

System 2 – Blumin marvellous

SYSTEM TWO IS notionally simpler than the first, comprising a digital source, integrated amplifier and a pair of speakers, but as a combination of brands it is still unique in the UK and while it might look more than a little retro, it's one of the most sophisticated streaming systems you can currently buy.

The Lumin A1 network player's ultra-minimalist design is built around a pair of Wolfson DACs and a pair of Lundahl output transformers. As well as handling the 'normal' streaming formats up to 24/384, it is also DSD-compatible.

Partnering the Lumin is one of the more seldom seen brands in the UK. Accuphase is one of Japan's most highly regarded high-end brands. Its products – finished in champagne with many featuring VU meters and wooden side cheeks – might look retro, but the technology is right up to date. The E-360 boasts 100W a side and makes use of a proprietary volume control called AAVA, which does without any form of resistor. £6,500 might seem a lot of money for an integrated amp, but the build quality is absolutely staggering and the attention to detail quite superb.

Fifties flair

If the Accuphase looks a little retro, the Tannoy Turnberry GR looks like it fell through a hole in time. Part of Tannoy's Prestige range, the styling is effectively unchanged from the fifties. Inside, however, much has been updated over the previous version, let alone its ancestors. The new GR driver takes technology from the flagship Kensington model including new driver materials and use of cryogenically treated components. The huge cabinet with its details and crenulations remains, making the Tannoy either the least cool or coolest speaker on the planet depending on your standpoint.

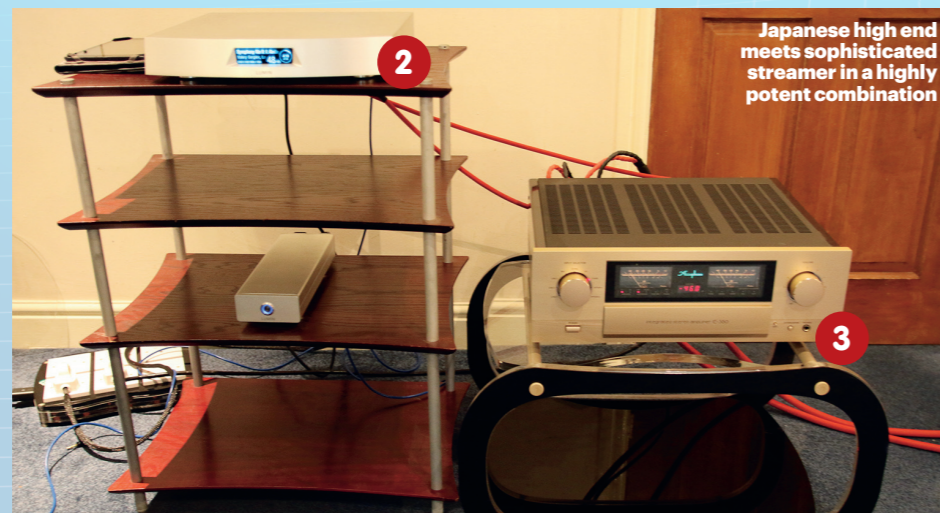
Forget any notion of a vintage sound, though. With a lossless rip of Gretchen Peters' *One To The Heart, One To The Head*, the presentation is bang up to the minute. This means that there are quite astonishing levels of detail unearthed by the system, but the effect is so unforced you never really perceive it to be as forensic as it is until – as in my case – you listen to the album on less talented electronics later on. Peter's voice is simply sensational – free of the

slightest sense of compression or artefact and with all the emotion of the album completely intact.

With material I am utterly familiar with like the Cinematic Orchestra's *Every Day* these slightly disparate components gel together in a way that a few one-make systems would kill to achieve. The resonating bass in *Burn Out* is perfectly reproduced – those 10in drivers in the Turnberry don't need to move very far to shift the required air and the grip that the Accuphase exerts on them is enough to give this system a fleetness of foot you simply wouldn't expect from such a large speaker. Winding the tempo up further with Little Dragon's *Ritual Union*, does nothing to ruffle the feathers of the system, although Yukimi Nagano's sugar-sweet vocals seem a little odd coming from something as burly as the Tannoy, it's like hearing a lion miaow.

