

A star is born

Jimmy Hughes believes Shanling's latest CD player gets closer to SACD performance levels than anything comparable on the market

Shanling's new CD-T2000 shares the stunning aesthetic of the former CD-T1500, but, although superficially similar, the two players are, in fact, quite different.

The CD-T2000 is a Red Book CD player constructed around a high-quality Sanyo HD-850 transport. It also features a Burr-Brown PCM 1792 24-bit/192kHz upsampling

DAC. It has a genuine tube output stage, but no solid-state analogue output. There are actually two 12AUX7 (ECC 82) tubes per-channel (four tubes total), because the player offers the option of single-ended or balanced operation.

USB-compatible

Like many new CD players, the CD-T2000 features a USB socket,



► DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Shanling CD-T2000

ORIGIN:
China

TYPE:
CD player

WEIGHT:
11.7kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
505x142x330mm

FEATURES:
• Tube analogue output stage
USB input

• Sanyo HD-850 pro transport

• 4x ECC82 valves

• Ultra-precise and linear volume control

• Full-function remote control

DISTRIBUTOR:
Real Hi-Fi

TELEPHONE:
01257 473175

WEBSITE:
shanling.com

enabling you to use its DAC with computer-based music storage systems. It also has a digital input (and digital output) via RCA phono sockets. Two sets of variable analogue outputs are provided – single-ended via RCA phono sockets and balanced via XLRs.

Output voltage levels are claimed to be 2.1V and 4.2V for unbalanced and balanced respectively. The volume control is a digital-type and, having variable output, allows you to connect the CD-T2000 direct to a power amp – though the unbalanced output voltage of 2.1V may be a bit low for some power amps.

There are three power transformers: two for the analogue outputs and one for the digital side of things. To retain the smooth classic lines of the earlier player, while offering various switching options, three of the four corner posts feature selector switches: power on/off; output volume and a CD player/USB input switch.



SONICALLY, AREN'T all CD players much of a muchness?

While it's not fair to infer they all sound the same, there do seem to be certain characteristics and limitations.

The first is a certain coarseness/congestion that robs the sound of its natural purity, making massed violins sound slightly rough. Voices display a slight 'edge' that emphasises sibilance.

Then there's a sort of 'closed-in' quality that affects the upper frequencies – a slightly hard nasal quality that compromises the natural timbre of voices and instruments, and takes the 'air' out of the sound.

Truth is, if you listen to CD for long enough, you stop noticing these drawbacks and limitations – you simply get used to them and the CD-T2000 tackles these sonic issues with greater success than many players we've heard.

The Sanyo transport is a high-quality device that's virtually silent during operation. There are no audible whirrs or clicks – important for an 'open' player like this, as there's no case to reduce the noise. The transport offers fast track access and reasonably speedy fast search – certainly, better than the CD-T1500, which was very slow.

Shanling's SCD-T2000 (SACD/CD player) had a solid-state output with the option of a tube buffer stage to add a bit of valve warmth. However, this player has a proper tube output stage and no solid-state option.

One slight grumble is the way the CD-T2000's volume control automatically defaults to -40dB once power is switched off. While, useful if you're connecting directly to

