



CREEK CLASSIC £550

An FM/AM/LW tuner with RDS on FM, this is part of Creek's newly tagged 'Classic' range of products. The tuner costs £550 (superfi.co.uk), which makes it the second most expensive here. It's solidly built with a brushed-metal silver front-panel, with six buttons to the left of a green text on black background display. To the right of the display is a tuning knob and an on/off switch on the far right-hand-side with a power LED above it. The instruction manual only consists of two sheets of A4 paper stapled together, and the RDS feature doesn't have the scrolling text that most of the tuners offer.

When setting up the tuner, an odd feature of the Creek is that the brightness of the display varied according to how weak or strong the signal is of the frequency you're tuned to. This can also make searching for stations slightly confusing, because when there is no signal present the display goes dim, so it is quite difficult to see the frequency. Also, entering stations into the presets wasn't as easy as it could be. However, navigation between stations is very quick and simple using the responsive remote control, and for all receivable stations the green LEDs are very bright and the display is easy to read from a distance or from an oblique angle.

Overall, I found the combination of the six buttons, the relatively small, well-proportioned green-on-black display and the brushed-metal finish of the front-panel to have the best aesthetics out of all of the tuners. The Classic also provided the best FM reception quality out of all of the tuners in the group test. The performance of the tuner on MW and LW was as can be expected for these bands.

SOUND QUALITY

The sound quality of the Classic was phenomenal - a very highly defined sound with an overall bold, dynamic and masterful delivery. It provides a step-change in FM performance compared to all of the DAB/FM tuners in the group test. On classical and world music, the delivery was exquisitely detailed, very precise, energetic and an enthralling listen. Although not up to the standard of the Creek, some of the DAB/FM tuners in the group test were also able to provide a highly accomplished sound on Radio 3, but where this tuner really stood above the DAB/FM tuners was its performance on the pop and rock stations. The big, bold and dynamic yet highly detailed sound of the Creek provided an electrifying

delivery, and it even came close to matching the Myryad's performance.

Possibly the most impressive thing about the Creek was its ability to squeeze as much detail from the signal and deliver a dynamic sound when presented with audio that the radio stations hadn't engineered very well. In contrast, some of the DAB/FM tuners occasionally floundered when presented with such material.

Overall, the Creek Classic provides a step-change in sound quality compared to the best FM performance on any of the DAB/FM tuners, and unlike many of the other tuners in the group test, was very much an all-rounder, providing high quality across all music genres as well as on speech. This tuner comes very highly recommended.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

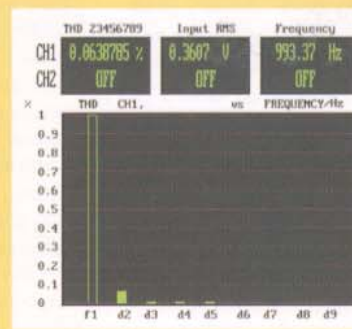
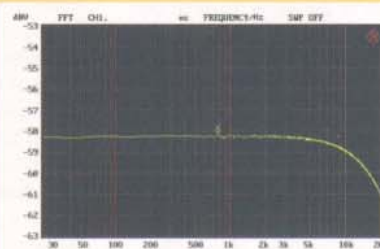
A strong feature of this tuner is its well controlled frequency response, quite obviously tailored to give a smooth, accurate sound. It runs flat from 20Hz to 11kHz (-1dB) our analysis shows, and is free from the perturbations seen in most rivals. Creek, like Myryad, tend to work like this, consistently achieving a good result, beyond even the Japanese these days. For not only is the Creek accurate, it also houses a quality vhf/fm chip set that provides ultra low distortion at 50% modulation, where thd measured around 0.07%, and at full modulation where it hovered at 0.1% - amazing figures. In view of this I was a little disappointed by the mediocre -68dB IEC A weighted noise figure, but all the same I would not expect hiss to be easily discernible even on Radio 3.

Full quieting (i.e. minimum hiss) was available down to 425uV from the aerial, a low value some indoor ribbons manage when close to a transmitter. The stereo IHF -50dB noise sensitivity was a good 34uV, but the tuner mutes at 5uV before the equivalent mono value can be reached.

The Classic lives up to its name. Measurement shows it offers a classic performance, common when VHF/FM was in its prime and high quality took

precedence over low price. NK

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Frequency response | 10Hz-11kHz |
| Stereo separation | 34dB |
| Distortion (50% mod.) | 0.05% |
| Hiss (IEC A) | -68dB |
| Signal for minimum hiss | 0.4mV |
| Sensitivity | |
| mono | mutes at 5µV |
| stereo | 34µV |



VERDICT

Big, sumptuous, dynamic sound provides a step-change improvement over any FM/DAB hybrid tuners. Superb.

