



Audiolab 8200T (£450)

Although the Audiolab 8200T is the least expensive tuner in this test, that's not obvious when you first inspect it. The casing, which follows the classic Audiolab proportions, is beautifully constructed from finely machined aluminium, fixed with polished miniature screws. All the controls have a quality feel and a pleasing action. Even the remote control (which can also operate other Audiolab components) is very presentable – certainly nicer than the one Naim provided.

In electronic terms too the 8200T is well engineered: the analogue AM/FM section is kept completely separate from the DAB receiver, and signal routing into the outputs is controlled by relays – high-end thinking for such a keenly priced model. Two sets of paralleled audio outputs are provided. These could be useful, for example, for the connection of a tape recorder if your amplifier lacks the facility.

Operation is simple too: a large rotary control is used for manual tuning in sensible 50kHz steps but if this is turned rapidly the 8200T enters search mode and automatically finds the next strong station, which can be cancelled again by another small turn. Finally on the subject of ergonomics, it is nice to see the mains switch located on the front panel, not at the rear as is the case on the Creek, Micromega and Naim models here.

SKIPPING TO BRAHMS

Nor is the Audiolab obviously a low-cost design when you listen to it. The first impression it gives is one of lightness and agility. I particularly enjoyed the way it skipped through Brahms' Clarinet Quintet on BBC



Radio 3 for example. The piece did reveal some low-level background hiss during the rests, which gave the impression of originating from the decoder or filters rather than as a result of weak reception (the signal strength meter showed maximum).

Being critical, I found the upper midrange slightly too brightly lit, which added an edge to some of the instruments and took the impression of the smoothness away. But overall the effect was slight and not that obvious away from the competitive environment of an A/B group test.

James O'Brien's phone-in show on LBC 97.3 showed that the 8200T was comfortable with spoken word programming, and the extended and substantially flat low-end response evident in the measurements translated nicely into well textured and warm vocal presentation, without degenerating into boom.

Turning to popular music, Snow Patrol's 'Chasing Cars' on BBC Radio 2 showed that the Audiolab could provide a spacious and well dimensioned soundstage although a tendency towards dryness was noted, despite the substantial bass. The station's jingles sparkled nicely however, notwithstanding a treble roll-off [see Lab Report] that appears to start prematurely.

Sound Quality: 80%

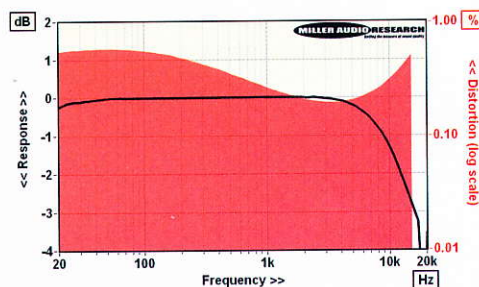


ABOVE: Classic Audiolab dimensions and details for the 8200T; controls are sensibly chosen and nicely weighted

HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Audiolab's FM signal strength meter spans a useful 3dBµ-44dBµ range in 8 steps (75% modulation) with the second-to-top segment (40dBµ) delivering an A-wtd S/N ratio of 50dB. Compared to tuners employing a combined DAB/FM front-end, the 8200T's separate FM stage is refreshingly sensitive with its stereo muting threshold set to 26dBµ or 20µV RF (about halfway along the indicator), but there's a worthwhile improvement in noise performance with higher (60dBµ or 1mV RF) signal strengths where the A-wtd S/N ratio approaches 63dB with a moderate 60% FM. Optimum performance occurs at >70dBµ where the A-wtd S/N ratio achieves close to 70dB (20Hz-16kHz).

Audiolab's pilot and subcarrier filtering is not especially aggressive (60dB, both) while IM distortions relating to the 19kHz pilot are largely kept out of the audio range. The frequency response shows a smooth treble roll-off [black trace, below] amounting to -1.5dB/10kHz and -3dB/15kHz, while harmonic distortion, principally 3rd harmonic, is highest at ~0.6% through bass frequencies. This is an intriguing design! **PM**



ABOVE: FM frequency response [black trace] with distortion vs. frequency [red fill] at 60dBµ (1mV RF at 75% modulation)



ABOVE: Dual audio outputs and both optical and RCA digital outputs for DAB are provided on the rear of the Audiolab, along with inputs for three types of antenna

Maximum output level/Impedance	880mV (500mV, 60%) / 27ohm
Muting threshold/Sensitivity (65dB SN)	20µV / ~7mV
Distortion vs frequency (20Hz-16kHz)	0.57 to 0.21%
Pilot/Subcarrier suppression	61dB / 59dB
Ultimate A-wtd S/N ratio (75% mod)	69.2dB
Frequency response (20Hz-15kHz)	+0.0dB to -2.85dB
Stereo separation (1kHz)	45dB
Power consumption	7W
Dimensions (WHD)	445x74x335mm