



## ASTINTREW AT3500CD £1,150

It's rare that you hear of British 'start-ups' in hi-fi, but Astin Trew is precisely this. Two years back, the company arrived from nowhere, offering an impressive range of mid-fi separates. With UK design overseen by founder Michael Osborne and manufactured in China, Astin Trew follow the increasingly popular Cambridge Audio approach.

The brand new £1,150 AT3500CD is the company's most high end product to date, and boasts a number of strategic tweaks including a very high performance clock with dedicated power supply, Class A biased DAC filters and upgraded power supplies with expensive passive components including Auricap capacitors. The player itself is centred around a Phillips VAM1202 transport and CD711 servo. A Burr Brown PCM1738 DAC is powered by the expensive 'C core' transformer. This is the only machine in the test running tubes in the output stage, specifically the ECC88 double triode valve. This 430x340x110mm machine is the second largest in the group behind the Marantz, and heavy at 9.1kg.

### SOUND QUALITY

If ever there was any doubt about this 'Johnny Come Lately' to the CD player market, it was assuaged after two bars of 'Riders' by The Doors. The Astin Trew threw out a massive soundstage, better than all others including the superb Cambridge, and (in the case of the latter) instead of hanging everything around the plane of the speakers, it was cavernous front to back, as well as left to right. The smiles didn't end there either, as the AT3500 duly went through each other player's strengths, delivering them a nonchalant cuffing. In some cases, it didn't so much beat them, as whip them without breaking into a sweat.

This new CD player showed me what the (admittedly cheaper) Arcam had been trying – but failing – to do with 4hero's 'Another Day'. It threw out a lovely sumptuous Fender Rhodes keyboard sound in the opening bars, and a big fat bass sound, but never lapsed into ponderousness. It ran the Quad and Cyrus up to the finish line on rhythmic alacrity, proving just as fleet of foot as the best here, but adding altogether superior tonality and stereo imaging/depth perspective. Like the Marantz, it give an expansive, punchy rendition of Prefab Sprout's 'Bonny', but avoided the SA15-S1's slightly wooden

rhythmic quality and instead turned it into a highly poignant musical event.

Although the AT3500 didn't throw low level detail out like its life depended on it, it was all there to behold. In this way, it reminded me of the Cambridge Audio – you could almost think of it as an 840C on steroids, with extra depth, subtlety and power for your £400. Best of all, the Astin Trew seemed very relaxed and in control of whatever it played, making the likes of the Cyrus and reference Quad (admittedly £150 cheaper) sound like they were trying just a little too hard. A blistering new contender.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The AT3500 has just a trace (0.1dB) of low frequency lift across a band, starting at 400Hz or so. Although low in spot level, its broadness may be sufficient to perceptibly increase energy by a small amount, just sufficient to give this player some extra body to its sound. As high frequencies roll down above 17kHz there should be no brightness to the sound. Results were identical at 44.1 or 96kHz upsampling.

Distortion levels were higher than usual at high levels, but second harmonic only in nature, so this will be inaudible. That the Astin Trew is linear is borne out by its fine -60dB result, responsible for an excellent dynamic range value of 111dB.

The only area of concern in this player lies in the jitter that exists on the digital output and is likely to affect analogue stages, as it measured a high 300pS random, and up to 600pS with programme - high values. Better reclocking is needed.

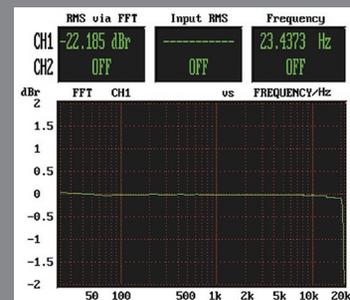
The AT3500 measures well in all areas except jitter. To what degree this impacts sound quality, in balance with positive factors, can only be assessed by listening tests. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)  
CD 4Hz-21.1kHz

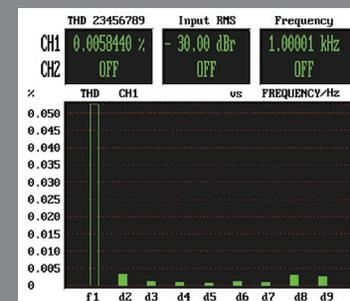
Distortion (%)  
0dB 0.042

-6dB	0.02
-60dB	0.22
-80dB	3
Separation (1kHz)	115dB
Noise (IEC A)	-110dB
Dynamic range	111dB
Jitter	500pS
Output	2.4V

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



## HI-FI WORLD

**VERDICT**   
Compellingly musical and sumptuous sounding machine that's class of the field at this price.

**ASTINTREW AT3500CD £1,150**  
Astin Trew  
☎ +44 (0)1491 414494  
www.astintrew.co.uk

**FOR**  
- expansive, powerful sound  
- superb tonality  
- engaging musicality  
- build

**AGAINST**  
- display