



➤ Test: Marek Lacki | Photographer: Filip Kulpa

ENGLISH MUSICAN

From London, just like Audionote before it, a perspective of contemporary trends in the construction of digital sources
Avoiding oversampling and upsampling but using old NOS valves

Abbingdon Music Research has made the right noises in the Polish market but it is still not well-known. There are two digital sources with this CD-777 being the lower-priced model. The other is the CD-77 and is twice as expensive. Besides players, this company with the same design, has a complete set of integrated amplifiers and the reference phono preamplifier - with an unprecedented number of settings and curves for correct equalisation.

CONSTRUCTION

De gustibus non est disputandum, but with a sense of obligation, I write a few words about the appearance, because not everything can be seen in the pictures. We have an elegant and simple front panel with large buttons and a large display. It is clear, but the digits could be somewhat larger and the buttons more clearly labeled. The function symbols look similar on



Three blue LEDs are designed to improve reading of the silver disks because the red laser operates at the opposite end of the spectrum (shown)

and are subtle, but are quite illegible and you can end up not knowing which button does what. The other parts of the housing, just as the front, are also made of aluminum and not just any grade. When the player is moved, it feels very solid. The top cover has six large holes, made of partially obscured plexiglass, for the job of convection ventilation. Through these windows you can see an intriguing interior and two blue LEDs that glow inside the sub-chassis, giving somewhat controversial results. Maybe if the lights were red or yellow or orange, they would look better, especially since the warm glow of the valves is orange. If I am not mistaken, somewhere in the literature, you may come across information that blue LEDs were specifically chosen to assist disk-reading (at the opposite end of the light spectrum to the a red laser). After sliding back the top cover, these LEDs shine into the disc-loading chamber. Of course, this AMR is a top-loader.



The touchpad is illuminated

The compact disk is held in place by a light puck, small in diameter. At the rear are two types of outputs: RCA and XLR. The output jacks are widely spaced at opposite sides.

In the middle are RCA jacks. These jacks are actually the SPDIF inputs/outputs enhancing the digital usability.

The second input is a USB (A) so that it can be used as a DAC.

The interior is impressive. Looking inside, it is a dual-mono construction arranged symmetrically. On the left and right front corners are two 32VA transformers that support the analogue and digital sections respectively. Just behind the left transformer is a smaller corresponding transformer delivering power to the transport and display. Centrally is the drive, which uses the Philips CD-18 servo and Sony K-Series laser.



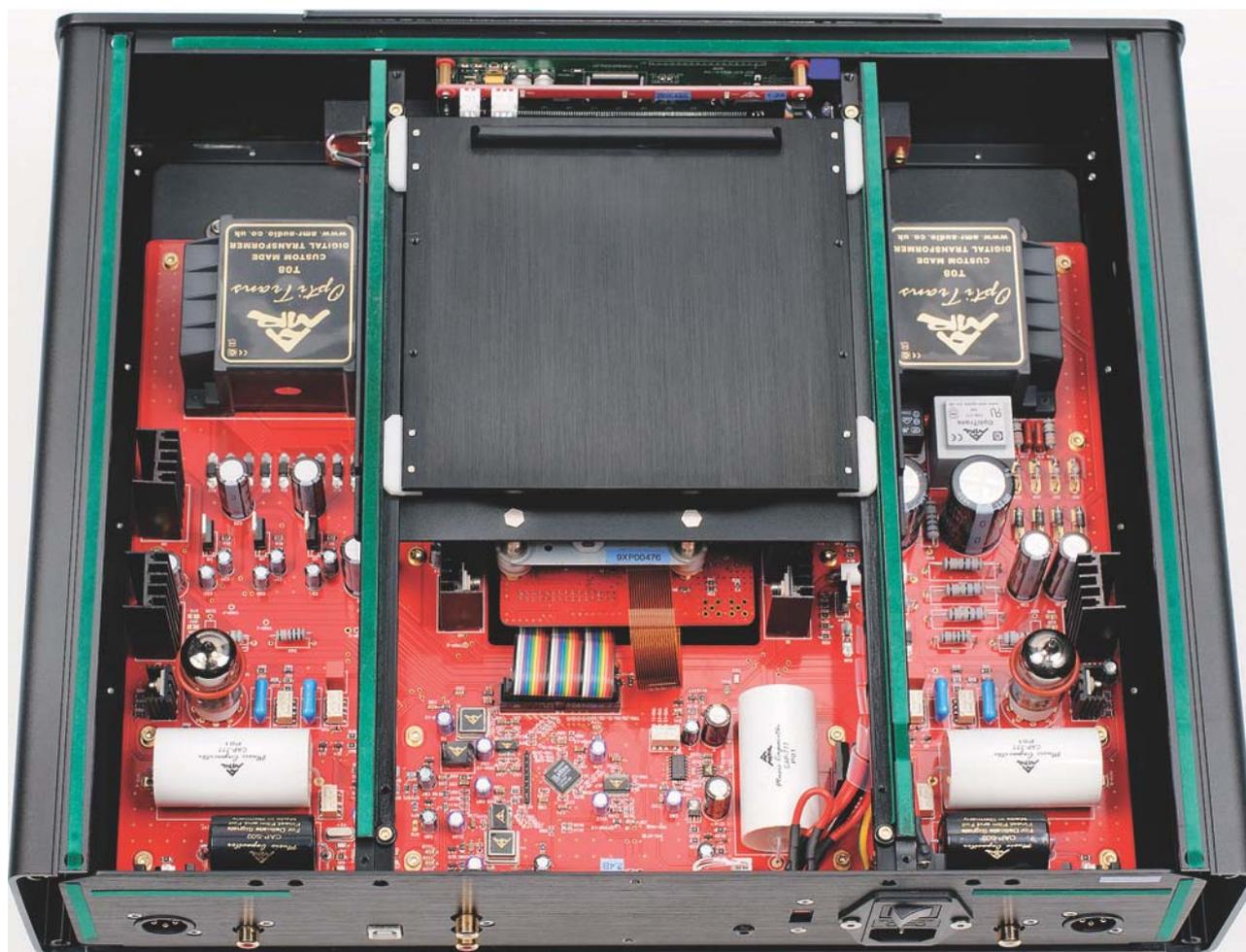
The CD-777 can function as a DAC connected to any source S/PDIF or computer. In the case of the latter, it is essential to have the optimal system configuration; AMR says that in this USB mode, it can play as well as CD

