

# tips Recordable CD

**Incredible as it may seem the compact cassette was invented in the 1960s as a speech recording medium rather than a home hi-fi system. It has soldiered on for thirty years, but let's be honest, isn't it about time it was replaced by something a little more reliable, more durable and more exciting.**

The battle to replace the cassette began in earnest in the early 90s with the arrival of MiniDisc and the ill-fated Digital Compact Cassette (DCC). MiniDisc won the original battle and has started to establish itself as a serious audio format that's especially good on the move (personal players, in-car systems etc).

However, hi-fi fans now have a very real alternative to MiniDisc as a home recording format in the shape of CD-R, or Recordable CD as it is better known. Put simply Recordable CDs are exactly the same as the CDs we've known and loved for the best part of two decades yet you can record on them just like a cassette. The really good news is that the standard of the recording is 'virtually identical' to the original. Put it this way, even the most golden-eared hi-fi equipment reviewer of all time would struggle to pinpoint any differences.

Originally the only CD Recorders on sale were super high-end models aimed at the professional market. However in 1997 Philips slashed the price of its recorders to under £500 and other manufacturers were forced to follow suit. You can now buy CD recorders for less than £200, and there's even a twin CD deck (one playback and one record).

So what can you record on to CD? Well, anything from radio transmissions to band and DJ demos. However, if you buy a recorder, chances are you are either thinking about archiving your vinyl record collection or making bootleg copies of your mate's CDs. We should point out at this juncture that recording someone else's discs is in fact illegal, so make sure your local constabulary doesn't get to hear about it!

So the pluses of recordable CD are very obvious, but what of the drawbacks? Firstly there are two kinds of discs, CD-R and CD-RWs. The latter are similar to tape in that you can record any number of times on the same disc. The down side is that CD-RWs won't play in all standard CD players, and at around £15 a throw they are hideously expensive. Standard CD-Rs are considerably cheaper - approximately £2.00 a disc - but you can only record once on them. If you make a mistake and record Steps instead of The Chemical Brothers - tough! The cheapest CD recorders are only compatible with CD-Rs not CD-RWs.

It's also worth mentioning that CD recorders are protected by SCMS (Serial Copy management System) technology and that, although you can make a 'virtually perfect copy' of a CD, you won't be able to make a 'virtually perfect copy' of your 'virtually perfect copy.'

Using CD recorders is fairly simple - not that much different in fact from using a cassette recorder. You hook up digital systems like a CD player or MiniDisc to the recorder's digital input, set a recording level, press record and you're away. You use a standard line input for analogue sources like vinyl LPs, cassettes, radio etc. Once you've finished recording you standardise your table of contents, and your CD will play like a standard disc in that you'll be able to instantly access tracks, use the random facility etc. You'll also be able to lend it to your mates as it will play on their playback only machines.

Still not convinced? Well put it this way. Which would you prefer? Hissy recordings or virtually perfect copies? Laborious rewinding or instant track access? Tapes that snarl up in your machine, or disc that play brilliantly every time? It's your decision, but the writing is on the wall for the cassette deck.