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METRONOME TECHNOLOGIE

CD ONE-S

Killer performance justifies the high price of this 'entry-level' top-loader

PRICE £6,666 **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds ■ 020 8971 3909 ■ www.metronome-technologie.com

Despite the relatively weighty admission fee, the CD One-S is actually the entry-level CD player in the Metronome Technologie range – which (for the sickeningly well-heeled) includes a machine costing around £52,000!

The CD One-S is a solidly made top-loader using a custom-modified Philips CDM Pro 2 V6.8 transport. Casing is made from 10mm-thick brushed aluminium with a massive sliding lid over the transport. Weight is 15kg (33lbs) – very heavy for a CD player.

The disc is kept in place by a Delrin puck with magnetic base. This arrangement holds the disc very securely and helps ensure low jitter. Controls are simple, and consist of the basics – next/previous track, play/stop and fast search.

A 24-bit DAC sampling at 192kHz is employed and the maker claims the converter achieves a high signal-to-noise ratio of 120dB. The player contains three mains transformers with six regulators to keep analogue and digital signals separate. High rejection of EMI (electromagnetic interference) is also claimed, by means of a special filter from the Schaffner company. All this should result in cleaner sound, free from digital hash, especially with delicate low-level signals. A 44.1kHz digital output (RCA connector) lets you use the CD One as a transport with an external DAC. Sets of balanced (XLR) and unbalanced RCA fixed analogue outputs are also provided.

The CD One-S is beautifully made – you certainly get a solidly built piece of kit for your money. However, the main reason most people consider spending this much on a CD player is the promise of improved sound quality. But, even with extravagant engineering and careful design, aren't there limits to what a CD player can deliver in terms of better sound? And aren't those limits set by CD's 16-bit 44.1kHz specification?

Metronome Technologie clearly thinks otherwise and has lavished much care on a player designed to extract the maximum from CD by dealing with issues like noise (including EMI and RFI) and jitter.

SOUND QUALITY

Early impressions are very favourable. Using the CD One-S via its unbalanced outputs, the player gives a strong, clear sound that has plenty of range and fine detail. Musically, the presentation is powerful and assertive, yet simultaneously smooth and refined, with a clear open tonality. Tonal balance is on the crisp-bright side and the sound is sharp and clearly defined, rather than warm or lush.

The CD One-S is tactile and articulate, despite a certain innate sweetness and refinement. The sound has excellent presence and

immediacy. The sound definitely improves once switching to the balanced outputs: voices and instruments seem to have more space around them and dynamics are improved. The balanced output sounds noticeably bigger and more assertive, though balanced/unbalanced output levels are the same at 2.5 volts.

Subjectively, the music seems slightly 'louder', with increased presence and added dynamic impact. If your amplifier has balanced inputs, we feel it would be worth getting the necessary cables to use this option.

One justification for spending this much on a CD player is the way it 'upgrades' your existing silver disc collection. At a stroke, your CDs suddenly sound more like a higher-resolution format. So, how might the CD One fare when compared with an SACD player with an SACD version of the same disc?

We elected to compare the Metronome (on CD) with Arcam's DV135 DVD player with SACD, our reasoning being that the Arcam is an excellent versatile universal machine that not only sounds good, but also represents superb value. The most obvious difference is volume level: the Arcam sounds quieter and 'smaller'. Although SACD sounds refined and spacious, with good depth and a certain effortless ease, the CD One-S matches this – and produces better dynamics.

Increasing the volume for the Arcam helps to reduce the difference, but it is more than that. The Metronome CD One-S sounds bigger, not just louder – the sound has more depth and space, plus greater attack and immediacy.

The player also has better than average bass – it's deep and powerful, but superbly tight and clean as well. This gives the music a greater sense of weight and body, creating the impression of a wide/deep 3D soundstage.

Not content to rest there, the CD One-S is also very good at revealing subtle backing voices and instruments. Quiet instruments 'appear' in their own space, sounding very focused and

precise, making stereo imagery sound more holographic and dimensional.

While the CD One-S might be Metronome's entry-level model, £6,666 is still a lot of money to

pay for a CD player. With a price tag like that, it's clearly not for everyone. However, if you appreciate quality and attention to detail, you're sure to be impressed. It's a class act, and those who do decide to invest in a CD One-S will be getting an exceptionally well-made player that delivers on all fronts. The CD One-S looks, feels and sounds like a precision instrument, oozing class from every pore. ■

Jimmy Hughes

"If you appreciate quality and attention to detail, you're sure to be impressed by the CD One-S"

