



ROTEL RCD-1072 CD PLAYER | ROTEL RA-1062 INTEGRATED AMP  
MONITOR AUDIO S8 LOUDSPEAKER | £1990

# Let Us Rock

*Fed up with powder-puff hi-fi? Fancy being pinned to the wall? This combo delivers on all fronts*

I know what you're thinking. Where are the curves? That achingly sexy aesthetic dripping with industrial designer inspiration – it's, er, missing. Yes it is. Moreover, I offer no excuses. This month's beautiful system just isn't very beautiful. At least not in the conventional, can't-take-your-peepers-off-it sense. But in another, perhaps less frivolous way, I think it is. Because sometimes lissom, meticulously measured prettiness doesn't quite hit the spot. Sonic suavity has its limitations, too. The lush build and honeyed clarity of the Unison Research/Diapason combo from a few months back is hugely alluring but it may not be the answer to all your musical needs.

Neither might this unashamedly angular and beefy CD-based combo from Rotel and Monitor Audio, of course. But, for starters, it does successfully poke fun at two rather pretentious hi-fi maxims, 'namely less is more', and 'power is the enemy of agility and high-res fidelity'. Let's consider its two-fisted take on these cherished principles. Beginning with the speakers, there's nothing detectably minimalist about Brit-fi stalwart Monitor Audio's weighty S8 floorstander. In fact it's a whole lotta rather densely-engineered speaker for your £800, toting no fewer than three gleaming metal-cone main drivers, all using 150mm non-magnetic polymer frames and 115mm diameter diaphragms. Operating in a two-and-a-half-way configuration, the lower two handle the bass only while the upper unit works in its own separate enclosure, taking care of affairs up to 3.2kHz where it hands over to Monitor Audio's signature gold-coloured metal

dome tweeter. Although quite slim and not particularly deep, each twin rear-ported enclosure is very sturdily built with extensive internal bracing and a meaty stability-enhancing plinth. And know what? It may be just a trad, hip-high box but it looks stunning. The superb quality of the natural oak veneers (one of four available finishes) is a contributing factor, but whip the grilles off and the sight of all those shiny metal drivers is something of a knee-wobbler.

The cast polymer chassis design used for the bass and mid-range drivers have an unusually large working cone area considering the modest overall chassis size. The general idea is that the new, larger drivers can be used with slimmer and more attractive cabinet designs.

The cones' rubber surrounds have been redesigned to be flush with the cone edge and take advantage of the larger drive unit size which, claims MA, allows greater cone excursions with lower distortion and improved frequency response linearity. The new chassis and driver assemblies have no screws or loose parts in the interests of consistency and reliability.

The shielded magnet structures have been designed for higher performance and more precise control of bass frequencies. The S8's bass and bass/mid drivers use four-layer voice coils, giving a claimed efficiency boost over conventional drivers of 2-3 decibels at bass frequencies.

Although it's an easy enough load to drive, no pale and interesting single-ended triode is going to properly get to grips with this modest behemoth. Rotel's £600 RA-1062 integrated amp is a rather different kind of beast, though. Already an exceptional solo

**"It pokes fun at two rather pretentious hi-fi maxims, 'namely less is more', and 'power is the enemy of agility and high-res fidelity'."**



**Rotel RCD-1072 £595**

Energetic balance and lots of drive find great synergy with matching 1062 amp. More rock than romance – that goes for build and design, too.



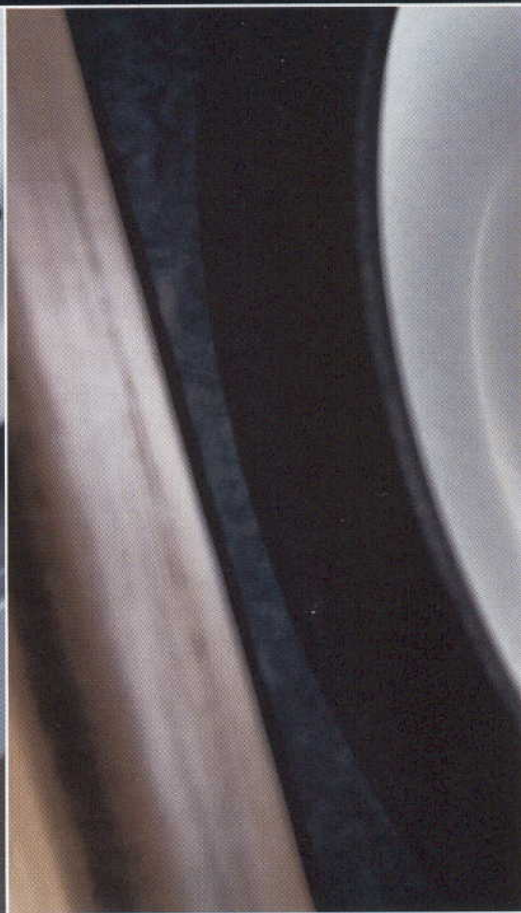
**Rotel RA-1062 £595**

A crisp, dynamic and expressive-sounding amp with excellent build quality at a keen price. Capable of serious volume hooked up to the efficient Monitor Audios but also very impressive control.



**Monitor Audio S8 £800**

Hard to believe such a slim box can weigh so much or feel so solid, but then the S8 does have four drivers per enclosure and is very sturdily constructed. Fine performance all-round but bass and clarity excel.



performer in these pages, it's very much an audiophile-oriented design in the Rotel tradition, but one with a notably plush fascia and well-stacked rear panel. The armchair convenience quotient is exceptionally high. There are six line-level inputs with independent listen/record selectors, a full set of tone or "contour" controls, a headphone jack, a 12-volt trigger circuit and an extra set of terminals for a second pair of speakers (all microprocessor-controlled from the slim but neatly laid out remote, of course).

