



ELECTROCOMPANIET EMC 1 MKV REFERENCE CD PLAYER

Stuart Smith and Electrocompaniet seem to have missed the memo that Red Book CD is dead and buried as he has an extended play with the Norwegian brand's £4999 dedicated silver disc player.



Stuart Smith

There's endless chatter on social media and in audiophile circles that Red Book CD is dead, but it appears that both myself and Norwegian manufacturing company Electrocompaniet seem to have been missed off the mailing list when that particular memo went out. We still have loads of CDs here at HiFi Pig and we regularly buy CDs, particularly second hand where they can be had for a lot less than a bag of chips. Personally, I still think that standard CD is a very good source and a very good medium, though, of course, it doesn't quite have the audiophile credentials of vinyl. I like streaming, though it took me many years and the right services to actually get on with it, but there is something to be said for actually having and holding a physical product and the ritual of putting on a CD, though, again, that ritual isn't

quite so involved as with vinyl. Whilst many audio brands are moving away from manufacturing CD players it's great to see that some are flying the flag for the format and not just at the budget end either.

BUILD AND FEATURES

The EMC 1 MKV Reference is an absolute beast of a player and weighs a not inconsiderable 18Kg/39.6lbs and measures 47 x 42.2 x 11.8 cm (WDH). I initially thought it would be too big depth-wise for our SolidSteel rack but it fits pretty much cock-on, though it does fill the single width/depth shelf completely.

I had thought it would look a bit blingy in the rack but it's not at all over the top, though that Perspex front panel is a magnet for fingerprints and anyone buying it is likely to spend at least some time giving it the

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once over with a microfibre cloth from time to time. The gold buttons don't actually look too ostentatious either and I kind of like its very individual styling – there's no way you'd mistake it for anything other than an Electrocompaniet product.

The front panel is actually pretty simple in its layout and there's just the on/off power button in the middle and four control buttons over on the right-hand side, though I suspect most people will use the included remote to skip track, re-wind and fast forward.

Apart from the blue LED display and an infra-red sensor for the remote, that's your lot apart from the gold E logo and the company name, the latter being on the front of the sliding door under which you will find the transport – yes, this is a top-loading machine and so you will need to have plenty of space above it on the rack or have it on the top of the rack.

The sliding drawer lid has a great weighty feel to it when you use it and is a real pleasure to use – it just feels right! However, before you can actually get to use the CD player at all you have to undo the transport screw, the doodad for stopping the lid moving in transport, and the two wingnuts underneath the unit – nothing is left to chance with this CD player during transport and that is a good thing.

That blue LED display is perfectly adequate and displays all the basic information you need and is well visible, though not over the top bright.

The unit also comes with a little magnetic CD clamp that you place onto the top of your CD and the player's spindle when you are playing a disc. It has a pleasingly solid clunk to it when you pop it onto the disc.

Around the back, you have a couple of balanced XLR outs and the RCA outs plus SPDIF and Toslink digital outputs so you can use the Electrocompaniet as a transport and output to the DAC of your choice. I don't really see the point of these as if you are spending this kind of money on a CD player then surely you'd want to be using the onboard DAC. However, by the same token, had Electrocompaniet not included them I'd be writing that they'd omitted to have

suitable digital outputs. I also wondered why there was not the inclusion of a couple or more digital inputs to allow the use of the onboard DAC, but as I assumed would be their response, it was thought that "the more inputs, the more sources for interference and other unwanted noise." This makes sense to me and better to be the master of one trade than Jack of All.

Also round the back is a small recessed switch to change the input voltage depending on where in the world you are (useful if you buy the unit and move from a country with 220V to one with 110V, or vice-versa.)

On top of these, you get the AC power input, an RS-232 socket for installation and service purposes, and a 12V trigger input.

All in all the functions of this CD player are pretty straightforward and the set-up is as per any other CD player I've had in the system.

The included remote is a bit plasticky but does what it's supposed to and is well featured. However, if I was buying a CD player at this price I would want to have a remote that echoed the styling of the player itself and pay the little bit extra that this would entail. After all, the remote is the thing that most folk will have the most interaction with on a day to day basis with the EMC 1 MKV.

In use the player is faultless and it does feel really good. Putting on a CD involved opening the drawer lid by pushing it back (the LED will let you know when it is fully open, though it's pretty obvious), placing the CD over the spindle and then the clamp over that, and then pulling the lid all the way back. The player will then tell you it is loading the disc and this takes a trio of seconds to be complete and then you are ready to spin your silver discs by pressing play on the remote or on the machine itself.

