

Take the first step on the separates ladder or give your existing system a much-needed boost with one of these great value **stereo amplifiers**

# Group Test

STEREO AMPLIFIERS R6100 - R9440

## Budget belters to power-up your tunes, from R6100

### SAVY SHOPPER

#### What's new?

This *Group Test* is jam-packed with top-drawer products. Leading the way is the Marantz PM6002, our 2008 Award winner at this price point. Rotel's excellent RA-04 – pipped at the post by the Marantz in the aforementioned Awards – is also here, along with NAD's five-star C326BEE. Yamaha's entry-level stereo amp, the A-S700, shows us what's available for R9440.

#### What do you get for your money?

When it comes to stereo amplifiers, there's not too much technology for you to get excited about. You'll get two sets of speaker outputs, line inputs and possibly a phono input for connecting a turntable. Tone controls – and 'direct' modes that override them – are about as much tweaking as you can look forward to.

**"A lengthy audition with partnering kit that you'll be using is time well spent"**

#### 1 Check the specs

There's nothing to compare to an AV amp in terms of specification, but it's still worth checking that your purchase offers sufficient source inputs. An integrated phono stage will save you having to buy an external one should you plan to connect a turntable, while a 3.5mm 'media' input is useful if you want to connect a portable music player.

#### 2 Always accessorise

Never underestimate the importance of cables, interconnects and supports. Look to spend around 10-15 per cent of your budget on good quality speaker stands, speaker cables and stereo interconnects in order to get the very best from your hi-fi equipment.

#### 3 Audition if you can

If possible, try to hear your kit before you spend your money. Individual tastes will always come in to play, so a lengthy audition, preferably with partnering kit that you will be using in your system, is time well spent.



**Tone controls:** some people like to be able to tailor their sound by increasing bass or treble, but you get a cleaner sound bypassing them entirely

#### RATINGS EXPLAINED

Five stars means the stereo amplifier in question delivers superb performance and does everything we ask of it. Four stars means that, while the amp is undoubtedly good, we have cause for some reservations – though it may be perfect for you. Three stars indicates a unit that is simply average, while two stars or one denotes a product that you should avoid.

★★★★★

Excellent

★★★★☆

Very good

★★★☆☆

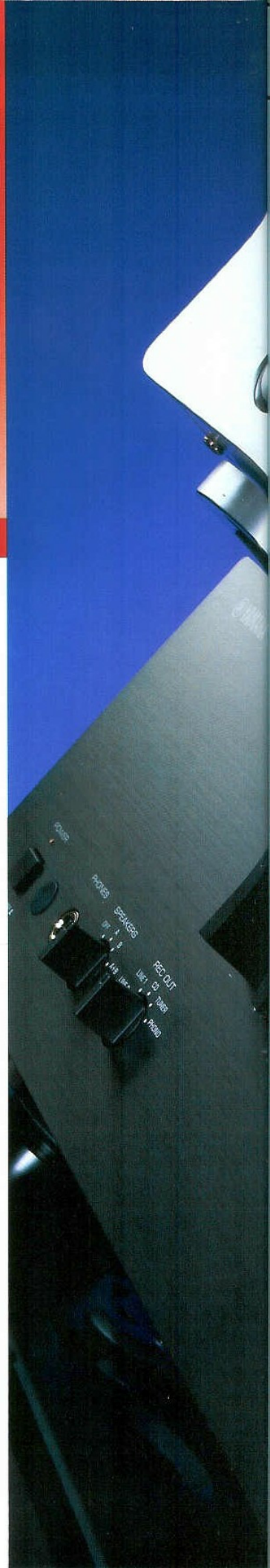
Average

★★☆☆☆

Below par

★☆☆☆☆

Don't bother



**STEREO AMPLIFIERS**

**TEST RESULT**

An incredibly close test sees the superb **NAD** edge victory.