The 1062 isn't exactly fading away under the bonnet, either, packing a substantial Rotel-made toroidal transformer, fine tolerance rectifiers and very high grade British Aerovox T-Network capacitors. The bottom line is a conservatively-rated 60 watts a side into eight ohms and a high damping factor, good news for the S8s which appreciate and can ably demonstrate the benefits of muscle and control when it comes to dynamics and loudness. It's clearly this amp's ambition to up-end convention by providing the best of all worlds. It seems, once again, that more is more.

You might be surprised to see the 1062's matching CD player, the RCD-1072, here – after all, it didn't exactly grab group test glory on its last *HFC*

outing. Well, for a start, it makes a smart stack with the amp. Both are slimline but purposeful – together the effect is compellingly chunky. Second, Rotel designed it as a natural coupling for the amp, so synergy just might overcome the standalone shortcomings. And third, the 1072's noted strengths – its ebullience, dynamics and sense of power – are, in any case, just what the system job description ordered.

#### NOT LEAN, JUST MEAN

Again, this is almost the antithesis of a lean machine. The 1072 boasts more functionality than most of its peers with programme (including review), repeat, random play and a ten-second intro scan feature. The choice of Burr-Brown's PCM1732 DAC is interesting, too. This IC doesn't have a reputation as a cutting-edge performer for its price, but it does have an on-board HDCD decoder. It might seem a bit old hat in the era of SACD and DVD-A, but Rotel is a long-time supporter of Pacific Microsonics' performance-massaging encoding scheme for CD, and there's a healthy smattering of HDCD-enhanced discs out there to take advantage of the extra circuitry, including some real honeys on the Linn label.

The 1072 is basically an update of the RCD-1070 with a revised fascia

layout designed around a centralised Sony drawer mechanism and upgrades to 60 internal components, including a new Burr-Brown op-amp, which is said to offer lower noise and distortion. Although Sony components, the drawer, mechanism and display have been modified to Rotel's specification. One downside is that the mechanism doesn't reliably handle CD-RW discs and nor does it support CD Text.

But never mind that. Never mind that the looks, far from being drop dead gorgeous, won't even leave you feeling slightly unwell. Smart and simple will have to do. In fact, it's a wonderful disguise for the frankly enthralling dimension of believability this powerful, unfrilly combo brings to the business of listening to your favourite music.

In short, it motors in a way *The Darkness* can only dream about. First and foremost, it's hi-fi for the big occasion. Give the rear-ported S8s a little space to breathe, place a suitably energetic CD in the tray (it isn't genre-dependent), lean on the volume and stand back. The scale, authority and dynamics will, I guarantee, blow you away. Rock played at high levels is underpinned by a powerful, fast and tuneful bass. With jazz or classical material, the system relaxes beautifully, sounding expansive, airy and tactile.





**“The way this system combines power, weight and presence with lightning response is far more unusual than the way it looks.”**

The clear, finely resolved presentation remains clean at high volumes and well controlled at the frequency extremes. Also remarkable is the way this kit delivers warmth with detail and insight.

But that's what's so remarkable. This system does killer dubs and subtle acoustic ambient cues with equal skill, while slickly recorded jazz has a shimmering, almost scalp-tingling presence. Deep, weighty bass is an obvious advantage of the Monitor Audio's tall, multi-drivered enclosure, but even more impressive is the way the effortlessness and obvious dynamic freedom of the S8 makes it a truly unflagging listen for long periods.

**GOOD AND PURE**

MA designer Dean Hartley's brief for this speaker was for it to combine knockout dynamics with decent loudness capability and power handling but without sacrificing subtly, finesse and transparency. Outstanding mid-treble transparency, a taut, propulsive delivery and fine rhythmic coherence say he got his sums right. The way this system combines power, weight and

presence with lightning responses and a light touch is far more unusual, it has to be said, than the way it looks.

So, to summarise – real grip and power from the bass and a pure, accurate midrange. The system goes effortlessly loud, hits hard and has a big, expansive soundstage. Yet there's nothing overblown about its presentation: when the material dictates, it's as light on its feet as much smaller speakers. It can also sound very classy and clean, with an attractive absence of grain and hardness that sometimes makes CD edgy to listen to. In fact, despite the sheer physicality of this system's performance, an outstanding amount of information is present in the signal but it's so well integrated into the larger musical picture, it never seems spotlighted. In the end, there does appear to be genuine synergy between the Rotel components which, with the help of the Monitor Audios, produces an amazingly assured style of music making, good at unravelling the densest of mixes, at making stuff sing and tug at the emotions while, at the same time,

sounding explicit and finely detailed.

One thing seems certain. If you've never experienced what real power and dynamics can bring to the hi-fi party, this aesthetically self-effacing system just might shock you to the core. It isn't just that it goes louder, higher and lower with more freedom than people would usually expect from a “mid-fi” system, but the gripping believability it brings to the activity of listening to music. In fact, it makes it less of an activity – more of an occasion.

But I think what I like about it most is the way it combines such infectious drive and energy with a decent helping of more conventional hi-fi virtues such as low colouration, precise imaging capabilities and spacious soundstaging. It might not be the last word in sleek, svelte design, but it is easy to use and enthralling to listen to whatever CD you choose to slip in the tray. If you're after a cosy, comfortable ride, this probably isn't the system for you. If you want real kick when you press the pedal to the metal, it could change your life. **HFC**

*David Vivian*

