



# AMR CD-77

*A radical approach to the use of new-old-stock lies at the heart of this substantial CD player*

**PRICE** £4,400 **CONTACT** Real Hi-Fi, 35 Water Drive, Standish WN6 0EH ☎ 0870 909 6777 🌐 www.amr-audio.co.uk

**A**MR's products look extremely professional: the detailing is superb and the features are very much of the moment, yet this company has been producing manufactured hardware for less than a year. Not many companies emerge fully formed in the high end quite so smoothly, but not many have the luxury of spending six years doing their R&D and design work without having to launch any hardware.

AMR stands for Abingdon Music Research, Abingdon being the town in Oxfordshire where BMC took the humble Mini and turned it into a world beating rally car. AMR's thinking is that it has the same approach to the design and manufacture of 'ultra-fidelity' components as BMC's engineers did when getting the best

We had to ask AMR why the CD-77 weighs 39 hemia-inducing kilos. Apparently the reason is that it's built on a copper chassis that is then encased in 10mm thick aluminium. Then the separate digital and analogue transformers alongside fully dual-mono output stages, choke input filtering (more transformers) and a suspended disc drive all add up.

Discs are changed by manually sliding back the lid, removing and then replacing a large puck once you've inserted a disc. Closing the lid again causes the machine to start playing whatever you put inside. The remote is an amalgamation of regular buttons and a touch screen; you can guess which are easiest to use but all of them work fine. The touch sensitive buttons on the player are a nicer touch, so to

associated with romantic-sounding valve amps. There's just good, plain, warts-and-all transparency that makes for music that is almost impossible to switch off – unless you have a deadline to meet!

It is not quite as refined or densely detailed as more expensive competitors and those looking for a super-smooth sound might be better off elsewhere. Those looking to hear right into the music and to enjoy the harmonics of instruments and voices, on the other hand, will be very happy. I'm not saying it's crude: it has considerable poise and finesse for its price but it makes a lot of the competition sound bland. It also has that all-important quality known as 'speed': the tempo is right on the money and there's plenty of time for notes to attack and decay, as well as the musical thrill power that this quality creates.

Next to our reference Resolution Audio Opus 21 CD player it sounds surprisingly similar, but adds to that player's similarly revealing and dynamic sound the qualities one associates with great valve equipment. Notably, that's a greater sense of body and life to each instrument and voice, along with an extra ease that means you can play louder without risking ear ache. The only area where the Opus 21 takes the lead is the bass, where its solid-state output stage has a more, well, solid feel. Overall, however, the AMR makes the more beguiling sound and, despite its ungainly weight, we'd certainly hang on to it if we could.

Another thing that appeals to vinyl heads like me is the way you can use it almost like a turntable. If you want to change a disc, just open the lid and swap it. Closing the lid initiates play again. Sometimes you don't want the first track but that's what the remote is for, and it's a worthwhile concession for the ergonomic benefit. 🍷

*Jason Kennedy*

## “The CD-77 also has that all-important quality known as speed: the tempo is right on the money”

out of the Mini. AMR is based in London but has its assembly facility in China and sources components from around the globe.

The CD-77 is a heavyweight single-box CD player that has an all-valve output stage using new-old-stock valves, and is based around a vintage DAC chip, the Philips TDA1541A, another new-old-stock component. Using valves in this way is not unusual in high-end hi-fi, but sourcing a DAC that went out of production ten years ago is pretty radical. The two engineers behind AMR, Pat Wayne and Thorsten Loesch, are both big fans of this classic multibit device and feel that no-one has built a better digital-to-analogue converter since. That suggests they have a pretty low opinion of the current over/up-sampling mania.

Having said that, the CD-77 offers a range of over and upsampling rates all the way from none to 192kHz, so AMR has not allowed its preference for old school converters to get in the way of commercial reality. The CD-77's default setting is what it calls Digital Master II, which uses no oversampling but has an analogue filter to compensate for the slight roll-off in the treble that occurs with the pure, filter-free, non-oversampling setting dubbed Digital Master I. The user has the option of choosing from those or either two-times or four-times oversampling, as well as 96kHz or 192kHz upsampling. These changes can be done on-the-fly with the remote.

Generously AMR supplies not only a fancy power lead but interconnects that use the same silver-plated copper wire that features inside the player.

Does this idiosyncratic approach add up to great CD sound? The answer has to be a resounding 'yes'. The CD-77 is one of the most dynamic and engaging players we have come across regardless of price. We stuck to the frequency balanced, non-oversampling DMII setting and were thrilled by the speed and poise that it brought to our music. Although valves have been used you'd have to be a knowledgeable tube-head to spot it, but the dynamics and timbral resolve give the game away if you know what you're listening for. Thankfully there's none of the colour or unnaturally emphasised 'naturalness' that is