The surprise is the DAC chipset. AMR has long been applied its own approach. And in this instance, the result is the MultiBit converter: a Philips UDA1305AT (called the Prince among MultiBit DACs). It is puzzling not only because of "non-oversampling," but also because of the fact that this model was not specifically developed for audio applications (it was used for industrial purposes). It was produced by Philips as the last ever MultiBit converter. On both sides of the machine are valves (NOS), double triode 6H1-n EVs. One half of the valve is for amplification while the other half is for output buffering. Acceptable alternatives are ECC88 tubes, E88CC, 7308, 6DJ8, 6922 and Cca.

An important part of the player is being able to choose the modes of digital circuits.

First, recommended by the manufacturer, are the Digital Master I characterised by the absence of any digital or analogue filtering. The second mode Digital Master II has an analogue filter added (normally required) and a further two modes allow Up/Oversampling (2 times or 4 times). The last two options activate Upsampling to 96 kHz or 192 kHz.

The remote control has the majority of the buttons located on the touchscreen. The disadvantage of the remote control is that it always has to be aimed precisely at the player, otherwise it will not work. An advantage is that the main function buttons are different forms; easy to feel. Even with eyes closed, which button to press is easy to locate. The buttons displayed on the touch panel are backlit, so it's easy to find, when you need it.



REVIEW SYSTEM

- **Room:** 16 sqm. with minimal acoustic treatment
- **Supports:** Equilibrium Eltheria
- **Amplifier:** Struss Chopin MKIV SE
- **Comparison player:** Ayre CX-7eMP
- **Interconnects:** Equilibrium Essence
- **Speaker cable:** Equilibrium Blue Light
- **Power cables:** Furutech FP-314 Ag i Alpha 3

Specifications

Outputs	RCA, XLR
Inputs	RCA, USB
Signal-to-noise S/N	>100 dB
Channel separation	>90 dB
Dynamic range	>90 dB
THD+N	<0,3%
Output voltage	>2 V
Dimensions (width x height x depth)	450x 120x 370 mm
Weight	11,5 kg

Distributor	Moje Audio, www.mojeaudio.pl
Price	15 000 zł

RATING
QUALITY/PRICE

A
HIGH-END

NOS valves, Philips multi-bit converter archaic, no oversampling and excellent signal capacitors – very high-level construction by Abbingdon

