

News

Novembre 2011
n. 18

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Numero speciale:
Messe di premi per
Naim, Rega ed Epos

Suono e Comunicazione

Premiatissimi!!!

Messe di premi per il marchi Naim, Rega ed Epos!

Le prestigiose e influenti riviste Hi-Fi Choice e Hi-Fi News, nelle loro edizioni di fine anno dedicate ai prodotti migliori e più premiati hanno incluso un numero straordinario di prodotti dei nostri marchi preferiti.

Non ci rimane che allegarvi le pagine estratte dalle riviste per invogliarvi ad ascoltare questi meravigliosi prodotti presso i nostri rivenditori.



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ASCOLTO!**



Awards edition 2011

The best turntables, speakers, amplifiers, headphones, streamers, CD players and accessories



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

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Issue No. 352

Awards 2011

£3.99

Naim+B&W's £2k gems

Our verdict on the new
ND5 XS streamer and
B&W's latest, the PM1

Amp champs

Sublime computer audio in our
four-way amp test

2012's hi-fi is here

Whittlebury Hall
show reveals the
hottest new kit:
full report on p16

DOUBLE
EXCLUSIVE



System synergiser!

IsoTek's £600 mains conditioner will
sweeten up *any* system says our
expert, find out more inside...



COMPETITION WIN!

Triangle Color
loudspeakers
worth **£899**

BEST TURNTABLE UP TO £1,000

Rega RP3

For many people, Rega is still synonymous with cost-effective turntables. So when the new RP3 turned up, our expectations were understandably sky high. No problem there though, as the RP3 is capable of bringing pretty much any recording to life, with a sense of openness and pinpoint timing that will embarrass considerably more expensive decks. As if this wasn't enough, the superb build and handsome lines make this a must-audition product for anyone shopping for a sub-£1,000 turntable.

DETAILS

PRICE: £475

TYPE: Turntable and arm

TELEPHONE:
01702 333071

WEBSITE:
rega.co.uk

HI-FI Choice
WINNER
2011



Pro-Ject Xperience 2 Pack

DETAILS

PRICE: £775

TYPE: Turntable and arm

TELEPHONE:
01235 511166

WEBSITE:
project-audio.com

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011



SRM Tech Athena

DETAILS

PRICE: £650

TYPE: Turntable and arm

TELEPHONE:
01767 313691

WEBSITE:
srm-tech.co.uk

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011



BEST DIGITAL-TO-ANALOGUE CONVERTOR

Rega
DAC

Rega has never made a DAC until now, but you'd be hard-pressed to notice, given how accomplished its first offering is. The Rega combines a useful set of inputs with fine build and a handsome appearance. It also sounds fantastic and won us over

with excellent timing and an accurate and engaging tonality. The result is a product that has all the detail retrieval and slam and impact you could ask for, but it's presented in a fabulously calm and inviting way. The best DAC of 2011.

DETAILS

PRICE: £498
TYPE: DAC
TELEPHONE:
01702 333671
WEBSITE:
rega.co.uk

HI-FI Choice
WINNER
2011

Electrocompaniet
PD-1

DETAILS

PRICE: £1,250
TYPE: DAC
TELEPHONE:
020 8893 5835
WEBSITE:
electrocompaniet.no

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011

Matrix
Mini-i

DETAILS

PRICE: £260
TYPE: DAC/head amp
TELEPHONE:
020 3384 6392
WEBSITE:
matrixelectronics.net

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011



BEST AMPLIFIER UP TO £1,000

Audiolab

8200A

The origins of the 8200A lie in the classic 8000A from the '80s and '90s. We loved the original and its successor proves equally enthralling. The 8200A combines neutrality and accuracy, with enough of a unique character to entertain. The midrange lucidity impressed us, while detail retrieval is simply superb. It also brings excellent pace and timing to all types of music. Couple that with a solid build, and a large number of inputs and outputs and you have a worthy award winner.

