

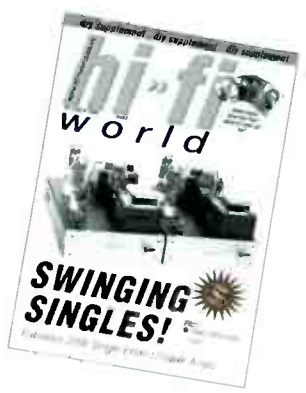
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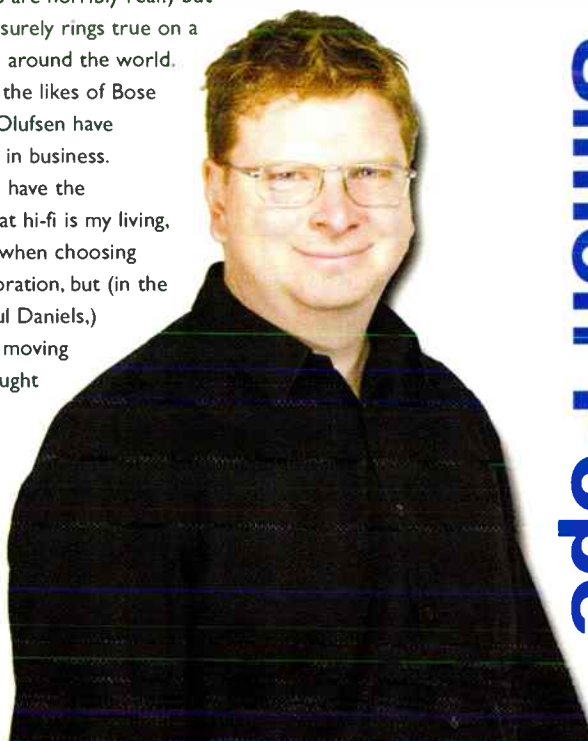
Next to the death of a close relative, moving house is the most stressful experience known to mankind. Two weeks ago I'd have said this was poppycock, but not so now. I recently experienced my first move into what estate agents call a 'project', one which will no doubt have me very busy at weekends for the next five years, and that's just the kitchen! For the dedicated audiophile at least, moving home is more stressful than even the demise of your nearest and dearest, the last squawk of your parrot or perhaps the end of humankind as a whole. Forget the travails of leaky roofs, dry rot and dodgy plumbing - I now have the horrors of suspended wooden floorboards to deal with. Convincing my other half that this is more important than the other aforementioned domestic catastrophes is tough. My recommendation that I should place some tasteful paving slabs in the bay window proved as popular as suggesting a four year stretch in Holloway.

Then, of course there's the problem of where exactly to put everything. Weeks of trying new listening positions and equipment placement will doubtless prevent me from picking up a paint brush while I deal with far more important matters. And then there's fitting it all in - the loft's already full with hi-fi boxes. (No matter how many times you view a place before buying, it always looks bigger before the damn thing is yours to live in.) Once in, your previously spacious accommodation fast becomes a rabbit hutch and your quest for musical enjoyment

ends up blocking out the daylight.

Two things have now dawned on me. One, hi-fis and family homes rarely harmonise, and two, much of it is bloomin' ugly. I've finally realised that great snakes of cable, industrial stands laden with smoking 40kg valve amps, esoteric turntables and all manner of gadgets hardly contribute to a happy, orderly home. Apologies then to those readers who've written to us in despair asking for solutions to their domestic hi-fi problems. Sorry for ignoring you! In our defence though, it was purely down to ignorance. Now I too may have to face a few hours a day in a sturdy locked shed to save my marriage...

Okay, I'm exaggerating to make my point (not much though - the roof and windows are horribly real!) but it's one that surely rings true on a daily basis all around the world. It's also why the likes of Bose and Bang & Olufsen have stayed firmly in business. Fortunately I have the advantage that hi-fi is my living, which helps when choosing interior decoration, but (in the words of Paul Daniels,) not a lot. So moving house has taught me one important lesson - to pay far more attention to certain readers' letters in future!



Simon Pope



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THIS MONTH SEES A GATHERING OF SIX BUDGET CD PLAYERS. WILL THIS POPULAR SECTION OF HI-FI CONTINUE TO THRIVE UNDER THE THREAT OF NEW TECHNOLOGY? THE HI-FI WORLD TEAM REVEAL ALL.

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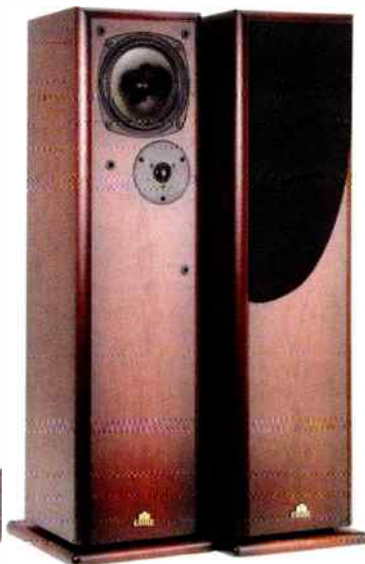
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World Radio History

WORLD NEWS

TURMOIL HITS MUSIC BIZ

To the obvious consternation of many corners of the music industry, the Napster saga continues. The online music file swapping site set up by Shawn Fanning has been an enduring thorn in the side of the recording industry, and its fate could well affect prices of music CDs in the US and Europe, as well as the cost of downloadable songs from Internet music portals.

In a San Francisco appeals court last month, Napster was given a last minute reprieve after having been ruled illegal and told to shut down. Napster's stay of execution was granted until early September, when it will appeal against the injunction granted against it by US District Court Judge Marilyn Hall Patel back in July. Judge Patel had ruled

that the site be closed from July 28, saying it encouraged copyright infringement.

Several major labels plus musicians including Metallica claim the site, which lets people download music for free, encourages piracy. Rap artist Dr. Dre called it, "an heroic and historic decision".

Other musicians, though, like Radiohead's bassist Colin Greenwood, believe it's an inevitability and accept the likes of Napster as the future. Further support comes from

Public Enemy's Chuck D, who reportedly said "Trying to stop the process of file sharing is like trying to control the rain."

www.napster.com

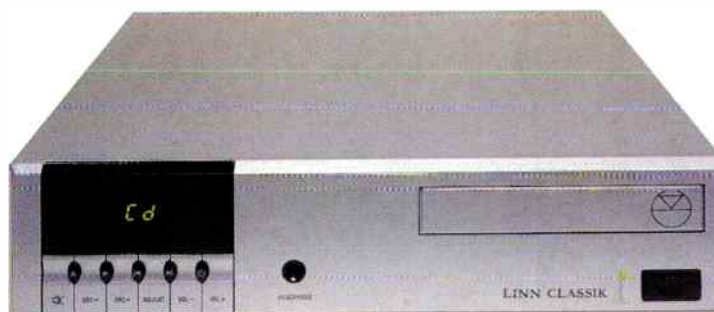


CLASSIK ROCKS?

Linn's latest Classik combines the electronics from its last-generation entry level separates (the well reviewed Mimik CD player and Majik-I amplifier/tuner) in one sleek box for just £995. You get stacks of features from a packed remote control (imagine the worst excesses of Japanese midi systems and double it), including Bass and Treble controls, independent Listen and Record switching, and even a timer activated switched AC mains supply. This, Linn point out, means the Classik can wake you up with music and freshly

brewing coffee - assuming you plugged in a coffee maker the night

before, that is! Coming in five colours (silver, black, Artik White, Pacifik Blue and Atlantik Green), it's an interesting package. Look out for a full review in Hi-Fi World soon, plus an in-depth Linn special later this year. For more details contact Linn on 0141 307 7777 or point your web browsers at Linn



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HACKER FIGHTS BACK...

The Motion Picture Association of America last month filed a lawsuit against a US journalist who distributed computer code that can be used to crack DVD's copyright management system. The MPAA argued that it illegally circumvented DVD's vital copyright protection system. David Touretzky, an artificial

intelligence researcher at Carnegie Mellon University countered that computer programs are expressions of thought and free speech, and therefore demand full First Amendment protection, like any other language. He is reported as saying that as a scientist, "My theories are expressed as computer

programs." The judge, Lewis A. Kaplan, said the argument was "persuasive", but that it may not be relevant to the legal question at hand. This law court drama will doubtless continue, graphically illustrating the problems the 'entertainment industry' is now having with copyright policing in the digital age.



CHIC PHILIPS DVD PLAYER LEAD THE WAY

The news that Philips has launched a new DVD-Video player aimed at audiophiles may come as a surprise to many. Over the past few years the brand has pretty much deserted the high end to concentrate on entry level hi-fi and all-in-one audio systems. The new DVD-960 marks an interesting change of direction then, featuring 'the highest performing video and audio

digital-to- analogue conversion processing systems' (i.e. decent DACs!) and luxury build with white anodised aluminium metalwork.

There's also a constantly powered-up Standby Mode, plus optical and coaxial digital outputs for MPEG, Dolby Digital and DTS outboard decoders. It's an interesting product but still something of a halfway

house, because while it should play 24/96 audio discs (thanks to its DVD-Video compatibility), it lacks the full 24/192 DVD Audio package but, being Philips, will play CD-R/RW discs.

Philips Consumer Electronics
Customer Information line
Philips UK Tel: 020 8689 2166



LECSON RETURN WITH DVD

The name Lecson may be familiar to many readers. Back in the seventies they produced a stylish range hi-fi to many a discerning audiophile. The name is to soon reappear in branches of Debenhams throughout the UK in the form of a budget DVD player, exclusive to the store. Sound familiar? Well, the new name behind Lecson is none other than Stan Curtis, late of Wharfedale and Quad, one of those responsible for bringing Wharfedale's budget DVD to Tesco's shelves.

He states that during his time in

Wharfedale he "was able to deliver a new standard in high quality affordable electronics". Knowing the potential of supplying exclusively to mass market chain stores, he's hoping sales of the Lecson DVD-900 will emulate the success of Wharfedale's DVD-750, this time in a department store rather than a supermarket. The DVD-900 features on-board Dolby 5.1 and DTS decoding and can be periodically loaded with a CD-R disc which will re-write internal software for future format features and progress.

Expect to see the Lecson DVD-900 on the shelves of your nearest Debenhams from September, priced at £199.95.

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Philips have announced that they're to planning to double production capacity of CD-RW drives due to growing demand. By the end of next year they intend to produce an output capability of twenty million units per year. As well as the success of CD recorders in the UK and USA, Philips intend to expand this success by increasing production from plants in Belgium, Hungary and China, as well as joining up with Ionics EMS

in the Philippines to open a new production facility.

Taco Gerbranda, General Manager of Philips' Optical storage CD-RW Business Line notes that, "CD-RW has struck a responsive chord among manufacturers and consumers alike." This would appear to be true, as in the UK alone, three of the top ten selling players are recorders (two from Philips), so consumers are welcoming CD-

RW technology with open arms and it doesn't appear to be letting up. Many more manufacturers are producing CD recorders as opposed to player-only models, so expect to see many more models cropping up over the next year or so, with Philips mechanisms!

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DVD-MULTI ANNOUNCED

In order to ensure the future compatibility of all DVD products, the DVD Forum recently announced a plan to prevent conflicts between the many differing DVD formats. At the moment DVD comes in a number of different flavours, including DVD Audio and DVD Video.

The new DVD Multi name incorporates all DVD's disparate hardware formats into one single specification, giving consumers a reasonable chance of buying what they wanted. There will also be a special DVD Multi logo applied to hi-fi separates, consumer electronics and personal computers, guaranteeing universal compatibility. The specifications will be finalised this Autumn and the first DVD Multi products should be ready

for sale early next year.

It looks likely that domestic DVD Multi players will be able to read the DVD-Video and/or DVD-Audio recorded on DVD-Video discs, DVD-Audio discs, DVD-RAM discs, DVD-RW discs and DVD-R discs, but DVD Video-only pplayers cannot read DVD-Audio discs, and DVD-Audio- only players cannot read DVD-Video discs. DVD Multi Recorders will be able to read in the same way as DVD Multi Players. DVD Multi Recorders will be able to write on DVD-RAM, DVD-RW and DVD-R discs.

Acting Chairman of the DVD Forum Koji Hase is reported as saying, "This is good news for consumers. The introduction of DVD products bearing the DVD Multi logo means

that consumers will be able to buy virtually any DVD product without worrying about its compatibility with another type of DVD disc or DVD machine." He added that, "with the global DVD market valued at around \$10 billion at the end of 1999 and forecast to double by the end of this year, and with new formats and products in the manufacturing pipeline, it was time to take action".



next issue

Here's a selection of some of the delights that we hope to bring you next month

SUPER SYSTEMS

We select some of the best one-brand systems that money can buy from names such as Sony, Roksan and Musical Fidelity.

Computer Audio World

New Media

The Lowdown on all tomorrows music carriers

Rio's Return

s3's latest Rio PMP 600 reviewed in depth



CD'S SAVIOURS?

Hi-Fi World gathers together six of the latest budget CD players to assess their worth. Will the rapidly changing world of digital audio challenge their capabilities?

With the stratospheric rise in sales of DVD-V players over the past year manufacturers are becoming loathe to launch yet another CD player that may not sell. This is especially the case in the 'mid price' £300-500 market. People looking for players here are often young, high-disposable-income gadget freaks that want to buy the latest technology. Since DVD will play CD, the market for dedicated CD players is fast disappearing.

There will always be those who want better audio quality than that

available from cheaper DVD players and this is where manufacturers have turned their attentions. Presuming that the one area of likely continuing sales in CD players lies in the budget market, production at the cheaper end continues. Players at this level are affordable enough to act as a 'bridging' product until the market, currently in a state of turmoil due to the promise of recordable DVD formats, as well as DVD-Audio and SACD, sorts itself out, or until DVD players with required audio abilities become cheaper still.

Budget CD spinners are also improving in sound quality. A model that will cost you, say, £150 today isn't sonically far off a £300 player of two years ago, making them exceptional value for money in the sound stakes.

Here we've gathered six of the best current players between £100-£200 and given them our usual tough and thorough review procedure. We'll tell you the best to buy for sound and facilities and whether, if music's your priority, they're a better purchase, for the time being at least, than a DVD machine. ■



DENON DCD-435 £130



MARANTZ CD5000 £150

Always to the front where value for money is concerned, Denon have again cooked up a solid sound-for-pound mixture. The DCD-435 has a slightly greater quoted S/N ratio than some at 103dB; the front panel proudly proclaiming an '8 times over sampling' filter, so we ought to be in for a smooth ride. The spartan back panel has only analogue phono and digital optical outputs - no 'system connectors here - but at least the mains lead is detachable, a convenience often forgotten with budget gear. 'Any colour so long as it's black' just about sums up the front. The buttons are all familiar and common sense in operation and all the accustomed functions are present. The supplied remote control duplicates all of these functions.

Beginning with the Telarc 'authentic' recording of Porgy and Bess, it was apparent that the Denon had been carefully trimmed to avoid extremes of muddiness or over-sharpness. There were places where the solo vocals could have been a bit more forward, but this was balanced by the rich clarity of the chorus. Cincinnati's well-known Pops orchestra was similarly well-portrayed along this middle path.

Having established that the Denon is careful to avoid muddiness, it was interesting to compare its playing of the Glazunov symphonies with the Onkyo. Certainly the Denon gave more detail and distinctness, if lacking just a fraction of the richness.

Benny Waters is not lacking in richness but it is the incisive warmth of his playing which makes this Opus 3 record so satisfying. The Denon played everything in trumps, with excellent stereo spread and depth, including the glass-clinking audience. Tell-tale points were the attack of certain phrases in Out of Nowhere; the saxophone kept its point without shrillness, yet Waters' ever-agile playing seemed ready to leap out of the 'speakers into the room.

Denon's DCD-435 steers a sensible middle course, offering both clarity and body but can sometimes err on the bright side. Unless your system veers markedly one way or the other, it is a safe and good-value choice. ■

WORLD VERDICT

 A commendable all-rounder with a forward and rhythmic sound. Better suited to smooth sounding ancillaries.


In the world of budget CD players, Marantz have all to play for. Their current reputation, founded on excellent mid-price players a few years back, is not unassailable, so it benefits the company to make good, inexpensive models. The CD5000 is provided with analogue stereo, optical, co-ax digital and headphone outputs, making it one of the best equipped of our group. In view of the nice things we have to say about the sound, perhaps it is not too harsh to say that the machine looks and feels a bit cheap. The control buttons and drawer trimmings are plastic in a big way, although of course they work as efficiently as any other. In common with most current-generation machines it will also play CD-R/RW discs and there is a host of facilities for recording output: fade, peak monitoring etc.

If the get-up is unexciting, the CD5000 more than makes up with its sound; this is obviously where the money goes. For its combination of different instrumental sounds, plus the necessity for the full details, Beethoven's E flat major Septet is useful. With the Marantz firmly in the driving seat, this recording was a genuine pleasure, with the unusual combination of instruments 'working' well. Whilst the clarinet kept its fluidity, there was plenty of body to the horn and lower strings. Best of all the bassoon cut through everything with its harmonically rich mid-register.

Away from classical subtleties, the CD5000 gave an agreeably broad spectrum to Sorry Seems To be... well recorded by Madeline Bell. In this golden oldie, the brassy shimmer of the percussion blended seamlessly with the bass guitar; all frequencies - and cymbals can be extreme - came off the disc nicely. Stereo placement and soundstaging were above average - indeed excellent - for the price.

For extremes of power, we get tired of citing Stravinsky's Firebird, but there it is! The Marantz seemed almost to throw the orchestra through the 'speakers, with the huge sound of the bass drum well to the fore. Altogether exhilarating.

If you can live with the budget build, the CD5000 compensates with a very rewarding all-round performance. ■

WORLD VERDICT

 Not the best built of the bunch but a great sounding player that deserves a listen.

Measured Performance
 see page 111



NAD C520 £170



ONKYO DX-7222 £150

NAD's C520 is as neat as could be wished for and finished as usual in 'NAD grey'. The spartan feel to the machine is continued on the back, where there are only three sockets: standard analogue stereo output and digital (standard phono). This puts the NAD in a slightly different category. Despite the lack of optical output, the C520 is better fitted for out-board DACs than many of the group.

Buttons on the fascia provide for all the usual functions including random play and repeat. The LCD display uses the same 'brick' indication for total tracks and tracks to play. Unusually at this price there is no headphone socket. The drawer incidentally - never the most robust feature of budget machines - is unusually slow, giving a touch of smoothness to operation.

We began listening with Chandos' Matthias Weckmann CD. As well as being an early music treat, it is a good indicator of any inherent harshness of reproduction. All-in-all the NAD gave little reason for complaint here. The authentic string instruments retained their bite without giving way to harshness and the stylized vocals were acceptably clear without grating. Certainly stereo placement was of a high order although, on this record at least, the soundstage did not seem particularly deep.

Next to the impeccably recorded but rather unadventurous sound of Loius van Dijk, 'Cocktail piano' surged from the loudspeakers with a richness of texture that comes from this player's impressive midrange. Percussion accompaniment may have been a touch forward but it remained easy to live with nonetheless.

For touching off the big guns, Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture has few peers. On this budget CD, it was noticeable that the NAD's broadly good-mannered approach was less tolerant of sub-standard material recordings. This was especially so with the patently over-dubbed cannon-fire which seemed to come 'from nowhere'. While this is scarcely the NAD's fault, this CD has sounded better, though admittedly on far more expensive gear.

NAD's C520 has many virtues aside from value for money. Like most gear from this company, it aims for the solid rather than the esoteric. With its neat looks and welcoming sound, it was very easy to live with and can be well recommended. ■

WORLDVERDICT

●●●●●

A good quality player that's well built, with a detailed and rhythmic sound. Good value. ■

Onkyo's DX-7222 player is both neat and stylish; the brushed alloy with its pale champagne colour makes for quite a classy presentation at the price. Like the Sony, no digital coaxial output is provided, though analogue phono, optical digital and headphone outputs are standard. The player may be woven into a complete controlled Onkyo system via the RI connections on the back. The remote provides full services and a few which the manual buttons don't, such as repeat and shuffle. All the fixed controls on the machine's front panel are solid and sensibly laid out. The golden display makes a pleasant change, although the 'not more than twenty' track indicator is a mild disappointment.

Inexpensive CD players tend to sound their most characteristic with open-structured music, so I kicked off with the Naxos record of Haydn's Prussian Quartets. Here I was quite surprised to note the apparent sprightliness of the Onkyo; the two violins had a sound much closer to 'life' than the craggy performance of cheap CDs a few years back. The workings of the inner parts particularly benefited from this treatment and the 'cello retained a sonority which made for soothing listening.

Cross-checking this with a larger ensemble showed the downside a little. Where the filigree work of the Haydn gained in naturalness, the big Romantic orchestra of Glazunov leant towards the muddy. I am well aware that this Russian State Symphony Orchestra recording is not the clearest available but it seemed that the player was adding to the general murkiness of the sound. Instead of sounding part of the whole, the solo woodwind parts tended to stand out as oases of clarity in the dark brown ensemble.

The Glazunov is an extreme case, however. Playing Diana Krall's Love Songs, the Onkyo's smooth approach did much good work in ironing out the at-times grating edge to the vocals. Stereo placement was maintained whatever the tone values, with a real depth to the sound picture as a whole.

With its good looks and solid build, the DX-7222 gives a lot of value for money. It is possible that its smooth sound is calculated to sound 'more expensive than it is'. For most smaller scale music this works well. ■

WORLDVERDICT

●●●●●

Good quality player with a sophisticated sound for the money. Worth a listen. ■

Measured Performance see page 111

▶▶



SONY CDP-XE530 £130



YAMAHA CDX-496 £180

◀▶▶▶ **S**ony's CDP-XE530 is a neat-looking box with all controls available on the front panel. This is handy compared with some, where some of the more refined functions are only available through the remote - if you can find it! Analogue phono, optical digital and headphone outputs are provided but no digital phono. As is common nowadays, the player may be linked to other Sony components to make a complete controlled system via 'S-link' sockets on the back.

Many of the player's gadgets are of use principally when recording CDs to another medium, hence the provision of fade in/out and pre-play peak measurement. A Music Scan facility allows you to dip into ten seconds' worth of each track until you press Play to fix your choice. This seems to me to be laborious system which the rotary track skipper would accomplish in less than half the time. The display assumes a CD of not more than twenty tracks; this assumption is more often than not correct but is not ideal.

Sound quality of Sony products is generally good and the XE530 is no exception. Given the essentially intimate sound of the Rio Trio jazz ensemble, the player gave a full-bodied sound to the acoustic guitar while retaining the right 'bite' on the saxophones. Only on vocals did a slightly papery sound occur.

With larger forces, the Sony warmed to its task nicely. Opus 3's beautifully recorded disc of the Omnibus Wind Ensemble gives a peculiar end-of-the-pier feel to most of their numbers but their Carmen Overture suits this well. The Sony gave a broad sweep of colour here with an openness to the sound most welcome at the price. Woodwind sounded plaintive but fully formed - about right for this recording.

The CDP-XE530 does a very workman-like job at the price and will compensate admirably for some of the inherent defects of budget 'speakers and amps. If you prefer your Martinis dry, give it a listen. ■

WORLD VERDICT
 Well put together and confident sounding. Sony produce yet another product that's excellent value for money.

The new CDX-496 is priced at £180 (the middle model of three new players), pricing it in the upper echelons of 'budget' and into the nether regions of mid price. The looks are the same as previous models, Yamaha sticking to the 'if it ain't broken don't fix it' policy. Like most new models the CDX-496 is CD-R/RW compatible and it features a single-bit digital to analogue converter. Round the back we have the usual phono outputs but the only digital output is via an optical socket, which at this price is a bit poor.

On the plus side, the servo control system alters the pickup tracking in reaction to damaged or warped discs, which is a nice touch. Facilities are good, including manual and automatic random sequential tape programming for recording tracks and CD synchronised recording when used with a Yamaha recorder. A headphone socket with output level is also located on the no-fuss front panel. A slimline full remote control finishes off the package in a discreet fashion.

Everything, including the drawer mechanism, is so fast on this machine that you expect the sound to match, and it does. Classical music in the shape of Tchaikovsky's Fifth symphony played by the Oslo Philharmonic on Chandos sounded rich and full, if a bit muddy. The Yamaha picked up all the best points from a performance which is rich in musicality but a bit lacking in the engineering stakes. The CDX-496 reacted like many good players do to this recording, picking out instrumental phrasing well. Woodwind, whilst not the most transparent I've heard, was still involving and both bass and treble were well controlled.

Supergrass' eponymous third album was next in the drawer and here the lack of clout of the Yamaha was heard. Whilst, again, the balance and performance was near perfect, it needed that final ounce of sheer grunt to carry off the driving grooves in this music. Vocals were clean and warm and the overall performance pleasing but the many layers of production here failed to separate.

This is a no-frills sound that can be bettered at the price but is nonetheless fairly involving and easy to match with virtually any similarly-priced equipment. It all results in an unfussy, warm and user friendly CD player that deserves a listen.

WORLD VERDICT
 A bit rough round the edges but an involving listen. Can be bettered at the price.

Measured Performance
 see page 111
 ▶▶

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World Radio History

conclusion

All of the players in this group will play CDs to a more than satisfactory standard. After all, there's only so much you can do with Red Book Standard sound quality. The differences come in the facilities available, build and subtle differences in sound quality.

Pound for pound the best sounding machine here was Marantz's CD5000. It would be very hard to better the exciting yet sophisticated sound of this player at its £150 price tag. The build is slightly flimsy but features are good and it will play CDR/RW discs. Next comes

NAD's C520. This player is in the solid tradition we've come to expect from NAD: good rhythmic sound, solid build and everything you need to make listening a pleasure. It gets our vote for the best all rounder and value for money, although it's by no means the cheapest here.

Sony's CDP-XE530 came very close to the top two. It offers excellent value for money and it's well put together, but sounded a trifle harsh compared to the players from Marantz and NAD. One surprise outsider was from Onkyo. This player had good build and

facilities and a pleasant sound. The only gripe came in the form of its dated appearance.

Of the remaining two players we'd have to plump for the Denon DCD-435 above the Yamaha CDX 496. The Denon has a good, if slightly bright, sound, the build could be better but it's good value for money. Unfortunately, although it's not bad, the Yamaha player suffers from being slightly over priced. There are equally as good sounding players around for, say, £50 cheaper. If it were priced at £130, it would appear higher up on our list. ■■■

farewell to the silver disc?



Rapid technological advances in consumer electronics have left CD looking more obsolete than ever. Is it really the end for Philips ageing format, and if so, what's next?



First it happened to Shellac, then open reel tape, vinyl and Compact Cassette. Now it seems MiniDisc and - gulp - CD are soon to suffer the same fate. In this new millennium, technological development is moving apace, especially in consumer electronics.

Although popular, MP3 still isn't exactly a household name, as any OAP in Woolworths' will confirm. However, we're now being told it's heading for the knacker's yard with the introduction of Microsoft's Windows Media Audio format. Factor in the looming presence of SD card (see our Malaysian Audio Show report on p.66), not to mention MP2 and MP4, and it's all getting a bit too much! Confused, frightened, sick to the back teeth? You should be. And there's more to come.

Let's consider the immediate future of mainstream digital audio. After nigh-on twenty years the CD player is beginning to look fatigued.

Compact Disc's only saving grace is now its vast catalogue of software and the low cost of pressing discs.

But there's also another trump card this 'pure, perfect' sounding music carrier holds for the time being - CD recording. The burgeoning popularity of hi-fi CD recorders, in America especially, but also in Europe, suggests there's life in the old dog yet.

However, new advances in technology mean we can now have something more than just an audio player. Enter DVD, sales of which have exceeded all expectations since last October, when Wharfedale's £175 DVD-750 appeared between the fresh fruit and veg at Tesco.

Apparently, well over 100,000 units of this cleverly marketed machine have been shifted - a figure that's believed to represent over 50% of all UK DVD player sales.

Although many of these digital delights get plugged straight into a TV,

they also play CDs well enough to keep general punters happy. They don't achieve the sonic heights attained by the cheaper players in our group test. For this you have to climb to the £300 plus price range, to something like Pioneer's DV-525, which with 24/96 digital output produces excellent audiophile-quality sound. Although 24/96 discs are not common, coming mainly from U.S. specialist labels, at least DVD players can spin them, something beyond CD players.

A little further away lies the prospect of recordable DVD, a development threatening to give recordable CD a short life. But even boxes of cogs and wheels, with the odd laser or two, will become extinct if Panasonic and Toshiba can be believed; computer memory will take over. Sony think so too.

Next month we'll venture into this debate a little further with a dedicated multi-page feature. ■

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Having perfected the acoustics, we turned to aesthetics. Hence the choice of five stunning contemporary finishes - exquisitely book-matched veneers, now including Cherry and the highly figured pale Albina Burr, with corners carefully radiused to eliminate residual edge diffractions. In all, literally hundreds of painstaking improvements were made.

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Like all the best things in life, they still don't come cheap - but to anyone who really appreciates sound, they're better value than ever.



REFERENCE SERIES



NAD ALL



NAD's 'audiophile' T550 DVD player threatens to put its CD playing brethren to bed. Noel Keywood listens in.

Word has it that DVD is taking over, but the audio quality of most players is pretty mediocre. With a reputation for sensibly priced, serious audio NAD are well positioned to step into the DVD market with the promise of serious hi-fi quality from a sensibly priced player. Enter their new T550, price £499.00, reviewed here - a machine that plays DVD video discs, Video CDs and audio CDs.

