



MOON lite

Fancy the MOON and the stars but can't stretch to the high-end price? **David Vivian** reckons this update holds the answer

Hear the one about the hi-fi manufacturer lauded for its excellent high-end electronics only to douse the golden glow with an entry-level product that was, frankly, a bit of a let down? Didn't think so. This is a scenario that hardly ever happens. For brands intending to enjoy the margins that come with top-end merchandise, the design and performance values assigned to its version of 'affordable entry-level' are calculated with meticulous care and for good reasons.

Savvy restaurants know the score when it comes to house wine. For the sake of the establishment's good name and continued custom, providing something more than merely respectable and conspicuous value is a no brainer. An entry-level hi-fi component from a brand with ambitions to keep its extensive, steeply aspirational kit portfolio well patronised, is no different. It's the gateway, the mechanism to lock in loyalty and a hankering for the more exotically priced and specified wares.

In the v2 version of its entry-level, all-analogue £2,350 250i integrated amplifier, Canadian brand MOON by Simaudio has a worthy exemplar of the strategy. I can tell, with the amp still in the box, it's going to look and feel good, work admirably and sound great. There's no way Simaudio, which recently launched the £25k

891 network player/preamp as part of its new high-end MOON North Collection, could allow it to be anything less than a glittering over achiever. So yes, buy with confidence.

Luckily for us, the circa £2-3k integrated amplifier market sector is awash with over achievers from the likes of Naim, Rega, Electrocompaniet, Hegel and Primare, to name just a few, and I've assembled Hegel's H120 and the ECI 80D from Electrocompaniet (HFC 460 and 473) to get a handle on the MOON's standing.

The looser-limbed approach creates a mood that's much easier to sink into

But first, a run through of what's new for v2. The integrated has been a long-standing stalwart for MOON, mirroring the smart, if slightly over-buttoned, look of all the company's amps. Originally called the Neo 250i back in 2014, and available in black, silver or silver/black finishes, it then became the 250i Black Edition (other finishes dropped to keep the price competitive) and, in 2021, it adopted higher quality Nichicon capacitors and the same bipolar output transistors as the far costlier 600i integrated and 888 monoblock

DETAILS

PRODUCT
MOON by Simaudio 250i v2

ORIGIN
Canada

TYPE
Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
10kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
429 x 89 x 366mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 2x 50W (8ohm)
- Analogue inputs: 6x RCA; MM phono stage
- 6.35mm headphone output

DISTRIBUTOR
Renaissance Audio

WEBSITE
simaudio.com
renaissanceaudio.co.uk

models. All this came under the heading of running changes, likewise the upgraded Alps volume pot.

For the v2, the boat has been pushed a little further offshore, changes embracing a modified circuit design incorporating next-generation semiconductors, improved shielding for the power supply and, not least, the introduction of an MM phono stage. Oh, and in addition to plain black, the two-tone black/silver combo is back. The 250i v2's form factor conforms to the classy appearance of all MOON amps, build quality is reassuringly robust and the remote is an object lesson to others in how to marry style and function.

Otherwise, the specs are much as before: 50W a side of Class A/B into 8ohm (biased to pure Class A for the first 5W) and 100W into 4ohm. The signal-to-noise ratio is quoted as 101dB at full power.

On the fascia, the motorised volume knob is joined by a 6.35mm headphone socket and, rarer these days, a 3.5mm analogue input. This is joined by a further four RCA inputs on the well laid out rear panel, as well as a pre-out and the newly introduced MM phono stage. Finally, there are RS232 and IR inputs and in/out ports for Simaudio's SimLink, which can accommodate other MOON components, cable supplied.

Sound quality

Is there anything wrong with being 'middle of the road'? To listen to some audiophiles you'd think it was a crime worse than placing 'bookshelf' speakers on a bookshelf. Where's the spice, the ambition, the distinctive sonic signature, the get-down-and-boogie gene? True enough. Hi-fi with attitude is what some people crave and there's enough of it out there to satisfy demand. But don't get the idea that



the skilfully contrived character act is where the real design gold resides and kit seeking to play it safe is scared of its own shadow and so disappointingly timid and dreary.

On the contrary, nailing the point in the middle of the road where the balance, colour and texture of any genre, from the 1812 to The 1975, sounds 'just right' – let's call it Goldilocks Central – is just about as tricky as it gets and, to MOON's considerable credit, the 250i v2 gets subtly closer to this under appreciated ideal than either of the rivals I've lined up for comparison from Hegel and Electrocompaniet. True, for different reasons both Scandinavian offerings sound more impressive initially, but give it time and the MOON's beautifully judged sense of proportion, consistency and unshakable poise is unerringly persuasive.

As is a presentation that's smooth without smothering fine detail. Take Joni Mitchell's 2000 re-recording of *Both Sides Now*. Yes, there's warmth and silky strings, but any tendency to massage the lush arrangement is the track's undoing. The MOON plays it to perfection, floating it delicately on the deep, weighty orchestral under swell and pitching Joni's dusky vocal with exquisite emphasis in the densely



I've already touched on how the 250i v2 squares up to its most obvious Scandinavian rivals from Hegel and Electrocompaniet and the good news is between them there's a wide choice of sonic favours to cater for most tastes though, arguably, none quite nails the 'all-rounder' brief as well as the MOON. If style and a spacious, sonorous sonic demeanour are high on your list of priorities, the Electrocompaniet is a very tempting option. The MOON 250i v2 might not be the most exciting listen for the money, but it is arguably the most consistently enjoyable option.

layered mix. Notable is the depth of the soundstage. The Hegel's take is more mid-forward and 'in room', the Electrocompaniet's discernibly broader and tonally lighter but neither is quite as three-dimensional or sumptuous.

The glassy synths and supple rhythmic chug of The 1975's anthemic *Somebody Else* from the album *I Like It When You Sleep...*, is handled just as adroitly, sounding unforced and uncoloured with a very

There's a beautifully judged sense of proportion, poise and consistency

grown-up absence of grain or coarsened textures. Both the Hegel and Electrocompaniet are a little punchier and, for me, just edge the day for intensity and impetus, but the MOON's richer, slightly looser-limbed approach creates a mood that's much easier to sink into.

It's a pattern that's repeated as the listening sessions roll on, the Hegel's clarity, speed and bass control making the MOON occasionally seem slightly laid back, opaque and rounded, the Electrocompaniet's tube-like warmth

and openness sometimes trumping the 250i v2's estimable assets in these areas. Cautious and dreary, though? Pull the other one.

Conclusion

If the only finger I can lay on the 250i v2 is its predictability, that can't be bad. Did I say buy with confidence at the start without even removing it from its box? Well, I repeat the advice here, with bells on. MOON really has done its due diligence with this one, distilling much of the sonic goodness and operational slickness of its pricier and more glamorous amps into a sensibly pared-back, all-analogue model at a keen price. In a way, it was ever thus with the 250i. No, the v2 isn't the loudest, hardest-hitting or most exciting integrated amplifier you'll find in this ultra-competitive sector, but everything considered it is one of the very best. The middle of the road has seldom looked or sounded this good ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL
★★★★★

LIKE: Classy sonics, design, build and finish; great remote

DISLIKE: Nothing of note at the price

WE SAY: All that's good about MOON in a smart, keenly priced package