



Total Exposure

Exposure have added a CD player to their XM series of specialist units. Jon Myles likes its sound.

Exposure's XM series has built a loyal following – both for design and sound quality. Half-size shoe box units (think Cyrus), their range includes an

Unlike most CD players nowadays Exposure has eschewed slot loading or a flimsy slide-out tray. Instead it's a top loader – slide back the panel, place the CD on its hub then place the supplied puck on top before closing and you are ready to go.

Exposure believes this provides a more solid, stable platform for digital replay. Inside, the CD XM is built around a Burr Brown PCM 1716 24-bit DAC with multi-level delta-sigma modulator architecture and 8x

Play/Pause and Forward and Back buttons. All these are replicated on the supplied remote control which is uncomplicated and easy to use.

Taken as a whole, Exposure have to be congratulated on producing something more sophisticated than the standard CD players seen from many other manufacturers. That top loading mechanism alone would have involved a fair amount of mechanical engineering. It also makes the loading of a CD feel a little bit more special. No OEM slot loader or sled bought from China for pennies here. Loading a CD is a bit of a joy – the digital equivalent of dropping a needle onto



integrated amplifier, phono amplifier, pre-amplifier, mono amplifier and headphone amplifier.

One glaring omission, however, has been a CD player/transport. So cue the XM silver disc spinner I'm reviewing here – a model that takes its design cues from the rest of the range.

It features all aluminium casework with an extruded front panel said to control resonances and stray electromagnetic fields. It's also compact at 218mm x 94mm x 348mm (WxHxD). Put it together with the XM integrated amplifier and they blend in seamlessly.

oversampling digital filter. It's an interesting choice when most other players now go for the almost ubiquitous ESS Sabre DAC. Doubled-sided printed circuit boards are employed with special attention applied to minimising resonance and the influence of electromagnetic fields – a growing problem with the number of gadgets in households today. There's also a large toroidal transformer with separate windings for the CD transport mechanism and audio stages.

Around at back there are standard RCA phono-socket outputs, plus coaxial and digital outputs for connection to an external DAC.

The front panel carries a slim display window indicating track and elapsed time as well as Stop,

a slice of vinyl. OK, it's not as simple as a slot-loading device but it feels more satisfying.

So build-wise and operationally the Exposure is something different. But it's ultimately the sound that counts. So how does it fare?

SOUND QUALITY

The XM CD has a truly engaging musical sound with a smooth tonality and thoroughly toe-tapping rhythm. With Daft Punk's 'Get Lucky' the various strands of the track were easy to follow, yet the Exposure knitted the whole piece together perfectly if you just want to kick back and let the music wash over you.



A fully featured remote control comes as standard.

There was an impressively wide and spacious soundstage through a pair of Spondor A1 standmounts via a Creek Evolution 100A integrated amplifier. I heard a smooth tonality without any artificial warmth or hardness to the sound. Instead it came over as perfectly natural.

With the guitars on Oasis's 'Possibly Maybe' there was real bite with no attempt to gloss over the harsh nature of the playing. Leading edges of notes had a rasp to them, and decay lasted that little bit longer than on other machines at the price.

Dynamics were another standout of this machine. With an up-tempo track like The Jesus And Mary Chain's 'Something's Wrong' the Exposure pushed it along – but not at the expense of detail. Each instrument could be clearly made out and followed.

come alive. It lacks that smidgen of detail that makes more expensive rivals sound more insightful but then again it doesn't cost as much and that top loading mechanism makes playing a CD more of an experience.

Overall the sound was never

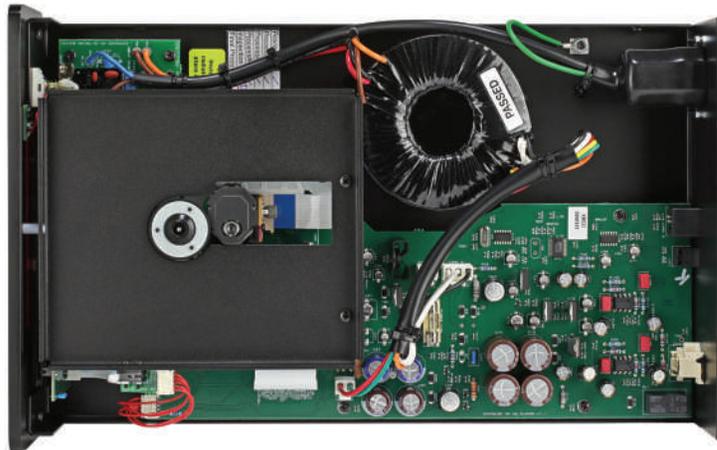
short of musical with just the right amount of detail allied to a thrusting presentation when needed and a true delicacy if the track demands.

It all came to the fore on Keith Jarrett's 'The Koln Concert' where piano veered between quiet, contemplative passages and hard-charging rhythms. Throughout the Exposure never missed a beat, drawing me into the performance.

CONCLUSION

Small in stature but potent in performance. The Exposure XM CD player is a real joy to listen to I found. Its compact form factor also makes it easy to accommodate – especially if paired with other XM series components. Digital outputs give it the ability to be used as a standalone transport. Highly recommended.

Despite its compact size the Exposure has a hefty linear power supply that contributes to its overall sound.



The rear panel has standard RCA outputs plus digital connections if you wish to use the unit as a transport connected to an external DAC.

There was light and shade on offer, the player managing to charge hard when needed but bring out the subtleties in something like Sinéad O'Connor's vocals.

I queued up The Velvet Underground's 'All Tomorrow's Parties' and the iciness of Nico's voice was perfectly underpinned by the basic, ringing guitar tones. As I said, light and shade in perfect harmony.

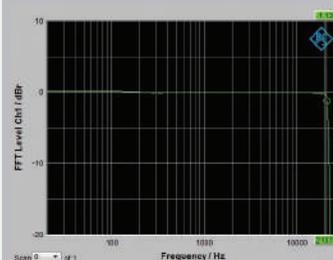
Criticisms? Well, the Exposure XM CD did not have the outright bass slam of some rivals. It trades that for an easier presentation - which to my mind is no bad thing. Also you can pay more to achieve greater detail and insight. Other players give a more enveloping 3D soundstage where the XM sounds a little flatter.

To be honest, though, this is being a little churlish. I've yet to hear a CD player that ticks all the boxes – especially at £1395.

What it does do is make music

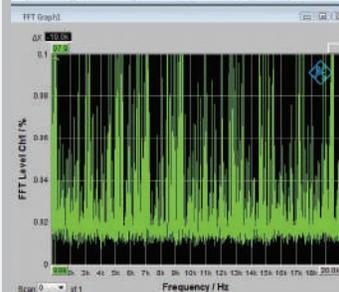
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION

THD at 0dB	Level (dB)	Frequency
0.2424 %	2.7309 mV	999.92 Hz
OFF	OFF	OFF



Frequency response reached 21kHz before rolling down sharply, as our convolved impulse response analysis shows. There are no filters.

Distortion at full level (0dB FS) measured 0.0013% and at -60dB a fairly typical (for CD) 0.24%. Dynamic range (EIAJ) came in at 99dB, where 102dB is possible, so good but not quite the best. Output was a standard 2.2V. Noise was very low at -123dB but likely due to zero-muting, the Dynamic Range value being a truer indicator of noise level.

Measured performance was absolutely standard in all areas, entirely as expected from well engineered CD. NK

Frequency response (192kHz,-1dB)	
4Hz-21kHz	
Distortion (-60dB, 24bit)	0.24%
Dynamic Range (EIAJ)	99dB
Noise	-123dB
Output	2.2V

EXPOSURE XM CD £1395



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VERDICT

An excellent CD player that does everything right and virtually nothing wrong. Strongly recommended.

FOR

- smooth, musical sound
- compact size
- digital outputs
- top loading

AGAINST

- bass could be stronger
- nothing else at the price

Exposure Electronics Ltd
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