The DVD market is a bit of a tangle, so before going any further here's what the T550 can and cannot do. It will play audio CDs like a CD player, hooking into the hi-fi in an identical manner. It should also play 24-bit/96kHz digital 'sound track audio', where "audio quality exceeding that of CDs is possible" the handbook states. Unfortunately, our tests showed it did not output audio information above 20kHz, a problem that exists with some DVD players, so there's no point trying to play 24/96 discs (e.g. Chesky) because sound quality will not exceed that of CD, contrary to what the handbook says.

Don't confuse this 'sound track audio' with forthcoming DVD-Audio

though, which has an even higher 192kHz sampling rate spec. Players meeting this specification are only just appearing in Japan, at a cost of thousands, and we are probably some time away from seeing commercial DVD Audio discs in UK shops. Current DVD players, including the T550, will not play these discs.

There's so much players like this will do though. NAD's new player has an on-board Dolby Digital AC-3 surround-sound decoder, so in addition to its stereo outputs, it has 5.1 channel sound (i.e. two front, two rear, centre and subwoofer audio outputs). It does not have on-board dts or MPEG decoders however, but is able to deliver a digital output to external decoders.

Against a similarly priced Sony DVP-S725D the T550 lacks quite a few facilities, notably an audio setup menu and a loudspeaker surround-sound set up menu. If you don't want a full cinema surround-sound setup the missing facilities are not crucial, and even if you do things like individual loudspeaker level settings can be adjusted in an external surround-sound amplifier. All the same, the T550 lacks the multitude of bells and

whistles crammed into the Sony, including the very convenient jog wheel on fascia and remote control. The handbook claims settings are held when power is switched off but the player reverted to surround sound from two channel every time it was switched off.

The T550 is aimed at the less committed surround-sound user, but that's not to say the less fastidious. NAD have a lot to say about audio quality from this machine, a topic that would be a side issue with the Sony.

Here's what NAD have to say: "The NAD T550 employs separate power supply regulators for the digital, servo and analogue circuitry. The regulators for the analogue section are designed to provide very low noise and low impedance supplies. Apart from a "clean" supply, this measure also helps keeping RF contamination by the many, very high frequency sections inside a DVD player at bay."

Many DVD players use relatively mediocre multi-channel D/A converters for their audio sections. The NAD T550 uses a Burr-Brown PCM1600, a superior chip with true 24 bit resolution. Knowing the

OVER



DVD video discs are available with high resolution 24bit/96kHz audio - better quality than CD. Here's a Chesky disc from Vivante - see www.vivante.co.uk

importance of D/A converters particularly in the context of 24bit/96kHz audio, but also for good old-fashioned 16bit/44.1kHz CD audio, the NAD engineers choose a separate D/A for the Left and Right channels. The Burr-Brown used here, the PCM1716, is a D/A converter that can be found in NAD components with true high-end, High-Fidelity aspirations.

D/A converters aren't the only critical components when it comes to performance; the analogue sections of the T550 make use of OPA2134 op-amps for Left, Center and Right. These provide a clean, open and detailed sound in the NAD C540 CD player as well. In important places, close tolerance metal film resistors and selected capacitors have been used".

Perhaps it is a bit technical, but this does show NAD have put some effort and resources into the audio side of the T550. The question is, did their efforts pay off?

In a nutshell - yes. Connected into a TAG MacLaren 60i amplifier driving World Audio Design KLS-9s, representative of a conventional hi-fi

system, it was interesting to pit the NAD against the Sony. Sony's player offers good quality audio, albeit a little incoherent against the NAD. Bass lines exist in broad outline from the Sony, as a good but subtly bland representation. Across the upper midrange though it has a glare that makes it sound detailed and insightful, these properties being a little at odds with each other. In contrast NAD's T550 delivers bass lines with power, fluidity and grip. The deep, walking bass on Angelique Kidjo's Fifa came through with no hint of weakness, nor any loss of expression.

Further up the audio band the T550 lacked the glare of the Sony, but offered lucidity and a convincing sense of balance. Whilst not holding a spotlight to the curious audio effects on Santana's Supernatural like the Sony, the T550 revealed them with superb insight. It has fine retrieval of detail and a fairly sweet nature, shown by the jangling strings of Steve Earle's guitar on You Belong to Me.

I hooked up to a Philips television using a SCART lead (Europe model only) and had no problem running

films like The Matrix. Euro players also have S-Video and Composite video out. The display doesn't identify Dolby Digital recordings, which is a pity. The player will handle discs from all regions. It's a bit slow to read a disc and start, but this shouldn't be a bother in practice.

Does NAD's T550 deliver it's promise of better audio quality? It certainly does, from normal CDs. Capable of sounding detailed, cohesive and well balanced, CD sound quality reached a high standard. It's no bland CD player, and audio buffs will appreciate the bass grunt of this machine - something of a hall mark with NAD. Pity it will not play 24-bit/96kHz audio too, but these discs are rare. Dolby surround-sound is output and DVD video of course - quite a formidable list.

Although NAD's T550 lacks the bells and whistles of Japanese players it still has the formidable array of functions to be found with DVD. This player is a good choice for audio enthusiasts who intend to hook up a DVD to their hi-fi system in order to play CDs. ■ ▲



WORLD VERDICT

Great sound quality from CD and plays DVD video well. Lack of true 24bit/96kHz audio was disappointing.

Measured Performance see page 211.

more power to the people



With the launch of Sony's mid priced SCD-XB940 SACD/CD player in their QS range comes two matching amps. Simon Pope integrates well with the TA-FB940R 'UK Special Edition'.

High resolution audio formats such as SACD and DVD-A contain high frequency musical information out to 100kHz. Compare this to CD's brick-wall limit of 21kHz and you can see that these new formats test power amplifiers and tweeters to the full. As most amplifiers reach 50kHz or so, they won't fully reproduce all information from either SACD or DVD-A. Sony have solved this problem with the launch of the TA-FB940R and TA-FB740R stereo integrated amps.

These amplifier's wider frequency response increases their 'rise time' (sound attack). They also have more stable phase characteristics, due to use of the Linear Phase Circuit found in their high-end amplifiers. Sony tell us. It is capable of meeting the demands of SACD.

Because most amplifiers are deliberately designed to go no higher than 50kHz or so, there's some truth in these claims. Amplifiers with 100kHz bandwidth are available though, from Harman Kardon for example - and it isn't difficult to design them. But we can expect a wave of new amplifiers from Japan claiming to be uniquely suitable for DVD-A and SACD all the same. It represents a good marketing opportunity.

The TA-FB940R model available in the UK has been 'tuned' according to the requirements of the Brooklands Sound Project (named after Sony's UK audio HQ in Surrey), hence the 'UK Special Edition' badge found on the fascia. The UK model has different grade power supply capacitors, the

power supply voltage has been changed and the open loop gain has been adjusted by further component change. As a result the UK edition has a higher output of 95W/channel as opposed to the 80W of the version found overseas.

Sony have given this amplifier a good range of facilities. Tone controls give a small amount of lift and cut at frequency extremes, acting subtly to alter tonal balance. There's a loudness button and even a disc stage for LP!

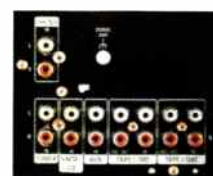
We set up the FB940R with the SCD-XB 940 SACD/CD player and initially tried it out with run-of-the-mill 44.1kHz (sample rate) CD material in the shape of the Foo Fighter's 'There Is Nothing Left To Lose' album. The amplifier gave a rumbustious reading of this powerful and tight recording. Drums were fast and detailed and the bass, whilst not quite as refined as you'd find in something twice the price, was none the less deep and well-focussed, albeit with a bit of colour. This slight colour in the bass actually adds a little bit of warmth to the overall sound, which although not strictly 'purist' in hi-fi sound, is quite pleasant!

The FB940R has commendable sound staging which gleans the best from well-mixed recordings such as this, creating depth and space in the listening environment Dave Grohl's vocals, for example, were perfectly placed. It's by no means a subtle and analytical sound of the sort expected from high-end equipment, but it can deliver the goods with power and speed.

Turning our attention to SACD, Hue And Cry's latest opus was inserted into the XB940 and here the amp showed its audiophile mettle with a more sophisticated sound than heard with CD. OK, so SACD is bound to sound superior anyway, but it was given extra breadth and space by the FB940R as confirmed by an A/B demo with TAG McLaren's excellent 60i £500 integrated. Admittedly the differences are subtle - for example there was slightly more airiness, and sometimes sharpness, at the top end with the FB940R. The 'cleaner' sound of SACD held some sibilance which had been present with CD. But although the sound was still bright and forward its refinement and control balanced things out nicely.

Like the SACD players available, there's no point in buying the FB940R solely for SACD. You'd become a little fed up with the limited number of recordings available. If you like a bright fast but powerful sound, albeit one without high-end subtlety, the FB940R has plenty else to offer, including the ability to play LP and, of course, normal CD. This wealth of facilities makes it a well featured product, one that can cope with any situation, at a keen price ■▲

SONY TA-FB904R UK EDITION £280
 Sony UK Ltd.
 The Heights
 Brooklands
 Weybridge
 Surrey KT13 0XW
 Tel: 01932 816000



WORLD VERDICT

Strong, forward sound with plenty of clout which could ultimately be a tad tiring.

Measured Performance see page 111

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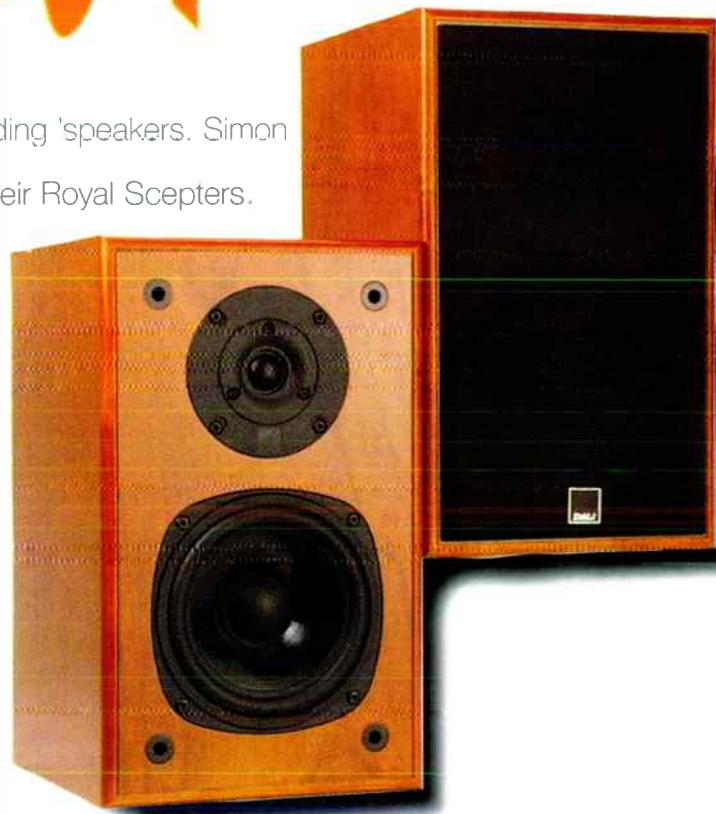


Henley Designs

World Radio History

its surreal thing

Dali have a reputation for solidly built and fine sounding 'speakers. Simon Pope dons his editorial crown and gets a grip on their Royal Scepters.



We've encountered Dali's products a couple of times in the past, most recently in a round up of mid priced stand-mounts earlier in the year. Their Royal Menuets achieved distinction in the midst of some stiff competition, showing a remarkable amount of mid and upper range detail with a solid and tuneful bass.

The Royal Scepters represent the next step up from the Menuets, priced at £650. Although still only the size of your average budget bookshelf, the dimensions are larger than the Menuets to accommodate the larger (120mm) bass/mid drive unit.

First indication that the Scepters are no run of the mill boxes is shown in the exquisite finish. The 22mm MDF enclosure is veneered in a luxurious cherry veneer, apparently polished and buffed by hand prior to the final lacquer being applied. Add to this the fact that they weigh a lot for their size and you could easily mistake them for a solid hardwood construction. Our review pair were light veneer, a darker 'Rouge' finish being also available.

The 130mm paper coated bass/mid driver (of light construction to ensure a fast response) is held in an aluminum chassis and uses the same 'Low Loss' system as used in the Menuet. This is the result of a combination of special suspension and the 'focussed magnet field'. A tuned bass reflex port is housed in the rear of the cabinet, as well as two sets of binding posts for bi-wiring. A ferrofluid-cooled, coated silk dome tweeter completes the appointments.

The hard-wired crossover is soldered by hand and eschews the use of printed circuit boards. Each component is bonded to the board in a bid

to reduce resonance. These components are selected for their neutrality and the chokes are wound by Dali in-house. Further care has been taken to present a linear impedance to the amplifier, including small phase angles to minimise amp distortion. This, claim Dali, makes the Scepters ideally suited to Class A or valve designs.

Taking note of this advice I hooked up the Scepters to our World Audio Design Kit88 valve integrated (also used was Audio Analogue's Puccini SE), with NAD's S500 Silverline CD player as a source, and set the musical ball rolling with Talk Talk's 'Spirit Of Eden' album. After a few hours burning in I was greeted with a very neutral yet warm sound, which is what you should expect considering the upper-midrange price. There's some good engineering going on here. Vocals are especially clean, with little sibilance and a pleasing amount of roundness which is rare with 'speakers of such detail, especially at this price. The experimental mix of electronic and acoustic instruments and voices used in this album (including a just about pre-wally Nigel Kennedy on violin joined by Chelmsford Cathedral Choir!) showed the finesse and control that the Scepters bring to reproduction. At no time did the sound become muddled and every phrase and tune was easily discernable.

Although the Scepters are a bass reflex design there's no whiff of bass boom to be heard. The lower registers

are taut and controlled and about as deep as you can get (or wish) from a box this size. Trying to trip them up with Underworld's bass-heavy 'Beaucoup Fish' album, I was impressed to find the Scepters taking low frequencies well in their stride. Low piano notes had a natural tone to them and electronic bass thumps remained clean and fast.

Like the Menuets, it's hard to find fault with the Scepters. Maybe the extra £250 is pushing it a bit, but then I've heard more expensive 'speakers sound vastly inferior. Treble is smooth and detailed, bass firm and tuneful and the imaging and sound stage give a beautiful out of the box sound. What else do you want from a standmount? Highly recommended. ■

Dali Royal Scepter £649.95
 Lenbrook UK Ltd.
 15 Faraday Rd.
 Aylesbury
 Bucks HP19 3RY
 Tel: 0700 00 28346

WORLD VERDICT

Excellent little speakers with a controlled, smooth and neutral sound. Great finish too.

Measured Performance see page 111

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GRAND designs

Meridian is famous for combining pioneering technology with stunning aesthetics. David Price traces the rise of this great British company through the years to the present day.



Meridian launched in 1977, the result of a partnership between one-time Lecson technical director Bob Stuart and industrial designer Allen Boothroyd. Having jointly penned one of Britain's most striking looking hi-fi products, Lecson's AC1/API pre-power, Bob decided that he wanted to start an audio company, "We both felt we had skills to produce fine sounding electronics with uniquely housable designs". The Lecson duly went on permanent display in the New York Museum of Modern Art, and brought Bob and Allen their first British Design Council Award in 1974.

The Meridian M1 loudspeaker was the company's first product, a radical active design featuring power amps installed inside the cabinets, driven by electronic crossovers. Bob's academic background in human psycho-acoustics and electronics convinced him that active speakers were the way ahead, thanks to the far greater control they gave designers over the problems

inherent in loudspeaker design. Sadly the M1s' high price made them prohibitively expensive for many audiophiles, and thus was born the smaller, simpler M2. This loudspeaker remains a favourite of Bob's to this day thanks to its ability to make, "a convincing sound from such a small package".

Back in the seventies, brashly styled separates dripping with brushed aluminium were all the rage, so the subsequent arrival of Meridian's first electronics range must have raised an eyebrow or two. The svelte looking 101/105 pre-power amplifiers comprised five diminutive 140x50x300mm boxes painted a dark olive green/brown colour. Compared to Japanese high end, their stark minimalism was almost as striking as their hefty £600 price tags. The 101/105 proved a highly capable amplifier, winning over the hearts of the British hi-fi press and proving a big hit with dealers too. Although tonally dry, it

sounded extremely detailed and refined by the standards of the day, with a fantastically capable 110w RMS power amplifier section capable of driving even the largest, power-hungry monitor loudspeakers.

The 100 series was soon augmented by Meridian's new 103 power amplifiers pushing out 50W per channel for £490. Then the 104 tuner appeared, with house styling to match the 101 preamplifier. A £225 FM-only design offering six screwdriver set presets with a small analogue tuning meter, it was another beautifully understated affair with fine ►►





Lecson AC1/AP1: Bob and Allen's first pre-power amplifier won a British Design Council Award in 1974, and is on display in the New York Museum of Modern Art

◀◀◀ sound quality. The range was subtly refined and improved over the years, and became ever more popular. Recognising this, its designers received their second gong from the Design Council in 1982.

Around this time Bob found himself involved in the early stages of development of Compact Disc, through his technical connections with Philips in Holland. For this reason, Meridian was the very first British hi-fi company to launch its own CD player, barely a year after the format had started back in 1983. Called the MCD, it's one of Bob's all-time favourite Meridian products, "it really demonstrated that digital audio had a very serious future". Although obviously based on Philips' first generation CD100 - sharing the same CDM1 Pro laser transport, diecast metal chassis and fourteen bit, Philips 1540 four times oversampling chipset - it featured a thorough reworking of its audio electronics to great effect.

The MCD proved a tremendous sales success and a big hit with the world's hi-fi press, winning awards for the best sounding CD player in seven major countries including Japan and the United States. The MCD Pro followed in 1985, adding a number of features and taking the sound quality to an even higher level. £675 bought you the original MCD with beefier power supply arrangements, a low jitter master clock, absolute phase switching, error indication and a revised disc clamping system damped by a rubber mat.

Meridian subsequently made a bold move into the integrated amp arena with the grey Nextel finished MCA-1. An ingenious modular design that clipped together with automatic electrical

connections, you could buy as many or as few bits as you needed to suit your requirements. The modules included a power amp, preamp/phono stage, line input extender, headphone amp and moving coil preamp. In basic single input guise the MCA-1 retailed for a mere £240. Sound was excellent for the price, with balanced preamp, discrete transistor phono amp and a power amp running complementary transistor output stages in dual mono configuration. With hindsight Bob is equivocal about the MCA-1, describing it as, "quite an advanced concept and rather harder to make than we had thought".

The next year Meridian surprised everyone by launching a completely revised range of electronics, the 200 Series. Visually quite different to the 100 Series 'mini-components', this new range was both physically larger and functionally far more versatile than the range it replaced. At the time, some fans of the earlier separates lamented the unspectacular styling, but some fifteen years later the 200 Series, complete with its pinstripes and shift key operation, looks no less radical! It was Meridian's most comprehensive product line up yet, and included CD players, radio tuners, pre-amplifiers, power amplifiers, digital converters and multiroom components.

Meridian's 207 CD player was one of the best selling products in the new range. A characteristically radical design, it offered a number of features completely unavailable from the company's British or Japanese rivals. First was its two-box design which physically separated the transport and DAC, allowing you to stand them side-by-side

or on top of one another. Another was its integral preamp which provided electronic volume control and source switching for two other line level inputs. This enabled CD fans to drive the player straight into a power amp or pair of active loudspeakers, the latter proving an enduring fascination for designer Bob Stuart.

The 207 proved a superb performer, offering a musical and articulate sound despite its humble electronic origins. In fact it wasn't too dissimilar to the original MCD, sharing as it did the Philips transport and fourteen bit chipset. Its superb build reflected its high £850 selling price, boasting a beautifully engineered transport housing complete with metal sleeve and glass front plate, pinstriped of course!

Unfortunately its control system - which included a programming feature for the first time - was an utter chore. This fact was obviously missed by Britain's Design Council, who gave Bob and Allen their third bauble in 1988. This, Meridian point out, is the only time a design team has won the award on three separate occasions. The CDR followed next. Although CD recorders are pretty run-of-the-mill these days, in the late eighties it was a staggeringly advanced piece of kit. Costing £5000, the CD-R wrote onto £30 blank discs with remarkable fidelity to the original.

In 1989 the company stamped its name on the super-fi scene with dramatic effect, with the introduction of the world's first digitally-driven loudspeaker, the £7,650 Meridian D6000. At the time it was arguably the most radical speaker ever. A fully active design with built-in electronic digital

D6000: Meridian's first active digital loudspeaker gave a stunningly clean and open sound





551 Integrated amp: smooth detailed sound allied to great flexibility

converters, preamp, digital signal processing crossovers and amplifiers, everything upstream of the power amps (and drive units) worked in the digital domain. Using an 'intelligent' remote commander, the D6000 even offered complete control of other suitably equipped Meridian separates, from source, track and channel switching to volume levels.

Each speaker comprised two units, a bass enclosure containing four 210mm woofers running in parallel, plus electronics which ran an umbilical up to the upper trapezoidal cabinet containing a 170mm mid/bass driver and SEAS metal dome tweeter. Fascinatingly, no attempt was made to engineer the driver/enclosure combination to give a flat response. Instead, all the equalisation was done actively in the digital domain. The result was an amazingly open sounding loudspeaker with Herculean amounts of control, if a touch dry and hard sounding. Twelve years on, the idea of 16bit digital speakers might sound questionable, but the D6000 is nevertheless an engineering *tour-de-force* which looks destined for a place in history. Bob counts it as one of his all-time favourites, arguing that, "for the first time a speaker system was able to place instruments in space and reproduce dynamics".

Meridian was no less busy innovating and launching new products in the nineties. After a management buyout in 1992 supported by Bob Stuart, The Meridian Group was formed, comprising Meridian Audio Limited, Digital Gramophone & Wireless Ltd, and Meridian America Inc. The new company immediately set to work on the new 500 Series, which was finally launched in

July 1993. Despite more sober, conservative styling, the new twelve-strong product range had vastly improved features and ergonomics which effectively brought the brand into the Home Entertainment market. With products like Meridian Digital Theatre, based on the 565 Surround Sound Processor and a range of DSP loudspeakers, the brand is spreading its wings further afield.

Despite branching out to over thirty products, the company has also remained true to its hi-fi roots. The £1,200 Meridian 506-24 CD player carries on the original MCD's tradition of sweet, smooth, clean sound from silver disc, while the 551 integrated offers much of the magic of the MCA-1 but with even greater flexibility and superior sound. As Meridian's entry-level pre-power the £1445 501/555 pre-power is a high quality multi-purpose amplifier ready for all manner of applications.

MODERN MUSIC

These days Meridian is a mature British high end specialist with about 80% of its products sold overseas, much of this going to North America. Currently employing over 100 people in the UK and 11 in the USA, it is based in Huntingdon, the UK's 'hi-fi Silicon Valley' in Cambridge, in a 25,000 square foot factory.

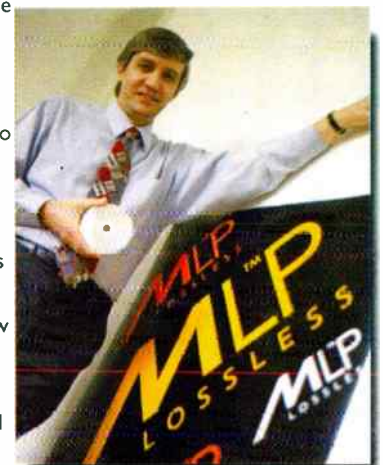
The story doesn't stop here though, because the company wrote itself into hi-fi's history books once again when Meridian Lossless Packing (MLP) was incorporated in the DVD-Audio 1.0 specification. This is soon to become a subset of DVD Universal (also incorpo-

rating DVD-Video, DVD-ROM, DVD-RAM and DVD-R) which all next generation DVD players will use, and puts Meridian on the world's hi-fi map once and for all.

A clever way of storing more digital audio data in a limited space, MLP enables standard DVD discs to offer over one hour of six channel audio at up to 24bit, 96kHz resolution. Crudely put, it permits better sound for a given 'bit budget', something digital audio devotees should be very thankful for! Bob cites MLP as another of his favourite Meridian products, thanks to its superior efficiency to rival coding systems. He says that without its dramatic technical superiority, he would have failed in his "David and Goliath" struggle to convince the Japanese electronics giants in the DVD Forum to adopt it.

The future promises more "high resolution audio rendering systems" (as Bob calls them) and the presence of Meridian Lossless Packing in the forthcoming DVD Audio-Recordable specification. Watch out also for a growing presence in Home Theatre, digital video and multimedia, and even a commitment to support the new compressed audio formats like MP3. After nearly a quarter of a century in the audio business, Meridian remains a consistently innovative and charismatic player. Few others have combined aesthetic beauty, ergonomic excellence and excellent sound so successfully. ■▶▶

Bob Stuart: shaping the future of digital audio



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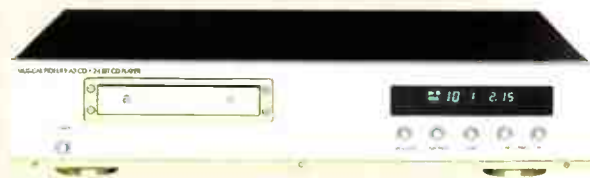


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MUSICAL FIDELITY X-Plora Tuner



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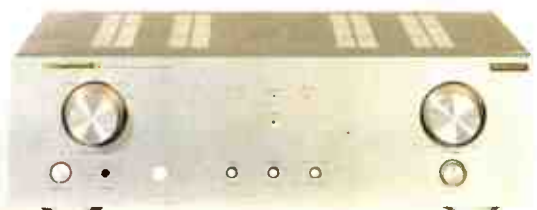
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4 bits better?



Meridian's new 506.24

has 4 more bits than its 506.20 precursor. But what does this mean in practice? David Price tries a bit of the other...



I knew it would happen. After the temporary respite provided by Bitstream, the bit wars are raging again. Anyone into hi-fi at the end of the eighties was constantly assaulted by '18bit, 8 times oversampling' (or whatever) legends plastered all over the fascias of Technics, Denon, Sony, et al. Now the 'bit race' is back on track, so prepare yourselves for a Spinal Tap-style 'my amp's 11 louder 'cos it goes to 11' world!

In truth, using 24bit DACs to play 16bit CD is rather like buying a Ferrari with a Fiesta engine. Compact Disc simply doesn't have any more information than can be described in 16bits, so longer digital word lengths simply should not be necessary. When they introduced the 506.20, Meridian argued that its extra internal resolution allowed more accurate handling of the least significant bits of the 16bit word, plus better accuracy from any subsequent digital signal processing. Maybe so, but it still smacks of tinkering around at the margins. As I'm sure Bob Stuart would agree, the big gains will be when 24bit digital audio discs hit the market a proper.

Why bother with all this 24bit business then? Cynics would argue it's more about marketing. Certain

knowledgeable industry figures have argued that the original 16bit specification isn't what limits CD's sound, but that the damage is done by inadequate transports, high jitter levels, poor internal digital noise suppression and dodgy power supplies. Of course, these all cost lots of money to sort and aren't easy to explain to marketing departments. On the other hand, buying in DACs with more numbers after their names is cheaper and easier to sell to the punters...

Well, I'm not going to level this accusation at Meridian. The black textured enamel and glass finished 506.24 looks and feels classy, and is surprisingly heavy considering its compact dimensions (6.4kg, 88x321x332mm) and modest £1195 retail price. Compared even to Marantz's CD-7 (costing three times as much) it seems better screwed together. One of the most pleasing aspects is Meridian's trademark glass and carbon fibre-damped disk tray, which gives the high precision data-grade (i.e. CD-ROM) Focault-focus linear three-beam laser pickup an easier time of reading the disc. Add custom servo software from Meridian and it's a very capable transport

indeed. Inside you'll find a smattering of audiophile components, a generous toroidal transformer and conscientious attention paid to smoothing the mains. The 24-bit dual differential Delta Sigma converter, apparently developed in conjunction with Burr Brown, feeds a discrete class A output stage.

Outside it's the usual Meridian look with a row of slimline transport controls running across the bottom half of the fascia, plus a purposeful eight character dot-matrix LED display showing track, time and index. Round the back you get fixed line level phono outs, plus optical and coaxial digital outputs. Last is the communications link, which lets you run any combination of Meridian kit from the single, rather swanky looking Meridian System Remote. More than just a standard plipper with a few extra buttons, it actually lets you extend the system into two or three rooms. In an increasingly multi-room world, this facility could be more useful than it first appears.

The bit question will run and run, but the real answer lies in the listening. After a few days intensive burn in, the Meridian went into my reference systems (KLP-PI, K5881,





Optional Meridian System Remote offers a host of extra facilities for all Meridian electronics

Yamaha NS1000Ms) via LFD's Spirolink 3 and we were away. I kicked off with 4 Hero's 'Cosmic Tree', a beautifully recorded slice of acoustic drum'n'bass including violins, viola, cello, Fender electric piano, Oberheim bass synth plus a fantastically recorded acoustic drum kit. To its credit, the Meridian conveyed the distinctive textures of all these instruments with tremendous accuracy. Rather than sounding airbrushed and artificial, the opening violins had wonderful lustre. The Fender Rhodes was rich and resonant, and the drums kicked in with machine gun speed and attack. The singer's voice was powerful and grainy, just like the gig I went to last year.

A real festival of the senses then, but this is no Japanese-style 'hi-fi sounding' silver disc spinner. Indeed the 506.24 had a nicely unforced musicality about it - not quite as beguiling as a good moving coil cartridge but not far off. It was able to excavate vast tracts of detail and string it all together very coherently, making for both a relaxing and engaging listen.