Now that is quite a ritual and I quite liked it.

The DAC chip in the EMC 1 MKV is a Cirrus logic 4398 DAC, but what is perhaps more important with regards to this CD Player is that the analogue circuitry that comes after the conversion of the zeros and ones is completely

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Class A in its design – this dedication to Class A topology is something that Electrocompaniet use in all their designs including preamplifiers, amplifiers and streamers, though their power amplifiers' final output circuits are Class A/B. As an aside, I've heard the big power amplifiers a handful of times at shows and they are certainly on my "must own at some point" list as they have always excelled, with them making a pair of Wislon Benesch speakers sound as good as I've ever heard at the last Warsaw Show.

The "EMC" in the "catchy" name of this CD player actually stands for "Electro Mechanical Cancellation" where Electrocompaniet has developed a proprietary mechanical filter and this filter has been frequency adjusted after listening tests. Further, the mechanical design is, say Electrocompaniet "No-compromise" and there are a total of five different housings which shield analogue, digital, transport, transformer and controller circuitry. The mechanical filter is designed to remove both internal and external vibrations from entering the laser pick-up assembly, which in turn is said to bring sonic benefits to the unit. In addition, there are eight separate power supplies; 4 for digital, 4 for the analogue input/output stage and with "ultra-fast" rectifiers used throughout.

The unit stands on Soundcare Superspikes as well as using a 7Kg steel-dampened mechanism that is itself built on specially selected damping feet.

THE SOUND

I used the EMC 1 MKV in our second system for a good while and to be honest it was over the summer and I just listened to tunes on it for my own benefit and without really listening critically. However, it was clear, not just from a price perspective, but also from a performance perspective that this CD Player belonged in a higher-end system. After deciding to bring it into the main system I hooked it up to our Leema DAC via both RCA and Balanced outputs and sonically I think the balanced outs had it by a hair sonically, though this could well be me just expecting the balanced outs to sound better. Speakers were the Audiovector R6 Arreté that have now been in the system for a few months and will now become our reference in this

system, with the amp being the big ol' Krell KST 100. My thinking is that the Leema DAC/Pre will allow me to switch between digital outputs (using the DAC in the Leema) and audio outs of the EMC 1 MKV (using the onboard DAC) and do instant comparisons without moving from the comfort of my armchair. However, as I mentioned, I fully expect anyone buying this CD Player to want to use the onboard DAC. With this in mind, I'd have also liked to have seen this player have inputs to allow it to be used as a DAC for external sources such as a streamer as I believe this would widen its appeal a little in today's market. However, I also see that it is sometimes best to be a master of one trade than a Jack Of All Trades. I say this as the DAC on the EMC 1 is clearly a very accomplished one.

First tracks up were from the Marillion Album Fugazi and I switched "on the fly" between the ripped CD and the physical CD. My immediate thoughts were that CD via the EMC had more of a more involving sound, though perhaps not as analytically precise as the rip through Roon and the Leema DAC, particularly at the top end. Subjectively speaking, and for me as a listener, I actually preferred the EMC over the streamed version and this surprised me a tad. With regards to soundstaging, the EMC appeared to have a more coherent structure in the way the sounds in the mix were layered, though perhaps not with the same separation. I suppose that what I'm saying is that the EMC was, to me, a little more organic sounding overall and not as analytical sounding. Now, whether you want a less analytical sound is going to be down to you and your individual tastes. Overall I felt there was a tad more detail at the top end with the streamed content, though the EMC was a "nicer" and more rounded listen. Drum hits and overall "punch" on the streamed version (remember, I'm using the Leema DAC here) on the track She Chameleon seemed to be more pronounced, though we are splitting hairs here. I'm going to say something that I really don't like to read when I look at reviews elsewhere and say that the Electrocompaniet has a more "analogue" sound to it than the streamed version. This sound, I think, will have a great appeal to many and were I choosing a new CD player with integrated DAC as opposed to a transport with separate DAC then my money

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would be winging its way to a Norwegian bank account. I haven't got the Lampizator BIG 7 DAC plumbed in at the moment, but I feel that the EMC is more in line with that than the Leema. There's really not a lot not to like about the Electrocompaniet offering listening to this record. Using our little CD player (Leema Essentials) into the Leema DAC and the Electrocompaniet also into the Libra DAC (so we are comparing just transports) the Electrocompaniet wins in every way – more stability to the image, more welly and more detail throughout. As a standalone transport, this is a very good machine, though, as mentioned, I can't see people using as such as you are essentially spending a good deal on an internal DAC you aren't going to use. Comparing the Leema CD player to the EMC and using both players' internal converters then the Electrocompaniet wins the competition hands down, but so it should be given the differences in price between the two. I don't usually do this kind of direct comparison but hope it was useful to give a bit of a comparison between what I have in our reference system.

