

MYRIAD  
Ext 7 Analogue 21

# Multi channel maestros

## We test seven flagship surround-sound combos

SO NOW THAT you can buy a perfectly respectable home cinema receiver – and one that's good with music, too – for not much more than £300, what's the point in spending ten times that, or even much more, on a multichannel amplification package? The answer, once you've experienced some of the processor/power-amp packages in this group, is pretty clear: these are products able to offer no-compromise home cinema performance along with excellent stereo amplification, and have the benefit of easy upgradability into the bargain.

And the jingoistic buyer will be pleased to read that most of the contenders here are British, this being the point of the market where the local specialists take up the running from the Japanese majors.

With such a wide spread of prices, we have the feeling this is going to prove quite some tussle...

### We tested each system with...

#### Reference

DVD PLAYER Arcam DV88 Plus £1000  
 SACD PLAYER Sony SCD-XA777ES £2300  
 CD PLAYER Marantz CD-7 £3500  
 SPEAKERS PMC FB1/TB2C/DB1 £2285  
 SUBWOOFER MJ Acoustics  
 Reference 1 £799  
 TELEVISION Sony KV28LS35 £800  
 CABLES Chord Company

### What we tested

#### Arcam AV8/P7



£5500

p64

#### Cyrus AV8/3 x SmartPower



£2900

p64

#### Marantz PS-17/2 x SM-17



£3400

p65

#### Myriad MDP500G6/MA500



£4300

p67

#### Primare SP31.7/A30.5



£4200

p67

#### Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075



£1840

p69

#### TAG McLaren Audio AV30R/100X5R:10



£6519

p69

## Plus

We recommend the best partners for our winning system  
 page 72

## Arcam FMJ AV8/P7

★★★★★ £3000/£2500

**FOR**  
Power by the truckload and no shortage of finesse, whether with music or movies

**AGAINST**  
If you can afford it, nothing at all

**VERDICT**  
A long time in the making but worth the wait: the processor is superb and the power amp sounds huge

FOR A WHILE Arcam lagged behind British rivals such as Myryad and TAG McLaren Audio when it came to AV equipment, but this new combination puts all that right.

The processor sets the tone. It is both comprehensively equipped – with all the current extended-surround modes, plus THX Ultra 2, increasing the speaker count to seven – and easy to set up, at least once you’ve mastered the logic of the menus. A huge range of trims, tweaks and adjustments is possible via onscreen displays, and you can also control the processor from a computer, or program the remote

the same way. Other notable extras include component-video switching – though we’d suggest a direct connection from player to display for the best results – and a high-quality phono stage. Arcam hasn’t forgotten those of us who play LPs, even in a hefty surround system.

And talking of hefty, the massive P7 power amp offers seven channels, each capable of 150w into an 8 ohm load. This monster is quite a work of art, making use of twin 1500VA transformers (plus another little one for the microprocessor control system!), along with four heavy-duty bipolar output transistors for each channel. Maximum output is 230w into 4 ohms.

Not surprisingly, the Arcam does the ‘iron fist in velvet glove’ thing very effectively, being able to drive those big action films right up to ‘say goodbye to the neighbourhood’ levels without the slightest sign of stress. Explosions, dogfights and car chases are all taken in its stride, with beautifully integrated surround effects and superb detail, ensuring those offscreen effects are truly disturbing. Extremely good speakers (and a pair of ear-defenders) would



Film explosions, car chases and dogfights are a breeze for the Arcam

be needed to start exploring the combo’s limits – suffice to say that you’re unlikely to wish there was just a bit more oomph available for *Spider-Man* or the opening of *Saving Private Ryan*.

Being an Arcam, the musical performance is no letdown, whether with SACDs or DVD-As fed in

through the analogue inputs or even a digital feed. As you might hope given the price, the AV8/P7 combo is also a pretty fine stereo amplifier, and certainly an answer for those who want an all-in-one solution.

Simply, the Arcam is stunning, but it faces some tough competition. Can it emerge victorious?

## Cyrus AV8/ SmartPower (x3)

★★★★★ £1100/£600x3

**FOR**  
Simplicity of set up; compact nature of the four units; high build quality

**AGAINST**  
5.1 channel only; a bit lacking in oomph compared with some here

**VERDICT**  
It may be relatively affordable in this exalted company, but the Cyrus shows its limitations. That’s a shame, because the automatic set-up is very neat



A microphone supplied with the Cyrus enables the processor to set itself up automatically using a pattern of test tones

THE AV8 SHARES the usual Cyrus casework, which suggests it’s something of a stripped-down processor. This isn’t too far from the truth: it’s a 5.1 unit only with no video switching, no multichannel line inputs and no onscreen displays. Yes, that means quality should be high – video switching inside a processor isn’t good for audio signals unless it’s handled carefully – but it also means the Cyrus will lose out in a straight facilities shoot-out with rivals.

