

REVIEWS
hardware

ayon

CD-07 CD Player

as reviewed by Gary Lea



This is the third installment of a review for Charlie Harrison's Ayon USA. The first installment was the fabulous Triton tube integrated amp. The second part was the Legacy subwoofer and this now completes the triumvirate!

The Ayon CD-07 is rather similar to the CD 2 I reviewed a year ago for another publication as part of a review of the Ayon Typhon mono-block amps and the Polaris two chassis preamp. That is the stuff that audio dreams are made of. In living with the CD 2 I will say that in summary it is a very finely built and extremely well performing unit that performs almost as well as many \$20,000 uber decks. It provided easy operation, refinement of sound and a build quality that I have not see surpassed at ANY price level! The CD 2 was a real pleasure to live with and so has the CD-07 been with the added benefit of an iPod dock integrated into the CD player and controlled by the universal Ayon remote.

According to Ayon the CD-07 is a dramatic rethinking of conventional based tube CD-Player industrial designs and represents an absolutely new standard in its price category. It was created to embody in a more affordable CD-Player, all the know-how and expertise acquired developing reference products.

This CD-Player now incorporates many advanced technologies, aspects and superior aesthetic from Ayon's upper end CD-Player line (I am not sure there is an upper and lower end just differing price points for differing features). The CD-07 provides exquisite musicality with transparency, dynamic, air, harmonics and resolution.

The CD-07 is 19 x 13 x 4.5 inches and weighs in at 30lbs. This is a full featured top loading CD-Player with a real class A triode vacuum tube output stage employing two 5687 triode tubes.

It is driven by a Burr Brown D/A converter at an up-sampling rate of 192kHz/24 bit.

Great pains have been taken to be sure that the shortest possible signal path is used in this unit as well as all other Ayon products. The unit employs a Phillips transport system. This unit is manufactured by the Austrian company Stream Unlimited. This is the same unit used in the CD2.

A few other noteworthy features are:

- Separate voltage regulators
- Warm up function – extends tube life time
- Modified suspension system to isolate the CD-transport from mechanical vibrations
- MOS-FET's for tube anode-voltage regulation
- Separate analog output stage for left and right channel
- Noiseless R-core power transformer
- Anti-vibration magnetic integral CD-clamp system combined with dark acrylic CD cover
- 2 Analog output (RCA & XLR)
- AC Phase control indicator
- Digital input USB
- Digital output S/PDIF
- IPOD docking station
- Display dimmer & mute function
- Heavy duty RCA gold-plated output jacks
- Absorber aluminum feet with superior damping characteristics
- Metal remote commander

The CD-07 has the exact same look as all other Ayon CD players. As is always the case with Ayon products the fit and finish are world class: thick machined aluminum cases; engraved wording and the awkward power button underneath the right front side of the unit (ok let's call it quaint and say it gives the unit a certain unique personality); topped off with the immediately recognizable Ayon name emblazoned in red light on the front panel.



As a top loader you need to place the unit on the top of your rack or on a shelf with enough room to not only operate and load the player but to also let it breathe as it is tube driven. It is easy to set up and easy to operate and the entire time I had it I never noticed the slightest bit of overheating or difficulty in operation. The weighted top clamp has a magnetic system that aids alignment when the lid is placed on top of the CD and firmly grasps the disc for better playback. I never had this feature fail to properly line up and seat the CD for a hassle free load.

While living with this unit I did not notice much difference at all between the 07 and the CD2. If anything the CD 2 may be a bit more resolving, but this will only be noticeable if you listened to both units side by side.

Something noteworthy is the pairing of this unit with differing electronics. When paired with solid-state amps,

like the monstrous Sheng Ya 600-watt per channel behemoths, the CD-07 delivered vibrant clarity and a level of energy that I would classify as sizzling without the accompanying harshness or edginess.

Chalk that up to the tube output stage leveling out the digital shrill.

When mated to the Jolida 211 Music Envoys, the sound became liquid and shimmering. Smoothness is the best way to express the sound. In all honesty and without the slightest hint of prejudice, but rather total journalistic neutrality, it was this combo that I enjoyed the most. The solid-state pairing was not the least bit offensive or un-enjoyable. I just like those 211 tubes. Oddly enough the CD-07 does not overpower the sound with extreme tube warmth. It seems to be rather neutral and allows you to create the sound you want with your choice of electronics and that is a real winning attribute.

Listening to Roger Waters' Live in the Flesh CD and the cut "Dogs" brought an incredible level of realness into the listening room. It really gave the amps and speakers a workout with the pinpoint placement of instruments and special effects, especially the barking dogs midway through the cut. With the best CD players one of the dogs will come from behind the listener and to the right by about 20 feet. The CD-07 presented this as well as any player I have used including my reference Grant CD-1000!

As someone with a dedicate iPod deck and DAC the idea of doing away with two additional pieces of equipment and associated cabling, not to mention the cost the CD07 is a very attractive proposition.

As an iPod deck the CD-07 was great. I had a chance to listen to it in direct comparison to the Wadia iDeck with a Blue Circle DAC. The performance was right on par with that combo. As I stated earlier having the option to eliminate a couple of pieces of equipment would be very attractive to many audiophiles. While playing back songs from the iPod, the sound was crystal clear, neutral, and at least on par with the sound from the CD transport... if not just a wee bit better. In listening to Marc Cohen's "Perfect Love", off his self titled album from Atlantic Recording, I found the bass to seem a bit tighter and James Taylor's voice a bit more in focus than when listening to the CD. Not enough of a difference to get all swoony over, but rather startling enough of an improvement over the standard iPod sound to really make you take notice and make the CD-07 a viable alternative to the Wadia solution. Of course there will be detractors to the whole iPod as a serious transport system for music, but there is no escaping the fact that millions have been sold and we have no less than nine in our family. The iPod can be a very viable transport for digital music and, when you bypass the Apple conversion software, the sound can be quite stunning. This is where the CD-07 is moving ahead of the power curve. Combine the CD transport and the iPod transport into one easy to use system requiring only one set of interconnects... simple, straightforward, and easy to use.



Overall the CD-07 represents a great value and a remarkable feat at the price. You get a top flight CD transport

and player with the added bonus of the iPod capability. If you do not care to have the convenience of the iPod deck then look right to the CD2 from Ayon. It is a world class CD player and a steal for the money.

But for those who truly believe there is a future in iPods and their storage capacity combined with their ease of use, then the CD-07 is the obvious alternative to a standard CD player. I really hate to see this one go. As a reviewer, the ease and availability of CD, true digital and analogue sources with the fewest boxes to mess with, well... it will be sorely missed. For someone in the market for a new CD player with a sweet sound, ease of use and super flexibility, the CD-07 is NOT to be missed! **Gary Lea**

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