

## ONE-MAKE HI-FI SYSTEMS

NAD C515BEE



£175

NAD C315BEE



£190

Q Acoustics 1020i



£130



It would be tough to find another £500 system that offers so much hi-fi for the money

## NAD/Q Acoustics



£495

**JUST WHEN IT WAS** looking like Cambridge Audio was going to run away with the budget one-make gong for the second year in a row, this system came along.

It includes three products we've seen individually before – the five-star C515BEE CD player, four-star C315BEE amp, and four-star Q Acoustic 1020i speakers – so we were pretty confident when we assumed it would be solid, though perhaps unspectacular. Instead, it proves an object lesson in the power of careful system matching.

When the CD player received the *First Test* treatment, we noted that the timing could be better; with the amp it was a slightly ill-defined bass that bothered us; and the speakers were just a little bit, well, bland. However, in partnership, these components compensate for

## FOR

Impressively controlled and grown-up performance for the money; extremely flexible over music choice and positioning; very solid build

## AGAINST

Could do with perhaps a touch more attack

## VERDICT

Perhaps the most impressive sub-£500 system we've seen, and a great advert for well-thought-out kit-matching

each other's slight weaknesses, and highlight their strengths.

Try Bloc Party's *Mercury*, which made the Cambridge kit sound a little brash, and the NAD/Q Acoustics system produces an impressively mature performance. It controls the constantly shifting synthesized sounds extremely well, and balances the

**"This is an object lesson in the power of careful hi-fi system matching"**

fast-paced treble snap with the seismic bass convincingly. It doesn't have quite as much attack as the Cambridge system, but it's not far behind, and the extra control and bass weight is more than ample compensation.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this more grown-up approach suits orchestral pieces very well. Try *The Battle* from the *Gladiator* soundtrack and it conveys the peaks and troughs of the music with poise and finesse. What's

more, the performance is simply huge, both in terms of the weight of the delivery and the width of the soundstage – truly epic stuff.

**Happy with gentle genres, too**

Not that the NAD has a problem with small-scale, either. Play Sufjan Stevens' beautiful, minimalist *John Wayne Gacy Jr.* and you're rewarded with a detailed, nuanced and subtle performance, conveying all the introspection of the recording.

So, a budget system that can turn its hand to anything, made from components that have the odd individual flaw – it shouldn't work, but it does.

**INSTANT UPGRADE**

This system is superb as it is, but swapping the speakers for the Tannoy Mercury F1 Customs will yield even greater results. They have enough all-round ability to match the 1020i's strengths, but they also have extra verve and attack. At £110 they're cheaper than the Q Acoustics, too, if possibly not as good looking.



**NAD C515BEE**  
**OUTPUTS** Phono, Coaxial digital, Optical digital  
**MEMORY** Yes  
**FINISHES** 2

**NAD C315BEE**  
**POWER OUTPUT** 40W  
**LINE-LEVEL INPUTS** 6  
**TAPE LOOPS** 1  
**PREAMP** No  
**SPEAKERS** 1 pair  
**TONE CONTROLS** Yes  
**HEADPHONE** Yes  
**REMOTE** Yes  
**FINISHES** 1

**Q ACOUSTICS 1020i**  
**STANDMOUNTS**  
**SENSITIVITY** 88dB/w/m  
**IMPEDANCE** 6 ohms  
**POWER-HANDLING** 75W  
**BIWIREABLE** Yes  
**DIMENSIONS** 25 x 18 x 27cm  
**WEIGHT** 4kg