

# hi-fi+

Issue 27 - Nov / Dec 2003  
UK £3.95

REPRODUCING THE RECORDED ARTS

## Two's company...



### ▶ Maths

*Wadia 302*  
*Rotel RDV-1060*  
*Pioneer DV-757Ai*  
*Philips DVD963SA*  
*Classé Audio Omega SACD1*  
*Metronome Technologie Kalista*

### ▶ Music

*L'Archet d'Or II*  
*Mercury Re-issues*  
*Kraftwerk*  
*Multi-channel*  
*Recommendations*

### ▶ Muscle

*Tom Evans Pulse Power Supply*  
*conrad-johnson Premier 140*  
*Pioneer Surround*  
*Orelle Pre-Power*  
*Graves Audio Valves*



9 771465 595011

27 >



# Rotel RDV-1060

by Alan Sircom

Rotel has a richly deserved reputation from the great old days of inexpensive hi-fi. The company made (and patently still makes) products from relatively prosaic CD and amplifier circuits, but they deliver the musical goods because Rotel builds them right. All Rotel's best products were made to last, with comparatively massive transformers and overspec'd build quality.

The £800 RDV-1060 is one such product, albeit now at a higher price point. On paper, the specifications are good, but relatively unexceptional at the price, but the execution of those specifications marks this player out as something really special.

Not that the specification sheet is basic. The player is a DVD-Audio/Video player of very good quality. It includes support for DVD-A, DVD-V, CD, CD-R, CD-RW, Video and Super Video CD and MP3-encoded recordings on CD media. Fitting the player with a 12-bit Video DAC, allied to a PAL/NTSC Progressive Scan video output (for suitably equipped monitors and projectors) is also a mark of quality, for picture reproduction. Similarly, the on-board Crystal 24-bit/192kHz audio DACs feeding Analogue Devices op-amps are a prerequisite for decent six-channel audio connection required for DVD-A replay. Naturally, it's Region Two replay as standard, but that can be fixed to play American discs (if you know the right people).

But it's the build that really stands out. The player is solid; this black box feels like it could be made out of flight recorders. Nothing flexes, it has the sort of solidity that both belies its price and feels like it could be used in hand-to-hand combat. Well, almost – the DVD tray is the standard issue black plastic

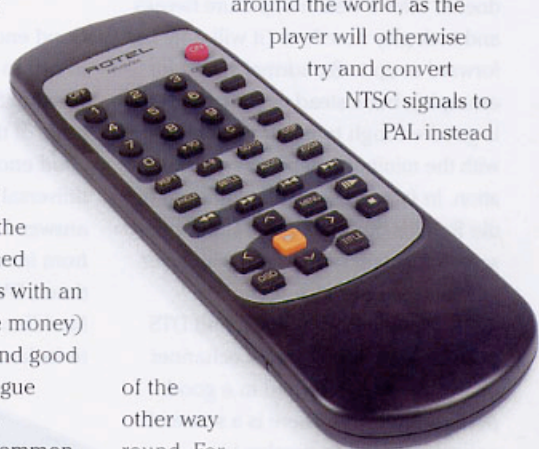
affair and the handset isn't much better. These feel quite cheap and tacky. However, those rack-mount handles help a lot to reinforce both the physical presence of the player, and its rigidity. If you stick with the standard black finish, it looks quite dated, but paradoxically the black and silver version looks bang up to date. Especially the blue LED display above the centre-mounted DVD tray; the two-deck display looks very 'now' and is extremely informative, although the dimmer switch for this display should be on the remote or the front panel and not a part of the on-screen menu system. That gets kind of annoying.

Beneath the casework, it's Rotel all the way. It uses what the company describes as 'balanced design', which means it comes with an extremely high quality (for the money) isolated linear power supply and good components (like those Analogue Devices op-amps) throughout.

There is also a bonus, uncommon in DVD players, let alone DVD players for this sort of price tag. The player sports a trio of remote control trigger inputs, two mini-jacks and one RJ45 input for a PC-style controller. This makes the player far more Crestron friendly than most at the price, and multi-room hideaway fans will no longer need to use one of those infra red repeaters that never quite stick to the panel properly. The rest of the back panel is standard issue, with S-Video, composite video and component/progressive video outputs, six-channel and two-channel analogue audio and both coaxial and Toslink optical digital outputs. Only one Scart

socket, though; these days, two Scart sockets (one to pass signals from other products, one to output the DVD – and other source – information) is considered standard issue. However, even this may have an audio benefit, by not having stray video signals running through the player, the sound will sound slightly better.

