

Michi Prestige Q430

Partnering the X430 integrated, the Prestige Q430 is the other half of a two-box CD-playing system curated for audiophiles wanting a big slice of Rotel's 'Michi magic'
 Review: **Mark Craven** Lab: **Paul Miller**

According to recent research, unit sales of CD media in the US increased by a massive 16% year-on-year in the first half of 2026. It's been suggested that Gen Z listeners with an interest in 1990s music are the reason behind this surge, buying silver discs in part for their collectible nature. Meanwhile, in the promo literature for its new Michi Prestige Q430, Rotel reminds us that 'more than 200 billion' CDs have been sold in the last 40-plus years. It remains, says the Japanese marque, a 'vital format'.

We shouldn't then be surprised that 'Michi by Rotel' has decided to add to its armoury of CD players, although with its £4499 price tag the Q430 is clearly aimed more at seasoned audiophiles than those newly converted youngsters. One of two models in its recently launched Michi Prestige strand, the other being the similarly priced X430 integrated amplifier [HFN Aug '26], it has the look and feel of a serious hi-fi separate, aided by generous dimensions of 431x148x385mm (whd) and the Michi series' trademark all-black finish.

FILTER OUT

Bigger still is the £5499 Michi Q5 [HFN Apr '25], which remains the flagship CD player and, says the manufacturer, informs much of the design of its new stablemate. Trickle-down elements include the use of ESS's eight-channel ES9028PRO DAC chip in its digital-to-analogue stage, a fully balanced analogue output, and a 'low-noise' power supply architecture combining a bespoke toroidal transformer with dedicated feeds to the transport electronics, digital processing, etc.

As before, Rotel has decided not to implement all the digital filter options of the ESS chip [see PM's Lab Report, p59]. A key difference between the Q430 and the Q5, however, is that the former's DAC

stage is entirely related to CD playback. Gone are the Q5's S/PDIF and USB inputs, and the associated handling of PCM and DSD files from an external source. This doesn't strike me as a dealbreaker, though, as such functionality is already built into the X430 integrated, a likely partner.

Connectivity is otherwise broadly similar, the Q430 offering unbalanced RCA outputs alongside its balanced XLRs, plus RS232, 12V trigger and IR receiver inputs for system integration. There's also a coaxial output to use the player with an external DAC, a USB port for firmware updates, and an Ethernet socket. The last of these doesn't support any network audio functions, instead enabling the Q430 to display album artwork on its front-panel TFT screen [see PM's boxout, p57].

Adjacent to this screen is a bank of traditional push-button transport controls, which is arguably preferable to the Q5's