A final performance of Dvorak's *New World Symphony* courtesy of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra via DSD shows that when it comes to the performance of a full-size orchestra, there is little to touch a member of Tannoy's Prestige range being driven by supremely well-sorted electronics. The exceptional dynamic range of the piece is bread and butter to this system and the Lumin makes the business of streaming DSD – something that can result in a good degree of head scratching – as simple as any other format.

This unique combination of state-of-the-art streaming, Japanese high-end horsepower and British pomp and circumstance is unfailingly capable, immensely flexible and completely addictive.



The Tannoy might look old hat, but the performance is bang up to date

- 1 TANNOY TURNBERRY GR LOUDSPEAKERS £5,000
- 2 LUMIN A1 NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER £4,995
- 3 ACCUPHASE E-360 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £6,500
- QUADRASPIRE Q4 EVO SHELF 4 £400
- MUSICWORKS REVO 2-TIER TABLE £850
- AUDIOMICA RHOD REFERENCE INTERCONNECT 1M £605
- AUDIOMICA DOLOMIT REF SPEAKER CABLE 4.5M £570
- TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £18,920

Japanese high end meets sophisticated streamer in a highly potent combination

System 3 – Front-end finery

HERE'S THE ULTIMATE

expression of The Audio Works philosophy of a system you listen through rather than to and this system might be the most extreme example of front end first I've ever seen. Like the previous two it's set up and installed with enormous care and attention payed to isolation and cabling. It also marks a return to Focal speakers, but at a different end of the range to the Arias.

The Diablo is the smallest member of the Utopia range and packs all of the substantial technology of the rest of the range into its compact cabinet. Larry has been one of the longest serving Focal dealers and understands implicitly the demands these singular speakers require.

This leads to the superficially unusual pairing of the Focals with a dCS CD player that occupies three boxes and comes at a price that would buy a well specified Porsche Cayman. The Vivaldi series represents the culmination of dCS' experience in digital and comprises DSD upsampling transport, external clock and DAC.

Sticking with you

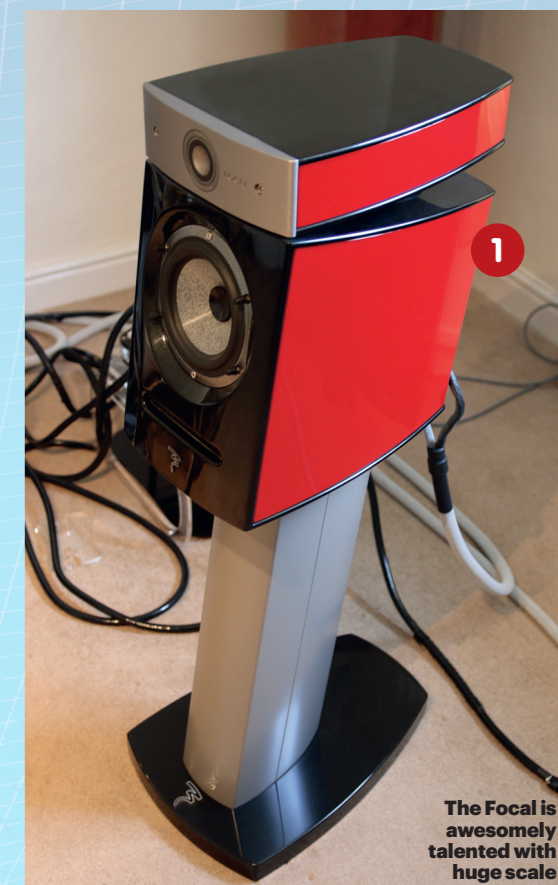
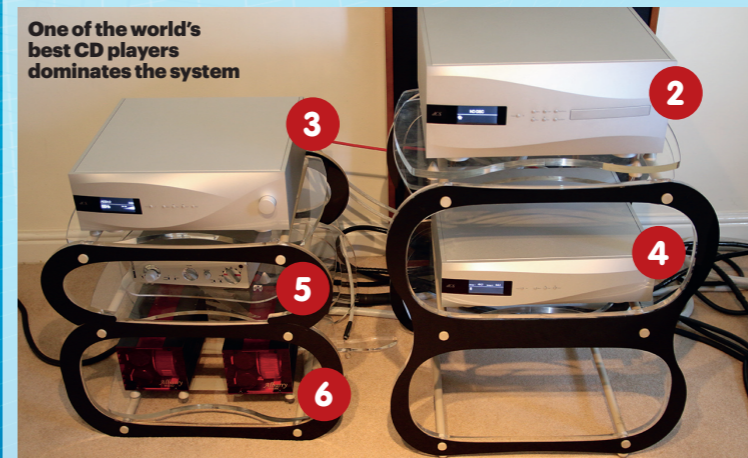
Acting as the glue between these components is a pairing of two more brands not often seen in the UK – Nagra and Albarry. Just 30 seconds of Martha Tilston's *Stag's Bellow* is enough to recognise the same happy synergy that underpins the other