Moving on to Mercury Rev's

'Goddess on a Highway', the Meridian's performance proved all this sweetness didn't come from coloration. On this rather sterile rock recording the 506.24 didn't add a thing - gone was the sumptuousness of the 4 Hero track and in its place a clean and dry recorded acoustic. This track also showcased the player's tremendous ability to resolve low level detail - there's a lot of weird, multi-tracked production effects going on over the main vocals, guitar, bass and drums and they shone through far more than with the Naim CDX I recently reviewed. Nothing added, nothing taken away.

Moving on to a bit of old school rock'n'roll in the shape of Rush's 'Fly By Night', I was better able to identify the essence of what is by any standards a highly neutral and self-effacing player. Compared to the aforementioned Naim, plus the new Linn Genki I'm currently trying out, the Meridian sounded slightly slow. Being so even-handed, it isn't set up for playing one particular type of music - rather, it's a great all rounder. By contrast, the Linn and Naim both seemed to live or die by their ability to resolve attack transients and

dynamics, leaving things like low level detailing and accurate soundstaging for the birds. They both made a better job of this track, pushing it along at double quick speed, whereas the Meridian was just a tad more sedate and polished in its performance.

Indeed, 'polished' is the Meridian 506.24 in a nutshell, and I mean this in the best possible way. Like Arcam's FMJ CD23 (one of its closest rivals) it's an extremely capable all rounder with an infectiously sweet and musical sound. Feed it anything from Debussy preludes to David Sylvian and you'll get a spacious, open acoustic with great stage depth, excellent low level detail resolving capability, a pleasantly sweet tone, grippy rhythms and strong dynamics - and it all hangs together superbly.

Another fine slice of British 'budget esoterica' then, and superb value at under £1200. It's also a welcome challenger to the previously peerless Arcam FMJ, with a marginally slower but weightier sound. Match it to open, transparent ancillaries and you'll have a peach of a system. If CD sounds this good fed by 16bits, the sky's the limit for Meridian's first 24bit DVD Audio player. ■ ▲



Tidy rear panel offers a host of analogue and digital audio outputs plus a COMMS link to connect to other Meridian electronics

Meridian 506.24 £1195
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WORLD VERDICT

 Highly musical yet very detailed sounding, this player almost has it all. Even-handed to a fault, it sounds great over a wide variety of music.
 Measured Performance see page 111



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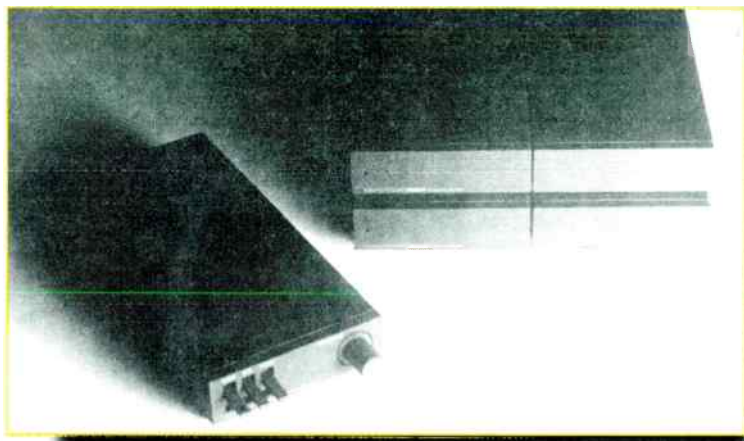
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modular magic

Meridian's earliest products showed the company's distinctive approach to hi-fi design. David Price revisits the 70s with the 101/105 pre-power combination.



Compare Meridian's very first 100 series pre-power amplifier to the current 501/555.

Both are subtle but elegant examples of industrial design, with an economical feature count allied to flexible connection options. Both have a characteristically smooth, self-effacing and even-handed sound, and both are built to last. You could also go on about the classy, albeit oddball finish, the modular construction, the top quality matching tuners that partner both combos, the fine phono inputs and the muscular power amp sections. Despite the twenty years that separate them, neither combos could be anything else but Meridian.

It's a testament to the design and engineering partnership of Messrs Boothroyd and Stuart that the 101/105 seems so damn modern even today. Aside from its DIN sockets, limited inputs and lack of remote control, it could almost be an early twenty first century design. Indeed, give the beautifully hewn slabs of aluminium alloy that encase the power amplifiers a splash of silver paint, and you'd think they were the latest brainchild of some esoteric high end lifestyle audio brand! In truth though, we're talking matt dark brown - well it was the seventies!

£700 bought you these five little boxes, each measuring 140 x 50 x 300mm. The idea was that you or your dealer connected them up by their DIN umbilicals, configured the

101 preamp for whatever cartridge you were using in your LPI2/Ittok at the time (well it was the only turntable back then, especially if you believed what you read in hi-fi magazines) by changing a natty little disc module inside, and switched the whole lot on via the single rotary volume control. A couple of dinky little LEDs would light up from the separate monobloc power supplies to signify motive power, and then it was time to spin that new Steely Dan or Doobie Brothers LP and revel in the sound issuing forth from your impossibly large and inefficient monitor loudspeakers... KEF 104abs, perchance?

The 105s drove power hungry seventies speakers with relish. Punching out well over 100 watts per side, they were substantially more grunty than even Naim's NAP250. True, they didn't have quite the same fearsome low frequency grip, or brightly lit midband for that matter, but they could certainly do any job asked of them without drawing attention to themselves. In a hi-fi world offering the choice of a full-on Naim pre-power or any one of a number of ludicrously over-sexed Japanese super amps (Rotel RA1312, anyone?), the Meridians were an extremely welcome new option.

Like its NAC32 rival, Meridian's 101 wasn't exactly overburdened with facilities. It was one of the first preamps to follow the minimalist

school of audio design, whereupon filters, variable frequency tone controls and balance controls were dispensed with in the name of straighter signal paths. Nowadays it seems bloody obvious, but in a world where most amps' front panels looked like something from a power station control room it was pretty radical stuff. Three toggle switches to switch between mono and stereo and 'disc', 'radio' and 'tape' were your lot.

Although Meridian's latest fare sounds considerably better than the 101/105s, it's still not a bad performer. Fans of classical music will particularly enjoy its dry, even presentation, with strong stereo imaging, confident (if a touch loose) bass, good detailing and crisp treble. True, you could say this combo sounds a tad unengaging by today's standards, but many will like its seventies-style big hearted, effortless character. Showy it is not.

So if you're looking for a classy sounding piece of kit that's also a design classic and a slice of British hi-fi history to boot, you could do far worse. The only trouble is that many i01/i05s around are a tad overpriced - sellers delude themselves that they're worth over £500, whereas £350 for a mint boxed set is closer to the mark. Find a decent example though, and you'll come to love and respect Meridian far more than you do now. And who knows, you may just by some new stuff to partner it! ■

NAD invites you to listen to its new 5.1 channel home theatre components in plain boring old stereo.



There is a rule in hi-fi that says 'AV is only for movies'.

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testing.. testing.. ONE - TWO

KEF have "re-worked and improved" their classic Reference Range.

Simon Pope spends some time with the 'baby' Model One - Two.

With the runaway success of their current budget models it would be easy to forget that KEF have more arrows in their quiver than just the Cresta range. A long and proud history of 'speaker making has produced many a gem from the Kent-based manufacturer and one of the highlights of the past was the excellent high-end Reference range. Realising the further potential of this most sophisticated-looking of loudspeaker ranges, KEF have re-vamped four new models in the range which all carry new finishes and features.

All four new models boast new improvements in the crossover in the form of polypropylene capacitors and have KEF's Boundary Compensation Device (BCD) fitted. Intended to allow for easy room placement, the BCD compensates for the bass lift when the speaker is placed close to a wall. The electrical filter that controls the low frequency section of the speaker is adjusted to cause an approximate 2dB reduction in the level of the bass below 200Hz.

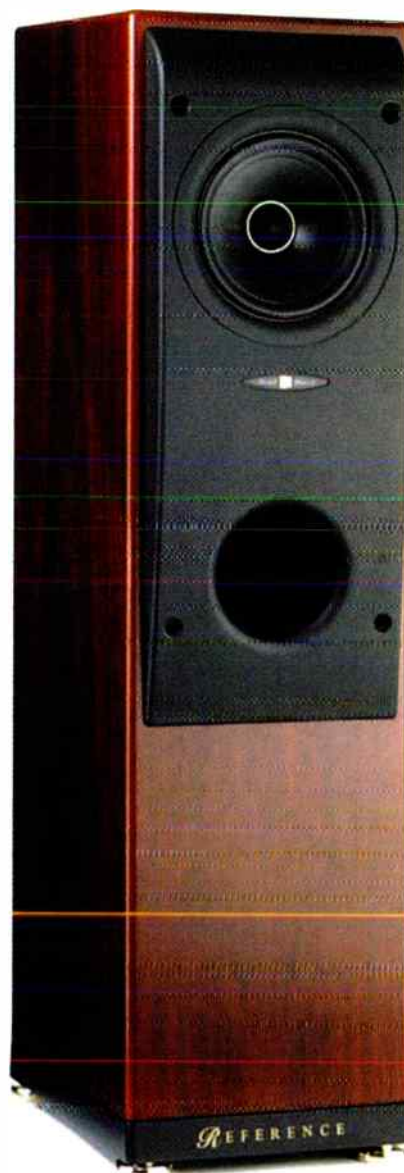
The smallest model in the all-floorstander range is the One - Two, a three-way "compact" design measuring 864 x 238 x 359 mm (H, W, D). The One - Two employs KEF's classic Uni-Q driver array (now in its fourth generation) in which the tweeter is mounted at the exact centre of the midrange cone. The 160mm mineral filled polypropylene midrange unit surrounds a centrally mounted 25mm fabric domed, ferrofluid cooled tweeter. These units are partnered by a 160mm pulp-cone unit on low

frequency duty in a coupled-cavity configuration in an aid to extend bass response.

The One - Two certainly has a look of high-end refinement about it. The baffle has an organically contoured appearance and the finish (available in Black Ash, Cherry and Rose nut) is excellent. This 'speaker is, aesthetically, very room friendly. It would look equally at home in a Clerkenwell warehouse pad as it would in a Grade-II listed house in Tunbridge Wells. To complete the luxury there are four heavy brass terminals at the rear making bi-wiring an option.

Linking up the One - Twos to an Audio Analogue Puccini SE integrated, NAD's Silverline S500 CD player and a Michell Gyrodec SE I started the musical ball rolling with some Cocteau Twins on good old vinyl. One of the traditions of KEF's uni-Q sound is its ability to deliver an out-of-the-box sound stage and this continues into the new generation. The Cocteau's enormous sweep of soundscapes wafted through the room with an unusually detailed performance. There's so much going on in the music that only the best equipment will pick up on each layer of the structure, which the KEFs did with aplomb. What I found most impressive (with the speakers very close to the back wall) was their excellent tonal balance. Bass boom was non-existent and the treble unobtrusive and very natural. It's not over-smooth or sickly sweet, just simply there...

Tchaikovsky's Fourth symphony conducted by Mariss Jansons with the ►►



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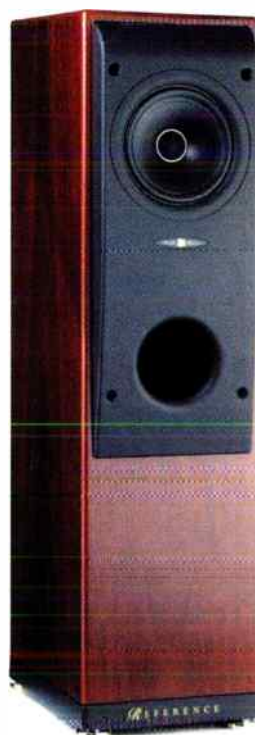
Oslo Philharmonic on Chandos is a very fine reading and the KEFs played it with fire in their belly. The descending sweep of orchestral strings in the last movement was lightning fast and the battery of percussion sounded tight and controlled. So often this can sound like a playschool let loose in a music shop with inferior kit. The full frequency range of this piece hinted that the One - Twos don't have a neutral or analytical sound, but then again it's not over-coloured, merely full, exciting and also subtle when needed.

Playing through a wide selection of material it was obvious the KEFs disliked bad recordings, and could sometimes sonically suck them in but this is very often sign a of good gear. With everything I played the KEFs showed a remarkably good soundstage, both deep and wide but well controlled. I have the feeling they

would work a lot better in smaller rooms than any equally priced floorstander due to this control and subtle use of bass frequencies.

From both our listening and measurement it's obvious that the One - Two is a gem of a 'speaker, well designed and built. Despite being a floorstander, the bass is remarkably even with no boom, and the overall sound, whilst not uncoloured, is as good as you will find at the price. They undoubtedly benefit from good recordings but will play any type of music, in virtually any environment, with equal expertise. Highly recommended. ■ ▲

KEF Reference One - Two £1,350
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 Kent ME15 6QP
 Tel: 01622 672261
 www.kef.com



WORLD VERDICT

Great engineering with a full and well-balanced sound, the Reference One - Two is a class act.

Measured Performance see page 111

WHERE'S THE TWEETER GONE?

KEF's special Uni-Q drive unit puts the tweeter at the centre of the bass/midrange cone. It lies hidden behind a protective but acoustically transparent cover and fires out through the cone.

Why? With separate treble units performance differs from above, either side and below the loudspeaker. Phase error produces response asymmetry. Ideally the tweeter should be as close to the radiating centre of the midrange cone as possible, but physically the closest it can get is hard against the chassis edge. This also puts it forward of the radiating centre, which lies at the base of the cone. All in all, a separate tweeter is a bad thing.

Long ago it was noticed that single cone drivers have a cohesive and natural sound. The problem with simple units like this has been to get smooth output right up to the highest frequencies, to avoid rough sounding treble. Tannoy produced

their famous dual-concentric to overcome such problems, but its complexity made cost excessive.

What KEF have achieved with Uni-Q is a drive unit with central tweeter that is simple and cost effective. It gives symmetrical results, so it sounds the same all round. This means it interacts with reflective room surfaces consistently, something KEF have always promoted. Uni-Q also eliminates

crossover phase errors, giving a cohesive sound. It's got to be better than a separate tweeter- and it is. Uni-Q solves a lot of problems elegantly, giving KEF's Reference loudspeakers a useful advantage. ■ ▲





the old country

Denon's classic PMA-250SE amplifier has been given a new number, a 'UK' badge and a re-vamp. Richard White listens for the differences.



Denon were the first Japanese company to produce a 'UK Version' product, tuned to British expectations. It was back in 1986 when the PMA-707 was tweaked by a British designer to improve its sound. This tradition has carried on. The new PMA-255UK and the more expensive PMA-355UK replace the old 250SE and 350SE but the prices remain the same at £140 and £180 respectively.

When it comes to styling, little has changed. In the case of the PMA-255UK reviewed here, it is fair to say that your £140 doesn't buy style: the same all-black box as the 250SE is used. All the changes are on the inside. The transformer is bigger and beefier, the ELNA power supply reservoir caps are custom made for Denon and feature direct hard wiring from the power amp section to the 'speaker terminals.

All the weight of this amplifier is at one end, by the power switch. This betrays the position of the power transformer, which is a hefty one. A delay circuit prevents switch-on thump. The amp delivers 45W into 8Ω.

The PMA-255UK has inputs for CD, tuner, tape/MD, plus two auxiliaries, one ear-marked for DVD. A large volume knob gives a usefully sensitive sweep of gain. Although tape is nominally provided for - indeed the recording output level is very healthy - there is no monitor button. I guess people who intend to use an expensive three-head recorder won't be buying a budget amp to go with it.

Like the 250SE, there is no phono stage and associated input.

Other controls provided are balance knob and defeatable ±8dB treble and bass controls. The operating leaflet warns that the effects of the tone controls lessen as volume is advanced, and indeed they behaved more like loudness controls than fixed EQs. Regardless of the position of the 'source direct' button, the recording output is 'flat'.

Input and output terminals on the back are 'serviceable' rather than rugged. There is no 'pre-amp out' so the unit is not readily usable for bi-amping.

The biggest clue to the sound quality of the amplifier lies in the use of the letters 'UK' in the model code. Judging from past experience, this is likely to mean that the manufacturers have selected their circuits and components with a view to satisfying the presumed tastes of the British market; in other words it's likely to err on the warm side rather than sounding bright and analytical, but bass will be solid.

To see whether this would be the case, I began my listening with a sharpish recording of Haydn's Prussian Quartets, on Naxos. That's not to imply that the tone is unbearably harsh but rather hyper-detailed! True to its UK badge, the Denon made rather mild work of this, with much of the top-end sizzle perhaps suitably tamed. Rather than this record's usual urgency, the amplifier put me among friends. Although I don't believe that dimming down is a

necessary attribute for the UK market, there is no doubt that the sound is pleasant, if somewhat uninviting.

Diana Krall's Love Songs have rather fallen from my wish-list lately but I used them because they too have a biting mix, coupled with some odd stereo placings. Whatever tweakings had been applied to the top end, the explosive power of the double bass came through the amp completely unimpaired, with quite exhilarating drive and speed. Electro-acoustic guitar always sounds dull to me, so the flatness of this instrument showed nothing one way or the other. It was on Miss Krall's vocals that the real difference made itself known. To my surprise, I found the change to be for the better! Gone was the go-getting sibilant edge, in its place a warmer, more feminine sound.

It's difficult to pronounce on whether a manufacturer should give a tweak for a particular market, especially such a noticeable one. It has proven successful in the past for Denon though and will likely be again I believe. In any case, the PMA-255UK is an easy-to-use package at a very reasonable price. It is easy listening as well.

WORLD VERDICT

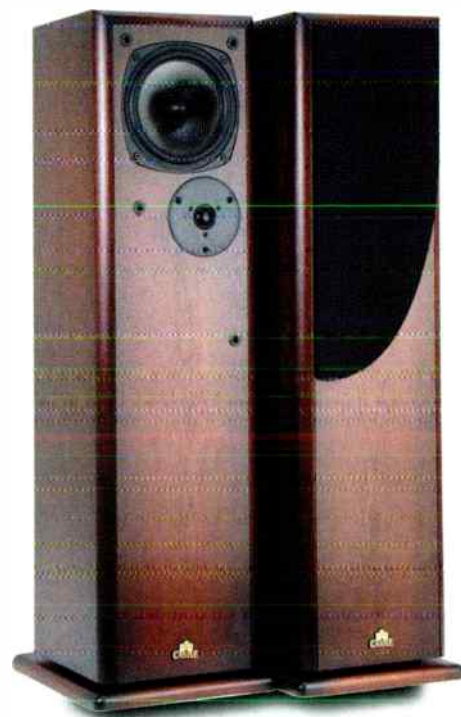


Good value integrated amp. Rather relaxed approach to music but not unpleasant. Soothing rather than involving.

Measured Performance see page 111

Severn Up

Richard White meets some of the larger kings of the Castle family, the Severn 2 SE floorstanders.



Despite the growing lack of British manufactured specialist hi-fi, a few existing companies harken back to the heyday of the seventies, where successful independent manufacturing was rife. Castle Acoustics are one such company. Still very much at the heart of Great British manufacturing, they feature two full ranges of loudspeakers (Classic Range and Inversion Series - with tapered cabinets) with a total of twelve models.

Part of the Classic range, the Severn 2 SEs are quite striking, serious-looking 'speakers' of fairly substantial build and size - 81cm x 21cm x 23cm (h,w,d). Castle's own drive units are employed and are housed in a 18mm MDF, wood veneered cabinet. The 150mm mid/bass unit is a carbon fibre cone housed in a convex roll surround unit, with a 'pole piece' (or phase plug) attached to the magnet central pole in a bid to improve dynamics and reduce distortion. The 19mm soft-domed tweeter is mounted off axis, underneath the main driver. Bi-wire terminals are sturdily mounted at the back, placed sensibly near the base of the cabinet.

The Severn 2 SE uses the same bass reflex arrangement as we noted on the Pembroke in our August issue, with a downward firing vent between cabinet and plinth with radiused edge to help reduce port turbulence. There's a good deal of sense to this: to use a very wide port invites all sorts of difficulties. It's all too easy to find you've made an oil drum rather than a loudspeaker cabinet. With the port output effectively capped and spread, as it is with the Severns, normal acoustic integration is easier to achieve. The

benefit of bass reinforcement is attained without too much detriment to the tautness which we expect from a modern design.

With a strong dose of Beethoven's Fifth, the Severn 2 SEs certainly gave a 'value for money' sound. The famous staccato triplets on which this symphony is built showed off the controlled bass very well - there was no obvious boom so the 'speakers' power is felt rather than heard, with accurate apparent volume levels in all parts of the range. Soft dome tweeters usually avoid too sizzling a sound in the upper range; with a symphony orchestra this sort of restraint is useful. There's little point in having powerful bass if the treble is at the same time cutting your ears off!

When we listened to the Pembroke, we felt that they were better suited to classical and acoustic material than any other. The Severns displayed a broader taste in more music. Despite the excellent recording, there's not much acoustic sound on van den Hul's CD with Madeline Bell. Processed or not, the Severns made the amplified vocals and bass guitar blend seamlessly with the virtuoso cymbal playing which is such a feature of these tracks. Stereo imaging was less hard-edged than with some 'speakers' but nonetheless satisfying. Particularly pleasing was the practically boom-free sound - bass guitars can play all sorts of tricks with ordinary reflex arrangements, one-note bass being the worst of them.

Having passed them for use with the classical orchestra and studio groups, I chose some live recorded jazz to see just how natural the Severns were prepared to be. Benny Waters still had plenty of music left,

even into his eighties, and he was fortunately recorded live in Stockholm towards the end of his life. As far as the loudspeakers were concerned, the event was passed on with its best qualities intact. Principal among these is the degree of attack which the old master gave to his alto; breathy, curiously delicate and yet able to drive the small band along like nobody's business. Large 'speakers' can give a big sound and this is just what's needed to relay live performances like this. The excellence of the recording helps but the solidity of the loudspeaker soundstage materially assists as well.

Overall the relaxed and warm sound is very inviting - but at a price. Unless you have both the money and the space, the smaller Pembroke may be a more logical answer. The new Severns are good items for those who like their loudspeakers to look the part. With their imposing finish and big sound, they have a lot going for them. One thing, make sure you have room; these 'speakers' work best with plenty of air to push around. ■

Castle Severn 2 S I · £699 90
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WORLD VERDICT

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 Measured Performance see page 111

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WHAT HI-FI?

extract from June 1999

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Cary 300B SE1	£1800	£4000
Cary 805c 845 30watt SE monos	£5000	£8500
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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Editor

I would be grateful for any advice you can offer on the following problem that has recently clouded my audio pleasure. My young son has just passed his first birthday and discovered the concept of simple harmonic motion, i.e., if you rock Dad's TDL RTL3s at just the right frequency they fall over and crush you. So far we've managed to catch them before they squash him but for the time being it realistically spells the end of floor standers.

So, I need some bookshelf speakers (which sadly may well actually end up on a bookshelf - near a wall, maybe quite high up!) I require something that offers the depth of image and clarity my beloved TDLs gave me. Bass extension isn't necessarily a problem as I could use my REL strata subwoofer (which can be hidden away from little 'cone poking' fingers); I don't normally have this connected but it's an option. My amp is an Audiolab 8000S with Arcam 6 CD. Budget is up to £500. What do you think?

Mike Kenna
Newbury, UK

This is a very common problem that many manufacturers ought to appreciate a little more. Tall heavy things with spikes aren't ideal with the patter of tiny feet. Hi-Fi and families, ironically, rarely live in harmony. It could be one of the reasons why hi-fi is commonly a pursuit of the committed bachelor!

As bookshelf speakers go, it must be remembered that not all of them sound so good up among the novels. For optimum performance, as we mentioned in last month's group test, you need good, sturdy stands. However, if you (sensibly) regard the safety of your offspring above sonic edification, stands still pose a hazard. In this case I'd plump for the best sounding and best built bookshelf you can afford. £500 is a bit of a grey area for quality bookshelf speakers, but one example that immediately springs to mind are Dali's excellent Royal Menuets at £450, which deliver a high-end-like neutral sound and are heavily-built, with

real wood veneer finishing that ensures a classy look. Also, they should be a great match for your Strata.

Another good choice could be Dynaudio's Audience 50s, which at £577 per pair may just scrape within your budget. These have recently had a revamp and we hope to have a pair in for review soon. Even going on past listening with the older models, these are full sounding and very dynamic but lack the visual sophistication of the Dalis. You'd be well advised to give both a listen. ■ SP



Dance a Menuet with Dali.

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THE BENDS

Salutations Hi-Fi World residents a reader craves advice: I have a Gyro SE with an Audio Technica 10051 II (remember it?), and a DNM Rica aboard. The amp is a 1995 Arcam Alpha, but the speakers may interest you! At the end of my DNM speaker leads are KEF KefKit 3 jobbies - 3 way with 10" oval bass units, bought in 1974. Question: What sort of CD should I consider which will fit in, and more importantly, hold its own? I would appreciate guidance on the interconnect as well. My taste extends from classical through 70's progressive to indie - I will be using 'OK Computer' as my test CD. I value musicality, naturalness and truth and I'm intolerant of minor exaggerations for overall effect, no matter how exciting or dynamic. What do you advise?
Phil Baker

Indeed I do remember the AT tonearm - I've got one on my Gyro SE at this very moment! ('What are the chances of that happening', as Harry Hill would say.) As your speakers (complete with classic KEF B139 oval bass units) have a quintessentially '70s rich, warm, fruity sound and your amp isn't the most forward either, you should aim for a crisp, dry sounding silver disc spinner. Sony's CDP-XB930E is the obvious budget choice at around £300 as is Arcam's Alpha 7SE which is a really fun, musical listen. With more dosh to spend, Nalm's CD3.5 at £1000 would be a synergistic match - the Cyrus dAD3Q and particularly the Arcam Alpha 9 are better rounded but could sound too rich through those big old KEFs of yours. After you've sorted your source, look to the likes of a Sonneteer Alabaster or LFD Mistral pre- power to replace your overburdened Arcam amp! As for using 'Ok Computer' as a test disc, remember to have the laughing gas at hand. ■
DP



Just the job for the upbeat tunes of Radiohead!

LONG TIME GONE

I am looking to upgrade my hi-fi system, and need your help as to what to do as it's been a long time since I was in the market. My current system is record-based: PT Too, SME IV, with fluid damper and Decca London Gold, Naim NAIT 1, ProAc Tablette 50 Signature and Super Flatline cable. Is the amp the obvious weak point? My budget is limited to about £500? Should I consider the second-market? Please advise.
Martin de Rose

You already have an impressively well balanced system - you obviously did more than your fair share of listening to get to where you are today. Judging by your choice of cartridge and amp, you obviously like a fast, forward sound - and presumably crave more of the same. If you're prepared to buy second-hand you could just about scrape a Naim NAC32.5/NAPI 60 for £500, which would grab those hard-to-drive ProAcs by the short and curlies. When more cash came along it would be HI-CAP time, and possibly a factory service for your amps back at the Salisbury ranch. Then, go see Len Gregory (aka The Cartridge Man) and ask him to work his magic on your Decca - he's just done one for me and did a storming job. An additional small but worthwhile

tweak is to buy SME's top silver litz headshell wires for your Series IV - your standard ones are rougher sounding LC-OFC copper. ■
DP

London's burning!



Many observers say that big macho amplifiers can sound "musclebound". If you want subtlety and fine detail with power – which is what realism is all about – choose your amplifier with care.

What sort

of watts work?

There are many different ideas on how amplifiers should be built – and that's just the box!

Designers know that case materials affect sound quality, because of **EDDY CURRENTS** and **MAGNETIC FIELDS**. Some use non-magnetic alloys while others believe that only non-metallic materials work.

Meaty amps easily dazzle with their **WEIGHT, POWER** and "**CONTROL**", and you are blinded to their loss of **PACE, DYNAMICS** and inner **DETAIL**. You hear hi-fi and forget music.

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Then find speakers which you and the amplifier both like! – the right sound and the right load. Not easy.

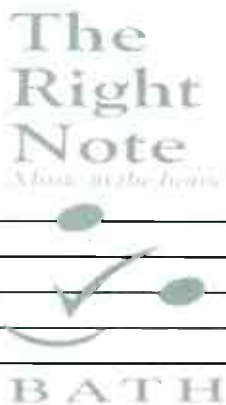
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Arcam's FMJ 23 CD: great sound for a mere grand!

