

Hi-fi newsTM

PURE AUDIO EXCELLENCE

www.hifinews.co.uk

May 2007

PACKED!

WITH DEFINITIVE TESTS

Boxing Clever

We test Meridian's all-in-one DVD receiver system



TURNTABLE REFIT LP12 GETS FUNKY



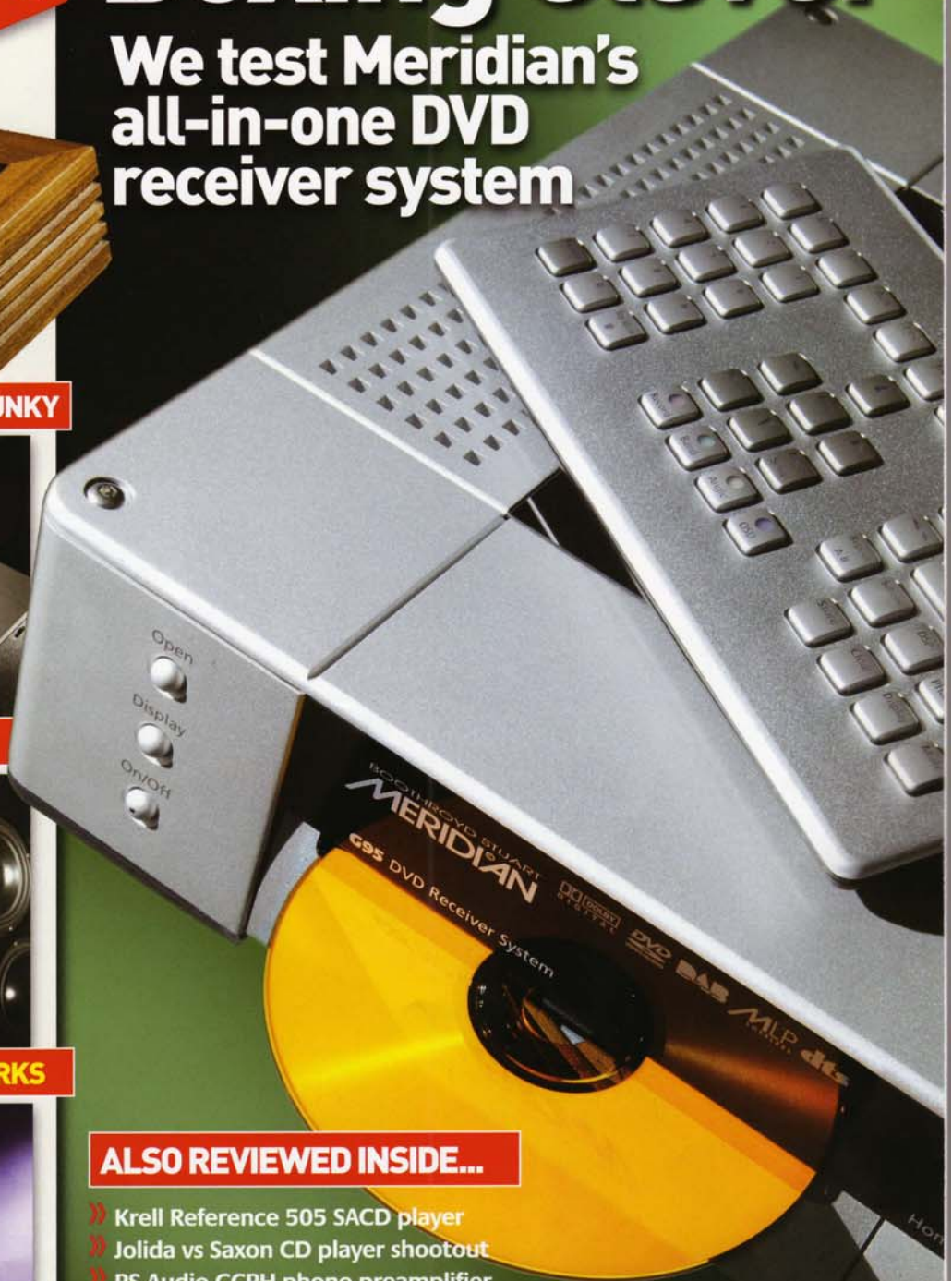
AMP COMBINATION BRYSTON



LOUDSPEAKER EGGLESTON WORKS



PREAMPLIFIER CHORD ELECTRONICS



ALSO REVIEWED INSIDE...

