


Audiolab | 8200CD | £700

Game-changing sound quality for £700? Believe it...

Audiolab hasn't produced a killer product for years, so we didn't have high hopes for the 8200CD. It looks a lot like the firm's old 8000 series CD players, so we expected much of the same competent but clinical sound. We were wrong.

Audiolab's engineers like to describe this product as a digital-to-analogue converter with an built-in disc drive. To that end there are digital inputs - coaxial, optical and USB - and clever circuitry that uses 256 individual DACs per channel. They work at far higher speeds than needed to reproduce CD, all in the name of making great sound. A lot of effort has been spent minimising timing errors and noise.

Filter settings have great effect

There are four filter settings. Changing presets usually means small differences in sonic flavour, but with the 8200CD the differences are enough to lift it from being a decent player for the money to a game changer for sub-£1500 CD players.

The standard Slow and Fast Roll-off settings don't do an awful lot. The Optimal Spectrum option is better, delivering a more transparent performance, but we like Optimal Transient best. Apparently this measures worse than the other options due to its more relaxed filtering, but the sound

is wonderfully detailed and expressive whether we used our laptop with the player's USB input or the internal drive.

There's a choice of analogue outputs too. The RCAs perform well, but the player's internal circuitry is arranged in a fully balanced configuration so it comes as no surprise to find the balanced XLRs perform the best. There's just an extra degree of dynamic punch and a little more detail.

Audiolab's engineers like to describe the 8200CD as a DAC with a built-in disc drive; it's more than just a CD player

If you really want to hear what this Audiolab's capable of with computer audio, use uncompressed files. We listened to a range of music, from a lovely Elgar cello concerto (in E minor, *Op.85*) to Blur's hard-charging *Song 2*, and through it all the Audiolab delivers a spellbinding sound that mixes insight, dynamics and fluidity better than we've ever heard at this price. The amount of information it uncovers is astounding, but the really impressive thing is that all this detail is organised brilliantly,

There's nothing rich or warm about the 8200CD's sonic presentation - it's as taut as you like, and a touch lean with it. But such is the purity of the sound, we can't help be convinced by the results

and never threatens to overshadow the music's message. There's definitely nothing clinical about this performance. Switch to the onboard disc drive and most of this character remains, but with just a touch less forwardness in the presentation.

You can add excellent build and a nice remote handset to the plus points, too.

The only things we can find to complain about are the small main display that's hard to read from a distance and a flimsy disc tray, which belies the unit's solidity.

We think the 8200CD is good enough to frighten the best machines anywhere near this price. It's the first machine we've heard in years that's good enough to worry Cyrus.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Astonishingly good sound for the money; terrific DAC; superb build; nice remote control

AGAINST Sound isn't particularly rich or easy-going; display could be clearer

VERDICT The 8200CD is an absolutely brilliant package for the money. At last Cyrus has a competitor to worry about

TECH SPECS

Integrated Yes **Transport** No **DAC** Yes **Multidisc** No **Inputs** Coaxial, optical, XLR, RCA **Outputs** Coaxial x 2, optical x 2 **CD text** Yes **Memory** Yes **Display off** Yes **Finishes** 1 **Dimensions (hwd)** 8 x 44 x 30cm