



Back to the future

Turning back the time machine, **Nick Tate** channels the spirit of the Eighties with Rotel's new Michi CD transport

This giant new CD player could be straight out of the late-Eighties or early nineties – in spiritual terms, at least. It is unabashedly expensive, but is more heavily engineered than your average battleship. It fills a sizeable gap in Rotel's flagship Michi range and the manufacturer describes it as a "Transport DAC", meaning it's a CD player with digital inputs as well as outputs – so can be used to upgrade, say, a budget streamer or even a legacy DAT or MiniDisc player.

The Q5 is the largest CD player I have come across and it sports a top loading disc mechanism housed in a machined aluminium chassis that's

The sheer space and detail retrieval are the Q5's most obvious strengths

sprung to isolate ground-borne vibrations. The disc transport feeds the ESS Sabre ES9028PRO DAC, a premium eight-channel design that Rotel has implemented in a fully balanced, fully differential circuit. Two large, bespoke-designed toroidal transformers are fitted, one for the digital circuits and one for the analogue voltage supplies. Rotel says the CD drive motor's voltage and current supplies are electrically isolated from sensitive audio signals.

The fascia is a minimalist affair – but the excellent remote control and

decent-sized, fine-pitch colour display make this CD player easy to use. The top-loading disc transport makes operating the Q5 satisfyingly tactile. The rear panel includes a PC-USB input (up to 32-bit/384kHz, with MQA and DSD256), plus 24-bit/192kHz-capable coaxial and optical digital ins. Although the DAC plays DSD, the disc transport does not read the hi-res layer of SACDs, just the standard resolution CD layer.

Sound quality

"Big" is the word that comes to mind when describing the Q5, both in stature and sound. It has a powerful and effortless style allied to fine detail and great width from left to right. Pretty much any disc you play is unpeeled and given a large, widescreen stage to make music on. Yet it's never overblown or airbrushed to sound romantic.

Spin up *My Life* from Billy Joel and the Q5 makes its presence known instantly. The song's percussive piano playing sounds wonderfully gutsy and propulsive, sitting inside a spacious soundstage. The singer's vocal is placed centrally with precision and clearly delineated from the backing instrumentation behind. The drum work is powerful and punchy, with the hi-hat cymbal sitting far to the right of the mix. The Rotel serves up vast quantities of detail effortlessly, with no sign of being flustered.

Although the sheer space and detail retrieval are arguably the Q5's most obvious strengths, its easy rhythmic flow is also clear to hear. Despite not being the most musically engrossing

disc spinner I've heard, its muscular bass and midrange speed is hard not to like. Percussion cuts through the mix well while the bass guitar bulldozes things along. At the same time, the lead vocals syncopate beautifully with the backing music.

You'd never call it warm. On Donald Byrd's *Say You're Mine*, hi-hat cymbals have a steely bite to go with their lustre and extension. The trumpet is precise, bright and brassy, and the double bass is powerful yet dry without a hint of overhang. Using the Q5 as a transport, feeding a Chord Electronics Hugo TT2 DAC (HFC 468), things warm up just a tad, and there's a slightly better sense of rhythm – but it's surprisingly close considering the Chord DAC costs nearly as much as the CD player. Likewise, the Rotel's DAC is a great upgrade for most budget and mid-price digital sources.

Conclusion

It might seem expensive, but if you adore physical media the Q5 is good value. It's a classic bit of kit – in terms of its build quality, aesthetics, ergonomics and sound – but just make sure you have room for it ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rotel Michi Q5

ORIGIN
Japan/China

TYPE
CD player

WEIGHT
23.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
485 x 150 x 452mm

FEATURES
● Inputs: coaxial;
optical; PC-USB
● ES9028PRO DAC
● Max resolution:
USB: 32-bit/384kHz
Coaxial/optical:
24-bit/192kHz

DISTRIBUTOR
Rotel
WEBSITE
michi-hifi.com

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

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LIKE: Build quality; wide-ranging functionality; sound

DISLIKE: Some will think it too big

WE SAY: A great-sounding giant CD spinner

OVERALL

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