

# audition

equipment review

## Quad QC-*twenty four*/II-*forty* Valve Pre/Power Amplifiers



**N**o, it isn't what it looks like. We haven't started to review vintage hi-fi gear in AVL just yet, but you can pretend with these classic-looking valve designs; a trio of amps that bear a striking resemblance to some very old, but much sought after Quad originals.

The originals are collector's items - I remember seeing a set in a London second-hand hi-fi shop about 10 years ago for 150 quid. I didn't buy them, and in hindsight it was a big mistake. Really big, come to think about it.

The monobloc power amps were Quads second design, called the Quad II and introduced in 1953. Production of the IIs lasted for 18 years and at the time there was no better power amp around for the money. Incidentally the price tag back then was £22 each and as stereo hadn't been invented, one power amp was all that was initially required.

Some 50 years since it's inception, the Quad II has been reborn in the form of the QII-*forty*, a new design that shares just more than a passing resemblance to the originals. Partnering them is the QC-*twenty four* line-level valve preamp, it too sporting the Quad design of bygone days. Andy Grove,

Quad's reliving  
its past with  
this nostalgic  
pre/power  
valve trio

By Nic Tatham

who previously worked for Audio Note, designed the amps and work started three years ago with production now strictly limited to just 10 sets a week. All the work's done by hand and Quad has never been known to rush things.

There's a pleasant old and new mix about these amps - sure, they'd look at home in a 1950's living room, but the retro styling works well with modern décor. The technology's improved too, not that you'd be able to tell at first glance, however these valve-based amps are anything but vintage. The preferred choice among valve amp manufacturers, each QII-*forty* features two Russian KT-88 output valves, a couple of 6HS7 input tubes and a single 5U4G rectifier. If you know anything about valves the model numbers will mean something. If you don't, trust me, they're very good ones. And the *forty* in the model number indicates the number of watts each one produces.

The QC-*twenty four* preamp isn't devoid of glowing bits either, fitted with a single 6111 twin triode device and also features relay signal switching, five line-level inputs (plus optional phono stage) and fast recovery power supply rectification. It looks simple, works

simply, but like all Quad gear, exudes function and form.

Quad as a brand and company has seen quite a few changes over the years and with it has come a swag of new products, however the current 99 Series is still only the company's sixth range since Quad started in 1936. One of founder Peter Walker's finest earlier moments was when he and Wharfedale's Gilbert Briggs, demonstrated to a capacity crowd of 3,000 people at London's Royal Festival Hall, that recorded music could compete with a live performance. Using an array of Quad II power amps and a wall of the infamous Quad ESL-57 electrostatic loudspeakers, it would have been a bit special being in that audience.

My experience with the company's products includes several years in retail and it's true to say that Quad products have always appealed to a certain demographic of the population. It's tempting to slip in a pipe and slippers joke, but I'll avoid that one. It is fair to say that the average Quad buyer during the time I sold it was male, middle aged to elderly and listened almost exclusively to classical music. These days I'd imagine the average Quad punter isn't going to be quite as conservative, with the company's last two series the 77 and 99, both providing wider lifestyle and music genre listening appeal.

I was sort of therefore expecting these latest Quad valves to sound especially lush, warm and easy-going - the sort of amplification that would make a string quartet or solo piano sound eminently pleasant with an inoffensive presentation. And they did. But what truly surprised me about these modern day Quads was the sheer attack, scale and dynamics the trio could produce with the sort of music no self-respecting Quad owner would ever normally be associated with.

The monoblocs are quite potent performers. Although 40 watts doesn't seem much, they sure go a long way, and driving tricky loads isn't a problem. Each power amp has the ability to drive between 3 and 16 ohm loads with a common negative speaker tap and a positive each for 4 and 8 ohm impedance values. There's a single RCA-type input on each power amp and each is individually mains connected. The valves are covered by a removable grille and other than replacing the valves, there's no other maintenance required. Valve life-spans vary,

## Vital Statistics

**Dimensions:**  
Not stated  
**Weight:**  
Not stated  
**Price:**  
\$14,999 (complete)  
**Distributor:**  
IAG Australia Pty Ltd  
Unit 30, 398 The Boulevard  
Kirrawee, NSW 2232  
**Telephone:**  
(02) 9521 4844  
**Facsimile:**  
(02) 9521 4222  
**Website:**  
[www.quad-hifi.co.uk](http://www.quad-hifi.co.uk)

depending on the amount of use, but on average you should get around 6,000 hours of music out of the KT-88s. Quad builds its amps to last, and these are no exception. Incidentally, if you bought an original Quad II back in '53, Quad still services them today, that's the level of backup the company offers on all its products.