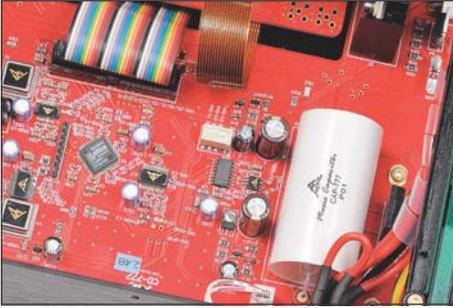
SOUND QUALITY

Aware of the tubes used in the machine, I was expecting a specific characteristic to the sound; soft and warm. It is true that a certain set of characteristics usually attributed to valves can still be noticed with this player, but the AMR surprises with a high level of neutrality. This is not neutral in the sense of perfect proportion of individual areas, because there are certainly exceptions to it, but the neutrality which allows a fine balancing act of reaching opposite characteristics: hard - soft, light - dark. The thing is that it avoids the tendency to express the color excessively in any *one* direction, at least not during listening – its presentation was immediate and unequivocal - not exaggerated.

Everything depends on the DSP setting. Trying all six, each time I returned to Digital Master I, which de facto means: no filtering and only the pure signal. The following are my main descriptions of the various settings. The differences between them – I found very subtle, but audible. Interestingly, at low volume levels it was almost impossible to differentiate when you switched between each of them,

each discernible at average and louder listening levels. The best bass control and speed was under "Upsampling 192" however, came at the expense of naturalness to the sound, which became a little digital. In this setting the best example is – Madonna. Most music is better off without using any form of oversampling.

The AMR has quite a lot of bass and this is the deviation from neutrality, which I mentioned earlier. Bass is powerful, strong in every area, through to the lowest octaves, although the most energy, as is often the case, is in the mid-bass range. Quality bass eludes unequivocal assessment because on the one hand - it is diverse, with good color dedication, and also contours, quite plainly, on the other, it lacks a little speed. Often, the speed and bass control were a found a little wanting, ie either the bass is fast and well-controlled, or it is slow and devoid of discipline. Palpable is a slight softness in the range, but the control seems to be good. Only the acceleration rate – when the player does not keep pace, see a slight slowing down in the rhythm.



The digital section runs a programmable circuit using Lattice MACH series 4000

Speed is not the domain of this structure and we have to simply accept this.

The CD-777 however, has many other advantages. One of them is transparency. To determine if it is contrary to what I wrote, but not up to the end. Well, when it comes to color transparency, differentiation reflected the quality of implementation. The player has its own distinct character, but this does not exclude an acoustic transparent purity, which paints a good picture of the differences between individual albums. AMR does not harmonize nor average, but it shows how it was recorded on the CD. It is able to banish these limitations - which certain publishers do not apply themselves to work on. This proves it is a high-grade test source.

Also this machine is able to reproduce perfectly the atmosphere surrounding the recording. However, this is done primarily through a well-built space, showing the acoustics of any room and creating a very large presence - stereo sound in which the free base extends well beyond the speakers on both sides. With concert performances, using a CD-777 allows the listener to be almost transported from the couch to the concert. I listened to inter alia, a remastered recording of the Dire Straits album "On The Night" as well as Avi-Shai Cohen's "As Is ... Live At The Blue Note." Both CDs are recordings of concerts. The first is a big show for the general public, the other a concert at a club. The AMR managed to recreate a representative atmosphere of the two. The listener almost feels they are participating at the concert due to the dynamics and spaciousness.

This AMR just runs through the whole gamut of colors. Electric riff, string pluck, but to name a few were all rewarding but slightly under-exaggerated yet presented with great color, which is simply great. Put it this way, its ability to play midrange vocals excellently favors those who seek the truth - it is a great pleasure to work with this machine.

Overall, with slightly more focus one could pick up high frequency, of which the variety is never restricted. I would say that they are sharp and sweet at the same time. Very rich in the decay of percussion, which shimmered in every possible way, it was able to hue colors, subtleties and nuances. Combined, you develop a very high respect of this machine's scope although at first it seemed to me that the highs were not especially even in distribution. However, it is because of the impact of both the recording and the time of the audition of this machine. It was within the first hour of switching on, that I was auditioning it which was in fact, too early. The next period allowed for the full development of the full potential of this player. Just about all of its qualities if you have not noticed already, are simply wonderful.

OUR OPINION

This English top-loader is a device of extraordinary sensitivity to the beauty of music, beautifully showing the color of the instruments. Spatialness and naturalness of communication enabling it to easily transport you to the ambience of the concert hall, especially as this AMR machine does not lack dynamics, a core feature.

The CD-777's mids are slightly soft, without depriving their succulence, but makes up for it with a bolder presentation of highs, which are wonderful. Listeners will love the bass, which is, a slight deviation from neutrality. As for the only minus, you may note a slight slowing down of the wording during the most dynamic passages. ■