

A CD player that sounds like vinyl? The prosaically named **Drive 1 Mk2/DAC 1 Mk4** is a great piece of kit, pulled off by German newcomer Accustic Arts

CD PLAYER
ACCUSTIC ARTS
DRIVE 1 MK2/
DAC 1 MK4
★★★★★
£ 2990/3195

FOR

Impressive build; natural and fluid presentation; treble refinement

AGAINST

All this player lacks is a little verve

VERDICT

This is a great-sounding combination that just needs a little extra bite to become a class-leading all-rounder



DRIVE 1 MK2
TYPE Transport
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL
OUTPUTS AES/EBU,
SP/diff RCA,
SP/diff BNC
OPTICAL DIGITAL
OUTPUT None
CD TEXT No
MEMORY Yes
DISPLAY OFF No
FINISH Silver/chrome

DAC 1 MK4
TYPE Digital-to-analogue converter
ELECTRICAL DIGITAL
INPUTS AES/EBU, SP/
diff RCA x 2, SP/diff BNC
OPTICAL DIGITAL
OUTPUT None
HDCD No
DIGITAL OUTPUT
RCA, AES/EBU
ANALOGUE OUTPUT
RCA, balanced XLR
VARIABLE OUTPUT No
FINISH Silver/chrome

ACCUSTIC ARTS IS a name that's new to us, but judging by the quality of this German two-box CD player, it's a company to be reckoned with.

The Drive 1 Mk2/DAC 1 Mk4, to give them their full names, are immensely well built, as you'd expect at the price. The Drive 1 Mk2 transport is a simply laid-out affair, with chunkily proportioned controls. We particularly like the sliding mirrored cover that protects the disc-spinning mechanism: it feels solid and lights up a funky shade of blue, if desired. As with most specialist manufacturers, Accustic Arts buys in an OEM CD-spinning mechanism rather than making one in-house. Here, it's the well-proven Philips CDM Pro 2M.

"Treble shimmers, is refined and packed with detail. There's not a hint of the bright, hard sound that CD replay is tarred with"

This CD player is one of the most natural and fluid we've heard. It makes much of the competition sound mechanical, and mirrors the organic quality most people like in vinyl. Voices and instruments are richly textured, which adds considerably to the sense of believability. Treble has to come in for a special mention: it shimmers when required, is refined, and packed with detail. There's not a hint of the bright, hard sound that CD replay is still tarred with.

Pulling its sonic punches

So far, you know there is an awful lot this two-boxer does well. It's undoubtedly right up there with the very best in its areas of strength. However, the Accustic Arts isn't quite the brilliant all-rounder we hoped for. Play something simple such as The Beatles' *Help!* and you'll notice a subtle lack of exuberance and drive. This player pulls its punches when it comes to delivering hard-hitting dynamics, and so fails to milk a recording for every last percentage point of drama. A slightly lazy attitude to timing doesn't help either, with the player failing to convey the momentum in a piece of



music with the conviction we would like.

We need to keep things in perspective. Neither of the shortcomings we've mentioned is massive, but they do manage to take the edge off what is otherwise a class-leading performance. Overall, this two-box combination is a good one. It may not tick all the boxes, but it does well enough to earn a recommendation.



The Drive 1 Mk2/DAC 1 Mk4 from Accustic Arts gives CDs that special vinyl sound



If you can do without the sound stage, the **ATH-W1000s** from Audio-Technica are a steal at £400

GOOD HEADPHONES, SUCH as these Audio-Technicas, are great value. That's right, we really are saying the £400 ATH-W1000s are great value. Why? If you tend to listen to music alone, you'd have to spend four figures on speakers plus a similar amount on suitable amplification to get similar results. These headphones are comfortable, too.

"These Audio-Technica headphones are vivid enough to squeeze every drop of drama from Tchaikovsky's 1812"

Audio-Technica's engineers have judged the sonic presentation well. These 'phones are vivid enough to squeeze every last drop of drama from Tchaikovsky's 1812 while having the refinement to keep a rough recording like Grinderman's debut set in check.

Judged by the high standards of the price we'd like slightly richer, better textured highs and a touch more subtlety in the midrange, but these are minor shortcomings. Budget around £300-£400 for a decent headphone amp from the likes of Creek or Graham Slee, ensure you've got a source at least as capable as Rega's Apollo CD player, and you'll end up with a sound that will be hard to better by conventional means.

HEADPHONES
AUDIO-TECHNICA
ATH-W1000
SOVEREIGN
★★★★★
£ 400

FOR

Comfortable; deliver a massive amount of insight into a recording; well-judged sonic balance

AGAINST

A slight lack of subtlety in the midrange and treble

VERDICT

Pricy, but a fine buy nevertheless



TYPE Over ear
DESIGN Clarino man-made leather pads; closed-back cherrywood housings
WEIGHT 350g
3.5MM JACK No
6.3MM JACK Yes
CABLE LENGTH 3m
IMPEDANCE 40 ohms