



QUAD II *Classic Integrated*

CD Tuner
Pass Aux Tape
Monitor

4 5 6 7 8 9 10



6SCL
RUSSIA
15

QUAD
KTE

QUAD
KTE



Quad

QUAD II CLASSIC INTEGRATED

The brand's legendary valve amp rides again in this retro-styled tube design

Price £4,500 **Contact** Quad [01480 447700](tel:01480447700) www.quad-hifi.co.uk

The Quad II Integrated is a gorgeous valve amp based on Peter Walker's famous circuit design from 1953, reinterpreted by Tim de Paravicini of E.A.R. fame. Offering 25 watts per channel, it features ten tubes protected by a steel cage.

At 19kg, it's surprisingly heavy – something emphasised by its fairly small size – and feels extremely solid. It's a simple design, with four line inputs, an MM/MC phono stage, and a single set of loudspeaker outputs. When you consider that the original Quad 22/II was a three-box affair – preamp, and two power amps – shoehorning everything into a single chassis is an amazing achievement.

The original Quad II was a monoblock power amp, discontinued in the late 1960s when Quad ditched valves for transistors. Even then it had a somewhat legendary reputation for sound quality, and quite a few enthusiasts were unconvinced by the replacement solid-state 303 power amp. The manufacturer's reaction was simple. The 303, it said, was a far superior device in virtually every parameter – noise, distortion, bandwidth, power output – and came closer to the ideal of a 'straight wire with gain'. But Quad II advocates never claimed the old amp was more truthful or accurate; most simply loved the sound it made. And hearing the Quad II Integrated, one can understand why...

SOUND QUALITY

The reinterpreted amp's sound is reasonably assertive and immediate, yet overall there's a gorgeous tonal bloom and smooth, rich warmth that is very beguiling. Here's a tube amp that actually sounds like one, fulfilling all our romantic notions of tube sound; rich, full, and succulent.

Peter Walker never denied the Quad II sounded nice, but his concerns were with accuracy and achieving 'The Closest Approach to the Original Sound', quoting Quad's advertising slogan of the time. This neatly explains why we have the Integrated model now, and not thirty-five years ago.

With just a 25-watt output, you'll need reasonably efficient speakers for best results. That said, it sounds more powerful than an equivalent solid-state design, and punches above its weight, creating the impression of having ample power, and produces a big, solid sound.

When pushed beyond its power envelope, the sound tends to compress dynamically, and eventually becomes coarse and congested. However, it doesn't 'hard clip' the way a typical transistor amplifier would. As a result, you can easily go beyond its limits without being made too aware of this.

This is definitely an amplifier that flatters to deceive. When you first listen to it, you're mesmerised by its rich, velvety allure, its silky smoothness. It's a gorgeous sound – the sonic equivalent of rich, dark chocolate. But, after a while, you may start to notice that every recording has much the same sort of full sound. Comparing five different recordings of Mahler's *Symphony No. 4* on different labels, there is an undeniable similarity about the sound of each one.

If a 'perfect' amp is one that sounds utterly transparent and acts as a faithful conduit for the recording, then the Quad II

Integrated falls short of this ideal. It tends to shade the sound with its own warm colours, and, in the process, reduces individual differences that more truthful amplifiers reveal.

But, that's not to say it doesn't sound good – on the contrary, it often sounds fabulous. By imparting its own qualities and characteristics to the sound, it produces very consistent results from disc to disc. In this respect, it's much closer to an old-time valve amplifier than most modern tube designs.

The Quad II Integrated runs hot: with four KT-66 output tubes situated fairly close together, the central block containing the power transformer eventually reaches a temperature of about 37°C. Above the tubes themselves, temperatures are over 50°C, though a metal cages provide protection from hot glass.

The time taken for the case to reach such operating temperatures is fairly extended – about two to three hours, assuming a reasonably warm ambient temperature. Although the amp runs warm, the heat is quite localised: hot as it gets, this amp ranks low in the surrogate room-heater stakes.

"It's a gorgeous sound, the sonic equivalent of rich, dark chocolate"

As it approaches its full operating temperature, the sound grows smoother and more fluid. Nearly all amps sound best when fully warmed up. But, for those wanting a slightly leaner more lucid result, the amplifier sounds sharpest after ten minutes or so, growing steadily smoother and richer as time goes on.

The phono stage has its own screened box, and at full volume there's a faint trace of hum, so it's best to use an MC cartridge with medium/high output to make sure that noise is not an issue. The phono input sounds very good, incidentally, commensurate with the quality of the amplifier.

To sum up, this is a gorgeous little amplifier for those into retro looks and sound. While it might not be the best option when spending £4,500 on an amp, it produces a beguiling sound that is always hugely listenable. ❧

Jimmy Hughes