The connections are kept just as basic – let’s face it, on the tiny rear

panel Cyrus couldn’t do much else – with three stereo line-ins, four coaxial and one optical-digital input, plus line-outs for the six channels, surprisingly with twin outputs for the subwoofer and centre channel. A final socket accepts the jack plug used to connect the microphone supplied with the unit: set this up in your listening position and the processor can configure itself automatically using a test-tone pattern.

To drive the speakers, Cyrus provided a trio of its SmartPower power amps, 60w-per-channel stereo

units able to be converted into 105w mono amplifiers, thus offering a clear upgrade path. These amps can be controlled via the Cyrus MC-BUS remote system, thus giving one-button power-up and power-down, the whole thing being driven from the very simple remote handset. Alternatively the AV8 and a couple of SmartPowers could be used with one of the company’s stereo integrated amps, such as the new 6 or 8.

The Cyrus combo sounds smooth but isn’t the last word in excitement. With hard-hitting soundtracks it

can seem a little breathless, lacking the effortless power of some rivals. The launch sequence of *Apollo 13* is a tad lacklustre, while even *Oh Brother Where Art Thou?* is warm and soft. Music, too, is smooth rather than packed with the detail and vitality that’s a mark of the company’s stereo amps.

The sum-up is simple: the AV8, used with two SmartPowers, might be a neat add-on to a Cyrus stereo system, allowing movies to be enjoyed, too, but in the context of this group, this set-up is off the pace.

**RATINGS** ★★★★★ The best on the market ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★★ Very good ★★★★★ Average ★★★★★ Below par ★★★★★ Don't bother

## Marantz PS-17/2xSM-17

★★★★★ £2000/2xE700

**FOR**

Highly effective in both stereo and multichannel; solid build

**AGAINST**

Unusual three-box design; more expensive rivals have greater punch

**VERDICT**

An unusual combo, but it works, with the usual exciting but weighty Marantz view of music, and plenty of impact with movie soundtracks

THIS SET-UP IS from Marantz's Premium range, and starts with an amp with built-in surround processing but only two 60w power channels onboard. The idea is that you can run it as a purist stereo integrated amp if you like – indeed, there's a Pure Direct mode that bypasses the amp's bass-management and tone controls, as well as shutting down the display and all the video circuitry for the cleanest possible sound. Alternatively you can add extra power amps to give the full 6.1 channel/seven-speaker surround configuration.

In this system, the PS-17 was partnered with a pair of Marantz SM-17 power amps, making an effective combination. You can use the SM-17s to drive centre, centre-rear and surround speakers, or use shorting plugs supplied with the PS-17 to use its internal amps to drive the rears, then drive the fronts with an SM-17. You could even bridge two SM-17s into 200w monoblocs to drive the fronts.

The Marantz caters for the 6.1 versions of all the current surround formats, is the only combo here to offer Dolby Headphone processing, and has a 6.1-channel analogue input for an SACD/DVD-A player. It also has a generous lineup of inputs and outputs, including a good moving-magnet phono stage. Set-up and operation is logical, and there's even a learning/programmable remote handset to drive a complete system.

And the PS-17/SM-17 combo lives up to that promise of high-quality music and movies: it sounds fast and punchy with big action soundtracks – even if some here offer more slam thanks to their bigger power amps – with excellent channel steering and impressive integration.



The triple-deck Marantz combo delivers high-quality music and movie sound

But it's the all-round ability of this package that really appeals: whether with the frenetic retro-techno of Scooter's KLF homage *Weekend* on CD, or with glorious music from the Budapest Festival Orchestra on multichannel SACD, the Marantz system is rich, warm and yet beautifully detailed.

Music sounds as good as it does on anything in this test, which is impressive given the relatively modest price, while the Marantz has the ability to drive movies to wall-shaking levels without showing any signs of stress. That seals its appeal – for those as interested in music as they are in movies, this is a fine buy.

## Those surround-sound formats in full

**Dolby Digital 5.1**

The most commonly found form of surround audio on DVDs, Dolby Digital 5.1 offers five separate audio signals, or channels, of sound for the main five speakers (left, centre, right, left-rear and right-rear), as well as a sixth dedicated bass channel. This bass channel, called the Low Frequency Effect channel, is specifically for use with a subwoofer.

