

EXCLUSIVE Audiolab 8200CDQ | **CD player/preamp** | **£950**

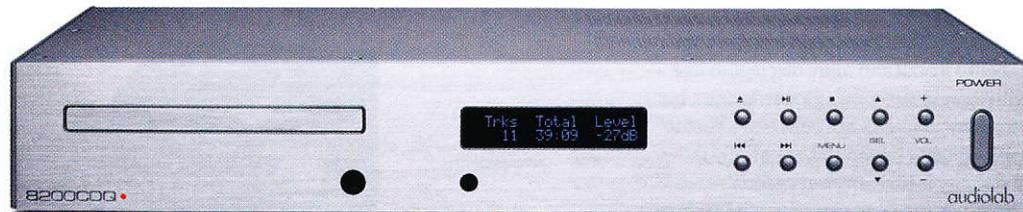
Hybrid player upgrade is a giant sonic leap

We're big fans of Audiolab's 8200CD player, so were a little worried about the prospect of the company cramming a preamp section into the same chassis - more electronics means the potential for a drop in sound quality. As it turns out, we needn't have worried. If anything, the CDQ is an even more capable unit.

Under-the-hood improvements

The CD-playing side is essentially unchanged, but Audiolab's engineering team has taken the opportunity to perform a few tweaks. The power supply arrangement has been refined, and more work has been done on the filter options. Our favourite filter 'Optimal Transient' is now supplemented by two further variations named 'XD' and 'DD'. Both newer filters deliver slightly greater detail, but we ended up preferring the original for its musical cohesion and drive. The digital inputs work as well as ever with the optical, coaxial and USB all able to cope with 24Bit/96kHz sources.

The CDQ retains the sonic character of the original 8200, but adds an extra dose of solidity, a little more detail and



stronger dynamics. The gains aren't massive, but they extend Audiolab's already impressive lead at this price.

The preamp section maintains the high standard. It sounds impressively transparent through any one of its three line level inputs, and had no trouble delivering fine results into a range of power amps, including our reference Bryston 4B SST2. If possible, try to use the unit's balanced outputs; they sound more dynamic and insightful. The headphone output is a good one, too.

The 8200CDQ is a forward-looking product that combines top-quality sound with some really useful features. The original 8200CD has been a big hit for Audiolab, and the CDQ version wowed us just as much.

USE IT WITH

A computer with USB

Connect a computer to the 8200CDQ's and you'll get great sound provided your files are up to scratch



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent performance with CD and digital inputs; fine internal preamp; improved display

AGAINST New filter settings deliver differences rather than overall improvements

VERDICT Improves on the 8200CD and adds a fine preamp into the (considerable) bargain

Also consider Audiolab 8200CD £700

★★★★★

If you don't need the

CDQ's built-in preamp circuitry, the standard CD player will save you some money - and deliver a sound that's almost as good