DETAILS

PRICE: £730
TYPE: Integrated
TELEPHONE:
01480 447700
WEBSITE:
audiolab.co.uk



HI-FI Choice
WINNER
2011



Creek

Evolution 2

DETAILS

PRICE: £680
TYPE: Integrated
TELEPHONE:
01442 260146
WEBSITE:
creekaudio.com

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011



Rega

Brio-R

DETAILS

PRICE: £398
TYPE: Integrated
TELEPHONE:
01702 333071
WEBSITE:
rega.co.uk

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011



LOUDSPEAKER UP TO £1,000

Epos Epic 5

The Epic 5 manages to get an awful lot right even before you connect it up. For starters, it's a very handsome and well-built speaker for the asking price and we love the clever interchangeable baffles. Once connected, the news just gets better. The Epic 5 combines excellent detail retrieval, accurate and appealing tonality, and a fast and tuneful low end. Above all, this is a speaker with an innate sense of pace and timing. Throw in good sensitivity and easy placement and you have a guaranteed award winner.



DETAILS

PRICE: £750
TYPE: Floorstander
TELEPHONE:
01442 260146
WEBSITE:
epos-acoustics.com

**Hi-Fi Choice
WINNER
2011**

Triangle Color



DETAILS

PRICE: £899
TYPE: Floorstander
TELEPHONE:
+33 323 753 820
WEBSITE:
triangle-fr.com/en

**Hi-Fi Choice
FINALIST
2011**

XTZ 99.26



DETAILS

PRICE: £670
TYPE: Standmount
TELEPHONE:
01623 857707
WEBSITE:
xtz.se/uk

**Hi-Fi Choice
FINALIST
2011**

BEST LOUDSPEAKER OVER £1,000

Rega
RS7

Winning a *Blind-Listening Group Test* (HFC 347) is always a considerable achievement. Winning against five dedicated speaker manufacturers (when your own product is part of a wider range of electronics) is remarkable, but this is what Rega has achieved with the RS7. Making use of a clever transmission-loaded side-firing bass driver, the RS7 demonstrates outstanding coherence and openness. As we noted at the time, it never fails to make listening fun and that's surely the whole point.



DETAILS

PRICE: £1,685
TYPE: Floorstander
TELEPHONE:
01702 333071
WEBSITE:
rega.co.uk

HI-FI Choice
WINNER
2011

PMC
GB1i

DETAILS

PRICE: £1,675
TYPE: Floorstander
TELEPHONE:
08704 441045
WEBSITE:
pmc-speakers.com

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011

Spendor
SP2/3R2

DETAILS

PRICE: £2,295
TYPE: Standmount
TELEPHONE:
01323 843474
WEBSITE:
spendoraudio.com

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011

BEST STREAMER

Naim ND5 XS

Naim gave us a clear demonstration of its streaming talent with the formidable ND5. What we didn't expect is that it would take almost everything that makes the ND5 great and squeeze it into a product that costs £1,000 less. The ND5 XS has a superlative performance with streamed media and is also a superb internet radio platform. And if that wasn't enough, the digital inputs and iPod functionality make it a true digital hub. All-in-all, a superb performer at a realistic price.



DETAILS

PRICE: £1,925

TYPE: Streamer

TELEPHONE:

01722 426600

WEBSITE:

naimaudio.com

HI-FI Choice
WINNER
2011



Linn Akurate DS

DETAILS

PRICE: £4,500

TYPE: Streamer

TELEPHONE:

0141 307 7777

WEBSITE:

linn.co.uk

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011



Logitech Squeezebox Touch

DETAILS

PRICE: £240

TYPE: Streamer

TELEPHONE:

01753 870900

WEBSITE:

logitech.com

HI-FI Choice
FINALIST
2011





XS all areas for just £2k

Naim introduces its 'entry-level' network audio player, but there is nothing 'entry-level', however, about its performance, says **Malcolm Steward**

The ND5 XS is Naim's second network audio player and its first to offer native streaming of 24-bit/192 kHz sources. It follows the lauded and more expensive (£2,995) NDX (HFC 345) that arrived in February, this year. It differs from its forerunner, though, in being built into the attractive, slim-line XS series case rather than the taller Classic series enclosure, but is similar in being performance upgradeable.

