picture. And while apparently a smooth operator it's not afraid to get down and dirty if something of that ilk comes along. In other words, if you want edge you got it.

It's also transparent without shoving it down your throat and has a finely judged balance between resolve and finesse. It's blissfully devoid of glare or hardness too, something that even in this day and age digital sources can often be heard to produce.

Next to its Danish competitor the Densen Beat Plus, the Hegel sounds more relaxed and sedate, even quiet, but while timing may not

This player is even more relaxed than the eternally calm Eikos which is surprising, yet it is never dull, a desirable quality in any audio component. The handclaps on Ali Farka Touré's *Niafunke* were reproduced with their natural reverb and rhythmic power fully intact while the great man's guitar playing effortlessly drove the piece along. These qualities are reminiscent of the Classé CDP-10, one of last year's favourites at this price point – it would be intriguing to put them side by side. Another contender in this ballpark that would be useful as a comparison is also Scandinavian – the Copland CDA 822. If you can't get a result with one of these three you need to save up more moola!

One good test of a player's manners is Nils Petter Molvaer's heavyweight *Khmer*. This is a very substantial track that can easily become fatiguing, and will reveal glare in almost any component. The Hegel coped admirably with the onslaught of bass drums, guitar, samples and trumpet. This is partly because it is slightly restrained in energy terms but mainly because it's so intrinsically placid, it adds very little of its own character to the music, especially when compared with more ostensibly 'musical' machines.

“The Hegel is clearly comfortable with the nether regions, digging out the woody tone of a double bass and relaying it effortlessly.”

from scratch, his experience with low-noise analogue front end and high-speed digital design providing the expertise required.

The CDP2A is fitted with an unusual but intuitive set of control buttons on its cast-alloy fascia. The two buttons each serve three functions by pressing in the relevant corner to elicit the desired response – play, open, stop and so on. Even nicer is the metal-bodied remote control – at least twice as nice as you usually find on players at this price. Densen charges £200 for its Gizmo remote which has a few more buttons but it's very similar in build and style. The Hegel remote includes half a dozen amp-oriented switches but its clear legends make driving the player very simple.

The blue LED display is not the brightest around but given that there's no option to vary luminosity it's set at a good compromise level for low and high-level ambient lighting.

SOUND QUALITY

This dark grey player does not, we're very happy to report, produce a 'grey' sound. It may seem a shade darker than some of the alternatives but there is plenty of colour and texture to the instruments and voices it reproduces. On test, John Surman's rich soprano saxophone soared against Dave Holland's solid and timely bass playing on

be as obvious as it is with the Densen the overall balance is more natural and rich. Bass in particular is more substantial but this doesn't stop midband energy from shining through, and the Esbjörn Svensson Trio's vibrant grooves lack none of the piano's 'clang' or the player's low-level 'singing'.

Little Feat's *Red Streamliner* proved that the Hegel is also a strong emotional communicator. Under the catchy groove there is a power in this tune that creeps up on you and catches the lump in your throat – the ability to reveal as much is not a quality to be underestimated. Another great oldie is King Crimson's *Larks' Tongues In Aspic Pt1*. In the Hegel's grasp this showed its age but retained much of its tension and power. We've heard greater dynamic contrasts from it in the past but always through more expensive hardware. With Shostakovich's *Jazz Suite No 1* (Chailly/Concertgebouw) on the other hand there was no shortage of dynamic contrast, high-frequency shine or space, which proves that the Hegel is highly sensitive to the material it's playing. As that's what high fidelity should be all about this is an excellent result. In fact, if this piece were the only one you played on it, the very notion that the Hegel is even the slightest bit 'dark' in balance would never occur.

All in all, the Hegel CDP2A is an extremely welcome newcomer – build, design and crucially sound, are all very much in the CD player Premier League, and if you need any more convincing, just look at the quality of that remote! **HFC**

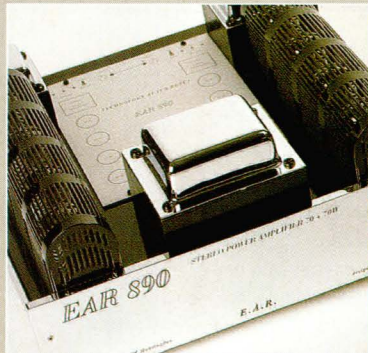
Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 88%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
FEATURES >> 85%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
BUILD >> 86%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
VALUE >> 87%	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
PRO	Remarkable transparency to the source, high neutrality, glare-free sound and a lovely remote handset.
CON	Quirky (but elegant) controls and no direct track access or open buttons on the remote.
CONCLUSION	
This attractively designed Norwegian newcomer deserves all the profile it can muster. It does what every hi-fi component should – simply gets out of the way and lets the music shine through.	
HI-FI CHOICE	OVERALL SCORE >> 87%

the AUDIO CONSULTANTS

FINE TWO CHANNEL AUDIO SYSTEMS



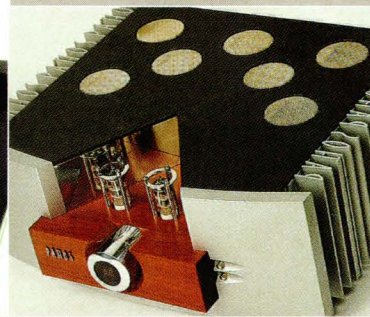
EAR/Yoshino 890 stereo amplifier
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Ferguson Hill FH001 horn loudspeakers
Very stylish with a dynamic, immediate sound.



Kuzma Stabi Reference with Tri-Planar VII tonearm
One of the very best vinyl replay systems.



Pathos Logos integrated hybrid amplifier A popular amplifier with great looks.



conrad-johnson MV60SE stereo amplifier We now have the superb Premier 140 on demonstration.



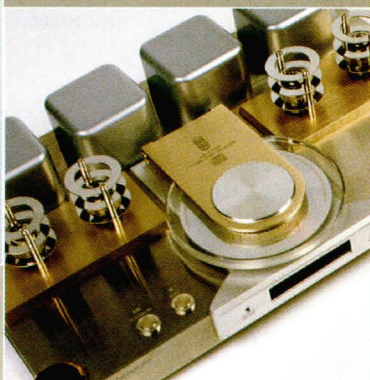
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Fast and articulate with neutral tonal balance. Slim floorstander which does not mind walls.



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With the new, thicker platter and upgrade kit it produces an even more neutral and stable image



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Superb sound and appearance.



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FERGUSON HILL ▶ GAMUT ▶ ISO TEK ▶ KUZMA ▶ LAVARDIN ▶ LYRA ▶ MONO PULSE ▶ MOON ▶ NORDOST ▶ NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE ▶ OPERA ▶ PAGODE ▶ PATHOS
QUADRASPIRE ▶ ROGUE AUDIO ▶ SME ▶ SHANLING ▶ SHUN MOOK ▶ SUGDEN ▶ TRANSFIGURATION ▶ TRI-PLANAR ▶ UNISON RESEARCH ▶ WADIA

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FM, PURE AND SIMPLE

There are bound to be compromises in budget hi-fi – NAD's AM/FM tuner makes all the right ones

PRODUCT NAD C422

TYPE AM/FM radio tuner

PRICE £180

CONTACT ☎ 01908 319360

🌐 www.nadelectronics.com

DAB or no DAB, there's plenty of room for FM tuners, especially good ones. NAD's upmarket S400 model did well in *HFC* a while ago, and this budget model hopes to repeat the success. 'Budget' is always a relative term, and it's true there are tuners around for less than £180, but it's hardly a very frightening sum however one looks at it.

At first glance, it looks as if NAD has fitted a nice rotary tuning knob to the C422, but it turns out to be rather different from that – effectively a three-position switch. Turn to the left and the tuner starts tuning downwards, and vice versa. If you're in preset mode it simply tunes down by one preset at a time and that's all very fine and handy. But you've got to tune the presets in initially, and one day you'll want to find a station that's not a preset, and at this point the tuning becomes a right pain in the nether area. Hold the knob to one side for a second and the tuner starts scanning but only until it finds a station, whereupon it stops and has to be instructed anew to scan. This can take forever if you happen to be in a city!

That relatively minor niggle apart though, the unit is nice enough to use. The display is clear and easy to read, with RDS displaying station name so in practical terms you'll hardly know it's not DAB. And to be honest, 30 presets should be enough to cover most people's needs.

In terms of reception features there's only one above the bare minimum, a simple 'HF blend' which can usefully reduce hash and grunge when listening to borderline stereo stations. There's no remote control supplied but you can use a NAD system remote, either via the normal infrared or via a wired connection on the back. Internal construction is typical of the breed, with a small integrated FM tuner head and a recent-generation chip doing the hard work.



SOUND QUALITY

Within its stated parameters of sound quality first and foremost, and assuming there is at least a reasonable RF signal available, this can be safely judged a successful entrant. In fact it's not particularly fussy about RF conditions, merely demanding a basic minimum signal level from which to retrieve the audio. Given that, it's a very capable performer.

What's particularly likeable about this tuner is the way it just gets on with things and doesn't fuss. Give it a bit of late-night jazz FM or Classic FM and it's perfectly happy to smooch away in the background quietly and imperturbably – just the thing. But with those dramatic moments in opera or big-scale rock it can really open up and let the excitement through, without imposing its own limitations of scale or characteristic roughness as can sometimes happen on FM.

With memories of Rega's very fine Radio 3 (at twice the price) fresh in our memory and some fancy references on hand, it's possible to be harsh and point out that this NAD doesn't always extract the full measure of detail from broadcasts, casting a slight but detectable veil over proceedings. Fair enough – for the price you'll be hard pushed to better it in that department. It's frankly astonishing just how good FM performance can be in the budget regions these days, and this is a fine example. Moreover, that lack of fuss and overt



character is particularly commendable and makes for more involving listening in the long term than more overtly 'exciting' but rough and/or temperamental tuners. Overall, then, it's worth looking beyond the initial mild frustration of the daft tuning procedure to enjoy a highly commendable performance from this good-value tuner. **HFC**

Richard Black

VERDICT		
SOUND >>> 83%	<p>PRO Generally good sound all round with a particularly gratifying lack of obvious grain or harshness.</p>	
FEATURES >>> 80%	<p>CON Irritating tuning system, a slight veiling that never quite lifts and bass can sometimes sound a touch hollow.</p>	
BUILD >>> 85%		
VALUE >>> 88%		
<p>CONCLUSION On balance, a thoughtfully designed and sonically gratifying tuner for those on a limited budget. You can certainly get better performance for more money, but the compromises struck here by NAD seem sensible and widely applicable.</p>		
<p>HI-FI CHOICE >>> 86% OVERALL SCORE</p>		





MUSIC IN A BOTTLE

The end of a preamp era meets the latest in valve power amplifiers from Conrad-Johnson

PRODUCT Conrad-Johnson PV10BL and MV60SE

TYPE Stereo valve preamplifier and power amplifier

PRICE £1,295 (PV10BL), £2,995 (MV60SE)

KEY FEATURES Size (HxWxD): PV10BL 100x40x28cm, MV60SE 18x45x34cm • PV10BL – five line-level inputs inc. tape loop, optional phono stage (PV10B) • MV60SE – 55W/ch with easy-adjust biasing for 6550 valves

CONTACT ☎ 020 8948 4153

🌐 www.audiofreaks.co.uk

It's accepted that American valve amplification is big, heavy and expensive, but meet the exceptions – Conrad-Johnson's PV10BL preamplifier and MV60SE power amplifier. Although no valve amp could ever be classed as a 'lightweight', the preamp only weighs 5.5kg and the MV60SE tips the scales at 22kg. The prices too are cheap by high-end American standards, the preamp

costing just £1,295 (£1,495 for the phono-equipped PV10B), and the power amp £2,995.

The 'classic' PV10 preamplifier has been in manufacture for more than a decade, and has undergone several changes in its lifespan. It remains a zero-feedback design sporting a pair of 6189 double triode tubes in line-only guise (plus an additional pair of 12AX7s and a single 12AT7 for the MM phono stage). The

cathode follower output stage gives the preamp very low output impedance, making the PV10BL ideal for long interconnects to the power amplifier. The latest PV10B and line-only PV10BL (as tested here) is the last iteration of the product. People these days expect a remote control regardless of price and, in fairness, the PV10B looks a bit out of place against the digital control circuitry in more recent C-J designs in the Premier range. It is very basic by those standards, with just a

There is just one oddity about the MV60SE though – the weird terminal blocks. These have a black plastic cover and look more like satellite coaxial connectors than speaker terminals, but they do support spade-lugs and bare wire cables. Unfortunately however, 4mm banana sockets will not fit. You may want to experiment with absolute phase at those odd speaker terminals – although the MV60SE is phase correct, the PV10B inverts phase at its output.

on the latter is masterful, with Dusty Springfield's voice sultry and seductive. Two minutes in, and the C-J sound was doing its stuff – I had sprouted an Austin Powers chest wig and two girls in white plastic mini-skirts turned up in an E-type. This doesn't just play music, it places you *in* the music.

Ultimately, the PV10B preamplifier is beginning to show its age, especially when compared to the MV60SE. It is slightly soft-edged and warm toned, softening transients that the MV60SE is more than capable of handling. Line-level source components and the discs played on them have improved immeasurably in the last few years and such rose-tinting isn't required by the preamplifier today. That said, it still offers extremely fine value for money, is exceptionally detailed, dynamic and never gets in the way of the music – it simply 'sexes it up' a bit.

This leaves the MV60SE. An honest, dynamic and transparent sounding power amplifier with a huge and very deep soundstage and the sort of coherence that only well-engineered tubes can muster, the MV60SE really fights above and beyond its weight. In a fair fight, it would take a much more expensive preamplifier to show up the MV60SE's limitations.

Taken together, the duo makes a fine introduction to what real high-end audio has to offer. They don't offer the latest gizmos, but instead turn in a fine sound that has oodles of refinement and more soundstage than anyone has a right to. Rich, classy stuff without rich-man prices, the C-J PV10BL and MV60SE are worth seeking out. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

“Taken together, the duo makes for an extremely fine introduction to exactly what real high-end audio has to offer.”

volume control, a source selector, a tape monitor switch and a power button – today's user expects so much more for their money. Still, its eventual passing (probably before the end of 2004) marks the closing of an era, and waves goodbye to the last C-J preamplifier to contain a built-in phono stage.

The MV60SE power amp is supposedly an entirely British reaction to the standard MV60: the UK distributor wasn't happy with the sound from the plain EL34 valve-based MV60, so – in part to keep that distributor quiet – the good burghers of Fairfax, Virginia reworked the MV60, making a variant 'Special Edition' design with a pair of 6550 output tubes per side in place of the EL34s. This wasn't a difficult change, as the MV60 uses the same power and output transformers as the old Premier 11 power amplifier, which used 6550s as standard. The 55-watt power amplifier has just eight valves in total – aside from the power tubes, it includes a 12AX7A input tube and a 6SN7 phase inverter per channel. Along with the SE version, there is another option, where the output stage is wired for triode operation instead of single-ended ultralinear mode as standard, but – like the standard MV60 – it receives, at best, the thumbs-down from the UK distributor.

Both products are very well made (featuring a selection of top-notch components throughout) and feel physically very chunky and solid. Considering they're valve amplifiers, neither runs particularly hot. Naturally, a power amp with four big output pentodes is going to be hot to touch, but the preamp is not much hotter than the solid-state variety, although adding the phono stage with its trio of extra valves would probably make the PV10B considerably hotter. Biasing the power amplifier valves helps keep them from running over-hot, and biasing simply involves adjusting screws on the top plate of the MV60SE until the bias LEDs blink out. It's a simple and effective way of optimising the system and only needs a plastic flat-headed screwdriver to bias the amp.

SOUND QUALITY

There are three sets of sound quality comments in one here – the sound of the PV10BL, the sound of the MV60SE and the sound of the pair of them in combination. And, while the two products have a common sound quality, there are significant differences in performance between preamp and power amp. These are worth noting independently.

Both amps give a high-class performance. Together the combination sounds big and musical, far larger than the 55-watts power output might suggest. And for a valve amp partnership, the bass is extremely well controlled, too. It's almost noiseless (there is some hiss – it's a valve duo, after all – but it's extremely quiet by valve standards) and wonderfully dynamic. Perhaps lacking the edge-of-the-seat drama and fast pace needed to 'rock out' with Nirvana, it goes large, loud and powerful whatever the music in play.

There is a wonderful sense of coherence right across the frequency range, allied to a fine and extremely deep soundstage. Images do not move too wide of the loudspeakers, but the Tardis-like C-J combo bulldozes through the rear wall and places the percussion section of an orchestra somewhere in next door's living room. Everything just seems to fall into place with this amplifier combo. Musical instruments have their own space in the soundstage without sounding either too big or too small, they are fairly and precisely bolted down in that soundstage and are finely detailed enough to hear the keys rattling over the sax sounds in John Coltrane solos. Yet, for all this insight into the music, it isn't so desperately insightful into the recording process that less-than-perfect recordings are rendered unlistenable.

It almost seems to beg for audiophile discs, just to show what it can do. So out come the soundtracks, like *Dead Man Walking* from the mid-1990s and even *Casino Royale* from the mid-1960s. *The Fall Of Troy* by Tom Waits on the former is exceptional, with the voice raspy and physically in the room. *The Look Of Love*



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 83% >> SUB RATINGS PV10BL 78% MV60SE 87%	PRO Beautifully made valve duo, with the sort of image depth that cows could pasture in. Dynamic, detailed and refined, without the price.
FEATURES >> 50%	CON Lack of remote control and rose-tinted view shows the PV10BL's age. PV10B inverts phase, you must correct at the MV60SE's speaker terminals.
BUILD >> 89%	
VALUE >> 80%	
CONCLUSION The PV10 is old enough to take its GCSEs this year, but despite changes it still clings on as a fine choice for your first high-end valve preamp. The MV60SE is a newcomer and drips star quality. They work well together, too.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 81%	



AZUR LIKE IT

The 640A is the big guy in Cambridge Audio's new brace of mini muscle amps

PRODUCT Cambridge Audio Azur 640A

TYPE Stereo integrated amplifier

PRICE £250

CONTACT ☎ 0870 900 1000

🌐 www.cambridge-audio.co.uk

Cambridge is a brand with form. In the seventies it created some great amps and tuners and went on to produce some of the most ambitious (if not the most reliable) CD players of the eighties, including one of the very first two-box designs.

Its latest creation, the Azur 640A is the larger by 15 watts of two physically identical amps, the other being the 540A at £200. The 640A is specified at 65 watts into eight ohms with a wide 5Hz-50kHz bandwidth.

The amp is feature rich because extra knobs clearly sell at this end of the market, though fortunately the extraneous bass and treble controls can be bypassed courtesy of a direct button. It even offers the option of an MM phono stage for those with a taste for vinyl.

Under the bonnet there are a wealth of protection systems both for the amp itself and the speakers attached to it. These include a clipping sensor, temperature sensor and something called CAP5, which is a means of monitoring the amp's behaviour to make sure that nothing untoward happens in the event of a problem with amp or speakers. It measures the distortion in the output signal relative to that at the input, which means that it's able to tell when the unit is being clipped or overdriven and apply protection if necessary. It even checks for short circuits and faults every time you switch on. It might make

Cambridge seem unduly nervous but there's a lot to be said for a failsafe product, especially if, as claimed, it has no effect on the sound.

SOUND QUALITY

Driving the fairly average load presented by a pair of Cyrus CLS50s, the Cambridge delivers a three-dimensional soundstage that's detailed without being 'in your face' – in fact by the standards of its class it's very relaxed. It digs out subtle details, bringing colour to the bells on Shostakovich's *Jazz Suite No.1* while keeping up the perky sense of time that's the key to this unusual polka.

With Nils Petter Molvaer's heavy jazz renderings it delivers instrumental energy in a steady and engaging fashion – only over an extended period does this dense music begin to challenge the Azur's sense of equilibrium. Ali Farka Touré's vibrant *Niafunke* is a more comfortable disc which revels in the level of transparency and dynamic enthusiasm on offer. The Cambridge has a more weighty sound than much of the similarly-priced competition from brands like NAD and Rotel, which don't have quite the same finesse in terms of building tension. Dzion and Kamienski's Viennese grooves reveal the amp's impressive bass kick and ability to track energy build upwards.

We tried the Clearaudio Emotion turntable (reviewed next month) and Trichord Dino+ phono stage through the Azur and were pleased to hear the classic vinyl virtues shine

through, Santana sounding as energetic as ever thanks in part to his enthusiastic percussion section. We also gave the amp a spin on the ATC SCM35 speakers reviewed this month (p42) to see just how far its 65 watts could go, but while the result was open and engaging it didn't warrant high-level or extended listening and it's wise to stick to speakers offering average to 'A+' loads (see our *Buyer's Bible* for 'ease of drive' ratings).

The Azur 640A is a welcome addition to the none-too-crowded ranks of high-quality, low-cost amps. It's not quite as much of a budget star as the matching Azur 640C CD player (reviewed last month), but at £250 it's more than capable of showing its rivals a thing or two about musical refinement. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT

SOUND >> 81%



FEATURES >> 85%



BUILD >> 82%



VALUE >> 89%



PRO
Well resolved and dynamic sound with a good sense of timing to boot.

CON
The speaker terminals could be chunkier and the control legends more legible.

CONCLUSION

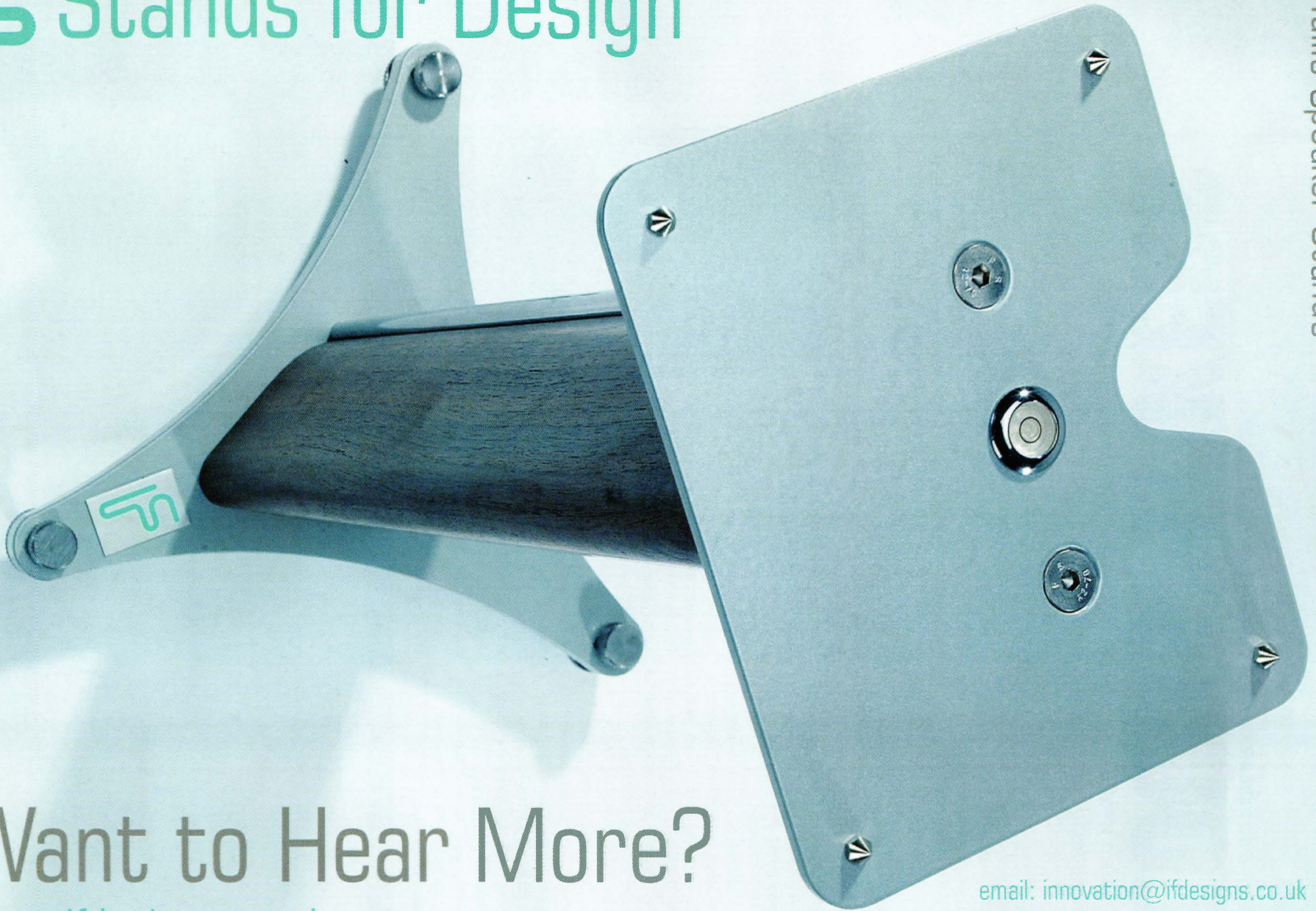
With the Azur 640A, Cambridge has launched a powerful weapon in the battle for budget amp supremacy. The sound is particularly well resolved and it offers a lot of musical entertainment for the money.

