

# What sounds good may not be music to the ears

UNTIL a few years ago, buying a hi-fi equipment was a simple task. There weren't many products to choose from and there was no need to worry about technical jargon.

Things have, however, changed dramatically today. What intimidates the buyer today is the pseudo-technicality which shrouds the products.

Consider a double-cassette recorder with a radio, its price ranges between Rs3,500 and Rs5,000. These are meant to be second systems in the house, for bedrooms, etc. The design priority in these sets is to pack in all the features at a moderate price. Of course, the sound quality is a step better than the regular mono.

As a general rule, buyers of the

format should look out for features like high-speed dubbing, stereo FM, four-to-five band graphic equaliser and radio with MW and SW bands. If these basic features are present, we can look for fancy features like bass extension and surround sound. These two features do not necessarily make the system sound better. But if proper care is not taken by the manufacturers, they can affect the sound quality.

The Aiwa CA-W51 sounds the smoothest of the lot. Its tonal quality is balanced and pleasing to the ear. Aiwa CA-W51's styling is compact and neat. However, it lacks output if you feel the need to blast. It doesn't have gizmos for extended bass. It is recommended for the sober.

The Panasonic RX-CT810 has a well-rounded tonal balance. Curiously, even though it's rated for 38 watts PMPO, there is no need for more power. However, it lacks punchy sound.

The Videocon SX-47 seems great for its price. A general view expressed by the dealers is that Videocon gives you the best value for money.

The Philips DR-828 has an electronically boosted bass in its dynamic bass boost system which makes the sound emitted unnatural. However, the overall getup can do with a better finesse.

The BPL CW-111K is the most expensive of the lot. It is feature-filled and looks impressive. The tonal quality of the sound tends to be on the 'tinny'. When you put on

the surround mode, it became even more so. The surround mode is very effective in expanding the sound stage. There is a separate speaker for bass reproduction, which seems marginally effective. A label on the system says that it is a five-way speaker system which is a bit objectionable. A five-way speaker system in genuine audio parlance means something totally different. However, there are five speakers in the system. It's got ample power. It is recommended for the teenager, who loves to blast.

The Sony CFS-W4255 is a disappointment, considering that it is a Sony product. The tonal balance is way off the mark. On a normal setting of the equaliser, the sound seems screaming loud. However,

it looks different with the golden strips, etc.

When you buy any of these do not get swayed by the output power mentioned on the model. Remember that 'power output' has no bearing on the tonal quality. Manufacturers often tend to create a hype about the power output to outdo competition. A lower power system which sounds pleasant is always preferred to a high-powered system which may sound 'tinny' or harsh. It is advisable to take a cassette of your favourite familiar music and listen to it on different models while trying out a hi-fi. You will be amazed at the differences in sound.

— Sanjiv Malvi