Upgrade options currently available include the XPS or PS 555 power supplies and the Naim DAC. We're told that a matching low-profile power supply will be available next year, as well.

In terms of technology, the ND5 XS draws significantly on the established and Naim DAC (HFC 328). It uses the same innovative SHARC 40-bit DSP-based buffering with fixed clocks technology, along with 16-times oversampling and Naim's proprietary low generated noise, digital filtering

algorithms. The ND5 XS's 16-times oversampling mode DAC is the Burr-Brown PCM1791A. This runs at a maximum sample rate of 768 kHz and can handle UPnP signals at up to 32-bit, floating-point, 192 kHz sample rates.

Naim's choice

Like its big brother, the NDX, the ND5 XS adds far more to a system than just streaming. It can also be a digital input expander through offering three S/PDIF digital inputs to support digital connection of computers, set top boxes and CD players. This can be regarded as a 'free' upgrade if your CD player will benefit from an external DAC and few will have on-board DACs anywhere near as sophisticated or as painstakingly implemented as that in the ND5 XS.

Furthermore, the player provides access to internet radio, supported by the vTuner, five-star, full service. This provides useful facilities and

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Naim ND5 XS
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Network audio player
WEIGHT: 6.5kg
DIMENSIONS: (WxHxD) 430x70x310mm
FEATURES:
• Apple authenticated iPod connectivity
• Playback from USB memory sticks
• Streams 24-bit/192kHz sources natively
• Internet radio with V-tuner facility
• Optional FM/DAB radio module
DISTRIBUTOR: Naim Audio
CONTACT: 01722 426600
WEBSITE: naimaudio.com

organisational abilities including access to 'Naim's Choice' higher-quality radio streams, which include the 320kHz feeds from Radio Paradise and AVROKlassiek. There is also an optional FM/DAB module that lets users add terrestrial radio capabilities to the unit if they so wish.

The fascia of the unit is elegantly simple and features a single USB port, an OLED display and a matrix of nine control/navigation buttons. Naturally, though, these are not the sole means of controlling the device. It comes with a remote control handset and for iPod Touch, iPad, and iPhone users there is the free n-Stream app, which we consider the easiest way to select the source and music you want to hear.

The ND5 XS streams and plays WAV, FLAC, AIFF, AAC, WMA, Ogg Vorbis and MP3 files, either through its UPnP connectivity, or from a memory stick plugged into its USB port. The latter can also be used to connect an iPod or equivalent. Being Apple Authenticated, the ND5 XS will extract a pure digital signal from the iPod or iPhone to enable optimum performance from the device.

Finally, fans of classical music and progressive rock will be pleased to hear that the ND5 XS offers true gapless playback of all formats.

Fine adjustments

The build quality here is typical of Naim Audio: the company obsesses over little details that clearly strike competing manufacturers as too insignificant to concern themselves with. However, the cumulative effect



of all that fanatical attention to detail gives the ND5 XS a finesse that eludes its competitors. The sort of detail we're discussing here is outwardly inconsequential: for example, exactly where and how the cable ties are fitted to a wiring loom; or the length and orientation of a wire between circuit boards. In isolation, these probably makes the tiniest of tiny differences, but include another dozen similar fine adjustments and the cumulative difference becomes far more significant and the result easily discernible.

In order to keep noise levels to an absolute minimum, the ND5 XS features galvanic isolation between sections of the circuitry. The power supplies for each section of the signal path are also independent. Four separate secondary windings feed

"The way the ND5 XS makes music simply makes you feel good to be alive."

four separate power supplies for complete isolation. These separate supplies provide part of the electrical isolation of the digital DSP section from the DAC chips and analogue circuits. The reservoir capacitors are larger than would typically be used to reduce the unregulated voltage noise and provide increased short-term current capability. Voltage supplies to many of the digital circuits are double- and, in some cases, triple-regulated to reduce noise further. When an external power supply is employed the supply

becomes quadruple-regulated. It also provides a significantly larger toroidal transformer and larger reservoir capacitors to increase the noise reduction.

