



## Moon 250i v2 Integrated Amplifier Review

If you find yourself in possession of a digital source that you're already very pleased with, the Moon makes a tremendous amount of sense. This is an amplifier pared back to a small (but not pointlessly minimalist) specification that delivers a level of sonic performance that goes a long way to justifying this approach. This is a fine amplifier.

### Pros

- > Open, neutral and extremely rewarding sound quality
- > Excellent phono stage and headphone amp
- > Beautifully made

### Cons

- > Goes against rivals with more functionality
- > Remote is a faff in low light
- > It's possible some committed test pilots might need more power

## Introduction - What Is the Moon 250i v2?

The Moon 250i v2 is a stereo integrated amplifier and the base of a range of amplifiers; initially in one box, then two then three, that extends up into the thresholds of very serious high end indeed. Judged by the standards of the present, the specification offered by the 250i v2 is simplicity itself (this is not going to be one of those reviews where we're north of 1,500 words before we even touch on what it sounds like). There's nothing here that would have been alarming in the year 2000 or even 1990 come to that.

Where this is potentially interesting is that Moon is not a company that insists on minimalism. We can look at something like the AVID Accent and see the absolute logic in it being a strictly analogue device, whose sole concession to the 21st century operation is a remote control because it joins a pantheon of analogue products. By contrast, Moon is extremely good at digital audio and has no qualms making

streaming preamps, integrated amps with DACs and many other measures of thoroughly modern products. The 250i v2 is simple by choice not by philosophy.

This means we need to see whether the decision to make the 250i v2 as a straightforward, all analogue amplifier makes sense when judged against other devices at the price point that hold onto these values as part of a wider ethos and when considered against rivals that can be invited to do a little more from their single chassis. Is this the two grand of integrated goodness you need in your life? Set course for the Moon.



## Specification and Design

As you will have gathered from the prominent 'v2' in the title, the 250i v2 is not the first iteration of this particular amplifier. The original 250i could still be found on the Moon website until recently and it is fundamentally very similar to the amp you see here. It's also an analogue only device built around a Class A/B amplifier that generates 50 watts into 8 ohms which doubles neatly into 4. There are lid off shots of the 250i v2 on the website which always speaks to a certain confidence in the contents and what you can see is all conventionally but effectively implemented.

This means you get a usefully burly toroidal PSU in a chassis that goes to significant effort to keep the pre and power sections apart from another. There's nothing showy here and, as I have no doubt someone will point out in the comments, you can buy two grand amps that put a lot more than 50 watts out into the world but the components in the signal path of the 250i v2 are all of decent quality and used in such a way as to inspire confidence in the outcome. There is also a completely analogue volume pot which is sufficiently unusual in this day and age for me to pass comment on it.

The amp itself is made available to five analogue, line level inputs. Four of these are on RCA connections on the rear panel while the fifth is on a 3.5mm connection on the front panel; something which feels a bit retro in world where almost nothing has a 3.5mm out but the Moon has enough other inputs for me not to gripe too much about that. There is an RCA preout as well which is handy both for subs and when discussing the output of a company that makes as many power amps as Moon does.

New for the 250i v2 is that what was a sixth line input has been changed to become a moving magnet phono stage. This reflects the wacky world in which we currently live in but it's a sensible alteration to make to design contesting this sort of price point. It's also worth noting that Moon makes some startlingly good standalone phono stages so it isn't like they lack the engineering knowhow to make such a thing. The other item of additional functionality is the presence of a headphone amp on a full



size 6.35mm jack connection. This features Moon's standard option to switch it in and out with the headphone jack physically connected which is a function that a small subset of people I know adore. In my case, it generally means I'll connect the headphones up and be puzzled why there's nothing coming out.

Power is made available to a single set of speaker terminals on the rear panel that accept the standard spread of connections. One area where the 250i v2 differs from most amps I can recall testing in recent years is that, as well as IR triggers on the back panel, there's an RS232 connection as well. Quite how many of them will ever see this being used is unknown to me but, if you need such a thing, the Moon is in a pretty small field of contenders. There is also a remote handset which I'm a little less enthused by. It's attractive enough but the button legend is busy and it's not something you can navigate without looking at. I've also found that the codes that Moon uses for it have more crossover with other components than I usually find. This is unlikely to be the end of the world; and most sane people will have fewer other devices in their rack than I do but, on an amp which will need source equipment, it's something to bear in mind.

The 250i v2 itself though is a great deal more confidence inspiring. Moon products are built in a manner that is slightly different to some other devices at the price. This is less about great sections of metal like an armoured belt and overt overbuilding. When you extract the 250i v2 from the packaging it feels pretty smart. The more time you spend with it though, the more you realise it is fastidiously bolted together in a way that is less concerned with you showing it off to your mates and more with the 250i v2 lasting for a very long time. I can argue that the silver buttons on the black fascia are a little fussy and that there are more classically attractive amps available for the price but there's very little that is better made.