- » Krell Reference 505 SACD player
- » Jolida vs Saxon CD player shootout
- » PS Audio GCPH phono preamplifier
- » SonicGear and Audica micro systems
- » Arcam FMJ DV139 Universal DVD player
- » Cambridge Audio Azur 640R AV receiver
- » Unison Research and Opera Super System

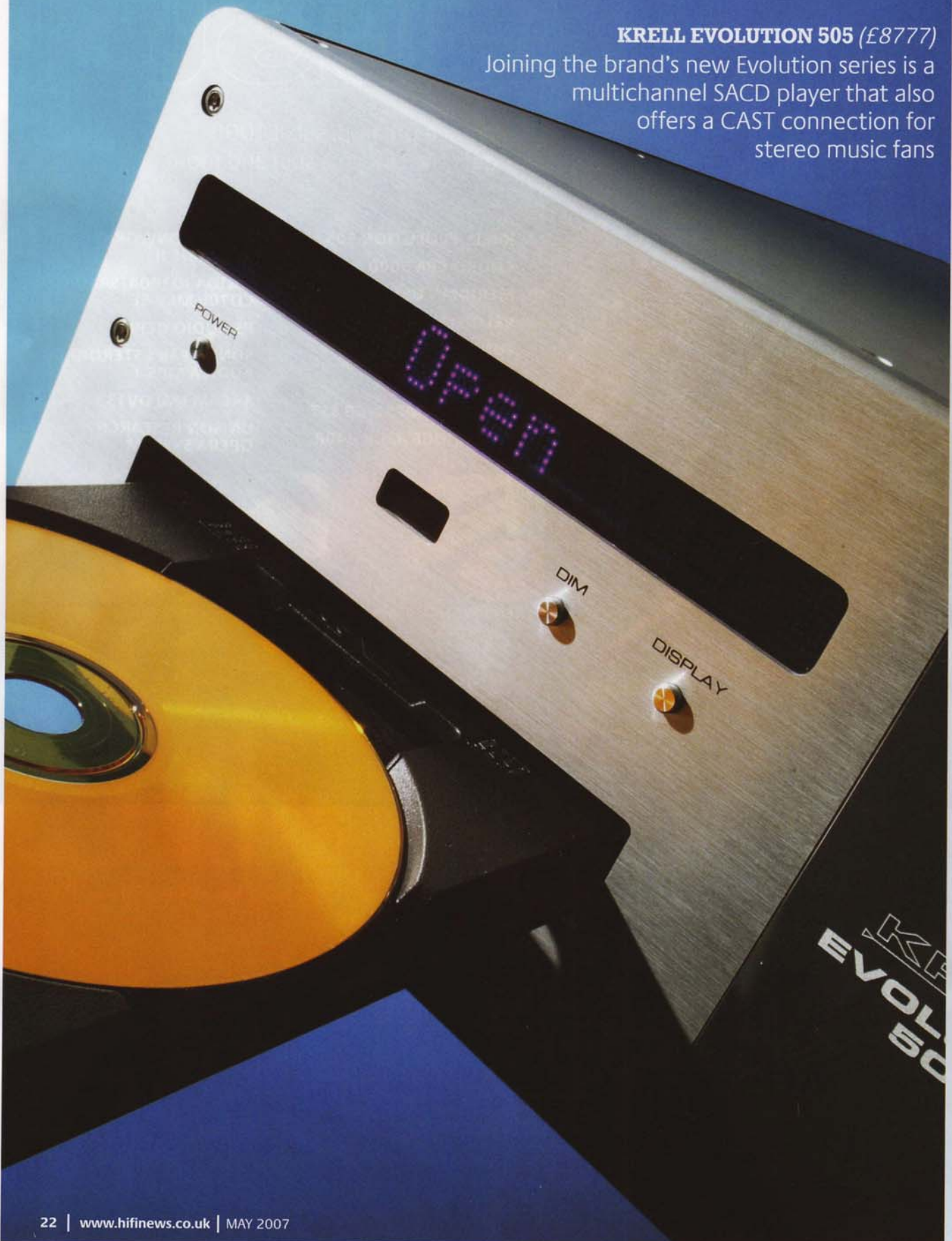
UK £4.00 US \$9.50 Aus \$9.95



Current Affair

KRELL EVOLUTION 505 (£8777)

