

**CD PLAYERS**

# Cambridge Audio Azur 640C ★★★★★

**FOR**

Speed, drama and excitement, with the weight and scale to back it up

**AGAINST**

Nothing of any significance

**VERDICT**

A superb machine from the new Azur range, challenging much more expensive players

OUR PHILOSOPHY HAS long been to get you the best sound for your pound, so we love finding products like the 640C. One of two CD players in the new Cambridge Audio Azur range – designed in the UK, built in China and sold through Richer Sounds shops – this one builds on the firm's reputation for performance, and wraps that ability up in a much classier package than has been the case with earlier Cambridge models.

That chain of British design, Far Eastern build and narrow distribution is how Cambridge manages to use such high-quality components. Inside, you'll find Sony laser optics and custom transport and servo assembly, a 24bit/192kHz Wolfson Microelectronics digital-to-analogue conversion system, proprietary reclocking

circuitry to tackle distortion-inducing jitter and separate power supplies for the transport, conversion and audio sections. Digital outputs are provided on optical and electrical connections, and the whole player is built on a vibration-absorbing chassis, the thick aluminium fascia playing a major part in the whole structural integrity.

Even with modest amplification and speakers, the quality of this player is apparent: it's fast and yet weighty in the bass, and has a well-judged midband and treble that bring out character in vocals and instruments. When you up the ante and plug it into some highly revealing amplification driving top-quality speakers, it pleases even more: play a set such as the Pet Shop Boys' Pop Art and the layers of

instrumentation are clearly delineated, while Neil Tennant's droll delivery is readily apparent. The player drives those rhythms well, too, from the growling bassline of West End Girls to the sting of high percussion.

The 640C majors on atmosphere. With a closely recorded chamber ensemble or the 'behind the scenes' second disc of The Beatles' Let It Be...Naked you'll find real involvement in the performance. The 640C gives music realistic scale, allowing you to enjoy the ambience even more.

While it is the most expensive player in this group, we're convinced it's worth every penny. Anyone in the market for a sub-£500 machine should give the 640C a listen before spending any more than £250.