I have a hi-fi dilemma that you may be able to advise me on. My amplifier is a John Shearne phase 2 integrated, connected to Rega ELA speakers. Front end is an ageing Marantz CD65DX and Ariston Q Deck. A few weeks ago whilst playing music, the J.S. amp set alight, blowing one of my speakers in the process. A quick trip down to Griffin Audio soon sorted out the damaged speaker, however, Shearne advised that a repair to original spec. would cost £450 or £490 to upgrade to 'reference' standard. What would you suggest as the best way forward, risk nearly £500 on an amp that has a tendency to self-destruct for no apparent reason, (Shearne say it was due to age and treatment) or start again? Musical taste is loud punk rock. Many thanks,
Dave

I'm not sure if I'm more surprised about your Shearne amp catching fire, or the fact that you listen to loud punk rock through it! It certainly doesn't strike me as the obvious way to go given your music tastes, spontaneous combustion or not! Whatever the reason for it blowing in such spectacular style (be it component failure or faulty workmanship - it's impossible for us to speculate), maybe you should think about re-focussing your system. As you need an amp whatever you decide, consider Naim's excellent NAIT 3 - it's a fantastically punchy and grippy integrated that's easily upgradeable when you want more wallop, and it's got a superb (optional) phono stage. I lived with one for three months a few years ago, and didn't want to give it back. With powerful rock and pop it's a really involving listen. Next upgrade would then be your source - only you can decide whether you want to prioritize vinyl or CD, but spending either £260 on a Rega Planar 3 or £775 on a Michell GyroDec Spider

Edition would dramatically improve your analogue sound. Arm/cartridge would be the Original Live Rega RB250 (or 300 if you get the P3), and a Goldring G1042. CD-wise, the Arcam FMJ 23 CD is the pick of the £1000 players to my ears at the moment, but with your musical tastes your ultimate aim should be a Naim CDX at £2335 - then you'd really have to hold on to your safety pins! ■
DP

THE MISSING LINK

Dear Sir,
My system consists of the following:
Amp: Audiolab 8000a
Speakers: Monitor Audio 20SEs
DVD/C.D. Player: Pioneer DV-717
Tuner: Denon
MD: Sony

I recently bought the 20SEs from a friend and, have decided I would like to bring my system more in line with these fine speakers. I think my starting point would be the CD area, as I use the Pioneer DVD to play both music and movies. The CD players I have tested so far include the Arcam Alpha 9, Musical Fidelity A3 and the Linn Genki. Out of that batch I think I favoured the Linn although it was a bit more expensive than I had hoped to have spent. But after speaking to Sevenoaks Sound and Vision, Birmingham, they said the amp (8000a) should be the first thing to replace.

I was somewhat surprised at this, as I have always regarded the Audiolab as a fine amp. He said that it did not produce enough current to do the speakers justice but did say the first upgrade should be to a secondhand Audiolab power amp or the new TAG version, and only then should I go for a new CD player.

Could you please advise me on this matter?

PS I am disabled and getting out can be a problem to hear equipment (I also have to save very hard for the better hi-fi

around) So any helpful suggestions are greatly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely
Jeremy Newell

Your Audiolab amp should not have any difficulty driving the Monitor loudspeakers; Audiolab were noted for their 'grunt' if for nothing else, so if you're happy with it, I should stick with it. However, the new £500 TAG McLaren 60i, is - as we found out last month - a very competent and detailed amp that has the ability to drive virtually anything with its solid 60W/channel of power. Forget fancy facilities though, this is a bare bones amp.

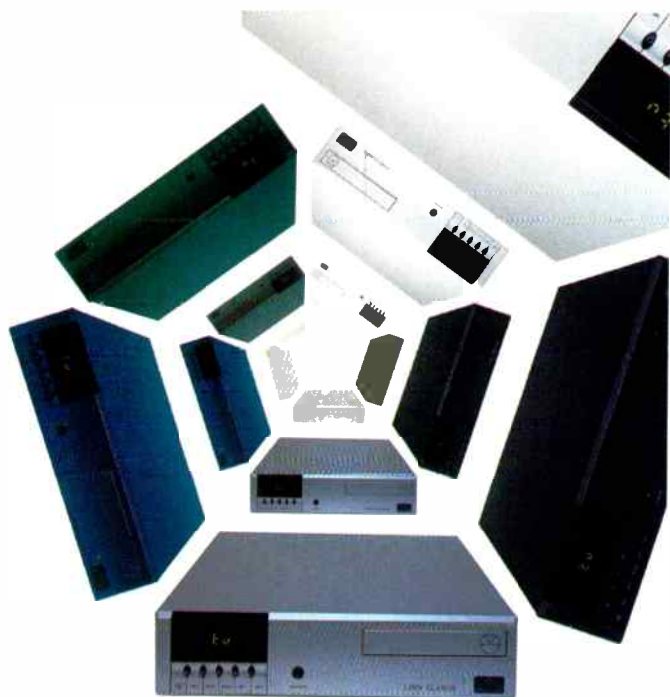
The trouble is that high spec. stand-alone CD players are beginning to look a bit over-priced compared with something like Sony's £500 SCD-XB940 SACD/CD player or the better-sounding DVD players such as the one you own. One way in which you can truly upgrade the sound of your current system is to add a 24bit/96kHz MSB Link DAC (HFW Nov. 99) to your DV-717. Pioneer's DVD players have a 24/96 output and this combination will deliver a truly high-end sound for relatively little cost.

But hi-fi has so many variables, it is impossible for anyone to be entirely right when it comes to choosing a system for you. Hold on and look to the future - if Sony have a £500 SACD/CD player, you can bet that others will not be far behind - it may well be best to hang on just a little longer for a wider choice of what shows signs of becoming the next 'industry standard'. ■

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computer audio world

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All the latest from the brave new world of online music distribution...

Microsoft Windows Media Player feature 52, 53, 55, 57

David Price takes a close look at Uncle Bill's new baby.

HP 9310i 58

Alan Seddon goes for a spin with Hewlett Packard's latest CD burner.

V-SHOP KILLS OUR PRICE!

• Virgin say that they will soon close all their Our Price music stores, and replace them with V-Shops which have direct music downloading facilities into the company's new MP3 mobile phone. This will be a £300 Samsung unit marketed under the Virgin brand as the SGH M100. It features 32MB

of memory for storing music, backlit remote control and all the software needed for transferring MP3s from PCs built-in. Soon after it will be possible to download music over the phone directly. Keep your browsers pointed at www.virgin.com/mobile



EGOSYS DOUBLE WAMI

• The new Waveterminal U2A from EgoSys is the answer to many notebook-using computer audiophiles' prayers. A USB stereo audio interface with 24 bit A/D/A converters, it taps directly into the digital audio running around your computer's motherboard and ports it to the outside world where you can get at it. Working at 32k, 44.1k and 48kHz sampling rates, it offers a choice of gold-tipped S/PDIF coaxial or optical digital inputs and outputs, plus a 10dBV unbalanced quarter-inch analogue phono jack. You also get an internal digital mixer with simultaneous monitoring of all outputs, plus real time hardware sample rate conversion. Available for Windows 98 and Mac platforms, it costs £199.99. The new WamiBox is 'the PCMCIA solution' and features 20bit converters, 2 in/4 out unbalanced analogue connectors, plus S/PDIF coaxial & optical digital ins and outs. There's also a Mic preamp with built-in effects processor which includes reverb, delay chorus, flanging and multi-band parametric EQ. With full MIDI and 64 voice synth, it will set you back £399.99. www.egosys.com

PONTIS SP504

• From Germany comes Pontis's latest £210 MP3 walkie, looking something like a late eighties handheld games machine. The fact that it comes with a miserly 32MB of RAM - when its price rivals have twice that - suggests that it could be a fairly old design. Facilities are good, with a comprehensive LCD display, adjustable treble and bass controls, bundled LED ripping software and speedy USB connection. Twin AA batteries give a respectable 10 hours of playing time between changes. Sound is better than expected, with powerful bass, clear midband, crisp treble and plenty of volume and clarity from the supplied phones. It's a strange but engaging player that will probably grow on you - if you can bear to look at it, that is! www.pontis.de

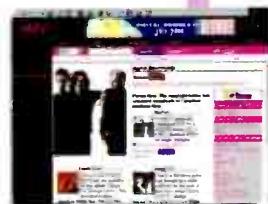
AIWA'S ICEY MP3

• It was bound to happen - an in-dash car MP3 player. Aiwa introduce the CDC-MP3. It's serious, having a fully specified variable bitrate MP3 CODEC that can play MP3s to the top 320kbps resolution, giving better-than-MD sound. Based around a CD-ROM drive it plays good old fashioned CDs, CD-Rs, CD-RWs and data CDs encoded with MP3 music files. You also get 4x45W output, a swanky steering wheel remote and the usual CD text and MP3 ID3 tag support. www.aiwa.co.uk



CD - THE FINAL CUT?

• Warner Music Group's new merger partner EMI Recorded Music became the second major label to start selling downloadable music on the Internet last month. EMI is selling over 100 albums and associated singles through numerous online retailers, from artists including Pink Floyd, Bonnie Raitt, Frank Sinatra, Snoop Dogg, Spice Girls and Tina Turner. HMV.com is charging \$15.99 for a downloadable edition of Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side of the Moon' in Microsoft Windows Media format. By 2001 Warners should have downloadable albums and singles available using Sony's ATRAC3 format. The merger with EMI should see the two giants consolidate their digital music delivery strategies into a formidable force. Between them, they already have stakes in musicmaker.com, Liquid Audio, Preview Systems and Digital On-Demand, sanity.com and Launch Media.



SMALL TALK

• Panasonic's SV-SD70 is a digital music player with a difference. No, it's not just a new feature here or a bright colour there - this one uses MP2-AAC (Advanced Audio Coding), which gives even better sound than top bitrate MP3 thanks to its lower compression ratio. The 43g 'SD Audio' portable runs off a single AAA battery and comes complete with a wristband so you can wear it, watch style. This Japan-only model is a great player, but we reckon traditional MP3 walkies like Samsung's YP-E64 are a better bet until the technology settles.

www.panasonic.com



Clever Stuff: Media Player goes on the Net and downloads all the track names for you...

Windows Media Player is the culmination of several years of hard graft on Microsoft's part, and can be regarded as the company's most serious attempt so far to embrace computer audio and multimedia en masse. It's both a fascinating piece of software to use and an extremely important development in the new politics of online music distribution.

Make no mistake, it's going to tread on a lot of people's toes, and start a format war the like of which we haven't seen since the early days of DCC vs. MD. In truth though, WMA (Windows Media Audio, as it's called) versus MP3 (Motion Picture Experts Group Layer-3, natch) could be a whole lot bigger, rather like the mid nineties' Internet Explorer v. Netscape browser wars. This is because Windows Media Player is in Microsoft's own words, "a premier feature of the forthcoming Microsoft Windows Millennium Edition".

There you are then - Big Bill reckons it's one of the main reasons for buying the new version of the world's most popular computer operating system! And not only is it to be bundled by the billion with the

next Windows OS, but you can also download Beta versions for Windows 95 and 98 free from www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/. (The final release of Windows Media Player 7 is scheduled for next month). It's certainly proving a popular piece of freeware - Microsoft say it's the fastest-growing digital media player, is available in 24 languages and has had over 100 million licensed copies distributed so far, which is more than one every second!

GOING FOR THE ONE

Windows Media Player's master plan is to seamlessly integrate all the audio and video functions modern multimedia PCs perform. Microsoft claims it, "sets a new standard in ease of use and extensibility for consumers", and that it, "removes the barriers for mainstream consumers by offering an all-in-one, customisable player that provides them with one place to find, organise and play digital media on their PC".

The idea is to move away from the hobbyist, make-do-and-mend approach to computer audio and multimedia that's prevailed to date - with this new application Microsoft

would like to bring the days of downloading your own MP3 ripper, player and even CODEC firmly to an end. Simply, WMP brings everything you ever wanted to do with audio together, then adds video and radio too.

It also forms part of what Microsoft calls 'Windows Media Technologies', a package of Internet-ready platforms designed for the creation, distribution and playback of broadcast-quality digital media. In plain English, Microsoft plans to move in on the home entertainment market by letting Windows, via this new Media Player, handle the downloading, storage and playing of music and movies into your home. Put crudely, now Big Bill's gunning for your CD, MP3 and DVD players.

'Broadband' is the word on everyone's lips right now, and it's immensely significant for the world's music buyers. Instead of going into High Street CD retailers (record

NOW PLAYING WMP

always starts with this option selected, offering up a menu of whatever tracks you have selected from a previous section. Rather like leaving a cassette in the car stereo, I guess. As soon as you click on the large Play button down below, it plays the track complete with psychedelic, Austin Powers-style light show to boot.

- MEDIA GUIDE

Clicking on the Media Guide button does the first of WMP's many clever on-line tricks. Acting as a purpose-built web browser, it takes you to www.WindowsMedia.com where you can find music, movie trailers and general entertainment news - all specially chosen for you by Uncle Bill of course...

Windows Media Player is here. David Price takes a close look at Uncle Bill's new baby and pits it against its arch rival, good old MP3.

studies



media player

You choose the tracks you want to record... ...or the radio stations you want to hear

shops, as we used to call them), the idea is that you download music and video via your cable modem in a matter of minutes and pay for it with your credit card. The UK isn't quite wired for broadband cable access yet, but well within five years most people who want it will have it. Windows Media Player, say Microsoft, is the first (and only?) platform ready for this new way of getting our home entertainment. And crucially, WMP also addresses the thorny music and video piracy issues.

Its new Windows Media Rights Manager means you get to enjoy "broadcast-quality" video and "CD-quality" audio with "end-to-end secure content distribution". This means that if Microsoft has its way at least, then gone are days of unlimited free CD copying. The second generation digital rights management system is said to be "industrial-strength", proved by the fact that the likes of BMG, Intertainer Inc., Liquid Audio Inc., Sony Music Entertainment and Yahoo! are all using it. This remains to be seen. To speak of, "protecting audio content from the server all the way to the sound card" is fighting talk, but that didn't stop hackers doing the

dirty on DVD faster than you could put a disc in the machine...

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR ME?

Lots, actually. After downloading Windows Media Player from Microsoft's website, it auto-installs in no time and places a little Media Player icon on the desktop. Click on this and the first thing it does is look around your hard drive for anything that might be construed as music (i.e. anything in an MP3 or .WAV file). Then it launches properly, displaying a neat little menu bar running down the left side of the screen with buttons for Now Playing, Media Guide, CD Audio, Media Library, Radio Tuner, Portable Device and Skin Chooser.

CUM ON FEEL THE NOIZE...

Ergonomically, Windows Media Player is a *tour de force*. The way in which it blends all the different facets of audio in one easy mix is a joy. It's comprehensively smoother and easier to use than even the best MP3 packages like MusicMatch Jukebox - you really couldn't ask for more in any way.

That isn't where the story ends however, because WMP is the user-interface in front of Microsoft's new

coding technology known as MS Audio. Uncle Bill pulls no punches about this, calling it the "best audio" format, one which "provides CD-quality music in files half the size of MP3 files, doubling music storage capacity and reducing download times for CD-quality digital music".

That's no small claim. As enlightened audiophiles know, MP3 done properly is a serious music format in its own right. Based on the heavyweight academic research done into psycho-acoustics that Philips used for its late (and for some, lamented) DCC format, MP3 can sound superb with the top quality Fraunhofer CODEC running at a high (256kbps or above) bitrate.

Last summer saw the spectacle of Microsoft launching MS Audio to a waiting world. Presented as the natural successor to MP3, Uncle Bill's press launch wasn't without its critics. After a live demonstration of its new CODEC, one key US music industry figure famously said, "Bill needs to go back to the audio lab"... We decided to put the two rival formats up against each other, with interesting results... ►►

- CD AUDIO

This works like a good old fashioned MP3 ripper. As soon as you put an audio CD into your PC's CD-ROM drive, WMP spins it up, has a look and displays all the tracks therein, along with little ticked boxes next to all the tracks. Clicking on the Copy Music button duly starts ripping every track with a tick next to it in .WMA format. Via TOOLS/OPTIONS /CD AUDIO you can select a bitrate of between 64kbps (taking 28MB per CD) and 160kbps (taking 69MB per CD). This done, clicking Get Names does the next of its clever online tricks - the program asks you for the title and name of the CD, and then goes online to All Music Guide, the world's most comprehensive entertainment database (say Microsoft, and I've no reason to doubt it) and down loads the name of the tracks you've just ripped, along with Album, Artist, Genre and Style information, plus a host of less useful stuff.

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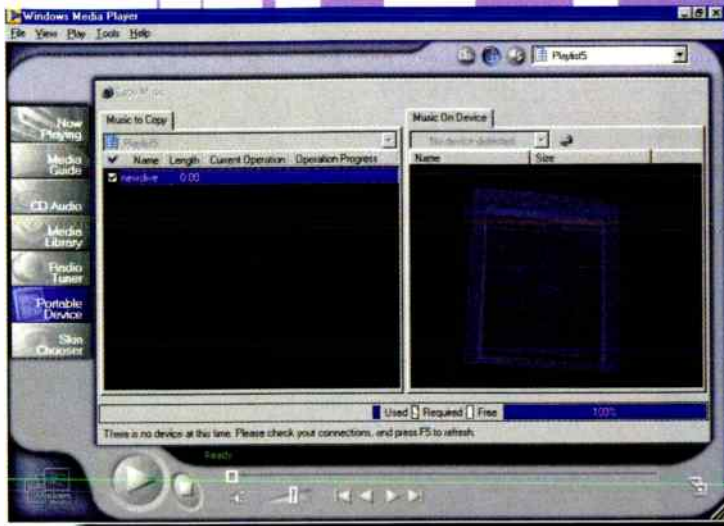
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Walkie talk: seamless integration with a 'portable digital music player' like Microsoft's forthcoming WinJam, for example...

...far out: not only does it play your fave tunes, but paints pretty pictures too...

- MEDIA LIBRARY
Click on this button and you'll suddenly find folders containing all the music you've either ripped or downloaded, laid out in a neat Windows Explorer-style window on the left of the screen. In the main right-hand window, you'll find the tracks themselves, complete with all that lovely text information you've just downloaded. To play the music, just select the track you want and click on that big Play button again. Basically it's a playlist or jukebox (whatever you want to call it), but seems far easier to use, maybe because we're all so used to finding files in Windows in this way?

- RADIO TUNER
Brits used to counting the pennies as the phone bill steadily mounts up won't like this feature, but if you're on an unmetered tariff (and many are now) you'll love it. Simply pick a language and WMP displays a list of radio stations it can tune. Just click on the one you want, wait 30 seconds while it buffers up the audiostream and off you go. Sound quality isn't that great, but it was a weird feeling for yours truly, a frequent visitor to Japan, to listen to his favourite spot on the Tokyo dial (J-Wave 81.3FM) in his front room in Bristol! Offering a choice of 1,500 radio stations around the world, it's a fantastic feature and works superbly. When broadband cable comes a proper, expect WMP to let you watch TV in this way too.

To test WMP's Windows Media Audio CODEC, we put it against the Fraunhofer IIS MPEG Layer-3 Codec (advanced) which comes bundled with MusicMatch Jukebox 5.0. (Fraunhofer do an even better sounding one - the Fraunhofer IIS MPEG Layer-3 Codec (professional) - but it's a specialist product that comes with its MP3 Producer Pro software). While Fraunhofer's Advanced CODEC allows up to 320kbps encoding, the Windows CODEC's maximum bitrate is a mere 160kbps, so the tests had to be done at this low rate. For the sake of fairness, your average cloth-eared user with a middling 32MB equipped MP3 portable probably wouldn't venture higher than this quality level anyway, so it's a good practical line to draw in the sand.

The tests were conducted as follows: with just a touch of irony your reporter encoded Slade's 'Cum On Feel the Noize' from his PC CD-ROM

drive, using both Windows Media Player (set to its maximum quality setting with digital error correction on) and Music Match Jukebox 5.0 (set to 160kbps, digital error correction on). The two files, called TRACK07.WMA and TRACK07.MP3 were compared for encoding time, length and sound quality. This was repeated with various other songs from artists as diverse as Miles Davis and Brian Eno.

Both formats encoded the 4 minute 31second song at around one and a half speed. Both encoders made faultless jobs, with no glitches audible at all. Amusingly, the MS Audio file actually turned out to be 0.05MB longer than the MP3 at 5.22iMB, something that will bring smiles to the faces of anyone who's read Uncle Bill's PR blurb. If the stats make interesting reading, the listening tests are even better. The music files were played back using their respective players (i.e. Windows Media and MMJ5.0) via the coaxial digital output from Digidesign's

excellent ToolBox PC soundcard, driving the DAC section of Marantz's superb CD7 CD player. This fed my reference valve power amp and Yamaha NS1000Ms.

Even at this lowish bitrate the difference between the formats was obvious from the first bar of the song - the WMA made singer Noddy Holder's voice sound congested and muffled whereas the MP3 was appreciably clearer and more atmospheric. Then the band kicked in and the differences were like night and day. Most noticeable was WMA's lack of definition given to the percussion work on the right channel. Noticeably softer and less dynamic, there was no sense of the physicality of sticks hitting skins. MP3, by contrast made a better - but not perfect - job of it, with superior dynamics and better clarity. Its downside was that ride cymbals sometimes sounded slightly slurred, whereas WMA seemed more consistently smooth. ■■■▶▶

Sound looks

cameo

Inner value



WHAT HI-FI? August 2000

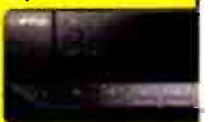
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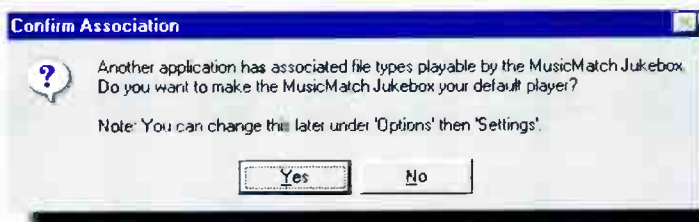
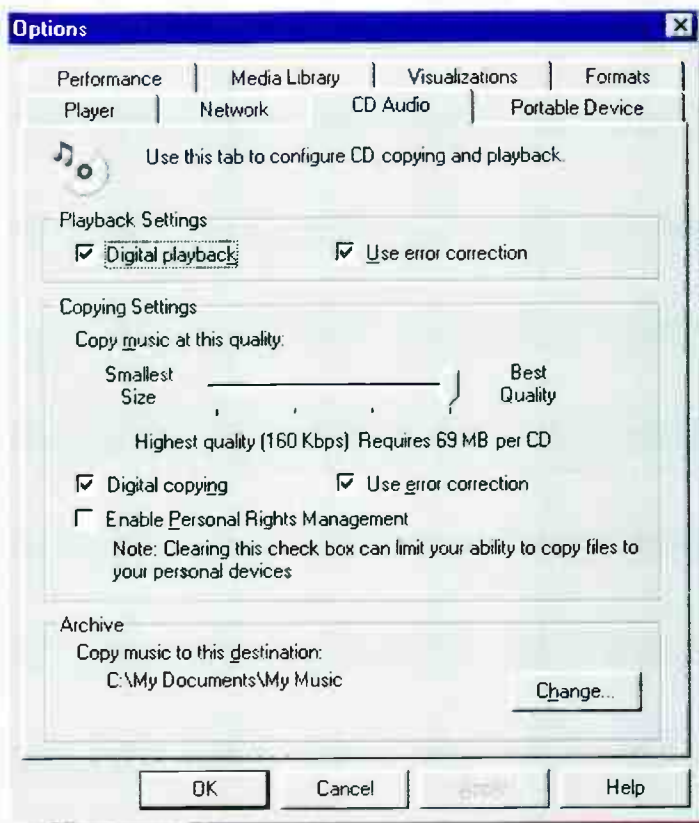
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...quality time: not much in the way of tweaking to be had - 160kbps is your lot...

...oops, a bit of politics: Windows asks if you want to use a rival to its new Media Player to play music!

Down in the midband Bill's new baby got a severe thrashing, with MP3 proving clearer, crisper and more detailed. Both dynamic peaks and silences between notes were easier to discern with MP3, while WMA made everything blur into one big wall of sound. In its defence, this wasn't wholly unpleasant to listen to, just rather uninvolved and inaccurate. The recorded acoustic stretched further back with MP3, whereas with WMA it just hung around the plane of the speakers rather dispassionately. Vocals and lead guitars really projected into the room with MP3, with WMA they meekly held their own in the middle of the soundstage.

The difference was no less marked in the bass, either. MP3's low frequencies were powerful and confident, with nicely articulated bass guitar playing and easily discernable kick drum work. By contrast WMA's bass sounded enjoyably warm but breathless - weight and drive were lacking. Once again the effect was pleasant and inoffensive enough, but less musically involving. This pattern was repeated pretty much regardless of

source material. Each time MP3 sounded clearer and more rhythmically engaging, with sharper, faster attack transients and the occasional slurring of cymbal decays.

THE FINAL CUT

So there you have it. It's a fascinating and beautifully crafted bit of code that manages computer audio better than any other software package to date, but is let down by the Windows Media Audio format it introduces. For the moment at least, the sound isn't as good as MP3, and in our limited tests we couldn't even back up Microsoft's claim that it uses less memory.

Whatever the politics of Big Bill's new audio format, one thing's for sure - it isn't the last word in digital sound. In fairness though, Windows Media Player is aiming far more into the mainstream than rival MP3 packages, which seem to bask in their hobbyist orientation. Politics and sonics aside, it's well worth a download. ■▲

Microsoft Windows Media Player £free
www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/



- PORTABLE DEVICE

This option gives lets you transfer files from the Media Library to what Microsoft calls a "portable music device" - what some of us still call an MP3 portable. As a number of major US manufacturers will be giving their next generation MP3 walkies Windows Media compatibility, this will doubtless be a useful facility. The new generation of palm PCs and Compact Flash drives will also benefit.

- SKIN CHOSER

A clumsy name for quite an elegant feature. Clicking on this option gives you a menu of skins (or 'on-screen looks') you can select instead of the standard one you start with. The bundled skins in this Beta 7 issue of WMP aren't going to win any prizes, but there will doubtless be countless sites with all sorts of weird and wonderful designs by the time this magazine hits the newsstands. Maybe the same enterprising individual who did the NAD skin for WinAmp would like to do the same for WMP? And why not a Naim skin, or even an Audio Note Ongaku?

international jet set



From across the pond comes Hewlett Packard's latest 'all-in-one' CD writer. Alan Seddon takes the HP9310i out for a burn.



Although not a name familiar to British audiophiles, American-based Hewlett Packard are an old hand at the computer peripherals game. Seems like they've been doing everything from laser printers to personal electronic organisers since the year zero. They've also made quite a name for themselves in CD burners, having proved very popular among American aficionados.

The £170 HP9310i reviewed here is more than 'just' a burner. It's actually a package that includes all you need to get going, including the drive itself with the associated mounting hardware (nuts, bolts, cables etc.), a CD-ROM of set up software, a kind of 'idiots guide' poster explaining how to install it, a free CD-R and another CD-ROM featuring some bespoke HP software including HP Simple Backup and HP Fast Format (for using it as a

data store), Adaptec's Easy CD Creator 3.5 and Direct CD. There's also Sonic Foundry's ACID, which is an all-in-one hard disk recording package with simple sequencing thrown in, and even a Neato CD Labelling kit too!

Sounds great, I hear you say, so what's the catch? Presumably the actual drive is a bargain basement unit, or last year's model? Wrong on both counts. It's actually a cutting edge design (32x CD-ROM, 4x CD-RW rewriting and 10x CD-R burning) with no less than 4MB of data buffer memory. This is a mighty impressive spec, meaning buffer underrun (where the CPU sends data to the burner faster than it can cope with) is virtually eliminated.

This drive was easy to set up thanks to common-sense design and high quality instructions, and proved faultless in use. This surprised me

somewhat, using as it does the old fashioned E-IDE interface which feels positively Stone Age compared to modern SCSI types. With decent CD-R blanks like the Philips CD-Rs I used, the HP9310i made extremely neutral and uncoloured recordings which were very hard to distinguish from the originals, save a very slight flattening of dynamics. Can't say fairer than that, especially at this price!

Overall then, thumbs aloft for this new package from HP. Only grumble is the old version of Adaptec's Easy Creator. The latest 4.02 version is streets ahead of the Neolithic looking 3.5 version the 9310i ships with. Still, you can always upgrade at a later date. ■▲

HEWLETT PACKARD HP9310i £175
www.hewlett-packard.com

SPECIFICATIONS Interface

E-IDE Buffer: 4MB
 Media Compatibility: CD-R and CD-RW, Red Book CD and CD Extra, CD-ROM, CD-ROM XA & CD-I, CD-ROM XA & CD-I, CD-Bridge & Photo-CD,
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KIT88 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT & KAT88 VALVE POWER AMPLIFIER KIT

Here is the amazing KIT88. The circuit is similar to that of the ever popular KEL34 with a few changes to incorporate the Tesla, JJ branded KT88 power tetrode. This is a pure Class A push-pull design providing 36 watts into an 8ohm load. Gary Devon has come up with a gem of an output transformer (E/I). Combined with the KIT88 it offers a virtually unmatched result for a valve amplifier. Frequency response measured 11Hz to 75kHz, separation 71dB, noise 98dB, sensitivity 400mV and distortion 0.03%. *As valve amplifiers go, the KIT88 is one of the best measured performances I have ever come across*, says Noel Keywood. Jon Marks says, "The KIT88 pulled a series of surprisingly fast, meaty basslines out of its trickbag when dealing with Suzanne Vega's Nine Objects Of Desire album. As if this wasn't enough, the mid and

treble were nice too - cymbals had a deliciously natural, golden shimmer without sounding soft, and vocals were extremely transparent and crisply defined. KIT88 didn't hang around when it came to exploiting the virtues of its four output valves on numbers such as 'Leaves' and 'Suspect Sustain' from Cirrus' Land's End Jazz CD. Saxophone had a wonderfully smooth, realistic character, and acoustic guitar mixed speed with harmonic richness to very impressive effect. Asian Dub Foundation and Moloko showed no sign at all of the sluggish, woolly bottom-end and poorly-delineated bass beats that most valve amps are to blame for. Which makes the KIT88 an all-round, high-end bargain.* Weight 16kg, external dimensions with valves are 30mm(w) x 300mm(d) x 190mm (h).



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says, "tonally the KEL34 E&I is a bit of a smoothie. It has a fast, dynamic sound, plucked guitar strings and bass drum enjoy crisp leading edges and great impact. Clear imaging and spacious sound staging meant voices and instruments really jumped out of the loudspeaker boxes. Overall the KEL34 E&I is a beautiful power amp." At the price, this kit is second to none and will open up the benefits of valve amplification to a whole new class of audio nuts! Weight 12kg. External dimensions with valves: 33cm(w) x 27.5cm(d) x 18cm(h).



