



Rotel RDV-1060

PRICE	£750
SUPPLIER	B&W Loudspeakers
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If Rotel's range of separates is mopping up the market, then this RDV-1060 DVD-A player makes it a clean sweep. At £750, this model offers excellent build quality, and is the only player here to feature correctly colour-coded 5.1-channel sockets (the same channel colours used on my graphs, incidentally). An ESS processor enables progressive video output with NTSC and PAL sources while a new DVD-ROM drive, from Keytronics in Japan, represents a further evolution from previous players. Replay of CD-R discs is still unreliable, but CD-RW is handled comfortably.

Rotel's on-screen display resembles that featured on the Cambridge DVD57 and is simple enough to navigate. The Audio setup page deals with digital output settings and degrees of compression, while the 2- or 6-channel output mode is defined within the Speaker setup page, [right]. The main/sub crossover frequency is not adjustable, but channel delays and level trims are adequately covered. The General page does offer a generous array of TV, picture mode, and other facilities, even offering a dimmer for the fluorescent display.

LAB REPORT

Fig 1 shows that 'small' main channels (centre, green) have a premature LF roll-off, not unlike the Panasonic player, but are otherwise very extended. With

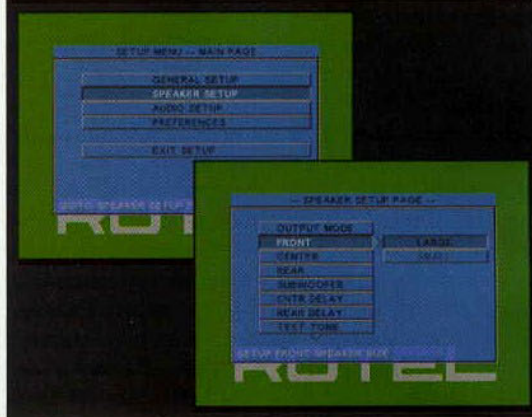
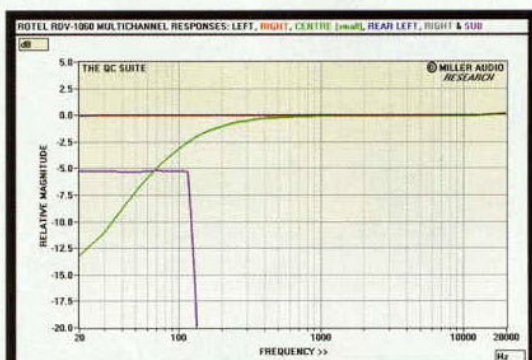
24/192 DVD-A, this amounts to $-1\text{dB}/60\text{kHz}$ and $-3.5\text{dB}/80\text{kHz}$ with ultrasonic distortion as low as 0.0016% (30kHz/ -20dBFs). The sub level (purple trace) is reduced to -5dB to accommodate re-directed bass from 'small' main channels (which works perfectly) but, like the Panasonic, this is thrown into disarray if the sub is disabled and either centre or surrounds are reduced to 'small'.

Fig 2 shows higher distortion than might be anticipated from three CS4396 24-bit/192kHz DACs ($\sim 0.002\%$ midrange, 0dBFs to -20dBFs) but channel tracking is clearly excellent. There is some uncorrelated or noise-like jitter surrounding HF signals, but correlated jitter amounts to just 250psec, which is a fine result.

SOUND QUALITY

'This is clearly the classiest player so far', remarked one listener, pre-empting the final decision of the panel. Indeed, for while the player's overall balance is keenly judged, individual instruments are also clearly depicted without destroying the unity of the music as a whole. It combined tonal smoothness with sharp image focus: for the first time, not only could we hear the female chorus to the Steely Dan track but also count their number. With the previous three players, these girls were a 'wash of treble sibilance'.

Track after track, we were drawn into the performance, a truly big and three-dimensional sound that filled the room. The lazy vocal theme to 'Goodbye Porkpie Hat' was conveyed without dragging at the heels of



the music itself. Even at low volume levels the sound would slip, unforced and articulate into the room, the player quickly developing a very charged atmosphere, immersing us in a pool of music and communicating with little perceived effort.

Described variously as 'gorgeous' and 'luxurious', the RDV-1060 drew us further into every DVD-A in our selection. By whatever means, it seems capable of delivering a genuinely insightful, room-filling sound free of the strain or hardness typically associated with 'digital' distortions. It's an organic player in a field of GM crops.

VERDICT

In terms of multi-channel audio, our group of six DVD-A players demonstrates that piling on the pounds (sterling) does not necessarily help you scale the heights of musical bliss. Neither, I might add, does it prove that less is always more, because the substantive difference in sound quality between the £170 Panasonic DVD-S75 and £200 Cambridge DVD57 more than justifies the mere £30 that separates them. The former offers a slightly crude but still broadly enjoyable sound that, for all its limitations, is still capable of creating a bigger experience than any sub-£200 CD player was ever able.

Cambridge's DVD57 was a real surprise, however, an inexpensive player with the heart of a have-a-go-hero. Sure enough, there's a loss of the deepest bass but its performance is still lifted into the room by a sense of drama and energy that is youthfully exuberant rather than coarse or edgy. If you are on a very limited budget, then this DVD57 is Hobson's choice.

By contrast, Harman's latest DVD player, the £450 DVD 30, sounds warmer than the Cambridge, but its relaxed balance is achieved

at the expense of pin-point imaging. The lack of an integral Dolby Digital or DTS 5.1-channel decoder is also pretty odd bearing in mind Harman has already gone to the trouble of including a DVD-A decoder, bass management and a fully compatible six-channel analogue output. But if you typically run a digital feed directly to your AV receiver when watching movies, then there need be no loss in practical terms.

Near the top of our fiscal tree, there was no disguising our disappointment at the slightly vague sound of Arcam's £1300 DV89, particularly as its two-channel DV88 and DV88 Plus had proved so popular. One benefit of the blind panel technique is that we avoid becoming 'brand victims', so I fully expect to see glowing reviews of Arcam's DVD-A players elsewhere. In truth, our extensive lab program uncovered a low-level but pervasive supply noise that's probably at the root of problem. Arcam is taking this data seriously, so we may see the DV89 'revisited' in the near future.

Toshiba's £2000 SD-9500 has no such technical issues, although while its linear performance is right out of the textbooks, its bass management could be, well, better managed. Its bold and authoritative sound was described variously as 'tasty' and 'visceral' but it was

never as musically captivating as the Rotel. Here is a player that sounds very close to the very best but, as if to prove the last step is often the furthest, not close enough.

That step was only taken by the new RDV-1060 from Rotel, far from the costliest player in our survey at £750, but unanimously voted as delivering the most animated and engaging multi-channel sound. For example, the Rotel was the one and only player that made the busiest sequences of Graham Nash's brightly-lit recording palatable, conveying

Piling on the pounds (£) doesn't necessarily help you scale musical heights

the hard crack of the piano and zing of strings without tearing our ears off. Less aggressive pieces soared into the room, surrounding us with tangible images of performers and instruments but without illuminating the presence of the speakers themselves. This is DVD-A at its very best.

With backwards-compatibility assured, the RDV-1060 will make a cracking choice for the enthusiast who's just as concerned with realising the best from modern, multi-channel digital audio as watching movies. **TV**

