



1 UP-Manship

Electrocompaniet's latest EMC 1 UP CD player is well worth switching on, says David Price...

And so it is that we reach the twilight years of the original 'Digital Audio Disc', and just as vinyl leapt ahead in sonic ability as hi-fi's grim reaper appeared for it, so we see a flurry of new developments arriving to hoist the venerable digital Frisbee up to another level now. Despite being a professional Compact Disc naysayer for the past twenty years - and for a long period of that seemingly in a gang of one - I have to concede that things aren't, ermm, quite as bad as they were soundwise. Indeed, if you're prepared to spend a fair sum, then you can get ye olde 16bit to really perform, as Electrocompaniet's latest EMC 1 UP shows...

It's not just me who's cottoned on to this, by the look of it. A quick shuftie at last year's Gfk figures show that while the size of CD spinner market is contracting, its value is holding surprisingly well. This means that we're all buying fewer CD players, but the ones we are buying are quite a bit more expensive than before. So, in a nutshell, the 'entry level' CD market is dead or at least moribund, and the only folks who want a curious machine that plays arcane physical media - which is the technological equivalent of a brick sized eighties mobile phone or the Sega Megadrive - are the hardcore enthusiasts who have a large collection of discs they want to enjoy for the foreseeable future. Fascinating,

as this is just where vinyl was when CD delivered it that near fatal blow in the late eighties!

Products like Electrocompaniet's EMC 1 UP are not therefore bought as casual purchases, but by people who know what they want and why they want it. They're discerning, and want all the latest technological tricks and the best engineering. This machine ticks all those boxes - surprisingly perhaps at a price a little lower than its some other natural competitors. The princely sum of £3,450 buys you a large (483x440x115mm) metal box - formed from crackle black finish pressed steel (think 1968 MGB dashboard), fronted by a thick slab of Perspex. Surprisingly, the casework



is quite resonant; rap it with your knuckles and it rings a little more than perhaps it should - especially compared to a price rival like, say, Naim's CDX2. Still, it feels, bigger, heavier (it is a portly 20kg) and more chunky than the Naim, all the same.

Sitting amidst is the latest and most expensive Philips CD Pro mechanism, top loading as has suddenly become the fashion these days, and complete with small magnetic puck. This is very carefully mounted to the main chassis with a proprietary mechanical filter which Electrocompaniet say has been tuned by extensive listening tests - it's designed to remove internal and external vibration components from entering the laser pick-up assembly, and quite right too as this has a highly deleterious effect on sound.

Having addressed the key mechanical design issues, the EMC I UP goes on to use a good deal of clever electronics, including the company's latest fully balanced symmetrical circuit design (complete with rear panel XLR outs to complement its standard RCA phono line outs) powered by four separate power supplies using Electrocompaniet's FTT (Floating Transformer Technology). These aspirate the digital unit, the display, the drive mechanism and the

analogue unit respectively. Finally, a 24bit 192kHz upsampling DAC is used to reduce the noise floor by 10dB, the company claims.

The EMC I UP isn't an unattractive bit of kit by any means, but it's certainly a little 'industrial' in its finish. For example, it has a good number of exposed allen bolt heads on the top plate which, were he found responsible, would doubtless cause a Japanese production engineer to commit *seppuku*. Closer to home, rival products from Linn and Naim are finished (on the outside at least) to a higher standard. The bad news continues with the remote control,

which is an embarrassment for a machine of this price.

Getting the EMC I UP going isn't as easy as some - it has three wing nuts underneath securing the transport which must be removed, as well as a disc cover lock which requires the removal of two allen bolts from a plate with a supplied allen key. Once again, getting a Naim CDX2 going is an altogether more civilised process.

Finally, an optional Spider Clamp

is available to replace the stock magnetic puck. It effectively centres the CD on the spindle even more accurately than the latter, and holds it not only from the centre but from the periphery. It's available in black, blue and silver.

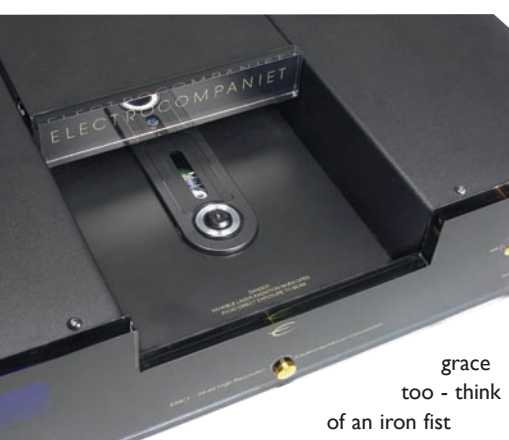
SOUND QUALITY

Having given the EMC I UP a good run in, I soon came to the conclusion that it's a sin not to use the balanced outputs (if your amplifier is thus equipped), and the Spider Clamp also helped in the sound quality stakes, so that's how the Electrocompaniet was used - sitting on a Quadraspire rack

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made a further pleasant step forward.

Kicking off with 4hero's 'Look Inside', and the I UP instantly impressed, showing a distinctive family sound with the massive NEMO power amplifier we reviewed a few months back. Its sound is as clean as a Norwegian river and no less bracing, with a very large amount of detail and a bold, epic presentation. But behind those big bass lines, expansive vocals images and biting hi-hat cymbals lies a certain civility and



grace too - think of an iron fist in a velvet glove. I was particularly struck by the opening bars, with the skipping, looped electronic percussion. Many mid-price CD players trip over their toes with this, trying to be too clever by attempting to accurately excavate all that detail along with this band's trademark sinewy rhythms. But the Electrocompaniet held everything together brilliantly, showing a dextrous touch that marks it out as a serious CD player.

