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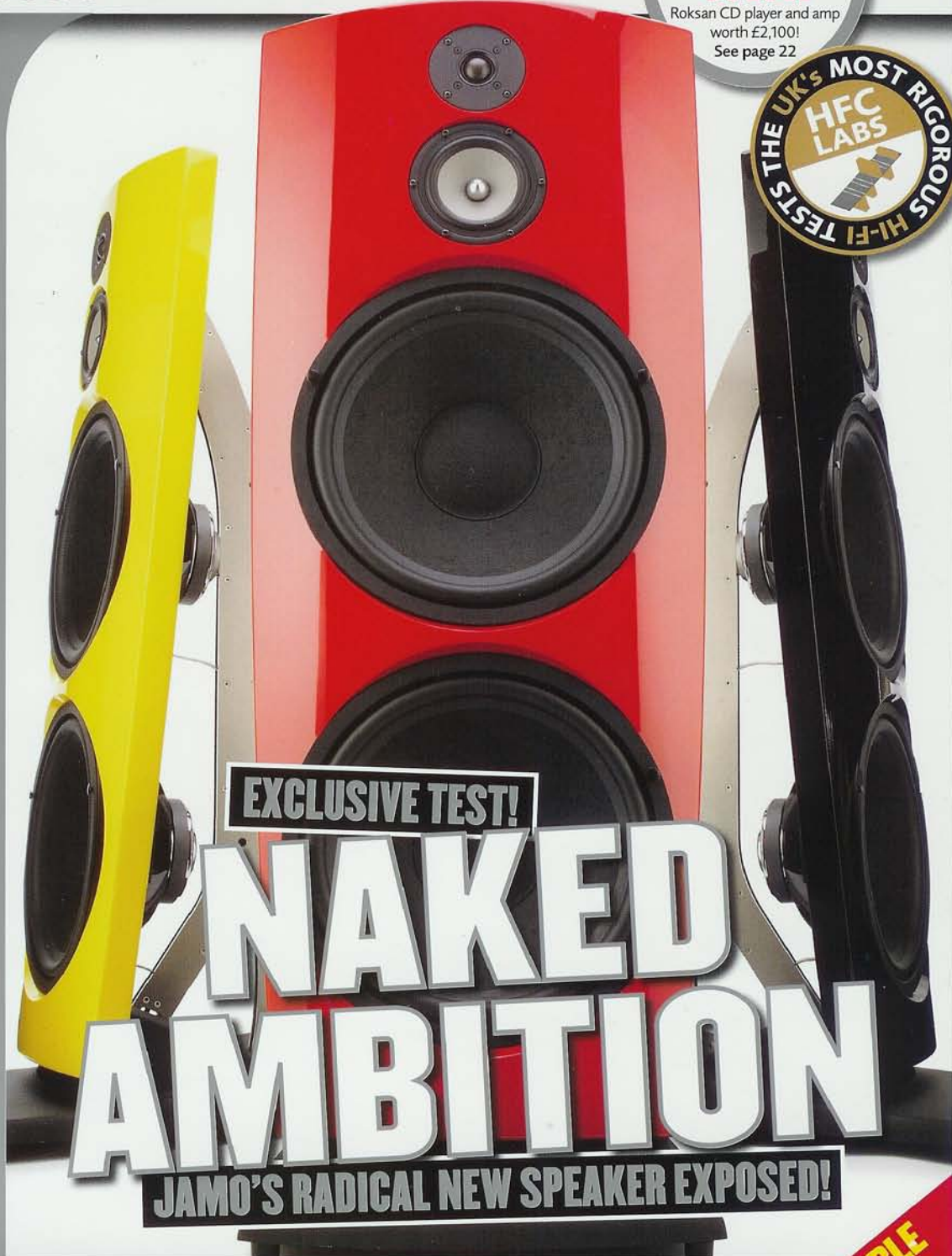
MARANTZ Best universal disc player yet?



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>>
CD PLAYERS

FEATURING

- > Arcam FMJ CD36
- > Copland CDA823
- > Creek Destiny
- > Exposure 3010
- > Naim CD5x
- > T+A CD 1230R



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COPLAND CDA823

Minimalist Danish CD player puts a CD-ROM drive to good use

We don't carry many reviews of Copland products in *Hi-Fi Choice*, because Copland maintains a relatively small product line-up and updates it infrequently. Indeed, the CDA823 is an update of a long-standing previous model, the CDA822, doubling the degree of oversampling. The analogue stages are apparently the same as in the CDA822, which is fine by us as we always thought it to be a very capable machine.

