

Audio Research Reference CD7

★★★★★

£7500

IF YOU VALUE form over (or just as much as) function, then you might struggle to find the heart to include the Audio Research Reference CD7 on your shortlist. Here's a CD player that positively revels in its own utilitarian unloveliness – it looks like the kind of equipment Dr Who employed on board the Tardis back when Dr Who was still our mate Tom Baker.

Chunky grab handles suggest rack-mounting possibilities, though the over-sized fascia isn't drilled to allow it. The control buttons also

“Behind the Mr Bean looks, this CD player sounds just as charming as George Clooney”

look as if they belong on a much less expensive machine. If the CD7 were a person, it would have a row of different-coloured biro clipped into its shirt breast pocket.

Specification is intriguing, though, particularly the use of seven valves in conjunction with a Crystal 24-bit DAC – the top of the player is heavily vented to cope with the valves' heat emissions.

FOR
Unburstable build quality; articulate, understated and engaging sound

AGAINST
Retro looks (but not in a good way); timing lacks absolute precision

VERDICT
Sweet, graceful sounds from what looks like an audiophile breezeblock



The disc tray is a manually operated top-loading affair. And though this is lacking a little of the sophistication of the motorised trays that some high-end players have, it feels just as reassuringly heavy and rugged as the rest of the Audio Research player.

Ugly duckling with a tuxedo sound

And if you can get beyond the Mr Bean looks, you'll find this CD player sounds as smooth and charming as George Clooney. That revelation only comes after a short while, mind you – for all its bulk, the CD7 isn't going to grab you by the lapels.

Grant Green's *Down Here On The Ground* initially sounds safe and undemonstrative, but given a little time you'll find the Audio Research has revealed the song in its entirety. Sweet, subtle and musical, the CD7 presents a spacious soundstage, binds each thread of the song securely into its right place, and saunters through the tune with the effortless stride of a truly authoritative silver-disc player.

An attacking recording like Massive Attack's *Rising Son* offers more of a test to the CD7. And though there's a tiny lack of fluency to its timing of this complex tune, it's every bit as impressive where focus and outright resolution are concerned. Similarly, listening to Mint Royale's surprise number one track, *Singing In the Rain*, the neat, synth soundtrack is effortlessly conveyed, but without perhaps the last ounce of dash.

If you want a CD player that's happy to dish out the finest musical details in a superbly unflussy and unforced manner, and you don't mind that it's had a run-in with the ugly stick, this could well be the one. Give it an audition for sure.

SPECIFICATION

Audio outputs RCA phono, XLR, coaxial digital
Headphone out No **HD/CD** No **CD Text** No **Memory**
Yes Display off **Yes Finishes** Silver **Dimensions**
(hwd) 13x48x39cm **Weight** 14kg

www.audioresearch.com

020 8971 3909