Sound XS

We auditioned the ND5 XS mainly through a Naim SUPERNATT integrated amplifier/Hi-Cap power supply combination and a pair of NEAT Acoustics Ultimatum XLS loudspeakers. The electronics were on Quadraspire Sunoko Vent supports; the speakers were on their own dedicated stands; while the loudspeaker cabling was TelluriumQ Ultra Black. It was also auditioned through an active, tri-amped, Naim DBL system.

The sound of the ND5 XS immediately makes one smile: the



HOW IT COMPARES

NAIM EQUIPMENT focuses primarily on musical performance. That is the be-all-and-end-all of its products, even if in recent years the aesthetics and user convenience elements have been given greater consideration than before.

The appearance of Naim's electronics has moved on quite a way since the 'Chrome Bumper' and 'Olive' eras. In this respect, though, one still cannot expect the overt styling flair of, say, Yamaha and the NP-S2000, another fine-sounding, if not as comprehensively equipped streamer.

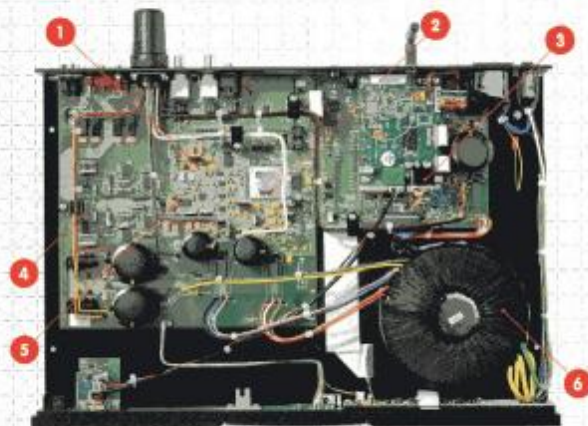
One can hardly also expect the low prices of a mainstream product such as the Marantz NA7004, which turns in a credible performance and an excellent array of facilities, including Apple Airplay, for around £600.

Regardless of its utilitarian build, the performance of the Naim tends to leave its fancier competitors very much in second place.

CONNECTIONS



HIDDEN TECH



- 1 Low jitter clock
- 2 DSP
- 3 ARM9 uController
- 4 Analogue filter
- 5 DAC
- 6 Large toroidal transformer

SYSTEM BUILDING

NAIM EXPECTS the ND5 XS primarily to appear in systems that include other XS-range components, as these are designed to be especially synergistic and do, in fact, work together exceedingly well. So you will probably find it being demonstrated by retailers with a CD5 XS CD player, NAIT XS or NAC152 XS/NAP155 XS amplifier, a Frailite support system and, perhaps, the Ovator 5400 loudspeakers in an all-Naim set-up. The CD5 XS can usefully benefit, of course, from the digital inputs on the ND5 XS.

The ND5 XS is not only designed to deliver its best performance in all-Naim XS systems; we found it worked well and sounded balanced and highly informative with a Creek 5350 amplifier and NEAT Petite SX speakers. It also worked flawlessly in a revealing, fully active system using Naim reference quality Classic components and DBL loudspeakers.

presentation is more than just hi-fi, it is communication at its most intimate and telling. Rather than analyse the sound, one's instant reaction is to sit back, relax and simply enjoy the music. And that is regardless of whether one is listening to a baroque guitar quietly strumming the works of Fernando Sor or the challenging *musique concrète* of Edgar Varèse being played with vim and vigour by a full orchestra. Either way, the word finesse springs instantly to mind: the music sounds so natural and unforced with no 'mechanical' or 'electronic' overtones intruding on your enjoyment.

Similarly, the sound is clean, extended at both frequency extremes, and free from any obvious coloration or added emphasis. Instrumentation

and voices on the 24-bit/96kHz rip of the eponymous Buena Vista Social Club album are pure and gloriously expressive, with a characteristically persistent but relaxed, Cuban beat. The top end is open and clear while the low frequencies have impressive weight and are sufficiently crisply defined to be rhythmically genuinely propulsive. Piano, that most telling of instruments, has weight, definition and absolutely secure, stable pitch, along with excellent transients and note shape.