CREEK CLASSIC £550

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FOR

- superb sound quality
- excellent reception quality
- looks

AGAINST

- nothing

This was an intriguing group test to do, not least because by sweeping the whole tuner market from under £200 right up to £800, we've managed to put all the different models available in proper context. Of course, the budget tuners aren't going to match the better ones, and so there's no implicit criticism of the cheaper ones for not matching the pricier designs. What it does do is let you know precisely how much improvement you'll get by spending more, and how the hybrid DAB/FM designs stack up against the bespoke analogue only products. It's a fascinating way to assess the respective value for money of all these bits of kit...

I'll rank the tuners in reverse order, based mainly on sound quality. As the best audio quality is on FM, the performance of the tuners on this band is the most important factor, although performance on DAB is also important where applicable.

At the bottom of the list is the Harman Kardon TU970. In its favour, it had very good reception quality on both DAB and FM, it was attractive to look at and it gave a pleasant delivery of classical music. But performance on the other genres of music was lacklustre on FM due to its relatively flat sound, and its sound did no favours to radio stations on DAB either. Another negative point was that it took a long time to scroll through the list of stations on DAB.

Next up is the Denon TU-1800. Like the Harman Kardon, it displayed slightly disappointing sound quality on FM, which was also as a result of having a quite flat sound, but it was better suited to the non-classical music stations than the Harman Kardon was. Also in its favour was that it performed better than the Harman Kardon on DAB, and it was the joint easiest-to-use tuner in the

using software-defined radio for FM reception, which made listening to Radios 3 and 4 very grating despite the fact that I don't have a weak signal on either of these stations.

Next is the Pure DRX702ES. I was surprised how well this tuner performed on FM. It provided a bright and lively sound that suited all genres of music, and the only slight criticism with the sound quality was that it could sound a little thin and harsh at times. Performance on DAB was also good, with its bright sound benefiting the dull-sounding DAB stations, and it was relatively easy to use. The only negative point against this tuner was that FM reception wasn't particularly good.

Ranked next is the Sony STSDB900. Like the Pure, the Sony has a bright, energetic and detailed sound that's well suited to all of the music radio stations. The main point it differs from the Pure is that it provided a slightly more detailed sound on FM and was less prone to sounding thin and harsh, although this does occasionally occur. FM reception on the Sony was also better than on the Pure and DAB reception quality was good, but not fantastic. Again like the Pure, the Sony's bright sound benefited the dull-sounding DAB stations. A couple of negative points against the Sony, however, were that the list of DAB stations couldn't be stored in alphanumeric order, and there is a question mark over the reliability of the user-interface software. Overall though, the Sony slightly outperformed the Pure in terms of sound quality, which is the most important factor.

Next up is the Marantz ST7001. What I liked about this tuner over the Sony was that instead of the bright sound the Sony displayed, the Marantz provided a more dynamic and authoritative sound, which was more engaging to listen to. FM on the

Ranked third overall is the Vincent STU-2. This tuner performed superbly well on the classical and middle-of-the-road music radio stations, with its velvety and mellow sound providing a smooth and luxuriant sound, although it wasn't as well suited to the pop and rock stations as most of the other tuners, however. Other positive aspects were that its design was very attractive and individualistic and it was the only tuner that allowed you to enter the frequency of the radio station directly, which I found to be the fastest way to tune into a station out of all the various methods possible.

Second best sounding in the group test is the Creek Classic. Its big, bold and dynamic sound provided an electrifying delivery of the classical and non-classical stations alike. The Creek also had the best FM reception quality and I considered it to have the best looks of all the tuners in the test...

Unsurprisingly however, the winner of the group test is the Myriad MXT2000. The tuner made classical music sound more realistic than its peers, and the sound quality across all genres of music was delivered with the most detail and the most open soundstage out of all the tuners in the group test. As a result, it comes heartily recommended for those who want the best FM sound possible, without going up to superfi designs such as those from Magnum Dynalab.

"the Creek's big, bold and dynamic sound provided an electrifying delivery..."

group test along with the Marantz.

Following the Denon is the Arcam DT91. It was difficult to know where to rank this, as it provides very good audio quality on most FM stations and it was the best performer on DAB. However, as mentioned above, the best sound quality is on FM, and the Arcam has a problem with noise as a result of

Marantz was especially good across all music genres, but it performed very well on DAB as well, making the most of the sound quality presented to it on the better and worse sounding stations alike. The Marantz was also the joint easiest-to-use tuner in the group test along with the Denon, as it had an intuitive and highly responsive user-interface.



Marantz ST7001 - best value for money choice



Creek Classic - best sound per pound by a mile



Myriad MXT2000 - best outright; superb, but expensive