**Dolby Digital Surround EX**

Developed jointly with THX, Dolby Digital Surround EX audio offers 'extended-surround' performance, with a 'matrixed' centre-rear channel of audio that's electronically buried within the discrete surround channels of 5.1 audio. This gives you more depth, spaciousness and ambience, although you do need at least one extra rear speaker.

**Dolby Pro-Logic II**

A radical overhaul of the Dolby Pro-Logic system, intended to produce a '5.1'-style sound from conventional stereo-audio sources, regardless of whether these contain encoded Dolby Surround audio information.

Two flavours have been developed: Pro-Logic II Movie and Pro-Logic II Music. 'Movie' emphasises greater effects 'steering', for more exciting surround sound, while 'Music' is intended to preserve the stereo image when playing music.

**DTS 5.1**

Effectively a very similar system to Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound, although superior in some technical terms. DTS transfers data at a higher rate per second, uses less compression, and offers a higher original bit rate.

**DTS-ES Matrix 6.1**

Similar in concept to Dolby Digital Surround EX, offering improved surround steering, greater 'depth' behind you and more ambience.

**DTS-ES Discrete 6.1**

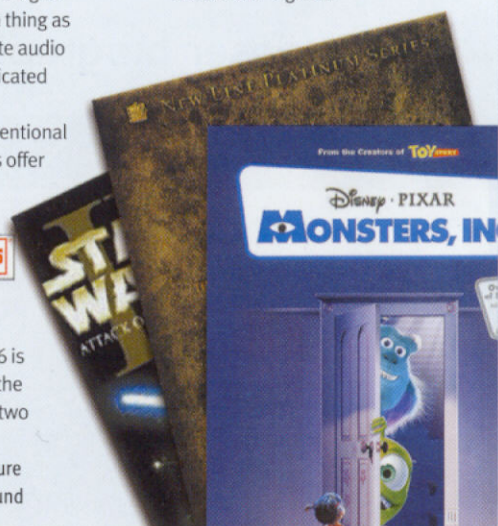
The only true 6.1 audio signal (note: there's no such thing as 7.1 sound). Six discrete audio signals provide a dedicated centre-rear signal to complement the conventional five. Only DVD movies offer DTS-ES Discrete 6.1.

**DTS Neo:6**

A direct rival to Dolby Pro-Logic II, DTS Neo:6 is intended to do much the same job. It comes in two

Many DVD movies feature extended surround sound

flavours, one optimised for movies (Neo:6 Cinema) and the other for music (Neo:6 Music). The Music version makes less use of the centre-channel speaker to improve stereo imaging. Neo:6 provides up to six channels of matrix decoding, which means that users with 6.1 systems will receive additional 'centre-rear' signals.



For full specifications of every product tested go to page 70

**Myryad MDP500  
G6/MA500**

★★★★★

£2600/£1700

**FOR**

A neat package; seven speaker inputs and outputs on processor; easy to use

**AGAINST**

Less involvement than the best here; menus rather crude; needs an extra amp for seven-channel operation

**VERDICT****A solid buy, with quality processing from the G6, but it faces tough competition from rivals**

MYRYAD'S ORIGINAL MDP500 processor was good enough to win a Best Buy in the 2001 Awards, and the new version, the MDP500 G6, claims improved performance all round, thanks to new processing and digital-to-analogue conversion. This adds a raft of processing modes, including 6.1/seven-channel handling of Dolby Digital EX, DTS-ES Matrix and Discrete, plus DTS Neo:6, Dolby Pro-Logic II and proprietary Surround 6.1 for sources from stereo to 5.1 channels. Twenty-four-bit analogue-to-digital and digital-to-analogue conversion

is used throughout, while other facilities include extended analogue input sensitivity adjustment.

The new version costs £800 more than the original MDP500, although existing processors can be upgraded. Bear in mind, too, that to get the full seven-channel operation you'll need to add an extra stereo power amp: the MA240 would seem the best match for the 5x100w MA500 supplied for this test, but this would bring the total price up to £5300.

The Myryad is simple to set up, thanks to functional if not exactly pretty onscreen displays and the

SL9000 learning remote handset provided, which can also control other components. We had the processor up and running within 15 minutes, with final tweaking taking us another hour or so.

There's plenty of subtlety and fine detail resolution, which was evident with everything from the *Apollo 13* soundtrack to the dialogue of *Gosford Park*; and the Myryads' abilities with music were obvious with discs as diverse as last year's Glyndebourne *Carmen* and The Who's *Albert Hall* set. But all the same we'd hoped for a bit more of the 'coo wow' factor.

