

€ 800-1000 CD PLAYERS

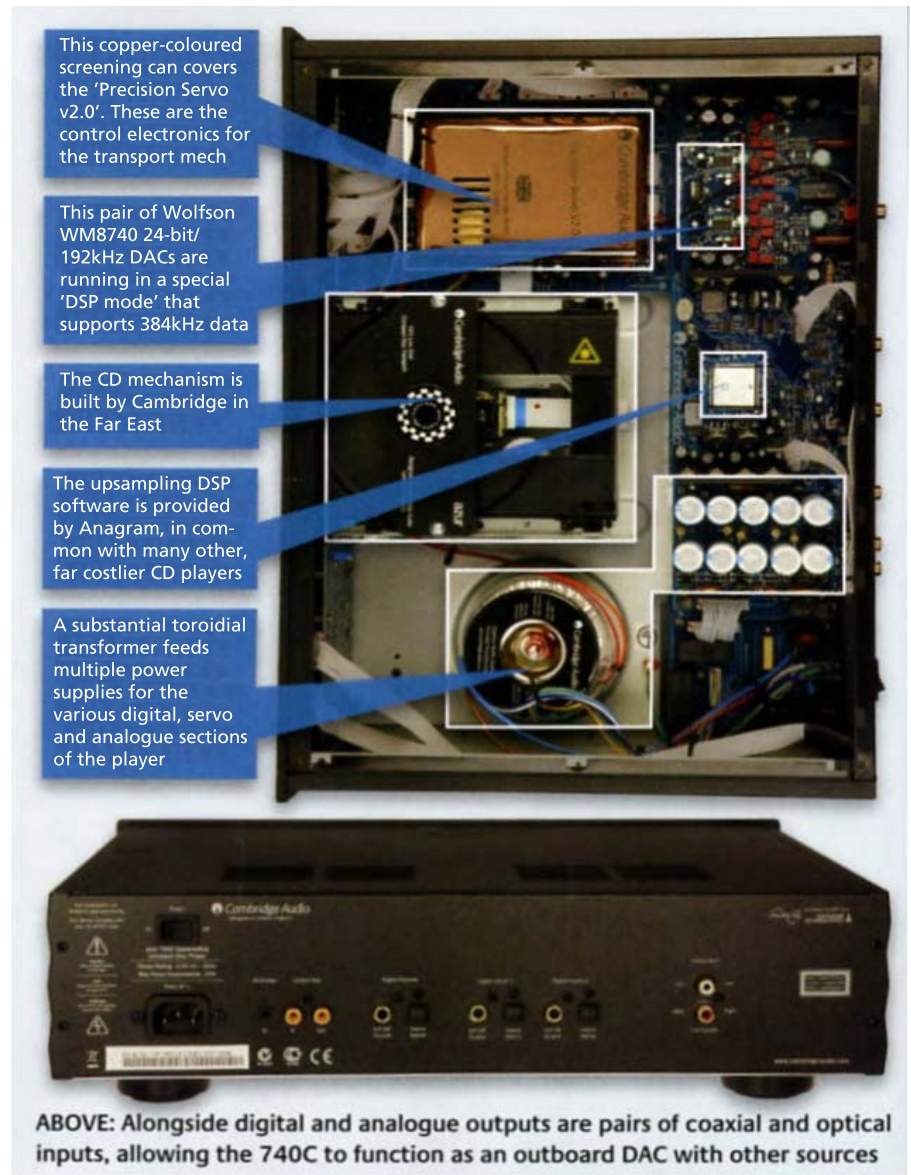
Hli-Fi News' definitive verdict on four of the best mid-priced CD players

Rounding up the usual suspects, you might say, but for this group we ended up assembling four very different and interesting players.

Arcam, Cambridge, Creek and Marantz all have vast experience of making CD sound better than you'd expect, and for less money. All of them have a strong offering at the E1000 price level, but it was our task here to listen, test and discover which one really is the best of the bunch.

....**Next** comes the Cambridge Azur 740C, a newer design using a proprietary upsampling system. Its large backlit display is far from elegant, but it is very practical, as the large figures can be seen from way across the room and are still readable at closer quarters even when the backlight is dimmed or switched off from the remote. This time, the handset is a biggish metal-fronted system controller, well laid-out and intuitively to operate.

So which one of these four really offers the most performance for the money? To find out, we put them through their paces with a wide variety of music and a main system comprising an Arcam FNJ A32 amplifier and Dali Ikon6 speakers.



