

STEREO AMPLIFIER • EQUIPMENT RACK • EARPHONES

Tweaked NAD is more musical

STEREO AMPLIFIER
NAD
C325BEE
★★★★★
£250

FOR
Fluid, articulate midrange performance; refined highs; decent feature count

AGAINST
Lacks the drive and low-end grip of the best rivals

VERDICT
If you're looking for an easy-going, musical amplifier you should give this NAD a go

NAD HAS BUILT its reputation on great-sounding budget kit, in particular its amplifiers. So it was a real surprise when our August 2006 test sample of the C325BEE only won a three-star rating. We've since learnt we were supplied a very early sample, and that NAD later tweaked the design before distribution. So, we decided to have a second listen, to find out if the sound quality has improved as much as NAD claims.

The one thing we're in no doubt about is that the latest version is a lot more musical than the first sample. Its midrange is so much more organic, leaving

classy vocalists such as Beverley Knight sounding classier still. There's a good level of cohesion, and a fair bit of control as volume

"Extra musicality and a more refined sound see it gaining a star"

levels head north. Add improved top-end refinement, coupled to greater insight, and it's no surprise this amp's gained a star.

The good news continues with the NAD's specification. This is a

feature-packed amp, boasting 50 watts per channel – easily driving most price-compatible speakers.

However, the C325BEE needs stronger dynamics and a firmer grip in the bass if it's to seriously worry rivals such as the Rotel RA-04 or the Cambridge 540A v2. Crisper timing would help, too.

A more musical must-hear

So, if you like your music smooth and fluid, give this amp a go. It might not have the grip or punch of some, but it's now musical in the tradition of NAD's past budget efforts, and that makes it worthy of consideration.

ALSO CONSIDER ?

ROTEL RA-04
★★★★★
£250
March 2007
Get past the lack of remote control, and you'll find the best-sounding amp at this kind of money

CAMBRIDGE 540A V2
★★★★★
£200
March 2007
Need a remote? This is a crisp sounding rival to the Rotel. Don't use it with bright speakers, though



NAD regains some of its old form with this revised version of its budget amp

AV RACK
ATACAMA
EQUINOX AVI
★★★★★
£380

FOR
Expertly built platforms; neatly integrated TV mount; looks smart; fine performance

AGAINST
Nothing of note

VERDICT
Want to mount a flatscreen above your AV electronics? Here's a neat, system-boosting solution from a fine rack range

Atacama's TV turn

TO SAY ATACAMA'S Equinox has some pedigree in the world of racks would be like saying James Bond gets lucky with a lady occasionally. Both hi-fi and AV versions are Award winners, so we had high expectations for the latest addition.

In fact, we merely wanted to confirm our high expectations, as this is the same rack as the Equinox

AV, though with the added inclusion of an integrated TV mount, capable of holding a screen up to 44in in size.

Build quality and design are up to standard with the universal mount, and the ability to turn your screen up to 80 degrees either way once mounted is a clever touch.

Performance-boosting base

As well as the neat features and smart appearance, the Equinox AVI does the task of providing a stable base from which a detailed, dynamic sound can be produced. Similarly, pictures are vivid and immersive, with no sign of any faults introduced.

All told, this AVI is a winning addition to Atacama's Equinox range, which looks to have the competition well and truly – ahem! – on the rack.

The Equinox AVI's universal mount will hold anything up to a 44in TV



Beyerdynamic's buds will make your music flower

EARPHONES
BEYERDYNAMIC
DTX 50
★★★★★
£150

FOR
Unearth lots of detail; excellent bass; light and easy to transport

AGAINST
Some won't like the 'invasive' bud design

VERDICT
Plant these buds, and your portable player's tunes (especially the high bit-rate ones) will truly flower

THE SILICON PADS on these new Beyerdynamic earphones provide a snug, effectively noise-isolating fit. If you can tolerate such tightness (and not everyone can), your reward is excellent sound.

To hear the buds at their best, pack your MP3 player with high bit-rate music files. These allow the DTX50s to fluently display their taut (and surprisingly deep) bass, plus marvellous detail retrieval.

They may seem pricey, but if you're after a serious iPod upgrade, get burrowing with these buds.



Shut out the world with some audiophile earplugs today...