Melco
N50-H60 £3,000

It's almost impossible to talk about music servers without thinking Melco, which is why its latest debuts here

Hi-Fi Choice GROUPTEST WINNER

▶ DETAILS

PRODUCT
Melco N50-H60

ORIGIN
Japan

TYPE
Music library/server with HDD storage

WEIGHT
7kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
436 x 62 x 352mm

FEATURES
● 6TB built-in HDD storage
● 3 x USB 3.0 output
● Roon end point

DISTRIBUTOR
Melco

According to Tokyo-based Melco Audio, its newest full-width HDD model perfectly bridges the gap between the entry-level N100 (*HFC* 444) and the compact N1Z while offering a sizeable 6TB of storage as standard. Another way to look at it is £2k cashback for a machine identical to the excellent £5k N50-S38 EX (*HFC* 495) except for a 6TB hard-disc drive (HDD) instead of a 3.84TB solid-state drive (SSD). Assuming sonic parity, it's a no brainer. But it is an assumption, and then there's the rest of the group to tussle with.

As with the N50-S38 EX, the internal drive is protected from vibration by a special rigid mounter floated inside the chassis. (If you need more than 6TB, additional storage capacity can be added with Melco's external E100 3TB HDD unit). It also points to a host of internal upgrades over the N1A including a new PCB, a dynamic power supply with 25 percent more output and an IEC mains input with true electrical ground to define the source component as a ground point.

There are four specific USB ports to cover expansion and back-up and one with an eye-catching Neutrik housing for the all-important USB 3.0 output to a USB-compatible DAC. In another performance hack, UPnP network players are catered for by a dedicated Ethernet port labelled 'Player Port' – which isolates the player from the home network in order to optimise performance. The USB block enables connected devices to operate without any need for configuration, offering importing/playback from memory devices, HDD/SSD NAS drives and CD drives/rippers.

Round the front, the scrolling OLED display is quite small but crisp and clear, while navigating the menus is a breeze. No CD slot, but the optional D100 optical CD transport (supplied) is a heavily built, high-quality item that's a joy to use. A typical rip takes seven to eight minutes.

Sound quality

I suppose the key question is: does HDD sound better than SSD? Some people may think so, and that really would be a result for the N50-H60

given the £2k price advantage over its solid-state sibling. As I don't have an N50-S38 here for comparison, I must leave the answer hanging. Not that it really matters – differences at most are going to be almost vanishingly subtle, especially as, without its own on-board DAC, the connected Chord Electronics Hugo TT2, amplifier and speakers will have the major say on ultimate sound quality. But just as with the S38, the Chord necessarily doing its digital bidding, the N50-H60 is an essentially immaculate source for everything downstream to get stuck into.

Take Taylor Swift's *Lavender Haze,* which sounds lovely but a little amorphous and tonally blended when delivered via the Vault 2i. The Chord-reliant Melco provides an altogether cleaner, crisper, higher resolution lens with which to inspect

> **There's a sense of impetus, authority and excitement that holds your attention**

the lush and spacey production. Separation, textures and soundstage depth are of an entirely different order altogether. The N50-H60 blows away the haze, if you'll forgive the pun, and the result is a more polished, sophisticated and insightful performance that's simply more interesting and relaxing to listen to.

Michael McDonald is absolutely feeling the love, too, with *I Was Made To Love Her* issuing from the speakers with impressive weight, bounce and energy alongside startling dynamic freedom. There's a sense of impetus, authority and excitement that holds your attention and is missing from most of the other servers in the group. It's hard to put your finger on it, but you'll definitely recognise it when you hear it ●

HI-FI Choice
OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★½

FEATURES
★★★★☆

LIKE: The easiest server to use here with the best sound

DISLIKE: Control app can be a little frustrating

WE SAY: Melco's fine reputation is well deserved, this is a terrific server/library

OVERALL
★★★★★