



ICON AUDIO STEREO 25 £500

were both detailed and musical in nature. Admirable instrumental separation aided the room given to each, which meant that, for example, cymbals ticked away delicately alongside a lazy double bass without any sense of muddle.

Can lacked the force and passion to the essentials. of the Rotel and the absence of lower bass removed a certain structure from the music. Instead, the Icon relied on its excellent midrange detail to give the drums character and soul to Michael Mooney's voice whilst each instrument maintained an unfettered clarity. Moving to vinyl and Kate Bush, the Icon was allowed to run free, smiling its head off and revelling in the higher resolution source. Yes, lower bass was still light but you could almost forgive it because of the tuneful, detailed and unhurried upper mid and treble. Also, on Yes's 'Yours Is No Disgrace', each instrument showed a wonderful tonality. The Icon may not have exhibited the same level of pizzazz as the Rotel but its excellent instrumental separation and clarity aided transparency whilst the broad sound stage helped to envelope you in the performance.

This will be of no great concern to many users but should be considered by others who populate their system with more esoteric additions.

SOUND QUALITY

Beginning with a slice of swing jazz from Carol Kidd's 'Berkeley Square', the Icon gave the best vocal rendition in the test so far, even topping the Audiolab. You could almost hear Kidd's vocal chords tensing and flexing as she moved the notes around her throat. Frequencies enjoyed a full dynamic range and, although lacking lower bass frequencies of the Audiolab, bass was still fully formed with tuneful upper registers. Mids, despite a touch of stress when attempting to tackle the most complex rhythmic passages,

This is the only member of the group to feature thermionic tubes instead of transistors. It sports hand-made, point-to-point construction featuring a Class A, triode front-end based on EL34 valves. Icon Audio is keen to see its amplifier as a platform to work from rather than as the final solution, although we tested the 'basic' version here. For example, the Stereo 25 is capable of including 6L6, EL34, 6CA7, KT66, KT88 or 6550 valves. In addition, Icon offers a range of customisation options that includes a 15W RMS triode output stage, an automatic HT relay to protect cold valves at switch on and extend valve life and the inclusion of copper foil in paper and oil capacitors. Of course, each upgrade adds to the basic cost of the amplifier and prices for each can be found direct from the company. A safety cover is included as part of the package. Some child-less users won't bother fitting it, preferring the pleasant glow of the valves to soothe them.

As supplied, the basic model measures 215x320x310mm and weighs in at a hefty 15kg. It also boasts some nice engineering touches as standard, including Teflon insulated silver audio cable and gold plated input and loudspeaker terminals. The only potential problem with the Icon is its limitation to just three line inputs which would demand that your system be restrained

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Icon Audio Stereo 25 produces 25 Watts only if a high 3% distortion figure is used. The amplifier distorts progressively by slewing, almost certainly due to its budget output transformers, behaviour that produces third order distortion. This adds a glassy edge to the sound and a sense of incisiveness some associate with 'speed'.

However, at low powers the Stereo 25 is distortion-free, so its sound is very power dependant. Bias on our sample measured 6.6V against 7V recommended and I found 8V gave slightly better linearity so the amplifier was run at this bias voltage.

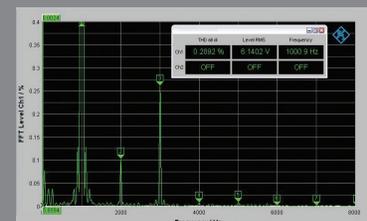
Sensitivity was high at 210mV and hum very low at 0.5mV. Noise (hiss) was also low. A damping factor of 4 is reasonable and bass distortion kept in check providing 5 Watts or so is drawn. Frequency response was wide and flat within the audio band.

The Stereo 25 has limitations;

it lacks the low levels of distortion that better output transformers bring. However, used conservatively with sensitive loudspeakers it should sound clean and open. NK

Power	25 Watts
Frequency response	6Hz-32kHz
Separation	76dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.12%
Sensitivity	210mV
Damping factor	4

DISTORTION



HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT

Valve fans will love the transparent nature of the top end, and expect the lack of rumbling bass. An excellent value integrated if matched carefully.

ICON AUDIO
STEREO 25 £500
 Icon Audio
 ☎ +44 (0) 116 244 0593
 www.iconAudio.com

FOR

- sweet treble
- midrange insight
- expansive soundstage

AGAINST

- low power