

RCC945 as seen in

Rotel RCC-945 CD Changer

Sugg. Retail: \$499.90



Rotel's second multi-disc CD player, the RCC-945, swaps the 5-disc carousel, with its noisy, slow mechanics, for a 6-disc shuttle system which looks (and may most often operate) like a single-play system. Sometimes called a "music bank" setup, this involves a conventional tray which takes in a disc, and can be programmed to store it and 5 others for quick programmed or random access. The disc tray is on the right side of the front panel.

The display is at centre, with operational buttons grouped around it, and shows disc and track number and elapsed track time, with selectable full program time and time remaining. The remote control has numeric buttons for both track and disc selection, the usual transport operations, and Repeat, Shuffle, and Scan functions in addition.

Internally, the RCC 945 uses a "Pulse Width Modulated" (PWM) 1 bit dual digital to analog converter with a second order Delta Sigma noise shaping circuit. This is followed by a digital filter equivalent to 8 x resampling", according to the manual. A 75-ohm coaxial RCA digital output is provided on the rear panel, along with the analog RCA output pair. I've always found carousel and cartridge CD players kind of kinky, and not quite there sonically; even the previous Rotel RCC940AX (WTR 94) carousel was somewhat unexciting with one's eyes closed. We'll see if this one has a little more brio.

But, first, some mechanics (those high end subjectivist fools who hate tracking tests [see Response] can skip the next two paragraphs and dream of Kathleen whispering French in their ears: "Jon-a-teen, zee Jadees ees merveilleux..."): in the Verany calibrated dropouts, the RCC 945 played cleanly through tack 31, ticking once on 32 (1.24 mm), then played 33 fine (1.5mm), but didn't start to do it on every revolution until 36 (2.5 mm); in the narrow gauge dropouts it managed through 42 (2mm), while in the double ones it was clean through 48 (2x1.5mm), ticked once on 49 (2x2.4mm), and regularly on 50 (2x3mm). Clearly, this player can easily handle over 2mm of error.

In the sedge test of increasing block error, the 945 handled 3 levels, ticking loudly on 4, and ejecting the disc entirely and heartlessly on 5: the drawer simply opened up

and said, "Take your filthy CD and clean it up!" I've never seen a CD player do this before; usually they just get confused and weepy, refusing to display or play.

The random error test was played as well as I've heard, for 2 minutes and three second, a level of tolerance not shown above. This player will handle multitudes of small and no-so-small imperfections. However, these do not extend to those involving under-aluminized CDs, the 945 having trouble right from the start, and through the second track of our see-through CD; it did play 3 and 4 well. These results show a player remarkably comfortable with scratched or dirty discs, but possibly prone to problems with poorly manufactured ones. Hopefully, these are now rare. If you own this deck, you'll find out.

Sonically, I liked this Rotel a lot. It has the slightly forward, detailed Delta Sigma sound I've heard from other players using the Crystal chipsets. Bass was very solid, extended, and authoritative, with good rhythmic impulsion. There was none of the hardness or glassiness of some other multi-play units, and a more natural sense of spatiality without the sense of fizziness I've heard from some single-bit players, in particular those using MASH DACs.

I had the opportunity to compare the RCC 945 directly with the Micromega Minium CD, playing both through the Minium system, and found interesting differences. While the Minium CD at first sounded less detailed and little softer in character, further listening revealed its greater ambient field and smoother spatiality, which extended around and behind the speakers; the Rotel seemed more confined, with a slightly forward sound, but deeper, more robust bass. Classical music buffs may prefer the more laid back Bitstream sound, while other listeners might find the more direct Rotel sound to their taste.

But, even as a transport, I think the RCC 945 is an outstanding value. It gets the signal off the disc cleanly, and provides excellent access times, both track to track, and disc to disc. Listening to its digital output through the Meridian 518, especially our nature collage from the Test and Reference CD (AI-CD-005, now in its third pressing run), all the subtle little cricket, bird and insect sounds were clearly heard in space; this track is true surround sound, especially when this well reproduced. Similarly spectacular spatiality was heard from the other tracks, in particular the Debussy Preludes, and the choral selections. This player's transport gets it all cleanly off the CD, ready for resolution enhancement.

If you want the simplicity of single play and the features and flexibility of multi-disc operation in an audiophile quality CD player, give a listen to the Rotel RCC 945. I think you'll be impressed.