



Rockin' Rotel
 Series 14 CD & amp duo
 make musical harmony

Miniature marvels
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Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

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Two's company

David Price discovers Rotel's latest mid-price CD player/integrated amplifier offering – the CD14 and A14 combination

Ever since I discovered the Rotel brand in the late seventies, it has always managed to come up with capable, affordable components. The recipe has always been worthy, well engineered and understated products that don't rely on superficial showroom appeal. The CD14 CD player and A14 amplifier combo here is no departure from this path. It's Rotel's mainstream, mid-market system that attempts to offer satisfying sound quality with the convenience facilities many demand.

Stylistically, the new CD14 is a subtle departure from Rotel products of yore. It has a drawer-loading disc arrangement (the company has used slot-loaders in the past), and has a slim, sculpted look with a refreshing minimalism to it.

The brushed aluminium fascia bolts on to the player's case, which is made of sparkle-silver painted steel. Whip the lid off and you can see a neatly

laid out machine; with the disc transport carefully mounted on its own sub-chassis. To the left is the power supply, which uses a frame-type transformer, and to the centre and right are the digital and analogue sections. Rotel says attention has been paid to the power supply and signal path routing, and there's certainly visual evidence of this. The board also sports a Wolfson DAC chip running at up to 24-bit/192kHz resolution. Around the back, are unbalanced RCA phono outputs, a coaxial digital out, RS232 in and a 12V trigger for remote controlling. The IEC mains socket means you can experiment with your own AC power lead; but a standard one comes supplied.

This is one of the first CD players you can control with your smartphone; in addition to the bundled Rotel remote, there's an Android/iOS app. This requires you to connect the CD player to the

matching A14 amplifier or T14 tuner/streamer, however. Overall, the only thing that marks it down is the slightly resonant top plate.

The A14 integrated amplifier is a neat visual match, offering a quoted 2x 80W RMS of Class AB power. Like price rivals, it is equipped with a wide range of inputs, including a moving-magnet phono stage, line inputs and integrated aptX Bluetooth. All of this comes via the plethora of small push-buttons on the fascia, which also boasts switching for two pairs of loudspeakers, a USB input and a 3.5mm headphone socket.

Underneath the hood, things are very tightly packed, with a largish custom Rotel-made toroidal transformer to the left rear of the unit. This connects to a full-width main circuit board that has power supply components, including slit-foil capacitors, and pre and power stages. You'll see an AKM 32-bit/768kHz DAC chip fitted, and a separate board piggybacks over at the back, while there's a chunky heatsink bar running through the central frontal area. Everything is tidily laid out and well made, with largely surface mount components; I get the sense that a couple of decades ago, this amplifier would have had to have been physically far larger in order to do what it does now.

The back panel rather underlines this and is bristling with connectors. The RCA sockets include two auxiliaries, MM phono, CD, tuner and preamplifier out. There are four digital inputs, two coaxial and the

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rotel A14

ORIGIN
Japan/China

TYPE
Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
8.2kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
430 x 93 x 345mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power: 2x 80W (8ohm)
- AKM 32-bit/768kHz capable DAC
- Analogue inputs: 4x RCA; 1x MM phono stage
- Digital inputs: 2x coaxial; 2x optical; 1x USB-A; 1x USB-B; Bluetooth with aptX
- iOS/Android control app

DISTRIBUTOR
B&W

TELEPHONE
01903 221500

WEBSITE
rotel.com

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rotel CD14

ORIGIN
Japan/China

TYPE
CD player

WEIGHT
5.9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
430 x 98 x 312mm

FEATURES

- Wolfson 24-bit/192kHz DAC
- Supports MP3 playback
- iOS/Android control app (for use with A14)

DISTRIBUTOR
B&W

TELEPHONE
01903 221500

WEBSITE
rotel.com

same number of optical Toslinks. Two pairs of speaker binding posts take up a good bit of the rear's real estate too. Then you've got remote triggers, Rotel Link sockets, and the USB input. The same IEC power socket is fitted to the A14 as the CD14. In terms of overall quality, this feels a classy product and is heavy for its size.

