



Arcam FMJ CDS27/A39 £2,300

It may be the most expensive in the group, but this dynamic duo packs a lot of power and performance

STREAM LOVER

It makes sense to design one digital source component to play back both CDs and also stream music from a UPnP source. The CDS27 does precisely this, and adds SACD playback for good measure. It sounds excellent across all formats that it is designed to play, but given that the matching FMJ A39 doesn't have any digital inputs, it's perhaps a missed opportunity that the CDS27 doesn't have the ability to also act as a DAC (like the Musical Fidelity). Still, this combination ends up as a flexible package, with a plethora of inputs and the ability to fit a moving magnet phono board, or to configure the back panel phono sockets as an additional line input. The only obvious omission is true USB DAC functionality (the CDS27 can only play Flash drives via USB) and Bluetooth – although Arcam offers the excellent rBlink (HFC 379), which can be powered by the FMJ A39.

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Arcam FMJ CDS27
£800/A39 £1,500
- ORIGIN**
UK/China
- TYPE**
CD player/streamer & integrated amplifier
- WEIGHT**
FMJ CDS27: 6.2kg
FMJ A39: 11.5kg
- DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD) FMJ CDS27: 433 x 87 x 278mm, FMJ A39: 433 x 100 x 425mm
- FEATURES**
- Quoted power: 2x 120W (8ohm)
 - 6x RCA line inputs; 1x MM phono
 - Ethernet networking, USB port; XLR output (CDS27)
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Arcam
- WEBSITE**
arcam.co.uk

Famous for its mid-price hi-fi separates, Arcam has been winning awards for over 40 years. It has always delivered fine products, but the company seems to be enjoying a particularly purple period right now. The FMJ A39 (HFC 394) amplifier is one of them, but the new CDS27 CD player/streamer also looks promising. The CD player as a breed is certainly on the wane, so what better way to make it relevant than to combine it with a network music player – giving all types of digital music playback from a single box? As well as offering CD and SACD compatibility, it also streams music at up to 24-bit/192kHz resolution through its Burr-Brown DAC. Careful clocking is utilised, and extra special attention has been paid to the power supply with separate feeds for the drive mechanism, audio and DAC boards.

The FMJ A39 integrated amplifier is an interesting device, running in Class

G; this mode of operation means that it works in near Class A up to around 20W, but then gives the cool running that's more commonly associated with Class AB at higher levels. It boasts a large toroidal power supply, acoustically damped chassis and a built-in moving magnet phono stage. Metal film resistors are used in the signal path, which have a much higher linearity than cheaper parts and careful attention has been paid in particular to the circuit board layout.

Its controls respond positively, and it has a wide range of (analogue) inputs and twin switched speaker outlets. Build and finish of both models is excellent, reflecting its higher price.

Sound quality

The priciest here, the Arcam combo also proves itself to be the best all-round performer. The amplifier has already been well reviewed and its talents are conspicuous here too; it sounds very powerful and gutsy, yet has a natural musical zeal that grips the listener and doesn't let go. Coldplay's *Speed Of Sound* becomes an expansive piece of stadium rock that soars around the room; I sit on the edge of my sofa, gripped by its scale and visceral impact. Even the superb Exposure 2010S2 integrated sounds surprisingly tame by comparison. The CDS27 is also a fine source, well able to capture the rhythmic nuances of *King*.

The Cocteau Twins' glorious *Lorelei* is the perfect track to reveal the true

class of this combo; though it can sound shrill and shouty, the Arcam duo seems to penetrate beyond its superficially forward balance and get into the groove, really highlighting dynamic contrasts. Compared with the highly capable Musical Fidelity combo it is more insightful and nuanced, and one can focus on the subtle inflections in Liz Frazer's singing rather than trying to shy away from it – as on the super-budget Mitchell & Johnson pairing! *Summertime* floats as if on air; it is wonderfully expressive and the recorded acoustic seems vast with lots of space. One feels the sensation of really being there at the venue, and I find myself transfixed by the music. Tonally the Arcam combo is pleasingly rich and warm in the bass, but it also has a lovely glint to cymbals that the others here all lack. In short, it's in a class all of its own ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Hugely powerful and lucid sound; flexibility; build; styling
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No digital inputs on either amplifier or CD source
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** The best sounding combination here, and versatile too
- FEATURES**
★★★★★

OVERALL

