

TOP 100

The best 100 products from the best 100 brands of the last 20 years

Over the last 20 years and 170 issues, *Hi-Fi+* has amassed a significant number of product reviews. More than 2,800 in fact, which at a rough guess works out at almost three million words of reviews about some of the best products in audio. Looking through that archive gives one a unique perspective on audio in the dying embers of the 20th Century and the first years of the 21st. Fascinatingly, although some brands have changed hands (sometimes more than once), surprisingly few companies have entirely disappeared; of the 22 different brands featured in that first issue, 19 of them are still going strong.

Perhaps even more remarkably, you don't need to look much further to find products that remain in production; the Digital Stylus Force gauge made by The Cartridge Man is still made to this day, and a metal version of Clearaudio's acrylic cartridge alignment tool is also available. The VPI HW16.5 record cleaning machine is also in production but is presently not sold in the UK. To find the first product in the signal chain that is in production to this day, you need to fast forward to issue three (Oct/Nov 1999) and the Shahinian Starter loudspeaker, followed closely by that evergreen amplifier, the Naim NAP 250 in issue four (Dec 1999/Jan 2000). That last amplifier may have been boosted by DR (Discrete Regulator) upgrades in recent years, but at the time we reviewed it, the NAP 250 was already approaching 25 years old, and shows no signs of slowing down as it reaches its 45th birthday. There are few other branches of consumer electronics that can lay claim to such product life cycles.

What follows is a round-up of some of the best products from some of the best brands we have seen in the last 20 years. We have set a couple of criteria: that the company should still be in business and – whenever possible – we select products that are still in production, or at least a variant of the product is still in production. Each brand stands on the shoulders of dozens of other companies that could just as easily make the cut, and out of the 300 or so initially selected, we thinned the pack out by selecting brands that featured regularly enough to suggest success was not a one-off. In addition, almost every product from these 100 names was picked from a number of very positive reviews for that brand in *Hi-Fi+*. In that case, we have gone for what we feel is the most significant product in the line-up.

We want you to get involved too. Over our 20th anniversary year, we will be highlighting some of the best products of the last 20 years online, and we want you to pick your favourites. Keep watching hifiplus.com for more details...

Primare I35

163 Alan Sircom The latest Primare platform is a highly modular amplifier system, but even as just an amplifier the I35 integrated is one of those products that you just love to enjoy!

