



Musical Fidelity M3scd **£1,150**



With none of the whiz-bang tech appeal of some rivals, this machine instead focuses in on sound quality

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Musical Fidelity M3scd

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
CD player/DAC

WEIGHT
6.1kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
440 x 100 x 380mm

FEATURES

- 24-bit/192kHz PCM-capable DAC
- Digital inputs: 1x USB-B; 1x optical; 1x coaxial
- Digital outputs: 1x optical; 1x coaxial
- Analogue output: 1x stereo RCAs

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio Ltd.

TELEPHONE
01235 511 166

WEBSITE
henleyaudio.co.uk

Following the modernity of the Marantz, comes the modesty of the Musical Fidelity. This isn't a do-it-all player, instead being a more humble option with DAC functionality. This company has been making silver disc spinners since the late eighties, and has produced a long line of quirky designs that always seem to sound good. The M3scd continues this tradition, although I would also add that it's one of Musical Fidelity's most agreeable-looking products for quite a long time. It's handsome, with a subtly understated look and fine build quality – plus a finish that's far less gaudy than the Denon or Marantz, making it feel like a far more expensive bit of kit than it actually is (see box).

The company claims “excellent technical performance” for this machine, and its quoted specs are certainly good – but this is academic, as it's what it sounds like that counts. A 24-bit/192kHz-capable, eight times oversampling dual differential DAC is fitted – the type is not specified – and

this works off the built-in CD mechanism and any of the three digital inputs. The disc mechanism is claimed to have very low jitter, and works smoothly and quietly, in conjunction with a smallish turquoise display that features a rather crude-looking retro font. Although the disc tray is plasticky, it works pretty slickly all the same.

Sound quality

Tonally, this is a halfway house between the warm Cyrus and the super-clean Denon. As such it works very well – *Star Of Sirius* is neither too bright nor too smooth. What really impresses is this combination of detail and rhythmic alacrity; it proves able to string together elements of the mix very dextrously, making for a natural and believable sound. There is better definition of the lead acoustic guitar, and its accenting is carried more convincingly. Ditto the vocal harmonies, which sound like several individual voices singing together rather than just an unseemly melange of them all muddled together.

BUILT TO LAST

While it doesn't necessarily focus on providing heaps of functionality, the M3scd is the unlikely winner of the best-built player award in this group – which is no mean feat, considering that it also contains models from Denon and Marantz. The Musical Fidelity has a thick alloy fascia plate, while its metal buttons have a nice, positive action. Also, its pressed steel casing fits well and is finished very nicely – and isn't gaudy like the Japanese machines can be. Even the display could be taken as a statement about its rivals; the Rega's red one is the best, but the Musical Fidelity's is a bright turquoise colour that's crisp yet warm to look at – compared with the cold ice blue of the Denon and Marantz, for example – and it has a no-nonsense quality about it that's completely in keeping with the player's fine ergonomics.

The player's excellent timing and tonal balance are no less important with *Good Life*. The recording is opaque and foggy, yet the M3scd cuts through it and delivers a foot-tapping extravaganza. Bass is nearly as strong as the Denon, and bouncy as a rubber ball. Treble is subtle and smoother than all of the other machines in the group – those hi-hats sounding neither fizzy nor masked. That lovely lilting vocal line is rich and fluidly delivered.

Soundstaging isn't quite as good as the Marantz, but is still strong; *Speak Like A Child* is wide with good depth perspective, inviting the listener in. The overall impression is one of an unerringly couch yet highly capable machine that makes music magic. Even Felt's edgy *Primitive Painters* jingle-jangles its way along in a really rewarding way, never assaulting the listener and always leaving you wanting more. An unassuming yet extremely capable machine ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Lovely, lyrical sound; detail; build quality; styling
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Display is an acquired taste
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A superb silver disc spinner with the best sound on test

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

