

# WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

THE UK'S BIGGEST HI-FI & HOME CINEMA BUYING GUIDE

## Rotel's amp revamp looks and sounds a winner

**Rotel RA-02**  
Amplifier £350

★★★★★

FOR

Slimline good looks; power, poise and authority; flexibility

AGAINST

Not without rivals, but that's about all

VERDICT

A new start for Rotel and a stylish arrival: this sleek amp is a fine addition to the sub-£500 arena

IT'S ALL CHANGE at Rotel: it has switched its UK distribution and is now handled by B&W Loudspeakers, and here comes its new product range, with the first significant styling overhaul for well over a decade.

The full line-up includes the £250 R-A01 amp (which lacks remote control), this R-A02, the £375 RCD-02 CD player

and a £275 tuner, the RT-02, with RC-03 and RB-03 pre/power amps (£275 each) to follow shortly. All are sleek, slimline and – shock, horror! – available in silver as well as black.

There's something vaguely reminiscent of Naim's Series 5 kit about the look of the new Rotels – the units are just over 7cm tall and have front panels split into three sections by styling creases – and while the RA02's sound isn't in the same league as the Nait 5, it shares some characteristics.

Thanks to Rotel's policy of investing in quality components, and splitting the development work between the UK and Japan, the amp has a fast, detailed and yet satisfyingly full presentation. That allows it to

make a fine job of the beats of Groove Armada's *Goodbye Country (Hello Nightclub)* set without losing sight of the fine details of the mix, and also husking out Marianne Faithfull's deliciously smutty vocals on *Kissin' Time* with real relish.

It's even more capable with big orchestral works like Dvorák's *Slavonic Dances*, combining its seemingly modest 40W output with free-breathing dynamic ability to good effect. Even when used with big, highly revealing speakers such as PMC's great FBIs the RA-02 sounds confident and in control.

Add in decent levels of equipment – moving magnet phono, four line-ins, a tape loop, two sets of speaker outputs and even

preouts to allow a bigger power amp to be added (or for biamping), along with defeatable tone controls and tape monitoring – and the convenience of that remote control, and we reckon Rotel has a winner on its hands. This is junior audiophile kit at its best.



LEADING RIVALS

**Arcam DIVA A65 Plus**

£350 ★★★★★ February 2002

Was an also-ran, now a class leader after internal revisions. A fine buy

**NAD C350**

£330 ★★★★★ September 2001

Big and effortless in typical NAD style, the C350 is part of a strong line-up