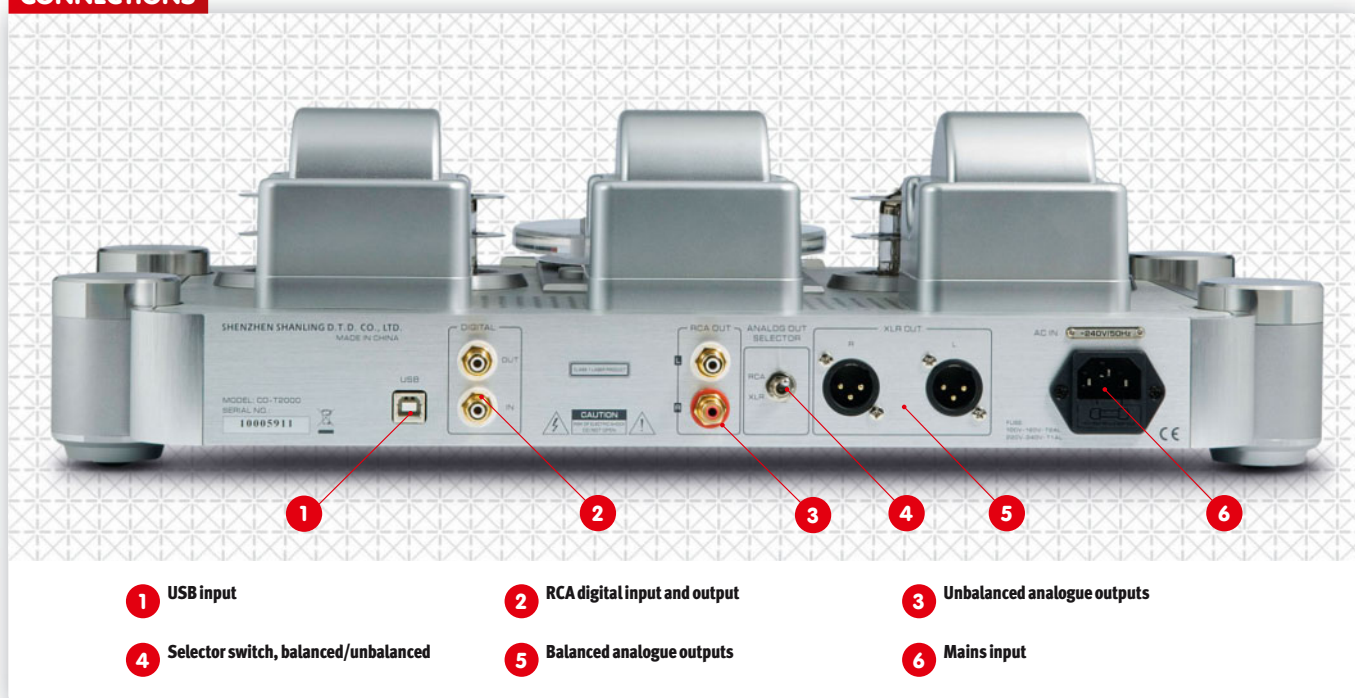
“An unusually good player, it lets you hear the music as it was originally recorded.”

a power amp, it means you have to turn the volume control clockwise about 2.5 turns (or use the remote) to get back to maximum output again each time you switch the player on.

Battleship build

Like most Shanling products, the CD-T2000 offers 'battleship' build quality and a very high standard of

CONNECTIONS



1 USB input

2 RCA digital input and output

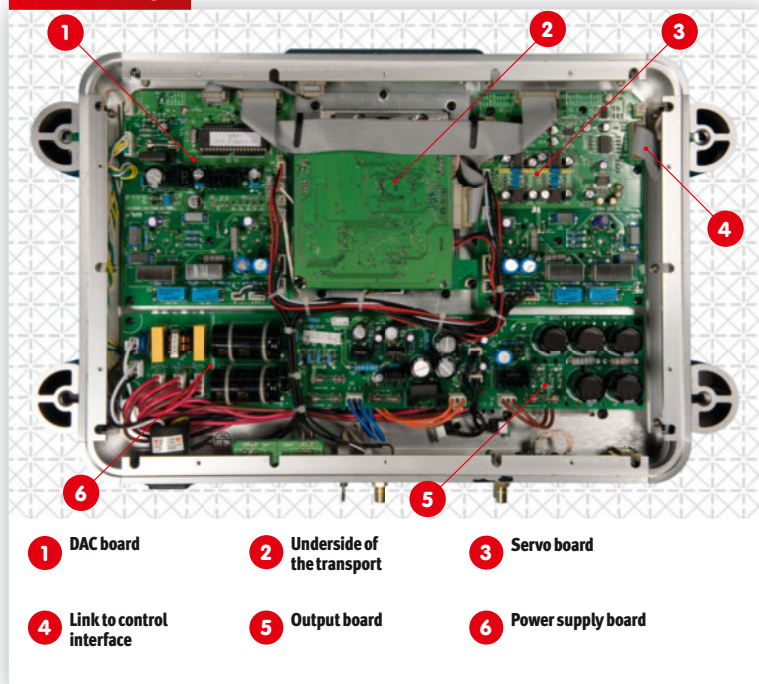
3 Unbalanced analogue outputs

4 Selector switch, balanced/unbalanced

5 Balanced analogue outputs

6 Mains input

HIDDEN TECH



- 1 DAC board
- 2 Underside of the transport
- 3 Servo board
- 4 Link to control interface
- 5 Output board
- 6 Power supply board

finish. The entire chassis is made from solid aluminium panels around one centimetre thick and sits on four corner turrets. It weighs in at about 11kg, which is remarkably heavy for a CD player and whether or not its substantial build affects performance is debatable. But the sound certainly has a 'solid' quality to match the look and feel of the player.

While the chassis dimensions are more or less the same as earlier Shanling players, having the feet at each corner has effectively made the player wider. Indeed, so wide, it only just fits onto a 'normal' 46cm-width hi-fi equipment shelf. Ideally, you need one with a width of about 50cm.