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KEL80 MONOBLOCK AMPLIFIER KIT

Following the success of our budget KEL34 40watt kit amplifier, we have come up with a 'bigger brother' design. The output stage utilises two pairs of TESLA EL34 pentodes in parallel-push-pull mode, allowing KEL80 to turn out 80 watts into an 8ohm load. Heading up the input stage we have the wonderfully linear Russian 6AU6 working into an American 5687 phase-splitter. KEL80's output transformers are 4ohm and 8ohm tapped. With an input sensitivity at around 380mV for full output, it

will happily partner both passive and active pre-amplifiers. It is easy to assemble. Simon Pope says, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating and the KEL80 is a feast for the ears, with solid bass attack, lightening fast reactions, that emphasises musicality as well as power. At 590.00 GBP a pair, a definite valve winner. Each monobloc weighs 12kgs., external dimensions with valves: 14cm(w) x 8cm(h) x 43.5cm(d).



£590 A PAIR

HD83 VALVE HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER KIT

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

wired up. The HD83 is a single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for that added purity and is a quiet as a mouse. For sound quality Jon Marks says, "The bass is punchy and controlled without becoming artificial, while treble has the crispness of the best solid-state, with the tonal purity, delicacy and speed associated with valves. External dimensions 18cm(w) x 30cm(l) x 8cm(h) weight 4kg.



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Kel34 mains toroidal transformer
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Secondaries: 195V-0V-195V,380mA/0V-27V,100mA/3.15V-0V-3.15V,7.5A

Kel80 mains toroidal transformer (encapsulated)
130mm dia. x 65mm(h).
Secondaries: 195V-0V-195V,390mA/0V-27V,100mA/3.15V-0V-3.15V,7.5A

HD83 mains toroidal transformer
80mm dia. x 35mm(h).
Secondaries: 0V-165V,75mA/3.15V-0V-3.15V,1A

PSU-II mains toroidal transformer
80mm dia. x 35mm(h).
Secondaries: 0V-270V,60mA/0V-10V,2A

TRANS1 mains toroidal transformer
95mm dia. x 50mm(h).
Secondaries: 0V-370V,150mA/0V-6.3V,3.5A

output transformers
KIT88/Kat88 E/I push-pull output transformer
80mm(w)x95mm(l)x100mm(h).
Primary-secondary 10K - 8ohms, max o/p-40watts, max current-160mA valves-KT88, 6550, EL34

Kel34 E/I push-pull output transformer
80mm(w)x95mm(l)x82mm(h).
Primary-secondary 8K - 8ohms, max o/p-40watts, max current-120mA valves-EL34,5881,6L6

Kel80 E/I parallel-push-pull output transformer
95mm(w)x115mm(l)x133mm(h).
Primary-secondary 4.6K - 8 & 4ohms, max o/p-80watts, max current-250mA valves-EL34,5881,6L6

HD83 E/I single ended output transformer 40mm(w)x50mm(l)x55mm(h). Primary-secondary 4K - 4 x 64ohms, max current-10mA, max current-25mA valves-ECL83etc

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

diy kits in the world

KLS10 HIGH TECHNOLOGY COMPACT MONITOR

Our mini-marvel uses an Audax carbon fibre bass/midrange unit, married to the world's most advanced tweeter, the piezo-electric gold dome HD3P from Audax. KLS10 offers high performance from a small package. The main 'speakers are designed to work alone, or with a dedicated subwoofer to extend their bass. Alone, they are suited to near-wall mounting and can be tuned by port adjustment to suit personal

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 Drive unit pack £160.00



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 Drive Unit Pack £230.00



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- c. AEROVOX 220uF 500Vdc v. high quality electrolytic (solder tag radial)
90mm(h) x 35mm diameter
- d. TROBO 470uF 450V high quality electrolytics (snap in radial)
50mm(h) x 35mm diameter
- e. TROBO 100uF 450V high quality electrolytics (snap in radial)
40mm(h) x 20mm diameter
- f. LCR 22.5uF 440Vdc polypropylene capacitors (wire leadouts radial)
100mm(h) x 45mm diameter
- g. ANSAR 22.5uF 630Vdc polypropylene capacitors (wire leadouts radial)
85mm(h) x 45mm diameter
- h. AMPOHM 0.47uF 630Vdc paper in oil capacitor (axial)
45mm(l) x 20mm diameter



printed circuit boards
KIT88/KaT88 Printed Circuit Board
 140mm(w) x 310mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)

HD83 Printed Circuit Board
 140mm(w) x 160mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)

Kel34 Printed Circuit Board
 140mm(w) x 310mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)

PSU-II Printed Circuit Board
 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)

Kel80 Printed Circuit Board (a pair)
 120mm(w) x 215mm(l) x 2.4mm(d)

PRE-II Printed Circuit Board
 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)

PHONO-II Printed Circuit Board
 105mm(w) x 130mm(l) x 1.6mm(d)
 tag board 2 x 16 connections (hard wiring)
 40mm(w) x 140mm(l) x 3mm(d)

special offers

K5881 chassis
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parts directory

World Audio designs

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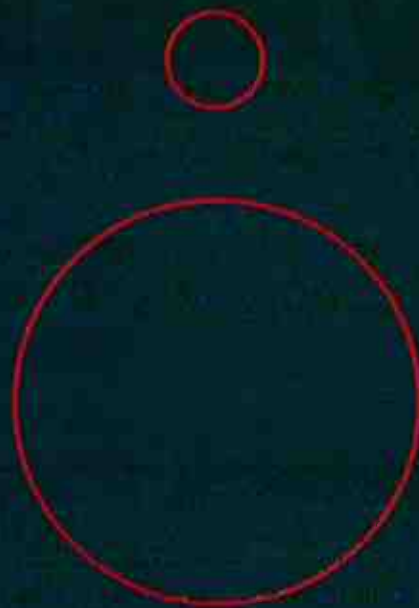
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amplifier kits description

amplifier kits description	order No.	qty	uk (inc vat & carriage)	overseas (exc. vat & carriage)
Kit88 Valve integrated amplifier kit (with valves)	Kit88-K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£440	£375
Kit88 Valve integrated amplifier kit (without valves)	Kit88-K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£325	£275
Kat88 Valve integrated amplifier kit (with valves)	KaT88-K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£425	£365
Kat88 Valve integrated amplifier kit (without valves)	KaT88-K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£310	£265
HD83 Valve headphone amplifier kit	HD83-K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£175	£150
Kel80 Valve Monoblock amplifier kit (with valves)	Kel80 -K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£590	£500
Kel80 Valve Monoblock amplifier kit (without valves)	Kel80 -K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£520	£445
Kel34 E&I 40W push-pull integrated amplifier kit (with valves)	Kel34 E&I-K240/120 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£265	£230
Kel34 E&I 40W push-pull integrated amplifier kit (without valves)	Kel34 E&I-K240/120 (no valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£230	£190
Kel34 E&I Transformer set (1 main & 2 outputs)	Kel34 E&I-K240/120 (T.set)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£140	£120
Kel34 E&I Output Transformer (pair)	Kel34 E&I-K240/120 (OPT)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£70	£60
WAP surplus toroidal valve mains transformer	Kel34 E&I-K240/120	<input type="checkbox"/>	£31	£21

loudspeaker kits

loudspeaker kits	order No.	qty	uk (inc vat & carriage)	overseas (exc. vat & carriage)
KLS3 Drive Units	KLS3D	<input type="checkbox"/>	£230.00	£200.00
KLS3 Drive Units + Crossover Kit etc	KLS3C	<input type="checkbox"/>	£350.00	£300.00
KLS3 Gold mkII Drive Units	KLS3G-D	<input type="checkbox"/>	£450.00	£392.00
KLS3 Gold mk II Drive Units + Crossover Kit etc	KLS3G-C	<input type="checkbox"/>	£575.00	£500.00
KLS9 Drive Units	KLS9D	<input type="checkbox"/>	£160.00	£140.00
KLS9 Drive Units + Crossover Kit etc	KLS9C	<input type="checkbox"/>	£230.00	£200.00
KLS10 Drive Units	KLS10D	<input type="checkbox"/>	£358.00	£311.00
KLS10 Drive Units + Crossover Kit etc	KLS10C	<input type="checkbox"/>	£394.00	£343.00
KLS10-Subwoofer Drive Units	KLS10-subD	<input type="checkbox"/>	£71.00	£61.00
KLS10 Drive Units + Crossover Kit etc	KLS10-subC	<input type="checkbox"/>	£149.00	£130.00

parts description

parts description	order No.	qty	uk (inc vat & carriage)	overseas (exc. vat & carriage)
Kit88/Kat88 mains toroidal transformer	88 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	75.00	55.00
Kel34 mains toroidal transformer	Kel34 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	55.00	40.00
Kel80 mains toroidal transformer(encapsulated)	Kel80 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	70.00	52.00
HD83 mains toroidal transformer	HD83 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	35.00	25.00
PSU-II mains toroidal transformer	PSU-II - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	35.00	25.00
TRANS1 mains toroidal transformer	TRANS1	<input type="checkbox"/>	25.00	17.00
Kit88/Kat88 E/I push-pull output transformer	88 - O/P T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	130.00	104.00
Kel80 E/I parallel-push-pull output transformer	Kel80 - O/P T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	170.00	136.00
HD83 E/I single ended output transformer	HD83 - O/P T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	85.00	65.00
Pre-II E/I driver transformer	PRE-II - driver T(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	70.00	54.00
Kit88/Kat88 Printed Circuit Board	88 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	37.00	32.00
Kel34 Printed Circuit Board	Kel34 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.00	13.00
Kel80 Printed Circuit Board	Kel80 - PCB(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	47.00	39.00
HD83 Printed Circuit Board	HD83 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	18.00	15.00
PSU-II Printed Circuit Board	PSU-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	18.00	15.00
PRE-II Printed Circuit Board	PRE-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	18.00	15.00
PHONO-II Printed Circuit Board	PHONO-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	18.00	15.00
Tag board 2 x 16 connections (hard wiring)	TAG	<input type="checkbox"/>	3.50	3.00
Alps blue audio grade 50K dual log potentiometer	ALPS - 50K	<input type="checkbox"/>	11.00	9.00
Alps blue audio grade 100K dual log potentiometer	ALPS - 100K	<input type="checkbox"/>	11.00	9.00
AEROVOX 150uF 500Vdc v. high quality electrolytic	AERO - 150U	<input type="checkbox"/>	12.00	9.50
AEROVOX 220uF 500Vdc v. high quality electrolytic	AERO - 220U	<input type="checkbox"/>	17.00	15.50
TROBO 470uF 450V high quality electrolytics	TROBO - 470U	<input type="checkbox"/>	8.50	7.00
TROBO 100uF 450V high quality electrolytics	TROBO - 100U	<input type="checkbox"/>	4.00	5.00
LCR 22.5uF 440Vdc polypropylene capacitors	LCR - 22.5U	<input type="checkbox"/>	10.00	8.50
Ansar 22.5uF 630Vdc polypropylene capacitors	ANSAR - 22.5U	<input type="checkbox"/>	16.00	13.00
Ampohm 0.47uF 630Vdc paper in oil capacitor	AMPOHM - 0.47U	<input type="checkbox"/>	9.50	8.00
K5881 chassis	K5881 - CHAS	<input type="checkbox"/>	55.00	45.00

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World Audio design

More Bass More Volume More Music



Internal section showing the unique woven cable construction which effectively removes mains interference



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"Your mains cables are excellent and have done exactly what you claim of them. So much so that my intended purchase of new loudspeakers has been put off! Indeed to anyone thinking of purchasing or replacing a piece of Hi-Fi equipment I would say: See Russ Andrews first!"

Mr K Brian, Stoke-on Trent.

The Importance Of Mains Quality

Mains quality is absolutely fundamental to the the quality of sound you get from your system. The problem is radio frequency interference (RFI). It causes loss of information, leading to less detail, reduced bass, and increased distortion. TV and radio, domestic appliances and factories all emit RFI.

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Ref: AW10500

M P3 wrong footed the Japanese. It came from nowhere (i.e. not out of Japan) to grab headlines around the world. Suddenly, MP3 was threatening to be the format of tomorrow, to the consternation of majors like Sony, who have been patiently throwing millions at MiniDisc since 1992 in an attempt to capture the portable music market. MP3 threatened to wrench it away, but now Japanese companies Panasonic and Toshiba are fighting back with a rival technology that to me looks like a good contender for the future - SD Card.

Whilst MP3 is fine in itself, it isn't going anywhere. I test players regularly and they are proving to be much of a muchness. Most come from small Korean companies and comprise a bundle of chips that by today's standards are simple technology. There's been little advance in quality or performance over the last year or so.

MP3 files give good quality when encoded properly through a Fraunhofer engine, but this takes time. Most MP3 rippers are too fast, which limits quality my measurements show. Associated software isn't changing either. So-called 'Juke Box' programmes are quite crude, poor rippers giving mediocre sound quality.

Players and software like this were fine as initial offerings: they were of their time. Time and expectations have moved on quickly however; MP3 players have not.

By way of contrast Toshiba and Panasonic in alliance have both published developmental road maps for their new SD Card system that clearly show they intend to develop it into something quite formidable over the next few years. Looking at what they propose to achieve offers tentative answers to questions about where audio is going today, in a confusing market full of technological change.

SD Card is set to offer a massive 1GB storage capacity by 2003, which raises some fascinating possibilities. I note the system accepts standard CD audio, in addition to AAC (Advanced Audio Coding to

MPEG 2) files and - surprisingly - MP3 files. Japanese Panasonic executives told me when I questioned them at the Malaysian launch. 1GB will easily accommodate an entire CD. It will also accommodate DVD Audio compressed by a 5:1 ratio, using MPEG2 compression. It would give 15 hours of AAC encoded music. Will we have wristwatch DVD-Audio in a few year's time?

I couldn't help but notice at the Malaysian show debut of SD Card that it got pride of place in Panasonic's giant exhibition space, DVD-Audio being consigned to a small demo room. Quite obviously Panasonic and Toshiba see card-memory audio as the way things will go in the mass market, with DVD-Audio occupying a small high-end niche for those who want ulti-

**Quite obviously
Panasonic and
Toshiba see card-
memory audio as the way
things will go in the mass
market**

mate quality. Since 1GB can handle DVD-Audio they will eventually merge, however.

If the idea of wristwatch DVD-Audio seems stunning, there's more! The SD alliance and Sony are working on wireless connection, based upon Bluetooth digital RF transmission technology. Intended for computers, it's coming to audio.

There are many ways to load flash memory, apart from today's slow and clunky system of hooking up to a computer and fiddling with a Juke Box

programme. Panasonic are looking to TV set top boxes, then there are music kiosks and mobile phones.

Flash memory is expensive but SanDisk say 64MB should cost around £6 in five years time, giving one hour of AAC encoded music. Toshiba say they are reducing cost 30% per annum and are acutely aware of the need for the \$10 chip. Will people be buying music on a chip instead of a CD soon? If these prices are achieved, it is possible.

What a fascinating future scenario! Although MiniDisc is inexpensive it looks technologically archaic against flash memory portables, including Sony's own Memory Stick Walkman. MP3 and the internet started it all but the Japanese are about to fight back with their version of future audio: SD Card. I can't help feeling that this is the way audio and true hi-fi, in the form of DVD-Audio, are going.



Noel Keywood



Noel Keywood travels to the mystic east for our report on Malaysia's annual audio showcase.

I bumped down a day early to get some rest before the Malaysia Audio Show started - but it wasn't to be. Panasonic had something new to reveal and were holding a lavish day-early press conference. Lasers flashed, music thumped and onto the stage walked two slender Malaysian girls to introduce to us a brand new technology: SD Card. Strapped to their wrists were wristwatch style hi-fi players; around their necks dangled pendant players. The scale of the presentation gave me the impression that SD Card looms very large in Panasonic's future plans - larger than DVD Audio.

SD Card is a solid-state memory card of 64MB capacity that stores up to one hour's worth of music for miniature audio players little larger than a matchbox. If it sounds like MP3, it is - in 'commercially correct' form and with better sound quality. The big Japanese companies have been slow to latch onto MP3, largely because of copying problems. Panasonic's card memory is SDMI compliant, hence the name SD Card, offering serial copying protection. I was fascinated by other features though. The coding scheme (AAC/MPEG 2) offers higher quality

than MP3, leading Panasonic to claim they offer higher audio quality than MP3 players. Demo units I listened to suffered from tinny sounding earpieces - always a limitation with portable audio.

The "road map" for SD Card also caught my attention. Panasonic, working in conjunction with SanDisk and Toshiba, expect to produce 256MB cards by 2001 and no less than 1GB cards by 2003, with a 10MB/s data rate. This raises some awesome possibilities. The company showed video cameras, still cameras, portable telephones and even microwave ovens with SD Cards. My Far East press data also noted that rice cookers will come with SD Card! Since a CD stores 600MB and SD Card can store CD audio data (as well as MP3), it will soon be able to store an entire CD, uncompressed. So by 2003 we'll be able to play CDs from a 'wristwatch' it appears.

Panasonic were also demonstrating a DVD-Audio micro system, the SC-HDA710, comprising neat mini components coupled to attractive conventional loudspeakers. A sequential demo of CD followed by DVD Audio clearly showed DVD Audio had

a perceptibly more open and spacious quality, lacking the enclosed and constrained character of CD. Even from a micro system I was fascinated to hear notes die away smoothly instead of suffering the sudden truncation imposed by CD coding.

Another upcoming technology Panasonic obviously wanted everyone to see was their fantastically impressive Tau plasma screen. At 9cms deep and 33kgs it can be hung on a wall. Picture quality was breathtakingly sharp, bright and colour rich. Pity that the price, in Malaysia at least, amounts to £10,000, albeit for a very large panel of 106cms (42in) diagonal. The days of the conventional TV are numbered.

So are video recorders using VHS cassettes. Panasonic want us to record to 4.7GB DVD RAM cartridges, which accept audio and video, using their new DMR-E10. Although on display it's currently for the Japanese market only. Pioneer were showing their alternative, the new DVR-1000 DVD-RW recorder, also only available in Japan at present. It records direct to DVD-RW discs, also with 4.7GB capacity. Both these recorders could of course record DVD-Audio in future. At



present they are expensive but cheaper models will doubtless become available soon. All the same, don't expect DVD recorders to reach the low, low price of below £200 being asked for DVD players at present.

Sharp had an interesting display of headphones that use a 64MB MagicGate (Sony Memory Stick) solid-state memory card to store up to one hour of MP3 audio at 128kbs. Again for Japan only, the quoted Malaysian price was 1710RM, or £285.

At the other end of the audio scale, with China so close, valve amplifiers get a good airing in this region, in spite of year-round temperatures that hover around 32degrees centigrade. Beautifully built and finished were the Audio Space range from Hong Kong. I spotted a new model, the AS-8P with 6550 output valves capable of delivering 45W per channel. It can be run in triode or ultra-linear mode and has adjustable negative feedback. The 6550 is very popular in America, at which market this model is undoubtedly aimed. Price was equivalent to £983. Audio Space have a model for everyone, also offering the AS-8i fitted with KT88s. This valve is popular elsewhere around



the world. Being one of the last power valves ever made it offers a great performance. Audio Space also make 845 single-ended amplifiers, EL34 and 84 types, plus a 300B amplifier - quite a range.

In from China came loudspeaker designer and founder of Acoustic Energy, Phil Jones. Now behind the U.S. brand American Acoustic Development, based in North Carolina but manufacturing in China, Phil brought with him a wide range of new loudspeakers, including a fascinating single-driver miniature that he claimed worked from 150Hz up to 20kHz. Phil handles every aspect of design, from drive unit through to cabinet, making



Top Left - A Panasonic SD Card audio watch in shocking Cerise pink. The Panasonic girl (top right) is wearing a yellow SD watch.


AAD loudspeakers better optimised than those based upon OEM drivers, yet priced lower than possible because of China manufacture. Expect them in the UK soon.

As they say in the West, "early bird catches the worm". Flying into this year's MAS2000 show early I caught SD Card. Japan has finally got to grips with the alien idea of MP3 (European file format played on Korea hardware) and is bringing its industrial might to bear. This looks like the future of audio. ☺



Middle: Sharp were showing headphones that carry a 64MB Sony Memory Stick that also gives 1hr playing time.

Bottom right: Beneath the Audio Space AS-8i valve amplifier, showing neat construction.



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BOOTHROYD STUART
MERIDIAN

“M P3. I heard that's going to be obsolete soon”, said the marketing manager of one of Britain's biggest hi-fi companies to me on the phone last week...

Well, it looks like Big Bill Gates' PR men are doing their jobs better than I thought. This statement wouldn't have mattered so much if it had come from some bloke down the pub, but for a well respected audio industry professional to have got the impression that Microsoft's new MS Audio format is the end of MP3 is alarming.

It speaks volumes about how a few carefully arranged press demonstrations and some off-the-record briefings to the right computer journalists can sway public opinion. Suddenly, thanks to a nod and wink, MP3 is on its last legs, facing imminent death at the hand of MS Audio.

For those audio freaks who've yet to hear Microsoft's mantra, MS Audio is the new compressed music format Bill Gates & Co. developed last year as a rival to

MP3. It isn't actually that dissimilar, being another variation on the theme of psycho-acoustic digital audio coding. Like Sony's ATRAC, Philips' PASC and the proprietary MP3 format it's simply a way of throwing away music data intelligently, so you can store more in a given amount of space.

MS Audio forms the mainstay of the new Windows Media Player, soon to appear bundled with Windows Millennium Edition, which is the latest and greatest (?) of Microsoft's home user PC operating systems. This fact alone means it will fast become a common occurrence simply through sheer volume of numbers. We music buyers will be ripping our CDs to .WMA files and squirting them to Microsoft's new WinJam portable digital player (yours for £129 from this Autumn - yes, they've thought of everything) simply because there's a WMA ripper free in our Operating Systems. If we want to use MP3, we'll have to either download some soft-

ware or buy an all-in-one like MusicMatch Jukebox. Not particularly difficult or expensive of course, but still more fussy than using Windows' built-in freebie...

Just think what this will all mean. As soon as the new Windows arrives in people's homes later this year, MS Audio becomes a serious global music format! So slow was CD's adoption that it took three years for it to look like it had any future, but thanks to the scale of the global PC industry MS Audio is going to achieve a massive market presence overnight. Now that's what I call monopoly politics...

Some UK hi-fi magazines were initially very sniffy about MP3, possibly due to a lack of understanding about its potential. Well this time it's our turn to put the downer on a new compressed digital for-



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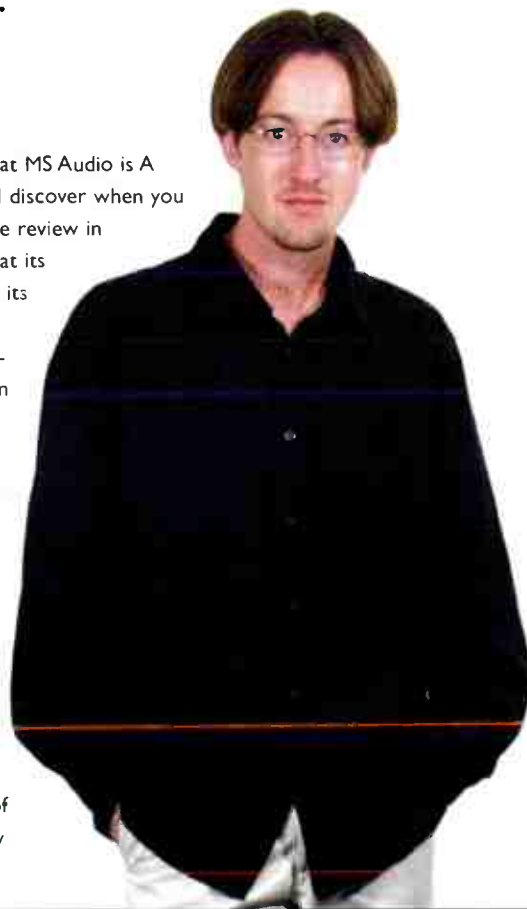
mat and declare that MS Audio is A Bad Thing. As you'll discover when you read our exhaustive review in this month's issue, at its best quality setting its sonics don't hold a candle to MP3 running at just medium resolution. And that's only the start of our objections.

You could argue that anything which gets people into music can only be a force for good - which is how I feel about all those millions of awful sounding low

bitrate MP3s up on the Net for free downloading. But why replace a universal, freely distributed, non-aligned music carrier with another from the world's greatest private monopoly? This fact alone gives me the heebeegeebees: it just can't be good for music (and music buyers) in the long run.

Take this to its logical extreme and think ten years into the future. Given that computer power doubles - and prices halve - every eighteen months, we'll soon be finding everything we do involves computer chips. (If Pentium P10,000s cost 1p each, why not put them in everything?) This means computers will dominate music and home entertainment, so if Microsoft continues to dominate computers, it could theoretically get to the point where you'll need a Windows Media Player to play any kind of recorded music anywhere on earth...

On the grounds of music (and computer) industry politics alone, Big Bill's innocuous little MS Audio format suddenly looks scary. And then there's the sound quality issue. Enjoy page 52! ●



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When a new format hits the hi-fi scene, there's usually one of two courses it will take. Either the market will accept it, ensuring initial steady growth, or alternatively the technology simply falls upon deaf ears and fades away within a year or two. Compact Cassette and Disc are typical examples of the former; Digital Compact Cassette an unfortunate example of the latter. There's always an exception to the rule though and, in terms of hi-fi, the exception comes in the form of MiniDisc.

The progress of MiniDisc has been far from predictable and has had most of the pundits baffled at some point or other. When I began my column seven years ago, MD was in its infancy. Generally praised for its portability and editing features, the format received a luke warm (to put it mildly) reception from most of the specialist press in terms of sound quality. It looked for sometime as though Sony's creation was doomed to follow DCC into obscurity.

The arrival of cheaper CDRs and imminent MP3 during the late 1990s looked set to seal the fate of MD. Yet thanks to the tenacity (and huge financial clout) of Sony it was at this stage that the format began to blossom. Unlike CD and latterly DVD, which firmly established themselves within the first five years of production, it took MD eight years to really get to grips with the U.K. market. Even then the product was not - and still isn't - a true global medium. Immensely popular in the Far East and Britain, not so popular within Continental Europe and hardly even recognised the other side of the Atlantic.

Even after eight years the future of MD is still difficult to predict. However, after three strong years the format appears at last to be suffering slightly. Sales of the machines, in the UK at least, have appeared to reach a plateau. Some of the major hi-fi retailers are even reporting a slackening of demand. Looked at in the cold light of day, this wouldn't come as a surprise to many. CDRs are now cheaper and better value than ever, and many of

those who don't have a hi-fi separates system are utilising the computer versions instead. MP3, whilst far from booming, is beginning to gain firmer ground within the market place. So the competition is stronger than ever. What's more, outside of portables and hi-fi separates the medium hasn't been so well received. There are a number of mini systems incorporating MD, but not as many as you'd expect for a format now eight years into its life cycle, and trying to find a car on the market with a standard fit MD is nigh on impossible.

Perhaps it doesn't help that finding pre-recorded material is a similarly thankless task. Yet there are other, less apparent, reasons for MiniDisc's current state of malaise. The first is that studies have



Perhaps Sony realise that MiniDisc's future isn't so bright and that they might as well charge as much for it as they can in its twilight years.

shown that there's a group of consumers that will always buy the latest technology whether it shows practical benefit or not! It could be that MD is no longer the 'in thing', with the gadget freaks attention now turned towards the likes of DVD, WAP phones and MP3. Secondly, and rather oddly, Sony still has strong control of the rights to the technology. Even after all this time, to my knowledge, there's still only Sharp and Sony licensed to make the mechanisms. This, and the high license price Sony charge to other manufacturers to use their mechanism, goes some way to explaining why such manufacturers are reluctant to enter the MD arena. In these times of competition and supposedly open markets it seems odd that Sony pretty much still has a monopoly with MiniDisc.

More extraordinary still, is that those expecting MD bargains for the new hi-fi season could find themselves disappointed. Retail industry sources have told me that Sony trade prices for many of their MD players have increased by around 20% or more. With profit margins already low with most discounted machines (eg. the Sony MDSJE530 at around £150), high street MD player prices look set to rise, if anything, over the coming months. Hardly what you'd expect from a medium at this stage in its product life. But then Sony no doubt have their reasons. I believe an interest in raising the profile of the brand has been touted as being one of the possible reasons for the move.

Of course there's still Sharp and the brands, such as Technics and Kenwood, that use Sharp mechanisms. Yet think MD and one naturally thinks Sony. Sales figures reflect this too. Without Sony, MiniDisc would sink without trace. Perhaps Sony realise that MiniDisc's future isn't so bright and that they might as well charge as much for it as they can in its twilight years.