The system produced excellent sound-staging, exhibiting incredibly accurately focused stereo images on Cassandra Wilson's album, *Belly of the Sun*. The next surprise came when we played *Moonshadow* from

Cat Stevens' 1971 album, *Teaser and the Firecat*; the ND5 XS revealed both strikingly dramatic and subtle dynamic contrasts in the music that came as something of a delightful surprise. It should not have surprised anyone, however, after the Naim's spell-binding presentation of a 24-bit/96kHz vinyl rip of Art Pepper's 1957 album, *Meets the Rhythm Section*. This was a genuine 'musicians in the room with you' experience. The instrumental timbre was so credible and vivid, and the playing so vital and animated, there was no other way to describe the sheer realism that we experienced.

The final challenge was to see how well the ND5 XS fared with the *bête noire* of most music collections, country music... albeit the modern variety of artists such as Shawn Colvin. The portrayal of her voice, and those of other singers, was superb, and packed with expression and emotion.

Close to sublime

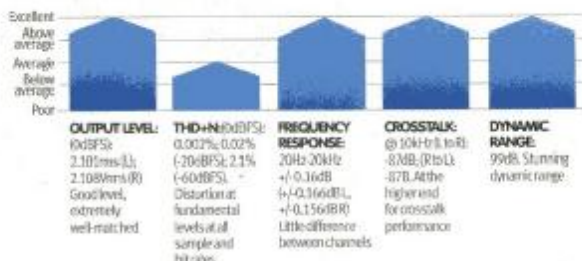
The performance of the ND5 XS is not far short of sublime and easily justifies its comparatively modest – in the scheme of things – price. It even holds its head high and exposes no weaknesses in the company of more expensive Classic components, which is high praise in itself.

Its ability to cope with 24-bit/192kHz streams future-proofs it for some considerable time and allows the lovers of hi-res to pursue their studio-master fix. The n-Stream app adds all the convenience to the package for which one could ask.

In an appropriate system, the way the ND5 XS makes music simply makes you feel good to be alive. It must be said that the £2,995 NDX has the edge over the ND5XS in sound quality terms, but most people will find that their performances are very close: there are certainly no glaring night and day differences. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



HIFIChoice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** We love the musical integrity and overall coherence of the design

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** There is honestly little to dislike in this competitive package

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A 'starter' product, its performance comes close to that of a reference-level streamer

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL





Brio benchmark

Rega's new compact Brio-R amp uses a circuit design originally conceived in the late sixties. **Jason Kennedy** examines the modern classic

The Brio-R is new in more ways than its remote handset, for a start it's a totally new circuit, albeit one that was originally conceived in the late sixties. Rega designer Terry Bateman discovered the circuit as a result of buying and reading a large collection of second-hand Wireless World magazines and noticing that the previous owner, engineer Mike Howell, had circled particular articles. These articles led him to a design which was published in 1970, but to Terry's knowledge never put into production.

Solid-state onions

The Brio-R uses modern Sanken Darlington output transistors, but it's the Class A stage that drives this final element that is different. It has more in common with valve amp design and, according to Terry, gives this Class AB amplifier the performance characteristics of the breed. This primary stage uses a single emitter-follower (or buffer) which reduces the load on the voltage amplifier and improves overall linearity. It's pretty technical stuff, but suffice to say that Terry knows his valve and solid-state onions better than most and used a classic Leak Stereo 20 valve amp as his benchmark, so we can't argue with that.

The Brio-R inhabits the same half-width casework as the Rega DAC (HFC 346) and is styled to match with aluminium push-buttons in its ABS fascia. It has four line inputs, a tape output and a moving-magnet phono stage. Confusingly, the latter is not indicated on the rear panel, but merely labelled Input 1, which leaves it vulnerable to abuse by line-level sources which will sound pretty distorted and could possibly damage the phono stage. It has an earth point, but this is underneath the case so doesn't give the game away.