Joining the brand's new Evolution series is a multichannel SACD player that also offers a CAST connection for stereo music fans



Tested by Ian Harris

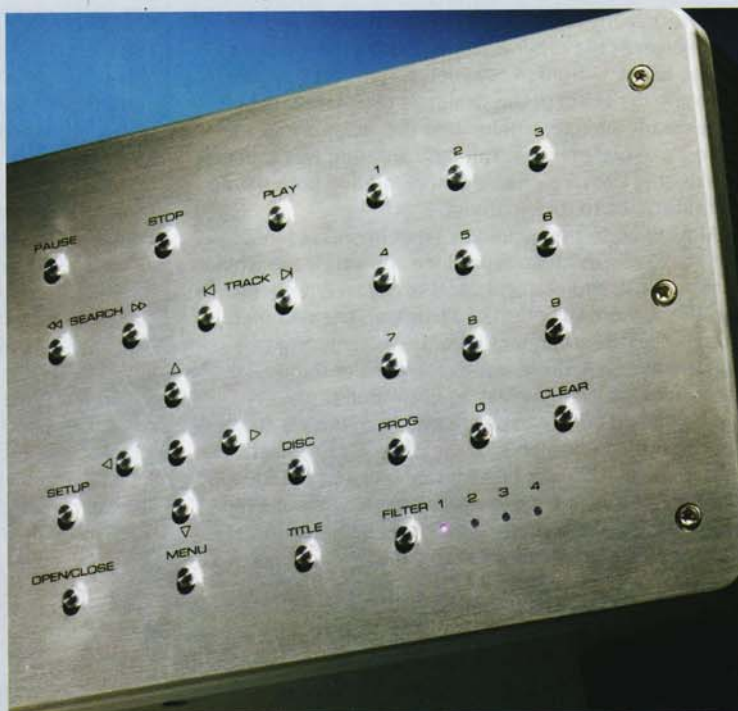
In these rather fraught days for the two-channel sector, the launch of a new stereo-friendly range by any manufacturer is a welcome event. When the manufacturer is Krell, and the range is as far reaching as the Evolution series, the welcome event becomes a major celebration.

OK, the Evolution 505 SACD/CD player is actually a multi-channel component, offering 5.1 replay on suitably encoded SACDs, but the relative paucity of any flavour of SACD makes it likely that the 505 will spend the vast majority of its time playing in stereo. Which was a good enough reason for me to leap at the chance of reviewing the 505 in my two-channel set-up.

SHOUT FROM ON HIGH

The unit's construction is all that you would expect of a component from Krell. The thick and lustrous aluminium faceplate, with its stainless steel centre-piece and vivid blue dot-matrix display, exudes quality and positively shouts of the player's high-end status. Although undeniably attractive, in aesthetic terms the plethora of controls gives the unit a 'technical' rather than a truly elegant look. In an era where we've all seen someone execute several laps of the living room searching for a remote (without even considering using on-unit controls), it's a moot point how many of the 30-plus buttons on the 505's fascia are ever going to be used. While my personal preference would be for a simpler, less crowded control zone, I'm sure there are those who will applaud the flexibility of on-unit control.

A quick look at the rear panel shows that connectivity of almost every form is catered for fully. Analogue outputs include balanced and single-ended, as well as Krell's proprietary CAST topology (see 'Current Fun' panel on p24). Both optical and co-axial digital outputs are also present and correct (CD only), along with a wide range of control options. AC input is via a standard 16 amp connection, allowing substitution of the mains lead to one of the user's choice, if required.



'If its bass made an immediate impact, it was due to its quality, rather than any hint of inappropriate tonal balance'

ABOVE: A plethora of buttons on the Evolution 505 means you can safely lose your handset and still take control

Operationally, the 505 was a model component. While initial TOC reading was a little slow (often the case with hybrid CD/SACD transports), commands from the supplied aluminium-cased remote handset were accepted from conveniently wide angles, and the display was clearly readable from my four-metre listening position. Transport loading was smooth and reassuringly positive and, while the unit generated enough heat to suggest a substantial class A output stage, the casework never reached temperature levels which might complicate installation.

