



System Audio 5010 Signature

Small speakers can kick ass too,
a fact well demonstrated by these
Kan-tankerous Danish devices.

£850

Before graduating to my current Naim SBLs I spent several years living with a pair of Linn's original *Kans*, which helped me develop a genuine admiration for high-performance miniature loudspeakers. It's easy to write off small boxes as being inherently too compromised to give fully satisfying performances — insufficient bass, limited loudness, restricted dynamics and so on — but when you cohabit with a decent example of the breed, tacked on the end of a well-sorted system, you soon dismiss those preconceptions.

The *Signatures* are roughly the same size as *Kans* when you look at them face-on, but their smartly finished cabinets are deeper and reflex ported. The ports and an eight-Ohm impedance help them deliver an impressively hearty account of bass instruments without demanding heaps of current. Nonetheless, I'd recommend that potential buyers don't scrimp when selecting an amplifier; the speakers have a candour and responsiveness that might well prove embarrassing for an amplifier that's not fully together in the control department. I used a Naim NAP250 and an Acurus A150, both of which were eminently suitable partners.

What I particularly appreciated with the *Signatures* was their speed — I love the way that small drivers stop and start, lending music a sense of genuine temporal precision. Mind you, that quality can prove wearing if the speaker doesn't play bass lines with a reasonable semblance of authority. The *Signatures* did. I thought that they'd at least come unstuck on Dread Zeppelin's *Un-Led-Ed*, but they sailed through it, ne'er once being tripped up by the dubward bass excursions. The low end demonstrated commendable grunt allied to superb articulation and intonation.

Given its size, this looks like an unduly expensive speaker, but its performance justifies its asking price.

If you have a small room and musically adept sources and amplification, the *Signatures* would doubtless complete your system most agreeably.

The Chord Company ☎ (01722) 331674

NAD 616

This double cassette deck appears
to have the right ingredients, but is
the recipe to Malcolm's liking?

£319.95

I've never understood why anyone would want a dubbing cassette deck, but I do know that most of them sound as inspiring as a party political broadcast. Still, if you feel a pressing need to make copies of material that's already on a third-rate format, I suppose you might as well try to find a good one.

Ask any sentient being to design such a beast and they'd slap a couple of decent transports in a box, then avoid weighing it down with the sort of features that most users will hardly ever need. This seems to be what NAD has done with the 616. The deck's facilities are restricted to those that are truly useful: Dolby noise reduction, auto-tape-selection, auto-reverse, and NAD's proprietary Play Trim equalisation control.

Nonetheless, listening to the 616 proved disappointing; playing com-

mercial cassettes it sounded dynamically compressed, restrained at the frequency extremes and lacking vitality. Play Trim helped to imbue the music with an appreciable sense of substance or life, but not enough. Normal-speed dubs exhibited similar characteristics, while high-speed dubbing quality was dubious and, as suggested by the instruction manual, best reserved for low grade (speech) copies. Recording from other sources naturally gave improved results, but even so, the 616 didn't light my fire. Music sounded shut in and prosaic, as though its energy content had been ironed flat. Pushing the record meters well into the red on metal tapes gave the liveliest recordings, but music still sounded dynamically muted with reduced attack on the leading edges of notes.

Over the years NAD has produced some truly memorable products, but I have to say that my experience with the 616 suggests it won't become one of that hallowed number.

NAD ☎ (0181) 343 3240

NAD has come up with some winners in its time — the 616 isn't one, alas.

The *Signatures* — proof that it's quality not quantity that counts.

