

WHAT HI★FI? SOUND AND VISION

SEPTEMBER 2008 | £4.99

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO HIGH END ENTERTAINMENT

SPEAKERS ▾

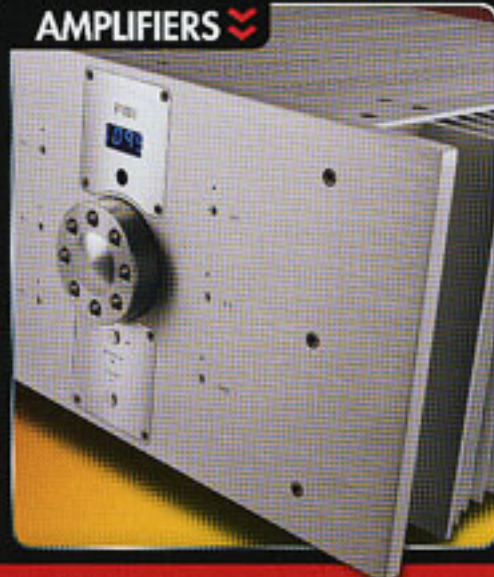


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REVIEWS
INSIDE

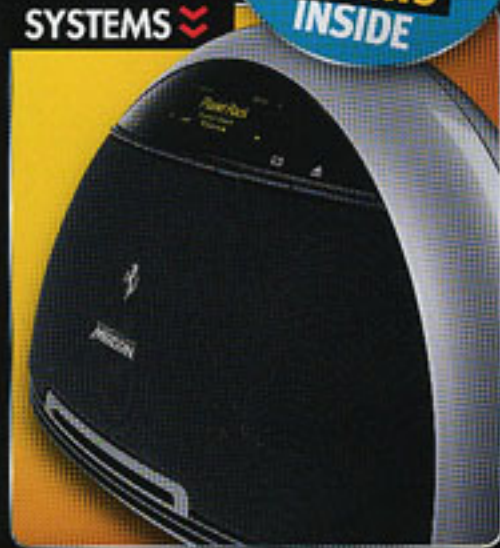
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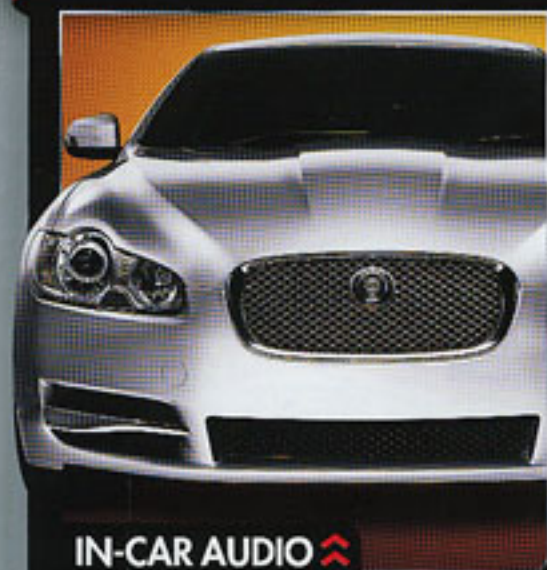


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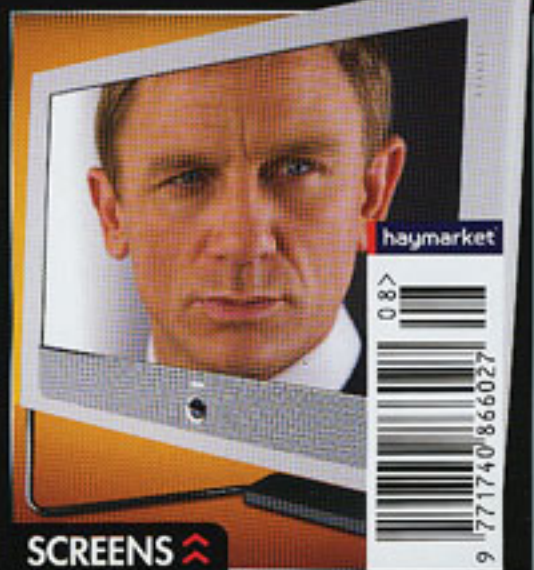
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Best buy

Thorens TD 160 HD/TP250 **£1560** | **p82**

Best of the rest up to £5000

Roksan Radius 5/Nima **£1295** | **p84**

Michell Gyrodec SE/TecnoArm A **£1478** | **p84**

Clearaudio Performance **£1670** | **p85**

Clearaudio Ambient/Satisfy **£4500** | **p85**

**“With Nick Cave,
this deck delivers
a performance
just as mighty as
the music itself”**
Clearaudio, p85



“I’m running in a new turntable, and it sounds like Johnny Cash is back from the dead, singing six feet away from me”

Clare N, www.whathifi.com

Once you’ve picked your jaw up off the floor, try your vinyl on this amazing turntable – it’ll never sound the same again

Clearaudio Performance



£1670

IF YOU'RE INTO your aesthetics then the Performance is a winner – it's stylish and sleek, with a milky white finish covering a satisfyingly damped Staron (artificial stone)/aluminium/fibreboard plinth.