If this product were manufactured in the USA, it would probably cost three or four times what Shanling is asking here and at just under £2,000, makes it a veritable bargain. You can buy it secure in the knowledge that

few products anywhere at any price will match it for build quality and finish.

Comparable to SACD

Before auditioning the CD-T2000, we'd been enjoying the sound of the SCD-T2000 SACD player. When playing SACDs, the latter delivers a very open, detailed sound that's very natural and the difference between CD and SACD on this player has been fairly marked (but that's what you'd expect given the technical advantages of a higher-resolution format like SACD).

With CD, however, the CD-T2000 sounds better than the SCD-T2000 and while the latter delivers a very open sound – it lacks that slightly hard 'closed-in' tonal balance you almost always get with CD. This difference is very noticeable on instruments like cymbals. Via the CD-T2000, cymbals reproduce with a



WE SPOKE TO Li Jinhui, (General Manager) of Real Hi-Fi about the CD-T2000.

HFC: Mechanically, the CD-T2000's disc transport seems much quieter than that of the SCD-T2000 – especially at the start of a disc?

LJ: The amount of noise is determined by the servo system. For the SACD player, we used the Sony servo, but this did not offer perfect stability for the CD-T2000, we were able to use a better servo system made by Philips.

Your SACD player featured a tube in line with the solid-state output; is the CD-T2000 similar?

For the CD-T2000 we used a proper tube analogue output stage, employing special custom-made high-end 12AU7 valves. It's superior to the output stage used on the SCD-T2000?

The CD-T2000 is a 24bit/192kHz up-sampling player, but it appears you can't switch between the native and high-resolution options – even though there's a 24-bit/192kHz button on the remote.

There's no switchable up-sampling feature on the CD-T2000, that's why the remote does not work.

Do the four tubes enable balanced operation?

Yes; separate tubes are used for the unbalanced right and left output RCA sockets and the other two tubes are for the XLR balanced right and left channel.

How do you wire your balanced XLR sockets?

Our balanced configuration is as follows. Pin 1: GND, Pin 2: Hot (positive), Pin 3: Cold (negative).

lovely breathy openness that sounds like good analogue. Transients have crisp attack and there's plenty of body and shimmer. But what's unusual and remarkable is the lack of tonal hardness – something that really lets you experience the sound of stick on metal – or metal to metal when orchestral cymbals are crashed together.

Playing the recent Boulez recording of Mahler's orchestral song cycle *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, we were forcibly struck by the truthful natural quality of the sound – the pure uncoloured timbres and spacious naturalness produced. Had we not known otherwise, we'd have thought we were listening to an SACD rather than a CD – there was a comparable purity and 'rightness' about the sound.

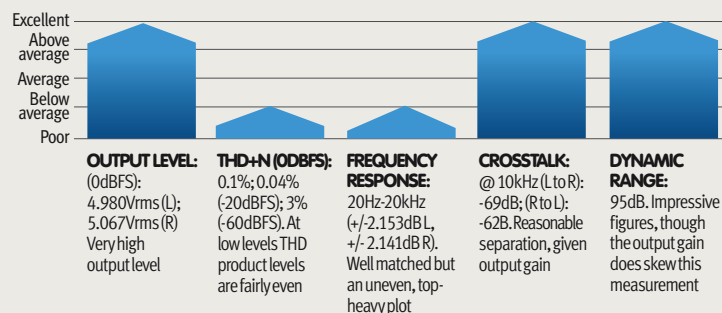
With no pressing copy deadline, we spent many hundreds of hours listening to the CD-T2000 on all kinds of music recorded over a vast period of time and always the sound had a pure, open naturalness that seemed like an open window on the music. If the aim of high-fidelity is to reproduce the original without adding or subtracting, then the CD-T2000 gets pretty close to that ideal. It's a player that satisfies your needs without leaving you hungry for more.

As good as SACD

This is an unusually good player – one that sounds as good as it looks. It delivers a smooth, natural, well-balanced sound that lets you hear the music as it was originally recorded. Considering our enthusiasm for the SACD player, the prospect of a player that could make CDs sound almost as good as SACDs might still prove too much to resist. And anyway, the thought of going back to something 'inferior' once the review period was over was just too depressing to contemplate. Hearty recommendation, as I think you'd agree. ●

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Great sound, good looks, superb build and unbeatable price!

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Volume automatically cuts to -40dB when you switch power off

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A superlative CD player that sounds great and looks terrific

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

