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screen that's only an inch or so longer than my 45x110mm Nokia 6500!

During my time with the DSi200, I only experienced one quirk, discovered when switching inputs: the remote's source select buttons also change tracks on the Musical Fidelity CD player. This is merely an unfortunate coincidence. But owners of kW DM25s may need a re-think if the DSi200 appeals to them.

We're still at a point where Class A operation is regarded as the pinnacle of amplifier operation and Class D is a modern freak. But, with increasing regularity, Class D designs are blowing such discrimination, conditioning and prejudice out of the window. There is one overpowering facet of the DSi200's being that will – as this article's sub-heading come-on suggests – rattle not just the cages of Class A fans, it will shake religious fervour for valves. No, not enough, perhaps, to create apostates. But it made me less of an anti-transistor snob.

That first burst is always the most telling, provided you'd let the system warm up before the initial session. I do that as a matter of habit, switching on and then leaving the room for a cup of Newby's Earl Grey. And I'm glad I did, because later sessions showed that the DSi200 warms up to optimal sonic merit after a half-hour.

ARC GOES GREEN

Representing the polar opposite of inefficient valve amplifier topologies, ARC is headlining the 'green' credentials of its DSi200 – the first Audio Research amp to earn itself an Energy Star rating. Not just solid-state but green-blooded analogue Class D amplification is the name of the game here, even if ARC has coupled this to a conventional 'purist' linear power supply instead of going the whole hog and employing a lightweight switchmode supply. This is not ARC's first foray into Class D (or PWM amplification), its earlier 150M power amp incorporated up to seven of Tripath's 'Class T' modules in one chassis. Nevertheless, the DSi200 is its first home-grown Class D design, employing MOSFET power devices in the final, high speed output stage and achieving a full 83% efficiency at its rated 200W/8ohm output [see Lab Report]. PM

At least, that's how it sounded to my ears, during a freakishly cold December, in a room with a thermometer monitoring my exposure to the ARC. So, as long as your dealer has it switched on before you get to the shop, you can assume that what you'll hear is what you're gonna get.

NEVER FALTERS

How to characterise the sound? It's impossible to talk about the actual power, because ratings no longer mean anything, when there are 60W amplifiers that seem subjectively more robust than amps rated at double that. But whatever the numbers, the DSi200 dispatched the Wilson Sophias with ease, worked miraculously well with the Martin Logan Summit X, and even managed to squeeze the tush of the LS3/5A. At no point, from listening to the overly gentle new Carly Simon title, *Never Been Gone*, to live-and-raucous Black Crowes to Rick Derringer or ZZ Top at air-guitar-inspiring levels, did the amp falter.

So set aside entirely the power debate with this baby, though it has been pointed out that the speaker's impedance can

ABOVE: Nearly faultless, the front panel offers ideal ergonomics and a modern look, while remaining inimitably a recipient of 40 years' worth of ARC's signature aesthetics

effect its sonic nature. After trying three wildly differing speakers, however, it was possible to make observations that transcend component-to-component synergy. Not least is that this amp will – while casting doubts on your allegiance to valves – convince many that there's no need to court a separate preamp and power amp.

'This amp is fast, widely dynamic, punchy and macho when needed'

This amp is fast, widely dynamic, punchy and macho when needed. On the Move's remastered 'California Man', the roiling, churning guitars manifested

themselves as powerfully as HM axework some 40 years younger, augmented by demented sax playing from one Roy Wood. Under the mix, the piano kept its shape, the soundstage spread across the room. Involving? It begged one serious question: why didn't the British appreciate this most stellar, polished, inventive and – indeed – *rocking* of bands?

On to 'Brontosaurus', a bass-heavy exercise that sounded like it was recorded at 45rpm and played back at 33.3rpm. If ever a tune lived up to its Jurassic name, the Move's track had it covered, and the DSi200 reached down deep to create a ponderous, but rock-solid foundation. And yet it kept the fluidity and grunginess that on occasion can be heard as sounding too tight. So detailed was the reproduction that I delighted in playing it against the vinyl original, the DSi200 showing that the CD's engineers narrowed the gap here.

