



First tests



Don't be put off by the heavy-metal looks: the Rotel can belt out rock, but can be subtle too

Rocking Rotel loves music

Rotel RCD-1070

CD player £525



■ Fine weight and superb levels of detail; excellent build quality

■ Macho styling not to every taste; remote control rather basic

■ A great player from Rotel, showing the company still takes CD very seriously indeed

Despite the rapid rise of DVD, and predictions that the format was set to replace CD, many manufacturers now seem to be taking CD seriously once more: in recent months we've seen British companies leading the

way, with the likes of Musical Fidelity, Meridian and Arcam launching new or revised models. But us Brits don't have it all our own way, as this newcomer from Japan's Rotel proves.

The RCD-1070 is designed to complement the £600 RA-1060 amplifier, the subject of a rave review in these pages back in July last year. It's part of a line-up designed to sit above the company's mainstream 900 Series, which has been with us for many years, and we can't help feeling that the styling of the CD player in particular is aimed at impressing the

American market. It's all a bit serious looking, complete with those fascia extensions fashioned to act as grab handles (even though the player isn't the most massive around). For all that this is a player with a very high standard of build and finish: the style may be unmistakably Rotel, but the execution is solid and reassuring, with high-quality panelwork and good finish. Only the rather plasticky remote control lets the side down a tad, but then the price is very reasonable, and probably rules out the use of a metal handset with 'hewn from solid' user-appeal.

There's more on what's under the impressive lid in our panel below, but it's enough to say now that Rotel hasn't just clad existing technology in designer clothes and upped the price, but rather built a machine from scratch to appeal to those who take their music seriously. What's more, apart from that remote, the player is a pleasure to use, with high-quality controls, making this feel like a much more expensive machine.

It sounds it, too: after a couple of days on repeat and random play to get everything warmed through, the Rotel – which

WHAT'S UNDER THE LID?

As if to prove that the number of bits in the specification of a DAC isn't the whole story, the RCD-1070 uses a new multilevel delta-sigma conversion system of 18-bit resolution from Burr-Brown, recent Rotels having used a 20-bit DAC. This converter is also found in a new player table-top series, the E900 RCD100, as was chosen after extensive listening tests. It's partnered here with a high definition 16x oversampling digital



filter with High Definition Compatible Digital decoding, again chosen as much for its ability with standard CDs as those encoded with HDCD information. The digital section is fed from a low-resonance overscan transport mechanism, reducing errors in the data coming from the disc.

Inside the Rotel uses a custom toroidal transformer and discrete components



sounds a bit cool and diffident out of the box – delivers a sound that immediately grabs the attention through its scale and weight, then goes on to impress with the levels of detail and information on offer. Used with high-quality amplification and speakers – the RA-1060 and floorstanders such as the FMC FB1s would be a good choice – this player is likely to bring a smile to the face of even the most jaded CD listener.

Yes, there's that warmth and weight, but this is apparent as extension and a lack of compression in the bass rather than any looseness or flab: there's excellent control of even the most demanding bass line, while the thunder of big drums is capable of making the unsuspecting jump, such is the impact and slam on tap. There's also a fine growl to electric bass, while acoustic double bass has a glorious sense of resonance and a natural decay, making the sound of great jazz bass as impressive as that of the low end of a symphony orchestra.

However, this player isn't by any means a one-trick pony: the beauty of its sound is that it's as impressive in the midband and

treble as it is in the bass. Everything from vocals to guitar and piano have superb character and definition, ensuring that soloists really stand out from even the most complex mix, as is clear with the huge range of guest vocalists on Jools Holland's *Big Band Small World* set. The Rotel manages to deliver artists as diverse as Marc Almond and Joe Strummer equally well, and still has the ability to convey the power of the band itself, and of course the Holland piano, which is ever to the fore in the mix.

Switch to something classical, be it symphonic or choral, and the space and openness in the Rotel's treble is just as fulfilling. Hyperion's reconstruction of the *Coronation of King George II* drips with atmosphere, and all of it, from the bells of London to the glorious choral singing, is there in shiver-making style.

Then in the next breath the player can evoke the intimacy of a small jazz venue, or give you a close-up view of a solo instrument, before turning on the power with some grumpy old 70s prog-rock or making you all too aware of that characteristic Oasis nasal whine. You throw the discs, the Rotel will play them, and in every case it will find something in them that's overlooked by lesser players.

The RA-1060 amplifier was very good indeed, and the RCD-1070 is more than just a good companion piece. By any standards this is a very fine CD player, and the fact that it sells for a very realistic price should ensure its appeal.

WHAT IT'S UP AGAINST

Creek CD43Mk2 E599 ★★★★★ (March 2001) The first of our trio of British rivals to the Rotel may not be the sexiest looking piece of kit, but this machine from the North London specialists in affordable audio has a sound that's refined and mature, if sometimes a little understated. It's always musical, if not immediately attention-grabbing, and well worth an audition.



Rega Planet E498 ★★★★★ (September 2001)

This is the second-generation version of the top-loading player from a company best known for its Planar turntables, and it has a reputation for a very vinyl-like sound, with a strong emphasis on rhythm and timing. However, it's not short of flaws, and may be too characterful for some listeners.



Roksan Kandy KC-1 E495 ★★★★★ (September 2001)

Definitely eye-kandy in its range of pastel finishes, and a solidly built player for the money, this machine from the British company certainly knows how to rock, with a fine rhythmic drive and powerful bass. But it can lack a little of the refinement found in the company's Caspian range, and it's up against tough competition.

