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We love top-loading decks, but you may have to rearrange your system to accommodate it

# Audio Research lands a royal flush with CD5

This premium CD player combines traditional looks with a performance that's distinctly modern. Whatever your musical tastes, this superb all-rounder delivers in spades

**THERE'S NO GETTING** around that fact that Audio Research is hi-fi royalty. It was one of the first brands to be associated with the term high-end, and has consistently produced top-class equipment throughout its 40-odd years of existence. Not many manufacturers can rival such a rich heritage.

Audio Research products have a distinctive look that hasn't really changed over the decades. Park the highly regarded SP10 preamp from the early 1980s next to the brand new CD5 CD player and there would be little in terms of appearance to suggest the CD player was the newer product.

For most Audio Research buyers this is a positive – it's something that's traditional and separates the brand from its rivals. The CD5's build quality is rugged and suggests this player is in it for the long run. It all feels solid, from the sliding disc lid to the well-damped casework. We're not totally convinced, though. The lab equipment look is all very well, but if Audio Research wants to charge over five grand for its entry-level CD player, we think the least it can do is take care over how and where it attaches screws on the top panel – there has to be a neater way of doing it than the mess Audio Research has made here. We don't like the little black plastic control buttons either: they look and feel cheap.

## Free from vibrations

Now we've got those complaints off our chest, you should know that from this point on it's all good news. As expected, the CD5 is a careful evolution of the CD3 SE. The transport, a Philips PRO2M, is mounted on a rigid beam, which itself is attached to a large metal plate. The whole assembly is damped, meaning that the transport is protected from external vibrations and so should be able to do its job of reading the digital data from the disc a whole lot better.

The CD5's audio circuits are all new, and combined with beefier power supplies the result is better noise performance, improved resolution and stronger dynamics. As if to prove the company isn't living in the past, this player is greener than its predecessor, using 14W of electricity at idle rather than 26W.

Connections are pretty much as would be expected at this price level apart from the exclusion of an optical digital output. Balanced XLRs are on the menu as is the rare (but welcome) AES/EBU digital link.

## Must sit at the top of the rack

We're fans of top-loading CD players, so using the CD5 is no chore. That said, the loading layout means that the player will need to be on the top shelf of any rack and that may be a problem for some people – particularly if they have a record player or preamp that already lives there.

It's on sonic ability that the CD5 justifies its hefty price tag. This is a wonderfully fluid-sounding player. It flows with the music, delivering changes of pace and dynamic shifts with ease. Listen to

*Harvey Two-Face* from *The Dark Knight* OST and the results tug at the heart, while delivering real thrills once the piece gets going. There's no shortage of refinement here, but this isn't bought at the expense of drama, as a spin of Bizet's *Carmen* proves. Audio Research is no stranger to making kit that images well and the CD5 is no

different. It produces a stable and precise sound stage – one that doesn't dissolve when the player is stressed by complexity.

Smooth, full-bodied tonality combined with a subtle midrange mean that the CD5 player works well with vocals, too. Rarely have we heard the likes of Jill Scott sound so communicative, so touching as she does on *All I*.

Don't go thinking this player can't party, however. Despite the conservative appearance the CD5 is right up with the best when it comes to delivering hard-charging tunes such as Radiohead's *15 Step*. Most rivals make the opening sound like a mess of noise; the CD5 has the grip, timing and drive to make it sound like music. This is something only the very best players can manage.

Despite our moans about certain aspects of finish we absolutely adore this player. It's a brilliant all-rounder that works well with every type of music. Give it a decent support plus a similarly talented system and we have no doubt that you will enjoy it immensely. **A**

“Most rivals make Radiohead's *15 Step* sound like a mess of noise; the CD5 makes it sound like music”

CD PLAYER  
AUDIO RESEARCH CD5  
★★★★★  
£ 5055

### FOR

A brilliant combination of subtlety, dynamics and refinement; times well

### AGAINST

Mess of screws on the top panel; cheap feeling control buttons

### VERDICT

Audio Research strikes gold again. The CD5 is a terrific CD player for the money



**TYPE** Integrated

#### OUTPUTS

Coaxial digital, XLR, RCA phono

**CD TEXT** No

**MEMORY** Yes

**DISPLAY OFF** No

**FINISHES** 2

**DIMENSIONS (HWD)**

13 x 48 x 31cm