SOUND QUALITY

While an initial listen often provides the purest impression of a new component, immediately 'outstanding' qualities sometimes can speak of subtle over-emphasis. In the Evolution 505's case, however, if its bass made an immediate impact, it was indisputably due to its quality rather than any hint of inappropriate tonal balance. While a spot-on combination of speed and weight is expected at this heady level, the Krell also provided an unusually musical low-frequency presentation. However deep bass lines resided in the mix, they universally blossomed into tuneful strands of counterpoint in their own right.

Another positive aspect of the low frequency reproduction was the fact it 'did' both subtlety and power equally well. At one extreme, in the title track from Gordon Lightfoot's *If You Could Read My Mind*, the bass line is initially picked out on an acoustic guitar, but as the track builds, an electric bass kicks in, providing a subtle sonic change of gear. While it may seem trite to comment on a very serious player distinguishing between an acoustic and an electric bass, the degree of timbral detail the 505 uncovered, without making



the effect seem contrived or disjointed, was deeply impressive. At the other extreme, during Peter Hook's driving bass line from Joy Division's 'Transmission', the changing dynamics of the strings as their arcs reduced were clearly audible, highlighting the variations in intervals between notes. This bass phrasing was exposed to a degree I've rarely heard before, adding both drive and substance to rock material.

Moving up to the midrange, what impressed most was the Krell's ability to reproduce accurately the whole gamut of instrumental and vocal textures. Whether it was the authoritative rasp of a trumpet, the shimmer of an orchestral string section or the rotary chirp of a Hammond organ, there was a real sense of the actual mechanics involved in creating each sound.

Insight and coherence were also from the very top drawer, during Eric Bibb's 'Get It While It's Hot', both the subterranean rumbling of a sousaphone and the squeal of a harmonica were wonderfully drawn, without ever obscuring the more subtle differences between guitar and mandolin further down in the mix.

HIGHLY EXPLICIT

In terms of vocal and instrumental presence, the Krell provided impressive image solidarity, along with a spatially explicit soundstage. As well as generating images well outside both left and right speakers, the 505 also maintained a solid sense of finely graduated depth, even when the image in question was directly behind a loudspeaker.

With transducers as visually imposing as the MartinLogan Prodigy, this is quite an achievement, and the Krell certainly meets the gold-standard when

'The Krell provided impressive image solidarity, along with a highly spatially explicit soundstage'

it comes to expansive and detailed soundstaging. High-frequency reproduction was equally impressive, with tremendous transient speed and impact, along with sometimes startling amount of detail. Cymbals shimmered realistically, and even details as ephemeral as triangle strikes had a piercing sense of presence.

CURRENT FUN

The Evolution 505 features Krell's Current Mode and Current Audio Signal Transmission (CAST) technologies, aimed at reducing the effects of current-to-voltage conversions on the audio signal. In a full CAST system, the signal remains in the current domain until one final I-V conversion in the power amplifier. Krell claims that as there's noise involved in such signal conversion, one incidence should be cumulatively quieter than three (source, pre and power stages). Transferring the audio signal in the current domain is also claimed to reduce the deleterious effect of interconnects. In a traditional system, signal flows from low impedance to high (source to pre, or pre to power), and the impedance of the cable can provide an effect on the audio signal. Using two current mode devices, signal flows from high impedance to low, masking the influence of the interconnect. Krell suggests that maintaining the signal in current mode throughout means the whole system acts as one unified component, rather than a number of interlinked ones. Krell Current Mode refers to the circuit topology within each component, which retains the signal in the current domain from start to finish. Like a player with dual valve and solid-state output stages, the Krell offers both a current output (via the CAST terminals) and a voltage output (via the others).



BELOW: The 505 includes stereo outputs on XLR (balanced) and CAST, plus 5.1 multichannel outputs

Ultimately, though, it was the sense of consistent excellence throughout the frequency range which impressed most. If it was bass which stood out during Soul II Soul's *Club Classics Volume 1*, it might be midrange which caught the ear listening to Ella Fitzgerald. Critically, you never felt the player was emphasising one aspect of a recording, or force-feeding you detail. While the Evolution 505 definitely had the knack of digging out new sonic gems from whatever material was being played, they were always presented in a wholly natural manner.





SACD playback undoubtedly moved the quality up yet another level. While some listeners bemoan a lack of dynamic 'edge' to the SACD sound, this viewpoint was hard to reconcile with the vital sound the 505 was emitting. Listening to Eleanor McEvoy's *Yola*, Brian Connor's Steinway piano had a stunning in-room presence and impact. Dynamic range here had a much more genuine feel than the superficial excitement sometimes heard on edgy CD tracks, meaning that – while fortissimo notes might pin you to your seat – the effect was never fatiguing.

