

Amplifiers

Good amplification isn't just about power – it's about control and finesse, too. Our six amp champs have all that, and more

Best Buy up to £150 ROTEL RA-921 £125

For the second year running Rotel's entry-level RA-921 scoops the gong at our lowest price-point. Despite its vintage, it remains the best way into hi-fi amplification on a tight budget.

As you might expect at this price, it's a simple design that eschews the convenience of remote control operation, but it's what you get for your money that will satisfy most. The solidly-built box features three line-ins, a decent phono stage, tape monitor, subtle-acting bass and treble controls, and a headphone socket. At 25W per channel it's not exactly a powerhouse, but those Watts are of good quality and will happily take entry-level speaker loads in their stride.

Wired and fired, the '921 astonishes with the kind of crisp, clean delivery that belies its price-tag. It's also a really punchy little performer, so spin dance or rock CDs and the energy and rhythm will be well communicated. Switch to classical and the timbre and scale are a delight from one so wallet-friendly: only at high levels does the '921 begin to balk at the challenge. And so, for another year, the budget amp throne belongs to Rotel.

WHAT HI-FI? Contenders – the products you shouldn't ignore...

AMPLIFIERS (integrated)
 Yamaha AX-392 £170 Marantz PM6010 OSE £230
 Creek 4330 £279 Musical Fidelity X-A100R £1000 Marantz HI-S PM17 £1300
 AMPLIFIERS (pre/power)
 Creek P43R/A52SE £350/£600 Naim NAC92/NAP90 £499/£473
 Musical Fidelity X-P100/X-A5100 £800/£800
 Cyrus aCA7/aPA7x2/PSX-R £798/£948 x 2/£328



AMPS