But looks aren't everything. The real heart of the Performance lies in its ceramic/magnetic bearing. This little device uses opposed magnetic fields to remove frictional contact between

“The cymbals crackle, the saxophone reaches out, and the bass is defined”

bearing shells, making the platter 'float'. It's doubly impressive as this creates virtually no noise, which translates on to the sound produced.

This Performance came with the Satisfy tone-arm and the wooden-bodied Maestro cartridge. Hidden at the side is the motor, a separate unit that fits into a cut-out in the plinth and drives the belt. The motor housing could do with being wider, as it's easy to knock when turning it on or off.

FOR

An honest, transparent and immensely detailed sound; aesthetically pleasing build; significant quality throughout

AGAINST

Cohesion occasionally is lacking; manual speed change; no cover; midrange loses projection

VERDICT

Up there with the best, this Performance doesn't fade with time



We tested the Performance with the complex *Straight Street* by John Coltrane. Immediately, you notice the level of detail, especially in the treble range. The cymbals crackle, the saxophone reaches out to you, and the bass is particularly well defined. In essence you're listening to exactly what is cut into the grooves – close your eyes and you could be in New York in 1957.

Give the Performance something mellow with close harmonies, such as The Beatles' *Yes It Is*, and its attention to detail really shines through.

There are quibbles, but only minor ones. This turntable has a distinctive

character in its ability to analyse a recording, and excels in its strong treble and bass reproduction. Sometimes though, its transparency and honest sound mean the midrange loses its sense of projection. Cohesion, too, sometimes feels competent, but no more.

To us, it's a small thing, but that lack of cohesion will niggle some. We still think the Performance is a cracking deck.

SPECIFICATION

Speeds 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, 45 Man/auto/semi op Yes/no/no
Phono amp No Tonearm/cart Yes/yes Belt/direct drive Yes/no USB No Suspension Yes Finish Perspex Dimensions (hwd) 13x42x33cm

www.clearaudio.de 01252 702705

Clearaudio Ambient/Satisfy/Concerto



£4500

FORGET THE AMBIENT turntable for a moment: let's talk about Mr Nicholas Edward Cave. Along with his band, the Bad Seeds, he created *Nocturama*, one of 2003's great albums. Beautifully produced, it's one of our favourite test records. And most testing of all, is the closing track, *Babe, I'm On Fire*. At more than 15 minutes long, it's both an exhausting and an exhilarating listen.

Ambient creates order out of chaos

So what has this all got to do with Clearaudio's Ambient turntable, you ask? Well, played on the majority of hi-fi, *Babe, I'm On Fire's* rampaging bass, crashing cymbals, lashings of feedback and frantic vocals result in a chaotic soundstage, bass that jumps

“Popper sounds more banging than a child with a hammer and a tin box”

around like a toddler on a Sunny D diet, and treble that cuts through week-old Stilton. Not good, in other words.

But play the same track on the Ambient, complete with the £640

FOR

Thrilling delivery; sweet, open treble; spacious, detailed soundstage; looks

AGAINST

Not without rivals; width; you wouldn't want to break a £1400 cartridge

VERDICT

Beautifully built, and a joy to use and hear



Satisfy Carbon Directwire tonearm, plus a splendid £1400 (yes, we did say £1400!) Concerto cartridge, and the Clearaudio delivers a performance as mighty as the music itself.

Cohesive across all frequencies

From the mass of drums, guitar, percussion and violin, you can pick out each instrument, note and nuance. However, this space isn't at the expense of integration: while the soundstage is wide and deep, the Clearaudio expertly knits together lower, middle and higher frequencies.

Of course, you might not listen to Nick Cave. No matter, this Clearaudio

package loves all musical genres: Orff's *Carmina Burana* gets the dynamic reach and impact it truly deserves, while Christopher and Raphael Just's *Popper* 12-inch sounds more banging than a child with a hammer and a tin box. Put quite simply, the Clearaudio Ambient is just wonderful, whatever it plays.

SPECIFICATION

Speeds 33 $\frac{1}{3}$, 45, elec spd change Man/auto/semi op Yes/no/no Phono amp No Tonearm/cart Yes Belt/direct drive Yes/no USB No Suspension No Finishes 4 Dimensions (hwd) 15x53x33cm

www.clearaudio.de 01252 702705