

# Icon Audio Stereo 60 III (£2220)



This is the largest integrated in Icon Audio's wide range of hand-made valve amplifiers. Revised last year, the Stereo 60 has improved transformers and, while compatible with KT88/6550 power valves, it now ships with the new, higher output Tung-Sol KT120 tubes that are being manufactured in Russia by New Sensor.

Its Class A front end employs two 6SL7 triode first stage tubes, with two 6SN7s used as drivers. Like the Manley Stingray in this month's test group, the Stereo 60 III's output stage can be switched between ultralinear and triode modes. Output valve idle current uses the fixed bias method which must be adjusted via trim pots set into the top plate (Icon supplies a multimeter and instructions for the task).

Internal assembly is entirely point-to-point, the only circuit board being a small one for the remote control receiver/decoder. Passive components include brand-name polypropylene capacitors, metal film and wire-wound resistors and an ALPS motorised potentiometer. Source switching is manual, the handset simply having gain up/down buttons and a mute button that fades the volume down.

## CRUISE CONTROL

Immediately the acoustic guitar began strumming in Free's 'Soon I Will Be Gone' it was obvious that the Icon amplifier serves up solid, holographic sound images. Some amplifiers can make this vintage

**RIGHT:** The copper-plated top plate adds a touch of luxury. Front panel has standby, tape monitor and ultralinear/triode mode switches



recording appear a tad thin and dated, but the Stereo 60 III made it sound full-bodied and gloriously 'analogue' – despite my listening to a digital remaster for CD!

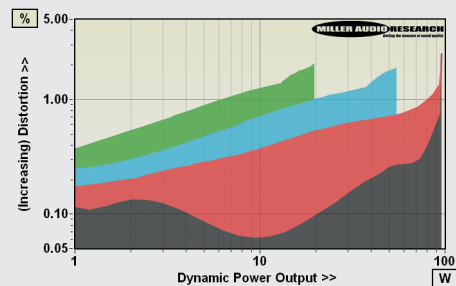
Instruments projected into the room with three-dimensional presence. The Icon delivered tremendous bass power along with a sense of effortless cruising, even with the in-your-face recording of Donald Fagen's 'Ruby Baby', which can manifest a steely edge. High frequencies were smooth and extended, especially in triode mode which added a touch of warmth and air, although I preferred the crisper focus with ultralinear. It didn't reveal quite the speed and detail of Manley's Stingray, sounding a bit thicker in the bass through my large monitors, nevertheless it could deliver thunderous pressure waves.

Sound Quality: 78%



## HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

There are a very few brands that demonstrate, by example, that tube amps need not be under-powered striplings, and none is more convincing than Icon Audio at the price. And so the Stereo 60 MKIII muscles its way to the front of this group with ease, its KT120s sustaining not 60W but a full 80W into 8/4ohm loads (8/4ohm taps respectively), increasing to 95W under dynamic, music-like conditions [see Graph, below]. The heavyweight transformers hold distortion to a modest 0.6% at 20Hz (10W) with <0.8% achievable through the midrange over a full 80W output. Noise is low and the S/N wide at 86.9dB (re. 0dBW) just as the response extends out to -3dB points of 35kHz in the ultrasonics and just 4Hz in the deep subsonics. As with others in this test, however, the system response will depend on the interaction between the speaker load and the MKIII's moderate 3ohm source impedance. Stereo performance is not in doubt though – the MKIII boasting a wide 85dB separation. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm loads (green)

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	83W / 80W
Dynamic power (<2% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	95W / 95W / 75W / 20W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	2.9-4.1ohm
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-0.55dB to -0.90dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/75W)	42mV / 375mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/75W)	86.9dB / 105.7dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10W/8ohm)	0.065-2.3%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	200W / 380W
Dimensions (WHD)	440x230x400mm



ABOVE: Three line inputs (four with the tape loop) are provided. A high/low sensitivity switch allows the integrated to be easily used as a power amplifier

# GROUP TEST VERDICT

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**S**adly, Mastersound's lovely-looking Due Trenta SE proved a tad disappointing when auditioned in the test system: its character was the antithesis of the lush, caressing sound craved by many tube lovers. Yes, it sounded open and vivacious, and delivered a fair amount of bass wallop given its modest power output, but its tonality was slightly hard compared to others here.

While lacking power, Pure Sound's entry-level A10 sounded charming. Ultimately, it can only be recommended to owners of very sensitive loudspeakers – and even then it might not truly satisfy, other than when listening to simply recorded works. However, it is keenly-priced. Music lovers who can't stomach the idea of running a characterless solid-state amp might consider it ideal for a second system.

I really enjoyed listening to Tsakiridis Devices' Aeolos amplifier: its smooth and relaxed demeanour was every bit 'the sound of valves'. While perhaps not worthy of an outright recommendation – many audiophiles might consider its softening simply *too* euphonic – it should be high on your list to audition if you're clamouring for a large dose of thermionic romance.

PrimaLuna's compact ProLogue Two delivered great sound for the price, serving up a wide and open



**ABOVE:** PrimaLuna ProLogue Two: Chinese manufacture, so keen pricing

image of musicians performing in space. If it couldn't match the more expensive Icon and Manley amplifiers it nevertheless sounded vivid and energetic with good dynamic shading. Recommended, thanks to its reassuringly solid build quality and high standard of finish.

## FAST AS A SHARK

US-made Manley tube gear has increased in price by about 10% since the Stingray iTube was first reviewed in these pages [Sept '09]. Nevertheless it remains a wonderfully organic and persuasive-sounding amplifier, even if the styling is idiosyncratic. As Manley says of the Stingray in its humorous literature: 'It swims with

the sharks: fast, agile, fluid, and with consummate authority.' I couldn't put it better myself.

Over time, Leicester's Icon Audio has established itself as a company building rugged, well-finished tube amplifiers that offer great value for money. It's no wonder its demonstration rooms at hi-fi shows are packed with enthusiasts. The Stereo 60 MKIII sounds luxurious,

its ultralinear and triode output modes allowing one to experiment at the flick of a switch. And while not shown in our photographs,

the Icon amp also comes with a protective Plexiglass valve cover. Exceptional sound and value – it's this month's outstanding performer. ☺

*'It's wonderfully organic even if the styling is idiosyncratic'*



**ABOVE:** Icon Audio's Stereo 60 MKIII delivers wholesome music with plenty of valve charm. Manley Stingray [below] is a ballsy and vivid performer... at a price

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