

Stereo

## Amplifiers

A great stereo amplifier will take your music to new and thrilling sonic heights, whether you're a jazz buff or a metal fan... or both

**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

Best stereo amp up to £400

Marantz PM6004 **£310**

**LIVING WITH IT**

The PM6004 is equipped with a front panel headphone output that delivers all the quality of the speaker level outputs.

After Yamaha's terrific A-S500 toppled Marantz's PM6003 to win in this category last year, Marantz went and changed pretty much everything...

The company's engineers ditched the integrated circuits of the PM6003 in favour of separate pre- and power-amp sections populated by discrete components. It's an approach favoured by many a high-end company in search of the ultimate in performance, and it's worked brilliantly.

The PM6004 is a clear step ahead of its predecessor, and perhaps most importantly, notably better than its Yamaha rival.

**Flawless build and sound for the price**

The positives start the moment you lift this amp out of its box. It feels solid and well built: gone are the days when flimsiness was fine in a budget product. Every control has a taut, well-damped feel, and the feature count is high enough to cope with even the most complex system. Marantz has even provided a headphone output and a decent moving-magnet phono stage - bonus points for that.

Plug it into a suitable system, fronted by the Marantz CD6004 and completed by KEF's Q300 speakers, say, and you have a well-mannered amp that's capable of revealing the subtleties in *The Road's* soundtrack better than anything else at this price.

It balances refinement, insight and attack perfectly and has the composure to make instrumental strands easy to follow, but it doesn't forget that music also has to entertain. Healthy dynamic punch, surefooted timing and pleasing agility see that done. It's a truly terrific amp.