HI-FI CHOICE >>> **84%**
OVERALL SCORE



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GROUP TEST: PAUL MESSENGER LAB REPORTS: PAUL MILLER

LOUDSPEAKERS

There's a wealth of variety and differences in approach which make the midrange loudspeaker market fascinating for audiophiles

Our test group this month covers the loudspeaker middle ground, with eight stereo pairs occupying a fairly narrow price band between £500 and £750. There are five floorstanders and three standmounts, in various configurations.

There is no obvious correlation between price and either size or complexity here – indeed all three standmounts are between £600-£700, which will put them near the top of the price list by the time the additional cost of stands is included.

A substantial floorstander with a real wood veneer finish at £500, Mission's £500 Volare V62 looks like very good value. That said, our experiences with the V61 and V63 could have provided more encouraging precedents.

The history behind Focal-JMLab's £550 Chorus 716S is altogether more positive, as its immediate antecedents received Best Buy ratings. This 'classic' two-and-a-half-way now has a new tweeter, which should further enhance its potential.

Infinity's £600 Kappa 200 is a gorgeous confection, in the cunning curves of the enclosure and the

combination of veneer and mouldings, while the alloy diaphragm drivers are deep-anodised for extra stiffness. Another standmount, Dynaudio's £647 Audience 50 is the latest in a succession of Best Buys, and one of the less expensive models from an upmarket Danish brand that has its own very individualistic view of drive unit and crossover design.

Tannoy's £649 Sensys DC2 is the bigger floorstanding brother of the already very successful DC1 standmount. Vinyl-finished but very smart, an extra bass driver and super-tweeter both augment the full-range, dual-concentric main driver. Then there's NHT's £695 SB3, which has two notable distinguishing features – the enclosure is attractively finished in a high-gloss black, and the main driver operates under sealed-box loading.

Finally, there are two £750-ish floorstanders, both with proper separate plinths. Rega's latest Ela is a very slim and compact two-way that transmission line loads its tiny main driver. AAD's S-5 two-and-a-half-way also has tiny drivers, this time in a beautifully finished enclosure with curved sides.

All in all, this is a group rich in variety, which clearly illustrates how many different approaches in terms of cabinetwork and driver configurations are available to the modern speaker designer, even at these relatively affordable prices. **HFC**

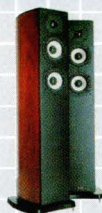
EQUIPMENT USED

- ⊗ Naim CDS2 and CDS3 CD players
- ⊗ Linn LP12 turntable
- ⊗ Rega RB1000 tonearm
- ⊗ Linn Akiva and Dynavector XV-1 cartridges
- ⊗ Magnum Dynalab MD102 tuner
- ⊗ Naim NAC552 preamp
- ⊗ Naim NAP500 power amp
- ⊗ Vertex AQ and Naim cables

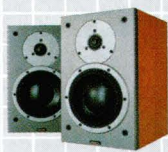
MUSIC USED

- ⊗ White Stripes *Elephant*
- ⊗ Massive Attack *100th Window*
- ⊗ Nickel Creek *Nickel Creek*
- ⊗ Lambchop *Is A Woman*
- ⊗ Mari Boine *Eallin*
- ⊗ LSO Live *Shostakovich Symphony No 11*
- ⊗ Christy Moore *Live At The Point*
- ⊗ BBC Radios 3 & 4 were also used

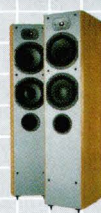
ON TEST



AAD S-5
£750



DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 52
£647



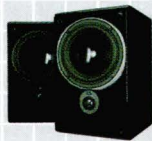
FOCAL-JMLAB CHORUS 716S
£550



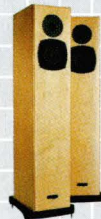
INFINITY KAPPA 200
£600



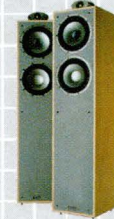
MISSION VOLARE V62
£500



NHT SB3
£695



REGA ELA
£749



TANNOY SENSYS DC2
£649

LISTENING TESTS

Loudspeaker listening poses a more complex set of problems from those involved in assessing components further up the hi-fi chain. Speakers vary dramatically in size, type and tonal balance, and also interact strongly and often unpredictably with the room. The fatal difficulty facing sequential unsighted loudspeaker presentations is the strong tendency to judge each example according to how its balance differs from the model that preceded it. Accordingly, extended hands-on listening sessions were adopted, giving proper scope to adjust to the inevitable changes in balance and to experiment with positioning.

LAB TESTS

The speakers were tasked by a mix of external, GPIB-controlled signal generators and analysers. The returned data is processed via virtual instrument software, allowing us to build very high resolution plots of the loudspeaker impedance and phase angles, nearfield responses and distortion trends. All this information is collated, processed and revealed, in a highly condensed fashion, by our at-a-glance bar graphs.

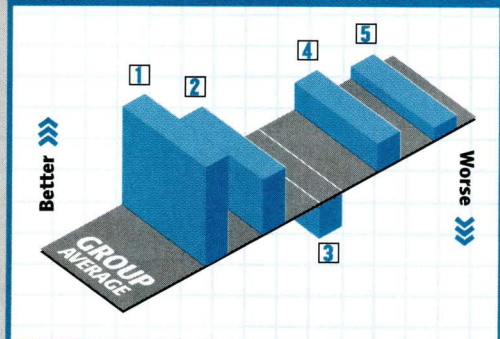
No other magazine offers an equivalent test and listening programme for comparative tests.

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] Sensitivity:** The speaker's axial output at 1m distance with an input of 2.83V. The level is averaged across 3rd-octave bands from 500Hz-8kHz.
- 2] Loudness:** The capacity of speaker pairs to generate short-term musical peaks without compression, at a given amplifier power output and at 2m distance.
- 3] Ease of drive:** Peaks and dips both in impedance and phase, along with the average impedance across the audioband, are all considered.
- 4] Bass extension:** The perceived bass extension will vary from room to room and certainly with speaker positioning, so this projected value represents an 'average' result at -6dB below the mean output of the speaker.
- 5] Low distortion:** An estimation of the impact that harmonic distortion across the audio range has on the 'colour' of the speaker. Generally, higher bar graph values suggest a more neutral sound.

OUR BAR GRAPHS: AN EXAMPLE



£750 per pair ☎ 01327 706560 🌐 www.aadsound.com

AAD S-5

New Chinese brand offers sharp styling at a very affordable price

AAD is a name that's relatively new to the UK and to *Hi-Fi Choice*, though its designer is Welshman Phil Jones, the original engineering inspiration behind the Acoustic Energy brand, who now lives in China.

The S-5 is one of a wide range and is remarkable for a number of reasons, not least the comment from a visiting rival manufacturer who reckoned he'd be hard pushed to build such a speaker in the UK for twice the price.

Its most impressive visual feature is the curved sides, which are attractively finished in a rich red real wood veneer. The shaping – quite narrow at the front and tapering towards an even slimmer back – ensures a good spread of internal standing waves, free from the focusing effect of parallel sides.

Front and back are black, as is the moulded,

shaped top, and the whole thing sits on a substantial MDF plinth that usefully extends the stability footprint. The plinth is secured via a central bolt which allows the whole speaker to be swivelled about a vertical axis, while spikes are supplied but without any lock-nut arrangement which is a regrettable oversight. The whole thing is very substantially built, at 22kg on the scales.

The driver line-up consists of two similar, small 130mm units, each with 90mm pleated paper cones. These operate in a 'two-and-a-half-way' configuration, the upper one as a bass/mid driver, the lower one used just to supply extra bass weight. Above these a single 25mm titanium dome tweeter takes over. Just a single pair of terminals is fitted, next to a couple of small ports. The in-room traces are a little unusual – full in the low bass but lean through the upper bass and lower midband, then strong again through the upper registers, with noticeable peaks at 1.7kHz and at 20kHz.

SOUND QUALITY

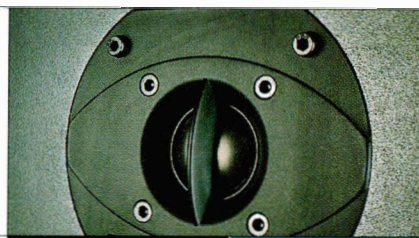
The unusual balance translates directly into a presentation that's a little different from the norm, with an overall sound that has plenty of scale and weight, but is also a little lean and forward, tending to emphasise and project the detail at the expense of a degree of warmth.

That in itself might not have been such a problem, but putting that 1.7kHz peak on top of an upper-midband that was already a bit exposed results in a quite severe coloration right in the middle of the voice bands.

Which is a pity, as this speaker shows considerable potential in other areas, thanks in no small part to good enclosure control and low box coloration, which creates a notably clean sound with a wide dynamic range and fine tracking of dynamic contrasts.

Perhaps assisted somewhat by the general forwardness, this speaker is very expressive and communicative, with good all-round musical coherence. It handled the 'difficult' banjo playing on the eponymous Nickle Creek album, for instance, with great agility and convincing dynamic 'punch'.

The good news is that this very attractive looking speaker is selling for a remarkably competitive price. The sound has a great deal going for it, though the 'cool' balance won't be to all tastes, and ultimately it's let down by a strong and obvious coloration in the heart of the midband. **HFC**



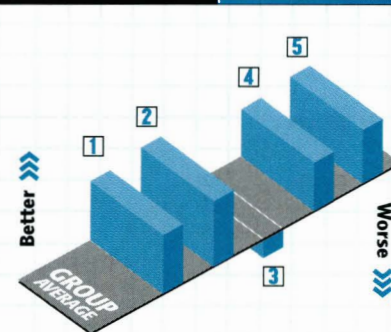
LAB REPORT

Viewed in averaged third-octave bands, the S-5 has an unusual response trend that drifts progressively upward (+6dB from 400Hz to 10kHz) albeit with a distinct emphasis of midrange frequencies.

Distortion also increases from a creditable ~0.4% through the bass closer to 1% through the midrange. A narrowband analysis also reveals a very, very sharp cancellation notch at 17.5kHz that's probably caused by AAD's obstructive tweeter phase plate.

This, of course, is of rather less subjective significance than AAD's excellent rear-port tuning at 33Hz which ties in perfectly with both the front driver nulls and impedance minima. Just a pity this clean execution is slightly muddled by a high-Q port or cabinet mode at 660Hz, which breaks through onto the forward response and impedance/phase curves. The latter are very complex with multiple swings about each crossover point, dipping to 4.5ohm at 1.9kHz and contributing to a fairly current-hungry average of 7.6ohm.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 49%
- 2] Loudness >> 53%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -15%
- 4] Bass extension >> 38%
- 5] Distortion >> 42%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	90dB	88.8dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	6ohm
Estimated bass extension	35Hz	38Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 72%

PRACTICALITY >> 83%

BUILD >> 90%

VALUE >> 84%

Chinese manufacture helps provide great styling and cabinetwork at an affordable price, but while the sound has significant merit, with a 'cool' balance and wide dynamic range, it's hampered by pronounced midband colour.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **79%**



£647 per pair ☎ 0207 378 1810 🌐 www.dynaudio.com

DYNAUDIO AUDIENCE 52

This neat but costly standmount comes with a great pedigree

This well-established Danish company is as well known for its unusual drive units as its complete speaker systems. The Audience series is actually its 'budget' range, though the 52's £647 asking price is well above today's budget price norm. And if you reckon that's expensive, there's now an SE variation with extra enhancements which stretches the price up to almost £1,000.

Hi-Fi Choice reviewed this model's Audience 50 predecessor on two separate occasions, both times earning itself Best Buy ratings. One advantage of this new model – and a justification for the ten per cent price increase over its predecessor – is that it is now clothed in a real wood veneer. It's not the most attractive or interesting example of the type, though it is at least nicer than its vinyl-covered predecessor, now discontinued.

Superficially a simple two-way standmount, the box feels reassuringly solid, and the chunky shape is sensibly arranged for good stiffness and a worthwhile spread of standing waves. The unusual main driver uses an over-size (75mm) aluminium voice coil operating outside the magnet to drive a combination cone/dome plastic diaphragm some 115mm in diameter, while a solid cast frame ensures fine overall mechanical integrity. Dynaudio makes its own tweeter, with a 28mm doped fabric dome diaphragm. The company doesn't believe in bi-wiring, so just a single pair of terminals are fitted.

Room measurements point towards free space siting, but the 50Hz-tuned port didn't give an ideal bass alignment in our listening room, tending to emphasise the mid-bass at the expense of the low and upper-bass. Foam bungs are provided for blocking the ports, which is probably worth trying, especially if the speakers are placed close to a wall.

SOUND QUALITY

If neutrality was the only high-fidelity goal, there's no denying that the Audience 52 set the standard to which all the others in this group would

aspire. While it's true that the bass end here could have been more even and weighty, that part of the audio spectrum owes as much to the room as the speaker. The modest ultimate bass weight might be an inherent consequence of the compact box size and chosen port-tuning frequency, but the mid and upper bass could well give smoother results in a different room.

However, it's the smoothness and evenness through the midrange and treble that really sets this speaker apart. It's quite delightfully free from 'boxiness', and does a remarkably effective aural disappearing act. Stereo images are therefore beautifully portrayed, with fine focus and depth perspectives, and the sound as a whole is notably free from any aggressive tendencies.

Tonal colours always sound natural, and voices are unusually low in coloration, which makes this a difficult speaker to criticise. However, some may find it all a little too laid back, and consequently rather lacking in excitement and brio. While the Audience 52 is exceptionally good at avoiding any nasties and any tendency to cause offence, which is a significant plus, the sound created is also a little weak in terms of drama, expression and dynamic tension.

All speakers represent a complex collection of compromises. While Dynaudio's Audience 52 has a lovely delicate neutrality that will be hard to resist, at the same time some may find the sound a little too smooth and well controlled, lacking the excitement on offer elsewhere. Definitely one to try though. **HFC**

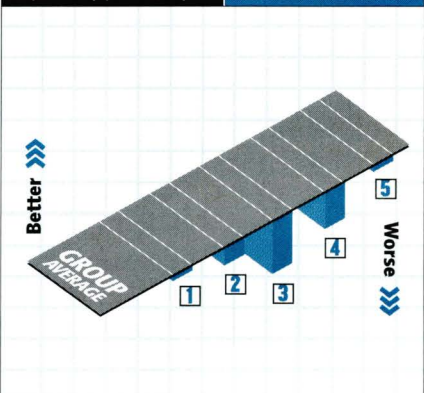


LAB REPORT

Despite similarities in design, there are key performance differences between this Audience 52 and the 42 tested in HFC 215. The larger model has a slightly higher 87.4dB sensitivity (the '42 managed 86.9dB) while its response is generally more uniform through bass and high treble. The slight depression in output through its presence band remains, but mid and treble distortion is much lower at ~0.3%. On the other hand, distortion through the bass is higher, from 1.2% closer to 3% at levels up to 96dBA. And this despite the fact that Dynaudio has a textbook bass tuning with a very clean 50Hz port resonance coupled with a -6dB point for its bass driver of 68Hz.

As ever Dynaudio's loading is a little tougher than average, taxing the amplifier with a minimum of 3.6ohm and – more importantly – an across-the-board average of just 6.6ohm. At least the minimal crossover exerts an acceptable +/-30 degree phase shift, so it could be worse from the amp's view!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -5%
- 2] Loudness >> -15%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -46%
- 4] Bass extension >> -27%
- 5] Distortion >> -5%

SPECIFICATIONS

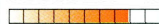
Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	87.4dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	4ohm	4ohm
Estimated bass extension	52Hz	50Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 83%



PRACTICALITY >> 79%



BUILD >> 86%



VALUE >> 79%



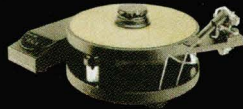
A cutely compact but costly standmount, the Audience 52 has a beautifully smooth and essentially sweet neutrality that is very easy on the ears, though the sound is a little laid back from the point of view of dynamic excitement.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> **82%**

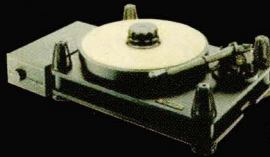
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 Cartridges: **VanDenHul**; **Kuzma**; **Reson**; **Cartridge Man**; **Benz-Micro**;
Kondo.
 Amplifiers: **Kondo**; **Border Patrol**; **Canary**; **Sugden**; **Art Audio**;
Monarchy; **Western Electric**; **Icon**; **Tom Evans Audio Designs**.
 CD Players: **Resolution Audio**; **Wadia**; **Sugden**.
 Louspeakers: **Living Voice**; **Vitavox**.
 Cables and Tables: **Kondo**; **Living Voice**.

We now have the lovely Eastern Electric "MINI MAX" line preamp at £800 for the standard configuration, or £1200 for the Definitive Audio magic dust version.

Sale of part exchanged and ex-dem items

Sale New

Clearaudio Insider Wood Reference - moving coil cartridge - a long name for a small thing (10 hours only)	£4000	£7500
EAR MC3 moving coil step up transformer - 4/12/40 ohm compatibility (i.e ideal for Ortofon) - better than your active moving coil input!!	£500	£750
Canary Audio 303 pwer amps - glorious	£5000	£7600
Canary Audio 309 power amps - glorious - as new - dem use only	£7000	£10000
Canary Audio 601 pre-amp - as new - dem use only - fabulous	£2500	£3200
ATC 50A loudspeakers - walnut - scuffed cabinets otherwise perfect - bargain	£2000	£5500
Tom Evans Groove - 500 ohm, 0.2 mV - perfect - 1 week of use	£1500	£1850
Horning Agathon - 98dB 2 way horn - Mahogany - new PM6As (alnico)	£1400	£3850
Ruark Crusader II - April 2000 very good condition	£900	£1800
AudioNote (UK) M3 pre-amp - line only	£2000	£3700
Audio Innovations P2 phono stage - standard, unmodified - collector's item	£700	
Roksann Xerxes Cognoscenti - black marble finish, very tidy	£600	
Audio Innovations 1st Audio - 8 Watt 2A3 4pin - collector's item - joy	£900	
Nottingham Analogue - Mentor with LV Mystic Mat - spotless	£1400	£2900
Avid Acutus turntable - 10 hours use if that, perfect.	£4000	£6500
Avid Volvere Sequel turntable - sealed box new	£3000	£3500

LIVING VOICE



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

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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FOCAL-JMLAB CHORUS 716S

The new Chorus show the more affordable face of Focal-JMLab

Sales of this leading French brand have grown rapidly in the half dozen or so years it has been available in the UK, and the company has followed a logical route in refining and developing its key products.

This new £550 Chorus 716S is the natural successor to 2002's Chorus 715, which in turn succeeded the 1998 Tantal 515, both of which earned our Best Buy ratings. The price has crept up from £495 via £529 to £550, but engineering improvements have also been incorporated along the way.

It's a port-loaded floorstander, featuring two similar (but not identical) main drivers in a two-and-a-half-way configuration with the upper one as a bass/mid unit, the lower one covering just the bass region. By comparison, the enclosure looks a tad prosaic – neat enough, but rather monolithic, especially with

the long grille in place. Still, the drivers are nicely flush-mounted, and the wood-veneered side panels provide nice decoration around the choice of laminates used for the rest of the enclosure.

The new TNC tweeter uses a push-pull double neodymium magnet with an aluminium/magnesium alloy diaphragm, with a bandwidth up to 28kHz. Bass and bass/mid drivers both use 165mm cast frames and the company's 'polyglass' cones, which use glass 'microballs' as the damping medium.

The twin terminal pairs are a bit of a cop-out, since the company prefers to mono-wire its more upmarket models – the bi-wiring/bi-amping option available here therefore has more to do with getting the dealers on side. Floor coupling consists of four rubber feet, inset with secure sockets for the supplied 8mm spikes. Room measurement suggests that some close-to-wall reinforcement might prove beneficial with this speaker.

SOUND QUALITY

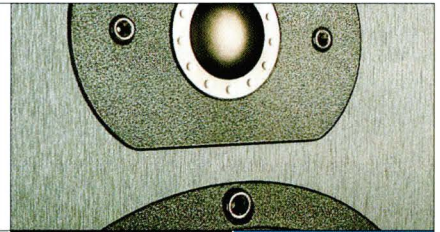
The 716S doesn't have the smoothest sound around, particularly through the bass region, but it more than makes up for that by delivering the midband with considerable enthusiasm and authority.

The sound can get a touch heavy with some material – Massive Attack's *100th Window* suffered a little from some thickening of textures, and orchestral cellos could be a little too rich and strong. But dynamic contrasts are drawn with a vividness and realism that is thoroughly convincing and entertaining, and with very modest levels of coloration.

Recent experience with Focal-JMLab models has shown some voicing inconsistencies, but the 716S is right on the money, with a beautifully judged presence transition between midband and treble that avoids any tendency to 'shut in' voices while also keeping aggressiveness under close control.

This was well illustrated by The White Stripes *Elephant*, an album which goes from the lyrically delicate to the hard 'n' heavy – sometimes during the course of a single track. The 716S excelled in its ability to handle both extremes with equal aplomb, subtle enough to cope with slight vocal inflections and acoustic tonality, yet fully able to punch out the heavy rock with power and authority.

While it's true that smoother sounding speakers are available at higher prices, this remains an excellent all-round performer. **HFC**

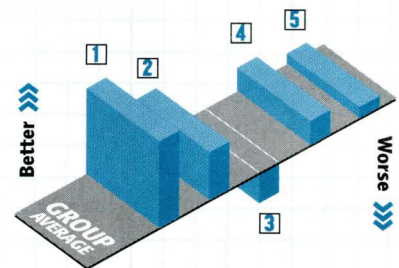


LAB REPORT

Through mid and treble, the Chorus 716S offers a very flat and even response, but its bass may quickly become over-heavy if care is not taken over its positioning. Walls and corners should be avoided if the '716S is to sound as transparent as possible. A nearfield analysis shows why, for the large port offers a very broad reinforcement from 22-125Hz (-3dB) that overlaps with the -3dB point of the bass driver at ~73Hz.

Otherwise, the 89.6dB sensitivity is just a little shy of its 91.5dB rating but this still allows for high sound levels at just moderate distortion, particularly through the bass where figures as low as 0.15% were scored. The central bass/mid driver is less impressive near its 2.4kHz crossover region, however, where THD (Total Harmonic Distortion) increases to around 2.5%. The speaker load is also moderately current-hungry with a lowish minimum of 3.4ohm at a very easy 200Hz, but an average that's just 7.4ohm. A nominal rating of 6ohm is appropriate.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 75%
- 2] Loudness >> 41%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -24%
- 4] Bass extension >> 19%
- 5] Distortion >> 10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	91.5dB	89.6dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	6ohm
Estimated bass extension	47Hz	42Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 86%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

PRACTICALITY >> 80%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

BUILD >> 84%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

VALUE >> 90%

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

It may not be the smoothest, and careful positioning is required to obtain the best bass evenness. But the mid and treble are truly impressive, combining coherent voicing with fine dynamic expression and a real sense of authority.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVE ALL SCORE >> **87%**



£600 per pair ☎ 0208 731 4670 🌐 www.infinitysystems.com

INFINITY KAPPA 200

Striking styling and classy drivers distinguish this solid standmount

Infinity is one of several speaker brands (also including JBL and Revel) that operate under the Harman international banner, all of which benefit from the generous research and development facilities located in Northridge, California.

Among a number of different Infinity ranges, the Kappas occupy a mid-price sector of the market. The three stereo pairs start with this two-way Kappa 200 standmount, and also include two three-way floorstanders: a Kappa 400 and the £1,300 Kappa 600 which we reviewed a year ago in *HFC* 237.

This is a very stylish speaker, and no doubt a costly one to produce, requiring impressively tight tolerancing to flush-match the plastic mouldings around the front with the real-wood veneer that covers the rest of the box. It has attractively 'soft' edges, a slightly 'domed' top, and a very hefty 12.5kg total weight makes the speaker feel very solidly built.

The bass/mid and treble drive units are essentially the same as those used in the *HFC* Best Buy Intermezzo 2.6, but the Kappa 200 is a normal passive two-way design, mounting those drivers in a regular wood-based enclosure. Both drivers use aluminium diaphragms that are stiffened by deep-anodising the surfaces to create a ceramic oxide 'skin', known as CMMD in Harman-speak. The main driver here has a 165mm frame with 120mm diameter cone, the tweeter a 25mm dome. The enclosure is

port-loaded, and the speaker is fitted with twin terminals to provide a bi-wire/bi-amp option.

Room measurements point to a free space alignment with quite good ultimate bass extension, though the bass alignment didn't entirely suit our listening room, being a little heavy in the mid-bass, and a little lean through the upper bass and lower midband. If the speakers need to be placed close to a wall, it might well be worth trying them with the ports blocked.

SOUND QUALITY

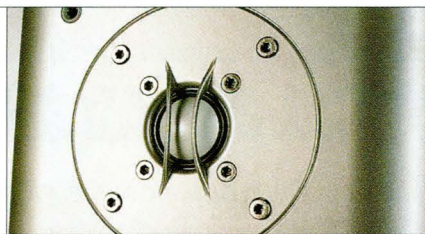
This is neither the smoothest nor the least coloured speaker around, but the Kappa 200 provides fair compensation by delivering its sound with a rare and impressive combination of coherence and authority.

It has a notably wide dynamic range, presumably as a consequence of the very solid cabinetwork, and delivers bass weight that seems surprising from such a compact loudspeaker. There was a slight tendency to 'thump' under our conditions, confirming that port-blocking could be worth a try.

There are some colorations here, to be sure. Voices have a nasal 'twang' that is unmistakable, and the sound can get a bit hard and edgy with the wrong sources and material. There's a mild 'cupped hands' effect too, and a slightly 'shouty' tendency, especially when playing the system loud.

For all these rough edges, which are most noticeable when reproducing speech, the Kappa has superior communication skills. The coherence through the midband and treble is a major strength that combines with fine dynamic performance to give excellent expression and a good measure of musical authority.

In the world of loudspeakers, choices have to be made. The Kappa 200 perhaps has a little too much 'character' for its own good, but if that character doesn't offend – and it's surprising how quickly the ear can adjust to and accept colorations – the rewards are there to be had, in a fine sense of grip and unusual coherence. **HFC**

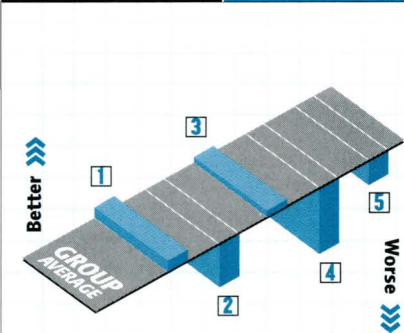


LAB REPORT

In many respects, the Kappa 200 is a colourful design, both in appearance and performance. The 87.7dB sensitivity is below its rated 89dB (although this can be stretched to 88.1dB if we measure from 200Hz-20kHz) while its load is not as tough as Infinity's 6ohm spec suggests. A minimum of 4.9ohm and an average of 9.5ohm is 'easier' than many so-called 8ohm designs. Its forward response shows a mild depression through the presence region with a slight 'sting' from 10-16kHz on both narrowband and averaged third-octave measurements.

Distortion is low through bass and treble, but the 'CMMD' bass/mid driver struggles to keep THD below 3%/96dB around the 3kHz crossover region. This strong third harmonic typically brings a degree of 'character' to a speaker's sound that some listeners may prefer. Otherwise, bass is tuned to ~40Hz via a rear reflex port, offering a clean output till 940Hz where there's a port resonance that's strong enough to impact on the speaker's forward response.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1) Sensitivity >> 8%
- 2) Loudness >> -35%
- 3) Ease of drive >> 5%
- 4) Bass extension >> -54%
- 5) Distortion >> -18%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	87.7dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	6ohm	8ohm
Estimated bass extension	50Hz	54Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 84%

PRACTICALITY >>> 85%

BUILD >>> 88%

VALUE >>> 83%

Artful styling blends real wood and plastic mouldings. The sound has some coloration, but combines fine coherence with a wide dynamic range. Good punch and drive impart a decent measure of dynamic propulsion and expression.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >>> 84%

£500 per pair ☎ 01480 423700 🌐 www.mission.co.uk

MISSION VOLARE V62

Beautiful to look at, but somewhat lacking in 'presence'

We've already reviewed the larger (£600) V63 floorstander, in HFC 245 and the smaller (£330) V61 standmount in HFC 246, so it's time to take a look at the middle model in Mission's Volante range. The £500 V62 is more or less a cross between the other two, with a two-way, two-driver configuration in a compact enclosure. While it's presented as a floorstander, it's actually more like a standmount with integral stand, as a partition blocks off the lower part of the enclosure, leaving it unused acoustically, while the main driver operates into a port-loaded volume of just 16 litres.

Overall, it's a very substantial affair, turning the scales at 19kg, which is only exceeded by one other considerably more costly model in this test group. One contributing factor is that construction is a mixture of 25mm and 38mm MDF, with the thicker material used for the vital front panel. The veneer does look



a little bland, with little figuring, but what matters most is that it's the real thing.

It's constructed using Mission's transverse folding technique, with heavy post-forming around the extra-thick front panel to aid lateral dispersion. Although there's no separate plinth here, the speaker is also notably deep, which ensures good fore 'n' aft stability, and each comes with six spikes to provide further security.

The magnetically shielded main driver has a 150mm frame and an aramid/pulp-fibre sandwich cone some 115mm in diameter. The 25mm fabric dome tweeter is decoupled from box vibrations by a damped suspension arrangement within the moulded front plate. Twin terminal pairs feed a crossover constructed using silicon-iron inductors and polypropylene capacitors.

Following Mission tradition, the main driver is above the tweeter, which should make time alignment through the crossover region easier. In-room measurement shows substantial mid-bass output even with the speakers well clear of walls, suggesting that port-blocking might prove beneficial, while there was also a rather abrupt discontinuity and obvious lack of presence output around the crossover point.

SOUND QUALITY

Neither the V61 nor the V63 gave particularly inspiring results under auditioning, so there seemed at least half a chance that the V62 would turn out to be 'just right'. That, however, turned out not to be the case, as this middle model seemed to suffer very similar limitations to its range-mates – indeed, rather more so in some respects.

While the broad midband is very nicely ordered with good tonal neutrality, the presence region above this, around the junction between midband and treble, is noticeably dull. This seems likely to be responsible for a general lack of dynamic drive and energy, and also leaves voices sounding rather 'shut in', with a touch of nasal coloration, and rather weak dynamic expression. The treble proper recovers somewhat, providing ample fine detail, but also sounding a shade exposed.

One thing's for sure, it's very unlikely this speaker will ever sound over-aggressive. The other side of this coin, however, is some lack of excitement and enthusiasm, which doesn't make for the easiest communication between speakers and listeners. **HFC**

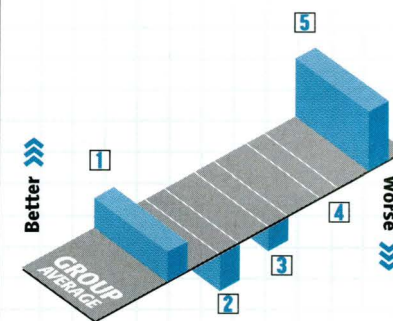


LAB REPORT

Gone are the days when Mission speakers were 'imaginatively' specified, for the V62 meets its 88dB sensitivity on the nail. In fact, because of the peak in high treble output (amounting to +5dB at 16kHz), its mean 200Hz-20kHz sensitivity is higher at 89.1dB. Younger listeners might prefer to turn the speakers slightly off-axis to tame the sting in its tail, but while this influences level it does not alter the moderate ~1% 2nd harmonic treble distortion. THD remains at this level through midrange frequencies (with a 3rd rather than 2nd harmonic) before the 2.4kHz crossover.

Unusually, THD is actually lower at ~0.3% through the bass at levels up to 96dBA. Bass extension, too, stretches down further than Mission's spec might suggest although the high-Q port resonance at 48Hz is accompanied by what looks like a pipe harmonic at 336Hz. At least the speaker load is uneventful, if more current-hungry than expected with a minimum of 3.9ohm and average of just 7.4ohm.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 23%
- 2] Loudness >> -28%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -20%
- 4] Bass extension >> 0%
- 5] Distortion >> 49%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	88dB	88.0dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	6ohm
Estimated bass extension	52Hz	45Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 63%



PRACTICALITY >> 82%



BUILD >> 85%



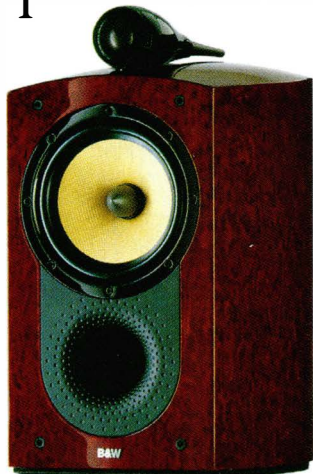
VALUE >> 78%



A lot of handsome speaker for your money, but the sound proved a little disappointing. Despite the smooth and even midband, a lack of presence energy leaves voices sounding 'shut in', and contributes to weak dynamic expression.

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

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NHT SB3

A very pretty little speaker that struggles to match first impressions

NHT – the initials that stand for 'Now Hear This' rather betray its Californian origins – has been through a number of changes since we last reviewed models like the Super Zero about three years back. The range has changed considerably since then, and now consists of a smaller and more rationalised roster of models. But the basic 'house style', distinguished by its black lacquered finish and sealed-box operation, seems to have survived intact.

That's certainly true of this SB3, which is the most costly of three standmount stereo pairs in the range, and the biggest too, though no-one would accuse this box of being a large loudspeaker.

Sealed-box loading – sometimes referred to as 'acoustic suspension' because the air in the enclosure acts as a spring behind the main driver cone – is relatively rare these days, perhaps because it results in rather less relative bass output than the almost ubiquitous reflex-loaded approach. However, it does actually have several potential benefits. It reduces the number of resonances that the amplifier has to drive, and is also less likely to excite room resonances. The simpler loading also gives a more gentle bass roll-off, which is likely to match up with the room-gain more accurately than a port-loaded alignment, and ultimately give smoother and more extended in-room bass.

NHT engineers apparently spent two years developing and refining the SB3's 165mm bass/mid driver, which is equipped with a 120mm polypropylene cone. This is mounted above the tweeter (a 25mm aluminium dome), an arrangement that tends to improve the time alignment of the respective voice coils. Just a single terminal pair is fitted, and these are quite close to the top of the enclosure, which will tend to emphasise the 'trailing wire syndrome' inherent in any standmount.

The SB3's in-room measurements show a bass alignment that's best suited to siting away from walls, and moreover a

balance that's more even and goes deeper than most, as theory predicts. However, there's significant unevenness up in the crossover region.

SOUND QUALITY

This is a well balanced speaker overall, and box colorations are very well controlled too, so the first impression was the effectiveness with which it seemed to 'disappear' sonically, leaving just a well ordered soundstage spread out in front of the listener. At the same time, it was noticeable that the volume control needed to be a little higher than average when listening at 'normal' levels, suggesting that sensitivity is on the low side here.

The bass goes deep, bringing satisfactory weight and 'heft' to appropriate recordings, such as Massive Attack's *100th Window*, and Mari Boine's *Eallin*. However, dynamics do seem rather weak, and this tends to rob the music of some of its power, tension and grip. These speakers occasionally give the impression of 'going through the motions', and could do a better job of sucking listeners into the spirit of things. The tension of a fine performance always seems just a little muted.

Stereo images are well portrayed, with fine focus and satisfactory depth perspectives, and while most of our listening was done in free space, the SB3s proved very tolerant of alternative siting. Colorations were pretty well controlled, though voices might have been cleaner. In the final analysis, this is a very competent speaker, but one that could be more exciting and involving. **HFC**

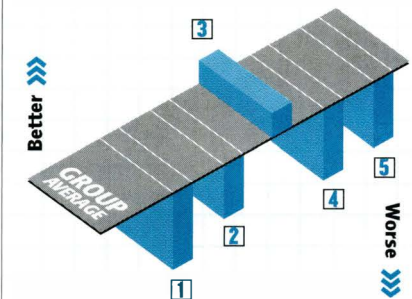


LAB REPORT

This beautifully finished little speaker is the embodiment of the 'art' of compromise in speaker design. The restricted volume of its sealed enclosure necessarily limits both its sensitivity and bass extension, but these are traded for a very easy-going amplifier load and an equally even-handed response with good off-axis properties and a clean changeover at 2.7kHz. So, the 84.1dB sensitivity is rather shy, limiting both its maximum sound pressure level (about 101dBA in the average room) and resulting in a higher-than-average distortion of ~3% through bass and midrange at the 96dBA reference level.

NHT's bass tuning peaks at ~90Hz and is a little under-damped, with an in-room, freestanding bass extension of ~55Hz. Naturally, this will improve if the box is against a rear wall, albeit at the expense of its forward uniformity. The SB2's load is simplicity itself. There are no nasty breakup modes, evil dips or miscalculations, just a brief minimum of 40hm at 140Hz and an amp-friendly average of 10.6ohm.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -66%
- 2] Loudness >> -45%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 20%
- 4] Bass extension >> -58%
- 5] Distortion >> -55%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	86dB	84.2dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	8ohm
Estimated bass extension	51Hz	54Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 67%



PRACTICALITY >>> 84%



BUILD >>> 85%



VALUE >>> 68%



A pretty little speaker in its high-gloss black clothes, sealed-box loading makes it tolerant of siting. The balance is very well judged, with good bass extension, but sensitivity is modest and dynamic expression a little weak.

HI-FI CHOICE 72%
OVERALL SCORE >>>

£749 per pair ☎ 01702 333071 🌐 www.rega.co.uk

REGA ELA

Rega packs a full transmission line into this compact floorstander

With a history that goes back to the mid-1980s, when standmounts still ruled the market, Rega's Ela can lay some claim to being one of the very first compact floorstanders, helping establish what has since become one of the most popular formats for speakers today.

There are several variations on the floorstanding theme, some adding an extra bass driver, others simply blanking off part of the enclosure. In the Ela's case, however, Rega deliberately sticks with a simple two-way driver line-up, but loads the small main driver with a generous length of transmission line, which extends from behind the main driver to the bottom of the enclosure, then up again and exits at the top rear. The line serves several functions, helping to absorb the midrange output from the back of the cone, adding some extra bass output, and also adding significant enclosure stiffening.



Thanks in part to its small main driver, this is a very slim and compact floorstander, covered in good quality real wood veneer and with nicely rounded front edges. Unlike the original Ela, where the front panel was tilted slightly backwards, this latest version has vertical front and back panels, and comes with a hefty spike-equipped MDF plinth that usefully improves the stability.

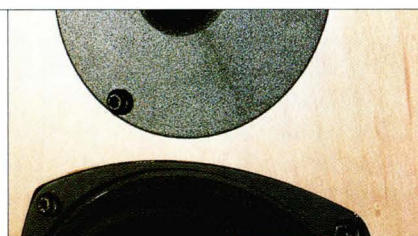
The cast-frame main driver has a hefty magnet driving a tiny little 19mm voice coil and similarly small, apparently undamped, 90mm paper cone. The tweeter is a classic (and costly) Scanspeak design, using a 19mm soft fabric dome with short horn. Twin terminal pairs, conveniently located close to the floor, provide the option of bi-wiring or bi-amping. Room measurement showed some lack of bass output with the speakers well clear of walls, but wall reinforcement does an impressive job of evening everything up. Do experiment for the best results, however, as reflections can create cancellations.

SOUND QUALITY

It's surprising how much bass the Ela's small main driver can supply, and while the sound could be a little weightier and heavier to advantage, there's also considerable agility here, and a refreshing freedom from the thickened textures that often result from going to a more complex driver array.

The midband is its particular strength, however, for the enthusiasm with which dynamics are given full expression. The banjo picking on Nickel Creek's eponymous album is particularly rapid and skilful, yet the Ela showed no difficulty in keeping up, and never the slightest tendency to trip over itself. A mild nasality was sometimes audible on voices, but this seems to be a common enough characteristic of most moving-coil loudspeakers at these sort of prices, and the Ela is no worse than the group norm here.

The top end is no less accomplished, and proved clean, sweet and detailed without ever drawing unnecessary attention to itself. During the course of the review it became necessary to choose one pair of speakers for assessing other system components further up the chain. Here the Ela more than proved its worth, showing fine powers of analysis in ably distinguishing the subtle differences between the signals it was being fed. It's important to experiment for best positioning here, but the end result should be well worthwhile. **HFC**

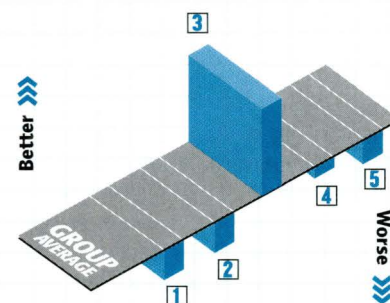


LAB REPORT

The speaker's forward, axial response looks a trifle uneven with peaks at 400Hz, 1.3kHz and 10kHz with third-octave weighting. A narrowband analysis resolves the response still further, showing a peak at 4.5kHz in addition to a broad depression throughout the presence band. This 'character' is broadly consistent with different measuring (listening) axes.

Otherwise, the 86.8dB sensitivity is only a little below average and distortion below 1% through both bass and treble up to 96dBA. However, the fibre-coned bass/mid unit has a tough job through the midrange where strong 2nd and 3rd harmonics finds distortion rising to 3%. Once the treble unit takes over, distortion drops off again. The load, while not tough, reflects multiple breakup modes and mistermimations. The transmission line bass loading is also extremely complex, showing some reinforcement from 40-90Hz, a main peak at 145Hz and secondary resonances at 245Hz and thereafter. In short, not especially tidy.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -27%
- 2] Loudness >> -26%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 74%
- 4] Bass extension >> -10%
- 5] Distortion >> -20%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	86.8dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	8ohm
Estimated bass extension	not supplied	46Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >>> 89%

PRACTICALITY >>> 85%

BUILD >>> 88%

VALUE >>> 85%

This compact and attractively discreet floorstander is a class act, no question. Though some might prefer a little more weight and grunt, few can match its impressive agility and delicacy, or its superior musical communication skills.

HI-FI CHOICE 87% OVERALL SCORE >>>

£649 per pair ☎ 01236 420199 🌐 www.tannoy.com

TANNOY SENSYS DC2

Floorstanding big brother to the Best Buy DC1, with extra bass

Now owned by the Danish TC Group, Tannoy's traditional design philosophies seem to have survived the takeover intact, if the new mid-price Sensys models are anything to go by. There are actually two Sensys ranges – less expensive models with conventional driver line-ups, and more costly DC models like this DC2 floorstander, equipped with the latest version of the company's longstanding dual-concentric main drivers. Top-mounted super-tweeters are fitted here too, plus unique five-terminal connection blocks that allow separate earthing of the main driver chassis for improved RF rejection.

Finished in a rather bland maple vinyl woodprint wrap, the DC2 has a tough and solid enclosure, built from 15mm MDF with additional bracing. The front panel has a silver laminate, as do the driver cones.



With a history that goes all the way back to the 1940s, Tannoy's dual-concentric drive unit is a two-in-one affair, firing a horn-loaded tweeter out through the centre of the bass/mid driver cone, and effectively creating a 'point source' for nearly the whole of the frequency range. This driver has a larger-than-usual 175mm frame, though its plastic cone has a more average 115mm diameter.

Below the dual-concentric is an extra bass-only drive unit of the same size, both units secured by eight screws. Built into a substantial cast alloy housing mounted on the top, the super-tweeter only comes in at a nominal 16kHz, a frequency close to the limit of human hearing. The ports are fitted to the rear panels, and the speaker sits on 6mm spikes, without a separate plinth.

Whereas the DC1 has a lean, agile bottom end, this DC2's is decidedly full on our room measurements, suggesting the supplied bungs could well be put to good use.

SOUND QUALITY

First impressions here were of a rather heavy and thickened balance, with a sound that had a tendency to 'thrum along' through the mid and upper bass. That effect was at least partly ameliorated by blocking ports with bungs, but not completely removed.

The midband is a little restrained and laid back, and also quite even and smooth, but with more than a hint of nasal coloration too. There's also a slight tendency towards top-end harshness when playing the speakers at high-ish levels. But there's no denying the fine scale and weight available here, the lovely spaciousness of the stereo soundstage and the suppression of unwanted boxiness.

Holding a middle-aged ear close to the super-tweeter reveals very little apparently going on. But sit back and compare the sound with the super-tweeter blocked off and unobstructed, and it's clear that it adds something to the overall sense of space and air, not least by widening the sound distribution at very high frequencies.

The Sensys DC2 has a rather different character from the others assembled for this group test. It offers considerable and impressive bass weight and scale, fine stereo imaging and impressive spaciousness. But the midband and presence are altogether more restrained and laid back than the group norm, which represents an interesting alternative that might or might not be to taste. **HFC**

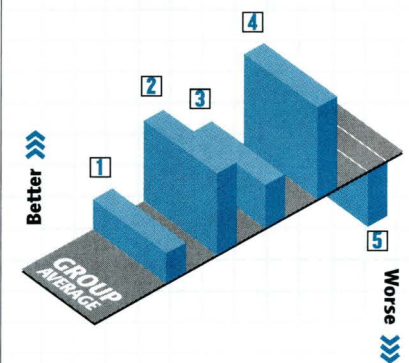


LAB REPORT

As far as room positioning and propensity to 'boom' is concerned, the DC2 mirrors the Focal-JMLab Chorus 716S. Like the Chorus, the DC2 has a prodigious bass capacity, with its lower bass unit peaking very sharply at 97Hz while the port offers an extremely broad 15-105Hz output. The impedance, too, drops as low as 2.9ohm at 100Hz and the only reason the average load is as high as 12.6ohm is thanks to the massive 41ohm peak caused by the rising reactance of the dual-concentric voice coil.

Unfortunately, bass distortion is rather higher than that maintained by the Chorus and, at 2-3% at 96dB, also higher than the ~1% achieved across the midrange. On the other hand, this Tannoy three-way also offers a very flat response from upper bass through to lower treble, albeit with a slight peak at the 1.8kHz crossover. Then, it looks a little less tidy from 8kHz upward (and particularly at 16kHz) once both concentric and super-tweeters hit their stride. There's quality here, but it'll be tricky to realise.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> 27%
- 2] Loudness >> 72%
- 3] Ease of drive >> 37%
- 4] Bass extension >> 82%
- 5] Distortion >> 45%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	89dB	88.1dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	6ohm
Estimated bass extension	34Hz	30Hz

VERDICT

SOUND >> 80%

PRACTICALITY >> 80%

BUILD >> 84%

VALUE >> 83%

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 82%



The sound has impressive scale and weight, with fine stereo soundstaging, but is also rather laid back and lacks the Best Buy-winning agility of its standmount stablemate.

CONCLUSIONS

Mid-price speakers necessarily involve compromises. The trick is to make the right ones

Although the £500-£750 price span for these pairs of loudspeakers limits the designers' options to some extent, there is still plenty of variety on offer here, and a good general standard of performance throughout all eight models too. Five of them are two-ways, and there's no denying the advantages in keeping things simple.

The compact two-way standmount still makes plenty of sense. All three examples in this group show the benefits of

keeping the enclosure surface area to a minimum, leaving lots of breathing space all round the drivers, and providing the speaker with optimum support. The Dynaudio, Infinity and NHT all illustrate this point in their various ways. However, all three are also relatively pricey even without adding the extra cost of good quality stands.

That's partly the reason why the two Best Buy accolades here both go to floorstanders. Focal-JMLab's £550 Chorus 716S is the latest in a succession of 'budget'

two-and-a-half-ways which have become steadily more refined in performance and presentation since we reviewed the Tantal 515 back in 1998. One can criticise it for some thickening and heaviness, which is typical of the configuration, but excellent voicing and fine dynamic drive and enthusiasm carry the day.

Rega's £750 Ela offers a rather different mix. Its two-way operation and small main driver give a more delicate and subtle, if more lightweight, presentation that is invariably involving, and

notable for its superior agility and liveliness.

If those two models stand out, it would be wrong to overlook the real strengths available from others – the delightful neutrality of the Dynaudio, for instance, or the superior scale, weight and imaging of the Tannoy, the vigour and coherence of the Infinity, or the brilliant styling of the AAD. The crucial feature of loudspeakers is that no two models are the same, and it's the diversity of choice available that makes them so interesting. **HFC**

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ROTEL RA-1062 £595

Fabulous sound with the ability to drive any loudspeaker it encounters.

HINTS AND TIPS

⊕ Floor-coupling spikes should have tight lock-nuts, but don't over-tighten these or you'll strip the socket threads.

⊕ Standmounts require the best possible stands to achieve best sonic results.

⊕ Finding the right place to put the loudspeakers acoustically is very important. Do take time and trouble experimenting.

⊕ Expect speakers to improve steadily over the first 100 hours.
⊕ Use decent speaker cable.

LOUDSPEAKERS AT A GLANCE



MAKE MODEL	AA S-5	Dynaudio Audience 52	Focal-JMLab Chorus 716S	Infinity Kappa 200	Mission Volare V62	NHT SB3	Rega Ela	Tannoy Sensys DC2
PRICE	£750	£647	£550	£600	£500	£695	£749	£649
SOUND	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
PRACTICALITY	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
BUILD	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
VALUE	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
OVERALL	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████	██████████
CONCLUSION	Great styling and cabinetwork, with a 'cool' balance, but hampered by midband coloration.	Compact standmount with beautifully smooth neutrality. Easy on the ears, if a little laid back.	Could be smoother but has fine voicing plus real dynamic conviction and authority.	A distinctive and artfully made standmount with a few rough sonic edges, but engaging punch and coherence.	Handsome speaker for the money, but lack of presence energy leads to weak dynamics.	High-gloss black clothes, and a very well judged balance, but weak dynamic expression.	Attractive and very compact floorstander has impressive agility with superior musical communication.	Impressive scale and weight, with fine stereo soundstaging, but somehow lacks easy agility.
KEY FEATURES								
SIZE (WxHxD)	19x99x33cm	20x33x26cm	22x95x30cm	22x37x36cm	21x90x33cm	20x33x25cm	23x89x30cm	21x97x29cm
DRIVER CONFIG	2.5-way	2-way	2.5-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2-way	2.5-way
MAIN DRIVER	2x130mm	1x165mm	2x165mm	1x165mm	1x165mm	1x165mm	1x130mm	2x170mm
STAND/FLOOR	Floor	Stand	Floor	Stand	Floor	Stand	Floor	Floor
BI-WIRE	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
LAB CONCLUSIONS E = EXCELLENT • G = GOOD • A = AVERAGE • P = POOR								
SENSITIVITY (2.83V/1M)	88.8dB G	87.4dB A	89.6dB E	87.7dB A	88.0dB G	84.2dB P	86.8dB P	88.1dB G
MAX LOUDNESS @ 2M	107dB @ 300W G	104dB @ 150W A	106dB @ 130W G	103dB @ 100W P	103dB @ 100W P	102dB @ 150W P	103dB @ 100W P	108dB @ 375W E
MIN/AVE IMPEDANCE	4.5/7.6ohm A	3.6/6.7ohm P	3.4/7.4ohm P	4.9/9.5ohm A	3.9/7.4ohm P	4.0/10.6ohm G	5.2/15.4ohm E	2.9/12.6ohm G
DISTORTION @ 96DBA	0.4-1% G	0.3-3% A	0.2-2.5% A	0.4-3% P	0.3-0.9% G	1.5-3% P	0.4-3% P	0.5-4% P
IN-ROOM BASS	38Hz G	50Hz P	42Hz G	54Hz P	45Hz A	54Hz P	46Hz A	30Hz E

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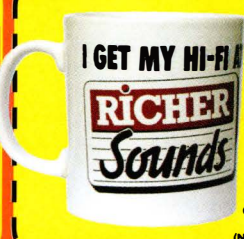
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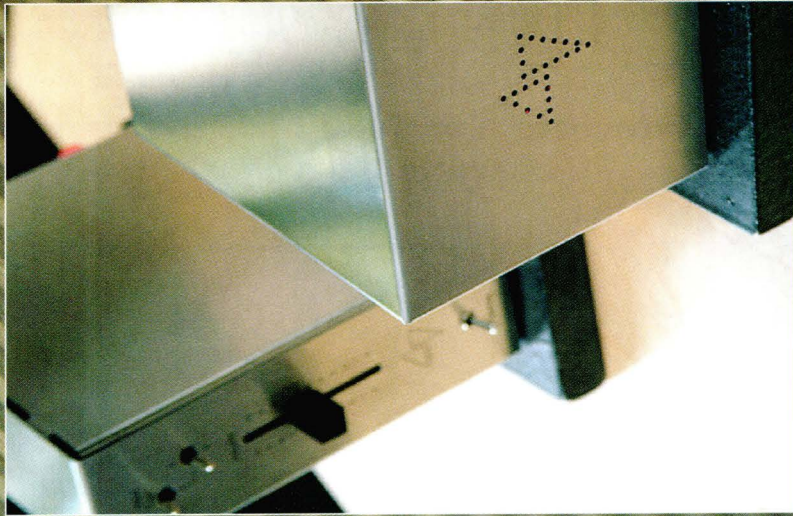
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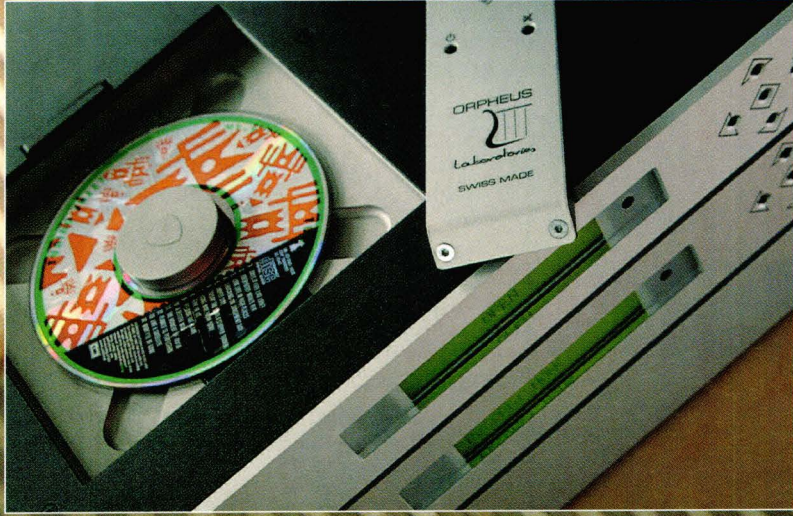


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47 Laboratory is now exclusively available at Midland Audio X-change the Shigaraki Line is the first of many solutions to musical wellbeing. Please call John Roberts to find out more about this truly wonderful product.



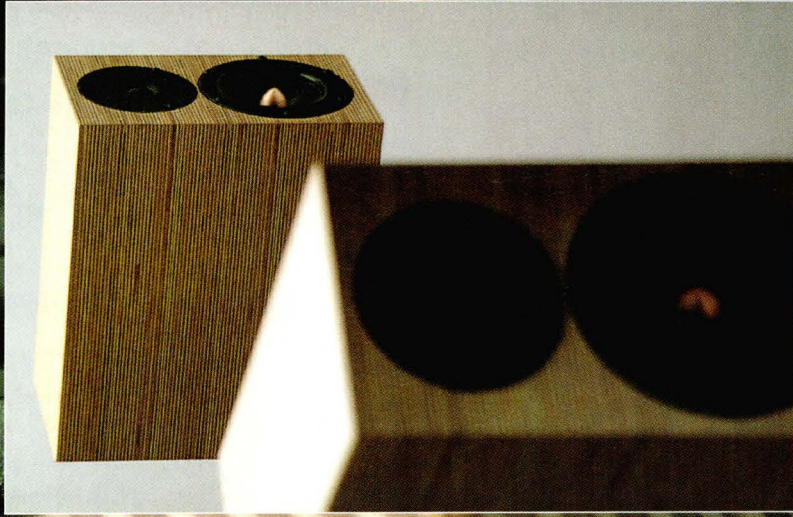
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R

RETRO

RUARK EXCALIBUR
LOUDSPEAKER



Almost every important loudspeaker brand has a go-for-broke model in the range. It may not necessarily be intended to sell in large numbers, or even make a profit, but it may well be a

technology demonstrator which encapsulates ideas that are later trickled down to lower, more commercially significant areas of the market. B&W has the Nautilus, Focal-JMLab the Grande Utopia, KEF the Maidstone, Triangle the Magellan and Tannoy the Kingdom (so named allegedly because it is big enough to fit a complete kingdom inside). In some cases the flagship is not there to make a technological point, but to act as a quality statement, and to add kudos to the range. Ruark has one of this kind of flagship, and it is called the Excalibur.

As so often with flagship products, the vital statistics are impressive. It's not just that there are more noughts in the price than any other in the range (an essential prerequisite for any true flagship). In fact the price was set at £8,000 when it was first launched back in 1998 and the company now recognises that it should have been pitched higher to be taken as seriously as it deserved. It is a big bruiser, standing 1.25 meters tall, and weighing in at 80kg. It was one of the first (not *the* first we hasten to add) to be constructed as separate enclosures. The two 225mm bass units are mounted in the larger of the two enclosures, which forms the bottom section of the speaker.

The upper enclosure, which continues the visual lines of the lower one, but which is decoupled from the main unit by rubber elements, houses two 75mm midrange units and a 28mm silk dome tweeter in an offset modified D'Appolito configuration. It is also home to a 15 element crossover, and it communicates with the bass unit using an umbilical. The use of two enclosures helps reduce intermodulation and is directly echoed in a number of other branded flagships, including most of the models listed above. It also means that energy storage and delayed release from the enclosure concerned with the midrange and treble is less of an issue than if the entire 80kg weight had been bolted rigidly to the back of the smaller drive units.



“It doesn't favour any particular musical genres, which is unusual enough in any loudspeaker.”

The Excalibur is nothing like as obviously high-tech as some of its counterparts. B&W for example has always been able to tell a very strong technical story. But it has always punched above its weight musically, and in a variety of ways. One reason is that it can be played at realistic levels in large rooms while retaining its poise. It doesn't favour particular musical genres, which is unusual enough in any speaker. Perhaps best of all, it has the knack of sounding like a small loudspeaker when the occasion demands. As was borne out in my own listening at the time of launch, a violin sounded like a violin. Normally with large loudspeakers it sounds a bit like a violin as interpreted by an elephant.

The model was commercially successful, easily outselling Ruark's initial projections, and selling several hundreds in the UK and abroad in its first few years. It was also in strong demand in the Far East. This was one flagship that really did pay the rent.

The Excalibur is nominally still on the books, but recently there have been problems because the cabinet manufacturer has gone out of business. The good news (and you're reading about it here first) is that Ruark is working on an updated version, and is proposing to take the opportunity to make some significant improvements. From what we have been able to ascertain, most of the changes are likely to be to the upper of the two enclosures, which may acquire a rear and upwards radiating element to drive the listening room better. Ruark now believes that a lighter mid/top section may be in order, and perhaps even one with an open baffle, which will take it into barely charted territory. At the same time, the opportunity will be there to engineer even higher standards of finish (it was always good), but the result is certain to cost more than the original. **HFC**

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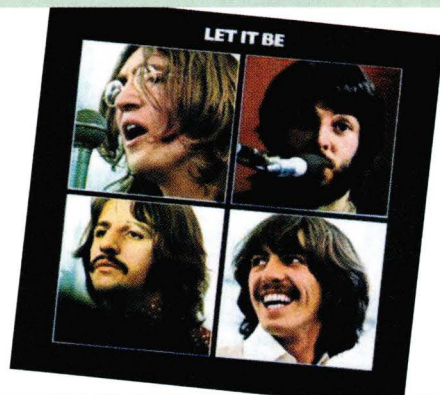
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MUSO

THE BEATLES
LET IT BE



It all started as a glorious ideal to catch The Beatles raw and live like in the old days. Paul McCartney in particular wanted to get back to the spirit of enthrallment he craved from live performance, and legend recalls him stopping his car outside a Bedfordshire pub and rushing in to perform an impromptu set of songs live at a piano. He persuaded the others to do a live, back-to-basics set which would be filmed in its entirety and end as an out-of-sight concert in an amphitheatre or on an ocean liner. But after a disastrous month of failed sessions which produced in Lennon's words, "the shittiest load of badly recorded shit", the greatest band in history were dissolving before the world's eyes. On 30 Jan 1969, the Beatles took their instruments up to the roof of their Savile Row offices and forty-two minutes later the most important group in the history of the world had performed in public for the very last time.

After a month of misery the most abiding memory of that moment (together with the green jeans, fur coats, the blistering wind, the police, the traffic chaos underneath) was the fiery commitment the group gave to songs like *Get Back* and *Don't Let Me Down*. This was what they wanted to do all along but trying to create new music, first thing in the morning, with cameras and no vibes nearly killed them dead. As Lennon pined, "I was psychologically destroyed".

Strangely, it was George Harrison who saved the whole thing. He had walked out of the earlier sessions at Twickenham Studios, promising to return only if the TV special was abandoned and a proper album was recorded in their new Apple Studio in Savile Row. The resultant tapes of the band, recorded raw with old friend Billy Preston on keyboards, were given to assistant engineer Glyn Johns to finish the album as *Get Back*, The Beatles as nature intended. In May 1969 the group rejected a first mix and then Johns spent eight more months tinkering and improving to no avail. (In the meantime the band made the superlative *Abbey Road* but were still bickering.)

After much deliberation, Lennon and Harrison decided to give twenty-nine hours of tapes to Phil Spector to create something

"McCartney's stripped-down dream was dead as Spector snipped, spliced, re-made and overdubbed new sections."

new. McCartney's stripped-down dream would be dead in the water as Spector snipped, spliced, re-made and overdubbed whole new sections during the spring of 1970 at Abbey Road. Lennon's mystical *Across The Universe* was slowed down and covered with strings and girlie chorus. *Dig It* was cut from twelve minutes to forty-three seconds but the most radical overhaul was McCartney's benchmark major/minor composition, *The Long And Winding Road*, which under Spector's direction and Richard Hewson's arrangements gained 18 violins, four violas, four cellos, three trumpets, three trombones, harp, celeste and a 14-strong choir! With the inclusion of Harrison's waltz-time *I Me Mine*, doubled in time by Spector, the album was fittingly finished on 1 April 1970 with drum overdubs by Ringo. This means that the now-retitled *Let It Be* (Apple PCS 7096) is historically the real final recording of the Beatles and not the oft-cited *Abbey Road*.

The *Let It Be* album, released at the same time as the film of the same name, would top the charts on both sides of the Atlantic and sell a staggering two million copies in America alone in its first two weeks. Original copies (Apple Parlophone PXS 1) would come in a lavish box with a book.

Now in a new guise, *Let It Be...Naked* (Apple 07243 595713 2 4) strips away Phil Spector's swimming fantasies for the first time so we can hear the original takes. Three engineers at Abbey Road have overhauled the tapes with Pro-Tools software under McCartney and Starr's approval. The result is basically a great demo with no *Maggie Mae* or *Dig It* but the final inclusion of *Don't Let Me Down*. It's fascinating and at times revelatory, but you'll miss Lennon lippping 'Hark The Angels Come' at the start of *Let It Be* and Ringo's glorious rolling toms at the end. Still, it comes with a bonus 21-minute disc of unreleased snippets. **HFC**

Mark Prendergast

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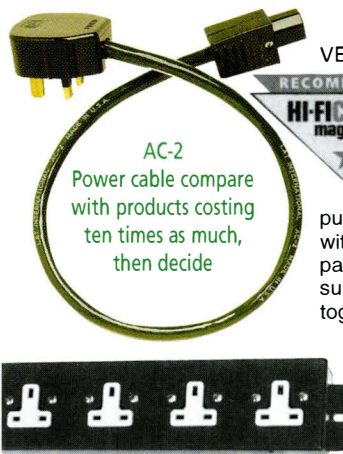
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GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA2.5)

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Eupen GNLM 05/2.5 (CSA 2.5) shown with Marincos IEC 320 will be fitted at extra cost.

GNLM 05/04

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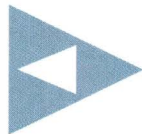
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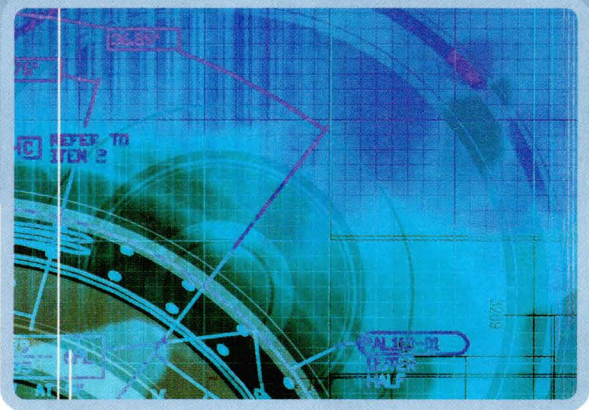


Having spent a little time ruminating over my past exploits with *Hi-Fi Choice*, and remembering with some fondness the truly huge group tests we would undertake, I was reminded that despite subsequent technological strides some things never really change. The last time we celebrated a birthday was in our centenary issue in November 1991, which was dominated by no less than 26 CD players in a massive test (the way the industry has evolved and fragmented now makes such large groups almost impossible to assemble). I mention this not as some misplaced nostalgic trip but to illustrate that while some things change, others stay the same.

In my three-page conclusion to that test, there was a reference to the budget players having made their mark. "It's always easier to kid yourself that player A sounds better than player B simply because the former is more expensive," I said, before explaining that our blind listening panel was unencumbered by such distractions. True to form, the stand-out stars of the test cost around £200 with the very best of the test – the now legendary Rotel RCD-965BX – tipping the scales at £300. These players would routinely slay the £1,000+ 'flagships' despite their lavish engineering. Or was it *because* of their lavish engineering?

I well remember comprehensive ranges of CD players offered by the likes of Sony and Pioneer, ranges that started at around £150 before stretching away into four figures. But it was the £200-£300 models that possessed the most vital and enthralling sound, a sound that more closely mirrored the rawness and passion of the music at hand. Sure enough, the bigger players had been to 'gravity school' where chunkier power supplies, multiple DACs and complex analogue stages were *de rigueur*. After all, the engineers had a bigger budget to play with and could indulge themselves with complex implementations.

Nevertheless, the core digital components, the decoder, the oversampling filter and DAC technologies were typically identical to those in the budget players. All that had really changed was the dressing, the flagships employing twenty components, say, where five had been sufficient in their cheaper cousins. And this added complexity, particularly in the analogue signal chain,



“Added complexity typically brought with it a polished, sophisticated but often uninteresting sound.”

typically brought with it an overly-polished, sophisticated but often uninteresting sound. The musical baby was simply drowned by an excess of bath water.

Twelve years on and with DVD, SACD and, more importantly, universal disc players supplanting the humble CD player, our listening panels are reporting much the same thing – just because a top-end player looks and feels the part, does not mean it trumps the performance of similar but cheaper derivatives. So if the core building blocks of yesteryear's flagship CD players were also shared in players costing £200, what is the pivotal price of today's universally-compatible players? Pioneer's £250 DV-565A is not only the cheapest but also the best universal player below £500, beyond which you are spoilt for choice with superb players, including Denon's £850 DVD-2900, providing a near-perfect blend of impressive construction with fat-free internal engineering.

Of course, while Pioneer currently reigns as king of the universal hill, its latest top-end player, the £1,000 DV-868AVi, is hardly a 'battleship' despite being equipped with virtually every feature imaginable. Indeed, you might mistake this sleek silver box for a more affordable model. Which poses the inevitable question – would Pioneer be launching a real heavyweight machine to compete with flagships from Marantz and Denon, for example?

Not a chance, I was told. And not because Pioneer's engineers lack the wherewithal or resources. They have simply come to appreciate that adding complexity, including additional DSP, to a refined circuit design is unlikely to provide the recipe for increased success. But to those that listen with their eyes and judge quality by pounds sterling and backache, it's a message that seems destined never to be understood. **HFC**

Paul Miller

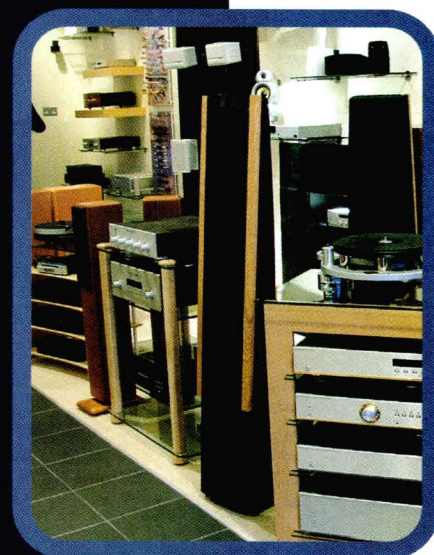
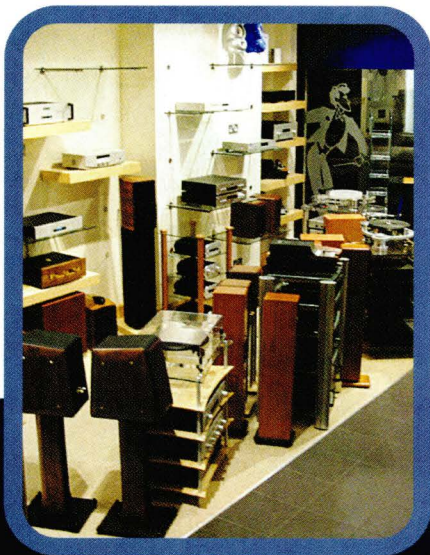
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HI-FI CHOICE BUYER'S BIBLE



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

Reviews you can trust

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

How to use this guide

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

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 surround sound using up to six channels, 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 44.1kHz 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



Arcam DiVA CD73T £400

This is traditionally a strong price point for Arcam, and the British brand's latest entry-level machine is another success – smooth, substantial and refined.



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.

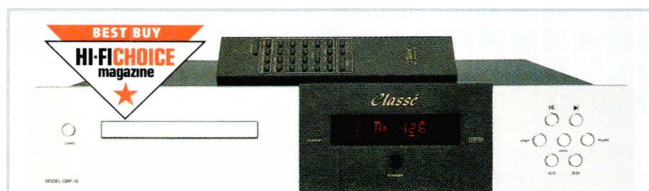
Our favourite BEST BUY EC EDITOR'S CHOICE

CD PLAYERS

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												
BB	Arcam DIVA CD73T	400	Refined and articulate, smooth and dynamic – a finely judged balance for budget to mid-price systems		●	●	●	●				247
BB	Arcam DIVA CD93T	950	Excellent high-resolution and transparent-sounding player in familiar DIVA clothing		●	●	●	●				247
BB	CambridgeAudio Azur 640C	250	This elegant little player can hold its own in very elevated company – a budget system will barely do it justice		●	●	●					249
	Cyrus CD8	1,000	Reveals the emotional and intellectual message in everything it plays and is guaranteed to keep you listening		●							247
	Exposure 2010	600	A smooth and substantial-sounding player, a little lacking in refinement but musical all the same		●	●	●	●				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
BB	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
BB	Sony SCD-XA3000ES	800	A revised and refined version of the SCD-XA333ES that provides an almost holographic sound	●	●	●	●	●	●			248
BB	Thule CD150B	775	A light but engaging and expansive-sounding player with a very quirky user interface		●		●	●	●			246
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
BB	Classé CDP-10	1,599	Very natural yet capable of revealing the finest of details in a coherent and engaging manner		●		●		●			238
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
	Exposure 3010	1,195	What this player lacks in immediacy and punch is offset by its sparkling sense of occasion and musical tension		●	●	●	●				246
	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
BB	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
EC	Naim CDX2	2,650	Fine quality one-box CD player, but its best feature is upgradeability via onboard XPS supply				●		●			238
BB	Orelle CD100evo	1,500	Very superior timing, a wide dynamic range, natural sweetness and fine transparency				●					248
BB	Primare D30.2	1,499	Superb high-resolution player gives a strong taste of musical structure and physicality		●				●			226
BB	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
BB	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,100	Not CD-RW compatible, but otherwise an excellent CD that punches above its weight		●							248
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 multichannel and/or two-channel mode. **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.



Classé CDP-10 £1,599

An exceptional CD player from the Canadian high-end brand – its natural, detailed and engaging way with varied music types is little short of stunning.



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 multifunction 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.

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, alongside CD and DVD-Video – a neat and relatively future proof route into high-resolution multichannel music. Higher-end models featuring high-bandwidth compatible digital audio links are now also appearing, enhancing DVD-A/SACD sound when used with similarly equipped amps.



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.

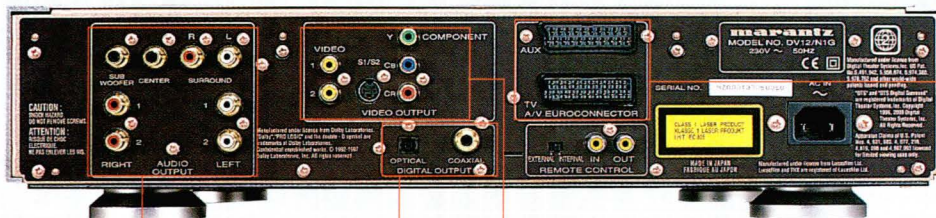
DO I NEED A MULTICHANNEL AMP TO USE A DVD PLAYER?

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.

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 BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

DVD PLAYERS

Audio/Video disc players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				DVD-A COMPATIBLE	SACD COMPATIBLE	ELEC DIG OUTPUT	OPT DIG OUTPUT	HEADPHONE SOCKET	ISSUE NUMBER
UP TO £1,000									
EC	Arcam DIVA DV88 Plus	1,000	The first DVD player (just) enabled to deliver progressive scan with UK-spec PAL discs. Superb picture and good sound						238
	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
HB	Denon DVD-1400	400	Denon's entry point to universal disc playback and a remarkably good one too. Excellent CD replay for a universal player						249
HB	Denon DVD-2900	850	A beautifully built universal player that delivers a strong performance across all formats, all at a remarkable price						248
HB	Pioneer DV-565A	250	Do-it-all 'universal' player is a decent performer with all disc types, and superb value for money considering its range						248
HB	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
ABOVE £1,000									
	Arcam DIVA DV89	1,300	No SACD playback, but CD sounds strong, DVD-Audio is highly engaging and video performance is excellent too						248
EC	Arcam FMJ DV27A	1,900	Very accomplished, clean sounding player with CD, DVD and DVD-Audio alike. Picture quality is equally top-notch						246
	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 596	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

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



Pioneer DV-565A £250
A universal player with respectable performance across all formats, at a remarkable price.



Denon DVD-2900 £850
A universal player that's good with CD and great with DVD-V, DVD-A and SACD alike.



Pioneer DV-757Ai £800
Now pressured by Denon's DVD-2900, but its wideband digi-out is still unique at the price.



Arcam FMJ DV27A £1,900
No SACD playback, but DVD-Audio and CD sound are first rate, as is picture performance.







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- Excellent Price
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VINYL

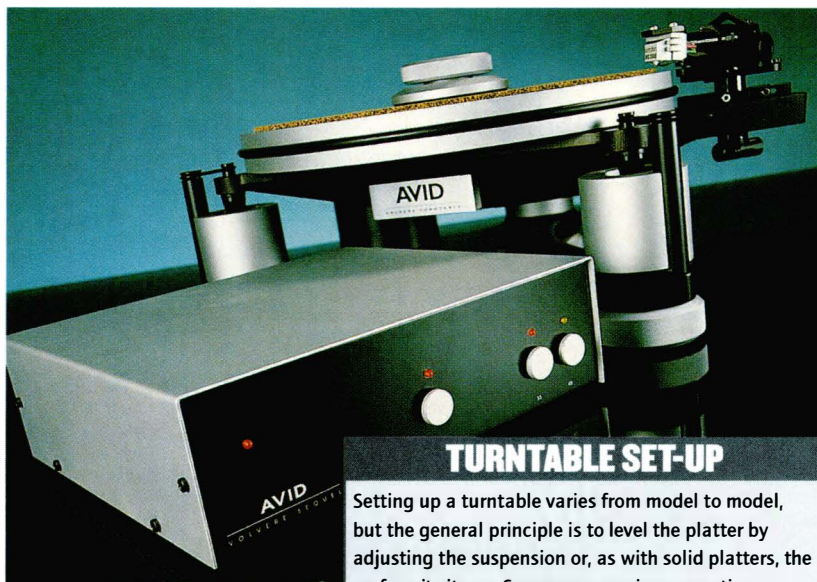
Turntables, cartridges and phono stages



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



Pro-Ject 1 Xpression £210

The latest model from Czech turntable specialist Pro-Ject is remarkable value for money – an Ortofon OM10 cartridge and carbon fibre arm are included in the price.



Roksan Radius 5 £850

A beautiful mid-price turntable with an impressively well-sorted sound from low bass to high treble. Price includes matching Nima tonearm.



Avid Diva £1,100

Superbly well engineered for the money, Avid's entry-level deck spins a highly involving musical message – solid, powerful and detailed.



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.

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

TURNTABLES

Record players

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				ISSUE NUMBER
				SPEEDS	SUSP SUBCHASSIS	SWITCHABLE SPEED CHANGE	SUPPLIED WITH ARM	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Audio Note TT1/ARM1	594	Simple and unpretentious, it delivers a real taste of true high-end performance at an affordable price	33/45	●	●	●	203
<input type="checkbox"/>	Avid Diva	1,100	A solid and powerful sounding deck with fine build, requires a smooth, relaxed cartridge for best results	33/45	●			247
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Volvere Sequel	3,500	Heavyweight turntable that will deliver more of what's in a vinyl groove than most of the competition	33/45	●	●		229
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Avid Acutus	5,000	Extremely capable design with no apparent shortcomings. Don't sell your vinyl 'til you've heard it on this!	33/45	●	●		194
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Michell Gyro SE	1,058	New DC motor-equipped Gyro offers great looks and even better sound. Price includes RB300 arm	33/45	●		●	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Michell Orbe SE	1,825	A superb turntable, able to mix it with the best at virtually any price. Now features new DC motor.	33/45	●			235
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject 1 Xpression	210	Well designed and executed budget deck with an entertaining and revealing sound	33/45			● ●	248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pro-Ject RPM 6	500	Basic, very neutral turntable and arm combination that can take a very expensive cartridge. A high-end bargain	33/45			●	236
<input type="checkbox"/>	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			●	239
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Rega P9	2,248	Exceptionally elegant hi-tech player with complex outboard supply, ceramic platter and wonderful RB1000 tonearm	33/45		●	●	228
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Radius 5	850	Sophisticated design with accomplished sound quality, excellent imagery, and good isolation	33/45	●		●	248
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Roksan TMS2	7,500	Typical Roksan sound, but better: pitch-accurate, lean, detailed and controlled, without the 'bloat' of lesser designs	33/45	●	●		246
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 10A	3,411	Elegant and extremely capable design with Series V/309 hybrid arm, superbly built	33/45	●	●	●	195
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SME Model 20.2A	5,274	Beautifully built, extremely neutral damped and suspended deck with superb sound. Inc V arm	33/45/78	●	●	●	186

Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO CARTRIDGES

MM and MC cartridges

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS			ISSUE NUMBER
				MM	MC	REPLACEABLE STYLUS	
	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grado Prestige Gold	110	Produces rich, open and expansive music with the minimum of fuss	●		●	235
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Linn Akiva	1,800	With fine dynamic expression and a wide bandwidth, what you hear sounds very close to master tape		●	●	242
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Lyra Helikon	1,095	Highly capable and highly neutral, this is a cartridge for all seasons, albeit fussy about vinyl quality	●			215
	Reson Etile	485	Plenty of life and detail, and refined with it		●		223
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sumiko Blue Point Special	250	A no-nonsense performer with engaging musical properties – one of the best around for less than £300		●		192
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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 EDITOR'S CHOICE

PHONO STAGES

Phono stages

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS				
				MM PHONO INPUTS	MC PHONO INPUTS	AU. GAIN	AU. IMPEDANCE	ISSUE NUMBER
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
	Musical Fidelity X-LPSy4	249	Simple, well turned out valve-driven phono stage lacks adjustability, but sounds sweet, open and well-behaved	●	●			248
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD PP2 phono stage	50	A fine buy for turntable users on a tight budget – open tonality and clarity is distinctly impressive for the money	●	●			245
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tom Evans Microgroove	400	For dynamics and real bass extension with good tonal colour this is the one to beat. The Plus version (£700) is even better!		●			234
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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.

MORE MERRY MARKDOWNS

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➔ Naim

The New DVD 5

NEW



Those of you lucky enough to visit the Hi-Fi shows this autumn will have probably seen the new DVD 5 from Naim audio. It is scheduled to arrive after the new year so if you would like some more info please contact Patrick who be happy to assist.

➔ Arcam - DV78

NEW



The new DV78 has a great video performance for an affordable price featuring: 625 Prog scan, PAL/NTSC conversion, RGB - Scart and component output with support for DVD-R & DVD+R recordings. Audio via a wolfson 24 bit 192 Khz DAC offers great analogue with support for MP3 and WMA files. Price **£699.00**

➔ Arcam - AVR300

NEW



Available in January the new AVR300 is a virtual power-house AV Receiver delivering top audio performance and 7.1 channel visual solution in one box. Supporting Dolby EX, DTS 24/96 and Pro logic 11x 2 to 7 channel decode with a video path allowing you to make the most of current formats including HDTV. Check our website or call for more info. Price **£1295.00**

➔ Arcam - B&W Power System

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Pioneer * Quad * REL * Rotel * Spendor
Sennheiser * Sugden * Vibe * Yamaha

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Arcam CD62T CD Player (was 369) **£269.00**
Arcam CD72T CD player (was 449) **£329.00**
Arcam DV88 DVD Player Blk (was 999) **50%** **£499.00**
Arcam DT26 DAB Tuner (was 999) **£549.00**
Arcam A85 Amplifier (was 799) **£549.00**
AVI UTES Loudspeakers (was 399) **50%** **£199.00**
B&W AS2500 Sub - Cherry (was 895) **£495.00**
B&W CMC Centre Spkr Maple (was 350) **£199.00**
KEF KHT 2005 AV Spkr Pack Blk (was 799) **£479.00**
Linn Klassik Movie - Silver (was 1995) **£1195.00**
Linn Kairn Line Preamp (was 1400) **50%** **£699.00**
Linn Klimax Twin Pwr Amp (was 6000) **£4395.00**
Linn Ninka Speakers - Blk (was 1145) **£695.00**
Linn Espek AV Speakers Blk (was 2800) **£1795.00**
Linn Trikan Centre- Maple (was 500) **£349.00**
Linn Sizmik Active Sub- Cherry (was 995) **£645.00**
Mission FS1 Cinema Pack (was 449) **50%** **£225.00**
Mission M70 Speakers (was 129) **£59.00**
Mission M51 Speakers (was 299) **£169.00**
Naim NAT-05 Tuner (was 785) **£579.00**
Naim NAC 112 Preamp (was 660) **£495.00**
Naim AV2 Processor (was 2255) **£1695.00**
Naim NAPV 175 3 Ch P/Amp (new 1225) **£895.00**
Naim NAP 150 Power Amp (was 795) **£595.00**
Naim Credo Speakers (was 1350) **50%** **£595.00**
Rega Mira Amplifier (was 498) **£249.00**
Rega Radio Tuner (was 374) **£219.00**
Rega ARA Speakers (was 255) **£149.00**
PMC TB2 Speakers Black (was 700) **£495.00**
2 yr G/tee on most goods. - U.K. 24hr Del £5 per item. E&OE

Pre-Owned Bargains

Arcam CD72 CD Player (new 399) **£259.00**
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B&W CDMCse Centre - Blk (new 400) **£199.00**
Linn Ikemi CD Player (new 2200) **£1195.00**
Linn Kairn Line Preamp (new 1300) **£595.00**
Linn Lingo Old style (new 495) **£325.00**
Linn Karik 3 CD Player (new 1850) **£595.00**
Linn Numerik DAC (new 1400) **£295.00**
Linn Numerik DAC (new 1400) **£395.00**
Linn Wakonda Preamp (new 845.00) **£479.00**
Naim CD55 CD Player (new 1195) **£825.00**
Naim CDS2Mk2 CD Player (new 4165) **£2995.00**
Naim XPS CD Power supply (new 2100) **£1375.00**
Rega Luna Amplifier (new 498) **£259.00**
Ruark Talisman Speakers (new 495) **£195.00**
ProAc Response 2.5 Spkrs (new 2700) **£1195.00**
Yamaha DSP E800 Processor (new 399) **£195.00**
S/H goods warranty vary please call U.K. Delivery £5 per item

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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 DAB500 £150

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



Rega Radio 3 £374

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



Magnum Dynalab MD102 £2,200

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

Our favourite TUNERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

FM & DAB HI-FI SEPARATES

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	WAVEBANDS	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 class 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
	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	400	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 DAB500	150	Very good sound, plus optional response tweaks, and slickest operation yet	DAB	10			●	●	248
	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	ISSUE NUMBER
CD-R/RW RECORDERS								
	Denon CDR-1000	400	A respectable player and recorder, though some mid-band 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.

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



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

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

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

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

CUSTOM INSTALLATION

Are you looking to neatly and seamlessly integrate a Home Cinema or Hi-Fi System into your home? Our Custom Installation experts are fully trained in all areas



and provide a prompt, reliable and professional service. Whether you're looking for lighting control systems, a dedicated home cinema installation with a retractable screen and built-in speakers or an integrated control system, Sevenoaks Sound & Vision has the solution.

NEW STORES NOW OPEN



STAINES & WEYBRIDGE

We are please to announce, the new stores in Staines and Weybridge are now open. Contact details for these stores are as follows:-

- **WEYBRIDGE**
43 CHURCH STREET,
THE QUADRANT
01932 828525
- **STAINES**
4 THAMES STREET
01784 460777



www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

WINTER SALE

20/12/03 - 31/01/04

We have hundreds of unmissable bargains available in our fantastic WINTER SALE.

For information on all the latest offers, call your nearest store or visit our website.

www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS

SUNDAY • 21 DECEMBER
MOST STORES OPEN

CHRISTMAS DAY
ALL STORES CLOSED
HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

BOXING DAY
ALL STORES CLOSED

SUNDAY • 28 DECEMBER
MOST STORES OPEN

NEW YEAR'S DAY
ALL STORES CLOSED
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

MANY STORES WILL CLOSE EARLY ON CHRISTMAS EVE AND NEW YEAR'S EVE

PLEASE CONFIRM OPENING HOURS BEFORE TRAVELLING

SUNDAY OPENING

Many of our stores are open on Sundays during December and January.

FOR UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION, PLEASE CALL YOUR LOCAL STORE OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE.

BEDFORD
BIRMINGHAM
BRIGHTON
BRISTOL
BROMLEY
CAMBRIDGE
CARDIFF
CHELSEA
CHELTENHAM
CRAWLEY
CROYDON
EDINBURGH
EPSOM
EXETER
GLASGOW
GUILDFORD
HOLBORN
HULL
IPSWICH
KINGSTON
LEICESTER
LEEDS
LINCOLN
LIVERPOOL
MAIDSTONE
MANCHESTER
NEWCASTLE
NORWICH
NOTTINGHAM
OXFORD
PETERBOROUGH
PLYMOUTH
POOLE
PRESTON
READING
SEVENOAKS
SHEFFIELD
SOLIHULL
SOUTHAMPTON
SOUTHGATE
STAINES **NEW**
SWANSEA
SWINDON
SWISS COTTAGE
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
WATFORD
WEYBRIDGE **NEW**
WITHAM (ESSEX)
WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE
NUMBER DETAILS



HI-FI SEPARATES

MICHELL GYRO SE
TURNTABLE / RB300 TONEARM
SALE £1049.95



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

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

SALE CLAIM £50 TOWARDS THE CARTRIDGE OF YOUR CHOICE*

PRO-JECT 1 XPRESSION
TURNTABLE (BLACK) SALE £209.95



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

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

SALE INCLUDES FREE GOLDRING EXSTATIC CLEANER*

ARCAM CD73T CD PLAYER £399.95



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product
of the year
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

SALE INCLUDES FREE INTERCONNECT CABLE WORTH £60*

HI-FI SYSTEM 1 SAVE £149



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2002
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

FREE
PRO-JECT DEBUT II TURNTABLE*

ROTEL
RCD-02 CD PLAYER
RA-02 AMPLIFIER
B&W
DM601 S3 SPEAKERS

Rotel electronics and B&W speakers are natural partners for each other, giving excellent sound quality and stunning looks. So what better than this combination of class-leading detail with an even and robust sound.

But at Sevenoaks we always aim to offer you more and this means What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision's Award-winning Project Debut II turntable is thrown in **FREE**.



SALE SYSTEM PRICE
£949.95
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2002
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

AMPLIFIERS
£251.£500

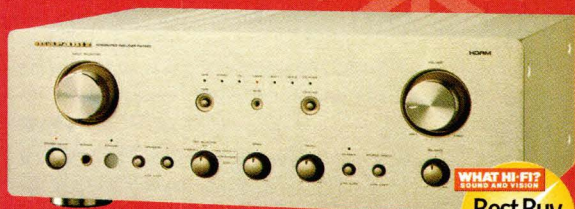
HI-FI SYSTEM 1 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

experience more

experience more
experience more



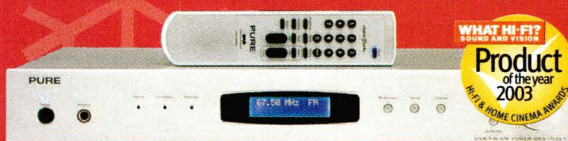
MARANTZ
CD5400 CD PLAYER
SALE £119.95 SAVE £30



MARANTZ
PM7200 AMPLIFIER
SALE £269.95 SAVE £60

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HIFI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

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



PURE DIGITAL
DRX-702ES ANALOGUE/DAB TUNER
SALE £299.95 SAVE £30

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product
of the year
2003
HIFI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

£
0%

PRICING POLICY

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive.

In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

FINANCE OPTION*

Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock.

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

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all stores. Please call before travelling. *Cable Offer - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. Advertisement valid until at least 31/01/04, E&OE.

HI-FI SYSTEM 2



MUSICAL FIDELITY
A3 CD PLAYER & AMPLIFIER
MONITOR AUDIO
SILVER S8 SPEAKERS

One of our most popular systems at an amazing sale price. Full-scale dynamics with a lightness of touch makes this combination stand out.