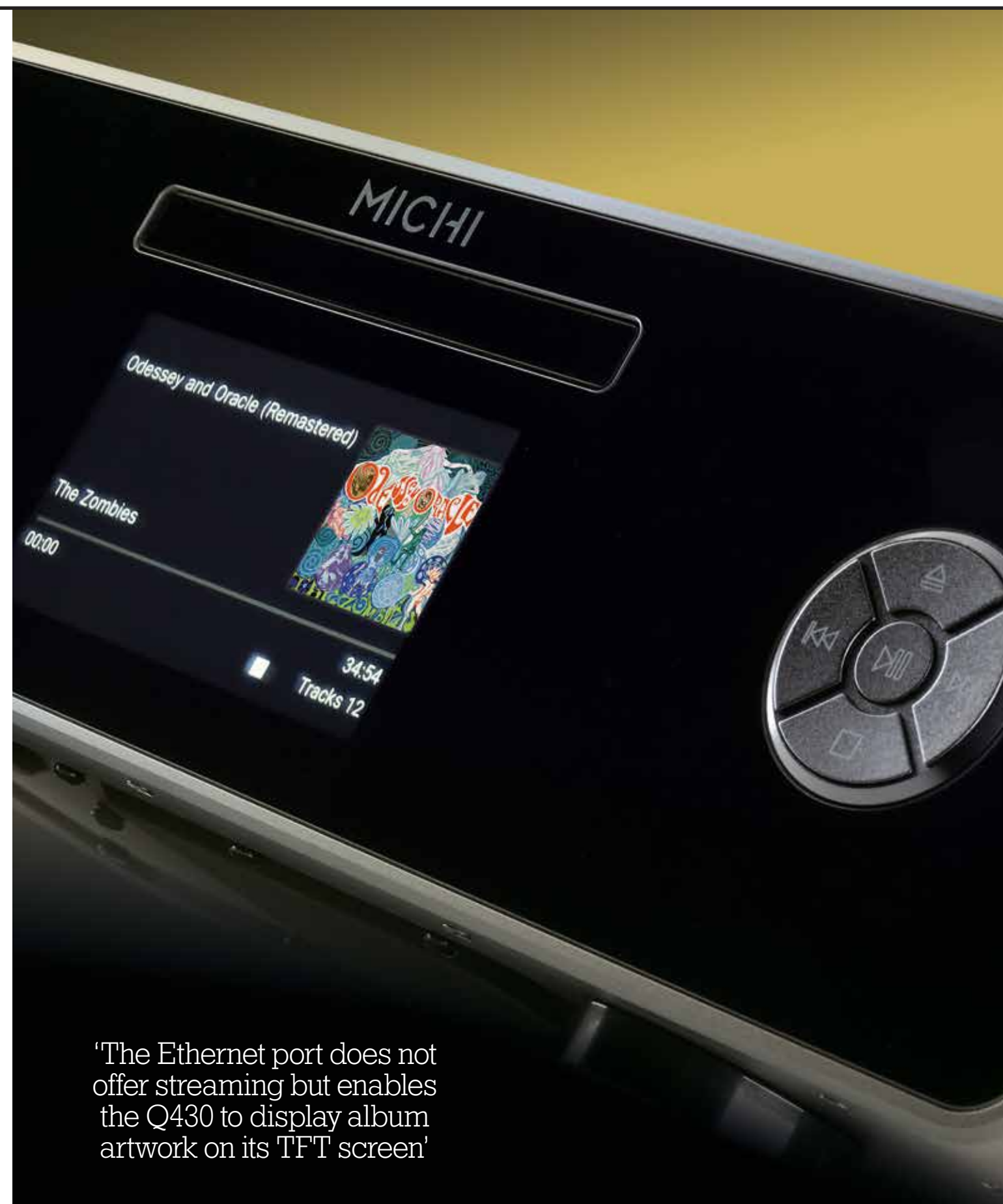
combination of hidden under-the-chassis buttons indicated by illuminated front-panel legends. They may be less stylish, but are simpler to use. The same applies to the Q430's use of a motorised CD tray in place of the Q5's snazzy, LED-illuminated top-loading system, although the tray has a curiously smeary-looking surface that feels out of sync with the player's otherwise sumptuous build and design.

SHAKE DOWN

Internally, Rotel's design is focused on maximising 'signal integrity' and 'mechanical precision'. The custom CD drive mechanism, incorporating controller and decoder ICs from Toshiba, is decoupled from the milled aluminium chassis to limit vibrations reaching the laser pick-up. Also, the PSU/PCB layout [see inside pic, below] is said to maintain 'physical separation of signal paths', while the output stage



RIGHT: Linear PSU [left] feeds regulated supplies for the custom CD drive [bottom] and mainboard with its STMicroelectronics controller [top centre], ES9028PRO DAC and balanced analogue output [top right]



'The Ethernet port does not offer streaming but enables the Q430 to display album artwork on its TFT screen'



incorporates discrete low-pass filters to ensure a 'smooth tonal texture'.

The Q430 is mostly a breeze to install and use, but not without some quirks. Firstly, pressing the play button on the front panel doesn't cause the tray to close. Unusual, but not exactly a major gripe. More annoying is the lack of numbered keys on the supplied remote control [p59], which precludes quick access to specific tracks. Instead, you use the forward/back skip buttons to alight on the desired track. This is far from ideal, especially if the CD player's display is not in view from the listening position.

Menu options, accessed either via the remote or by holding down the 'Stop' button on the player's fascia, are limited to changing the brightness of the Q430's display and power LED, setting the time of

the Auto Power Off feature, and checking the current version of the main system software and the CD drive electronics.

BONE APPÉTIT

If you've moved away from CD or been told so many times that the format is inherently bright and brittle that you've started to believe it, the performance of the Michi Q430 will surprise you. Fed a variety of 'plain vanilla' CDs, Michi's big-boned player sounded consistently impressive and full of character. Top-end details, while clean and revealing, had an ever-so-slightly sweetened edge, just as the lower registers could sound gently plump when the material demanded it. The Q430 doesn't rewrite the Red Book rulebook but it does strive to emphasise

'I was ready to jump into the spaceship with Peter Hammill'

the musical quality at the heart of a CD collection. The user experience is worth noting, too. It's not often that playback from a digital source doesn't come with a raft of filter/upsampling modes to be considered. With the Q430 you just put in a disc, press play, and enjoy. And while track programming isn't on the menu, you can always select the random mode to make listening sessions a surprise.