Copland, like many others, uses a CD-ROM drive to read the discs, and its plasticky whine as it opens and closes is the only external downside to this classy-looking player. Disc reading is a little slow, and it seems strange not to include CD Text when the display could so easily support it, but we definitely loved the 'thermometer-style' display of position within a track, something we've not seen elsewhere.

That drive feeds, via the usual S/PDIF connection, a sample-rate converter and DAC chip, both from Analog Devices. This is followed not by the usual assortment of op-amps but by a fully discrete filter and output stage, which offers both unbalanced and balanced outputs. Modern op-amps can give very fine performance, but Copland's designers are among those who believe that for ultimate performance it is still preferable to 'roll your own' solution from good old-fashioned transistors and passive components.

Copland's construction is based on a thick, two-part steel body, the upper part of which could benefit from more damping. The front panel features some very funky deep engraving and the buttons have a pleasingly firm feel. Rear connections include the near-obligatory remote control sockets and a coaxial digital output.

SOUND QUALITY

The CDA823 matches the Copland 'house style' of an essentially mellow sound. Mellow, however, should not be taken to mean lazy or any other unfortunate implication, and in fact this was thought one of the most rhythmically



alert of the players. It achieves that in the best possible way, reacting to rhythm and dynamics with alacrity but not attempting to impose them when they don't apply, nor promote them when they should be secondary. Just occasionally this can be unsettling, especially if you are used to a very fast-paced sound, but a little experimentation with recordings soon shows that this Copland tells it like it is and if a recording is slack, that's what you'll hear.

Tonally, there seems to be the very subtlest hint of coloration. This shows up most clearly by projecting vocals a fraction forward of the rest of the mix. Because this coloration is in the lower harmonic ranges of the voice, though, it doesn't lead to listener fatigue. In fact, the very highest reaches of the treble are where the mellowness is best illustrated: extreme high frequencies are not actually cut back but are so effortlessly presented that one is positively encouraged to listen for long periods at a stretch. Bass is what it should be on CD – seemingly limitless and neatly controlled, without stifling resonance.

This is not the most overtly detailed-sounding CD player below £2,000, but it is certainly one of the most enjoyably musical. Its performance is full, fluid and free-breathing, and overall it comes highly recommended. **HFC**

VERDICT

<p>SOUND >> 92%</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 10px; background: linear-gradient(to right, white 92%, black 92%);"></div>	<p>Effortless extreme treble leads to a gorgeously mellow character, while timing is excellent and dynamics and bass unforced but more than merely competent. A fine high-end CD player.</p>
<p>FEATURES >> 84%</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 10px; background: linear-gradient(to right, white 84%, black 84%);"></div>	
<p>BUILD >> 87%</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 10px; background: linear-gradient(to right, white 87%, black 87%);"></div>	
<p>VALUE >> 88%</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 10px; background: linear-gradient(to right, white 88%, black 88%);"></div>	<p>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE 90%</p>

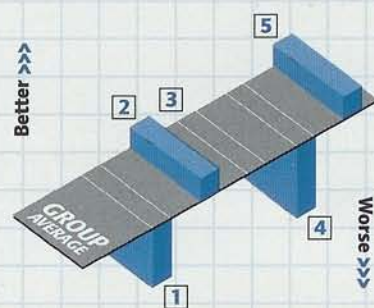


LAB REPORT

It says much for the standards of modern CD players that this one gave the worst measured performance of the group in two key areas and yet was still, frankly, pretty impressive in both of them. Distortion a shade above 0.01% at full level and at any frequency hardly qualifies as 'poor' and given that it obligingly drops away to practically zero at outputs below -20dB, we're not much concerned. Likewise noise of -100dB: granted, with exceptionally noise-free recordings, mastered with noise-shaping from high-bit originals, this may be a limitation but it's far enough below the noise level of most discs to qualify as inaudible in general terms. Output level is a little below the 2V average, so beware when auditioning.

What does bother us is speed accuracy, which at 1,700ppm fast is well beyond the range most DACs will lock to. Blame lies with the CD-ROM transport – these things have their problems!

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Distortion >> -50%
- 2] Jitter >> +20%
- 3] Linearity >> 0%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -60%
- 5] Digital filter >> +20dB

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Maximum output level	2.0V	1.78V
Total harmonic distortion	0.01%	0.013%
Signal-to-noise ratio	100dB	100dB