

Four years is a long time in Shenzhen, but that's how long it is since *Hi-Fi News* first published a review of a Shanling CD player. Back in January 2003, when we still thought that Chinese valve amplifiers were nothing but cheap-and-crude Far Eastern substitutes for some marvellous Western Real Thing, Shanling had just burst on the scene with an outrageous-looking tube-output-stage CD player it called the CDT-100.

With its metal-and-acrylic centre-loading hatch flanked by a quartet of caged valves, and a row of transformer housings at the back that made it look like a valve amp, the CDT-100 was calculated to win the heart of any audiophile with the slightest thermionic inclinations. But there was more to this CD player than the hot glow of a few tubes. The £1650 CDT-100 used the then-highly-regarded combination of Pacific Microsonics PDM-200 digital filter/HDCD decoder along with Burr-Brown PCM1704 DACs with a good Philips transport. It even offered an alternative solid-state output stage for comparison.

By 2005, Shanling had broadened its player range to include the far cheaper CD-T80 [*HFN*, May '05], which, although keeping its two output tubes hidden inside a conventional case, wasn't much inferior in terms of key components and performance. In the same year, moving up the price scale, Shanling unleashed the CD-T300 Omega drive player.

STYLING FANTASY

Owing something to 47 Lab and something to Oracle, and eventually only trumped by the Pathos Endorphin from Italy, the curvy, limited-edition CD-T300 was Shanling's high-end style statement. But its successor, the CD500, is every bit as imaginative; another wonderful, confident styling fantasy, if with just a slight echo of Marantz about it. If the CD-T300 was a flying saucer, the CD500, is a mother ship, an imposing space-station. That massive aluminium shell – the player measures 482 x 150 x 380mm (whd) and weighs 17kg – carries four stylised radiating vents that look as if they ought to have some sort of engine underneath, and in fact there are two EH6922 valves in the analogue output stage. The digital electronics include four Burr-Brown PCM1704 D/A converter chips which provide a balanced output option. Intriguingly, as well as a conventional 8x oversampling filter, the DACs are



preceded by a sample-rate converter which provides user-selectable upsampling to 192kHz.

With a 'special custom made' CDM1230 servo system, the top-loading transport is accessed by manually lifting the heavy alloy-handled blue-acrylic lid. When the lid is replaced, the built-in captive magnetic puck locates the disc on the drive turntable.

Once switched on, the transport cover glows with blue light, as does most of the front panel. No mere piddling LEDs for Shanling – this player provides enough light to read by. Those large porthole-like recesses around the six front-panel buttons, and the block-acrylic returns on either side of the central display window, are all bathed in blue. The far left button is On/Standby (the main power switch is on the rear) while next to this is

ABOVE: Glowing blue buttons include a '24bit/192kHz' switch to toggle between oversampling and upsampling

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