ABOVE: Alongside a track navigation dial, and under the CD loading tray, a colour TFT display reveals CD Text and album artwork [see boxout, below, and The Zombies Vinyl Icon, p108]

Performed at Kingsway Hall in 1981 by the National Philharmonic and Richard Bonyng [Decca 410-139-2], and labelled a 'Digital Recording', the Respighi/Rossini ballet *La Boutique Fantasque* barrelled out of Bowers & Wilkins' 801 D5 speakers [HFN Oct '26] into the HFN Listening Room [p35] with a captivating sense of orchestral bombast. The Q430 didn't flatten its dynamics, confidently building passages from quiet to loud and really letting rip with huge brass and percussion.

THE CD DATABASE

Both Michi's Prestige Q430 and flagship Q5 CD players include a very novel feature – the ability to display album artwork for the disc in play. We are accustomed to seeing this with the streamers on review in *Hi-Fi News* because online media is typically packed with tags and metadata – search for an album or track via Qobuz, Tidal, etc, and you are regaled with bonus material spanning artwork, lyrics, reviews, awards, release date and other technical information. Compact Disc, on the other hand, hails from a far more primitive era and contains no useable metadata short of 'CD Text', an option added at the turn of the millennium. The Q430 can extract CD Text from compatible CDs, revealing the album title and name of the track in play.

Recovering the album artwork, however, is an entirely separate process that relies on the fact that, of the millions of discs released, almost all have a unique combination of tracks and track/total disc runtimes. The first online CDDB (CD DataBase) solutions appeared in the mid-1990s, hand-coded by enthusiasts who would contribute the track numbers, times, etc, of their favourite albums that could then be linked to album artwork. Once a CD player has read the disc's TOC (Table of Contents) the track timing information provides a key to unlock the album name and download the artwork from an online database (hence the Q430's Ethernet port). Today, MusicBrainz (<https://musicbrainz.org>) and GnuDB (<https://gnudb.org>) are two principal CDDB resources, although Rotel does not reference any particular copyright/usage information in its literature. PM



RINGING TRUE

The scale and atmosphere of the piece was evoked well, some performers placed at the back of a deep stage and others sent far left and right. Attack and bite weren't in short supply, as shown by flurries of castanets and bells. And I'll put the fleeting moments of compression during the biggest of the crescendos down to the limitations of the source, not the hardware. Mostly, the Q430 sounded particularly open and assured. So much so, the full 41-minute piece simply flew by.

Equally dynamic and punchy was the Michi player's delivery of 'Chuck E.'s In Love' from Rickie Lee Jones' eponymous debut [Warner Bros. 3296-2], although ➡



ABOVE: Fixed line outputs are offered on RCAs and balanced XLRs alongside a coaxial digital output, Ethernet port (firmware updates and connection to the CD database), USB-A port (firmware updates) and RS232 / 12V trigger ports (system control)

here the sound was more forward. Jones' sassy vocals battled against snappy, slap-guitar rhythms and crisply recorded drums, and it's to the Q430's credit that all the clarity and sparkle didn't become overbearing. Rather, it sounded exciting, as did the following track, 'On Saturday Afternoons in 1963'. Here, though, the vocal is more isolated, backed by a simpler accompaniment of strings, piano and woodwind and it was the clean tones and sense of space within the recording that held my attention.

SKY HIGH

In an ideal world, and considering the Q430's price tag, I'd have been able to enjoy the SACD layer of MoFi's 2011 'Original Master Recording' release of Stevie Ray Vaughan's album *The Sky Is Crying* [UDSACD 2078]. Still, playing the 44.1kHz/16-bit version of the title track didn't leave me feeling short-changed, for two reasons in particular. One was the deep, languid notes of Tommy Shannon's bass guitar, which had a scene-setting presence while remaining firmly in the background. The other was the glorious leading edge

delivery and distinct tone of Vaughan's playing. With these elements sounding spot on, everything else fell into place.

Compared to other recent CD players, including my regular Hegel

LEFT: The Q430's remote shares the same RR-MH32 handset design as for the X430, but with a couple of alternate buttons. This version offers basic track access, repeat play, display brightness and menu navigation



Viking [HFN Sep '23] and the be-tubed Unison Research Unico CD Uno [HFN Oct '25], the Q430's midband presentation has a slightly darkened quality, preferring focus to euphony. Yet this only serves to heighten the impression of clarity and resolution, and to my mind doesn't bring on listener 'fatigue'.

