



KEN KESSLER'S NEW COLUMN INSIDE!

HI-FI CHOICE

PASSION FOR SOUND JANUARY 2007 | £3.95 | WWW.HIFICHOICE.CO.UK



PERFECT SOUND!
Why Krell's new CD/SACD player is the world's best

LEEMA Cracking floorstanding speakers

IN-DEPTH TESTS INSIDE!

▲ **LYNGDORF** Ingenious amp adapts to your listening room

▲ **GAMUT** New CD player is a gripping musical performer

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

£3.95
01
9 770955 111083
JANUARY 2007

FREE!
2nd hand hi-fi
mini-mag!



ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>

AMPLIFIERS

FEATURING

- > Arcam DiVA A70
- > Creek Evo
- > Marantz PM7001 KI
- > NAD C372
- > Onkyo A-9555
- > Rotel RA-06

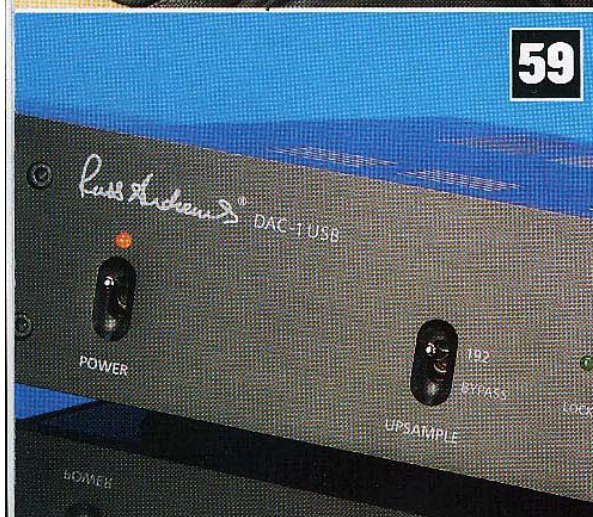
*** BUYER'S BIBLE**
The world's best hi-fi rated



46



52



59



All change please!

No longer making one new product a decade, Gamut has moved its top CD player up several gears

PRODUCT Gamut CD3

TYPE CD player

PRICE £3,500

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 43x11.1x42cm

• Weight: 15kg • Analogue outputs: balanced XLR sockets, single-ended RCA phono sockets • Switchable coaxial digital output • 24-bit/192kHz upsampling

CONTACT ☎ 01252 702705 • www.gamutaudio.com

It's all change at Gamut! Since Lars Goller took over two years ago, the company has been launching new products at the rate of about two or three per year. And now, Gamut's top disc player – the CD1 – has been replaced by the CD3. Its distinctive blue lights are a perfect aesthetic match for the DI 150 integrated amp that we reviewed so positively in *HFC* 275. But the question is, can this solidly built player live up to that precedent?

Gamut has taken a comprehensive approach to chassis construction and shielding. The CD3's interior is divided into three by a tunnel of stainless steel. This forms an inner chassis, which supports both the Philips disc mechanism and digital output board on rubber suspension. It also shields the power supply from the sensitive signal processing and conversion elements.

The power supply has separate toroidal mains transformers for the player's digital and analogue sections, in an attempt to minimise

any negative influence that one can exert on the other. The idea is to keep high-frequency noise out of the analogue stage, to minimise distortion in this final part of the signal chain.

To ensure voltage stability, the DAC board itself incorporates ultra-low-noise components. These are said to make for a better sounding player, with increased stability and reliability compared to its forebear. Prior to converting the signal, the CD3 uses a 24-bit/192kHz converter to upsample the digital signal. It takes this bitstream into the analogue domain via a Burr-Brown PCM 1792 24-bit DAC (replacing a Crystal unit in the CD1).

According to Gamut, the analogue output stage has been designed using a psychoacoustic (rather than purely measured) approach to making the best component choices. The selection of components therefore largely relied on subjective tests and not so much on objective lab measurements, even though the CD3 is claimed to measure very well.

The analogue stage's output can be extracted via both phono and balanced XLR sockets, the latter offering a 4.35Vrms output that doubles the single-ended voltage level and makes it eminently capable of driving long interconnects. The coaxial-only digital output has a switch beside it inscribed 'open' and '75ohm', somewhat cryptically, as is Gamut's style of late. Open actually means 'on' and

75ohm means that the output is terminated with a 75-ohm load internally and is thus 'off'. Sometimes a little clarity would be helpful!