Buy Quad and chances are, you'll be making one of those life decisions. Most owners are 100 per cent brand loyal and it's one of very few hi-fi names that people tend to completely stick with.

Not that long ago either, reading a Quad equipment review in mainstream hi-fi mags was extremely rare; Quad didn't feel its products needed that sort of exposure. This trio has already been

## Technotalk

**Product Type:**  
Valve pre/power amplifiers  
**Valve Complement:**  
See text  
**Power Output (II-*forty*):**  
40 watts RMS per channel  
**Residual Hum & Noise:**  
Better than -80dB  
**Frequency Response ( $\pm 0.5$ dB):**  
10Hz - 30kHz (II-*forty*)  
5Hz - 50kHz (QC-*twenty four*)  
**Line Stage Gain:**  
15dB (QC-*twenty four*)  
**Damping Factor:**  
20 at 700Hz (II-*forty*)  
**Total Harmonic Distortion:**  
0.3% (40W@700Hz), (II-*forty*)  
Less than 0.2% (IV RMS), (QC-*twenty four*)  
**Power Consumption:**  
180VA max (II-*forty*)  
**Recommended Minimum Load:**  
50kohms (QC-*twenty four*)

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer



“Headbangers might be a little disappointed, but this doesn’t mean these Quads can’t rock. Bass is deep and weighty, and with an attractively open midband and treble, the Quads are capable of a fast, punchy sound that goes against the myth that all valve amps sound sweet but about as agile as a beached whale.”

received in its native UK with much enthusiasm from the local press and thanks to Aussie distributor, IAG Australia Pty Ltd, the valves have finally made their way Down Under.

Some running in’s required - the output valves need to warm and bed themselves in and there’s a short period required for this before they settle into their most musical stride. As I mentioned, I wasn’t expecting much get up and go from the monoblocs, but was genuinely surprised by their gusto and ability to drive pretty hard. Headbangers might be a little disappointed, but this doesn’t mean these Quads can’t rock. Bass is deep and weighty, and with an attractively open midband and treble, the Quads are capable of a fast, punchy sound that goes against the myth that all valve amps sound sweet but about as agile as a beached whale. Load up New Order’s latest *Get Ready* and the Quad’s, somewhat uncharacteristically, get deep into the mix without ever losing sight of the rhythmic beat. There’s plenty of power and volume on tap, and even when nudged, the valves show no sign of breaking up, driving even inefficient speakers with relative ease.

This confidence extends to a wide variety of music, although I have to admit, it’s with acoustic or classical material that the Quads truly shine. Here, the music is utterly unforced, sounding rich, smooth and eminently listenable. Classics, such as Miles Davis’ *Kind of Blue* ooze from the loudspeakers, the closely-miked instruments and intimacy of the recording is delivered with all its spellbinding, captivating charm. Even if you’re not a jazz fan, listening to it on these amp’s will have you growing a goatee and smoking Gauloise in no time.

On this particular CD, the closely-recorded instruments sound superb, with such high levels of detail and separation, making it easy to follow the double bass or the subtle piano background accompaniment. These Quads reach deep into music, retrieving fine detail and engendering terrific presence. Vocals sound rich and well-textured and thanks to a balanced and natural midband, there’s plenty of persuasive projection. Uppermost frequencies sound clean and accurate, cymbals for example are live and crisp-sounding, and likewise the string section of an orchestral orchestra.

And when you change to some rousing classical music, say a Beethoven

Symphony, there’s unusual power and dynamism allied with scale and detail readily apparent. The amps always sound fast and responsive to the twists of the scoring, and give a striking presentation of instrumental timbres.

Here’s a valve combination that’s full of surprises. There’s so much about these latest valve additions to Quad’s well established pedigree that is both familiar and comforting as well as new and exciting. The looks are purposefully dated but with the individual touch put into each component as it’s built, the new Qs are the sort of valve-based amplification that’ll appreciate in value.

That chance to relive the good old days with modern day know-how comes at a price, but why not look at it as an investment in a future classic? AVL

**Ancillary Equipment:** Ambience SuperSlim 1600 Ultra loudspeakers, Teac VRDS-10 CD transport, Musical Fidelity X-DAC D/A converter, Audioquest Topaz interconnects, Nordost Flatline loudspeaker cable.

## O p i n i o n

The ‘Opinion’ expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

★ Shocker  
★★ Average  
★★★ Good  
★★★★ Excellent  
★★★★★ Perfection

“There’s a pleasant old and new mix about these amps - sure, they’d look at home in a 1950s living room, but the retro styling works well with modern décor.”

Performance

★★★★

Build Quality

★★★★★

Compatibility

★★★★

Value For Money

★★★