SALE SYSTEM PRICE
£2399.95
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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

SAVE £379

MISSION
780 SE SPEAKERS
SALE £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?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

SALE INCLUDES SPEAKER CABLE WORTH £50 FREE OF CHARGE*



MISSION
782 SE SPEAKERS
SALE £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?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

INCLUDES SPEAKER CABLE WORTH £100 FREE OF CHARGE* SALE



SAVE £169

HI-FI SYSTEM 3



ROKSAN

KANDY KD1/III CD PLAYER
KANDY KA1/III AMPLIFIER

QUAD

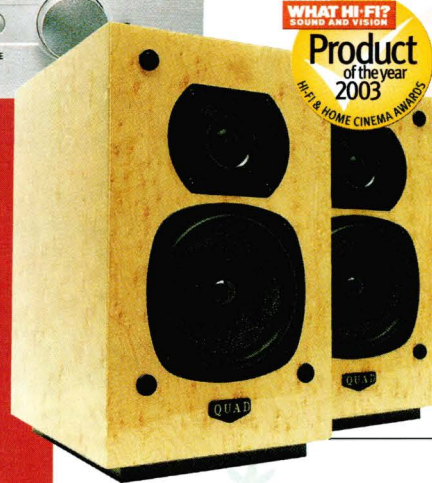
11L SPEAKERS

If you're after detail and excitement in your music then this system's for you. Here we've combined the Quad 11L speakers - Product of the Year 2002/2003 - with Roksan's double Award-winning Kandy KA1/III amplifier and its ideal partner, the Kandy KD1/III CD player.

Awarded five stars in a recent What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision group test, the Kandy KD1/III CD player was described as "offering a great array of talents - team it with its amp stablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."

But don't just take our word for it; come in for a listen.

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



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product
of the year
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

SALE SYSTEM PRICE
£1399.95
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

**WHARFEDALE PACIFIC
EVOLUTION 30 SPEAKERS
SALE £649.95**

"Evolution? This is more like a revolution: Wharfedale's new range is more than an upgrade of its Pacific series.

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 we love the Evolution 30s. They're beautifully made and great all-rounders."



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Mar 03
★★★★★

SALE INCLUDES SPEAKER CABLE
WORTH £80 FREE OF CHARGE*

Please Note: Some products may not be available at all stores. Please call before travelling. *Cable Offer - From range available in-store. Not in conjunction with any other offer. Advertisement valid until at least 31/01/04, E&OE.

HI-FI SYSTEM 4

SAVE £399

**CYRUS CD8 CD PLAYER & 8 AMPLIFIER
MONITOR AUDIO SILVER S6 SPEAKERS**

Another very popular combination that's more than the sum of its already talented parts - and that's before you've examined the upgrade options. The CD8 is a magnificent player (Best Buy - What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards 2003) and like most Cyrus products its performance can be maximised with the addition of a Cyrus PSX-R power supply

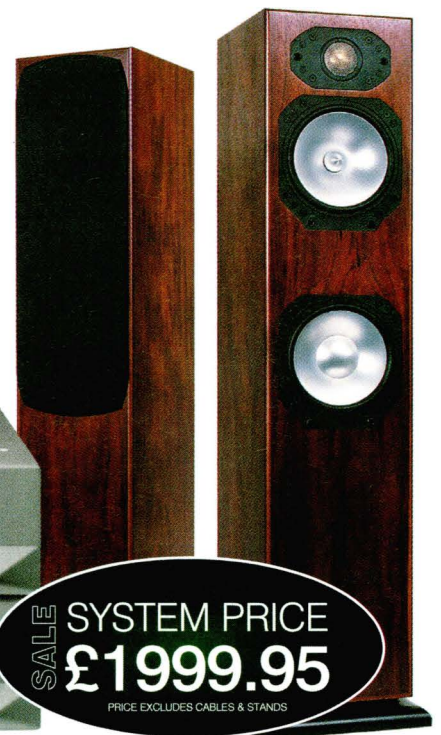
The beautifully crafted Silver S6 speakers from British speaker specialists Monitor Audio complete the package.

HI-FI SYSTEM 4 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Best Buy
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
Product
of the year
2003
HI-FI & HOME CINEMA AWARDS



SALE SYSTEM PRICE
£1999.95
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

experience more

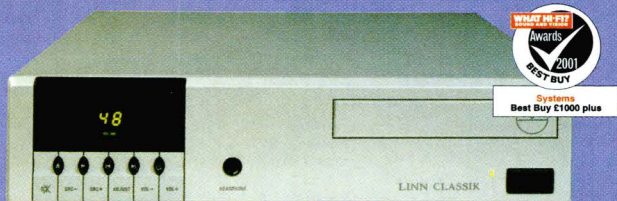
experience more

experience more



LINN CLASSIK ▽ MUSIC SYSTEM (EX SPEAKERS) SALE £749.95 SAVE £100

"The Classik sounds simply marvellous. Boasting fine impact and drive, it retains its grip even as it thumps out rock and dance tracks. Ask it to



play quiet acoustic music and its smooth, liquid presentation impresses still further. The Classik offers the performance you'd expect from high quality separates in one lovely package - this is a very superior product."



YAMAHA CDR-HD1300 CD-RW/HD RECORDER SALE £499.95 SAVE £30



PIONEER PDR-609 CD-RW RECORDER SALE £159.95



DENON DM31 ▶ UD-M31 CD RECEIVER SALE £184.95 SAVE £45

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

OPTIONAL RECORDERS: DMD-M31 MINIDISC RECORDER • DPR-M31 CASSETTE DECK
NB - PRICE EXCLUDES SPEAKERS



HI-FI SYSTEM 5 SAVE £169

ARCAM CD73T CD PLAYER & A65 PLUS AMPLIFIER MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE B2 SPEAKERS



SALE SYSTEM PRICE
£799.95
PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

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

At the front of this package is Arcam's upgradeable CD73T CD player - a What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision 'Product of the Year 2003'. We've coupled this with Arcam's complementary A65 Plus integrated amplifier and Monitor Audio's beautifully balanced 'Best Buy' Bronze B2 speakers. According to What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision (Awards 2003), these compact speakers "Sound superb... Speakers don't get much better than the B2s."

HI-FI SYSTEM 5 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION





PRODUCT RANGE

An outstanding selection of products are on display and available for demonstration at all Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores. However, some products may not be available at all stores.

Please call to check availability before travelling.

TURNTABLES

Goldring GR1	£ SALE
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 £50 TOWARDS CARTRIDGE*	£1049.95
Michell TechnoDec	£ SALE
Project Debut Phono SB	£ SALE
Project Debut II (Black)	£ SALE
Project Debut II (Colours)	£ SALE
Project 1 Xpression FREE EXSTATIC CLEANER*	£209.95
Project RPM4	£ SALE

TUNERS

Arcam DIVA T61	£ SALE
Cyrus FM X	£ SALE
Cyrus TU260L MKII	£99.95
Marantz ST4000	£ SALE
Pure Evoke 1 DAB	£89.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£ SALE
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£299.95

CD PLAYERS

Arcam DIVA CD73T FREE £60 INTERCONNECT*	£399.95
Arcam DIVA CD82T	£ SALE
Arcam DIVA CD93T	£ SALE
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£ SALE
Cyrus CD6	£ SALE
Cyrus CD8	£ SALE
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£ SALE
Linn Ikemi	£ SALE
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Marantz CD17/II M	£ SALE
Meridian 507	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A308 ^{PA}	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista SACD	£ SALE
Quad 99 CD-P	£ SALE
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKIII	£ SALE
Roksan Caspian M	£ SALE
Rotel RCD02	£ SALE
Rotel RCD1072	£ SALE

RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£159.95
Sony RCDW3 CD-RW	£169.95
Yamaha KX393 Cassette Deck	£99.95
Yamaha KX580SE Cassette Deck	£179.95
Yamaha CDR-HD1300 CD-RW	£499.95

AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	£ SALE
Arcam DIVA A80	£ SALE
Arcam DIVA A85	£ SALE
Arcam DIVA A90	£ SALE
Arcam FMJ A32	£ SALE
Cyrus 6	£ SALE

Cyrus 8	£ SALE
Cyrus Pre X Pre	£ SALE
Cyrus Mono X Power (Each)	£ SALE
Denon PMA355	£189.95
Linn Kolektor Pre	£ SALE
Linn LK85 Power	£ SALE
Marantz PM4400	£ SALE
Marantz PM7200	£269.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity A308	£ SALE
Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300	£ SALE
Quad 99 Power	£ SALE
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKIII	£ SALE
Roksan Caspian M	£ SALE
Rotel RA-01	£ SALE
Rotel RA-02	£ SALE
Rotel RA-1062	£ SALE

SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£ SALE
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£ SALE
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII (From)	£ SALE
B&W DM303	£ SALE
B&W DM601 S3	£ SALE
B&W DM602 S3	£ SALE
B&W 705	£ SALE
KEF Q1	£ SALE
KEF Q4	£ SALE
KEF XQ1	£ SALE
Linn Katan	£ SALE
Linn Ninka	£ SALE
Mission m31	£ SALE
Mission 780SE £50 FREE CABLE*	£349.95
Mission 782SE £100 FREE CABLE*	£899.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£ SALE
Monitor Audio Silver S1	£ SALE
Monitor Audio Silver S6	£ SALE
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£ SALE
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20	£ SALE
Quad 11L	£ SALE
Quad 12L	£ SALE
Quad 22L	£ SALE
Rurak Epilogue II	£ SALE
Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30 £80 FREE CABLE*	£649.95

HI-FI SYSTEMS

Denon 201 Ex Speakers	£499.95
Denon DF101 Ex Speakers	£299.95
Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£184.95
Linn Classik Music Ex Speakers	£749.95
Onkyo CS210 Ex Speakers	£ SALE
Teac Legacy 600 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Teac Reference 300 Ex Speakers	£449.95
Teac Reference 500 Ex Speakers	£569.95

DVD SYSTEMS

Denon ADV-M71 Ex Speakers	£ SALE
Denon ADV1000 Ex Speakers	£ SALE
Jamo DVRS0/A305PDD	£ SALE
Jamo DVRS0/A355PDD	£ SALE
Linn Classik Movie Ex Speakers	£1299.95
Linn Classik Movie Di Ex Speakers	£ SALE
Onkyo DR-S2.2 Ex Speakers	£ SALE
Panasonic SC HT1000	£ SALE
Pioneer NS-DV99	£ SALE
Teac Legacy 700/LS-L800 Speakers	£849.95

DVD PLAYERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Arcam DIVA DV78	£ SALE	£ SALE
Arcam DIVA DV88 Plus	£ SALE	£ SALE
Arcam DIVA DV89	£ SALE	£ SALE
Cyrus DVD8	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-1400 Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-2200 Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Denon DVD-A1	£ SALE	£ SALE
Harman Kardon DVD21	£ SALE	£ SALE
Harman Kardon DVD25	£ SALE	£ SALE
Marantz DV4300	£189.95	£189.95
Pioneer DV360	£89.95	£109.95
Pioneer DV464	£99.95	£119.95
Pioneer DV565A Universal	£179.95	£209.95
Pioneer DV668A Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DV868A Universal	£ SALE	£ SALE
Tag McLaren DVD32FLR	£ SALE	£ SALE
Teac DV50	£ SALE	£ SALE

Toshiba SD330E	£79.95	£99.95
Wharfedale DVD M3	£69.95	£69.95
Yamaha DVD-S540	£ SALE	£ SALE

DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Panasonic DMR-E50 DVD-R	£269.95	£299.95
Philips DVDR70 DVD+RW	£249.95	£249.95
Philips DVDR75 DVD+RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Philips DVDR80 DVD+RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DVR3100S DVD-R/RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Pioneer DVR5100HS DVD-R/RW	£ SALE	£ SALE
Sony RDR-GX7 Recorder	£ SALE	£ SALE
Toshiba RD-XS30 DVD Recorder	£549.95	£ TBA

A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR200 A/V Receiver	£599.95
Arcam AVR300 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Arcam AV8/P7 A/V Pre/Processor/Power	£ SALE
Cyrus AV8 A/V Processor	£ SALE
Denon AVC-A1SR A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Denon AVC-A11SR A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Denon AVR1604 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Denon AVR1804 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Denon AVR2803 A/V Receiver	£529.95
Denon AVR3803 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Harman Kardon AVR2550 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Harman Kardon AVR5550 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Harman Kardon AVR8500 A/V Receiver	£1499.95
Marantz SR4400 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Marantz SR5400 A/V Receiver	£369.95
Onkyo TX-SR501E A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Onkyo TX-SR601E A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Onkyo TX-NR900E A/V Receiver	£1499.95
Pioneer VSX-C301 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Pioneer VSX-C501 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Pioneer VSX-D812 A/V Receiver	£329.95
Pioneer VSX-AX31 A/V Receiver	£679.95
Pioneer VSX-AX51 A/V Receiver	£949.95
Pioneer VSA-AX10i A/V Amplifier	£2199.95
Rotel RSX1065 A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 A/V Pre/Power	£ SALE
TAG McLaren AV30R A/V Processor	£ SALE
TAG McLaren AV192R A/V Processor (From)	£ SALE
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Yamaha DSP-Z9 A/V Amplifier	£ SALE
Yamaha RX-V440RDS A/V Receiver	£ SALE
Yamaha RX-V640RDS A/V Receiver	£379.95
Yamaha RX-V1400RDS A/V Receiver	£ SALE

A/V SPEAKER PACKAGES

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B&W VMI/AS1	£ SALE
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Energy Encore	£ SALE
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KEF KHT1005	£ SALE
KEF KHT2005 2 £150 FREE CABLE*	£799.95
KEF KHT5005	£ SALE
KEF Q7 AV £200 FREE CABLE*	£2199.95
M&K K5 £200 FREE CABLE*	£1699.95
M&K K3	£ SALE
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M&K 850/CS35/V850	£ SALE
Mission m70	£399.95

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SUBWOOFERS

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Sony Latest Models	£ SALE
Toshiba Latest Models	£ SALE

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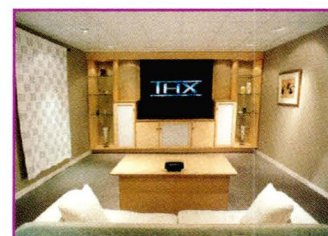
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The Sevenoaks Sound & Vision website has news and information on the Sevenoaks group and its stores.

There are regularly updated special offer and stock clearance lists with hundreds of products available and detailed pages to help you locate your nearest store. To find out more, click on www.sevenoakssoundandvision.co.uk

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STEREO AMPLIFIERS

Integrated and pre/power amps



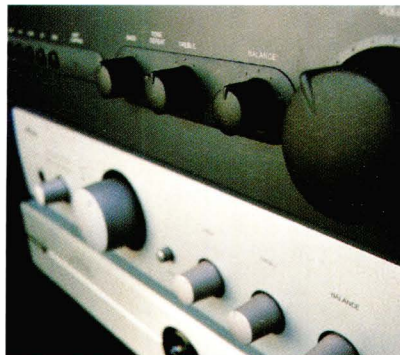
Amplifiers come in two basic forms: integrated and preamplifier (pre) plus power amp combinations. Integrated simply means that both pre and power sections are in one box. There are definite advantages to separating the low level, delicate signals in the preamp from the radiations of a power amp, so the more ambitious designs come in two or more cases. In some cases, each channel has its own power amp called a monoblock.

Amplifiers use two basic technologies: transistors or valves. Transistors are popular because of their practical and technical advantages, but valves – aka tubes – live on owing to aspects of sound quality that transistors can't replicate. If you want to play your music loud, use transistors; if you appreciate acoustic music, try valves.

The fundamental of amp/speaker interfacing is power rating and speaker sensitivity. You can drive a high-sensitivity speaker with a ten watt valve amp, but it takes a 200W behemoth to get the best out of speakers which present a difficult load. As a rule, you can't have too much power.

How to choose an amp

The main areas in which amps vary are: timing, dynamics, stereo imaging and transparency. Timing is the ability to present the attack and decay of each note precisely; amps with strong timing have a snap and coherence that is very appealing.



Dynamics is a general term for the ability to portray variations in level between individual notes and is different to dynamic range (the difference between the loudest and softest notes). Dynamically strong amps tend to have more life and energy.

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

Transparency of detail is the most obvious difference between amps. One amp will present more subtlety than another, but the drawback with using this as your main criterion is that a forward or 'bright' sounding amplifier will emphasise detail at the expense of overall musical coherence.

HOME CINEMA STEREO

Stereo amps can be used in home cinema set-ups as well. You don't get the surround and centre channels, but well set-up stereo speakers do a remarkably good job of creating atmosphere for movies. Stereo amps

tend to be better at reproducing music as they don't have the (electrical) noise-inducing digital processing of AV amps. AV amps cost three to four times as much as stereo models of a similar quality.

Q&A

SHOULD I LEAVE MY AMP ON ALL THE TIME FOR BEST RESULTS?

All audio electronics perform better when they are warmed up, and this is particularly the case when it comes to amplifiers. If there's no way that you can leave it on all the time, make an effort to switch it on at least 20 minutes before listening.

WHAT IS BI-WIRING AND BI-AMPING?

Bi-wiring is when you run separate cables to the treble and bass/mid terminals on the speaker. In most instances, this improves sound quality so long as identical cables are used. Bi-amping is using two stereo amps to drive one pair of speakers, using one amp to drive the treble and the other for the bass/mid sections of the speakers.

WHY DO VALVE AMPS HAVE SO LITTLE POWER?

Valve amps are inherently low powered in absolute terms – at least when you compare them to their transistor-based cousins. But when partnered with high-sensitivity loudspeakers, they are quite capable of producing perfectly adequate head-banging levels.

TOP BUYS



Marantz
PM7200 £330

A true budget belter from Marantz – power and finesse in equal measure, plus the ability to switch between Class A and Class AB operation. Giant killing amps are back!



Rotel
RA-1062 £595

Rotel's latest is an affordable taste of the high end, packed with power and detail. It'll drive virtually any speaker and embarrass a good many more costly amps.



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									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	370	Highly articulate and fluent, offers unusual insight for its price	5	●	●	●	40	232
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A75 Plus	470	Quick, lively and well-presented amplifier, bass is sharper and more tuneful than its predecessor	5	●	●	●	50	224
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam DIVA A80	600	Affordable integrated, with sophisticated control system, and crisp, detailed sound	5	●	●	●	85	245
	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
	Exposure 2010	599	Neatly turned-out amplifier with mainstream appeal. Sounds musical, if a touch 'safe'	6		●		50	214
<input type="checkbox"/>	Exposure 3010	1,000	A mix of old and new, combining greater power with Exposure's traditionally sweet and enthralling sound	6	●	●	●	120	244
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marantz PM7200	330	High power, plenty of features, and remarkably clear and informative sound with lots of impact	6	●	●	●	105	248
	NAD C320BEE	220	Spirited and enthusiastic amp with slight bass hump and a sound that will suit relaxed speakers	7		●	●	50	232
<input type="checkbox"/>	NAD C370	450	Flexible, ultra high-power integrated amplifier delivers a real punch, but is not without finesse	6		●	●	120	217
	Primare A10	500	Beautifully made, smooth and easy sounding, and though not overtly detailed it is well organised musically	6		●		50	208
<input type="checkbox"/>	Primare i20	750	An amplifier with attitude: punchy fast and secure sounding, with excellent build quality for the money	4		●		70	239
<input type="checkbox"/>	Roksan Caspian M Series	1,000	Improved mainstream model from Roksan is a fine, expressive amplifier – right at the top of its class	6		●		85	248
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rotel RA-02	349	Agile and capable slimline design with an engaging sound that draws you into the music	4	●	●	●	40	232
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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									
<input type="checkbox"/>	Arcam FMJ A32	1,150	Remarkably flexible and well-featured, with excellent sound quality for the price	7	●	●	●	100	228
<input type="checkbox"/>	ATC SIA2-150	2,375	Starkly revealing powerhouse that eats most integrateds for breakfast	5		●		150	228
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AVI Laboratory Series	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Krell KAV400xi	2,698	The best integrated Krell yet is quick, agile, solid and finely detailed	5		●		200	247
	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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
<input type="checkbox"/>	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										
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	ATC CA2	750	Stripped-down version of ATC's range topper delivers considerable transparency and bandwidth. Excellent value	●		5		221		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creek P43R/A43	900	Great value, with a particularly impressive way with dynamics	●		6		140	212	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Naim NAC112/NAP150	1,425	Clean, clever simplicity, plus a very well-balanced sound that's much sweeter than earlier Naims	●	●	6		50	213	
<input type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	AVI S2000M	2,398	This preamp/monoblock pairing does most things very well and images better than most	●	●	5		150	221	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Border Patrol P20	6,750	Muscular 300B P-P design with fluidity and dynamics to match the best	●	●			20	231	
	Bryston BP25/4BSST	4,000	Extremely transparent, high-power combo, you'll listen louder and longer because you can	●	●	8	opt	300	241	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Chapter Preface/II+	9,800	Among the finest amps available, the resolution of this preamp and power amp challenges the best at any price	●	●	6		300	249	

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	
				PRE-AMPLIFIER	POWER AMPLIFIER	LINE INPUTS	PHONO INPUT	REMOTE CONTROL		POWER OUTPUT (W)
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	Gamut D200 Mk3	3,950	A great power amp that's now even better – one of the best regardless of price		●				200	247
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 NAC202/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
EC	Sugden Masterclass AA	5,600	Yorkshire's finest class A kit. Dynamic and tonally rich, this gives even valve amps a run for their money	●	●	7		●	35	246
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.

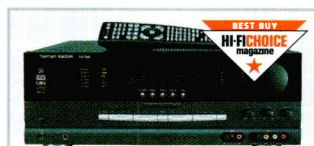
HI-FI MEETS SURROUND SOUND

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



Harman Kardon AVR 5550 £900

Here's a rarity - a sub-£1,000 AV amp that does a good job with both stereo and surround sources, and well equipped too.



Pioneer VSA-AX5i £1,200

Trickle-down version of the VSA-AX10i is a superb performer at the price, good with both music and film soundtracks, with the added bonus of i.Link digital connection.



