

This is still a very good amp, but sitting alongside some illustrious competition, it loses some sparkle

### Roksan Caspian M series-1 £1000

#### ↑ FOR

Big, bold sound; agile and well-defined bass frequencies

#### ↓ AGAINST

Looking pricey, and the poor-quality remote won't inspire you much

#### ❖ VERDICT

A worthy piece of kit, but suddenly lacks the sparkle of the best – Cyrus has shown it a clean pair of heels



WHEN THIS AMPLIFIER was part of a *Group Test* in April this year, it scored the full complement of stars and ran the Cyrus 8 achingly close for winning position. So what has happened in the interim?

Well, the Cyrus 8vs happened, but that can't be enough to render the Roksan a poor amplifier overnight. There's enough ability on board here to make it some people's perfect choice. Those who crave a substantial, broad-beamed sound, from a beefy, well-finished device, won't be disappointed by the Roksan.

The Caspian is screwed together with reassuring thoroughness, destined to last for decades, but plays it fractionally mean in the facilities department. Most importantly, it presents a big-boned, solid sound, crammed with bold low-frequency impact. It has the sort of fulminating bass presence that brings Franz Ferdinand's *Take Me Out* bounding effortlessly from the loudspeakers in a pure rush of adrenaline.

Wholly expansive, the Roksan can thrill with its energy and smooth attack when conditions are favourable, but if the source material is on

the bulky side, can equally sound slightly musclebound – it's not lacking in insight and is by no means short on confidence, but can be tripped up by less lithe recordings, becoming overemphatic at times.

Through the midrange, the Caspian is a model of clarity and focus. No, it can't approach the Unison Research machine in terms of sheer uninhibited communication, but in fairness, none of these amplifiers can. Its solid soundstage and respectable speed are enough to ensure Marcia Griffiths' awkward-to-time *No, No, No* never gets bogged down. True, there's a tiny tendency for high-frequency information to be played safe, rolling off some of the more strident tones that the Cyrus would be happy to dish up, but this is an inconsequential quibble. No, the major problem faced by the Caspian lies elsewhere.

In that April issue, we voiced some vague but nagging doubts about the price of this latest Caspian amplifier (along with some rather more specific complaints about the standard of the remote control). The emergence of Cyrus's 8vs has thrown these concerns into sharper relief.

**“Roksan, along with others, has been left breathless by Cyrus' decisive kick off the bend with its 8vs”**

Roksan, among others, has been left breathless by Cyrus' decisive kick off the bend with its superb 8vs, in terms of both sound and value for money. It's impossible to deny the Caspian's agile, forceful presentation, nor its excellent build and potential for longevity, but it's looking a bit pedestrian and expensive.

### Unison Research Unico £900

#### ↑ FOR

Warm, weighty bass; the Unico has a supernatural ability with voices

#### ↓ AGAINST

Poor remote control; this amp has actually become more expensive

#### ❖ VERDICT

Refined, but not prissy, the Unico is still one of the best – we'll even forgive the disconcerting price rise



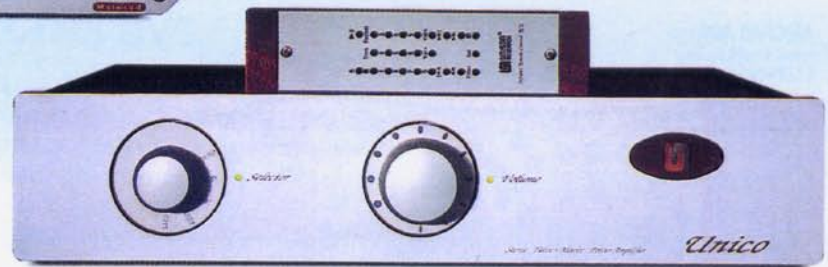
IT MIGHT NOT be unique, but it's mighty unusual – in the 16 months or so since we first reviewed this amp, despite rising interest rates and wobbly consumer confidence, the Unison Research Unico has actually contrived to go up in price. Can it possibly hold its own against fresher competition, at a new and 'unimproved price-point?

The answer is that it certainly can: it still sounds fabulous. Within that steel casework, with its ostentatious front slab of aluminium, is the Italian manufacturer's textbook arrangement of hybrid technology – a valves'n'transistors concoction that combines the best characteristics of each to gratifying effect.

Young members of the Nintendo, instant-gratification generation might find the 20 seconds of flashing LEDs that indicate the Unico is warming its valves to be unendurable. However, once the lights are steady, the Unison Research is primed, and it's well worth the wait.

The valves make their presence felt with a pleasingly weighty, luxurious low-frequency signature that's entirely free of the heavy-

Overall, this is a cracking amp, and its ability with vocals might just take your breath away



legged torpor that can afflict valve-only devices. Tempos are perky and timing is sprightly, as good as anything here bar the Cyrus's or the Eclipse's. Can's metronomic track *Vitamin C* shows an enviable combination of warmth and speed, while the galloping bassline is both finely controlled and fast.

The top end, too, is well catered for: crisp and attacking when needs be, but never hard or brittle. However, the real star turn of the Unison Research's performance is the midrange, and particularly its uncanny ability with voices – in this area, the Unico is not only demonstrably the best amp in this test, but one of the best you'll ever hear, full stop. The sheer naturalness this machine invests in voices is almost – ahem –

**“The top end is well catered for – attacking and crisp when it needs to be, but never hard”**

unnatural. Listening to Nina Simone's bloodchilling version of Brecht and Weill's *Pirate Jenny*, the undisguised malevolence and glee in her voice is enough to give you goosebumps. Each of these disparate elements are elegantly, seamlessly integrated.

Unison Research has always been fond of wood – witness the badge and remote of this device. Which leads us to our last question: what's the definition of a microsecond? It's the time for which you must press the volume button on the remote control for the volume to shoot from minimum to maximum. But, hey, it's a minor moan – don't imagine that the Unico is anything other than an amplifier of rare ability.