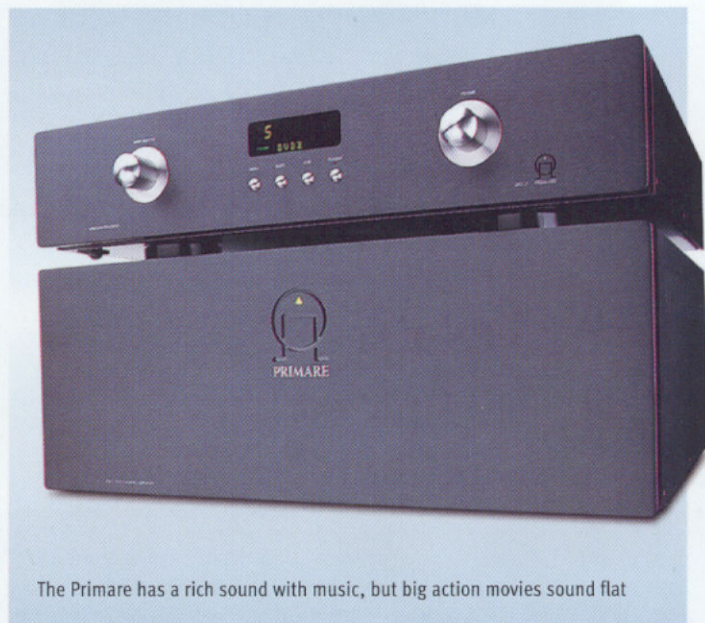
It's the same story in stereo, and indeed when Pro-Logic II music processing is applied to stereo sources: the Myryad is a cut above the AV mass-market in this respect, showing plenty of delicacy with chamber music or, for example, Norah Jones, and having plenty of drive with acts from Coldplay to Scooter. But the Myryads always seem to be holding themselves slightly in check: we'd like them to let rip a little more – as can the Arcam, the TAG McLaren and even the Rotel – which would increase the fun factor enormously.

that something's missing – such as a multichannel input – you're only half right: with a juggle of the comprehensive onscreen menus, inputs 5-8 become a seven-channel analogue input fed straight to the volume control and then to the preout sockets.

Other connections include remote triggering and an RJ-45 for external control, while a miniature microphone socket is also provided – connect a microphone (not supplied) to this and the processor will set the speaker levels automatically.

On the receiving end of all this skilfully concealed wizardry is the A30.5 amp, delivering 120w into each of its five channels. As with some others here, an extra investment in amplification would be needed to bring the system up to the full seven channels – in this case some £1200 for an A30.2 – thus pushing the Primare near to the price of the Arcam or TAG McLaren.

And that comparison does the Swedish combo few favours, even if the Primares have a rich and detailed sound with music, whether from SACD or CD. This set-up is among the most fulfilling here with



The Primare has a rich sound with music, but big action movies sound flat

a big chamber work or a spot of beautifully recorded live jazz. But somehow this doesn't translate into all-out movie-playing ability: the A30.5 has the power, but it doesn't deliver those big action soundtracks with the same integration and pizzazz that the best here can muster. The aerial sequences of *Spider-Man*

are just a little flat, and the big finale to *Deep Impact* also lacks, well, depth and impact, actually.

We wanted to love the Primare, its looks being more to our taste than the usual home cinema kit. But while it's good, it's challenged too hard by the best here – and by at least one much less expensive rival.

**Primare SP31.7/  
A30.5 MkII**

★★★★★

£2500/£1700

**FOR**

Smooth, warm and musical in stereo; rich and lush surround sound

**AGAINST**

Lacks the thrills and sheer brute force to keep the action fans happy

**VERDICT****A good all-rounder, but the generous stereo sound takes some toll on the system's ability to deliver pin-point effects and massive slam**

THE SWEDISH PRIMARE brand eschews flashy styling and concentrates on performance, and this AV two-box is no exception. The SP31.7 processor has a small display, just two main controls and four ancillary buttons. However, it packs in all the latest surround modes, with a seven-channel analogue output. One set of balanced analogue inputs is provided, along with seven more line-ins and digital inputs on AES/EBU, coaxial-electrical and optical-ins, while video connections are on component, composite and S-Video sockets. If you've guessed

## Rotel RSP1066/ RMB1075

★★★★★

£995/£845

**FOR**

As good in stereo as it is with movies; bags of power for the money

**AGAINST**

Apart from the need for an extra amp for the full seven channels, nothing

**VERDICT**

For some in this test the Rotel is embarrassingly good for the money, with plenty of power and a fine performance. It looks impressive, too

HERE WE HAVE what is – by some margin – the least-expensive combination in this test, although you wouldn't guess the price to look at the duo. Not only does the Rotel two-box look all the money, it's well equipped, delivers plenty of power, and sounds as good playing music in stereo as it does whizzing surround effects around the room.