Inevitably, that led to the Beatles remasters, which I am now savouring off ☺



car that still offers the sumptuousness of a coach-built motor carriage of the 1930s. Simply shoving valves into a CD output stage, for example, isn't enough. When we reviewed Micromega's top pre/power combination last December (coincidentally costing exactly the same as this integrated amp-plus-CD player), I learned that Micromega's roots and reputation, though entirely based in digitalia, had been respected in the brand's reawakening. But the focus on digital has not been allowed to dominate.

And yet... however much one approaches this as a pair of carefully voiced and matched siblings, the CD player manages to overshadow the amplifier. We'll get to them as standalone products in a second, but keep that thought in mind, for it's all-pervasive. Alternating my listening with nice, comfortable vinyl sessions and a couple of bouts with other CD players such as my aged Marantz CD-12/DA-12 and Quad's 99 CDP-2, I kept returning to the synergy that is the CD-30/IA-180 *au naturelle*.

IT'S STEAK TARTARE THEN
As an ensemble, the two create a balance between the aforementioned modern-and-retro that will mean more to older listeners. By that, I refer to those who started with vinyl and witnessed CD's evolution from its launch in the 1980s through to its

maturing to something acceptable in the 1990s. (This is not the place to defend CD *per se* but, trust me, you *will* miss the maligned CD when compressed formats become the norm.) Digital versus analogue sonic differences may never be resolved, so any *détente* comes in the form of behaving realistically: by treating the two as merely dissimilar rather than as good versus evil.

Using the two with Red Book CDs creates an experience that asks, what is all the fuss about? I sat there and listened to all three discs in the new Charisma Label anthology *Refugees* without stirring except to change discs. Ladies and gentlemen: that statement is far more pregnant with revelatory import than identifying the system's ability to hold my attention for a couple of hours: amongst the tracks were offerings from artists I'd drive 100 miles to avoid, like Lindisfarne, Genesis and Van der Graaf Generator.

Indeed, the music is so utterly, mercilessly, putridly 'progressive' that I don't even know why I bought the set. I don't like Peter Hammill *that* much. And yet the music is also of the era before digital recording made audible artifice a permanent part of our lives, so I was captivated by textures and detail, spatial

ABOVE: Minimalism and clean styling endow the Micromegas with both high functionality and the kind of look that won't grow tiresome; a large rotary volume-control aptly dominates

trickery and studio gimmickry that reminded me why I was first blown away when life moved from mono to stereo (which is another can of worms not to be opened here).

Classicists will be gnashing their teeth, for the decade in question – 1969-78 – also represents the era, defined by those

with an ear for natural sound, as that when studios lost the plot, compared to the genius studio work of the 1950s. Either way, the Micromega system, with Charisma's music, possessed exactly the

'A coherent, top-to-bottom richness pervades the music'

seductive charms which keep us wedded to vinyl and valves and analogue in its most pure form. Voices, even if weirdly processed in the recording stages, sounded more real than those which pass for today's cutting-edge releases. The likes of Simon Cowell would do well to look back to their own early years if they're to salvage the sound of the swill spat forth by *X Factor*.

Keep in mind that I am discussing the way the pair behaved without any tweaking or cable chicanery or accessory indulgence. It simply works. Just listen to the kick-drum opening to the Black Crowes' 'Kept My Soul' on the sublime *Before The Frost*: the air, the resonances, the scale, all possess the sort of airiness and authenticity that keep sending us back to our turntables and moving-coils. Then the band kicks in, and the sheer mass reminds you that you are listening to a fast, crisp and powerful solid-state amplifier, its Class D technology forgotten in the musical bliss delivered.

Yes, there's a knee-jerk tendency that says a Class D amp has no right to sound this good after all the years the hard-core

132K UPSAMPLING

Look closely at the CD-30's slim fascia and you'll see a little badge declaring '132kHz Upsampling'. That's 132kHz, not the usual 192kHz. In its white paper, Micromega explains that the mathematics of asynchronous upsampling from CD's 44.1kHz to 192kHz are not straightforward, unlike upsampling from DVD's 48kHz to 192kHz, which is direct 4x multiplication requiring one single synchronous clock. Upsampling between two rates that are not multiples of one another requires two clocks, with the possibility of 'beating', jitter and inaccurate calculation. *HFN* has been saying the same thing for a few years [most recently Feb '10, p90]. Micromega has opted for the simple expedient of 3x upsampling from 44.1kHz to 132kHz followed by another 8x oversampling in the Analog Devices DAC that follows [see Lab Report, p50]. **PM**