



Music with pictures

BLUENOTE KOALA TUBE DVD/CD PLAYER **\$3663**

After sampling Bluemote's fantastic Stibbert 2 Tube CD player in *Tone 42*, it seemed just a matter of time before the Italian company produced another audio/visual statement. Enter the Koala DVD/CD player. In keeping with the Bluemote's preference for tube output stages, the new Koala has exactly that: a pair of tubes, one for each stereo channel.

Like its more expensive stablemate, it's a very attractive player with its black and silver casework. It's also built like a tank with a thick front panel and a solid sheet steel exoskeleton. The front panel button count is minimal with most functions accessible via the supplied remote control.

Although aimed primarily at audiophiles, the Koala will handle most movie and music formats thrown at it - it will play MPEG4 (DIVX) files, along with SVCD, VCD and DVCD, while on the music side MP3 and WMA music can be decoded as well. Bluemote has even included Kodak Picture Viewer for those wanting a slideshow of their holiday in Florence!

Befitting an audio player of its stature, the Koala has a pair of AES/EBU-balanced connectors for stereo analogue output, and full 5.1-channel outputs for Dolby Digital through the player's own decoder chip. Both coaxial and optical digital outputs are available, with component and composite video, and rounding out the connectivity chart is the good old Euro-connector or Scart plug.



There's no HDMI or I-Link, and to be fair, I wasn't expecting it. The money here has gone into the audio section with its tube output, highly regulated ElectroPower voltage stage and Zero Clock digital filter technology.

So that's the rundown on the Koala and its technology, and it was going to be an interesting test, this one. Sure, there are plenty of SACD/DVD-Audio players out there, but do many listeners have the software? Certainly the great bulk of DVD players in the market are pretty average when it comes to CD replay, so it was in earnest that the listening (and watching) test began.

I've had this disc for a while, but haven't yet watched it. *Videodrome* is a cult movie from the '80s that, despite its weirdness, has some relevance today (subliminal messages in advertising). Through the Koala, colours were saturated as expected (old movies tend to be strong in terms of colour) and although detailed, it was about on a par with a modern \$1500 player.

Change tack, and on went *Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets*. This modern film had nice, detailed images and minimal digital noise. It was actually quite filmic on my 100-inch screen, with good hue and colour through the Koala's component output.

A nice result then, but things became really interesting when the CDs went on. The Koala has a very similar sound to the Stibbert 2 Tube, with excellent mid-range sweetness and detail combined with a palpable, organic quality that makes it very difficult to turn off the player.

It ate disc after disc and showed no real weakness in terms of sound quality, although I would certainly still pick the Stibbert 2 as a music player. (If memory serves me, there was more of a sense of 'air' around the performers).

Still, for those audiophiles wanting a quality movie player that loves the CD format, Bluemote's Koala is sure going to be one tough act to follow. ■ GARY PEARCE

DETAILS

CONTACT

www.referenceaudio.co.nz

SPECIFICATIONS

VIDEO: Component, S-video, composite video, scart
AUDIO: Balanced, single ended stereo and multi-channel analogue outputs
DIGITAL: Coaxial (x 1), Optical (x 1)

KEY FEATURES:

- DVD / SVCD / CD / DVCD playback
- CD / CD-R / CD-RW / MP3 / WMA
- MPEG4 / DivX Playback
- Kodak Picture CD
- Built-in Dolby Digital Decoder
- Tube output stage
- Electro-Power[®] voltage supply
- Proprietary 'Zero-Clock' digital filter
- 24 bit/192 KHz audio D/A Converter
- PAL/NTSC Progressive Scan

PLUS

- ✦ Just superb on CD, oh, and it plays movies as well

MINUS

- ✦ A good movie player, but not exceptional. Remote is too directional

VERDICT

Strongly focused on its CD replay abilities, the Bluemote Koala Tube is *the* machine for those music lovers who enjoy the occasional movie. Line up in an orderly fashion, folks!

Aesthetics	90%
Performance	85%
Features	85%
Functionality	85%
Price Value	85%
Overall	

86%