The RSP1066 processor looks businesslike and handles all the current surround modes, including Dolby Digital EX and DTS ES Matrix/Discrete. It can also decode HDCD and MP3-encoded discs

when fed from a CD or DVD player's digital output, and comes with both a 6.1-channel analogue input and seven-channel output.

And if you have a large system it's no problem: there are eight line-ins, along with three electrical and two optical-digital inputs. All of these can be assigned to the processor's video inputs, which include a pair of component connections, to make switching simple.

The power amp is a chunky 17kg unit powered by a massive 1500VA transformer and capable of 120W per channel, with plenty of slam and dynamic ability ensured by the use of four 130W/15A output devices for each channel. Yes, you'll need to add an extra stereo amp to fully exploit the seven channels, but the matching RB1070 won't break the bank at £495. Even in seven-channel configuration this would be the least expensive combination in this test.

But there's no sign whatsoever of the bargain price in the performance – whether with music in stereo, surround soundtracks or SACDs, the Rotel sounds powerful, refined and exciting. It has all the slam anyone could want, hammering out the



It may be the least expensive in the test, but the Rotel holds its head high

action sequences of *Spider-Man* with excellent soundstaging and pinpoint accuracy, while at the same time being perfectly at home with the nuances of *Gosford Park*'s dialogue. With SACDs or Dolby Pro-Logic II there's excellent ambience, while stereo

tracks played 'straight' have both superb timbral accuracy and authentic listen-in involvement.

The RSP1066/RMB1075 is an absolute steal: it may be outperformed by some pricier rivals in this *Supertest*, but the margin isn't as great as you might expect.

## TAG McLaren Audio AV30R/100x5R:10

★★★★★

£1799/£4720

**FOR**

Flexibility of the 'stripped down' processor; excellent in stereo, too; ten-channel power amp is a monster

**AGAINST**

Options could easily add another £300-400 to the price; Arcam's AV8/P7 puts up a very strong challenge

**VERDICT**

Offers bombproof build quality and the performance to match

AS STANDARD, TAG'S slimline AV30R processor comes in 5.1 channel form, with both 5.1 inputs and matching line-outs, though an extra £200 will bring a seven-channel configuration, including suitable outputs and Dolby Digital EX, while moving up to the extended forms of DTS adds another £100 to the price. And our review sample came with a power amp more than capable of making the most of all that flexibility: TAG's 100x5R:10 packs no fewer than ten 80W channels in the space previously occupied by five mono ones, and it's possible to mix

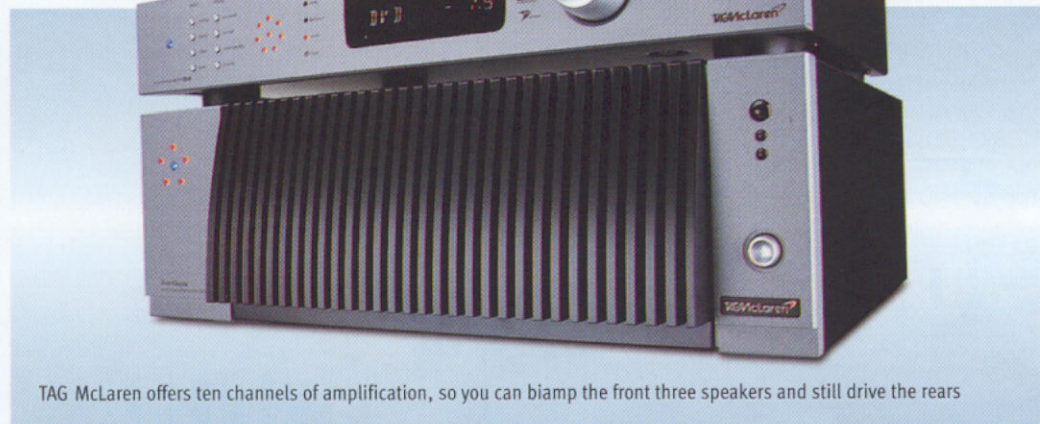
mono and stereo modules to get a 100x5R:7, for example, should that be what your system requires.

