



# Rotel plays up its CD strengths

## Rotel RCD-02

CD player

£379

★★★★★

### FOR

Power and poise, plus plenty of drive; high standard of finish and build

### AGAINST

Not a quick fix; needs to be used with good amplification and speakers

### VERDICT

A great player from the revitalised Rotel range, with striking looks and a very appealing sound

WHOEVER'S READING THE myth that the CD player's days are numbered didn't tell Rotel: the company has just launched a cracking machine in the sub-£500 arena, where it joins the already rather fine RCD-1070 (tested on p57). What sets the two apart, beyond a £120 price difference in favour of the newcomer, is style. The RCD-1070 is old-school Rotel, albeit of the heavyweight 10-series kind, while the new machine has the striking silver looks of the sleek '02' line-up that's being rolled out by Rotel's new UK distributor B&W.

The RCD-02 impresses even before a note of music is played: its slimline styling, minimal controls and large, clear blue-on-black display all ensure it has definite presence in your system. If your domestic circumstances mean you have to smuggle new purchases past a partner, don't even bother with this one – you'll never get away with it. On the flipside, anyone who thought the old Rotels looked a bit functional and basic – oh, alright then, dated – will find much to admire in this player and its matching amplifier, which is tested elsewhere in this issue (see review p78).

Run the RCD-02 in for a few days on repeat (it really makes a difference) and it will grab the attention with its forthright, fast and well-balanced sound. The treble is open and expressive without ever being shouty or overly forward – at least provided you don't partner the player with thin-sounding electronics or speakers – while the midband has a lovely transparent quality that really allows the timbres of voices and instruments to sing through.

Whether it's the raw, and sometimes just plain barking, vocals of Tom Waits, or the stinging guitar stabs of Pete Townshend on some old Who tracks, the Rotel is one of those players that can't help but bring a smile to the face. Compared with the safe

sound of some contemporary CD hardware, not to mention the muddled and compressed presentation you get from the majority of DVD players when spinning music discs, the Rotel RCD-02 is like a breath of fresh air, blasting out those windmill licks of *Won't Get Fooled Again* and allowing the much-missed Who rhythm section full expression.

Full-on rock and dance music is just as convincing, the bass extension and control ensuring great drive and weight. The Rotel does a fine job with classical music too. Big orchestral ensembles have realistic substance and power, while there's an excellent impression of the space in which the recording was made. Smaller-scale works, and acoustic jazz, benefit from the player's focus

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and precision, but the presentation never becomes a technical exercise – instead, there's just a strong sense of the performers being placed before you.

We listened to the player in a number of systems, including one using the large £1410 PMC FB1 floorstanders, and it never failed to delight. In fact, we found it formed a particularly good set-up when used alongside its partnering amplifier – the £350 Rotel RA-02 – and Sony's new SS-B4ED speakers, also tested this month (p12). It's a £1000-ish system we would highly recommend to anyone looking for a cost-effective stereo combination that offers more than a dash of style.

This player isn't a return to form for Rotel, because the form never went away. It is, however, a clear statement that the brand is determined to stay in the two-channel arena, and do so with style. Now it has the visual appeal to match its sound quality.

### LEADING RIVALS

**Arcam DiVA CD62T** £350  
★★★★★ May 2002 Another striking player from Arcam – provided you don't need the DiVA CD72T's upgradability, it's a bargain  
**NAD C541i** £330 ★★★★★ July 2002  
OK, so it's only a mild workover of the old C541, but the player is now even better for the same money

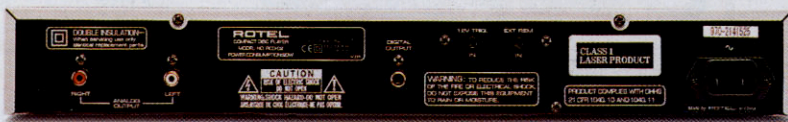
### HOW IT WORKS

#### Error correction

THE ROTEL USES 18-bit digital-to-analogue conversion from Burr-Brown, fed by the same overscan transport found in the company's RCD-1070 player. This mechanism re-reads the data from the disc, allowing errors to be corrected before they reach the digital section. Filtering is by Pacific Microsonics' High Definition Compatible Digital filter/decoder, chosen as much for its sound quality with standard CDs as its extended resolution when playing HDCD encoded titles. There's also Rotel-designed circuitry built for low jitter, thus avoiding another cause of annoying digital distortion.

### TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

DAC	18-bit
HDCD	Yes
Remote control	Yes
CD-R/RW playback	Yes
Electrical digital out	Yes
Optical digital out	No
Analogue outs	RCA phono
Remote control	Yes



The Rotel keeps everything simple on the back panel, with just phono and electrical outputs



HDCD-encoded discs are no problem