



Roksan Caspian £895

For Vitality and punch; futuristic looks and superb build

Against Can sound over-keen; others here better controlled

Verdict ★★★★★

One of the older machines in this group, and though very good, it's not among the finest

First launched in 1997, Roksan's Caspian CD player has proved to be an enduring favourite with critics and punters alike, the company having kept it up to speed with an ongoing programme of component tweaks.

Inside the very solid casework can be found single-bit digital-to-analogue conversion allied to a well-isolated transport using some innovative proprietary technology, Roksan's Laser Environment Enhancer Light being used to make life easier for the disc-reading optics. But what will strike most people is

the display, housed in the drop down drawer-front, and the paucity of buttons on the fascia. Roksan has clearly taken the stylish-but-minimalist approach.

In action, vitality and impact are what the Roksan player is all about. It does a superb job with rhythms, having big, fast bass and plenty of zing in the treble, plus an open midband that ensures voices and solo instruments stand out in the mix. That said, the Caspian can sound a bit too bright and fast at times, and what may seem exciting with rock or dance tracks can seem overblown and a shade false with classical or jazz music, lacking a little richness and warmth.

Used within its limits – and that means mainly with mainstream music styles – the Roksan is consistently impressive and exciting, and few players this side of a Naim can hammer out searing rock tracks or even goodtime pop as can this one.

Rotel RCD-991 £750

For Powerful and detailed sound; solid build; good price

Against Dither adjustment may be a distraction

Verdict ★★★★★

A truly fine sub-£1000 player, this flagship Rotel is a great buy, with or without the dither control

It's a sign of the maturity of the CD market that manufacturers are turning to user-adjustable settings for that added value factor. So while Sony players now have variable digital filters, Rotel offers a choice of dither settings.

And what the devil is dither? you cry. In a nutshell, it's an ultrasonic noise added to improve the performance of the digital-to-analogue conversion system, and is usually set at the design stage. In this player, however, you can adjust the dither over a range of seven settings to affect changes in the sound.

Otherwise the Rotel follows fairly common design principles, features dual 20-bit Burr-Brown converters, and also uses Pacific Microsonic's HDCD digital filter.

In use, the Rotel proves a solid, reliable conveyor of all kinds of music. We preferred the player when used with its dither selector in the standard setting.

Big, gutsy and well-controlled – that's the sound of this player, whether belting out the dance rhythms of Will Smith's *Willennium*, crashing through the latest Rage Against The Machine set or conveying the live atmosphere of The Corrs' *Unplugged* disc. Instruments and voices have a gloriously rich and detailed character, and it's striking the way the player can deliver a full-scale picture of a band or orchestra with insight and accurate soundstaging.

For these reasons, and the solidity of its build, this machine takes the full five stars.

DAC 18-bit HDCD capable No Analogue outputs One set
Digital output Electrical Programming Yes Display off Yes
Headphone socket No Remote control Yes

DAC 20-bit HDCD capable Yes Analogue outputs One set
Digital output Electrical/Optical Programming Yes Display off Yes
Headphone socket No Remote control Yes



The superbly-built Roksan is fast and rhythmic, if a little over bright at times; Rotel's flagship spinner offers an articulate, gutsy and gloriously rich performance



Linn Genki ★★★★★

So it's got a strange name, but we won't let that detract from what is a superb player from a relative latecomer to the world of CD. Indeed, **Linn** now makes one of the finest players in the world – the amazing CD12 – and it's clear that this expertise in the digital domain has trickled down to the Genki and its big brother the Ikemi.

This isn't a player to rock the listener back on their heels at first listen – there are rivals here with a much more immediately impressive sound – but the charms of the Genki grow over protracted listening, and the way it focuses the attention on the music is hard not to admire. Yes, there are other players that come close, obvious contenders being

the **Musical Fidelity**, **Rotel** and **Sony**, but when it comes to all-out musicality and sheer 'what shall we play next?' enjoyment, the Linn takes the crown. And when you consider its flexibility (especially if whole-house hi-fi is on the cards) and the absolute simplicity of its ergonomics, this Scottish stunner has all the hallmarks of a *Supertest* victor.



We tested them with

Musical Fidelity X-P100 preamp

Musical Fidelity X-AS100
power amps (x2)

**Monitor Audio Studio 20SE/
REL Stygian** speakers/subwoofer

Nordost Red Dawn interconnects

Nordost Flatline Gold speaker cable

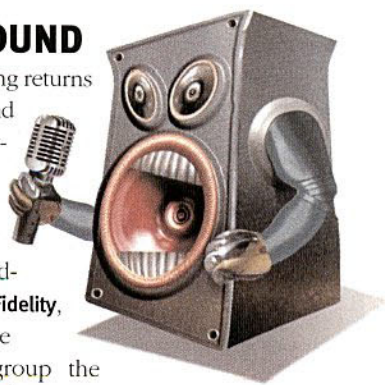
WHAT HI-FI? says

	sound	build	facilities	verdict
Arcam Alpha 9	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Audio Analogue Paganini	★★★☆☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
AVI S2000MC Reference	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Cyrus dAD3Q24	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆
Linn Genki	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Musical Fidelity A3CD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★★
Roksan Caspian	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★☆	★★★★☆
Rotel RCD-991	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Sony CDP-XA555ES	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Talk Electronics Thunder 3	★★★★☆	★★★★☆	★★★☆☆	★★★★☆

BEST OVERALL SOUND

Although the law of diminishing returns begins to bite between £750 and £1000, the best-sounding players in the group are at the upper end of the price spectrum. That's not to diminish the performance of the mid-priced **Arcam**, **Rotel**, or **Musical Fidelity**, but if you are looking for the best performance in the group the honours must go to the **Linn** and **Sony**.

Of our two leading contenders the **Sony** is perhaps the more obvious of the two, having a big, bold sound the user can easily manipulate with the variable digital filter if they so wish, while the **Linn's** appeal is more subtle, and all the better for that. It's a deceptively relaxing sound, but one which loses none of the essence and spirit of the music – and that's how the Genki works its magic.



BEST BUILD/ FACILITIES

If you're spending over £750 on a CD player you've a right to expect a high standard of build and finish, and while not all the players here ooze class, they are well put together and use high quality components. That said, we'd prefer a better display on the **Audio Analogue**, a digital output on the **Talk**, and a bit less plastic on the **Arcam**.

Facilities here vary from the simple to the lavish, taking in frills like the variable digital filter on the **Sony** and the **Rotel's** user-adjustable dither, but in general terms all the players here have everything most users could want.

But we like the thinking behind the **Linn's** choice of analogue outputs, and the flexibility they afford, while the 'user interface' here is both classy and easily understood. It gets our vote.