Ferrous-free

The remote handset is an attractive lump with all the usual options, including Mute but not Power On/Off. Unlike the Rega DAC, the Brio-R has a conventional IEC mains inlet, so there is room to try aftermarket power leads. Power output is quoted at 50 watts into eight ohms and this rises to 73 watts when the impedance is halved. So it's no powerhouse, yet despite its Class A driver stage it does not run particularly hot.

Build quality is neat and solid, rather than particularly flashy; the only real concession to cost being the ABS front and rear panels. The main chassis is aluminium, so the whole thing is devoid of ferrous metals and that's a desirable quality at any price.

DETAILS

PRODUCT: Rega Brio-R
ORIGIN: UK
TYPE: Integrated amplifier
DIMENSIONS: (WxDxH) 80x218x325mm
WEIGHT: 6kg
FEATURES:
• Power output: 50w/8ohm, 73w/4ohm
• Four line inputs
• MM phono stage
• Remote control
• Colour options: black, silver
DISTRIBUTOR: Rega Research
TELEPHONE: 01702 333071
WEBSITE: rega.co.uk

Game-changing

While the Brio-R might be based on valve ideals, it does not have the classic mid/forward balance and slightly softened bandwidth extremes of the ilk, it does, however, reveal an uncanny amount of the character of everything it plays, which is a positive glass audio characteristic.

It also does the thing that all Rega products seem to excel at: it's a great communicator that delivers the message in the music. It's not the most powerful-sounding 50 watts we've encountered and if you want to crank up the volume you'll need high-sensitivity speakers. However, if you want to be drawn into the music then it's the best value tool for the job that we've heard since the Pioneer A400.

The phono stage is remarkably good for the money, too, we plugged in a Rega RP3 with Elys-2 cartridge and were instantly engaged by the texture and timing subtleties of the music. Again the forté is musicality not sound for its own sake. Bass could be more extended, for instance, but there are big differences between recordings which can be astonishing.

Giant-slaying

The Brio-R proves that you do not have to play loud to get the best out of your music, it is unusually transparent and totally engaging at sensible levels. We were quite taken aback by the degree to which it tells you what's going on in the mix and had to remind ourselves that it's a sub-£400 amplifier on more than one occasion. This amp is one of a rare breed of components that can be dropped into a highly revealing system and, speaker sensitivity allowing, actually enhance the results, thanks to its ability to reveal so many of the key musical details. Very few budget amps can do that. ●



www.hifichoice.co.uk

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Fights well above its weight in terms of timing and musicality

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** The lack of clear labelling on the phono input seems unwise

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Don't judge this book by its cover, just close your eyes and fly

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★

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hi-fi news

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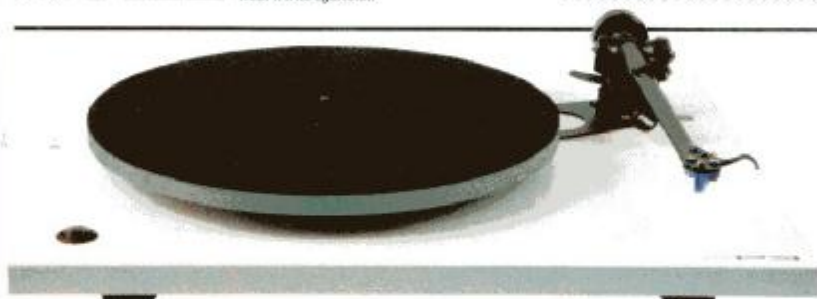


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AUDIO
FILE

Belt-driven turntable with manual speed control
Made by: Rega Research Ltd, Essex
Supplied by: Rega Research Ltd
Telephone: 01702 333071
Web: www.rega.co.uk



Rega RP3 (£549 w/Elys 2 pick-up)

The RP3 turntable is the latest descendant of the original Rega Planar 3 of 1977. Replacing the P3²⁴ (of 2006), this new model uses the same drive system, bearing and platter, but comes with the new RB303 arm and a new plinth design, introducing what Rega calls Double Brace Technology.