Why do you need ten channels? Well, you only have to whisper the magic word 'biamping' and the penny starts to drop: with a 100x5R:10 you can biamp your front three speakers and still drive four across the back and sides. Very neat switches on the rear allow two channels to be partnered to a single input or driven separately, and this, combined with the easy menu-driven set-up of the processor, makes the TAG a doddle to install and operate.

The new stereo modules, despite lower power, sound even better than the excellent mono units of the original 100x5R, and used in concert with the AV30R, the 100x5R:10 sounds amazing, with a beautifully relaxed clarity that never suggests it's working hard, as well as a real ability to turn on the slam when required. We loved watching movies via the TAG combo, the lift-off of *Apollo 13* shaking the whole room; the cut and thrust of dialogue in *Gosford Park* was just as thrilling, and music DVDs also benefited from the TAGS' deft touch.

Biamping the front speakers brought useful extra bass control and focus to the sound, and this was particularly noticeable when playing music in stereo or from multichannel SACD through the 5.1-channel analogue bypass sockets, where everything from vintage Muddy Waters to techno sounded involving and thrilling.

Ease of use, bombproof build and great performance are only part of the story here. The disdainful smile on your lips when you say to your mate 'what, you've only got a seven-channel amp?' is the rest!



TAG McLaren offers ten channels of amplification, so you can biamp the front three speakers and still drive the rears

# Pre/powers data in full



**Arcam AV8/P7**  
£5500

**Cyrus AV8/  
3 x SmartPower**  
£2900

**Marantz PS17/  
2 x SM17**  
£3400

## Ratings

Movie sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Music sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Facilities	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>VERDICT</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Summary	An amazing entry into this exalted company by Arcam: the AV8 is flexible and excellent, and the power amp is just massive	A neat and stylish system, but probably best viewed as a bolt-on for existing Cyrus stereo systems. Outclassed in this group	An unusual but effective set-up. And considering the sensible price – at least in the context of this group – the sound quality is superb

## Specifications

THX Ultra 2	Yes	No	No
THX Surround EX	Yes	No	No
Dolby Digital EX	Yes	No	Yes
Dolby Pro-Logic II	Yes	Yes	Yes
DTS-ES Matrix 6.1	Yes	No	Yes
Dolby Headphone	No	No	Yes
DTS-ES Discrete 6.1	Yes	No	Yes
Stereo-analogue inputs	7 plus phono	3	9 plus phono
Multichannel analogue-in	8	No	6
Multichannel analogue-out	8	6	8
Stereo analogue-out (tape)	2	Yes	1
Electrical digital-in	5	4	3
Electrical digital-out	1	1	1
Optical digital-in	2	2	3
Optical digital-out	No	No	1
Video-in (S/composite/component)	5/5/3	No	5/5/2
Video-out (S/composite/component)	2/3/1	No	3/3/1
Power amp output (into 8 ohms, all channels driven)	150w x 7	60w x 6	60w x 6
Dimensions (processor), wxhxd	43.3x13x43cm	21.5x7.3x36cm	45.8x16.6x49cm
Dimensions (power amp/s), wxhxd	43.3x18x46cm	21.5x7.3x36cm	45.8x11x44cm

## Other stuff...

Manufacturer's phone number	01223 203200	01480 435577	01753 680868
Manufacturer's web address	<a href="http://www.arcam.co.uk">www.arcam.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.cyrus.co.uk">www.cyrus.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.marantz.com">www.marantz.com</a>
Number of dealers	80	42	50

## What our testers said...



“These are all serious pieces of kit, and ideal for those who value high-end performance with music as well as movies, but the big surprise is that our winner is easily the most affordable combination.”  
**Andy Clough**  
Editor



“The Rotels are great, but if you have the money (and I know it's a big 'if'), then I'd still urge you to audition the Arcam AV8 and P7. The combination costs more, but in my view, it's worth it.”  
**Andy Kerr**  
Home Cinema Editor



“The dust has settled, the trusses are back in the cupboard and we have a winner. The law of diminishing returns is, it would seem, alive and well in the home cinema market.”  
**Andrew Everard**  
Group Technical and Online Editor



“You know you're in premium multichannel pre/power amp-test territory when the cheapest entry totals almost two grand. But on a sound-per-pound basis the Rotel combination is a veritable bargain.”  
**Murdo Mathewson**  
Staff writer