One thing's for sure though. Don't discount MiniDisc as a dead duck just yet. If there's one thing the last eight years have shown me, it's to be wary of making predictions! MD has risen from impossible odds. ●



Dominic Todd

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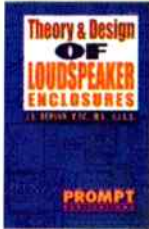
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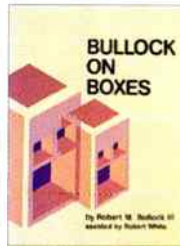
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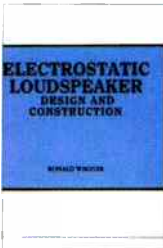
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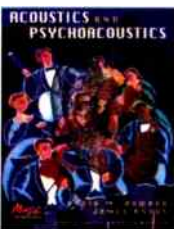
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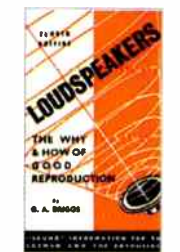
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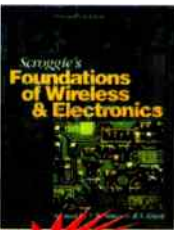
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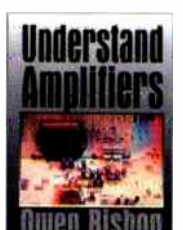
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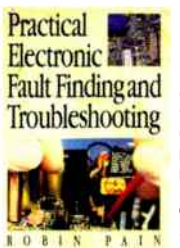
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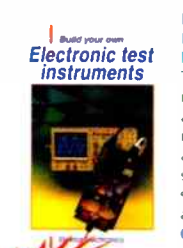
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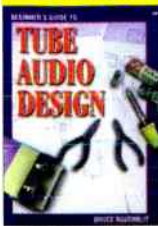


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VALVE BOOKS



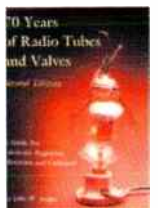
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by Bruce Rozenblit
This book takes a comprehensive look at tube audio design. It explains how vacuum tubes work and how to design with them. Rozenblit covers stabilisation and testing, a description of 13 famous and classic amps and preamps and how to work effectively as a designer. A hands-on guide to construction techniques, tools and choosing components and tubes is provided.
1997, 132pp., 8" x 11"
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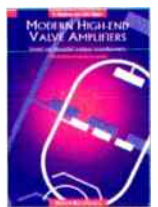
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by Fritz Langford-Smith
This is a classic reference handbook for all who are interested in the design and application of audio amplifiers and radio receivers, and deals with basic principles and the practical design of all types of classic audio amplifiers, radio receivers and record-producing equipment up to the invention of the transistor, covering valves, valve testing, general theory and components; audio and radio frequencies; power supplies, design of complete AM and FM receivers, and reference information.
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70 Years of Radio Tubes and Valves
by John W. Stokes.
Outlines the evolution of radio receiving tubes and the part they played in the domestic radio receiver. A reference for those interested in the history and development, and collectors alike.
256pp "8" x 11" Paper back
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Modern High-End Valve Amplifiers Based on Toroidal Output Transformers
by Menno van der Veen
Explains the whys and wherefores of toroidal output transformers at various technical levels, starting with elementary concepts and culminating in complete mathematical descriptions. The schematic diagram of a valve amplifier often appears to be very simple at first glance, but anyone who has built a modern valve amplifier knows that a lot of critical details are hidden behind the

apparent simplicity. These are discussed extensively, in connection with designs for amplifiers without output powers ranging from 10 to 100 watts. Finally, the author gives some attention to a number of special valve amplifiers, and to the theory and practice of negative feedback. 170mm x 240mm Hard back, 250 pages.
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Audio Anthologies - When Audio Was Young
Volume One: May'47 to Dec'49
Contents: 9.5W, 5W and 6.5W 6AS7G amps., 30W 300B amp., valve FM tuning indicator, 30W 211 power amp., cathode follower amp. using 6V6, an adaptation of the Williamson amp., valve phono pre-amp., several horn and reflex loudspeaker designs.
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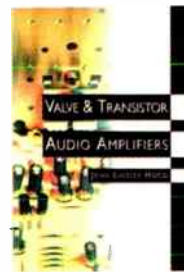
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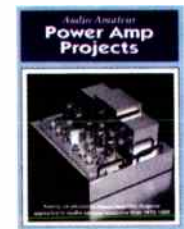
Audio Reality
by Bruce Rozenblit
A fine read that investigates conductors, skin effect, impedance, interconnects, speaker cables, balanced lines, transmission lines, power cords, isolation transformers, damping systems, tubes, acoustics and much more. Also, includes 6 excellent detailed valve design projects, 80Watt OTL, 25Watt OTL, grounded grid pre-amp, 150Watt amp., 6550 SE amp. and a grounded grid cascode phono preamp.
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Electronic Universal Vade-Mecum
by Piotr Nikolski & Bohdan Paszkowski
This Data book comprises 5693 valves divided into 442 groups. A comprehensive book which contains connection details, operating parameters, load lines and example circuits.
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Valve & Transistor Audio Amplifiers
by J.L. Hood
This is J.L. Hood's greatest work yet, describing the milestones that have marked the development of audio amplifiers, from the earliest valve amp to the latest solid state design. It is the complete world guide to audio amp design. Other contents: active & passive components, amplifiers, pre-amplifiers and power supplies.
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by the editors of Audio Amateur
This illustrated handbook features 26 of the best articles on power amps from 1970-89. Authors from six countries offer an array of designs to provide almost any level of high-quality audio power needed by the resourceful amateur who prefers the pleasure of building his or her own equipment.
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by Herbert J. Reich.
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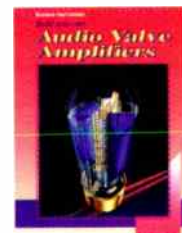
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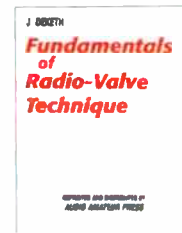
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Build your own Audio Valve Amplifiers
by Kamer Zur Linde
This book covers construction projects for preamplifiers, power amplifiers and two amplifiers for musical instruments aimed at the practical audio/hi-fi enthusiast, it offers much information on the operation of electron tubes, while the first chapter gives a short history of the thermionic valve.
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Fundamentals of Radio-Valve Technique
by J. Deketh
This is part of the philips technical series written in 1947 it was one of the most authoritative and comprehensive treatments of the nature and function of the vacuum tube.
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Valve Amplifiers

by Morgan Jones - Audio Engineer
This book allows those with a limited knowledge of the field to understand both the theory and the practice of valve audio amplifier design, such that they can analyse and modify circuits, and rebuild an amplifier. Constructional techniques are also provided so readers can build from scratch designs that actually work.
374pp 6" x 9" Paperback Code No. 1330
£25.00 + 2.75 P&P (UK)

Electronic Valves in Audio Frequency Amplifiers

by E. Rod-nhus.
Originally published in 1954 by Philips, this book encourages amp. builders to experiment with design elements. Discussing the use of valve data, the function of different amplifier stages and includes detailed descriptions of eight designs. A wealth of practical data, measurements and interesting features will be found. A very good read.
Paperback 147pp Code No. 1520
Price £12.95 + £2.00 P&P (UK)

Volume Five: Jan'58 to Dec'59
Contents: Stereo valve multiplex decoder, 7W EL84 amp., valve active crossover and 20W treble amp/50W bass amp., monaural, binaural, monophonic and stereophonic explained, heterodyne FM multiplex adaptor, transistor pre-amp., 60W EL34 amp., high power audio amps, hi-fi loudspeaker enclosure.
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Contents: Transistor pre-amps., feedback techniques, the coming of FM stereo, FM multiplex adapters, Tape recorders; distortion, frequency response and noise, 120W 6550 amp., loudspeaker efficiency.
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welcome to world favourites

Here's a list of products that are a good buy. We've tried to cater for a range of tastes, identifying strong products in every area. We're agnostic so you'll find a wide range of products, from valve pre-amps through to MiniDisc players. Products marked * are recently out of production but make a good second-hand buy.

Prices shown are those at the time of the review



Roksan Caspian CD player
Solid as a ROK

COMPACT DISC

ARCAM FMJ CD23 £1100
This British-built player is extremely versatile. Controlled and detailed with a musical insight that few match. (Jul 2000)

CAMBRIDGE CD45E* £200
A touch soft in the treble but outstanding in every other respect. (Feb 98)

KENWOOD DP-3080/II* £180
Has great clarity and presence for the price. Not as naturally expressive as the CD45E though. (Feb 98)

LINN KARIK III* £1775
Under rated and overlooked, the final Karik was a gem. Superb transport gives a brilliantly tight, grippy dynamic sound, albeit tonally rather dry.

MARANTZ CD-17 KI-S £1100
The Marantz excels in all areas. Without doubt this is one of the most involving CD players on the planet. Build quality is also exemplary. (Sep 97)

MARANTZ CD-63 MKII KI-S* £400
Similar to the CD-63SE but more powerful bass and an all-round smoother sound. The famous KI tweaks pay off again. Whether or not it is still pre-eminent against the vastly improved competition is a matter of opinion.

MERIDIAN 506 20-BIT* £1100
Very detailed and revealing player. More cerebral than visceral sounding, however. (May 95)

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-RAY £800
Commonsense sturdy CD player of exceptional ability. Clear and detailed with high quality internal processing system. The X-Ray is inclined to show up poor recordings, but it's only doing its job! (Feb 99)

NAD S500 £1000
This dynamic top of the range Silverline spinner delights with any type of music. Exciting, sophisticated sounding and highly recommended. (Jun 2000)

ROKSAN CASPIAN £895
The Caspian has a smooth, slightly bright sound with some of the clearest treble in the business. Very engaging, dynamic character. (Aug 97)

ROTEL RCD 951 £300
HDCD capability at a midrange price. Plain Jane looks but solid construction. There is some higher than average measured distortion which may take the edge off this otherwise tempting product. (Aug 99)

COMPACT DISC TRANSPORTS

SONIC FRONTIERS TRANSPORT £6999
Cutting-edge design and technology combine to make this one very desirable product. The only problem is the fantasy hi-fi price. (Sep 98)

TEAC P-30 £2500
Cheap it isn't, but then it sounds like a million digital dollars. Nothing short of superb. (Jun 97)

TEAC VRDS-T1 £600
Excellent mid-price silver disc spinner with a powerful, expansive and warm sound. Easily beats most sub-£1000 designs. A good choice for the budget conscious who want the best. (Feb 95)

CD TRANSPORTS

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO DACMAGIC 3* £99
Superb value for money with extensive facilities and solid, detailed sonics. Upgrades any sub-£300 player.

DCS ELGAR £8500
Future-proof convertor which will handle 24/96 and 24/192. Extremely open and natural performer. (Nov 97)

DPA LITTLE BIT 3* £299
A taste of the high end on a budget. Rich, clean, punchy sound transforms budget CD players.

MIDIMAN FLYING COW £299.9
Excellent as a DAC and doubles as an ADC for archiving to CDR. (Jun 98) Great value, as is junior version Flying Calf at £109. (Feb 99)

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-DAC* £300
A bargain for normal CDs and even better with HDCDs. (Nov 97)

SONIC FRONTIERS PROCESSOR 3 £6999
Quality never comes cheap! This DAC oozes class and when matched with the Transport 3 is certainly up with the best. (Sep 98)

LUPINABLES

LINN SONDEK LP12 BASIK £1100
Off the pace these days in many respects but still an extremely sweet and engaging listen with a quintessentially analogue sound.

MICHELL GYRODEC SE £775
Exquisitely built, infinitely upgradeable deck that gives true high end sound at mid-fi prices.

MICHELL ORBE £2000
Fantastically capable all rounder with commanding, powerful, detailed sound that gets the best from almost any arm and cartridge. Supreme build, brilliant value. (Apr 95)

ORIGIN LIVE STANDARD (KIT) £145
Good in standard form with AC motor; frighteningly good with a DC motor and battery PSU.

PINK TRIANGLE TARANTELLA £680
Not only does the Tarantella have more style than a catwalk full of models, it also combines PT's usual clarity with real authority. (Oct 97)

PRO-JECT DEBUT £110
Straight out of the box and onto the shelf! Nothing short of a bargain. Vinyl's never had it so good, so cheaply!

REGA PLANAR 2 £214
Brilliant starter deck with extremely polished manner. Better built £274 Planar 3 is a great all-in-one package that eats mid-price CD players for breakfast.

ROKSAN XERXES X £1295
DSU or XPS 3.5 power supply £150/170 extra. Excellent pitch stability from a new Swiss motor and outboard power supply. Very tight bass, fine dynamics and revealing clarity. (Jan 97)

SYSTEMDEK IIX900*/RB250 £330
A fine all-rounder and easy to upgrade too. More depth and breadth than Rega Planar 3. (Sep 94)

VESTAX BDT-2000 £225
A stylish looking deck with infinitely variable speed 16-90 rpm, DC belt drive and built-in MM phono stage. Good value, with plenty of chassis room for alternative arms, if required. (Sep 99)

TONERMS

HADCOCK 242 SE £649
Latest of a long line of unipivot arms. Added mass makes the 242 suitable for both low compliance MCs and straw-in-the-wind high compliance types. Revised geometry and chromium plating completes a first-class job. (Jun 2000)

NAIM ARO* £975
Truly endearing and charismatic performer - wonderfully engaging mid-band makes up for softened frequency extremes

REGA RB300 £180
Some may prefer the simpler RB250 at £130. Detailed, tight, rhythmic sound but tonally rather grey and cold-sounding. Still excellent value, though.

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 Blue Vulcan - screened twisted pair with drain wire, 8 nines copper/silver 26 AWG cable with pure Teflon £14.95/meter
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Musical Fidelity X-Cans2
Warm, sumptuous, sweet sound

SME 3009II £309
Once king of the art, but no longer. Weak at frequency extremes and detail, but its legendary serviceability makes it a still in Japan. Can be picked up for peanuts second-hand. (Jan 93)

SME 309 £285
A down-market version of the IV and V with aluminium armature and detachable headshell. Tight, neutral sound with good tonality but lacks the IV's pace and precision. Like the other SME 3009 series, this arm is also available in 10" and 12" versions. (Jan 92)

Cartridges

AUDIO TECHNICA AT112E £30
Great starter cartridge that's refined, detailed and musical beyond its price. Best value MM under £30.

GOLDRING 1012GX £74
An accomplished MM with a solid bass, slightly forward midrange and clean transients. Very reasonable price for such an able performer. (Jul 93)

DMM MICA £185
Beats Goldring's 1042 and costs only £135 on trade-in. An assured and transparent MM. (Feb 98)

ORNAVECTOR DV200-H £239
The best modern budget MC combines deliciously sweet sound with fantastic get-up-and-go. High output version works a treat with valve phono stages too.

MUSIC MAKER £575
When mated with a good quality arm, this hand finished high-output pick-up gives an ear-boggling account of itself. Very high compliance ensures maximum information retrieval. An absolute (grain orientated) gem. (Feb 99)

ORTOFON MC 7500 £2000
Conclusive proof that there's hope for the world. It's a long time ago now but this high-priced favourite still earns its niche - CD lovers would die if they heard it. (May 94)

ORTOFON MC 15 SUPER II £140
Not quite as good as the dearer Supremes but the Super II is a splendid introduction to the joys of moving-coil cartridges.

GOLDRING 1042 £130
One of the best Moving Magnet cartridges going, with beautiful treble and muscular bass. New low price makes it a bargain.

ORTOFON ROHMANN £1000
In a way it's MC 2000 meets MC 7500 with great tonal strengths and a dynamo sound. (Apr 96)

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS

AUDIO ANALOGUE PUCCINI SE £595
This superbly-built Italian integrated has a locality and control which leaves others nowhere. Sound stage is wow. (Dec 97)

AUDIOLAB 8000s * £495
Well rounded integrated with smooth and detailed sound plus a huge feature count. Great build makes later versions a top used buy.

DENON PMA-250SE £160
It might not have bags of grunt but the Denon can sound exceedingly natural and open. (Feb 97)

McIntosh MA6800 * £3735
The MA6800 not so much plays music as takes control of it, with effortless bass drive. (Sep 95)

MISSION CYRUS 2 * £299
Classic eighties minimalism combines arresting styling with clean, open, lively sound. Further upgradable with PSX power supply.

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANS2 £160
Warm, sumptuous, sweet sound h/phone amp. gives startling results with a decent set of headphones.

NAIM NAIT 3 * £575
Superb rhythms and dynamics make for great music making, but tonally monochromatic. Super optional phono stage makes it ideal for vinyl junkies.

ROKSAN CASPIAN £695
Smooth, warm integrated with remote control that works happily into most 'speakers. (Dec 97)

SONNETEER ALABASTER £995
Builds on the strengths of the Campion with ample control, colour and drive. (Oct 97)

PHONO STAGES

CREEK OBH-8 SE £180
Punchy, rhythmic character with oodles of detail makes this a great budget audiophile product.

LFD MISTRAL PHONO STAGE * £300
The Mistral has a warmth and involvement that make many pricier stages sound overpriced.

MICHELL DELPHINI MONOBLOCS £1995
Analogue tour-de-force gives supremely clean, detailed and finely resolved sound with breathtaking dynamics. Great value, even at this price.

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-LP £125
One of the famous MF X series. Full marks throughout for clarity and detail. Switchable between MM and MC. Indestructible build! (May 99)

PRO-JECT PHONO BOX £39
Not the last word in many respects but a thoroughly honest piece of work. Inexpensive introduction to all that vinyl has to offer. MM and MC provision plus choice of two impedances.

ROKSAN ARTAXERXES X £950
With the Attessa PSU the Artaxerxes X MM/MC stage still shines. Great stage depth, neutrality and tonal colour. (Oct 97)



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Cyrus 2/PSX Amplifier S/H(649.00)	£299.00	ProAc Response 2 Speakers S/H(1995.00)	£1399.00
Linn Wakonda Preamp S/H(1Yr G/tee)(750.00)	£399.00	Quad ESL63 Electrostatic Speakers S/H(2500.00)	£795.00
Linn LK140 Power Amp (2Yr G/tee)(750.00)	£469.00	Rega Brio Amplifier (2Yr G/tee)(298.00)	£225.00
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Linn Kaber Aktiv (Walnut/Grey) inc cards(2850.00)	£795.00	Rega Planet CD Player (2Yr G/tee)(475.00)	£349.00
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world favourites

SONNETEER SEDLEY £399
Combines transparency and fine dynamics with excellent rhythmic ability. (May 98)

PRE-AMPLIFIERS

AMC 1100 £150
Suffers from un-defeatable tone controls but an extremely good value piece of kit. Partners the similarly budget level AMC 2200 power amplifier, also at £150. Comfortable beginners' choice. (Mar 99)

AUDIO ANALOGUE BELLINI £475
Showcases AA's characteristic mix of clarity and musicality and blasts the competition. (Apr 98)

CHORD CPA1800 £1800
Clarity, insight and control are second to none - an addictive mixture. (Mar 98)

CROFT VITALE £350
A modestly priced valve pre-amp with exceptionally transparent performance. MM phono stage plus three line stages are standard. Volume controls are separate for each channel, thus giving balance adjustment. A remarkable item in all respects. (Feb 2000)

XTC PRE-1 £1000
Almost valve-like in its smoothness, the line-level Pre-1 is warm and seductively clear. (Nov 96)

POWER AMPLIFIERS

ARCAM 9 £400
With 70W on tap, the 9P will drive most loudspeakers with a spacious and detailed sound. Good bass welly too. (Dec 96)

CHORD SPM400 £1400
There's a sense of effortless power to the Chord that gives music real scale and presence. (Mar 98)

MARANTZ MODEL 9 £8000
Authentic reproduction monoblocs still more than cut the sonic mustard. Highly expensive and highly sought after. (Mar 97)

MICHELL ALECTO £1989
Crisp, clean and beautifully controlled with gorgeous styling. Partnered with the £1650 Orca this is a superb winning combo. (Oct 98)

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-A200 £1000/pair
200W of high-end monobloc power in a grooved tube. (Aug 98)

NAIM NAPI80 £1060
Partnered with a NAC82, this has classic Naim control, and a superbly rhythmic presentation.

TUNERS

CAMBRIDGE TS00 £180
An extremely engaging tuner with a performance at odds with its low price. Not exactly a Troughline, but you may not notice... (Feb 99)

CREEK T43 £399
Excellent detail, separation and dynamics. A great little tuner and unbeatable at this price. (May 98)

MARANTZ ST17 £600
A positive dreadnought of a tuner. Sweet and refined but with a heavy punch when needed. A tuner of this quality demands a decent aerial. (Jul 99)

MISSION CYRUS FM7 £300
Clear and lucid sound puts it up with the best. Superb build too. (Apr 94)

NAIM NAT03 £S95
The NAT03's warm, atmospheric sound is further proof of Naim's proficiency with tuners. (Sep 93)

SONY ST-SA3ES £250
Beguiling RDS tuner for the sonically discerning. Good ergonomics and sensitive too. (Apr 97)

CASSETTE DECKS

AIWA AD-S750 £200
Sonically a very decent machine at the price. Comes fitted with Dolby B, C and the dead handy Dolby S. (Apr 96)

AIWA AD-S950 £300
A stable transport, superb head and Dolby S make the AD-S950 an excellent all-rounder. (Feb 95)

KENWOOD KX-3080 £160
A simple deck, but excellent-quality head and transport give top quality sound. (Oct 96)

PIONEER CT-S740S £430
A great piece of engineering from Pioneer, with first-rate sound. (Jun 96)

YAMAHA KX-S80SE £250
The 'SE' tag is more than a marketing gimmick. Sound is solid and clear with Dolby S. (Sep 97)

LOUDSPEAKERS

CASTLE EDEN £469
Impressively vice-free 'speakers that offer great transparency and involvement. One of a select band that simply makes music regardless. (Mar 97)

EPOS ES12 £495
Strong, punchy bass is allied to finely detailed, articulate midrange and sparkling treble. (Oct 96)



Kef Cresta I loudspeakers
A very musical sound

KEF CRESTA I £100
Delightfully sophisticated presentation for the price. Won't blow the roof off, but will deliver a very musical sound. (April 2000)

KLIPSCH HERESY II £1100
An outstanding high sensitivity loudspeaker with midrange and treble horns coupled with infinite baffle 12" bass driver. Effortless, fast and accurate. (May 99)

MISSION 752 £495
Cracking mid-price mini towers combined HDA drive units and metal dome tweeters with surprisingly warm results. Benign load characteristics makes them great for valves.

MISSION 771 £170
Characteristically fast, punchy Mission sound from the Aerogel mid/bass and silk-dome tweeter. (Jul 98)

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TANNOY AMS8 * £2700
Bold sounding pro active monitor with solid bass, clear midrange and delicious treble. (Aug 96)

TANNOY MERCURY m2 * £140
A true audiophile bargain which embarrasses many more expensive boxes. Never mind the price, let your ears decide. (May 97)

MINIDISC PLAYERS

KENWOOD DM-9090 £500
One of the best MD players yet. ATRAC 4.5 gives clean and very musical recordings from this Kenwood. (Jan 98)

SONY MDS-JB930Q £250
Great mid-price machine that adds better build and facilities to the 'S30's already excellent sonics.

SONY MDS-JAS0ES * £1300
This Sony can put the wind up Nakamichi cassette decks when used with better blank MDs. (Apr 98)

SONY MDS-JE555ES £520
MiniDisc recorder
The best sounding MD deck made so far, thanks to awesome build and heroic ATRAC-DSP Type R coding.



Alesis Masterdisk
A glimpse of the future

SONY MDS-JE510 £300
An impressive sound and unmatched convenience make this MiniDisc player an excellent buy.

DIGITAL RECORDERS

ALESIS MASTERDISK £1400
A groundbreaking hard disc recorder with a built-in CD drive. An amazing bit of kit and a glimpse of the future. (July 2000)

KENWOOD DMF-9020 £500
An excellent tool for home recording, combines convenience, superb sound and a fair price. (Aug 99)

MARANTZ DR-17 £1100
Probably the best sounding CD recoder on the market. Built like a brick out house with a true audiophile sound. HDCD compatible. (July 2000)

PHILIPS CDR-765 £360
One of the first twin deck recorders/players that boasts high speed dub facility. Playback could be warmer, but still a bargain. (Oct 99)

PIONEER PDR-55SRW £480
Excellent mid-priced CD recoder that both plays and records with equal panache. (Oct 99)

SONY TCD-8 DATMAN * £599
Super clean and detailed sound makes this an amazing portable. Not as robust as it should be though.

DVD PLAYERS

DENON DVD-5000 £1600
Monster build, as you'd expect at this price. Facilities and gadgets galore and drop-dead high end looks. A very smooth and sophisticated sound, although not as good as similarly-priced CD players (Mar 99)

PIONEER DV-717 £700
Well built and a solid performer, with a 'true' 24/96 digital output. Facilities in abundance and a controlled, exciting way with CD replay. Shame it lacks a Dolby Digital decoder! (Sep 99)

SONY DVP-S725 £490
One of the best buys in the DVD market. Available in a dodgy white case, but the facilities and performance more than make up for this. Excellent with both music and visuals, and a whole host of up to the minute facilities to keep you occupied. (Mar 2000)

HEADPHONES

JECKLIN FLOAT MODEL TWO £99
Wonderful panel-like and open sound from these esoteric-looking headclamps. Do not wear in public unless you like being made a fool of!

SENNHEISSER HD-490 £50
Good value cans with an exciting and bassy sound. Everything one should look for in headphones at a sensible price.



Nordost Blue Heaven
A simple and effective upgrade

INTERCONNECTS

CHORD COMPANY CHAMELEON 2 £90/m
One of our favourite favourites, the Chameleons are musical performers with a smooth yet open sound.

DNM RESON £40/m
Neutral and transparent, and a steal at forty quid!

NORDOST BLUE HEAVEN £150/m
Some of the fastest and most transparent cable around. A simple and effective upgrade.

VAN DEN HUL ULTIMATE THE FIRST £260/0.6m
Carbon interconnects that help you forget the electronics and concentrate on the music. Miraculous transparency.

LOUDSPEAKER CABLE

CHORD COMPANY RUMOUR £9.95/m
The Rumour is our reference at the price. Tight and tuneful bass mixed with air and space results in a cracking cable for the money.

DNM RESON £6.95/m
This cable has a transparency of sound that's rarely heard at the price. Excellent value for money.

NORDOST BLUE HEAVEN £375/3m pair
This isn't cheap, but it sounds absolutely fab. An open and spacious sound that simply carries music.

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World Classics

CASSETTE

NAKAMICHI DR-2

A great machine with Nakamichi's legendary heads. The lowest cost 'true' Nakamichi at the time, retailing for £600.

NAKAMICHI CR-7

The last of the great ones, and definitely the best Nakamichi ever (yes, better than a Dragon)

YAMAHA TC-800G

Early classic in serious cassette. Its ski-slope looks got it a cult following once it had ceased to be simply ugly.

CD PLAYERS

MERIDIAN 207

Beautifully-built two-box with pre-amp stage. Very musical although not as refined as modern Bitstream gear. No digital output.

PIONEER PD-91

Built-to-last player with easy upgrade routes for modifiers. Not knockout as it stands but get one cheap and have a go!

CAMBRIDGE CD1

The first two box player with weighted mechanics and even an optional Dropout/error counter. Radical and effective at the time - a classic.

AMPLIFIERS

LEAK POINT ONE, TL12 & TL10

Ancestors of hi-fi, consequently expensive nowadays. As with all vintage valve stuff, overhauling is de rigueur before use, using original parts if possible.

LEAK PRE-AMPS

Line of 'good for their time' pre-amps. Use of EF86 pentode valve for high gain rules out ultra performance. Not the highest-fi.



Garrard 401
A legendary turntable.

LEAK STEREO 20

Excellent workaday classic valve amp. In good order the 20 will not disgrace itself. Various upgrades are available from specialist repairers.

LEAK TL12+

Plentiful monobloc equivalent of Stereo 20. Reasonably inexpensive and a tweakers' dream. Genuine valve hi-fi on a budget.

NAD 3020

You can't argue with success! NAD's budget transistor integrated gave thousands their first taste of hi-fi and remains great value.

QUAD 33/303 PRE/POWER

Great style and construction, also bullet proof. Warm and wooly sound, but easy going. A good introduction to early transistor audio classics

QUAD 22/11 PRE/POWER

One of the all-time classic valve amplifiers. Unusual circuit but it works beautifully. 22 pre-amp not up to today's standards.

SUGDEN A21

Seventies transistor integrated has an eminently likeable smoothness and musicality. Limited inputs via DIN sockets.

TECHNICS SE-A5 Mk2

Nice transformer and electronics, shame about the casework. With tweaking, this 150watter can sound sweet.

LOUDSPEAKERS

KLIPSCHORN

Not exactly plentiful or cheap but a splendid beast. For efficiency they have seldom been equalled. Space hungry!

LEAK SANDWICH

Rather warm sounding big infinite baffle but cheap with it. With a reasonably powerful amp can sound quite satisfying

LOWTHER PM6A

High quality full-range driver; still manufactured. High sensitivity, as fitted to many classic horn designs.

MAGNEPLANAR SMGa

Touch dry in the bass but a technological loudspeaker with genuinely musical abilities

MISSION 770

Father of the 77 range which continues to this day. Well mannered with a warm sound and a kind load to amplifiers.

QUAD ESL57

Unrivalled. Properly serviced there is nothing like them. Their natural presentation may make them caviar to the general.

YAMAHA NS1000M

Hi-tech favourites of the Japanese and Americans. Viewed more warily in the UK but can give excellent results.

WORLD CLASSICS

TANNOY GRF & AUTOGRAPH

Folded horn monsters which certainly sound good if you have the space. For Tannoy vintage see HFV November 1998.

WHARFEDALE SUPER 8 RS DD

Ideal experimenters' driver. High sensitivity ~14,000 Gauss magnet and extended frequency range. Inexpensive too!

TANNOY YORK, LANCASTER ETC.

Many similar models of infinite baffle or reflex design. Not the last word in tautness but the drivers work well in modern cabinets.

VINYL

ACOS LUSTRE

Very honest piece of kit, well made and easily adjusted. Vinyl beginners could do very much worse.