It's a class-leading all-rounder with a very tempting price-tag

**BOTH PRICING AND** availability threatened to throw a spanner in the works, but we've managed to get on top of it all in an extremely competitive *Group Test*.

First in the firing line was last year's Award winner, the Marantz PM6002. According to the company itself, this amp should be going up in price. However, a look online shows that its price remained the same as it's coming towards the end of its life. For these reasons, you should act fast if you want to pick up what remains a superb amplifier.

The Rotel RA-04 was fighting to hold on to its five-star rating, and does just that. Articulate and agile, it delivers an unshakably solid and organised soundstage. Yamaha's entry shows what's out there for a little more cash, and there are definite improvements to be had – insight, vocal texture, build – but not enough to fully justify the extra outlay.

So it's the NAD that's the new class leader. Delivering the best of both worlds, with exciting dynamics, impressive subtlety and fine attention to detail, it's an all-rounder to get the very best from your budget hi-fi components.

“The NAD amplifier will get the very best from your budget hi-fi components”

**NAD C326BEE**



**R6100**

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
SOUND AND VISION  
GROUP TEST WINNER



**NOW ADD THESE**



**CD PLAYER**  
**NAD C545BEE**  
★★★★★  
March 2009

**R 7500**  
We said this was a CD player to trouble the class leaders and it remains an undeniably effective performer – you should be able to search out a bargain deal if you buy it with the amplifier.



**SPEAKERS**  
**DALI LEKTOR 2**  
★★★★★  
March 2009

**n/a £273**  
These Dalis might be small but they're as musically enjoyable as anything else at this price point, and they will provide ideal partners for your NAD electronics.



**SPEAKER STANDS**  
**QUADRASPIRE QX600**  
★★★★★  
April 2009

**n/a £100**  
An ingenious design that look and sound superb, the QX600s are a real find. They will help to deliver a smooth and rounded sound to your system.

**FACTS AND FIGURES**

PRICE RANGE:	MARANTZ PM6002	NAD C326BEE	ROTEL RA-04	YAMAHA A-S700
<b>PRICE</b>	<b>R 6999</b>	<b>R 6100</b>	<b>n/a £250</b>	<b>R 9440</b>
<b>POWER PER CHANNEL</b>	45	50	40	90
<b>LINE LEVEL INPUTS</b>	5	7	4	3
<b>PHONO STAGE</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>TAPE LOOPS</b>	2	2	1	2
<b>PREAMP OUT</b>	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>SPEAKER OUTS</b>	2	2	2	2
<b>HEADPHONE OUT</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>REMOTE CONTROL</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>DIMENSIONS (HWD)</b>	12 x 44 x 35cm	10 x 44 x 29cm	7 x 44 x 34cm	15 x 43 x 38cm
<b>HOW THEY RATED</b>				
<b>SOUND</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>BUILD</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>FEATURES</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>VERDICT</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

**POWER** Don't judge an amplifier on its power rating. This is only a very rough guide to how loud it will go, and says nothing about how good it will sound at any volume. Any of the amplifiers here will drive a modern, typical pair of loudspeakers.

**LINE LEVEL INPUTS** These are suitable for most sources, such as CD players, tuners, MP3 players, and so on. They're not suitable for turntables, which require a phono stage.

**PHONO STAGE** A turntable's cartridge outputs signals at a much lower level than a CD player, so it needs extra amplification from a phono stage. Many amplifiers have them built-in. Otherwise, add your own.

**TAPE LOOPS** Allow you to attach, and also monitor, recording devices such as analogue cassettes or a CD recorder.

**PREAMP OUT** Lets you output an unamplified signal, which can also be altered using the volume. Useful for sending a pure signal to a recording device such as a computer.

**SPEAKER OUTS** Every amp here allows two pairs of speakers to be attached. Don't expect to play them all at ultra-loud volumes, but it's a good basis for a simple multiroom system.

**HEADPHONE OUT** For private listening.