This is a big player, but it still fits on a standard 17-inch rack. Nevertheless, it's a good-size lump with well-finished casework. The top plate has the brand name cut out, the footwear underneath appears to be in stainless steel and each foot has three silicone beads inset, in an attempt to minimise resonance in the chassis. Operationally, the remote is a touch idiosyncratic; pressing 'back skip' takes you to the previous track and pressing 'play' does not relieve one from pause mode. The lovely front panel buttons rely on words rather than symbols, which makes them a little slow to navigate and – should you use the dimming option to extinguish the lighting – you are left with no names at all. The drawer sled seems a little clunky for a player at this price, but we had a very early sample.

SOUND QUALITY

We used the CD3 with both balanced and single-ended cables. On the whole, the XLR-plugged persuasion gave a better result, but the difference is small enough for this not to be an issue if a partnering preamp has only RCA phono socket inputs.

It took a while to get to grips with the sound from this player. It doesn't have any obvious



“As with other Gamut electronics, this player carves out very solid and real imagery when the music has it to offer.”

foibles for one to grasp and it doesn't make a song and dance about any one audio aspect in particular. In this respect it's like the matching DI 150 amp: its exceptionally high resolution gradually makes itself heard and the more music you play, the more it becomes apparent that you are hearing things that were not previously noticeable. For instance, in our oft-used Brendel/Beethoven piano piece there seem to be fewer quiet moments between notes; this is because you hear more of the harmonics/decay from the preceding notes filling in the gap. An inky silence in-between may seem calmer and more attractive in some respects, but is not telling the whole story.

As with other Gamut electronics, this player carves out very solid and real imagery when the music has it to offer. Keith Jarrett's Carnegie Hall disc reveals an extremely weighty instrument sat upon a stage that Jarrett can't help but tap his foot upon. This inspires similar footwork from the listener in response. The CD player effortlessly reveals the charged atmosphere of Jarrett's first solo concert for ten years and the ambience of that iconic venue. Diana Krall's *It's Got To Be Love* is

likewise reproduced in starkly real dimensions, all three coming together to place her in the room between the speakers – though whether 'stark' is appropriate for such a sophisticated sounding recording is a moot point.

Dynamics have always been a Gamut strong point and we suspect it's because of its capabilities in this area that the CD3 really elevates itself into the front row of high-end players. In both micro-dynamics (the difference in level between notes) and energy (the ability to swing power precisely where and when it is needed), its dynamic quality is clear with both subtle and powerful music. This helps to make each piece seem more interesting and musically deep than usual. So engaging was the experience that several well-worn test tracks ended up playing their way to the end.

We were also struck by the ability to peek out space and light from Jaga Jazzist's *What We Must* disc, which usually sounds horribly compressed. The rendition it gave of *Oslo Skyline* was nothing short of awesome, the track opening up and revealing the multiple layers of instruments and effects, not to mention noise, albeit of the joyful variety. It

couldn't pull the drums up in the mix though, more's the pity; we suspect that only the sound engineer could have managed that trick.

We can imagine some listeners craving a more demonstrative sound from their discs, with beefier bass and more etched highs, but that would be to ask for a contribution from the player itself – a coloration, in fact. Subtle varieties of coloration can be found in lots of hi-fi and often to pleasing effect, but ultimately this gets in the way of the main attraction: the music. With a player of the CD3's calibre, you have to rely on the software to provide your bone-crunching lows and sky-touching highs. But have no fear, it will if you've got both Metallica and Arvo Pärt in your collection. Which, as a broad-minded, catholic tasted HFC reader, we assume you have. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 94%	PRO Superbly balanced sound: dynamics, timing and imaging are all first class, while the tonal balance is right on the money. If you want absolute CD fidelity, this is your player.
FEATURES >> 82%	CON Drawer mechanism on our sample could be slicker; remote operation is a little counter intuitive; unclear digital output labelling.
BUILD >> 92%	
VALUE >> 88%	
CONCLUSION Come the HFC Awards issue next year, rivals will have to raise their games to stay ahead of this Danish player. It has superb resolve of fine detail combined with a perfectly judged balance and ultimately an irresistible ability to draw you into the music.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 91%	