Sound quality

Starting with the CD14 in isolation, I am pleasantly surprised. It's a competitive player with no apparent vices and a lot to recommend. Tonally it's quite warm and mellifluous sounding – although certainly not excessively so – and this ties in with a bouncy nature that enjoys making music. At the same time, it is detailed with a fair degree of air and space.

Goldie's *Terminator* is a heavy piece of mid-nineties electronica and yet the Rotel excavates a lot of detail, throws it out at breakneck speed and strings it all together in a most coherent way. At the same time, it doesn't deconstruct the recording unduly and displays a nice tonality too. With the wrong front end, this track can be a real headache, but the CD14 is a model of good behaviour and doesn't put a foot wrong. I am surprised to find it gives such a convincing view of the music world, sounding sweet and organic. That's a high bar to match.

So, does the A14 let the side down? No, is the simple answer – it is an able solid-stater with a vibrant sound and oodles of power considering its diminutive dimensions. Tonally again it's just a fraction on the warm side,

but only just enough to take the sting out of poor recordings or make harsh speakers more bearable. Bass is fluid and supple, and even at high levels doesn't fall apart with arduous speaker loads. In the midband, it's pretty wide in its stereo image and falls a fair way back, too. Inside this, there's a lot of detail, yet it's all conveyed with consummate smoothness. Treble is unexpectedly refined and detailed, with lots of air.

This amplifier can track dynamics well, and the end result is a veritable foot-tapper of a product that doesn't get its rhythmic prowess from any undue harshness or forwardness. In absolute terms, the A14 sounds a little mechanical and lacking in scale, but it compares favourably to

The sound is a lot more exuberant than the sensible styling suggests

similarly priced components from the likes of say Exposure and Roksan. Cue up The Emotions' *Best Of My Love* and you're greeted with a rousing rendition of this classic seventies disco stomper; it's a great recording and the Rotel leaves you in no doubt of this fact.

Able to start and stop with alacrity, the natural speed of this integrated, allied to its ability to thump out large wads of power, is impressive. Again, in absolute terms it's certainly no 200 watter, and really loud parties or those seeking to fill large spaces with

sound will feel that its performance is just a little breathless at high volumes, but by the standards of its price rivals it is pretty muscular.

Taken together, the Rotel combo really gets its mojo working. Two capable performers voiced to work alongside one another make for a gusty and musical sound – one that's a lot more exuberant than the 'sensible shoes' styling suggests. The way they make music is more characterful than expected, and the result is that you keep wanting to listen, for hours on end. Kate Bush's *Wow* has me transfixed – it is full of detail yet sounds suitably ethereal and other worldly. The only criticism I can make here is that stage depth isn't the best I've heard at the price; the system hangs things fairly close to the plane of the loudspeakers and doesn't fall back quite as much as it should.

Conclusion

Considering its tidy but relatively bland aesthetics, I am pleasantly surprised at how polished this pair sounds. The good old-fashioned engineering and attention to detail results in a highly listenable combo across all sources – from low-res Bluetooth to hi-res files and vinyl. It's a musically satisfying and flexible yet fuss-free way to enjoy music ●

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Moving-magnet phono stage input
- 2 Binding posts for two sets of loudspeakers
- 3 Digital coaxial and optical inputs
- 4 Rotel link to amplifier
- 5 Coaxial digital input
- 6 RCA analogue outputs
- 7 RCA analogue pre output

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT – A14

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Power, poise, punch; facilities; compactness

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Display is hard to read, but that's about it

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Excellent-value solid-state integrated amp

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT – CD14

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Musically engaging and assured; great build quality

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No DAC input will put some people off

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Strong-sounding machine that's fine value

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL



**DETAILS****PRODUCT**
Bowers & Wilkins
P9 Signature**ORIGIN**
UK/China**TYPE**
Over-ear
headphone**WEIGHT**
413g**FEATURES**
• 40mm dynamic
driver
• Quoted sensitivity:
111dB/mW
• Detachable cables
with 3.5mm jack**DISTRIBUTOR**
Bowers & Wilkins**TELEPHONE**
0800 2321513**WEBSITE**
bowers-wilkins.
co.uk

that immediately stand out are the energy and speed, and *Alpha Female* pounds along and generates real excitement as it does so.