Tonally, the 1 UP is fresh as ocean spray; there's not a hint of tailored response curves designed to imbue an artificial warmth, yet nor is there any hardness present either. It has an upfront and immediate sound, yet it never becomes forward even with the icy vocals of Kate Bush on 'This Woman's Work'. This CD player isn't dull by any means, but it seems quite devoid of harshness or distortion which is what really gives the sensation of brightness. Indeed, well recorded piano was a delight through the 1 UP, which managed to resolve its shimmering harmonics particularly well for a 16bit silver disc spinner. This machine gives the sense of being very incisive yet not bright - which is just what you want.

Corduroy's 'London England' showed the player's bass prowess. It's not as obviously imposing as, say, a Naim CDX2, lacking that last fraction of a percent in dynamic articulation, but I was struck by its natural tone and organic tunefulness. If anything, the CDX2 - which is acknowledged to be excellent in this respect - timed in a slightly more 'frigid' way. The Electrocompaniet's bass just seemed to sashay along like the coolest swinger at the party, making it all seem so effortless and unrehearsed - and, more to the point, so enjoyable. This player's low frequencies are strong and weighty, but not conspicuously so.

Give the 1 UP a bass driven song like The Emotions' 'Best of My Love', a classic slice of late seventies disco, and the result is a riot. The suppleness shown down below runs right up to a very tuneful midband, bristling with percussive details which are beautifully syncopated; drums, hi-hat cymbals and maracas started

and stopped with great alacrity. Better still, the player is able to sew together all this transient information in a wonderfully lucid way, making for an extremely enjoyable listen. A late seventies analogue recording such as this is also a great showcase for the Electrocompaniet's treble finery. Cymbals are resolved with finesse, a great deal of space around them, crisp leading edges and a long, natural decay. They're not anywhere as nice as the sound of a good moving coil cartridge tracing a vinyl groove, but just about the best I've heard at this price all the same.

A Linn Records release of Mozart's 'Colleredo Serenade' (Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Alexander Janiczek) crystallised the EMC 1 UP's true character for me. A majestically wide recorded acoustic within which there was a tangible sense of atmosphere and perspective, beautifully rendered solo instruments (brass had rasp, oboes a 'reedy' sound and violins



came with body) and tremendous sense of vivaciousness in the musicianship, together made for an immensely enjoyable experience. This player proved able to communicate both the fine details of the music and a visceral sense of occasion without drawing attention to itself. I found it all too easy to sit in front of the system, getting 'lulled' into the music, distracted from my task of attempting to ruthlessly deconstruct this player's abilities.

CONCLUSION

An interesting one, the Electrocompaniet EMC 1 UP. In design, build and finish it is more quirky than you might expect from an avowedly professional purveyor of high end hi-fi, but in performance it is not. Instead, this CD player greets you with

a compellingly musical yet highly finessed and subtle performance. It is less obviously 'voiced' than its rival Naim CDX2 for example, sounding slightly less conspicuously powerful and dynamic but certainly no less captivating - indeed if anything it is more beguiling and nicer to listen to over long periods. As such, there's very little to touch it for those wanting a CD player at this price - it's a brilliant upgrade from 'super budget' machines like Astin Trew's AT3500 and yet easily capable enough to make buyers of more expensive machines like Accoustic Arts CD Player 1 Mk2 think again. So if you're in the market for your first serious CD player - or even your last - make sure you hear this.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Marantz CD63 KI DP CD player
Sugden IA4 integrated amplifier
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT

Super clean sounding CD player that's beguilingly musical and sophisticated too - an excellent mid-price proposition.

ELECTROCOMPANIET EMC-1UP

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FOR

- commandingly musical
- superbly finessed
- easy to listen to
- balanced operation

AGAINST

- slightly 'industrial' finish
- awful remote
- fiddly set-up

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Our analysis of frequency response of the EMC 1-UP shows it is all but flat, falling by just the smallest amount - a mere 0.1dB - at high frequencies. The measured high frequency limit was a normal 21.3kHz (-1dB) and the low frequency limit a very low 2Hz. The EMC 1-UP will sound accurate as a result, and free from undue brightness or warmth due to response errors.

Distortion was well suppressed throughout the player's dynamic range and this helped significantly toward a good EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 111dB being achieved, amongst the best, if not quite the top of the tree.

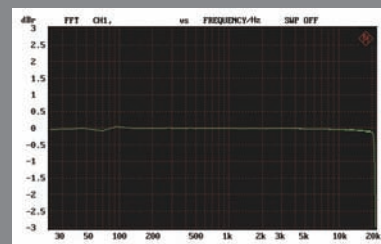
Noise was very low and output level a healthy 2.4V. Signal related jitter from the digital output, via both unbalanced and balanced, was on the high side, a 1kHz -60dB tone experiencing 500pS, compared to around 80pS expected. Random jitter was also a little high, peaking at around 40pS against 10pS expected. This suggests the EMC 1-UP isn't ideal as a transport.

The EMC 1-UP measures well in all respects except via its digital output, so as a CD player it is up with the best, if as a transport isn't. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)
CD 2Hz - 21.3kHz

Distortion (%)	
0dB	0.004
-6dB	0.003
-60dB	0.22
-80dB	3.9
Separation (1kHz)	-120dB
Noise (IEC A)	-113dB
Dynamic range	111dB
Output	2.4V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION

