



● RAW POWER

Lunar tunes

The Moon headphone amp delivers stellar sound.

GIVEN THAT AN increasingly large amount of our music-listening is via ear/headphones these days, if you care about the way your music sounds then it makes sense to get some decent kit to deliver it to your lugholes. If you're really serious about it, start by getting rid of all those MP3 files and instead use better, higher resolution sound sources (CD, FLAC files, vinyl). Get some decent headphones; as we've mentioned before, go for fidelity over fashion. And then save some of your partying money until you've got enough for a quality headphone amp (like headphones, there are plenty of 'toys' and 'fur coat and no knickers' types out there; choose wisely, Grasshopper), such as the Moon Neo 230 HAD from Simaudio. "Think 'affordable luxury' where spectacular sonic performance meets an opulent feel and appearance, all at a modest price," says the sales pitch. Which sounds cool, eh? And so does your music when this gizmo does its thing on it.

So what do you get for your not insubstantial outlay of what you used to chuck into pub tills? Apart from an end product that'll blow your socks off, that is. Well, you get a rather big, black, cool-looking, reassuringly heavy metal box with one big knob, a couple of silver buttons and some pretty red LEDs to look at if you get bored

during the gaps between tracks. It has digital and analog mini-jack, USB and RCA (what in old money we called phono) inputs, enabling use with just about any digital source, while analogue outputs include a quarter-inch jack headphone socket (you probably figured it has one of those, eh Einstein?) and both fixed and variable line-level RCA stereo pairs. Last but not least, it comes with a remote control, so you don't have to get off your audiophile arse when you want to fiddle with the functions (you do, however, in order to plug the thing into a mains socket; no remote's that clever).

The most important thing you get, of course, assuming you're listening on similarly high-end 'phones and you're not feeding the Moon with MP3s, is quite superb rich, sparkling sound quality, and music that sounds like the artist intended you to hear it.

You might think the Moon is expensive (around 200 pints in a posh pub), but with this sound and this build quality you're getting a piece of kit that's going to enhance your music-listening pleasure enough to make it worth shelling out for.

£1,150. More info at simaudio.com

Paul Henderson



FUZZY LOGIC

Is that a guitar, or a pile of electronics?

Strange how since the birth of rock, people have been striving for better, cleaner, more accurate, more 'natural' sounding hi-fi components that will make the music we listen to as close as possible to how it was intended to be heard, while at the same time guitarists have done anything and everything they can to make their guitars sound as unlike the instrument's natural sound as possible. With fuzz boxes, flangers and phasers, reverb units, distortion and overdrive pedals, often on pedal-boards the size of a London studio flat, they have succeeded getting as far away from the early rock'n'roll sound of, say, Hank Marvin's spotlessly clean Stratocaster twang as it's possible to get.

But that's kind of the easy way to tailor an individual sound. Far more impressive is someone like Jeff Beck (pictured), whose recognisable and wonderful guitar tone comes not from foot pedals and racks of effects, but from how and where he hits the strings. And nobody does it better.