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„Hi-Fi Choice”

January 2009, Issue 315

Arcam CD17/A38

W styczniowym numerze „Hi-Fi Choice” ukazał się test systemu Arcam CD17/A38 z serii FMJ.

Urządzenia zostały dostrzeżone i nagrodzone wyróżnieniem Best Buy Hi-Fi Choice Magazine.

W teście czytamy:

„Bas jest mocny i dobrze prowadzony (...). Scena dwukanałowa jest dobra – mówimy o precyzji

i stabilności lokowania instrumentów, choć wokół instrumentów jest nieco mniej powietrza niż czasem słyszymy.

Mimo to precyzja pozwalała z łatwością wyróżnić poszczególne linie. Choć dwukanałowiec nie jest hiperanalityczny, jest w nim mnóstwo detali. Dodajmy jeszcze, że w różnorodnych słuchaniach była

pełna zgoda co do tego, że odtwarzacz CD i wzmacniacz są znakomicie skomponowane pod względem dwukanałowym.”



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ARCAM CD17/A38

At first glance prices seem ill-matched, but take a closer look...

When we asked manufacturers for pairs of CD player and amp, we took care not to be too restrictive in terms of price, giving only an overall ballpark target. Arcam could have fielded several combinations that would have met our request, but took what turned out to be an unusual approach in sending an amp costing over twice as much as the CD player. We can easily see the logic here, though: we've opined in this very publication that the law of diminishing returns sets in quicker with CD players than with amps, so apportioning the budget in this way is not something we regard as bizarre.

In many ways these two units are well matched – obviously visually, but also in terms of general internal and external construction. They both feature sensible use of modern components and circuit techniques (both use surface-mount components very widely), with shrewd employment of high-grade passive parts among the integrated circuits. The amp has a rather more modest-looking output stage than some of the other amps in this group, but it uses some rather clever output transistors with enhanced thermal stability, which should help it cope with heavy loading and the toroidal transformer is adequate rather than over-specified.

Arcam has not deprived these units of features. The CD17 supports CD text, albeit with some limitations and the amp has such niceties as input level trims and a choice of volume steps (2dB, 1dB, 0.5dB) thanks to the electronic volume control. Main switching is by relays, with electronic switches apparently routing the record selection, which can be independent of the listening selection. Build quality is good and the lightweight top cover of each unit is efficiently damped.

SOUND QUALITY

It's always nice to have our previous reviews borne out by new listening test evidence and in this case our listeners reiterated comments from the past about civilised, polished performance from these units. The bass was well-liked, but it seemed to be the upper midrange and treble where these units were most clearly distinguished from their peers, with great detail and refinement going hand-in-hand with excellent integration.

There was slight disagreement about the tonality, which we tend to interpret as a question of presentation rather than actual frequency response (which is, of course, essentially flat, as expected). Some comments suggested that the sound can be a little thin at times, which implies an over-emphasis of the treble, while others praised tonality as neutral. It seems that the particularly clear quality of the treble has differing effects on listeners, some finding that it draws attention to the upper frequencies in such a way as to boost them subjectively. This is just the kind of subtle difference, we feel, which justifies the existence of multiple products in the market.

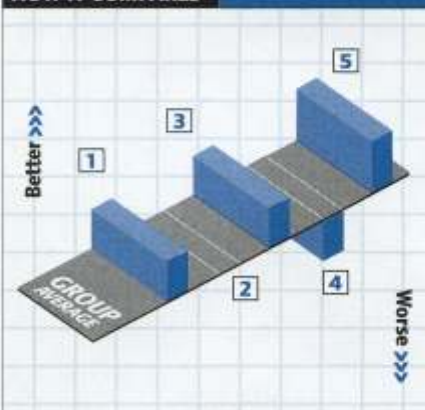
Bass is strong and well extended, but perhaps not quite as full of impact as some of the combinations produced. It just isn't the tightest of the group, but there's still decent rhythm to be heard. Stereo imaging is good in terms of precision and stability of instrumental placing, but there's rather less space and air around the performers than we've sometimes heard. Still, the precision makes it easy to pick out individual lines and while the sound is not hyper-analytical it's plenty clear enough to allow one to hear detail. Incidentally, sighted listening after the main panel session suggested that the CD player and amp are indeed very closely matched in sonic attainment. **HFC**



LAB REPORT

Despite the relatively modest dimensions of the amp, it's quite powerful and also has relatively high power headroom. Its frequency response is beyond reproach; flat to less than 1dB a full two octaves above and beyond the audio band. Distortion is extremely low and is very similar in level whether the amp is driving 8 ohms or 4; in fact, high-frequency distortion is actually slightly lower into 4 ohms, a highly unusual situation, but not one we're inclined the agonise over when the level in question is still well below 0.01 per cent. The CD player has similar distortion to the amp at low and midrange frequencies and full level, though it effectively vanishes below about -10dB output. Jitter is hardly measureable and noise from the CD player is very low: the amp's noise floor is a little higher than average, but still more than adequate. The amp's output impedance is higher than average, but the overall effect on speaker damping will be small.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +20%
- 2] Frequency response >> 0%
- 3] Distortion >> +20%
- 4] Dynamic range >> -20%
- 5] Jitter >> +30%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	100W	110W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.005%	0.0015%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	±	±0.2dB

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



Sound is above all civilised, with a positively deluxe feel to the super-smooth – but highly detailed – treble. Bass is clear if not the weightiest ever. Stereo imaging is good in terms of precision, though not the tightest in the group.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE
★★★★★