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 AV AMPLIFIERS

BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

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
BB	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
EC	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
BB	Harman Kardon AVR 5550	900	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
BB	Marantz SR9200	2,000	Powerful, cool-running UK-customised THX receiver with spacious, relaxed sound quality with music and movies alike	●	9	●	●	235
BB	Pioneer VSA-AX5i	1,200	Standard setter in its price category, with i.Link digital interface and MCACC auto set-up	●	11	●	100	248
EC	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								
EC	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
EC	Bryston SP1/9B THX	7,100	Stripped-back 5.1 channel processor/amp combo reaches genuine audiophile heights		6	opt	120	219
EC	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
EC	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
BB	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
EC	Meridian 861	9,833	Powerful surround processor with flexible modular construction, marvellous versatility to drive any speaker configuration		6	●		230
	Myrad 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
EC	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
BB	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
EC	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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- ✓ Specials to order

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HF 6	6	557mm	£92.47
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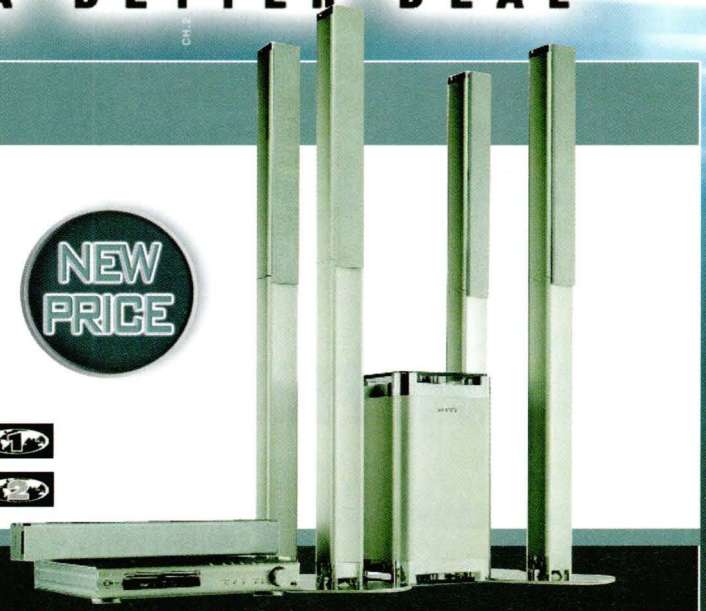
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- SPEAKER STANDS INCLUDED
- SACD MULTI CHANNEL PLAYBACK
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- CD-R/CD-RW PLAYBACK



AMAZING PRICE

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SONY

STR-DB2000

DETAILS:

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- 100W X 6 POWER OUTPUT
- TRUE 6.1 CHANNEL AMPLIFIER
- 6.1 CHANNEL INPUT
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SONY DVP-NS930

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- OS COMPONENTS SOUND / QUALITY / PERFORMANCE
- CD-R/RW / (S)CD & MP3 PLAYBACK • 12-BIT / 108MHz NOISE SHAPED VIDEO D/A CONVERTER • NTSC PROGRESSIVE SCAN • ALUMINUM FRONT PANEL



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AVR-200

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AMAZING PRICE

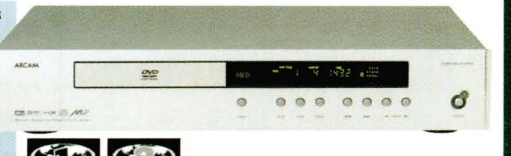
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ARCAM

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YAMAHA

RX-V740RDS

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RX-V540RDS

DETAILS:

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- 6-CHANNEL DISCRETE AMP. CONFIG. (140W X 6 DIN; 90W X 6 RMS)
- DIGITAL TOP-ART • HIGH CURRENT AMP. • COMPATIBILITY WITH D. DIGITAL EX, DOLBY PRO LOGIC II, DTS-ES DISCRETE 6.1, AND DTS NEO:6
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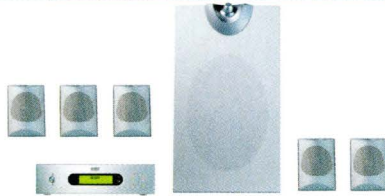
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Panasonic

PTAE200



DETAILS:

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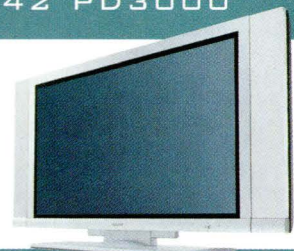
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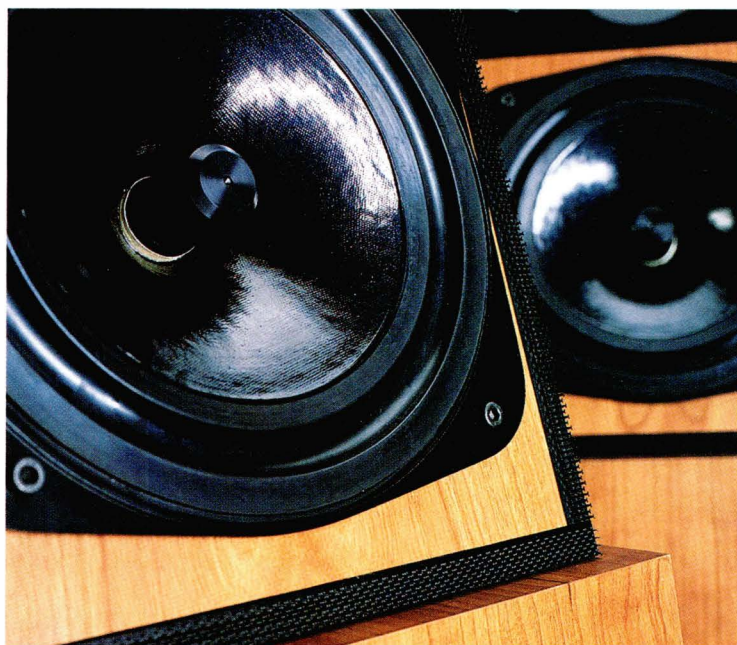
STEREO SPEAKERS

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
703 £2,000
A hi-tech, three-way floorstander sporting a 'surroundless' midrange driver. Delivers a thoroughly engaging sound with great bass and an expressive midrange.



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 STEREO SPEAKERS

■ BEST BUY ■ EDITOR'S CHOICE

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SIZE (WxHxD) (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
■	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
■	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	Much of the grace and punch of the smaller DM303 – a superb floorstander for the money	20,91,30	●	A	60	●		235
■	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
	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
	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
■	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
	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
■	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	Pricy 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
■	Epos ELS3	200	Few affordable speakers sound as clean and convincing while taking up so little real estate	18,27,19	A-	60	●			241
■	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
■	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 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
	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
■	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
■	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

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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Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major hifi brands:

Apollo, Arcam(Diva/FMJ), Ash Design, Atacama, **Atlas** (spkr cables & interconnects) B&W, **Chord Company**, **Creek**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Epos, **Exposure**, **Genelec**, **Anthony Gallo Acoustics**, Harman Kardon, Infinity, Iso Tek, KEF (including **Reference**), Linn Products(including Knekt), **MJ Acoustics**, Meridian, Michell, **Mirage**, Mission, Musical Fidelity, NAD, **Naim**, Ortofon, Pioneer, **PMC**, **Primare**, **Proac**, Project, Pure, QED(including Systemline), Quad, Quadraspire, REL, Rotel, Sennheiser, Soundstyle, **Spendor**, Stands Unique, **Tag McLaren**, Wharfedale, Yamaha.

Nobody else in these areas carries all the following major Home Cinema products:

DVD players: Arcam & **FMJ**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha,

Processors: **Arcam FMJ AV8**, **Cyrus**, **Lexicon**, Linn, Meridian, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**.

Amplifiers: Arcam/FMJ, **Bryston**, **Cyrus**, Denon, Harman Kardon, **Lexicon**, **Naim**, Rotel, **Tag McLaren**, Yamaha.

Display devices: Plasma screens from Loewe, Panasonic, Pioneer and **Yamaha**. Televisions/LCD: Loewe.

Projectors: **Barco(CRT/DLP)**, **Sim (DLP)**, **Yamaha(DLP/LCD)** Screens: **Stewart/Draper/Vutec** ,

Video Processing: **Faroudja**, **I-Scan**, **Key Digital**, **Lumagen**, **Tag**. Control systems: **Crestron**, Lutron lighting.

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE

STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE W/H/D (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EASE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (HZ)	FREEL SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
	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
BB	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
BB	Tannoy Sensys DC1	449	Modest sensitivity but beautifully balanced with fine authority at a very realistic price	21,41,29		A	40	●	245
	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
ABOVE £1,000									
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 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 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
EC	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 703	2,000	Elegant floorstander with excellent bass drive and mid dynamic range, but slightly strong and obvious top end	23,101,36	●	A-	20	●	247
	B&W 704	1,400	Sleek and stylish two-and-a-half-way with deep, lively bass, sweet treble, and rather laid-back presence	22,96,32	●	A-	20	●	248
EC	B&W Signature 805	2,500	Gorgeous standmount sounds delicately transparent and laid back with very superior resolution and imaging	24,42,34		A	30	●	247
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
	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
BB	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
	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
BB	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
	Eclipse TD Lulét 307/316	1,250	Extraordinary satellite plus sub solution sounds a cut above other sub/sats. Can be expanded to multichannel	12,16,16.2		act	40	●	247
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 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
EC	Focal-JMLab Alto Utopia Be	11,000	Attractive and beautifully balanced, with fine bass alignment and focus, low coloration and very clean top end	37,121,53	●	A-	20	●	248
	Graves Audio Korongray	1,999	Fast and very time-coherent, but rather bass-light and aggressive higher up – valve amps preferred	25,109,36	●	A+	45	●	247
	Harbeth Super HL5	1,699	Looks old-fashioned, but classic monitor combines authority and transparency with good neutrality	33,64,31		A	30	●	233
BB	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
	Jamo D870	2,200	Handsome floorstander is a good basic communicator, though ultimately just a little 'cold' and 'shiny'	27,105,38	●	A-	20	●	247
	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
	Living Voice Auditorium	1,700	Gloriously coherent and dynamic midband, though the top end is restrained and bass was uneven in our room	21.5,86,28	●	A-	30	●	247

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Our favourite BEST BUY EDITOR'S CHOICE
STEREO SPEAKERS continued

Stereo speakers

BADGE?	PRODUCT	£	COMMENTS	SPECIFICATIONS					
				SIZE (W/H/D) (CM)	FLOORSTANDER	EDGE-OF-DRIVE	BASS FROM (Hz)	FREE SPACE	CLOSE TO WALL
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
EC	MartinLogan Clarity	2,498	Relatively affordable and easy to live with electrostatic hybrid with class-leading resolving power	26,135,31	● A-	46	●		245
EC	Meridian M33	1,560	Compact active wallmount packs remarkable dynamic vigour into a very discreet package	15,38,22	act	45	●		214
	Mirage OM7	2,000	Warm, full and laid back Omni has weak stereo focus but brings the musicians into your room	30,115,16-39	● A-	25	●		247
	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 SL-2	4,995	Delivers magnificent musical analysis and communication skills in a notably discrete physical package	28,103,33	● A-	20	●		232
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	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
EC	PMC FB1	1,410	Has the lively coherence of a simple two-way, alongside impressive bass weight and extension	20,105,31	● A	20	●		204
	PMC OB1	2,450	Genuinely deep bass and lovely overall neutrality, though mid could have more tension and bass more punch	20,103,33	● A-	20	●		243
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
EC	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
EC	Sonus Faber Cremona A	2,149	Standmount 'Auditor' version of the Cremona makes a soundstage bigger and better than its size suggests	19,35,32	A	48	●		246
	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
EC	Totem Forest	2,390	Low sensitivity but wonderfully open neutrality, at heart a beautifully communicative and musical loudspeaker	19,5,90,27	● A	25	●		247
	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
	Triangle Naia	1,900	Exciting, vivid and communicative, but also a bit untidy and uneven, the Naia is a whole lot of fun	23,119,32	● A-	25	●		247
	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W 600 S3 package	900	Unquestionably delivers the sonic goods. High-quality drivers in standmount enclosures (uses 602 S3s at the front)	A	5	22	●		224
	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	Multichannel package for hi-fi purists with real authority and imaging, but needs subwoofer for full-bore movie sound	A-	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	KEF Q AV7	1,300	With latest Uni-Q refinements, this system is astonishingly accomplished and amazing value	A+	5	35	●		232
	Mirage Omni 2	2,650	Dark tonality, but superb imagery makes this an excellent all-round choice	A	5	30	●		232
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mission m5	1,450	Main m52 is a clean, attractive full-range stereo speaker, while the m5as does big bass for movie fans	A	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Tannoy mXAV4	500	Lacks some grunt, but smooth and refined with seamless surround coherence. Excellent value	A	5	20		●	210

SPECS KEY **EASE OF DRIVE** How much power the amplifier needs (approximately) to drive the loudspeaker effectively: **A+** 25 watts plus **A** 50 watts plus **A-** 100 watts plus.
NUMBER OF SPEAKERS The amount of individual loudspeakers in the package. **BASS FROM** How low the speaker goes, the smaller the number the deeper the bass.
FREE SPACE The speakers work best away from wall(s). **CLOSE TO WALL** The speakers will work best when up against a wall (but avoid corners).

Our favourite 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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	B&W ASW850	2,000	Does all the things subwoofers should do with music and movies alike, but transparently and seamlessly	53,56,52	1000	18	246
	Monitor Audio ASW100	300	For the price, this compact subwoofer performed well	32,32,34	120	27	225
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	REL Q150E	500	Great value compact 'cube' sub adds genuine weight and drive thanks to superior filtering	29,32,33	150	20	239
	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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ruark CL300	2,000	Shows what a good subwoofer can do: controlled, detailed and dynamic. A delight with music and movies alike	60,52,5,40	300	30	225
	Titan Saturn	800	Very bulky sub has curious styling, but decent filtering gives good weight and headroom	72,48,72	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	STRAINED	SOLID CORE	COPPER	SILVER	DIGITAL CABLE TYPE	ISSUE NUMBER
ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS									
	Black Rhodium Illusion	77	An upfront, lively, exciting cable which still manages subtlety when needed. Slight coloration though		●	●			248
	DNM TBB75	75	Bass not always completely consistent, but sound has great clarity and insight		●	●			241
EB	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
EB	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
EB	Kimber Timbre	72	Typical Kimber construction with ditto sound – clean, extended and detailed	●		●			248
EB	Monster Interlink 400 Mk2	70	Really lively and enjoyable sound	●		●			224
	PM Dragon Tails	600	Targeted at valve equipment, but its virtues, including superb imaging, apply to solid-state duties too	●			●		249
	QED Qunex 1	20	Well balanced and easily rivals more expensive cables	●		●			211
EB	Townshend DCT100	100	Unusual construction with copper strip conductors, giving very detailed sound, but just an occasional hint of hardness		●	●			241
EB	Townshend Isolda DCT	300	Unusual construction and cryogenically treated too: whatever the reason, a remarkably capable wire		●	●			234
EB	van den Hul The Bay C5	45	Terrific detail, nice balance – a great cable	●		●			224
EB	van den Hul The Well	65	Hybrid cable with carbon-fibre conductors added. Very slight bass coloration does little to detract from fine performance	●		●			241
EB	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
EB	QED Qunex P75	25	A superbly capable interconnect that's highly detailed and well balanced			●		E	207
EB	QED Qunex SR75	50	Lots of bass and good clear midrange and treble at a sensible price	●		●		E	234
EB	Supra Trico	40	Very well made digital/video cable which noticeably improves the sound of a cheap DAC	●		●		E	241
EB	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 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
EB	Electrofluidics 20/20	45	Excellent bass extension and very fine performance elsewhere – one of the best all-round cables available		●	●			241
EB	Kimber 4PR	5	Considering the price, this cable's very slight dryness is forgivable when everything else is so right	●		●			192
	Kimber 8VS	18	Beautifully full, open and transparent sound right across the board. Price for 1m terminated pair	●		●			227
	Kimber 8PR	21	Bass very full, just occasionally a touch flabby, but detailed and sweet upper frequencies make this a good value cable	●		●			241
EB	Kimber 8TC	39	Very capable in all areas, particularly good at imaging and with firm bass. Price for 5m terminated pair	●		●			203
	QED Silver Anniversary	5	A few minor flaws, but overall performance is very assured for this price	●		●			192
EB	QED X-Tube XT300	10	A natural and well controlled sounding cable that's cost effective for mid-priced systems		●	●			234
	QED X-Tube XT400	20	A practical cable with a liking for lively music, but slightly less assured with subtle classical grooves	●		●			248
	Supra Ply 3.4/S	8	Good in all areas, with rich bass and just a touch of treble roughness	●		●			203
EB	Townshend Isolda DCT	50	Cryogenically treated 'impedance matched' cable with stabilising components added: great sound all-round		●	●			241
EB	Wireworld Solstice 5	20	Unfriendly to handle, but makes up for it with very assured sound – heaps of bass and great insight	●		●			248

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 supra-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
BB	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
BB	AKG K270 Studio	129	Pro oriented design which is very transparent and great with acoustic material			●		●	270		230
EC	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
BB	Beyerdynamic DT990	160	Impeccable balance, very extended bass and treble, and bags of detail place this model ahead of the pack			●	●		250	●	245
BB	Grado SR60	90	For sheer musical enjoyment these are hard to beat. Retro styling may not be to everyone's taste		●				200	●	194
BB	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
BB	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
EC	Stax System II	400	Luxury option at its price, but the sound delivery is five-star quality all the way	●		●	●		295	●	205

SPECS KEY **ELECTROSTATIC** Uses electrostatic film instead of more common cone or dome dynamics. **SUPRA-AURAL** Earpads sit on ear rather than around it. **CIRCUMAURAL** Earpads rest on the head around the ears. **OPEN BACK** Vented capsules let sound in and out. **CLOSED BACK** Sealed capsules. **WEIGHT** In grams. **3.5MM JACK ADAPTOR** Allows connection to personal stereos, computers etc

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HI-FI CHOICE

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
	Alphason A5-G	399	Nice looking, very solid and practical with a pretty well balanced sound, but lacks a little detail	80	66.46		5	Glass	247
	Atacama Equinox	280	Stable, modular design with style. Excellent bass transients and a fresh design concept	81	50.50	●	4	Glass	217
 	Audiophile Furniture Base	615	Price is justified by its earth-shattering sonic abilities – a worthy upgrade	82	43		4	MDF	193
	Avid 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
 	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
 	Custom Design Concept 400	700	Slightly drab appearance, but good sound and efficient use of space	74	48.40		4	Metal	247
	Isobluie 'The Stand'	460	Attractive modular design that's as easy on the ear as on the eye	47	48.40		4	MDF	247
 	Naim Fraim	1,825	Pricey but very classy looking and sounding, with modular flexibility	96	45.34		5	Glass	232
	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
 	Sound Organisation Z560	195	Excellent value rack, five shelves too! Well balanced and under 200 quid!	92	50.40		5	Glass	217
 	Standesign Design 4	190	An all-in-one support at a budget price, with good sonic performance	88.5	50.8	●	4	Glass	193
 	Townshend Seismic 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
	Custom Design R/S300 MkII	100	A solid stand improving on the original, with better focus and detail	61, 56, 51	16.5, 18	●		2	202
	hne Cableway	399	Looks great, sounds great, so start saving! Clean and sweet, and neutrality is exceptional with orchestral material	63	17, 20	●		1	220
 	Kudos S50	115	Formidable bass with real authority, and a wide dynamic range across a broad bandwidth	61	15, 20	●		1	220
	Partington ANSA 60	90	Elegant flat-packer 'disappears' sonically; restrained but neutral and coherent	62	18, 15	●		4	232
 	Partington Dreadnought	100	Fully welded high-class engineering gives a very clean, open sound at a sharp price	61	17, 15	●	●	5	220
	Sound Organisation Z522	95	Very hefty build for the price helps to deliver a solid sound with good authority and drive	60	16	●		4	220
	Townshend Seismic Sink	499	Unique inflatable plinth that works wonders with decent floorstanders, as well as standmounted speakers	4	38, 48			0	202

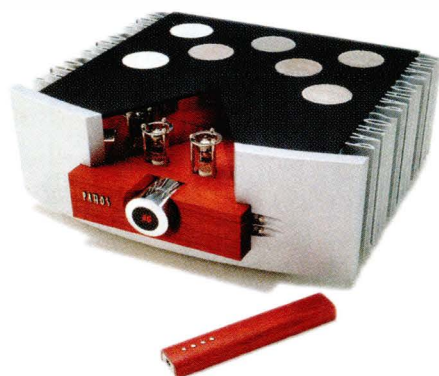
EQUIPMENT SUPPORTS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of complete stand. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of the supporting platform(s). Single figures indicate a square platform.

WELDED As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF SHELVES** To put your kit on (different configurations are often available). **SHELF TYPE** Material that shelves are made of.

SPEAKER STANDS SPECS KEY HEIGHT Of each stand, not including spikes. TOP PLATE SIZE (CM) Width by depth of platform. Single figures indicate a square platform. Speakers generally overhang top plates.

FILLABLE The stand can be mass-loaded with sand and/or lead to stop ringing. **WELDED** As opposed to bolt-together construction. **NUMBER OF LEGS** That support the stand

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GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CLASS A The operation of an amplifying stage or device in which current always flows, as opposed to Class B, where some of the devices are effectively turned off some of the time. Class A tends to have the advantage of offering lower distortion while Class B tends to generate less heat.

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

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

CLOCK Any electronic oscillator that is used to generate a timing reference signal. Used to synchronise the data being taken from a disc.

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

DAB (digital audio broadcasting). Digital radio using frequencies in the band 217.5 - 230MHz. Broadcasters use varying degrees of compression and offer a broad range of programming.

DAC or Digital-to-Analogue Converter. The stage in any digital component at which incoming digital data is used to reconstruct a recognisable analogue (music) waveform.

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

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

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

DSD (direct stream digital) The coding format used for SACD offers a frequency response of over 100kHz and a dynamic range over 120dB, it has over four times the data capacity of CD.

DSP or Digital Signal Processor. Integrated circuit that handles the decoding of digital audio streams. In 5.1 processors it separates the left from right and front from rear while managing the various bass options.

DTS or Digital Theatre Sound Competitor to Dolby Digital with a reduced 4:1 compression ratio that, ostensibly, promises higher quality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

KBPS (Kilobits per second) Digital data rate measurement system used primarily with highly compressed formats such as MP3, DAB etc. The higher the amount, the better the quality.

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

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

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

MIDRANGE The middle three or so octaves of the audio band, where the

ear is most sensitive, covering the approximate frequency span from 160Hz up to 3kHz.

MP3 (MPEG layer 3) Lossy compression format for digital audio that drastically reduces data content in order to squeeze music through internet connections or allow hundreds of CDs to be stored on a hard disc.

OUTPUT IMPEDANCE A measure of resistance to alternating current, a source with low output impedance (below 100 ohms) helps ensure compatibility with most amplifiers, even with long interconnect cables.

PCM (pulse code modulation) The digital coding system for analogue waveforms used for CD and DVD. Quality is limited by the oversample and bit rates used – CD is 44.1kHz/16-bit while DVD-A is capable of 192kHz/24-bit.

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

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

SACD (super audio CD) was launched in 1999 and is a Sony/Philips format based on DSD coding that offers high resolution stereo and multichannel sound from hybrid discs that can also be played on ordinary CD drives.

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

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

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

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

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

TREBLE High frequencies, the top end of the audio band, ie above 3kHz.

TWEETER Treble driver.

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

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

DESCRIPTIVE TERMS

AGGRESSIVE Forward and bright sonic character.

AMBIENCE The impression of an acoustical space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

ANALYTICAL Highly detailed.

ARTICULATE Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

ATTACK The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music.

BALANCE Essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasised above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

BODY Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass. Opposite of thin.

BOXY The sound of a loudspeaker with audible cabinet resonances.

BRIGHT A sound that emphasises the upper midrange/lower treble.

DARK A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright.

DECAY The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

DEFINITION (or resolution) The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

DEPTH (of image) The perception of music being reproduced behind the loudspeakers and inhabiting a reproduction of the acoustic space of the original recording.

DETAIL The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

DRY A sound that is devoid of 'juice', which usually comes across as fine-grained and lean. Also a loss of reverberation as produced by a damped environment.