FOUR FILTERS

The 505 offers four filter options for use when playing back SACDs (against two for CD) and, notwithstanding a marked change in gain between positions two and three, they can be used to play off ultimate dynamics against warmth and insight.

Some users will find a setting they prefer for all material, others will switch depending on mood and material. Either way, the options do add to the unit's flexibility, although

it is possible to exasperate yourself figuring out which setting is most appropriate as you change between tracks and discs.

Of course, it would be disappointing if the Evolution 505 was not a little special. In terms of value, the Krell is subject to both the genuine excellence now available at substantially lower price points, and that strange transatlantic conundrum, where everything,

from CD players to cars, seems to have the same ballpark figures on the price tag, whether accompanied by a UK Sterling symbol or a US Dollar one.

Even taking this into account, the Evolution 505 makes a very strong case for itself. Its performance with Red Book CD is good enough to put it very close to the state of the art, while SACD performance is quite simply tremendous.

In the context of my non-Krell (and, therefore, non-CAST) set-up, the 505 earns a strong recommendation for those with deep enough pockets; as the source for a full Evolution CAST set-up, it deserves to be the default choice. ⚡

FOR:
Clean,
accurate,
musical

AGAINST: Substantial
cost, that's all

Verdict **KRELL EVOLUTION 505** (£8777)

While nominally multi-channel, a lack of suitable material will likely make stereo the Evolution 505's staple diet. In this guise, the unit excels, with a clever combination of subjectively flawless sonic accuracy and enough soul to really bring music to life. SACD facility is a welcome one for those with appropriate software, adding a layer of naturalness and musical flow above and beyond CD playback. Strongly recommended for those with deep enough pockets.

FEATURES



SOUND QUALITY



BUILD QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



Hi-fi news 17/20

OVERALL RATING

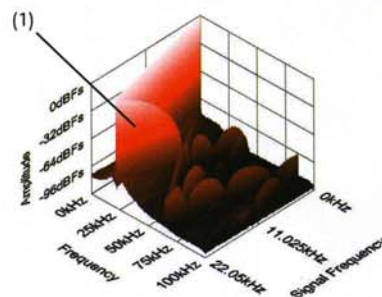
Review system breakdown

AMPLIFIERS: Musical Fidelity kWP preamp, kW power amp
LOUDSPEAKERS: Martin Logan Prodigy

Contact numbers

UK DISTRIBUTOR: Absolute Sounds **TEL:** 020 8971 3909
WEB: www.krellonline.com

Hi-fi News lab report



The first two digital filter options have an important impact on the performance of Krell's 505 with CD media. The first behaves like a standard, brickwall FIR filter offering some 80dB rejection of stopband images together with a response that rolls almost imperceptibly to -0.2dB at 20kHz. The second filter employs a far gentler slope to reduce what are known as 'pre and post echoes' with transient data while also reducing any group delay. This is achieved at the expense of increased digital 'images' (just -7.7dB immediately outside of the audioband, indicated by (1) on the graph, above) and a more rolled-off treble response (-3.2dB at 20kHz).

Otherwise, the 505 offers a combination of low distortion (0.0005% through the midrange, rising to 0.005% at 20kHz), excellent low-level resolution and a wide 107dB S/N ratio. Incidentally, the full four filter settings all have an effect with SACD which rolls-away to -15dB, -19dB, -13dB and -14.5dB at 100kHz, respectively. Full QC Suite Reports for the 505's CD and SACD performance, with the alternative digital filters, are available at www.milleraudioresearch.com/avtech. PM

Hi-fi News lab specifications

Maximum Output Level	3.96Vrms (balanced outputs)
A-wtd S/N Ratio	107.1dB
Distortion 1kHz, 0dBFS/-30dBFS	0.0005%/0.004%
Distortion 20kHz, 0dBFS	0.005%
Frequency Response (CD, Filter 1 & 2)	+0.0/-0.19dB & +0.0/-3.2dB
Digital Jitter, CD/SACD	710psec/240psec
Resolution @ -100dB, CD/SACD	±0.1dB/±0.0dB
Stereo separation (20Hz-20kHz)	>104dB