

Stepping Stone...

The Cyrus CD 8 SE/ PSX-R CD Player

by Alan Sircom



Imagine a scenario; you are in your spanky new supercar (not a Bugatti Veyron, but something fast and expensive with an animal in the logo) and pull up at the toll gates of a German Autobahn. At the gate next to you is a little Japanese hatchback and the guy is challenging you. Against your better judgement, you go for it; the roads are clear and you can do Warp Factor 9 down them. Thirty minutes and nearly 100 miles later, you realise the guy in the hot hatch is still at your side; sometimes you were ahead, other times he was. You can't help feeling it – performance-wise, you just got served by the little guy.

Welcome to the world of the Cyrus Servo Evolution.

The Cyrus CD 8 SE is the top integrated CD player from the company, and it's £1,100. Add a PSX-R power supply and you stack a further £500 on the sum, with the two half-size, die-cast 'singing shoeboxes' now taking up a single shelf in the rack. Nevertheless, at £1,600, the full Cyrus digital banana barely scrapes the high-end CD player firmament from a price perspective.

There's more to high-end than price. And it's here where the Cyrus CD 8 SE shines. The Servo Evolution side of things is a bold move on the company's part. Cyrus dispenses with the usual off-the-shelf laser servo mechanism used in almost all CD transports; it's a stumbling block of the high-end – the mechanics of the transport might be made from materials only found in Star Trek and stealth fighters, the tray and disc clamp could be forged from gold mined in the bowels of Mount Doom and the whole transport could be welded onto a chassis so heavy that light itself could not escape its clutches, but the little laser that reads data off the disc and the motors that move it into place cost pennies and are identical to those found inside £20 CD portables, in the auto-changer in your car boot and cheapo CD-ROM drives. This is all delightfully hidden from public consumption by calling the transport an OEM device. ▶

► Cyrus is virtually unique in not going down the OEM route. Instead, they have sourced a disc loader, laser and motors – and then written custom software – to produce a less-compromised CD transport dedicated for high-end audio use. This allows the laser to be precisely tracked into position by software, instead of a disc scrabbling round for position using a servo-control system. A simple experiment explains this well. Read this paragraph twice; the first time by reading a few words, then randomly looking around the rest of the page before trying to read the next few words – that's how your CD looks for digital data today. Read the paragraph again, this time without skipping around the page; that's what the Servo Evolution does. It's arguable whether this is a better plan than reading the data into a whopping great buffer (a la Meridian), but in comparing like for like, that's an order of magnitude improvement in on-the-fly disc-reading accuracy over the standard CD transport mechanism.

After this excitement, the rest is relatively straightforward. The player has two toroidal transformers (one for digital, one for analogue), feeding 11 separate and regulated power supplies and a built-in 24-bit DAC with re-clocking to help reduce data jitter. It comes with an MC-Bus connection (for connectivity in an all-Cyrus system)... and if all that sounds like the previous CD 8, well done. The Servo Evolution upgrade takes place on the previous player platform, and that allows owners of the last generation models to have their products revamped. Cyrus also prints a roadmap of upgrades to Cyrus-based systems, including the aforementioned PSX-R, a DAC X converter (with another PSX-R as an option) and finally the dedicated transport/DAC/pair of power supplies, four-box grande fromage system as the best Cyrus can do. We had a CD 8 SE, along with one PSX-R and a DAC X to play with.

Starting with the CD 8 SE on its own, the player has the ability to stun you with its musicality and integrity. For a while... then you become aware of the typical Cyrus etched midrange and glassy tops. It's not a deal-breaker necessarily, but is something that comes along. Nevertheless, the musical performance alone places it at the very top of the CD players you can buy for the money and would happily take on a two grand player. That makes it a solid recommendation.

Then plug in a PSX-R. Oh boy...

Now, where it was taking on



similarly priced players and trading blows, suddenly it's capable of not sounding outclassed by players costing twice as much. Or more.

The upgrade frees up an already free sounding, er, sound. And puts paid to the limitations in the mids and top in the process. So what you get left with is a remarkably natural sounding player that digs out a sublime amount of info from the disc. Realising that the sound of the CD 8 SE on its lonesome could tip over into brightness, the pairing got subjected to some of the brightest sounding discs around. Think Albert 'Iceman' Collins eviscerating a Fender Telecaster kind of brightness. This won't just highlight brightness in a player; it'll pick it out like a searchlight grazing the night sky, looking for Heinkels. You'd struggle to get

past track one on the solo CD 8 SE, but with the PSX-R in tow, you can happily play about four tracks in a row without dismay. Given this album – *The Ice Axe Cometh* – can stump anything this side of a Zanden and even the Audio Research could only cope with about seven tracks before fatigue set in, it shows the Cyrus combo is up to something good.

Imagery too is improved in the upgrade. The baseline soundstage is wide, but pitched forward, like the sound is just in front of your lap. With the PSX-R in place, the width remains, but the sound drops back to between the speakers. There's a good sense of solidity to the mix, but this is not substantially improved in the upgrade. Nevertheless, images appeared nicely rooted and 'there' without sounding oversized or ponderous.

The big plus to the Cyrus combo is the way it handles dynamic range. The CD 8 SE is already a dynamic sounding player, but it's not 'obvious' in its presentation of dynamic shading. Add in the PSX-R and the already dynamic sound comes alive, with boundless enthusiasm for bumping along to Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* and yet the sort of subtlety that can follow the delicate interplay between the rest of the band when Mike Stern goes off on a ten-minute jazz noodle.

What sets the CD 8 SE and PSX-R apart from its peers is the seamless coherence it has. Music knits itself together beautifully when played through the Cyrus; even when the original can decay into a bit of a mess. The Fall is a perfect example of this, because some of their music can sound like a Transit full of instruments being thrown down stairs, but is actually extremely controlled... just listening to The Fall is an acquired taste. The Cyrus duo helps that acquisition process by making sense out of all that near chaos and presenting it in a more ordered form; not remixed or simplified, just ordered. ►