There is a PAL/NTSC switch designed to determine whether the player speaks PAL or NTSC as a native. This is surprisingly useful if you move around the world, as the player will otherwise try and convert NTSC signals to PAL instead



of the other way round. For the rest of us, though, this is about as useful as a chocolate fireguard and this is a fit and forget switch.

There's a lot of watching and listening when assessing any DVD-Audio/Video player. It's also easy to dismiss video performance in an audio magazine. But remember this is a DVD player: whether it's a corker on the audio side or not is immaterial if it produces a terrible picture. It simply will not sell in numbers large enough to sustain it. Fortunately, the Rotel does a great job at the movies. I lack the requisite technology to parse progressive scan pictures for now



► (it's still a very new issue in the UK) but the basic DVD picture was extremely precise and focussed, even on the rudimentary composite video setting. Its colourful, vibrant picture is vivid and fresh, but not overt and Technicolor in approach, and as such copes with the muted flesh-tones in *Solaris* and the comic book colour of *Spider-Man* with equal aplomb. But its strongest picture suit is that it is exceptionally detailed and dynamic, with fantastic black levels, which make it ideal for both conventional TV and projection use. Unlike the Pioneers of this world, the RDV-1060 doesn't offer a wealth of picture tweaks and trick play functions (it will only fast forward at up to 8x normal speed for example), but instead the basic picture is good enough to cover most bases with the minimum of picture modification. In fact, the only real criticism of the Rotel is the lurid green Rotel splash screen that you have to see whenever you load or unload a disc.

Replaying Dolby Digital and DTS through both digital and six-channel analogue outputs turned in a good performance, too. There is a sense of cohesiveness from speaker to speaker which places the listener right in the thick of the action, yet the RDV-1060's vocal articulation was never once overawed by the surround. Once again, the atmospheric *Solaris* highlighted all that is good about Rotel's cinema sound. George Clooney's slightly mumbled chocolate Kentucky-bred tones are easy to understand, yet he doesn't seem divorced from the whirrs and hums of the spaceship. The ethereal

score also flowed with the sort of litheness and grace that's hard to muster from a compressed, balls-out format like Dolby Digital.

So Rotel clearly pass the DVD-Video test with flying colours – but how does it do with DVD-Audio discs? Surprisingly well.

Good enough, in fact to question whether SACD is the more audiophile of the two formats and more than good enough to make you wonder if a universal player really is the right answer. Like many audiophiles, I suffer from intractable snobbishness at times; DVD-Audio may have Meridian credibility in its favour,

but the majority of DVD-Audio players leave the music sounding artificial compared to SACD (of course, until someone comes out with a recording on all formats, this remains impossible to determine accurately), even if DVD-Audio generally sounds more bass-heavy and rhythmic. The Rotel retains the good things of previous DVD-Audio

players and strips away that artificial layer. Suddenly, the transparency issues about DVD-Audio recording do seem false and not worth worrying about.

A year ago, I'd have been able to play the entire canon of DVD-Audio recordings in an afternoon or so, but now there are hundreds of them. I went through several favourites – and a few newcomers – and each time that little bit more came off the disc.

*Sinatra at the Sands* was an interesting insight into big Frank's singing voice. This classic recording from 1966 has all the right elements; Sinatra, the Count Basie Orchestra, Vegas, 'I've Got You Under My Skin'. Yet, for all that, there are occasional flat notes that simply don't slip through the CD version. Despite (or perhaps because of) those bum notes, the recording is so well handled, you get that time machine effect and you feel like you should be wearing a skinny tuxedo and drinking Whiskey Sours (any excuse). The tux and the stiff drink aren't so important in playing Chicago or Doors records, but the same recording quality stands. *L.A. Woman* is probably

one of about six recordings on DVD-Audio I know really well, and once again the RDV-1060 raised the bar. The obligatory 'Riders on the Storm' is filled out larger than ever before and that rolling thunder at the start takes on big, scary run for cover proportions. Then, when the band kick in a few seconds later, soundstaging seems better defined and the really poor spring echo effect used on Jim Morrison's voice in the second verse appears truly dreadful, yet doesn't ►