Of those 200 billion CDs in existence, one is the Van der Graaf Generator compilation *First Generation (Scenes From 1969 To 1971)* [Virgin COMCD 2]. These early compositions by the prog-rock also-rans are packed with quirky production/instrument ideas, from Peter Hammill's vocals being locked to the left channel on 'Darkness (11/11)', to the romantic piano flourishes and panned stereo chaos of 'Man-Erg'. Add in the subject matter, and listening through the entire CD in one sitting was a delightfully odd experience – but one helped, not hindered, by the Q430's articulate presentation.

Hearing Hammill discuss a journey into the galaxy on the 12-minute 'Pioneers Over C', backed by various flavours of bass and a cavernous drum/percussion track, I was soon ready to jump into the spaceship with him. There's musical gold in those CDs, and Rotel's entry Michi player will help you find it. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The Michi Prestige Q430 sounds as clean and sophisticated as it looks, and yields little ground to the series' step-up Q5 model in performance. Anyone weighing up the two CD players, and the £1000 price gap between them, needs to therefore decide if they can live without the flagship's outboard DAC features and more attention-grabbing design. Those who opt for this front-loading model won't be disappointed.

Sound Quality: 87%

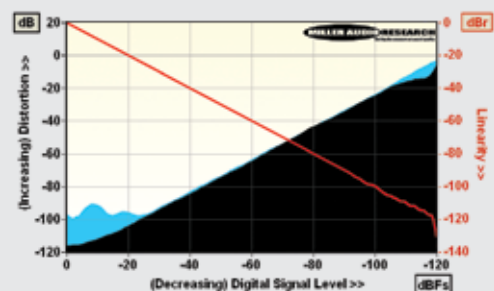


LAB REPORT

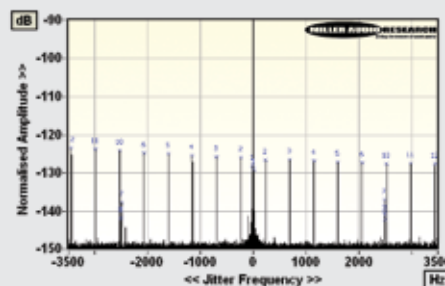
MICHI PRESTIGE Q430

Unlike the partnering X430 integrated amp [HFN Aug '26] that employs the low-consumption ES9039Q2M DAC in its USB DAC section, the Q430 CD player reverts to the ES9028PRO DAC used in the flagship Q5 CD player [HFN Apr '25]. Both players default to the same 'fast' minimum phase digital filter that offers a significant 94dB stopband rejection, traded for a marked post-ringing in the time domain. Otherwise, the Q430 does not have a clone of the Q5's analogue output stage where its slightly lower – but still sufficiently 'high' – 4.12V maximum output (re. 1kHz/0dBfs) is driven via a higher 896-948ohm balanced source impedance, and has a very slightly more rolled-off treble response at –0.25dB/20kHz. The A-wtd S/N ratio is a similarly generous 115dB but low-level resolution is always going to be limited by the 16-bit data encoding, dither notwithstanding, with errors of ±0.1dB over a 100dB range and ±0.6dB over a wider 110dB range [red trace, Graph 1]. Nevertheless, these are very fine figures for a notional 96dB/16-bit resolution.

Distortion is broadly similar to that achieved by the Q5 at high frequencies, holding to a minimum of 0.0012% over the top 30dB of its range at 20kHz [blue infill, Graph 1], but is lower than achieved by the Q5 at bass and mid frequencies where the Q430's 0.0002% is nearly half that of its bigger brother (re. 1kHz/0dBfs). Moreover the magnitude spectra are subjectively 'cleaner' via the Q430, with less spurious deep in the noise floor. Arguably this is a function of the Q430's dedicated design, lacking the additional USB/higher-rate processing, but it is also reflected in the tidier jitter spectrum [Graph 2] showing no more than ~5psec of sidebands beyond the residual J-test pattern. PM



ABOVE: Distortion versus 44.1kHz / 16-bit signal level over a 120dB range (1kHz, black; 20kHz, blue) plus resolution/linearity (1kHz, red trace and Y axis)



ABOVE: High res. jitter spectrum with 16-bit CD data (mkrs 2-6 & 10-12 show the residual J-test pattern)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum output level / Impedance	4.158Vrms / 896-948ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio	115.0dB
Distortion (1kHz, 0dBfs/–30dBfs)	0.0002% / 0.0047%
Distortion & Noise (20kHz, 0dBfs/–30dBfs)	0.0015% / 0.001%
Frequency response (20Hz–20kHz)	+0.0dB to –0.26dB
Digital jitter	117psec
Resolution (re. –100dBfs / –110dBfs)	±0.1dB / ±0.6dB
Power consumption	12W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	431x148x385mm / 8.8kg