The clever bit is that when you play something more delicate like *Tori Amos' Under The Pink*, there is no sense of the P9 being forced or overdriven. The combination of Amos' vocals and partnering piano sound rich, detailed and extremely well balanced. I'm not sure that anything I play definitively points to the drivers being angled slightly forwards, but the spaciousness and positioning of the music is generally very good. With something truly small scale, like a 24/96 download of *Nick Drake's Pink Moon* there's the sense that while it doesn't shrink the performance down to be intimate, it still sounds compelling and enjoyable.

One of the reasons for this is that the P9 has a truly superb top end. It combines a sweetness and naturalness of tone with the ability to handle poor recordings regardless of how aggressive they are. This feeds into a similarly smooth and detailed midrange that also flatters poorer recordings. The only real criticism is that the bass level can periodically be too much of a good thing. When listening to acoustic material it lends a welcome sense of weight and body, but with more potent electronica it can make performances sound unbalanced. The bass quality itself is detailed and never becomes over powering, but there is the sense that there is more of it than is strictly accurate.

Conclusion

This does not detract from a headphone that offers an effective combination of comfort, solidity, and high overall performance. If you are looking for a model that works as well at home as it does on the move, the P9 makes for an impressive choice and exploits an evolutionary niche extremely effectively ●

Hi-Fi Choice**OUR VERDICT****SOUND QUALITY****LIKE:** Energetic yet refined sound; well built; comfortable**VALUE FOR MONEY****DISLIKE:** Over-enthusiastic bass; a little too large to be truly portable**BUILD QUALITY****WE SAY:** A talented, elegant headphone that is good to listen to and easy to live with**FEATURES****OVERALL**

Cloud nine

The new flagship headphone from Bowers & Wilkins is its most ambitious yet. **Ed Selley** turns on and tunes in

Not content with releasing the deeply impressive 800 Series D3 loudspeaker range and gearing up to celebrate its 50th birthday, Bowers & Wilkins has also entered new territory with the release of the P9 Signature.

The P9 is – outwardly at least – relatively conventional. It is built around a pair of 40mm dynamic drivers that have been specially developed with a suspension system that claims to deliver strong bass extension without sacrificing high frequencies. The enclosures are different to most rivals, using B&W's proprietary Finite Element Analysis to create an 'optimised environment' using composites and aluminium. The drivers themselves have been angled facing forwards 15° to give a greater sense of the music being in front of the user to imitate listening to a pair of conventional loudspeakers.

The enclosures are mounted via a decoupled flexible mount to a folding headband. Bowers & Wilkins argues that the decoupling allows each driver to go about its business without interference. It also makes for a more

comfortable fit as the enclosure can move freely in a useful axis on the head. This is partnered with an excellent choice of materials and design touches – the removable magnetic pad to change the cord from the short one with mic and remote to a longer one for home use is both simple and elegant. Build is very good indeed and the colour scheme gives it a very slight retro feel.

The niche that the P9 fills is a little harder to judge, though. In terms of size and weight, it is very much in the mould of a home headphone but the folding headband, carry case and short cord (as well as the soon to be available Lightning connector cable) point to use on the move.

Sound quality

In use the P9 is impressively sensitive and running it off a smartphone is not an impractical proposition. Best results are gained with something slightly more potent. Connected to a Chord Hugo (*HFC 386*), performance is competitive with dedicated home rivals. Listening to *Wild Beast's Boy King*, the elements of its performance