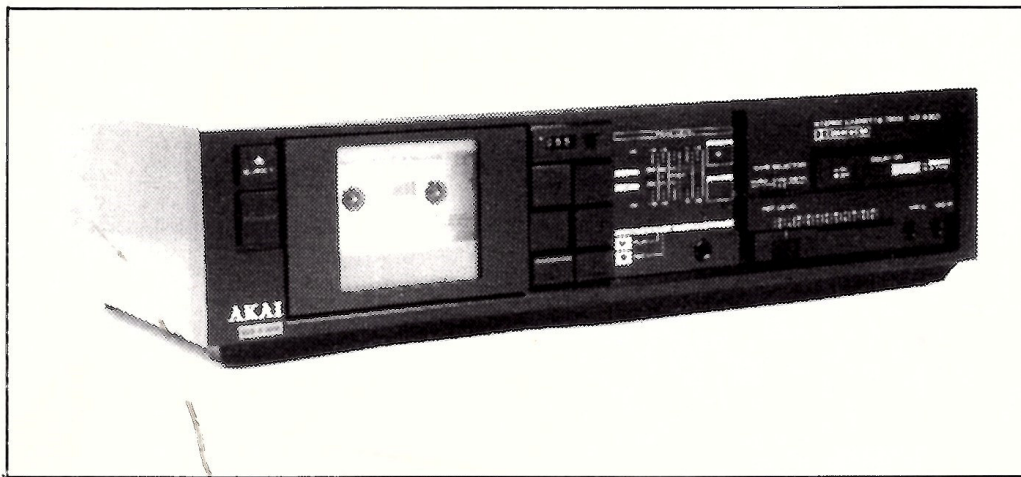


AKAI HX-A201



The HX-A201 is neatly styled but, mechanically, exhibits many of the drawbacks of a budget deck in the bottom price range. Its tape transport buttons run vertically on the right hand side of the cassette drive, and as with most mechanicals the buttons are a bit clanky.

A more important deficiency is their poor identification. Symbols are impressed directly into the

plastic and lack distinguishing coloured legends.

On the plus side, the transport buttons are mechanically inter-linked and will accept unusual commands, such as fast forward from reverse, without trouble. More sophisticated changes like 'punch-in' record or fast reverse from record mode are not possible, though it does have one touch record.

The peak level meter has a limited upward range and poor resolution — only three green and two red LEDs per channel. When recording a piano nocturne, they rarely lit on low level passages.

Record level adjustment is made using a sliding control which though smooth proved a trifle flimsy, a characteristic it shares with the manual tape selection switch. The identification mark on the latter is simply a central groove without distinguishing colour, making mis-selection a probability. This is a problem compounded by the lack of a display for tape selection.

The 201 has both Dolby B and C, and a facility operated by two push buttons: off/on and Dolby B/C. Short travel and lack of warning lights was, again, a potential source of operating error.

This was the second HX-A201 I have tested, so its performance was compared with the first sample I have on file, reviewed a year ago. It is a tribute to Akai's quality control that there was little variation between the two. Cassette recorders can vary enormously in performance between samples if sloppy production line adjustment techniques and inadequate post-production tests are adopted. So in spite of its budget appearance and feel, the HX-A201 is consistent in what it offers.

Better still, this performance is of a high standard compared with most other budget rivals. A flat replay frequency response (see Fig 1) suggested good results with pre-recorded tapes, but I was somewhat surprised that they sounded congested, lacking clarity, and suffering from time-

domain smearing to a degree not suggested by the deck's measured replay response. The earlier sample sounded far better. Replay speed was accurate, so tempo was correct too.

Although the transport controls feel 'shaky' and give the impression that the thing they are connected to — the tape transport mechanism — is of equivalent quality, tests revealed this was not the case.

Akai have kept wow, or slow speed variations, down to 0.08 percent, which is good enough to prevent blatantly obvious pitch slurring or warbling of steady tones. Impurity of tone was detectable though, due to slight capstan warble and there was some insecurity of pitch to piano notes. Flutter was adequately suppressed, as Fig 2 shows.

Akai continue to use a compe-

AKAI HX-A201

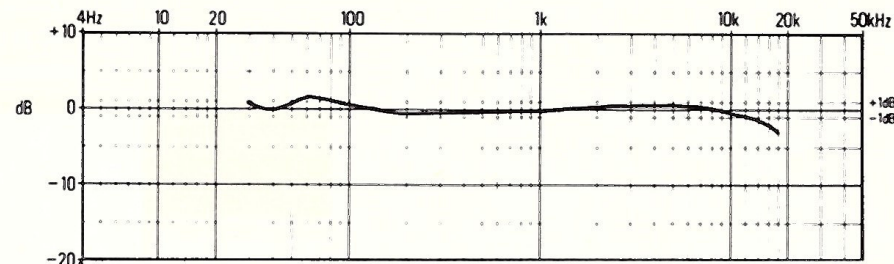


Fig 1: Replay response — slight treble loss

REPLAY PERFORMANCE of musicassettes

frequency response 30Hz-16kHz
speed accuracy +0.4%

tent, if not exceptional record/replay head. It gets reasonable signal levels onto ferric and chrome tapes, but doesn't manage too well with metals, except at high frequencies. Hiss levels were low and hum has now been suppressed.

Frequency response measured flat with ferric, chrome and metal blank tapes, as the record/replay

graphs in Fig 19 show. This was responsible for good tonal balance on recordings and with metal tape we were generally impressed by a fine sense of clarity and naturalness. Mild confusion sets in if it is over-recorded so Akai's indicated maximum should be adhered to. The 201's recording quality proved relatively good with ferric and chrome too.

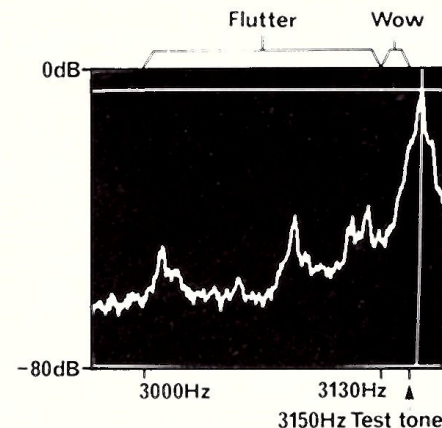


Fig 2: Flutter peaks visible, plus random wow

RECORD/REPLAY PERFORMANCE of blank tapes frequency response (IEC Primary Refs.)

ferric (IEC I)	20Hz-16kHz
chrome (IEC II)	20Hz-16kHz
metal (IEC IV)	20Hz-16kHz
distortion	1.2%
hiss (Cr, Dolby out)	-53dB

Hofkamp & van Droffelaar

*Specialisten in vintage HiFi en analoge camera techniek
met eigen technische dienst.*

**Jan G. Hofkamp
Hoornsedijk 9
9752 XJ Haren**

**050 - 534 15 06
06 - 38 18 34 64
info@dehofkeuken.nl**