ALPHASON HR100S

First class arm, up to present-day standards. Buy carefully, though, as there's no service available now.

ARISTON RD11

A one-time king of turntables very similar to the Linn LP12. Now deposited but worth a look at the right price.

LINN AXIS

Uncomplicated, lower-price version of the famous Sondek. Less expensive than some of its stablemates.

GARRARD 301 & 401

Legendary turntables, once fairly plentiful. Excellent back-up available; many different custom plinths available. High quality.

GOLDRING Lenco 88 & 99

Great deck for the kitchen table enthusiast. Garrard fans won't look at 'em but cheap and capable. Servicing available.

HADCOCK 228

Recently out-classed by Hadcock's updated 228 Special Edition but a proper hi-fi arm for all that. Makers still service.

MICHELL FOCUS ONE

20 years and still going strong. Early runner in the 'modern' turntable cycle with a first class arm. Factory servicing available.

SHURE M75

Recent line-contact improvements have left the M75 behind but the wide range of needles make it a handy tool.

SME 3009 IIS

Everlasting classic tone-arm. Spares permanently available from SME. No longer the last word but peanuts second-hand.

THORENSTD124

Best classic deck ever? Judging by the prices they fetch it's possible - 78rpm too!

THORENSTD150

Mid-price deck with a keen following. No real difficulty with servicing - novices may find the suspension system unnerving.

TRIO L-07D

Knockout heavyweight from 1980 with stainless bearing and 11lb platter! Not a give-away and beware! - spares scarce.

TUNERS

LEAK TROUGHLINE (ORIGINAL)

Interesting ornament but no longer hi-fi. Limited coverage of 88MHz to 100MHz only.

LEAK TROUGHLINE II & III MONO

Arguably the best-sounding tuners ever. Adaptation for stereo easy via phono multiplex socket.

LEAK TROUGHLINE III STEREO

Excellent tuner with indifferent stereo decoding circuit. Best when adapted to use modern outboard decoder.

MARANTZ ST-8

Possibly the ultimate Tardis console, including an oscilloscope for checking the strength of signal. Expensive even now.



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AVI BIGGATRON LOUDSPEAKERS	XD	£600	£479
AVI S2000 MM MONOBLOCKS PAIR	XD	£1400	£999
B&W LM1	XD	£199	£179
CASTLE TAY LOUDSPEAKERS	XD	£350	£249
CHARIO ACADAMY 1	NEW	£1500	£1099
CHARIO ACADAMY 1	XD	£1500	£950
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CHARIO ACADAMY 3	XD	£8500	£4995
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ELECTROCOMPANIET EC1-2 (STONE)	XD	£119	£799
HARMON KARDON HK630 AMP	XD	£230	£169
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LINN NUMERIC	SH	£1800	£399
MARANTZ ARCH	XD	£499	£399
MARANTZ LAYLA	XD	£499	£399
MERIDIAN 500 CD TRANSPORT	XD	£1325	£1125
MERIDIAN 502 PRE AMP	XD	£1385	£1159
MERIDIAN 556 POWER AMP	XD	£950	£759
MERIDIAN 505 MONOBLOCK (EACH)	XD	£845	£679
MERIDIAN DSP5000 LOUDSPEAKERS	XD	£3885	£2999
MERIDIAN 200 CD TRANSPORT	SH	£800	£299
MICROMEGA MICODAC	XD	£499	£199
MICROMEGA MINUM AMP	XD	£350	£229
MICROMEGA SOLO	SH	£2500	£1299
NAD C320	XD	£199	£159
NAD C340	XD	£269	£229
PIONEER SX205 RDS	XD	£149	£119
TANNOY MERCURY M1	NEW	£119	£99
TANNOY MERCURY MC	NEW	£99	£79
TANNOY MERCURY M2	NEW	£149	£119
TEAC CD 3450SE	XD	£199	£159
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TRICHORD REVEALTION	XD	£899	£499

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Audio Alchemy DDE1.0V D/A Converter	399	120
Audio Alchemy DDE1.1V D/A Converter	399	149
Audio Note CD2 (New & boxed) Valve CD	1000	695
Audio Note CD3 (New & boxed) Black Gate Valve CD	1599	1199
Audiolab 8000 DAC D/A Converter 20 Bit	950	349
Densen Beat 400 CD Player (New & boxed) HDCD	1280	999
DPA Enlightenment DX32	800	350
Helios 2 CD Player	1000	595
Lab 47 Flat Fish CD Player/Dumpty	3500	1995
Lab 47 Progression DAC	1800	995
Monrio 18B2 DAC	950	399
Monrio Bit Match Transport	950	499
Monrio Privilege 20 Bit CD Player	950	699
Nakamichi DV10 DVD DTS/5.1	799	549
Resolution Audio CD50 HDCD CD Player (with volume)	3000	2250
Resolution Audio D92 24/96 DAC/Processor	1500	995
Resolution Audio VT960 DVD Transport	3500	1995

Turntables Tonearms & Cartridges

	Was	Now
Ariston RD40/RB250/Blue Point	569	249
Basis 1400/ RB250 Ex Demo	1200	849
Decca London Gold (J.Wright Re-Built/Podded)	N/A	250
Densen DP02 Drive MC Phono Stage	350	229
EMT HSD15 Special MC Phono Cartridge (NEW)	995	650
Garrard 401/Aphelion/RB300 (As New)	N/A	599
Garrard 401/Aphelion/SME 3009/V15	N/A	499
Linn Archiv (Low Hours)	1000	399
Linn Ittok LVII Silver	N/A	325
Linn LP12 Lingo Cirkus/Ekos Troika Blk Trampolin (90)	3250	1599
Linn LP12 Valhalla Black (89)	650	399
Linn Troika (no cantilever)	N/A	150
Michell Iso HR/Hera MC Phono Stage	950	450
Michell QC Gyropower	495	350
Naim Armaggedon	780	475
Rega Planar 25 Ash Turntable(99)	598	449
Roksan Radius 3 Turntable	470	250
Roksan Shiraz (Latest Black Version)	1000	699
Roksan TMS Piano Lacquer Turntable (97)	2750	1795
Roksan Xerxes Piano Lacquer/XPS 3/DSU/Tabrizi	1850	799
Tubaphon TU2 (Stereophile Class B) 50 hrs	695	425
Wilson Benesch Act 2 Tonearm	1500	850

Amplifiers

	Was	Now
Accuphase 306 Integrated (New & Boxed)	3229	1995
Alchemist Forsetti 100W Stereo Power Amplifier	1500	749
Audio Note PS2SE Valve Power Amplifier	1499	895
Audio Synthesis Desire Power Amplifier	1995	895
Audion Sterling Integrated Line	799	449
Beard M1000 125W Monoblock 6550 Triode	6500	1899
Graaf 50/50 Push Pull Power amplifier (New & boxed)	2100	1795
Graaf GM20 OTL Ex-Demo Re-Valved	2995	2395
Lab 47 Gain Card/Humpty Power Amplifier	2390	1799
Meridian 551 Integrated (Phono Fitted)	1098	549
Meridian 555 Power Amplifier	950	450
MP211A monos 2X 211 SE Valves (Chinese)	2500	995
Pathos Model One Hybrid Integrated (6 months old)	999	750
Quad 33/303 Amplifiers (New caps Fitted)	N/A	199
Roksan Caspian Integrated	795	549
Unison Research Pentode 35 Valve Integrated (4xEL34)	1500	895

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Audio Research LS2 Hybrid Preamplifier	3980	1299
Audio Research LS9 Remote Solid State	1999	1399
Beard P505 Preamplifier with Valve Phono Stage	N/A	575
DPA Enlightenment New Style	799	499
Gate Audio Line Valve Preamplifier	1699	650
Linn Kairn / Brilliant PSU Preamplifier	1395	649
Sony Reference Preamplifier Esoteric TA 1ES	3000	2399

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Audio Note AN-Z Two Black Loudspeakers	450	375
Apogee Mini Ribbon Monitors	695	399
Diapason Karis Walnut 2 Way Monitor (New & boxed)	1250	950
Epos ES30 Dark Cherry	2700	1299
Impulse Maya Loudspeakers	695	395
Rega Jura Cherry	450	279
Snell J MK2 Loudspeakers Black/ Huygens Stands	900	349
Spendor SP7/1 Black Ash	1900	750
Velodyne TX810MK2 Subwoofer	695	379

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Audio Sculpture 2 x 3m Speaker Cable	235	99
Avvik B4 Tier Cherry Table	330	175
Air Sus Cherry Platform	169	99
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BKS 2x 2m Speaker Cable	300	99
G-Flex Anti-vibration Feet Set of 4 M1	145	49
G-Flex Anti-vibration Feet Set of 4 M2	135	45
G-Flex Anti-vibration Feet Set of 4 M4	175	59
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Lindsey Audiophile 2x 10ft Speaker Cable	249	99
Lindsey Audiophile 2m Satin RCA Interconnect	495	199
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Magnum Dynalab FT11 Analogue Tuner	599	399
Revox B77 fi Track 3fl - 7fi MK1 Reel to Reel	1600	499
Roksan Caspian Tuner AM/FM	599	399
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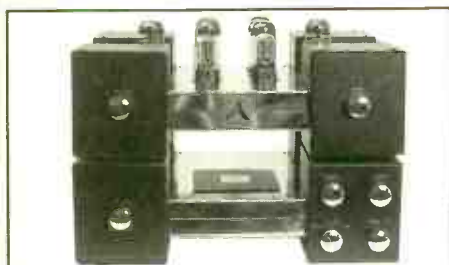
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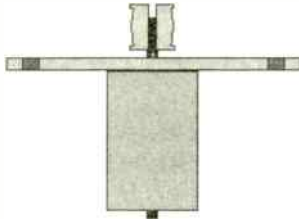
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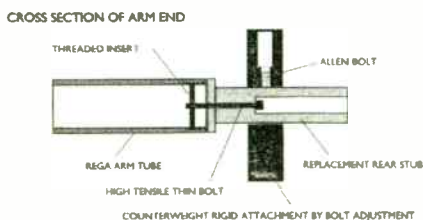
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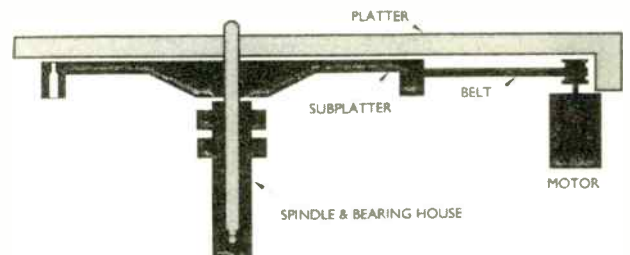
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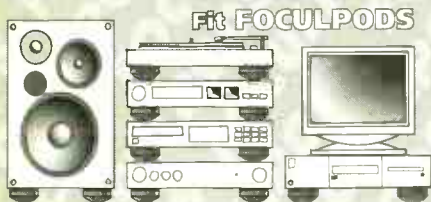
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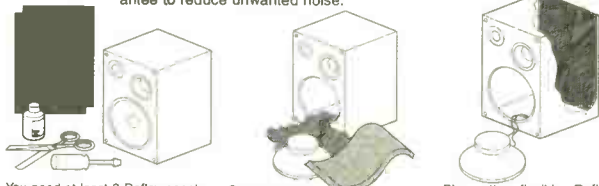
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Sound Quality: ■■■■■
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Measured Performance

AMPLIFIERS

DENON PMA-255UK

I was surprised at the sophistication of the tone controls on this inexpensive amplifier. Not only do they offer very tightly tailored 8dB boost and cut at spectrum extremes (i.e. below 50Hz and above 2kHz), but boost decreases as volume is turned up, giving flat response much above 3 o'clock on the volume control.

Response was flat at their detent zeros, but an over-ride button can be used to bypass the circuits to purify the signal path.

Power from the PMA-255UK measured 55W into 8Ω and a healthy 80W into 4Ω. There's plenty of muscle here for low impedance loudspeakers and enough power to get good volume from reason-

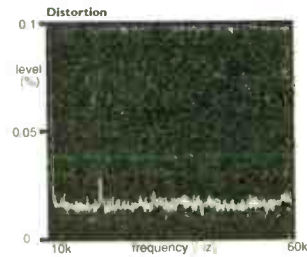
ably sensitive modern designs.

Distortion was low in the midband and at high frequencies - a good sign. What little there was comprised of second harmonic - even better.

With wide bandwidth of 5Hz-50kHz, low noise and good sensitivity of 200mV on all inputs, the Denon measured really well in all areas. Like its predecessors, it's a neat piece of design work that will give good results. NK

Power	55watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	5Hz-50kHz

Separation	52dB
Noise	-101dB
Distortion	0.046%
Sensitivity	200mV
dc offset	0.2/1mV



SONY TA-FB940R

Both SACD, Sony's new audio format, and DVD-Audio deliver information up to 100kHz, assuming it has been recorded in the first place of course. With solid-state amplifiers 100kHz has always been reasonably easy to reach so I wasn't surprised to note Sony's TA-FB940R reached exactly 100kHz before starting to roll off gently, the -1dB limit measuring 116kHz.

Power output was a modest 66W, rising to 100W into 4Ω. Although distortion was low into 8Ω loads, with the heavier 4Ω current draw it rose considerably, reaching 0.08% at 10kHz, just below full output. Although the absolute distortion values were low, the distortion behaviour of this amplifier was a little suspect.

Sony have fitted tone controls that give just a few dB of tonal trimming at spectrum extremes. They're good, but might surprise some. A loudness button similarly applies just a

little bass and treble lift.

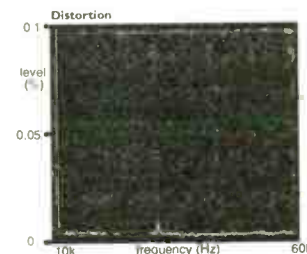
Perhaps surprisingly, the amplifier has a phono stage (MM only) too. Bandwidth was good, measuring 13Hz-120kHz, but slow low frequency roll off will give it a bright sound. Sensitivity was normal at 3mV and overload high at 150mV. There was no hum and little hiss at -84dB. Sony fit a subsonic filter that applies bass cut below 20Hz to lessen cone flap from warps. It's a comprehensive package.

The TA-FB940R measured well, but I'd expect a bright sound, possibly with some hardness. NK

Power	66W
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	7Hz-116kHz
Separation	107dB
Noise	-105dB
Distortion	0.012%

Sensitivity	130mV
dc offset	1/1.8mV

Disc	
Frequency response	13Hz-120kHz
Separation	90dB
Noise	-84dB
Distortion	0.018%
Sensitivity	3mV
Overload	150mV



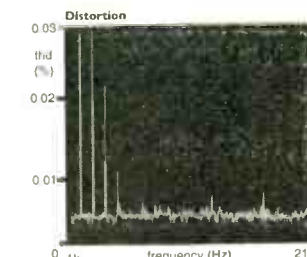
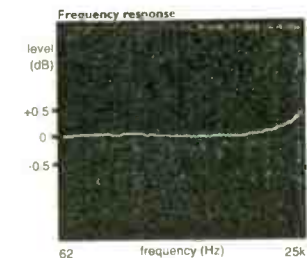
GROUP TEST CD PLAYERS

DENON DCD-435

Denon's DCD-435 looked disappointing under test. It produced quite strong distortion until it had warmed up, then the convertors settled down to give reasonable, but not exceptional results. Levels of 0.05% at -30dB and 0.47% at -60dB were significantly worse than the other players, although down at -90dB things were normal enough.

Unfortunately, this player also had steeply rising treble, which in conjunction with distortion usually results in a bright and gritty sound. They are not good partners. Placed in a bright system with peaky loudspeakers this player will likely make CD sound none too pleasant. NK

Frequency response	4Hz-20.3kHz	
Distortion	left	right
-6dB	0.09	0.09
-30dB	0.05	0.06
-60dB	0.49	0.47
-90dB	30	30
Separation	left	right
1kHz	116	118
20kHz	89	89
Noise	-103dB	
with emphasis	-103dB	
Dynamic range	110dB	
Output	2.14V	



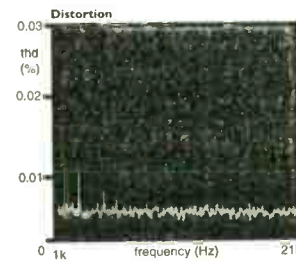
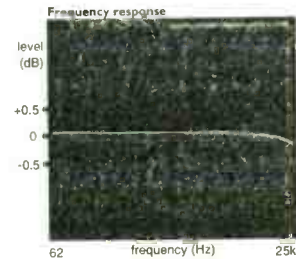
MARANTZ CD5000

Frequency response shows a slow roll-off at high frequencies to give smooth treble, a normal enough Marantz characteristic. Frequency response limits of 5Hz to 21.5kHz are those expected for CD, being much like the other players in this group.

Marantz use linear convertors, the CD5000's showing little sign of distortion on both channels except below -60dB where, as always with 16-bit, levels rose as fewer bits became available to represent signal level. A figure of 28% at -90dB was normal enough.

Channel separation was adequate, output level normal at 2V and noise very low at -112dB. In every area the player gave a good measured performance. NK

Frequency response	5Hz-21.5kHz	
Distortion	left	right
-6dB	0.004	0.005
-30dB	0.02	0.02
-60dB	0.36	0.34
-90dB	27	28
Separation	left	right
1kHz	98	99
20kHz	86	88
Noise with emphasis		-112dB
Dynamic range		109dB
Output		2.2V

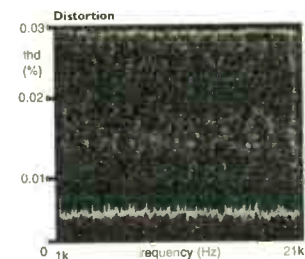
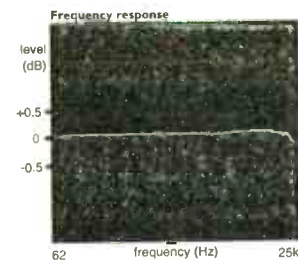


NAD C520

NAD's C520 looks quite well tailored, having an unusual frequency response characteristic, together with low noise and distortion right through the audio range. A small amount of controlled treble lift is likely to enhance detailing without making the sound overtly bright. The C520 may well seem a little forward at times, or perhaps a little more lively than is common for CD, if this lift balances the strong bass NAD commonly manage to give their products.

Low levels of distortion and quantisation noise should help toward a smoother, more open sound than is common with CD. With normal channel separation, low noise and standard output of 2.1V the NAD C520 measures well all round. NK

Frequency response	4Hz-21kHz	
Distortion	left	right
-6dB	0.004	0.004
-30dB	0.008	0.008
-60dB	0.45	0.46
-90dB	32	33
Separation	left	right
1kHz	96	97
20kHz	90	90
Noise with emphasis		-111dB
Dynamic range		110dB
Output		2.12V



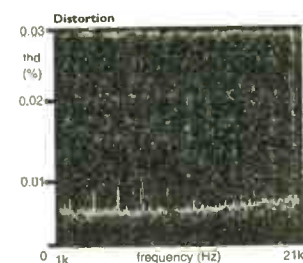
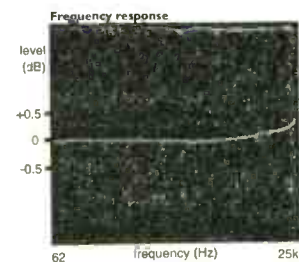
ONKYO DX-7222

Onkyo's DX-7222 was notable for its treble lift on both channels, something our frequency response analysis clearly shows. This will give at least a sheen to the treble, possibly a little spit with some discs, when played through loudspeakers with emphasised treble. A player with a response like this needs to be treated with care since it can tip the balance when paired with a bright amplifier feeding peaky loudspeakers.

Distortion from the Onkyo was well suppressed and although the noise and separation figures do not look too good they are perfectly adequate.

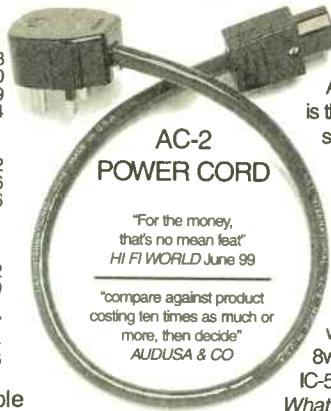
Measurement shows the Onkyo is likely to sound a little bright. It may also seem a little more detailed too. NK

Frequency response	4Hz-20.3kHz	
Distortion	left	right
-6dB	0.006	0.006
-30dB	0.02	0.02
-60dB	0.64	0.56
-90dB	32	32
Separation	left	right
1kHz	96	97
20kHz	73	74
Noise with emphasis		-96dB
Dynamic range		106dB
Output		2V



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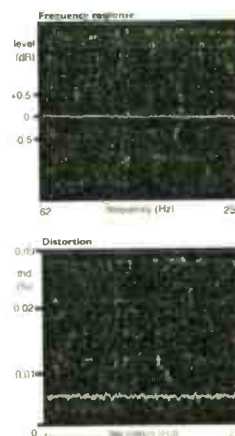
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SONY CDP-XE530

Sony are pretty consistent in giving their CD players an immaculate measured performance. As co-developers, alongside Philips, they seem to consider themselves technological standard bearers so, although inexpensive, the CDP-XE530 measured well in all areas.

Flat frequency response should give it a bright-ish presentation, although not so forward as the Denon or Onkyo. It will not sound as smooth or neutral as the Marantz though. Distortion was reasonably low on both channels, noise very well suppressed - likely due to muting at digital zero - and output absolutely as per standard at 2V. It is a neat player in terms of measurement. NK

Frequency response		4Hz-21.1kHz	
Distortion	left	right	
-6dB	0.006	0.0056	
-30dB	0.02	0.02	
-60dB	0.65	0.6	
-90dB	32	32	
Separation left		right	
1kHz	130	129	
20kHz	106	105	
Noise with emphasis		-120dB	
Dynamic range		107dB	
Output		2V	



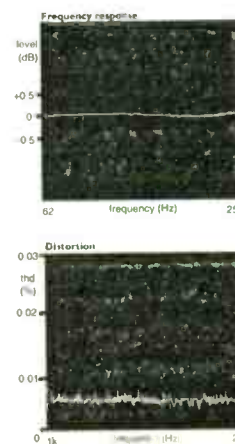
YAMAHA CDX-496

This player was characterised by distortion at low levels. Denon have shown that linearising low level performance, using their Delta Sigma processing scheme, markedly improves sound quality. So there is a penalty to be paid, even though the CDX-496 otherwise measures well at ordinary music levels (between 0dB and -30dB) where distortion hovers around 0.02% worst case.

Distortion figures apart, the player produces a good set of figures, frequency response measuring flat out to 21.1kHz, although audio output was a little low at 1.9V.

The Yamaha may well sound a little coarse or grey as a result of distortion. NK

Frequency response		4Hz-21.1kHz	
Distortion	left	right	
-6dB	0.004	0.004	
-30dB	0.026	.025	
-60dB	1.34	1.22	
-90dB	69	65	
Separation left		right	
1kHz	95	97	
20kHz	81	74	
Noise with emphasis		-108dB	
Dynamic range		101dB	
Output		1.9V	



CD PLAYERS

MERIDIAN 506

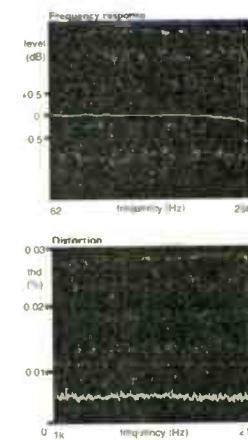
Meridian CD players consistently turn in a superb set of performance figures. The 506 is very linear throughout the dynamic range, within the limits set by standard 16-bit coding. Distortion figures on both channels of 0.35% are as low as they come, helping toward an excellent EIAJ dynamic range figure of 110dB. Our analysis at -30dB shows an absence of distortion harmonics and low quantisation noise.

Frequency response has a slight roll down at higher frequencies, but not so much as to produce softness. The upper measured limit was 21kHz, comparable with most players.

Channel separation was wide and noise low. Audio output was a little above average, measuring 2.6V.

The Meridian 506 gave some of the best performance figures possible from CD. NK

Frequency response		4Hz-21kHz	
Distortion	left	right	
-6dB	0.005	0.005	
-30dB	0.008	0.008	
-60dB	0.36	0.35	
-90dB	28.8	28.7	
Separation left		right	
1kHz	99	99	
20kHz	75	75	
Noise with emphasis		-111dB	
Dynamic range		110dB	
Output		2.66V	



NAD T550

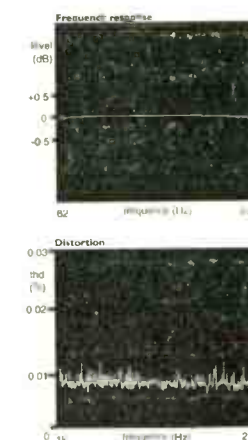
The T550 refused to play a Philips distortion test disc, so the distortion figures are a little higher than usual, coming from a sub-optimal Technics disc. All the same, at -30dB our analysis shows there's little sign of distortion harmonics. On rare occasions Philips' disc is rejected by players but this seems to have no bearing upon behaviour with ordinary discs.

Frequency response from CD was flat, ensuring accurate tonal balance. Channel separation was wide and noise low. Output measured a normal 2V.

This player would play 24bit/96kHz coded audio recordings, but with CD quality only, output cutting off sharply at 21kHz.

The T550 provided a normal set of test figures for CD and looks good in this area. NK

Frequency response		4Hz-20kHz	
Distortion	left	right	
-6dB	0.007	0.004	
-30dB	0.01	0.017	
-60dB	1	1	
-90dB	40	40	
Separation left		right	
1kHz	111	110	
20kHz	89	88	
Noise with emphasis		-111dB	
Dynamic range		102dB	
Output		2V	



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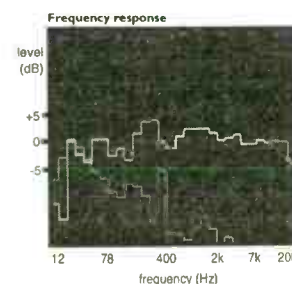
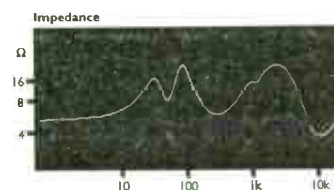
CASTLE SEVERN 2SE

The Severn 2SE looks impressive for a small floostander. It's unusual but effective damped porting system returns low frequencies in phase with forward cone output to give a measured forward response that reaches right down to 40Hz. Below 40Hz the port falls to -6dB at 25Hz, so I'd expect good, deep bass from this loudspeaker. It doesn't peak up so there'll be no boominess; in fact it may sound dry, even a little lean. Tweeter integration was excellent and the tweeter itself gives a very smooth output up to 20kHz. As a result the Severn 2SE will seem tonally accurate, quite explicit and well detailed. This is an accurate and wideband loudspeaker.

Sensitivity was high at 88dB. The Castle

will seem quite loud compared with other loudspeakers. It is an efficient design since the bass unit doesn't rely on low impedance (DCR 5.7Ω) to draw current, its impedance reaching down to 6Ω or so with reactive component added. This gives the loudspeaker an 8Ω nominal impedance. Unfortunately, a massive drop in impedance at 8kHz, probably due to a notch filter, makes the load very reactive and may not induce the best performance from amplifiers. Raised current draw also increases amplifier h.f. distortion. These factors will likely make treble quality amplifier sensitive.

The Severn 2SE should offer a big sound with a good sense of accuracy and control. Amplifier matching needs care, though. NK



DALI ROYAL SCEPTER

Our response analysis shows the Scepter has a raised midband, which is likely to push vocals forward a little. It may add other effects: for example the pink noise test signal sounded a little coarse compared with 'usual' responses. Lumpiness in the response characteristic also contributes to this.

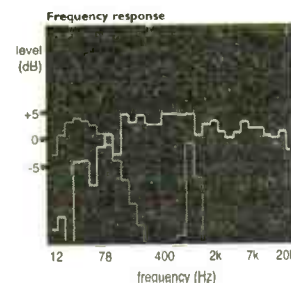
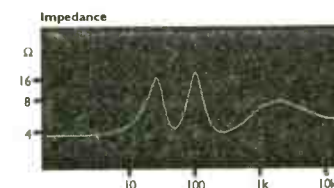
High frequencies are depressed by around 3dB, likely to add a little warmth, but not dullness in this case because there's plenty of output up to 20kHz, with no crossover suckout. Integration of tweeter to bass/mid was good technically, although there may be some subjective disjointedness because of the peculiar step in frequency response.

The port is centred at 45Hz and works over the entire bass range, reaching up to

100Hz. Since it gets down to a very low 25Hz the Scepter should produce good quality low bass, depending upon how port output integrates with forward cone output in a room.

Dali resort to low impedance to boost sensitivity, squeezing 85dB SPL from one nominal watt of input. Since overall impedance measures 6Ω with the bass unit dipping down to its DCR value of 4Ω the Scepter draws current and will benefit from a beefy amplifier. The load is mainly resistive however, which helps toward consistent behaviour between amplifiers.