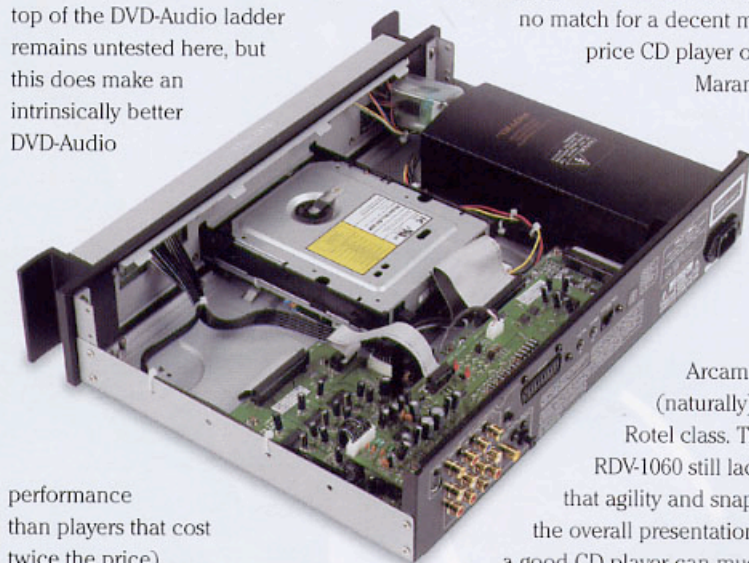


► undermine the performance.

More modern classical recordings show just how majestic the RDV-1060 really is. Harmoncourt's version of the Bach *St. Matthew Passion* is multi-channel bliss and could convert hard-boiled atheists into fully paid up God-bothers in seconds. Choral works are always exciting and impressive through multi-channel systems (simply because our hearing is so well attuned to differentiating human voices), but this fights the multi-channel cause better than many. Even poor recordings get a fighting chance through the RDV-1060; Donald Fagen's *The Nightfly* is too topky and disappointing in multi-channel; it still sounds brash and hard, here, but the edges are not so patently obvious, compared to most other DVD-Audio players (in fairness, the very top of the DVD-Audio ladder remains untested here, but this does make an intrinsically better DVD-Audio

of a bad tribute band playing through blankets while on Mogadon. It even has some soundstaging, generally considered impossible from the wall of sludge that is CD replay, DVD style. Instead, the RDV-1060 makes a lively, detailed and fast-paced sound that has plenty of bottom end dynamic grunt backed up with an open midrange and a treble that begins to extend into the bat-eared regions. All sorts of discs came out to play (a good sign in and of itself), including Beethoven and Mahler symphonies, Montiverdi madrigals, classic 50's Cannonball Adderley jazz, Lambchop, and Metallica and it made a fair fist of almost everything placed in the platter.

Let's put this into some kind of CD-playing perspective though. It makes a surprisingly good CD sound, but is still no match for a decent mid-price CD player of the Marantz,



performance than players that cost twice the price).

The big question arises when making the final step – if this player were to replace an existing CD player, would there be tears? Here, the answer isn't so clear cut, and it depends on what you were used to listening to. Given the generally poor performance of DVD players – especially those not resorting to dual-laser mechanisms – this player deals with CD like a native. It has some sense of timing, the dynamics are not squashed and the overall sound no longer reminds people

Arcam or (naturally) Rotel class. The RDV-1060 still lacks that agility and snap to the overall presentation that a good CD player can muster.

It's not a big failing, though, and something that is best highlighted in comparison, so those who sell off the CD player first may will not notice it.

This leaves the true audiophile with a dilemma on his or her hands. Although this makes a better job at CD replay than any other DVD player in its price range, if you invested in a decent CD player (costing £400 or more) within the last seven or eight years or so, it will likely present a difficult challenge for the Rotel RDV-1060 to

overcome. But this is also better at DVD-Audio replay than any player at double the price and deserves to be used and loved by audio buffs. Perhaps we are too spoiled by the idea of convergence – we were content to play LPs on a record player and CDs on a CD player; why should we ditch our existing CD players if they sound superior at playing CD, just to keep up with the endless march of progress? Maybe this is an additional source component and tomorrow's audiophile will have this player (and possibly the Philips DVD963SA SACD player) taking up shelf space alongside an already well-established CD player. It's worth making that shelf space for the RDV-1060, though; you'll start buying mondo DVD-Audios when you do. ➤

#### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Disc Replay Capability:	DVD-Video, DVD-Audio, Video CD, SVCD, CD Audio, CD-R, CD-RW MP3, JPEG, DVD-/+RW
Video Outputs:	Component Video (Progressive Scan) Composite Video, S-Video, RGB (via Scart)
Audio Outputs:	Digital Coaxial, Optical, Stereo Audio six channel audio outputs 1x SCART Output, Component/Progressive Scan Video, Composite Video, S-Video Stereo Audio
Remote Triggers:	RS232/RJ45 link 2x mini-jack remote links
Dimensions:	432x92x336mm
Weight:	5.1Kg
Price:	£800

#### UK Distributor:

Rotel Europe  
Tel. (44)(0)1903 221600  
Net. [www.rotel.com](http://www.rotel.com)