

Unison Research Unico CD

After the Unico integrated comes this stunning valve CD player

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| PRICE | £1100 |
| SUPPLIER | UKD |
| CONTACT | 01753 652669 |

Why should I make you wait until the last paragraph? Unison Research has done what I thought was impossible: followed the universally praised (no, make that adored) Unico integrated tube-hybrid amplifier with a matching CD player. And I don't mean 'matching' just in looks and dimensions: the Unico CD corresponds to the integrated in performance *and* value for money, which makes it another world-class bargain. It just might be *the* CD player to buy if you're shopping at around a grand.

It's not just a case of slipping someone else's sub-assemblies and modules into a fancy enclosure. Somehow, Unison Research has managed to cram the thing full of designer bits, radical solutions, a cutting-edge transport, valves and more, but at a sane price. When you read what Unison has done, you can but marvel. Even its bare-bones description would do justice to a £2500 machine. So forget anything I've ever told you about settling, *circa* 2003, for a compromised, sub-£1000 universal SACD/DVD-A player. This is the way to go until the record industry gets its head out of its ass.

As in the past, Ing. Sacchetti has collaborated with Prof Leopoldo Rossetto of the University of Padua's Dept of Applied Electronics. The two settled on a design using: a proper CD-ROM mechanism; a fully balanced, pure triode valve

amplification stage, with true balanced analogue output; a 24-bit/192kHz Crystal D/A converter; their own sophisticated microprocessor control; a unique, high-quality power supply worthy of a power amplifier; and the kind of construction we're grew to love in the Unico integrated. It even boasts a serious heat sink on the back... just like an amplifier.

Sacchetti and Rossetto tested a number of drives before deciding that the only way to go was with a CD-ROM mechanism, especially because of the digital output that this type of transport offers. It required a redesign of the interface between transport and DAC, but this in turn allowed the player's performance to be kicked up a notch by inserting a 're-conversion circuit' and PLL circuit, resulting in a significant reduction in jitter. Additionally, the CD-ROM

I could only think of the sound as scarily close resemblance to a decent moving-coil, playing mint vinyl through a tube phono stage

mechanism is more robust, offers superior disc reading accuracy, operates with better quality brushless, low-noise synchronous motors, uses a glass laser lens instead of a plastic one and the CD tray runs on lapped metal guides — again, not plastic.

The Unico CD uses an upgradable Philips 64kB Flash memory chip, which also enabled the designers to fit a distinctive and highly legible, green-lit, personalised graphic display. It can

show the company logo and visual information such as 'valve warm-up' and countdown when the Unico CD is first switched on, as well as 'time elapsed', 'time remaining' and the usual track information. I was slightly disappointed that the review sample's display wasn't in Italian!

All of this good stuff wouldn't mean much if Unison Research had neglected the ergonomics. Worry not: this machine is an absolute delight, from the side-mounted On/Off switch to the luxurious infrared remote. The latter is a piece of sculpted, solid hardwood [seen on page 19!] that stands up, like one of B&O's remotes.

The front panel of the CD player itself contains just the basic transport functions; the remote covers those plus all minor operations. It's been pointed out that the remote's legends are produced using a galvanic print process 'so

the colour is absorbed into the metal and won't fade over time'.

A hefty unit at 11kg, it measures 96 x 432 x 343mm (hwd), dimensions and weight that are accounted for by for the high component content, plus a case made from 1.5mm-thick sheet steel and a 15mm aluminium faceplate. The mechanism support is made from 2mm-thick sheet steel and is 'anchored' to the front panel for maximum rigidity. It doesn't feel like anything