## Pre/powers data in full

<b>Myryad MDP500 G6/MA500</b> £4300	<b>Primare SP31.7/A30.5</b> £4200	<b>Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075</b> £1840	<b>TAG McLaren AV30R/OOX5R:10</b> £6519
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★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Movie sound
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Music sound
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Build
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Facilities
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	<b>VERDICT</b>
★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	Summary

Very good combination, but a little restrained, and given the need for an extra amp for 6.1/seven-channel ability, a bit on the pricey side	A good package, but better with atmospheric movies or subtle music on DVD than all-out action. Needs an extra amp for seven channels	An absolute bargain, given that it's capable of so persuasive a presentation. The Rotel is as good in stereo as it is with DVD soundtracks	The most expensive package in this test, and worth every penny: the AV30R processor is excellent and the power amp a stunner
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No	No	No	No	THX Ultra 2
No	No	No	No	THX Surround EX
Yes	Yes	Yes	£200 option	Dolby Digital EX
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Dolby Pro-Logic II
Yes	Yes	Yes	£100 option	DTS-ES Matrix 6.1
No	No	No	No	Dolby Headphone
Yes	Yes	Yes	As above	DTS-ES Discrete 6.1
9	8 (one balanced)	8	6	Stereo-analogue inputs
8	Configurable to 8	7	6	Multichannel analogue-in
8	8	8	6, with 8 as part of £200 option	Multichannel analogue-out
3	1	4	1	Stereo analogue-out (tape)
4	6, one AES/EBU	3	6	Electrical digital-in
No	1	1	1	Electrical digital-out
2	2	2	1	Optical digital-in
1	1	1	No	Optical digital-out
6/6/0	4/3/2	5/5/2	4/4/0	Video-in (S/composite/component)
2/3/0	2/2/1	4/4/1	2/2/0	Video-out (S/composite/component)
100w x 5	120w x 5	120w x 5	80w x 10	Power amp output (into 8 ohms)
43.6 x 9.5 x 34cm	43 x 10 x 38.5cm	43.2 x 12.2 x 34cm	44.5 x 7.5 x 33.8cm	Dimensions (processor), wxhxd
43.6 x 13.5 x 36.8cm	43 x 17.5 x 38.5m	43 x 18.8 x 39.6cm	44.5 x 15.2 x 35.2cm	Dimensions (power amp/s), wxhxd

020 8863 9117	01423 359054	01903 221800	01480 415600	Manufacturer's phone number
<a href="http://www.myryad.co.uk">www.myryad.co.uk</a>	<a href="http://www.primaresystems.com">www.primaresystems.com</a>	<a href="http://www.rotel.com">www.rotel.com</a>	<a href="http://www.tagmclaren.com">www.tagmclaren.com</a>	Manufacturer's web address
50	40	100	30	Number of dealers

### Tricky terms explained

---> **Biamping** Each unit of a speaker is driven by a separate amp channel, so a pair of two-way speakers needs two stereo amps, and two sets of cable to each speaker.

---> **Biwiring** Some of the benefits of biamping but at a lower cost. You need suitable speakers (with two sets of inputs and a split crossover), then use twin sets of speaker cable from the amp (again if suitable) to each loudspeaker.

---> **Digital output** Allows the digital signal from a CD (but not a DVD) to be recorded, or processed by an offboard digital-to-analogue converter.

---> **Digital input** Used for connecting the digital output of a DVD player into a home cinema amplifier or processor.

---> **DVD-Audio** New high-resolution audio format that offers multichannel surround-sound music and high-quality 24-bit/192kHz stereo.

---> **Multichannel analogue-in** A set of six conventional phono inputs for connecting a DVD-Audio or SACD player into an amp or processor. Only a very few models allow a direct digital link at the moment, so the signal has to be transferred in the analogue domain.

---> **Super Audio CD (SACD)** Like DVD-A, offers multichannel music playback, but using one-bit Direct Stream Digital technology developed by Sony/Philips.

Turn the page  
for our full  
system set-up



THE OVERALL WINNER

# Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075

★★★★★ £1840

THIS IS A seriously competitive group, with the Arcam AV8/P7 and TAG McLaren Audio AV30R/100X5R:10 setting the standards for the others to match.

Of the remainder, the Marantz PS-17/SM-17s gets extremely close to the ability of the much more expensive class leaders, and shines in particular with music in stereo thanks to its no-compromise design. The Primare is warm and lush but loses out a little when it comes to the kind of sheer impact that serious home cinema fans crave these days.

The Arcam and TAG McLaren certainly satisfy those needs, the Arcam with a combination of processing power and sheer brute force, the TAG with its ability to biamp your front speakers – we like the original 100X5R power amp, but reckon the ‘:10’ version is even better, despite having less power available to each channel.

