



Rega Aethos £3,300

Stripped back to the absolute minimum of features, who says going back to basics doesn't pay dividends?

Best known for its turntables, Rega Research's range of electronics and speakers followed many years after the launch of the original Planet record player in 1975. Surprisingly perhaps, considering that designing amplifiers requires a very different skill set, the company has done very well with its electronics. The Aethos is its latest mid-market integrated offering and is based loosely on the Elicit-R (HFC 374), but with a claimed 125W per side as opposed to 105W.

It's arguably the most minimalist design here, with only the Sugden coming close in the 'less is more' stakes. This is because it eschews features like DACs, streaming and Bluetooth. Surprisingly, you don't even get a phono stage. There are five line inputs, plus a tape loop and power amp in and preamp out sockets. A fascia-mounted 6.35mm headphone jack with matching headphone stage is arguably this amp's only luxury. As with all designs in this test, its metal casework is sturdy, although the ergonomics don't follow

the herd and take a little acclimatising. All the same, it isn't difficult to use, even if the remote has loads of buttons.

As per other Rega amps over the years, this is a Terry Bateman design – he once told me that he's a huge valve amp fan. The Aethos is considerably more powerful than thermionic tube-powered designs, though, courtesy of its Class AB circuitry using discrete, doubled-up Sanken Darlington transistors. It has an unusual volume control, which changes both the input and feedback level. A high-quality Linear Systems FET works alongside an ALPS Blue Velvet volume potentiometer, says Rega. The result is a very solid product in a distinctive, attractive and yet relatively slimline design.

Sound quality

The best-sounding amplifier here in several respects, the clean, smooth and subtly warm nature of the Aethos is quite a thing to hear. It is very detailed, highly rhythmically engaging and – unlike the valve amplifiers – is underpinned by a seriously muscular

power amplifier that shows no fear with hard-to-drive speakers or loud dynamic crescendos. It has less power on paper than the mighty NAD M33, but doesn't sound any less powerful in practice.

The way it reproduces punchy, well-recorded music like the Liquid Crystal track is quite something. It combines the feeling of being 'let off the leash' – with nothing to slow it down or otherwise restrict it – with great subtlety and poise. It's able to serve up large amounts of detail, yet piece it together in a highly rhythmically coherent way. This set of skills translates right across the musical board, meaning that it thrives with the soul/funk of Lynx yet renders the Vaughan Williams piece with tremendous alacrity.

It might lack the syrupy sound of the Synthesis valve amp, nor is it as warm and sweet as the Sugden Class A design. Indeed it's noticeably drier and crisper than both, yet you would never call it forward. It is closest to the Cyrus in tonal balance, but with superior rhythmic snap and dynamic punching power. None of the amps in this

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rega Aethos
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
Integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
17.5kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
433 x 95 x 360mm
FEATURES
• Quoted power: 2x 125W RMS (8ohm)
• 5x RCA line inputs; tape loop
• 6.35mm headphone jack
DISTRIBUTOR
Rega Research Ltd.

The clean, smooth and subtly warm nature of the Rega is quite a thing to hear

roundup are harsh by the way – the difference lies in how far on the warm side of neutral they are.

The litmus test is the dry, crisp sounding Genesis track – which the Aethos renders brilliantly. It combines musicality with detail and drive in a way which betters everything here. The Sugden, PrimaLuna and Synthesis are all really strong with this recording, but the Rega hits the spot delivering great insight but carrying vocals in a super fluid and delicate way. A most attractive offering if facilities aren't your priority ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★☆

OVERALL

★★★★★

LIKE: A detailed, powerful and highly beguiling sound

DISLIKE: There's no phono stage

WESAY: A brilliant performer wrapped up in a pretty case