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CD player of the year

Audio Research Reference CD8

Reviewed in issue 64

The look might not change drastically over the years, and the company will always use tubes in the output stage, but the Audio Research Reference CD8 is something really special in CD players. The latest flagship player from the electronics specialist, Audio Research combines a top loading, Philips-pro mechanism, a Burr-Brown chipset and more tubes than many a good small valve amplifier; five 6H30 and a 6550C.

It had a difficult enough task to follow the Reference CD7, itself one of the most well-received CD players ever produced. Fortunately, the Reference CD8 easily eclipsed its predecessor.

By moving to a 6550 tube in place of a pair of 6H30s (akin to the Reference 3 preamp), and moving to a Burr Brown 24bit/192kHz DAC, the Reference CD8 delivers a sound that's more focused, better separated and transparent performance. The CD8 also delivers far better bass than its predecessor and approaches the excellent Wadia 581se player. Almost SACD-like in its warmth and naturalness, the Reference CD8 is "quite possibly the best all round single-box CD player I've heard and certainly a match for anything at its price," we concluded. Audio Research's Reference CD7 pushed the brand into the top league of digital performance; the Reference CD8 builds significantly on that reputation.

Price: £9,498

Manufactured by Audio Research Corporation

Net: www.audioresearch.com

Distributed by Absolute Sounds

Tel: +44(0)208 971 3909

Net: www.absolutesounds.com

Highly Commended Lyngdorf CD-1

Reviewed in issue 67

Price: £1,795

Manufactured by Lyngdorf

Net: www.lyngdorf.com

Distributed by Gecko

Tel: +44 (0)845 262 2882

Net: www.geckohomecinema.com

Highly Commended dCS Puccini

Reviewed in issue 65

Price: £10,799

Manufactured by Data Conversion Systems Ltd

Tel: +44(0)1799 531999

Net: www.dcsLtd.co.uk

Highly Commended Esoteric P-03 CD/SACD and D-03 DAC

Reviewed in issue 65

Price £10,495/£9,995

Manufactured by TEAC Esoteric

Net: www.teac.co.jp

Distributed by Symmetry Systems

Tel: +44(0)1727 865488

Net: www.symmetry-systems.co.uk