“The Rotel delivers home cinema thrills beyond all but the best single-box AV receivers or amps”



Certainly the TAG 100X5R:10 never seems to lack muscle, even when running at serious music or movie levels.

But the star of the show is amazingly the least expensive package in this test: the Rotel delivers home cinema thrills beyond all but the best single-box AV receivers or amps, has power to spare and is great with music, too. And yet it costs just over £1800, or about a third of the price of the Arcam. This is serious home cinema processor/power-amp value, and even with an extra stereo amp included to realise the processor's full seven-channels-and-a-sub potential, it's still the least expensive package in the test.

Yes, the Arcam, Marantz and TAG McLaren Audio systems here are without doubt stunning, but on sheer value for money the Rotel must take pole position. It's a cracking piece of kit.

## We build a system around our winner

The Rotel's fine amplification deserves top-notch speakers and a great DVD player to produce superb sound and vision

### What's in the system?

#### PROJECTOR

**SIM2 HT300 Plus** £8995

★★★★★ January 2003

This compact projector is easily installed and delivers sensational pictures

#### DVD PLAYER

**Denon DVD2800 MkII** £750

★★★★★ April 2003

A great DVD-Video player and, by DVD standards, a fine CD player, too

#### PROCESSOR/POWER AMPLIFIER

**Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075** £1840

★★★★★ May 2003

Terrific value, and gives much pricier rivals a real run for their money

#### SPEAKER PACKAGE

**Ruark Contemporary Prologue** £2920

★★★★★ October 2002

A Best Buy in our Awards 2002. Offers great sound with movies and music

**SYSTEM PRICE** £14,505

WE'VE ESTABLISHED THAT the Rotel combination does more than just make movies: now it's time to furnish it with the partnering kit that's needed to enable it to shine. First stop, speakers. Our guideline is to spend at least 50 percent more on the speaker package than you did on the receiver/amplifier or, in this case, processor/power amp. So if you have a £300 receiver, you should be looking to buy a £450-plus speaker package. Following those rules, we've teamed the £1840 Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 with the £2920 Ruark Contemporary Prologue speaker package, a more-or-less ideal match in price terms.

Thanks to its floorstanding Prologue front speakers, the Ruark system also provides the Rotels with the sonic poise to deliver not only great movie sound, but also fine stereo listening. Granted, when listening in surround

sound the Epilogue speakers can be more directional than bipole or dipole rear speakers, but they compensate well with multichannel music, whether of the discrete variety (say, DTS) or via Pro-Logic II.

That's the sound sorted: on to the vision. Since we're trying to create a system for all occasions, we've gone for a projector rather than a hefty TV. This removes the soundstaging problem that some TV sets can cause: a chunk of plastic and glass doesn't aid stereo imaging when plonked between two speakers, even if it's fairly essential to the movie-watching experience. Using a projector solves the problem, because the speakers can be placed further apart with only the centre speaker between them.

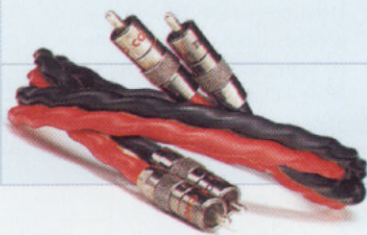
And which projector? What else but the SIM2 HT300 Plus, our favourite DLP design of the moment, able to deliver sensational images with both DVDs and 'conventional' imagery, such as TV

or games. It's compact, it works superbly, and it makes a fine foil for the Denon DVD2800MkII DVD player, a fully-loaded videophile's dream machine that also manages to sound good with music.

In action this is a sensational set-up. It has bags of power (120w per channel) but it also provides excellent surround steering precision and fantastic detail. And even if you switch to stereo, the fun-factor is present and correct: a loud blast of The Datsuns shows that the Denon/Rotel/Ruark combination has both the timing accuracy and the sheer attitude to deliver a properly 'hi-fi' performance.

The picture is wonderful, too, with an 8ft image of the highest calibre – full of life, colour vitality and depth of field.

That's our winning system then. Not cheap, granted, but an all-purpose, every-occasion solution.



#### GETTING WIRED

We used Chord Company Rumour speaker cable, Chord Chorus and Prodac interconnects, QED's Quinex P-SW subwoofer interconnect, and a Nordost Optix component-video cable

Home cinema systems don't get much better than this, and the Rotel/Denon/Ruark package sounds suitably musical, too