I chose the next album because I love the music but the production is such that I've only ever been able to listen to it in the car – on the proper HiFi it's all but unlistenable. The album is Honeyblood's Babes Never Die and I'm both glad and sad to report that the album is still muddy and mushy sounding. This may seem a bit of a daft disc to play given what I have said, but then if the EMC had made it listenable alarm bells would have been ringing with regards something being covered up. Buy this record as it is musically brilliant, absolutely explosive and infectious despite the way it sounds – after all, it's all about the music, man!

By contrast, the HyperDub box set is eminently listenable, though I have absolutely no idea where it falls genre-wise. It's electronic and both accessible and leftfield at the same time. The EMC does a great job of presenting this music with power and finesse, allowing all the effects present to really bounce about the room, though the music still manages to feel natural and not overly analytical in its presentation and despite the jarring nature of the actual music, though Clio the HiFi Pig cat did a swift disappearing act when I played this. There is the required precision and speed to the sound when listening

using the EMC and whilst you don't feel bombarded with information overload there's no feeling that anything is missing from the music you are listening to.

I listened to a lot of music on the EMC, I've currently got Neil Young's Unplugged album playing whilst I type up my notes, and what I really got from my time with this CD Player was that there wasn't that immediate "sit up and take notice" moment when I plugged it into the system. Instead of being immediately bowled over with a bells and whistles presentation, I found that I was drawn into the sound of this player and it immediately put me at ease with a desire to listen to the music rather than the player itself. Now I know the latter is my job but I think it is a very good sign when all you want to do is listen to album after album and at no time feel like you are doing a job of work – that's not always the case.

CONCLUSION

If you use CDs as your main source and don't see the need to add streaming or the need for an external DAC for other sources then go buy this player – it's a class act and I will be sad to see it go back to Norway. I found it both detailed and engaging, whilst at the same time a sound that I just fell into.

It is as natural a player as I have heard, and whilst it was in the system I found myself playing it pretty much exclusively, even when I wasn't actively listening or taking notes. Neil Young is still playing quietly on the system and as I look up I can almost picture him sat in the round on his stool – the acoustic as he moves away from the mic on Pocahontas does catch my attention. The sound I'm getting is untaxing, clear and detailed – and that's pretty much how I'd sum this CD player up.

In use, the EMT 1 MKV is an absolute joy. It's built to last, has a bit of a ritual to it, looks fab, and sort of harks back to days before streaming - in a good way.

I have one or two moans about it, though these are pretty petty. The remote isn't the greatest thing and needs to be much better given the price of the player. It really could do with digital

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inputs, though I fully understand why the technical team at Electrocompaniet chose to leave them out. Had I not had these, admittedly minor moans, then this would have been an Editor's Choice product, most certainly.

Price:

UK price: £4999

EU price: €5999

US Price: 6500 \$US

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality and Features:

Looks good, though some may think it a bit blingy

A real heavyweight

Superb build quality

Remote nothing to write home about

Lacks digital inputs

Digital outputs seem superfluous to me

Sound Quality:

Detailed, relaxed and untaxing

Value For Money:

This is five grand in English beer tokens which is a lot. However, this needs to be seen in context - the EMC 1 is a very accomplished transport with the required DAC on board and with this in mind, and if CD is still important to you, I can think of no better way to spend that kind of money.

We Loved:

The looks.

The build

The captivating and easy-going sound quality.

We Didn't Love So Much:

The Remote doesn't reflect the players quality, though it works fine.

Fascia is a fingerprint magnet.

Elevator Pitch Review: Built like the proverbial brick outhouse, the toploading CD player (EMC1 V) from Norwegian company Electrocompaniet proves that the CD format still has a lot of life left in it. The sound isn't flashy or attention-grabbing but draws you into the music and you want to just continue to listen to CD after CD. The remote doesn't reflect the build and it doesn't have any digital in/outs, but if you are in the market for a standalone silver disc spinner then this should seriously be on your very shortlist. I loved it.

