



HiFi Rose

RA180

Whatever industrial design eccentricities HiFi Rose might embrace, the brand is all about offering a multitude of features and functions. However, with its £5,500 price tag, the RA180 also marks a significant move upmarket for the company.

It's also offering something 'different' by housing no fewer than four GaN (gallium nitride) transistor-based Class D amp modules under its precision-milled bonnet. The higher switching speed and power handling of these new transistors improves the linearity of HiFi Rose's homebrew modules, a claim further reinforced by its invention of the term 'Class AD' operation. Class A distortion at low levels with the efficiency of Class D? At least that seems to be what the creative licence would suggest.

A typical stereo amplifier features four loudspeaker terminals. The RA180 has 16. There are four identical amplifier modules under the hood for a claimed total of 4x 200W. But you'll only use the four together when utilising one of its specialised speaker modes, either to bi-amp a pair of speakers (two amplifiers per channel) or bridging each pair into a higher-powered stereo configuration where the claimed output becomes a whopping 2x 400W.

While the RA180 does partner with an app via an internal wi-fi network, this doesn't introduce any streaming options. Instead, it serves purely as a remote control and conduit for

firmware updates. Of course, HiFi Rose has a pre-existing range of networked separates to choose from.

Sound quality

The out-of-left-field design and feature-rich spec almost hide the fact that this is a punchy, authoritative and thrilling-sounding amplifier. Used initially with a Primare PRE35 as a digital source and Focal Sopra No2, it reveals a slightly warm character that pairs nicely with such a revealing speaker and a strong sense of driving ability. For an integrated design, there's plenty of power.

When a manufacturer claims huge amounts of grunt, Massive Attack's *Angel* and Modeselektor's *Wake Me Up When It's Over* remain favoured tracks to challenge the assertion. The RA180 handles these moody electronic pieces and their complex deep percussion without stress. And there is no lack of energy when playing Jack White's *Fear Of The Dawn*. Featuring fat, overdriven guitars and a relentless drumkit, the temptation is there to crank the volume high and just let the RA180 rock out – which it does, ably. The following track *The White Raven* is equally rowdy and up-tempo, and finds the amplifier again sounding unflustered, this time also displaying an admirable midrange focus.

Spinning up a Pro-Ject X1 (HFC 453) with a mid-output MM pick-up, and utilising the regular RIAA EQ (only avid vinyl collectors will encounter pressings requiring the

legacy equalisations), the amplifier's phono stage steers the vinyl version of White's album with confidence. Tracks are presented on a quiet background, dynamically and rhythmically assured, with good separation.

Playing Max Richter's take on Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* on a 180g Deutsche Grammophon pressing, we're not inclined to change our opinion of the RA180's phono preamp. There's no faulting the rich presentation of Daniel Hope's violin on *Spring 3* and *Summer 1*, to the point where bettering it would likely require a change of cartridge, not amp.

Conclusion

Changing over to the discrete, bi-amp (separate bass/treble amp) configuration, the difference is much more apparent when listening to Lizz Wright's *Grace*. A full four amps within the RA180 drive a mid/bass-happy Canton 7K with ease, ensuring the bass drum in *Barley* resounds throughout the entire room, while increasing soundstage scale and separation. All of which leads us to conclude that HiFi Rose's bold quest to provide extreme versatility has turned out to be a real success. **HFC**

DETAILS

PRODUCT
HiFi Rose RA180

PRICE
£5,500

ORIGIN
South Korea

TYPE
Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
16.7kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
430 x 110 x 350mm

FEATURES

- Claimed power output: 4x 200W (8ohm)
- Inputs: 3x RCA line-level; balanced XLR; MM/MC phono stage
- Outputs: subwoofer; 16x 4mm speaker binding posts

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio Ltd.

WEBSITE
hifirose.com
henleyaudio.co.uk

REVIEWED
HFC 491

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

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LIKE: Well thought-out front fascia; supreme performance

DISLIKE: Nothing of any real note

WESAY: An eccentric-looking integrated with oodles of power

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