ABOVE: Alongside digital and analogue outputs are pairs of coaxial and optical inputs, allowing the 740C to function as an outboard DAC with other sources

INSTRUMENTAL PROWESS

My starting point was *Pierre Bensusan's Intuité* [Favored Nations 2130].**Turning** to the Cambridge the same disc was louder, punchier than on other players, with more of a genuine 'snap' to his percussive effects and a heavier bass, as well as a generally more forward quality. Now the guitar seemed to fill the recorded acoustic with ringing sound.

TEST PARAMETERS / MODEL	CAMBRIDGE AZUR 740C
Maximum Output Level	2.3Vrms
A-wtd S/N Ratio	104.3dB
Distortion 1kHz, 0dBfs/-30dBfs	0.0006% / 0.004%
Distortion 20kHz, 0dBfs	0.0012%
Digital Jitter	125psec
Resolution @ -100dBfs	±0.3dB
Stereo separation (20Hz-20kHz)	>100dB

KIND OF BLUE

Next came another instrumental record, a potentially rather hackey choice but one that remains revealing to this day. On 'So What?' from Miles Davis' *'Kind Of Blue'*. In fact, only the Cambridge 740C conveyed a feeling of really deep bass from Paul Chambers, and also a convincing attack to the notes. Cymbals sounded clean without being over prominent, Miles's trumpet gained a keening but realistic edge, and Coltrane's sound also had more attack, making both soloists sound more forceful.

VOCAL TALENT

It was time to listen to some vocals, so I put Eric Bibbs *Diamond Days* [Telarc Blues 83660].**There** was spatial wizardry with the 740C

JENNY SINGS LENNY

Befor signing off, I returned to that most durable of test tracks, 'First We Take Manhattan' from Jennifer Warnes' album of Leonard Cohen songs, *Famous Blue Raincoat* [Classi RTHCD 5052].**This** same bass sounded firmer with the Cambridge 740C. In the upper registers, the sound on this busily detailed track came over more, I think, as the producer intended.

....**only** the Cambridge induced me to leave the disc playing. Its top end had a feeling of sparkle without any unwanted zings -for example the triangle sounds on the opening of Warnes' 'Bird On A Wire'. maybe the triangle (or whatever-shaped bit of metal this actually is) isn't the most important thing on the record, but its lifelike 'ting' tells you something. **G**

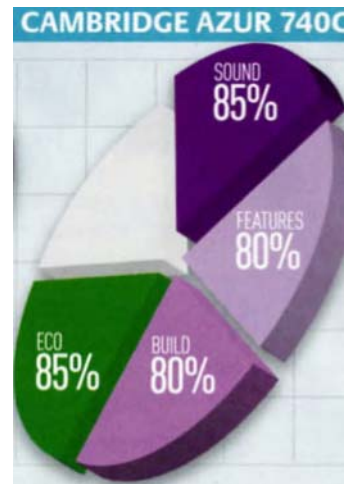
CD PLAYER VERDICT

..**Finally**, Cambridge's Azur 740C proved you can have a sound that's lively and super detailed, while offering a transparency and spaciousness that none of the other players here matched. All this adds up to an engaging, exciting sound and makes the Cambridge our first choice in this quartet of top-flight, mid-priced players.

Cambridge Audio Azur 740C

While Cambridge Audio still offers its 'economy' products, the current Azur range goes far beyond these. Top dog in the Azur CD player range is the E 1399,00 840C, but the 740C uses the same 24/bit384kHz upsampling technology (though with different DACs) in a design that is unusually 'high tech' at this price level. Rather bluff and hardly stylish (though perhaps better looking in silver than the black finish shown here), the 740C is solidly built with a chunky metal fascia.

Equipped with digital inputs, the 740C can also be used as a high quality upsampling DAC to process other digital sources. The 740A/C remote (which also operates Cambridge amplifiers) can be used to control the basic functions of an iPod mounted in Apple's universal dock, or other docks compatible with the Apple remote.



CAMBRIDGE AZUR 740C

This player is packed with the kind of technology found in far costlier players. It uses a pair of the WM8740 DACs found in Arcam's CD73 but driven at 384kHz from customised Anagram upsampling software. Coupled with a highly linear analogue stage, the 740C holds its low 0.0006% midrange distortion to within 0.0012% at 20kHz. Rejection of digital images is better than 125dB while jitter is pretty much at the theoretical limit for 16bit audio at just 125psec. This falls to just ~20psec with 24bit data from the digital input.