systems is present here. The Diablo pays only cursory attention to the laws of physics, producing a vast and open soundstage with pinpoint positioning of performers and incredible detail. The dCS has an extraordinary ability to pull everything off a disc without tipping over into a merciless evaluation of the flaws of the piece.

Finishing off the day with some Afro Celt Soundsystem reveals that this system is simply devastating. The slow building *Sure-as-knot* is effortlessly unpicked, expanding into a massive wall of sound. It seems faintly improbable that a two-way standmount should demonstrate even more low-end shove than the two much larger speakers used in the other systems, but the Diablo has obviously made some sort of pact with its namesake that imbues it with a potency that no speaker of this size should have. I'm sure there are cogent arguments for spending more money on speakers to better compliment the source, but none seem especially valid when confronted with the Focal.

On paper, this system is less logical than its two more terrestrially priced counterparts – it will seem odd to spend more than twice the price of the amplifier and speakers on the source, but the way the electronics combine is as cohesive as the other systems here and it can easily take on pretty much any other system I've heard at this price.

One of the world's best CD players dominates the system



The Focal is awesomely talented with huge scale

When you consider that the Diablo is far easier to get working happily in a more conventionally sized UK lounge and that even with three substantial boxes of dCS, it is still impressively compact. In short, this is a quite sensational system.

- 1 FOCAL DIABLO UTOPIA SPEAKERS AND STANDS £8,799
- 2 DCS VIVALDI TRANSPORT £24,500
- 3 DCS VIVALDI DAC £20,000
- 4 DCS VIVALDI CLOCK £9,700
- 5 NAGRA MELODY PREAMPLIFIER £6,000
- 6 ALBARRY MT108 MONO BLOC POWER AMPLIFIERS (PAIR) £6,495
- MUSICWORKS REVO 3-TIER TABLE £1,300
- MUSICWORKS REFLEX ULTRA MAINS DISTRIBUTION BLOCK £890
- MUSICWORKS REVIVE IEC LEAD 6 £750
- AUDIOMICA ORMUS CONSEQUENCE AES CABLE (PAIR) 1M £1,525
- AUDIOMICA EUROPA ULTRA REF INTERCONNECT 1M £1,330
- AUDIOMICA MIAMEN CONSEQUENCE SPEAKER CABLE (4.5M) £5,100
- TOTAL SYSTEM PRICE: £63,985



In this day and age, it is not too difficult for a dealer to find brands that are not commonly seen at rival premises. What is harder is turning these products into a portfolio that works together and compels you to seek them out. Larry has managed to do this with a success that

makes this undoubtedly one of the key destination stores in the UK – one that will attract visitors from far and wide. What is more impressive still is that although many of the products at The Audio Works are undoubtedly high end, the performance of the comparatively

sanely priced system one still gives a big slice of the philosophy and intent of the more expensive examples. There are some very rare and exciting brands on sale at The Audio Works, but the completed systems it offers are even more exciting still.