

AUDIOTRENDS

P R O D U C T R E V I E W

NAD C521BEE CD Player



For a player that hasn't been around long it's already a classic. Great sound and reliability with good facilities. It offers excellent value for money."

What Hi-Fi gives the C521BEE its "best buy" award in the CD player category. If you're counting that would be SIX years in a row for this little titan. Some excerpts from the C521BEE review:

"NAD players are fast becoming the Sergey Bubkas of the CD world. During his career the pole-vaulter set 35 world records each time raising the bar just a notch. Both players here were upgraded last year, but NAD is at it again in an effort to squeeze out even better performance. And remember, the new machines' predecessors cleaned up in last year's Awards. The £200 C521i grabbed a Best Buy and the £330 C541i claimed the CD player Product of the Year gong. Happily, the prices stay the same.

In comparison to its predecessor, the C521BEE sounds markedly better: it offers significantly greater bass weight and depth, which adds

to the drama of classical and hip-hop tunes. This extra force is also evident in the midrange, where it helps convey more realistic vocals - Nina Simone's voice sounds richer and has extra presence. Tonal balance is superb for a £200 player: the deep drums and high-pitched strings during the Gladiator soundtrack's orchestral crescendos sound superbly clear and defined. And the previous model's impressive dynamics take a step up, helping to communicate the plunges and surges of instruments. We also detect a touch more detail from the new machine - it delivers Nina Simone's rendition of My Baby Just Cares For Me from her posthumously released Gold set with deftness. The drummer's nifty brush-work sounds fast and detailed and Nina's glorious voice is tender and expressive.

...NAD is at it again in an effort to squeeze out even better performance

So the first NAD tweak is a success. The C521BEE is a worthy successor

to last year's Award-winner and we have no complaints.

Next up is the £330 C542: visually it's almost identical to the £200 player but sonically there's a distinct increase in performance. However, up against the C541i the C542 sounds better - but not earth-shatteringly so. That said, this fine-tune attempts to improve a Product of the Year winner - never a simple brief.

For the money, its combination of great sound and solid build is unbeatable

Detail resolution increases - you hear more of the Spanish guitar in Gladiator's battle track, which thrillingly sets the scene for the warrior's entrance. This gentle rise in performance also applies to attack and bass weight, but the dynamics on offer take a greater step up: crescendos sound superb.

Fortunately this extra bass weight is not at the expense of control - during the Golden Globe-winning soundtrack, the deep bass drums sound firm and solid. Add this lower-frequency excellence to better

timing and the result is a romping presentation. The C542 belts out the battle sequence with gusto, and at the same time demonstrates those impressive, far-reaching dynamics. Very exciting stuff.

Switch musical genres and it's a similar story: this machine retains all the characteristics of the previous model - refined high frequencies, tuneful bass and a cohesive presentation - but raises performance levels in all areas just a notch. This is yet another successful NAD tweak - both players improve on their forebears - but which player would we choose? Well, the C542 remains an excellent buy, but the competition is hotting up: check out the new Arcam CD73T on page 29 of the October issue. We reckon the £200 NAD is now even better value. For the money, its combination of great sound and solid build is unbeatable. The C521BEE is not only the undisputed class leader, it's a true sonic athlete.

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