

Classé Delta SSP-600 and CA-5200

Classé's Delta range redefines high-end multichannel sound for music and movies

PRICE £11,900 (SP-600 £5,450; CA-5200 £6,450) CONTACT B&W Loudspeakers, Dale Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN11 2BH ☎ 01903 221500 www.classeaudio.com

The strategy that B&W-owned subsidiary Classé is adopting for the multichannel world is finally becoming apparent. There are three elements to it: the SSP-600 preamplifier-cum-processor and CA-5200 power amplifier reviewed here, and the CDP-300 DVD player, which is due imminently.

This is how it works. The CA-5200 is a high-grade processor, with a plethora of audio and video inputs up to and including component video, and the ability to transcode video up or down through the different standards. This helps to simplify the wiring between processor and display screen. The CA-5200 five-channel power amplifier is rated at 200 watts per channel, and has a circuit architecture directly derived from the CA-2200, Classé's superb, audiophile-quality power monoblock.

“These are distinguished by more than just flexibility, power and an integral TFT screen.”

Both components use Classé's uniquely sophisticated user interface, which includes a set of nested graphic menus that are displayed on the processor's own TFT screen. This saves using a TV screen, for example when navigating a DVD-Audio disc, and it will also show any video programme material if required. But what's missing here is any digital video output capable of driving an HDTV screen.

The third and final element in the story is the forthcoming CDP-300 DVD player. This will be able to display to a HDTV screen, because (unlike the processor) it will sport an HDMI output that can be channelled straight to the display. This by itself doesn't allow the use of multiple HDMI sources, likely a common requirement among adopters of HD DVD or Blu-ray players and Sky HD+ set-top boxes. But there is an upgrade in preparation that will allow two HDMI sources to be connected through the player, turning the player into an enhanced model, the CDP-30V. This will also be available separately in its own right.

SOUND QUALITY

These components are distinguished by more than just flexibility, power and an integral TFT screen. They are also superbly built. In each case, the wrap-around front and side panel member was conceived as a kind of mechanical earth, but a strong anti-resonance and microphony story lies behind the whole of the mechanical design. The firmware of each component is also used to monitor its status, and if necessary to report its condition, including faults, to the dealer using a laptop computer with appropriate Classé-supplied software.

This is a system that will soon be able to cope with digital video, albeit in a slightly clumsy way. In every other respect, the Classé equipment is superbly equipped and readily upgradeable. More to the point, no excuses need be made for its performance. The power amplifier is massively powerful, with a low-frequency delivery that has a bold, open musculature, and a vivid, expressive yet disciplined midband and treble. It

is broadly comparable to the best stereo power amps available from elsewhere, in some cases from models that – channel for channel – cost considerably more than the CA-5200.

And what of the SSP-600 processor? It's almost in the same class, and that's a remarkable achievement for a product so inherently complex, and whose roles in life involve so much more than just dealing with sound-quality issues. If listening in stereo, using the processor as a preamplifier, it pays real musical dividends to switch the internal TFT display off and use all the relevant bypasses. Also, use the balanced outputs if possible. The power amp has balanced mode inputs and is configured internally as a balanced design.

The SP-600 is an excellent tool for reproducing stereo or multichannel SACD from heavyweight players, like those reviewed elsewhere in this issue. But switch to films and you have a superb Dolby and DTS-equipped processor, with a heavy duty, high-speed DSP section capable of generating a genuinely three-dimensional soundfield. If you're looking for top-class multichannel amplification – here it is! **HFC**

Alvin Gold

See HFC 278 (April 2006) for our original review of this product