*"There are lid off shots of the 250i v2 on the website which always speaks to a certain confidence in the contents"*

## How Was the 250i v2 Tested?

The Moon has been used on a Quadraspire rack connected to an IsoTek Evo 3 Sigmas for power. It has been used with the Chord Electronics Qutest and the iFi iNeo DSD2 connected to a Roon Nucleus and an Eversolo DMP-A6 being used as a Roon Endpoint. An AVID Ingenium Twin with SME M2-9 arm and Vertere Sabre cart was used to test the phono stage and the Focal Clear MG was used for some brief

headphone tests. Speakers used have been the Neat Petite Classic, the Focal Kanta No1 and Rega Aya. Material used has been FLAC, AIFF, DSD, Tidal, Qobuz and some vinyl.

## Performance

In one specific way, the audio performance of the 250i V2 mimics that slow burning impression of how it feels out of the box. From the outset, there is a lot to like. The Moon initially displaced the Musical Fidelity A1, dropping between the Qutest and Petite Classic and the effect was to reduce some of the curious (if personally addictive) character of the A1 and bring everything back to a more even keel. David Gray's endlessly charming Babylon on the 20th anniversary version of White Ladder is less 'whoa, listen to David Gray!' and instead finds a little more detail and gives a better perception of the performance as a whole.



Something else that is immediately apparent is that I can't see there being many occasions in a UK listening environment where the fifty watt output of the Moon isn't utterly sufficient. Across all the test speakers, the 250i v2 rarely passed the 10 o'clock point on the volume to run at levels I'd consider firmly antisocial. Even allowing for this being an analogue pot set up in the old fashioned way where 12 represents the realistic maximum output, there still feels like plenty left in the tank.

Once the initial perception of the considered, detailed and usefully powerful performance passes, the Moon gently starts to work at the more emotive ends of your perception. Listening to a 24/88.2 version of The Ubiquitous Mr Lovegroove by Dead Can Dance, the Moon delivers the almost waltz like time signature with a composure and control that is hugely impressive. This is not a 'fast' sounding amplifier; it's sufficiently transparent, it is barely even a 'sounding' amplifier. What it does is exert enough control over most connected speakers to ensure that they move with absolute precision. This also means that when the music being played has almost no propulsive energy of its own, the Moon imparts nothing to it. The effect is uncommonly effortless.

The more time you listen, the more you also realise that the Moon is able to balance a respectable top end energy with a refinement that sometimes isn't present when more crudely recorded material is being used. You can run the Moon hard into the Kanta No1 with the 44.1 stream of Tascam Tapes by DeWolff; an album which, as the name (and cover) suggests is not the last word in fidelity, the result is still extremely engaging. Normally I find myself typing some sort of permutation that 'amp x won't flatter poor material' but, without clipping its wings with high quality content, the 250i v2 is hugely and consistently forgiving. This ports directly over to the headphone amp too which, while not as effortlessly powerful as the amp feels, puts in a more than respectable performance.



That freshly added phono stage is a well considered extension of these virtues as well. First up, it has impressive gain; pretty much parity with a 2v output digital source when switched between the inputs and it manages this without any unwanted noise. More than this, it's a compellingly transparent window into the character (such as it is) of your turntable. The analogue side of things has seen a series of superbly talented moving magnet carts being released at prices well into four figures. What this phono stage does is deliver a level of performance that combined with the supremely talented Vertere Sabre, would be more than sufficient for me to listen at length without complaint, not thinking about when I might upgrade to something better but enjoying the performance on its own virtues.

There's something else too. The Moon is sufficiently transparent that you would have the choice of making a system that had a genuine stab at inducing no character of its own or choosing how and where to induce a little character. The performance it has exhibited with the Rega Aya; a speaker that does have some traits all of its own is a case in point. Where certain partnering electronics with the Rega might be a bit too much of a good thing, the combination with the Moon allows for it to do what it does incredibly well without the other quirks of its behaviour becoming more dominant. The effect of partnering it with something like an Audiolab 9000N which offers the same astonishing transparency would likely be very even handed indeed.



*“The Moon is sufficiently transparent that you would have the choice of making a system that had a genuine stab at inducing no character of its own or choosing how and where to induce a little character”*

## Conclusion

Viewed this way, the Moon makes a great deal of sense. You can buy rivals at the same sort of money with more functionality and some of them are brilliant but, by stripping the 250i V2 back to being just an amplifier, Moon has delivered an effortlessly transparent bit of kit that can be partnered to double down on this or to shape the system you want. It goes without saying that, with talented digital options starting from not a lot of money at all any notional functionality deficit that the Moon has is fairly easy to overcome as well. This is a truly brilliant amp that will drop into a host of systems and delight in all of them and the result is an easy Best Buy.