The Royal Scepter will have a strong character, likely sounding a little coloured. Bass will be strong and firm though. It has merits and weaknesses. NK



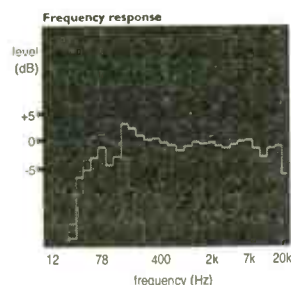
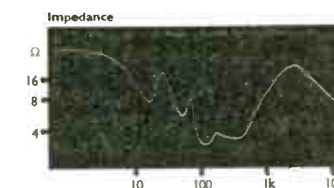
KEF REFERENCE ONE-TWO

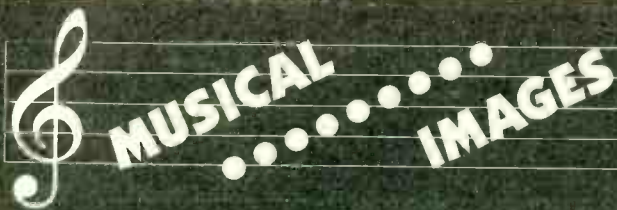
Misled by the appearance, some might think the Reference Series have just one drive unit. In fact the visible unit is co-axial, a tweeter lying behind the dust cap of the woofer. Its central position reduces phase errors and gives broadly symmetrical radiation right through the audio band. Frequency response of this combination unit is smooth and flat, although there is a small dip at 10kHz on-axis due to symmetrical cone reflection. Kef suggest listening a little off-axis to ameliorate this.

The third drive unit is hidden inside the cabinet in a "coupled cavity" arrangement. It works from 40Hz up to 160Hz, output through the large front port being in-phase. Kef cut off output fairly hard below this frequency by the use of a series input blocking capacitors - another unusual idea. It raises impedance progressively below 100Hz, as

our analysis clearly shows. The speaker will not absorb subsonic power nor be affected by d.c. offset. Unfortunately, the Reference One-Two hits a low 3.5Ω from 100Hz up to 400Hz, an area where it will stress an amplifier. Big impedance swings indicate heavy reactance and energy storage, also not too good. The coupled-cavity unit seems to produce plenty of bass in spite of high overall impedance. With impedance measuring 5.7Ω overall, the Reference One-Two isn't too difficult a handful, especially since strong deep bass signals do not draw heavy currents from an amplifier. A healthy sensitivity of 88dB means there'll be plenty of volume from amplifiers of 60-100W, or even less.

The Reference One-Two should sound cohesive, weighty and smooth too. As a load it is a bit difficult, but a loudspeaker like this demands good amplification in any case. NK





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FALCON MAXIMUS speakers 93.5dB sensitivity 123 litres 5 watts for 100dB focal drive units Audiom 15VX Audiom 7K2 TC120TDX £800. Magnum iA170SE amplifier phono stage 6 months old £175. Tel: 020 8531 5979 (Nov/1)

FOR SALE. Ruark Crusader II loudspeakers £850. AVI Reference CD player £750. AVI monoblocks £750. AVI pre amp £435. Tel: Adam 01525 753 356 (eve). (Oct/1)

AUDIOLAB 8000C preamp £325. Audiolab 8000SX x2 power amp £325 each. All items one year old with only eight months use. With boxes and manuals. Tel: 01483 489 444 or 07720 038 258 (Oct/1)

HAS ANYONE got an Arcam TV Nicam tuner in G.W.O., please, which they would sell me? Please ring 01502 715 724 or e-mail jrn@beccles.psnet.co.uk (Oct/1)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A3CR power amp (May 2000), 120 WPC, new £1000 - £795. Tel: 01604 478 505 (Oct/1)

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KRELL KPS-20i/L reference CD player with integrated linestage preamp, digital output, 4 digital inputs, single-ended/balanced outputs, remote control, owner's manual, boxed £3995. Tel: 01449 676 335 evenings (Dec/1)

ARCAM ALPHA 9 CD player, 10 months old, boxed, mint £500. Arcam Delta 290 hi-fi amp and Arcam Delta 290P power amp, warm powerful detailed sound. VGC £350 the pair. Tel: 0121 624 7445 (Oct/1)

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FLAGSHIP SONY SS7-ESD CD player £450. Mint. Beard preamp CA-506 £550. Beard P100 preamp £500. Beard P100 MkII preamp £600. All mint boxed etc. N-T-W. please. Tel: 01562 827 710 (Oct/1)

PIONEER A300R Tom Evans modified £350. Crimson Electric 610c/630 100 watt monoblocs, new, guaranteed £500, norm £1150. Sony CDP920E CD player £150. van den Hul, 102 MkIII interconnect £30. DNM speaker cable £5.50 per metre. Viper interconnect £45. Moth 30 series pre-amp active £100. Tel: 01582 724 414 (Oct/1)

AUDIO RESEARCH classic 30 £850. Rock turntable record clamp £30. Snell K's Huygeus £395. Audio Innovations pre-amp £175. Walker CJ55 arm cartridge £140. Wanted: Oracle Alexaworia well tempered turntable Rehdeko RK115 Spica TC50. Tel: 0113 255 9475 (Oct/1)

ONETHING AUDIO upgraded mint Quad FM4. Separation 44dB distortion not measurable FLA board presents 2.6dB boost. Increased depth and presence. Delighted or refund £240. Tel: 01202 481 386 ask for Mike (Oct/1)

B&W 802N light cherry, 15 hours use, as new £4300. NuVista 300 amps, 15 hours use, as new £3200. Audio Research CD2 stunning sound, pristine condition £2100. Tel: 01483 359 600 (Oct/1)

AUDIO RESEARCH LS8 pre-amp, 5 months old, very little use £1200. Musical Fidelity Explora tuner, never used £399. Denon DMD 1000 minidisc, never used £100. Tel: 01483 359 600 (Oct/1)

ARCAM ALPHA 8 integrated amp and 8P power amp £250, Alpha 7 (not SE) CD player £150. Tel: 01889 562 164 (work) ask for Stuart (Oct/1)

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AUDIO ANALOGUE Puccini SE silver amp £350. Castle Severn 2 speakers natural oak £300. All boxes, very little used. Supplements seven to fifty, offers. Tel: Tony 020 8743 5690 (West London) (Oct/1)

KEF Q35 speakers £140. Kimber PBJ CD interconnect 0.5m £38. Two sets Daruma-31 isolation feet, cost £70 each new, sell at £20 set. Rogers amp DBF cables, offers. Tel: 01293 786 453 (Oct/1)

TECHNICS SL10 record sized deck. Linear tracking arm Audiotechnica MC cartridge, sought after collectable, a gem, so stable you can hang it on the wall! £475 ono. Tel: 01202 481 386 Mike (Oct/1)

TANNOY 10" Golds £225. 12" Gold £75. Yamaha NS20's £175. Heathkit MA 12's £150. Nakamichi BX2 £185. Sugden tuner £75. Audio Alchemy drive 3 CD £325. Magneplanars MG3.3R £1200. Tel: 01736 740 421 (Oct/1)

MERIDIAN 500 inc. MSR £865. Meridian 201 + 209 £365. Sony MDS-JE510 mini-disk £55. All boxed. 6-off DPA 'The Power' £60 each. Tel: Mike 0032 2 512 0952 (Belgium, but equipment in North London) (Oct/1)

AVI S2000 MP pre-amp £500 ono. AVI S2000 MCD CD player £500 ono. AVI S2000 MM monoblocks £700 ono. AVI S2000 MT tuner £400 ono. Megatron speakers £2500. Or all @ £4200. All very good condition. Tel: 020 7439 1365 or 07773 777 777 (Nov/1)

MERIDIAN 555 power amplifier. Arcam Delta 60 integrated amplifier. Mission 780 SE speakers. Sony Walkman professional cassette recorder. Saisho CDP-10 CD player. Reasonable offers considered. Tel: 020 8968 5248 (Oct/1)

NAIM 32.5 old style £160. Naim 90 old style £150. The pair £350. Tel: 0956 329 067 (Essex) (Oct/1)

WOODSIDE STA50, 50 watt stereo valve amplifier and SC26L all valve line stage pre-amplifier. This stunning combination is in original condition £900 and £600 or £1400 pair (£3745). Tel: Mike 01758 741 026 (Oct/1)

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PATHOS ACOUSTICS 'Twin Towers' hybrid valve/solid state integrated amplifier. 2 x 35 watts. Beautiful sound, exquisite Italian design. Just 6 months old, cost new £3200, asking £2000. Tel: 01296 437 314 Bucks (Oct/1)

AUDIOLAB 8000S amplifier approx 3 years old. Mint condition. Boxed. Manual. £300. Pioneer A400 amplifier also mint condition £90. Tel: 02380 346 262 (Oct/1)

QUAD ESL63, recently serviced, too small for my room £1000 ono. Tel: Edinburgh evenings 0131 555 0886 or daytime 01968 377 008 or email: tom.edwards@lawpfi.sysnet.co.uk (Oct/1)

NAIM NAT 0.3 tuner.V.G.C. Boxed with manual complete with Chord Cobra 2 interconnect. 3 years old. £330. Tel: Graham 01388 606 920 (Oct/1)

ZETA TONEARM, van den Hul silver wired, excellent condition, well cared for. Offers. Also Target TT2 turntable rack, 2 MDF shelves £30. Tel: 01444 234 097 daytime or 0410 368 611 anytime (Oct/1)

KEL 34 E&I integrated amplifier, professionally built and tested. £250. Aiwa portable minidisc player AM F65 mint, cost £170, sell £100. Tel: 0121 778 5812 Jon (B'Ham) (Oct/1)

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MICHELL ORCA pre-amplifier boxed as new £1050 ono, may exchange for alternative pre-amplifier or CD player. Audioteac 3 tier equipment supports, spiked £90 each. Can arrange delivery Scotland. Tel: 0141 776 1643 (Oct/1)

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ORELLE SWING speakers virtually new £750, rrp. £1200. Tel: 01642 511 369 (Middlesborough) (Oct/1)

QUAD FM3 33 405-2 £250. Thorens TD160B SME 3009-2 Shure, needs slight attention £100. Marantz CD63 needs slight attention working. Offers. Tel: Vic 01277 810 990 work (Oct/1)

AUDIO SYNTHESIS Passion Passive pre-amp £325. Tel: Jonathan 01233 740 629 (Oct/1)

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JAMO CONCERT 8 (2 pairs), 1 pair in piano black with stands £850 (£1640). 1 pair in maple £700 (£1500). Jamo Concert centre speaker £275, (£500). All mint & boxed. Tel: 0116 271 5439 (Oct/1)

AVI 'REFERENCE' 20 bit CD player £475. Linn LK1 pre-amp phono £195. LK2 power £225. Sara 9's £325 including stands. Nordost Blue Heaven XLR 1m pair £100. Little Bit DAC £100. Tel: 020 8948 0899 (Oct/1)

NEAT MYSTIQUE speakers, cherry. V.G.C. Boxed, £325. Naim Aromatic arm lift £20. Linn Lingo, boxed £300. Tel: 01638 668 299 (Oct/1)

CELESTION SL600's boxed £200. Heybrook Integra amplifier 70wpc £160. Arcam Alpha 5 CD £120. Power amplifier 100wpc fixed and variable outputs (built from Crimson kit) £70. Tel: 01621 772 884 (Essex) (Oct/1)

KRELL KSA80 £1300. Proac Response One SE with A&E stand £950. Both mint condition, boxed, manual. Audio Research SP8 Mk2. VGC, manual plus service bill by Absolute Sound £825. Tel: 020 8203 3150 (Oct/1)

GARRARD 401 turntable S.M.E. plinth £120. Castle Trent two's speakers £100, both in good condition. Or swap for Thorens TD160SN in good condition Tel: 01274 593 457 after 6pm (Oct/1)

EXPOSURE CD player (£1050) £550. Audio Alchemy headphone amplifier HPA VI.0 (£250) £120. Above items in mint condition, boxed with instructions. Tel: Mark on 01508 499 586 after 4pm or leave message (Oct/1)

TOWNSHEND ROCK fitted Rega RB300 Roksan Chorus Black £399 ono. Dynavector D17 MkII moving coil (boxed) £250 ono. Sony TCK611S three head tape deck £100 ono. Tel: 0115 989 0116 (Oct/1)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A1 amplifier, final edition £175. Leak Troughline tuner Croft modified £110. van den Hul The First 0.5m single cable £45. Deltec mains filter £35. Tel: Nick 01889 584 241 (Oct/1)

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REVOX B260-S tuner £500. Revox B-150 amplifier £125 both mint condition. Ron Smith Galaxie 23 Ariel (dis-mantles, two sections). Tel: 024 7667 9165 or mobile 07989 559 129 (Coventry) (Oct/1)

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ARAGON 24K pre-amp 5 line inputs plus MM/MC phonostage designed by Krell (£1700 new) accept £450. Alphason Symphony turntable with Atlas power supply black and gold (£1800 new) accept £795. Tel: 01634 387 686 (Oct/1)

B&W DM 14 floor standing speakers. Teak. Perfect. £185 or S.A.O. for review copy. Tel: Mr Fletcher 01323 485 654 (Oct/1)

JOHN SHERNE Phase 3 Reference amplifier 18 months old, immaculate (£800 new) £425. Nordost Solar wind biwire speaker cable terminated 2 x 6m (£335 new) £135. Tel: John 01425 489 196 daytime or 01202 516 289 evenings and weekends (Oct/1)

VOIGT FULL size corner horns. Fitted new Lowther PM2C's £1200 ono. Delivery possible. Can be heard working in West Dorset. These are rare as a pair! Tel: 01935 850 375 evenings best. (Oct/1)

CYRUS pre-amp ACA7 tuner FM75 CD DAD3 + Q power supplies PSXR 2 No power amps DPA7 2 No pair KEF Reference Fours leads £4500 bought 1999. Tel: 01743 792 555 (Shrewsbury) (Oct/1)

YAMAHA NS1000 M's black £500. Nakamichi cassette deck 2, vgc (£350) £110. Akai GX95-B Reference 3HD remote classic £250. Quad II's working £230. Studer: A80 reel £300, A710 cassette £290. Tel: 0161 764 8888 or 0161 762 9884 (Oct/1)

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CAN YOU LIVE WITHOUT IT

I spend a lot of time evaluating all items of hi-fi (and home cinema), from turntables to cartridges, amps, speakers, interconnects, speaker cables, stands, and equipment racks. Sometimes things can be extremely close, and I could happily live with any of those items that I stock, otherwise I wouldn't stock them.

Occasionally, however some item or system is so overwhelming that you couldn't bear to be without it. There isn't a perfect speaker, each having an individual signature, which is why I find speakers so fascinating. Even one particular piece of music can sound absolutely right on one given speaker and not on another. A live recording by the BBC of Tchaikovsky's Manfred by the B.S.O. under Silvestri only worked 100% on the passive ATC 50's with AVI cd player, preamp + monoblocks, one particular interconnect and Sonic Link AST 200 speaker cable. It doesn't strangely work quite so well on the ATC 50 actives although basically a better speaker. I wouldn't want to live without that sound. But one of the things I miss most when I have loaned it out, is the Townsend Seismic Sink stand or the Arcici stand, both using air suspension. You get so used to the sound you get when sitting your components on these units and you forget how much contribution they are making, until you take them away. I referred to this 2 months ago, but as there isn't much new around at the moment, I thought I'd remind you. They aren't cheap, but can be far more worthwhile an upgrade than changing amp or speakers. So do come and hear how dramatically they can change a fairly modest system.

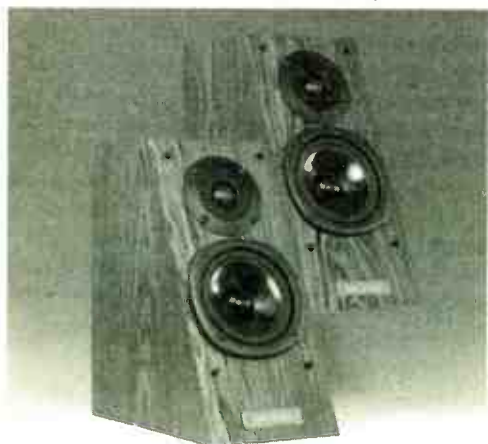
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see page 130 for details

SONAB OMNI directional speakers Model 22-12 two bass two midrange twelve tweeters in each cabinet refurbished mahogany need a large room £900. Tel: 01244 533 970/836 131 (Oct/I)

ROKSAN XERXES rosewood Artemiz arm new black Chorus £495. Harbeth Compact 7SE speakers, 6 months old, mint £625. Atacam 12" stands £25. Creek OBH9SE MC phono stage unused £85, Spirolink 1 metre interconnect £35. Tel: 020 8952 2044 (Oct/I)

MICHELL ARGO HR pre-amplifier with Panasonic pot volume control. Hera P.S.U. £450. Audio Alchemy headphone amp (new P.S.U.) £150. Cogan Hall Intermezzo interconnects £95. Tel: 01952 406 759 (Oct/I)

WANTED: QUAD 66 pre-amp and remote. Must be excellent condition. Tel: 01947 810 035 (Oct/I)

NAIM AND Linn complete system LP12 Ittok Asak 42/110 Snaps Linn Saras stands cables leads £650. No offers. Tel: 01908 691 941 (Milton Keynes) (Oct/I)

SIMPLY THE best smart 300B. Mono-B. New and boxed. £3500. Simply 845 inter., plus warranty mint £2250 plus KT-88 for sale plus ECC-81 Mullard. N.T.W. please. Tel: 01562 827 710 (Oct/I)

AUDIOLAB 8000 CD and Audiolab 8000 S amplifier 1998 CD Tag McLaren serviced both boxed v.g.c. £800, may sell separately. Tel: 01382 520 316 or Email: ghu3210aol.com (Scotland) (Oct/I)

QUAD 33, 303 & FM3 tuner. Excellent condition. Quad serviced. £300 ono. Tel: 01763 848 871 (Oct/I)

MERIDIAN 508 20bit CD. New laser & recent service by Meridian. Boxed and in pristine condition. £975. Tel: 020 8293 3185 (work) or 020 8952 8586 (home) (Oct/I)

AUDIO RESEARCH CD 2 £1550 (£3500). Audio Research LS5Mk2 pre-amp £1500 (£5600). Mark Levinson 333 poweramp £4000 (£8500). All Stereophile Class A. All mint, manuals, boxes. Tel: Bill 01993 851 508 or 0468 660 697 (Oxford) (Oct/I)

CASTLE HOWARD S2 £675. Musical Fidelity XA 200 monoblocs £660. XP 100 pre-amp £550. B & W 601 speakers £50. NAD 402 tuner £50. Linn Wakonda pre-amp Sneaky Kudos tuner £650. Tel: 01270 651 330 (Oct/I)

GARRARD 401 deck - SME arm/diamond stylus £150 ono. Leak 2000 tuner/amp £100 ono. Pair Celestion Ditton 44 speakers £150 ono. All perfect working order. Tel: 01959 700 386 evenings (Oct/I)

B&W CDM2 speakers, rosewood finish, excellent sound and condition, complete with Atacama 20 sand filled stands, £170. Marantz CD67SE, Trichord re-clocked, excellent sound, very good condition £150. Tel: 01689 830 282 (Oct/I)

ROGERS CADET III valve amp plus fixed station tuner BBC R2,3,4 and stereo decoder £80. Rogers Cadet II amp plus Rogers Ravensbrooke stereo tuner £80. Garrard 301 deck with Ortofon arm £130. Tel: 01379 898 676 evenings (Oct/I)

LINN KARIK III CD Player, Linn Numerik, Linn Kairn Preamplifier (mc) Owner upgrading Linn system. £600:00 each. Tel: 0161 280 5115 (Oct/I)

AUDION SILVER KNIGHT 300B valve monobloc power amplifiers, together with matching Silver Knight single-ended pre-amp with phono stage and separate power supply. Bargain at £1750. Tel: 01703 711 778 (Horsham) (Oct/I)

THORENS TD124/2, SME 3009/2, set in oak plinth £150. Technics SP10 with massive BBC PSU £200. Monitor Audio D-Drive turntable, SME 3009/2 Linn KS, separate PSU £65. Leak TL-12 plus £50. Shackman electrostatics £65. Tel: 07974 657 885 (Oct/I)

KEF RDM 2, cherry, cost £700 accept £250. KEF Reference Model I black, cost £1100 accept £500. Both perfect condition. Tel: Andrew 07967 646 089 (Oct/I)

B&W NAUTILUS 803, red cherry finish, with the essential H.N.E. granite plinths (£400). Total cost new £3900, asking £2800. Triangle Antal speakers, cost new £750 asking £400. Tel: 01296 437 314 (Aylesbury, Bucks) (Oct/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY MC6 speakers rare floor standers, top of the range £2500 new. Phone for spec £850 part ex. Luxman integrated Classic Mosfet amp £110. Kelvin Labs integrated Croft valve 4, mega micro. Tel: 01626 774 246 (Oct/I)

LOWTHER ACOUSTA PM6, nice condition, £300. Tel: 0161 720 7245, Fax: 0161 795 6432 (Oct/I)

NAIM NAT01 £600, Quad 33, 306, FM3 £250, 33, FM3, 405 £250, 2, 22, AMII, £300. Radford STA25, SC22, FM2 £500, ZD100, ZD22 £250, Art Audio VPI pre-amp £250. Rotel Michi RHA10 pre-amp £250, Sugden SDA1 D/A £250. Tel: 01704 530 928 evenings (Oct/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY A270 power amp, new board and power supply £600. Croft Epoch upgraded internal wiring £350. Ear 834 deluxe pre-amp £350. Quality interconnect silver plated OFC screened Teflon dielectric. Tel: 01443 423 402 (Oct/I)

CLASSIC LECSON AP3 and API £350. Matching speakers £150. Yamaha TC-800GL wedge cassette deck £150. Transcriptors Saturn turntable £150 all prices ono. Cheaper for whole. Good condition. Tel: 01353 664 432 (Cambridge area) (Oct/I)

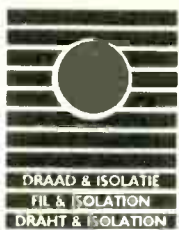
PIONEER A400 amplifier with F656 tuner. Rotel RCD-965BX CD player. Yamaha K-320 cassette deck. Monitor Audio R300/MD loudspeakers with Target stands £475. Tel: Baz on 020 8925 8546 Email: bdurrent@lineone.net (Oct/I)

WELL TEMPERED turntable £995. 'Super' deck 'Reference' arm, Dynavector DV-20X cartridge. Fantastic sound and looks. Tel: Alex King 07884 313 778 or Email: alex_king39@hotmail.com (Oct/I)

MUSICAL FIDELITY Rainbow preamp 2 x Typhoon power amps £340. Audio Analogue Puccini SE £300. Pioneer PD9700 CD player £80. Mission Cyrus 3 amp £230. All boxed with instructions except Pioneer. Tel: 0114 221 5271 (Oct/I)

REVOX B760 Tuner £400. Revox B710 Mk2 cassette £300. Wharfedale 510 speakers £50. Nytec int. amp 202 £45. Kenwood C2 pre + Sonamp 260 pwr £280. Philips CD880 + Musical Fidelity Digilog DAC £150. Pioneer TX7500 tuner £50. Aiwa ADF810 cassette £50. Philips 4506 reel to reel £30. Creek 4040 Mk1 £40. Tel: 020 7394 0870 (Oct/I)

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CYRUS FM7 tuner £200. Mission 731 speakers £60. van den Hul 'The First' ultimate i/c £140. All packaged and mint condition. Tel: 01482 644 727 (Oct/1)

KEF Q15 speakers, brand new, boxed, acclaimed Uni-Q design, black ash, can be used on bookshelf or stands. Only £95 (£200). Tel: 01273 844 719 (Sussex) (Oct/1)

FOR SALE: Pair Castle Chester speakers in very good condition with boxes and spikes, £400. Tel: 01406 364 935 (Oct/1)

LINN AKTIV Kabers (special finish) £875. Linn Aktiv cards £230. Linn LK100 power amps £300 each. 11m Linn K60 cable £95. All items boxed, mint condition. Tel: 01482 618 116 (evenings) (Nov/1)

QUAD 22/2XII valve set, GEC KT66 boxed £495. Luxman LV131 valve/ss/hybrid £200. Sony HA55 step-up £95. Teac A3340 reel to reel, 4 channel, simul-sync, excellent £300. Coral step-up £60. Kef Concerto speakers £75. Classical LPs SXL/2000/6000 SAX/ASD etc, various prices. Decca London Blue, boxed, mint £150. Quad ESL 57, one perfect, one needs treble panel £200. Tel: 01543 453 069 (Oct/1)

AUDIO RESEARCH D110 poweramp £1400 ono. Apogee Stages £900 ono. Meridian 602, 606, £850 ono. Tel: 0121 459 9616 (Oct)

NAIM SYSTEM for sale: Hi-Cap, NA-1XO, Super Cap, NAP-250 x 2, NAC-82, NA-CDPA, NA-CDS, cherry speakers, plus accessories. Boxed, excellent condition £7500. Not for sale separately. Tel: 07957 266 676 (Cardiff) (Oct/1)

LOWTHER DX3 drivers, 200 hours use, mint, boxed £375 pair. Bicolor 200 folded horn cabinets built Lowther drawings £60 pair. Pioneer CT91A cassette deck, mint, boxed £250. Tel: David 020 8444 8591 (Oct/1)

BEARD B100 Mk2 int. amp, excellent condition (£1400). Cyrus Discmaster/Dacmaster, A1 condition (£1800). Rogers Studio 9 speakers, rosewood, as new (£1500). CableTalk 3, bi-wire, terminated (£90). Yours £1400 ono. Tel: 01252 659 058 (Oct/1)

REVOX A77 quarter track reel to reel. Excellent condition. Recent professional realignment. 10 1/2" reels. Look the business! £250 ono. Tel: 07774 143 104 (West Midlands) (Oct/1)

AUDIONOTE OTO SE single ended integrated valve amp with phono stage £600 ono. Musical Fidelity X-Tone £60 ono. Tel: 01407 765 294 (Oct/1)

AUDIOLAB 8000Q pre-amplifier for sale, £575, as new and boxed with manuals. Tel: 00353 509 35469 or 00353 86 8196711 (Oct/1)

LINN LP12, black Valhalla Akito tonearm. Audio Technica OC9 cartridge. Excellent condition. hardly used. £450. Tel: Steve 01993 878 379 evenings (Witney) (Oct/1)

VALVE CLASSICS. One Thing Audio serviced. Rogers HG88 integrated amplifier, revalved £150. Pye Mozart FM tuner, adapted to use modern outboard decoder £95. Decoder £50. Delighted or refund. Tel: 01202 481 386 (Oct/1)

CAMBRIDGE DISCMAGIC transport and DacMagic 2 DAC and Soniclink Green digital interconnect (new £60). Fantastic transport, good with other DACs. £160 for everything, will split. Tel: Martin 0208 800 6124 (North London) (Oct/1)

WANTED: TOWNSEND Glastonbury speakers and Merlin psu. For Sale: Leak Troughline 3 Stereo valve tuner £60. Leak Stereo 30 £20. Tel: Alan 01661 852 874 or Email: alcav@yahoo.com (Oct/1)

WANTED: INTERCONNECT. Nordost Blue Heaven, Red Dawn, Audionote ANS/ANV. For Sale: Kimber 4TC, 4.5m pair £90. Nordost Flatline Gold 5m biwire pair £100. Kimber Select KS1020 0.75m £220. Tel: 01429 429 953 (Hartlepool) (Oct/1)

NSW (7/00) Sony TAFB 930R amplifier, boxed (TSP £300) £125. No offers. Also NSW (6/00) Yamaha AX592 amplifier (TSP £269) £120, boxed. Tel: 01652 650 538 (North Lincs) (Oct/1)

FOR SALE: Nakamichi 582Z 3 head cassette deck overhauled and serviced by makers, vgc, manual, no box, £240 ono. buyer collects. Tel: 01903 247 779 (Sussex) (Oct/1)

ION SYSTEMS Power supply X-Pak, 1 300 V.A. excellent condition £100. Also Naim Nait 3 integrated, 2 years old, receipts £300. Tel: 01282 814 723 (Lancs) (Oct/1)

AUDIONOTE MEISHU, mint, 300B valve amp, awesome sound, worth £3500, sell £1750. Also Audionote AN E/L speakers in rosewood and MAF stands, worth over £2200, sell £1200, mint. Tel: 0777 559 1014 (Oct/1)

COPLAND CSA14 £600. Oxford Crystalette turntable, Rega 300, Corus black £350. Standesign five tier £100. Rel Strata £150. All excellent condition. Can demonstrate. Tel: 01727 855 036 (St Albans) (Oct)

TUBE TECHNOLOGY Unis integrated amplifier with phono stage and new valves, in perfect condition £870. Musical Fidelity E10 as new £260. Thorens TD160S £60. Will demonstrate. Tel: 01708 250 572 (Upminster, Essex) (Oct/1)

MISSION 780 Argonauts, large three unit black real veneer super efficient with awesome bass attack cost £600 ten years ago, now £200 ono. Tel: Chris 01457 765 292 before 9pm. (Oct/1)

NAKAMICHI DR-2 three head tape deck £350 ono. Nakamichi LX3 two head tape deck £250 ono. Both machines mint condition. Tel: (home) 0113 235 9614, (work) 0113 222 5590 (Oct/1)

MAGNAPLANAR 2.7 SE speakers, almost new, amazing sound £1800 (£2650). Pair Denon 4400 monobloc power amps £350. All in mint condition with original boxes and manuals. Tel: 01257 277 857 (Lancs) (Oct/1)

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what you are missing. £14.95 per bottle.

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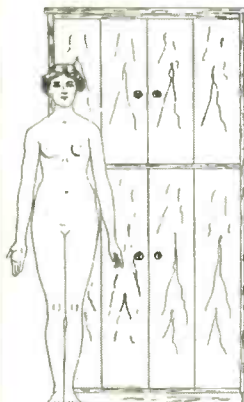
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John Shearne Phase 3 Reference	749	449
John Shearne Phase 6 Pre	999	599
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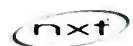


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