DYNAMIC The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic range. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

EUPHONIC An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

FAST Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and 'snap'.

FOCUS A strong, precise sense of image projection.

FORWARD(NESS) Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of the image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener.

GRAINY A slightly raw, exposed

sound which lacks finesse.

GRIP A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

GRUNT See grip.

HARD Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

HARSH Grating, abrasive.

IMAGING (stereo) The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room.

JUICY Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

LOW-LEVEL DETAIL The quietest sounds in a recording.

MUSICAL or musicality. A sense of cohesion and subjective 'rightness' in the sound.

NATURALNESS Realism.

OPAQUE Unclear, lacking transparency.

OPEN Sound which has height and 'air', relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

PACE Often associated with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

PRESENCE A sense of an instrument or voice occupying a place in the listening room.

PRESENCE RANGE The upper midrange.

SEISMIC Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

SIBILANCE An emphasis of the 'S' sound, often heard on radio.

SNAP A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or 'snap' of live instruments.

SPEED A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

STURDY Solid, powerful, robust sound.

THICK A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

THIN Bass light.

TIMBRE The tonal character of an instrument.

TIMING A sense of precision in tempo. See speed and pace.

TRANSIENT The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

TRANSPARENCY, transparent. A hear-through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

TWEAK To tune a system or component in an attempt to get the best performance from it.

TWEAKER Someone who enjoys this process.

VEILED Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

WARM A fullness in the lower midrange/upper bass.

WEIGHT A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass.

Welcome to the Hi-Fi Choice accessories shop

Choice Bits 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. It couldn't be simpler!

This issue's featured accessories deal with one of the most important issues of a high quality audio system – cleaning! We all know the importance of keeping CDs or LPs clean and dust-free, but what we tend to overlook are the hardware elements that go to make up your audio system.

Keeping the lens of your CD or the contacts throughout your audio or AV system clean will give you as much of an increase in performance as cleaning a record or the stylus on your record deck.

SHOWCASE

Disco AntiStat

Award-winning manual record cleaning system

Key Features

- Manual cleaning bath
- Label protection clamp
- Drying rack.
- Funnel and filter papers for re-use of fluid
- 1 litre of record cleaning fluid



Knosti Disco AntiStat

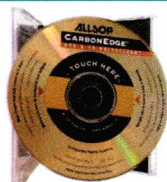
The principle is simple – two discs with a 100mm diameter clamp each side of the record's label, thus protecting it during cleaning. This then rests in a groove at the top of the

rectangular cleaning bath, which is topped up with supplied cleaning fluid. The record is then rotated around its central axis and as it passes through the bath, two sets of brushes clean each side of the album.

Once you're happy with the results, simply remove the record and centre clamps and place your clean album on the rack to dry. Because the cleaning solution contains a wetting agent, records dry without smears. The cleaning fluid can also be re-used by filtering through the special funnel provided.

Only £44.95

Allsop Carbon Edge laser lens cleaner



Carbon Edge gives results that can be a real ear-opener. Carbon fibre brushes gently clean your laser lens, effectively removing all manner of dust and grime as well as preventing static build-up.

Only £14.95

Caig Laboratories Inc DeoxIT & ProGold contact cleaner and signal enhancer



Caig DeoxIT and ProGold are two contact cleaning treatments that can make a huge difference to audio. DeoxIT features fast-acting deoxidising agents that clean, preserve and improve conductivity on all metal connectors and contacts. DeoxIT is recommended for surfaces that have oxidation or corrosion.



ProGold has been specially formulated to improve conductivity and protect. ProGold outperforms its competitors by stabilising connections between similar and dissimilar metals, giving performance and protection.

DeoxIT (200ml) Only £13.95

ProGold (20ml) Only £13.95

Last Stylus Cleaner



Last Stylus Cleaner dramatically reduces the risk of record damage by completely cleaning the stylus, removing all accumulated deposits and particles. Improve playback accuracy and reduce noise and sound distortion with Last.

Only £19.95

Nagaoka anti-static record inner sleeves & high quality record outer sleeves



Considered by many an audiophile/music enthusiast to be the finest anti-static record inner sleeves in the world. Their distinctive curved base fits perfectly into the card inner sleeves. 50 sleeves in each pack.

Only £14.95

Keep disc covers safe with these high quality 400-gauge polythene outer sleeves.

Only £1.20

Anti-static carbon fibre record brush



Two lines of carbon fibre bristles work together to remove all manner of dust and fluff from a record's surface. The brush rests on a handy black stand that doubles as a way to clean the carbon fibre bristles.

Only £7.95

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Chesky DVD Surround 5.1 Set-Up Disc	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Densen DeMagic CD	£11.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lasertrack CD2000 Set-Up Disc	£19.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ultra Burn-In CD3000	£24.95	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Clearaudio Deluxe Bubble Level	£21.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearaudio Exact Stylus Gauge	£265.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Clearaudio Stroboscopic Light	£69.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Loricraft Stroboscopic Light	£49.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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T Force Ortofon Tracking Force Gauge	£7.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Cartridge Man Digital Force Gauge	£199.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Voodoo AIRTEK (490x430mm / 45kg/oak)	£249.95	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Welcome to *Hi-Fi Choice Reader Classified*, the UK's premiere free service for second hand hi-fi. These pages are a must-read if you're thinking about buying used kit, and if you want to sell something it's definitely the place to be.

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FOR SALE

ARCAM ALPHA 8 CD, Alpha 8 amp, Alpha 8 power amp. Acoustic energy AE109s, £550. Eddie/Ros 01689 851005 (Kent).

ARCAM ALPHA 9 CD player, mint condition, boxed, £260. Clive 01732 882530 or email tccoop@btopenworld.co.uk (Kent).

ARCAM ALPHA CD player with HDCD and DCS ring DAC. Boxed, excellent condition, £345. Rod 01706 345418 (Rochdale).

AUDIBLE ILLUSIONS L1 Line Valve preamp for sale. Excellent condition, boxed. Valves changed three months ago with matched factory pair plus one pair spare. Black brushed aluminium fascia. (£2,300) £1,200 ono. 07881 988122 (London).

B&W P4 floorstanding speakers, cherrywood, bi-wireable. Excellent sound quality. (£675) £200. Glenda 01908 584153 or email glenian@tinyworld.co.uk (Milton Keynes).

CASTLE HARLECH speakers, yew finish (£980) £450 ono, *Hi-Fi Choice* Best Buy. Happy to demo. 01843 601919 or email miller.alicol@virgin.net (Kent).

CASTLE PEMBROKE floorstanding speakers. Rosewood, mint cond, original packaging, £250. 07977 185216 or email david.fenton@met.police.uk (Kent).

COMPLETE CYRUS system. DAD3 CD, straightline amp, XPA power, PSXR, quality rack, stands cables. Mission 750LE speakers. (£2,400) £1,200. 07720 597667 or ajmal@dar007.freeserve.co.uk (Notts).

DECCA CORNER HORN, immaculate cond, Wharfedale super 8, circa 1950. Collectors item. Mr Allen 01485 542661 (King's Lynn).

EZO CD, preamp, pair mono power amps 200 watts. Silver, boxed mirage FRX9 semi-active speakers (£5,300) £2,500. 01885 410517 (Worcs).

GRAAF GM20 £1,500. Conrad Johnson PV12A preamp with phono stage £1,000. Helios 1 CD player £500. 01395 442194 (South West).

KEF Q355 £70, Tannoys £50. Mr K.Bennett 01438 221477 (Stevenage).

KENWOOD QUARTZ synthesiser. AM/FM stereo tuner KT-2030L. Very good cond. £100. David 01834 860934 (eves). (Narberth).

KRELL KAV300I integrated amplifier, 150wpc, remote, manual, boxed. As new cond. (£2,550) £1,300 ovno. Matthew 07976 833168 (Bath).

MANA SOUND FRAME rack, £100. Kef Q35 (£350) £150 Musical Fidelity X-Linx interconnect £35. Marantz ST40 FM tuner (£140) £75. Partington speaker stands £20. Jason Moore 07831 271714 (Surrey).

MARANTZ ST17 Top of the range RDS tuner, gold. FM/AM/LW. Mint with manual and box £350 ono. Richard 01424 216769 (East Sussex).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANS V2 £95. Marantz PM6010 OSE amp £90. Beyerdynamic DT231 H/Phones £30. Cambridge DAB300 Digital Tuner £75. All mint and boxed plus unused Audax HD3P gold tweeters, £150 pair. Pete 0115 9754070 (Nottingham).

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-PRE/X-psu with XA-50 monoblocks (£850) £400. X-ray CD (£800) £450. Jason Moore 07831 271714 or 01883 345 305 (eves). (Surrey).

WANTED

POWER AMP, large size and power. Must be in good condition. 07932 330269 (Lancs).

TARGET M SERIES equipment rack, shelves, spacers etc. Mark 01256 387565 (Basingstoke, Hants).

NAIM ALLAE speakers, beautiful cherry finish, 11 months old, selling due to upgrade. Boxed, etc. Excellent cond. Will accept £1,350 ono. Rod 020 8689 8750 or email rod.ayling@bt.com (Greater London).

NAIM CDS2 and XPS with boxes leads and flash. Both 2001. Mint condition, will demonstrate. Selling due to upgrade to CDS3. £3,300. 01793 341059 (Wilts).

PIONEER A300R PRECISION amp, full after-market upgrade by Tom Evans. Proof of mods, manual, remote, original box. Immaculate, £500. email jobc@totalise.co.uk (Sussex).

PIONEER DV737. (£700) £250 ono. Progressive scan. Martin 020 7684 2046 (London).

PMC FB1 speakers three yrs old £600. Rega Planar 2 (super bias) six years £75. Creek P43R/A52SE amps four years £350. 5m 8TC speaker cable £175. Silver Streak interconnect £50. 01424 425679 (Hastings).

PMC FB1 speakers, mint cherry finish, boxed as new (£1,410) £1,050. Fantastic pace, depth and detail, house purchase forces sale. Ian 01483 729552 (Surrey).

PMC floorstanding speakers transmission line. Dynaudio units in solid elm cabinets. Mint cond £200. 01621 860630 (Essex).

PRIMARE PRE30 and A30.2 £1,600. KEF Reference 2 speakers

WANTED

Wanted: Sony TA-F1000s amplifier, finish, shoebox model M with remote and prefera manual. Rod 01706 345418. Also PM&A or condition. Jeff 020 842 250. Roksan Arte. John 01462 91111. B&W 1

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£800. Chord Anthem interconnect £150. QED Genesis speaker cable 2x4m £160. All immaculate. Keith 07968 722397 or 01242 578135 (Cheltenham).

QED GENESIS speaker cable 5M stereo pair (not bi-wire). Air-lock terminations. May be able to deliver £200. Ken 07754 188247 or email mcgowran@tesco.net (South Cumbria).

QUAD EL 63 electrostatic speakers, as new. One speaker requires new elements, £500 ono. 01666 504129 (Tetbury, Glos).

ROKSAN ROK ONE speakers vgc. 18 months old, 100 watts (£595) £300. Adrian 0114 2442192 (Sheffield).

RUARK CRUSADER II as new bi-wire/tri-wire floorstanding speakers. HFC recommended. Stored and hardly used, boxed with manual. (£1,600) £650 ono.

Richard 01372 743864 or email rayments@epsomhq.fsnet.co.uk (Surrey).

RUARK CRUSADER MKII floorstanding speakers, walnut finish. Rare opportunity to buy in excellent condition with manufacturer's boxes, £700 ono. 023 8073 8935 (Southampton). **SME SERIES 309** tonearm. Mint, boxed with all accessories and manual £350. Also AT OC9, price negotiable. 020 8777 6015 (Croydon).

SONY 51-INCH widescreen rear projection TV. TVB, nicam, silver finish, mint condition. £1,700. Mick 07932 330269 (Lancs).

SONY CDP-XE520 CD player for sale. With digital output and remote. Good condition except one wobbly button. £60. Nick 07717 777584 (Bristol area)

SONY ES system in black comprising of FA50ES amplifier, XA50ES CD player, JA50ES

MiniDisc recorder, SA3ES tuner plus B&W CDM 1 speakers. Boxed and in immaculate cond. (£4,300) will accept £2,200. Also TAP 9000ES multichannel preamp in gold, £400. 0151 4254142 (North Cheshire).

SOUND ORGANISATION Hi-fi stand, gloss black. Five adjustable glass shelves, spiked £90. Mick 07932 230269 (Lancs).

SOUNDSTYLE X6105 five-shelf hi-fi stand, Misura green, mint condition, (£310) £100. 01759 380596 (York).

SPENDOR PRELUDE large standmount speakers. Excellent cond with boxes. £90 no offers. Graham 01702 520063 (Southend).

SPENDOR SP1 speakers with stand and deliver stands, good condition with original boxes and manuals £385. Andy 01508 549071 (Norfolk).

SUGDEN pre/power amp. Signature 41 remote line preamp with 100-watt AU41 power £500. 01733 810516 (Peterborough).

TECHNICS REFERENCE Series 2000, pre/power amp, CD player, all mint with boxes and instructions. (£2,800) £975. 01782 256087 (Stoke On Trent).

THORENS TD124 MkII turntable in plinth, SME 3009

arm, unmarked £300. Revox G36 1/4 track stereo valve tape recorder, new capstan and service, ex condition £300. 01782 256087 (Stoke On Trent).

THX ULTRA power amps, DD/DTS pre/processor, Denon DVD 2900, B&W 604 S3 plus ancillaries. All mint and boxed. Call 07880 837425 (Manchester).

TOM EVANS MICROGROOVE phono stage with Lithos regulation £399. 01344 621388 or email gpanton@gpanton.evesham.net (East Berkshire).

TOTEM MODEL 1 biwirable mini monitor loudspeakers (Not Signatures). Approximately five years old, fantastic sound, perfect condition, box, grilles, stands, cables etc. (HFC 247). £850 ono. Geoff 01403 254 973 (Sussex).

YAMAHA DSPE800 processor mint £150 ono. Sonic Link AST200 bi-wire speaker cable 2x3 metres terminated £50. Van den Hul first ultimate coaxial cable, one metre £70 ono. Nick 07760 261056 (W.Mids).

YAMAHA SYSTEM, Class A power amp M-85, control amp C-85, CD-2000, tuner T-85, cassette decks K-1020 and K-340, turntable TT-500/U, speakers NS-1000x. Little used. £1,100. Colin 01442 863843 (Herts).

Below: Ruark Crusader MkII - £650 ono



BUYING TIPS

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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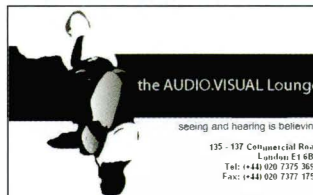
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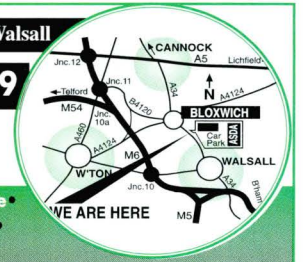


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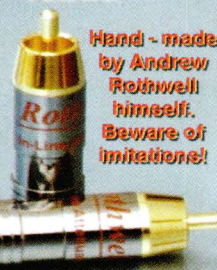


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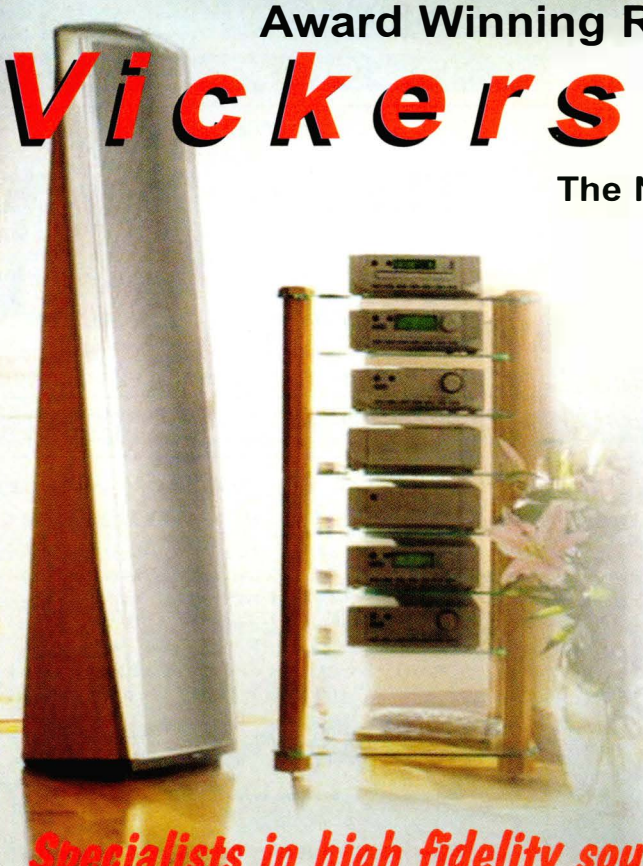
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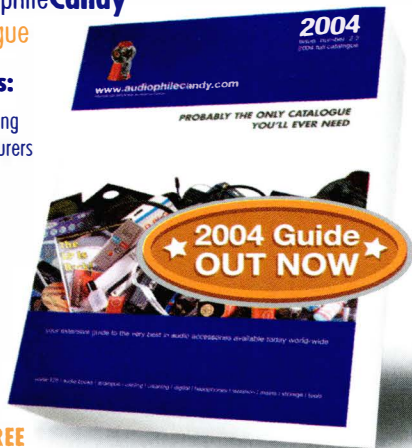


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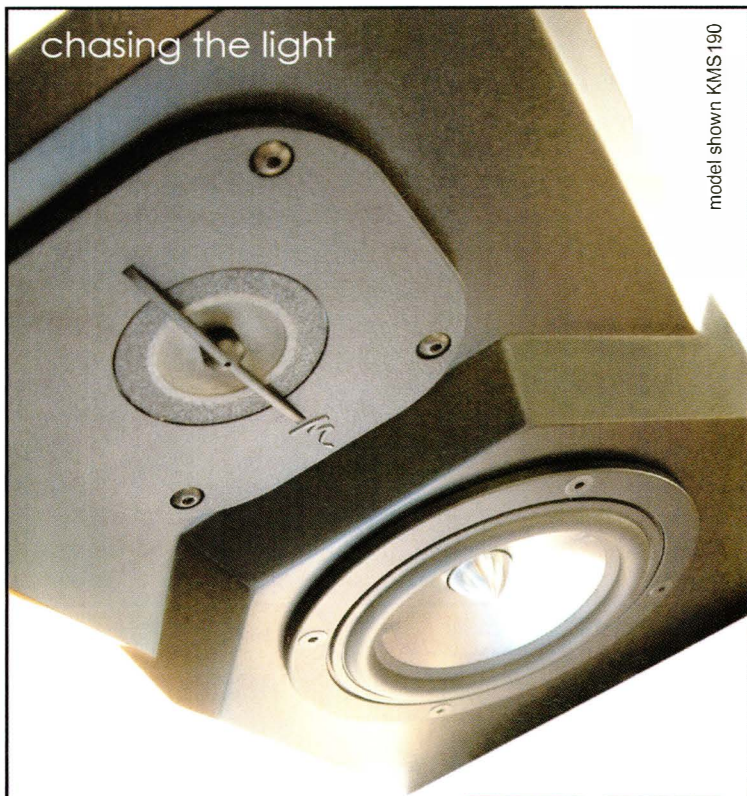
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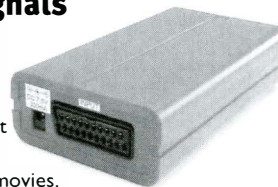
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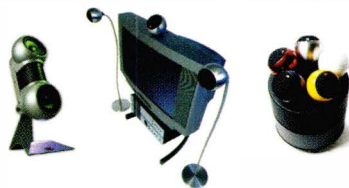


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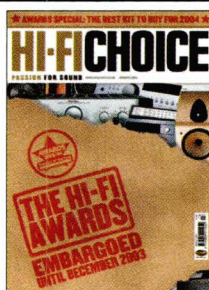
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HI-FI EXTREME



Tiny tones

David Vivian sings the praises of little speakers for little people

Nearly bumped into Cliff Richard a few weeks ago. He was standing in front of me in the queue to collect a new passport. Couldn't help noticing how much hair he still had and how little space he took up. Apparently, he's on the Hay diet. I wondered if this had something to do with the strange, chestnut hue to his rug, but there was no doubting his svelteness. Surprisingly short, too.

I kicked myself later for missing a golden opportunity. I could have nailed the great Sir Cliff mystery that's been haunting legions of hi-fi enthusiasts for over a decade. Assuming they're all wired for sound, which kind of speakers does he really prefer – tall speakers or small speakers? With a bit of patience, I'm sure I could have secured the answer (and, as an aside, did he have any plans to make another roller skating video?)

I reckon small. Cliff could wander into the shadow cast by a JBL K2 and go missing for weeks. Personally, I'm a small speaker man, always have been. I've never been able to sell my Mk1 Linn Kans, partly because in most systems they sound awful, but also because they're so aesthetically right – small black boxes, flush black grilles, perfect.

Okay, it's easier to make a big speaker look

and, indeed, sound impressive. Size, power, drive units that shift serious air, it's hardly rocket science. I've been 'blown away' by monster designs on countless occasions: PMC's £30K BB1s in a 5.1 studio setting were just extraordinary. And at Chord's extremely spacious listening room, I've had my chest cavity threatened by both B&W 801s and the aforementioned K2s. Helps if you've got hundreds of Chord watts on hand, of course.

“Cliff Richard could wander into the shadow cast by a JBL K2 speaker and go missing for weeks.”

To live with, though, it's small speakers that have always honked my horn. It isn't just that, like Sir Cliff, they take up so little space. It's more fundamental than that. Volume and bass notwithstanding, they simply sound better. And the simpler the design, the more magical the results. We're all familiar with small speakers' strengths – better box rigidity, lower panel resonance, two-driver coherence, superior imaging – but that doesn't make it any less startling when we hear the cumulative effect.

My favourite babies at the moment are AVI's made-to-order Positron V6.2. A genuine two-way miniature with a rear-ported six-litre box, hand-made and calibrated using what AVI describes as “the best drive units available”. The design brief is to deliver genuine high-end mid-range neutrality, resolution and transparency at 'modest' levels in smallish rooms. And it does so magnificently.

But just how far can you shrink things and keep it real? Just what are the smallest genuine hi-fi speakers on the planet if you exclude multichannel sats like KEF's KHT2005s? British speaker manufacturer Monitor Audio reckons its Radius 90 – the smallest model in its new multi-purpose lifestyle range – fits the bill and I haven't found anything smaller. The 90 is truly tiny for a two-way, measuring barely seven inches high by just over four-and-a-half wide. Perfectly formed, though. The metal matrix polymer bass/mid driver is a miniature version of that found in the excellent (much larger) Bronze 2, while the 25mm gold C-CAM tweeter is said to extend to 25kHz. The crossover uses high-grade metalised Polypropylene capacitors, air core inductors and laminated iron core inductors to minimise distortion, and all internal wiring is PCOFC. A single bolt provides a degree of mechanical decoupling but also acts as a cross brace giving the rear-ported MDF enclosure great rigidity and very low resonance. It needs to sound a whole lot bigger than it looks, of course, but, like Sir Cliff, it can do that too. **HFC**

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