

WHAT HI★FI?

SOUND AND VISION

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Exclusive test of new Azur 740 CD & amp

haymarket



GAME ON! PS3 vs X-BOX FOR MOVIES, MUSIC & MORE p49

You'll need a preposterously big kit rack to accommodate these **Audio Research REF 210** amps



IN HI-FI, COMPOSURE isn't a particularly glamorous-sounding talent. We're sure most people would put speed and dynamics well ahead in a list of desirable traits. That is until they hear composure, REF 210 style. Throw the most complex and demanding music you know at them – Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, *The Battle* from *Gladiator*'s OST or Massive Attack's *Angel* – and the 210s respond with a spellbinding calmness.

Vying for 'best ever amp' tag

None of the excitement and drive of the music is lost – attack is furious, while detail is as good as it gets – but these valve-powered monoblocs deliver the sound without ever sounding rushed. A power output of 2 x 210 watts helps, but these amps sound far stronger than even that massive figure suggests.

Complaints? Well, the REF 210s are packed with valves, so it's no surprise they run hot. Their cooling fans are noisy, too, though this is only a problem if you sit closer than 3m. Also, don't even think

“We can talk about specifics all day, but the fact is it plays music better than anything”

of skimping on the partners. Consider the glorious Audio Research REF 3 pre-amp mandatory (another nine grand), plus source and speaker combo to match.

That's a truckload of money, but hear these in full flow, and you'll spend hours figuring out how to earn it. We can talk about resolution and timing all day, but the nub of it is that these play music better than anything else we've heard.

MONO POWER AMPS
AUDIO RESEARCH
REF 210



£ 8950 each

FOR

Utterly brilliant sound quality; built to last

AGAINST

More of a workhorse than a show pony; runs hot

VERDICT

The REF 210s are some of the finest amplification ever made; you mustn't skimp on the rest of the system, though



POWER OUTPUT

210 watts

INPUT

Balanced XLR

FINISH

Black/silver