

Linn Unidisk SC

Linn Unidisk SC universal disc player. \$9995

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The Linn Unidisk SC is the latest member of Linn's universal disc player family.

Like its Unidisk 1.1 and 2.1 brothers it plays all the popular small disc formats (CD, SACD, DVD-Audio/Video, MP3, VCD) using Linn's proprietary Silver Disk Engine. This is Linn's unique digital processing that keeps each format in its native form and uses dedicated signal paths for each format instead of the more common approach of converting the different audio formats to a single common form (PCM) and using a single processing path.

"SC" means the Unidisk includes a full function surround sound preamplifier capable of handling additional digital (via TOSLINK or S/PDIF coaxial connection) and analogue audio inputs (with Dolby Pro-Logic II/Digital, DTS processing) plus video inputs in all the popular flavours (composite, S-Video, component).

For New Zealand that means RCA connections with component video instead of the Euro-centric Scart/RGB configuration. Hooray!

Outputs are equally comprehensive: RCA analogue audio outs, including a pair of fixed level outputs; TOSLINK or S/PDIF digital out; component, S-Video, composite video out; various RS232, IR, RCA In/Outs for third party system control and a set of Linn Knekt connectors for integration into Linn multi-room systems.

The SC is packaged in a stylish, compact box similar in appearance to the SC's more expensive brothers. Inside, the SC uses a bought-in transport instead of a Linn manufactured item.

A slim plastic handset full of similar looking buttons and small legends in the European fashion completes the package.

The only things missing from the specification are of more concern to the video enthusiast than music lover, namely; the latest surround modes like Dolby Digital EX, DTS ES, Pro-Logic IIx and digital video outputs (HDMI, DVI).

To the casual observer the Unidisk SC's complexity may imply a complicated setting up procedure but the reality is relatively painless, thanks to easy to follow on-screen menus and the excellent manual. Once your preferences have been set all you need do is pop in a disc, hit "play", sit back and enjoy.

When using the Unidisk as a playback machine there is the choice of switching it to Source mode where the Unidisk operates like a normal disc player, bypassing most of the preamp controls or by using the outputs labelled "TV Out" which carries a fixed level stereo signal.

This may be preferred by some as I accidentally discovered that in Source mode the signal is not totally pure and is still run through some of the preamp stages such as channel level trim. Level through TV Out is quite a bit lower but sound quality is unchanged.



Simply musical

The Unidisk played no favorites, with every disc being handled with aplomb. In true Linn fashion pace, rhythm and timing were spot on. Music sounds so natural without any hint of artifice or edginess. Tonally the Unidisk was as smooth as silk with just a smidgeon of roll-off at the extremes and a touch of dryness to the overall presentation. Soundstaging was excellent with good dimensionality and image placement. Dynamics were generally well portrayed with just a hint of softness compared to some other high end players.

Redbook CD and DVD-A replay was very good but the real eye-opener was SACD replay, a traditional universal player blind spot. Good SACDs had an openness and effortlessness that made music sound more realistic and enjoyable without the exaggeration produced by lesser SACD players. Here is a player that finally lives up to the SACD hype.

Visual performance to match

Using the component output into my Pioneer plasma, the resulting pictures were stunning, bringing video replay a step closer to the richness of film. Picture detail is sharp with no over-enhancement. Colours beautifully rendered, with excellent saturation. Noise or digital artifacts were nowhere to be seen. Even without digital video output, the picture quality from the Unidisk ranks with the best standalone DVD players.

Surrounded

Switching the Unidisk into preamp mode and using the onboard Dolby/DTS surround decoding gave very listenable results, not too far off from my reference preamp/processor. Highs were a little shut-in, there's a bit of bass roll-off and soft dynamics, giving a somewhat polite feel for movie replay.

Using the Unidisk as an integrated player/preamp introduced a small degree of veiling to the sound. Clarity and transparency were both slightly reduced, akin to changing from a 75 watt light bulb to a 60 watt one. However this is a small trade-off for a surround preamp that does a better job with music than any separate AV preamp or AV receiver that I've experienced.

Simply Linn

With the Unidisk SC, Linn have come up with a near-perfect package of performance and poise. A universal disc player that plays all formats with equal excellence, coupled with a full function preamplifier that excels in both audio and home theatre roles. All in a single component, this is convergence at its best. Even at its high price, the Unidisk SC is great value for money—*Michael Wong*

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