Rega's philosophy is that while the plinth has to be as rigid as possible, it also should be as light as possible. And seeking to maximise the plinth's rigidity between tonearm and main bearing, a phenolic stiffening brace is added. On the RP3, the brace visible on top of the plinth is complemented by a second one below, forming a stressed beam assembly. The actual plinth is a piece of special light furniture board, finished to a very

redistribution of mass' has improved the arm's resonant behaviour, says Rega. In addition to the new arm tube, the RB303 has a stronger arm carrier or mounting part.

Exactly as with the P3²⁴, Rega offers optional upgrades for the standard small plug-top power supply with a dedicated unit, giving electronic switching between 33.3 and 45rpm, and you can treat your RP3 to a more accurately made belt, which has a rounder cross section and less unwanted flash.

Our RP3 came complete with Elys 2 moving-magnet cartridge. It has an elliptical stylus and tracks at 1.75g. With the cartridge factory-fitted, leaving just tracking force and bias to be set, the turntable was soon ready to 'plug in and play'.

MIDRANGE CLARITY

It's hardly surprising that the RP3 did a great job on Rega's own audiophile recording, Christine Collister's *Love* [ENS 002]. In the opening 'Time In A Bottle' its

great midrange clarity and freedom from smearing really helped Gary Bennett's guitar to glow, while his banjo sounds came to life with tangible placement in the soundstage. The cello, which provides the underpinning bass line on this track, sounded clean and in better proportion than on some systems, where it can stick out a bit awkwardly. At the same time,

Collister's delivery had an expansive quality, the vocal brought forward with a sense of good breath and lip detail. The backing vocals were well presented too, with a clear definition of individual voices.

Next, we put on Blondie's *Parallel Lines* [Chrysalis CDL 1192]. The RP3 was admirably tight and clean-sounding, always delivering the rhythm with conviction while sounding faithful, open and clear in the midrange, giving a window into the production sound so that you felt you could hear how the vocals had got like that.

Eric Clapton's *Backless* showed the Rega's ability to give you a coherent view of a complex mix of instruments. On 'Walk Out In The Rain' it delivered an unusually well-sorted presentation of what can be a rather grungy sound. Carl Radle's bass line came through with clear and arresting musical logic, and on 'Watch Out For Lucy' the whole band swung brilliantly.

Putting on the Elgar *Introduction and Allegro* with Barbirolli [EMI ASD 521], there was a generally light and open quality as the music progressed. The lower strings were light-footed and explicit without the slightest boom or muddiness. In the midrange, the strings had bite and attack when they needed to, and the effect was to make the playing sound full of verve, not to lead to harshness. There was a good sense of space too.

VERDICT

The RP3's taut and tangibly 'right' bass, and its clear, spacious, uncluttered and inviting sound, makes the best argument for Rega's design philosophy. With or without the Elys, the RP3 represents outstanding value. (✓)

ABOVE: Shown here in White finish, the RP3 is also available in Cool Grey and Titanium. Glass platter is driven by a hand tuned 24V AC motor with optional electronic speed control. Felt mat is standard. Price without cartridge is £475

'Freedom from smearing really helped Gary Bennett's guitar to glow'

high standard by something akin to a printing process.

As for the arm, the new RB303 looks much the same as the former RB301, but in fact has been re-designed and re-tooled. The bearing housing area has been given more rigidity, and the bearings are placed further apart. Also, the back end is slightly heavier and the headshell end slightly lighter. This 'intelligent

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.33rpm (-0.01%)
Time to audible stabilisation	2.5sec
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.09% / 0.02%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-69.4dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-71.5dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-54.8dB
Power Consumption	4W
Dimensions (WHD)	446x105x363mm

hi-fi news
HIGHLY
COMMENDED

Digital streaming amplifier. Rated at 30W/8ohm
Made by: Naim Audio Ltd, Salisbury
Supplied by: Naim Audio Ltd
Telephone: 01722 426600
Web: www.naimaudio.com

AUDIO
FILE



Naim Audio UnitiQute (£1380)

Cute by nature, Qute by name. Though there's nothing overtly cuddly-feely about the Naim Audio UnitiQute (black and angular in the familiar functional Naim manner) this compact box offers so much at an attractive price that you have to regard it with affection.

