

»» BEST BUYS

TOP CD PLAYERS

Forget all those MP3s stored on your PC. The best way to hear music is by playing a well-recorded CD on a top-notch CD player

BEST FOR VALUE

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AZUR 640Cv2 £250

★★★★★

The Cambridge is a rare breed, especially at this price point, because it has no real weaknesses to speak of. Budget players can be easy to criticise, usually lacking refinement and an even tonal balance – or they have a rhythmic snap similar to an elastic band. This CD player excels, though: music is delivered assuredly, without the sound being diluted too much by unwanted intrusions. The result is an even tonal balance and a detail-packed, exciting listen. This is a class-dominating player that is unlikely to give up its crown for a while. If your budget is limited, it makes an excellent buy.



BEST ALL-ROUNDER

CYRUS CD6s £650

★★★★★

The CD6s was our Product of the Year in 2006, the second year in a row it won our top accolade. It's undergone a number of tweaks, primarily to comply with the EU RoHS directive. What's that, you ask? Well, it stands for 'the restriction of the use of hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment'. But fear not, the changes have all been for the better. Gone is the usual leanness associated with the Cyrus sound, replaced by a more even tonal balance. The result is an amazingly complete sonic performance for the money. For those wanting to upgrade a budget player, the CD6s is ideal.



BEST FOR TIMING

CYRUS CD8x £1000

★★★★★

Another Cyrus, but we make no apology for that – the CD8x has a special place in our hearts. It won the Product of the Year award a couple of years ago, and it's such a consistent performer, it regularly flourishes in CD group tests. We've been known to bang on about musicality in the past, and we're going to do it again with this. Throw any type of music at it, from The Arcade Fire to Amon Tobin and beyond, and each note is delivered with power, excellent definition and more well-timed, accurate rhythms than a metronome. The more affordable CD6s is great, but this model is better still.

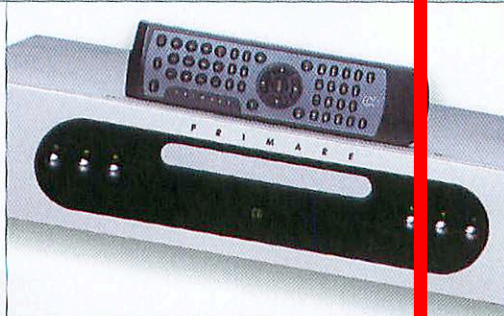


BEST FOR DYNAMICS

PRIMARE CD31 £1500

★★★★★

This is a hugely accomplished CD player, and it delivers a big chunk of high-end performance at a relatively reasonable price. We have always placed sonic ability above all else, and the CD31 sounds fantastic for the money. Whatever you partner it with, it never sounds out of its depth. You get lashings of detail, well-balanced tonality and superb dynamics. We also love the fact that listening to the Primare makes listening to music fun. Add in build quality that can best be described as lavish, and you have a very special player indeed. If you can afford it, you certainly won't be disappointed.



Try them with these...

AMPLIFIER



ROTEL RA-04 £250

★★★★★

Don't be put off by the Rotel's relatively modest price. This amp is ruthlessly efficient when it comes to control and poise, while bass is deep and tight. All it lacks is remote control, but so what?

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SPEAKERS

MONITOR AUDIO BR5 £400

★★★★★

The BR5s are a shining example of how to beat an Award-winner (in this case KEF's IQ5s): use it as your benchmark during product development, and make something better. The BR5s add a large dose of excitement to the mix.

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INTERCONNECTS

SUPRA DUAL £40 (0.75M)

★★★★★

This is an ideal 'first upgrade' cable, sounding far superior to the free cables that come with most equipment. Its performance is cohesive, well balanced and full of drive. The only question you might ask yourself is if a 0.75m run is long enough for your system. If not, we suggest you rearrange your set-up!

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