The award-winning Uniti was Naim's original all-in-one music source with CD replay, network streaming, replay of audio files from USB stick or iPod, radio reception via FM/DAB/internet, analogue and digital inputs, and on-board power amplification. The UnitiQute is the Uniti sans CD player. The 'Qute assumes, then, that optical media

Supported file formats via streaming are WAV, FLAC, AAC, MP3 and Windows Media format. Maximum sampling rate is 96kHz, so to replay 176.4kHz or 192kHz files you have to configure the media server to perform downsampling. The same limit applies via the USB socket which supports WAV, AAC, MP3 and Apple Lossless. (A 192kHz upgrade is scheduled for later.)



CLEAR DELIVERY

We found the UnitiQute to be sufficiently intuitive to use that no reference to the owner's manual was necessary. We expected the amplifier, in keeping with Naim's long-established concern with pace,

rhythm and timing, to be always engaging. It might not be one to seduce SET fans but it has a precision and clarity of delivery that really does inform you about who is playing what,

where and how.

For example, Gwyneth Herbert's 'Annie's Yellow Bag', on Naim's own label, thrives on a crisp, impactful drum sound without which much of the track's energy is dissipated. The UnitiQute majored on this, serving up fast leading edges and great separation – both timbral and spatial – of the different percussion sounds, and delivered a tight,

tuneful bass. Unamplified music recorded in a natural acoustic fared well too, not for any euphonic bloom adding spurious warmth but because the UnitiQute does a fine job of blowing away fogs that often obfuscate small but telling details of instrumental character and playing style. With FM radio it delivered persuasive sounds from R3.

But what most potential buyers will most want to know is how the UnitiQute sounds when streaming audio. Replaying the same files via USB stick, coaxial S/PDIF (from a Mac mini via a TC Electronic Digital Konnekt x32 pro audio FireWire interface) and ethernet, our sound quality preference was in exactly that order, with network streaming some way behind the other two modes of replay.

Via USB stick Grace Jones' 'Well Well Well', from her latest album *Hurricane* had all the expected energy. Via coaxial S/PDIF, from the same USB stick now connected to the Mac mini, there was a slight diminution of the rhythmical pulse – although perhaps that shortfall could be addressed, at least in part, by a different digital interconnect cable. These are not, however, huge differences; some might even prefer the restraint of the streamed sound. But if you hear and mind about the sonic difference that the UnitiQute's earthing switch will make, you'll care about these differences too.

VERDICT

The UnitiQute is a fine amplifier, to which signals can be delivered in myriad ways. The streaming option doesn't provide the best sound quality (a USB stick is needed for that), but its flexibility and Naim's neat interface are undeniable. Ⓛ

ABOVE: The fascia is simplicity itself, with two convenience inputs via 3.5mm jack and USB socket, and a headphone output, also on mini-jack. Control is via the supplied remote handset

"The UnitiQute majored on the impactful drums on 'Annie's Yellow Bag'"

have given way in your life to audio files on networked storage, which you wish to access via either wired or wireless ethernet.

But you can still attach a separate CD, SACD or DVD player if you wish, via the four S/PDIF digital inputs (two on phono, two on Toslink). And the single analogue input will allow attachment of, for instance, a turntable via a step-up.

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	37W / 58W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	46W / 79W / 124W / 155W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.231-0.229ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-45kHz, Analogue/Cd)	-0.1 to +1.8dB / +0.0 to -16.9dB
Digital jitter (24-bit: 48kHz/96kHz)	22pssec / 42pssec
A-wtd S/N ratio (Analogue/Digital)	83.1dB (0dBW) / 103dB (0dBFS)
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, Analogue/Cd)	0.009-0.039% / 0.0018-0.05%
Power consumption (idle/Rated off)	22W / 120W
Dimensions (WxHxD)	207x87x114mm