

QUAD 66 FM TUNER



Top to bottom: Quad 66 CD player, 66 preamplifier and the new 66 FM tuner, together with the composite remote control panel

IN APRIL and May 1990, some 200mm (or 8 inches) back along your file copies of GRAMOPHONE, when we reported on Quad's new look remotely controlled 66 preamplifier and 66 CD player, we fondly expected that they would speedily be followed by a companion FM tuner—so did Quad! Ivor Humphreys reported on some of the problems they had run into with this desirable extension to their remotely controlled Series 66 when detailing his visit to their home-base at Huntingdon in May 1992. Continuity of supply of core components is essential to a manufacturer like Quad who expect a design to continue in production for a number of years and to be capable of repair, if necessary, for many years after that. Unfortunately replacement of a major item such as a control integrated circuit with a substitute is not the simple matter it might seem these days because of interaction with other circuits; that this should happen twice in the course of a product design eventually stalled the project. I quote from a letter from Ross Walker to their overseas distributors: "On the 20th February 1992 we decided to scrap the first design because of technical problems. This decision should certainly have been taken earlier, but it is difficult to scrap a design which is very nearly right. Having made the decision, we set ourselves the target of eleven weeks from the start of the new design to production". Well in the event they met their target and in doing so not only upheld the Quad tradition of honest trading but reinforced founder Peter Walker's oft repeated claim always to get a Quad design right before selling it, rather than experiment on the customer.

The review sample 66 FM came on the scene at a propitious time, with the season of Promenade Concerts imminent and the first tests of Britain's new network of classical

music stations, Classic FM (but see later). The inauguration of this latest network means that my local Oxford transmitter—7 miles distant—now radiates seven FM programmes at medium to high power. Historically, though, because I believe the quality—certainly of the BBC majors—is superior, I choose to use the London transmitter at Wrotham in Kent (which is more like 70 miles). This practice imposes severe demands on any tuner because of the narrowness of separation and colossal disparity of signal strengths. The 66 seemed to positively revel in this challenge, rarely met in British designs which give way to cross modulation or those annoying background noises commonly called birdies. Of course I am not suggesting that this tuner is in any way intended for the seeker of remote and exotic programmes; such a person would be far happier with something like Technics ST-G90L which I found exceptional way back in January 1989 and is still listed in their latest catalogue. Quad's intention is, as always, to provide something simple to use and able to extract the optimum result from a relatively short list of local transmissions. That it does so well in meeting my out-of-step demands merely serves to indicate that their choice of pre-mixer and IF selectivity, together with good linearity in the FM to audio conversion and its filtering, is close to ideal.

In outward appearance the 66 FM is an exact match with the two existing units; again the only panel control is a semicircular On/Off button at bottom left. Once installed and set up this is left in the On state since the accompanying control unit will then take over its job. All other functions are then controlled from the 66 preamplifier remote control panel, using its CD function buttons—Search, Track, Store and so on—having first switched them for

SPECIFICATION

Tuning range: 88–108MHz
 Channel spacing: 25kHz (50kHz displayed)
 Sensitivity (50dB quieting): Mono 2.7µV (8 dBf), Stereo 25µV (28dBf)
 Full limiting: <1µV
 Signal-to-noise ratio (1kHz at 1mV, A-wtd): Mono 76dB, Stereo 70dB
 Distortion (at 1kHz, ±75kHz deviation): Mono 0.15%, Stereo 0.15%
 Capture ratio: 1.5dB
 IF rejection: 100dB
 AM suppression: 60dB
 Pilot tone suppression: 60dB
 Crosstalk (at 1kHz): -40dB (nominal at 1kHz)
 Frequency response: 20–15,000Hz +0, -1dB
 Output level: 100mV
 Output impedance: 1,000 ohms
 Minimum load impedance: 47,000 ohms
 De-emphasis: 50µs or 75µs
 Aerial input: 75 ohms unbalanced
 Dimensions (W × H × D): 321 × 80 × 255mm
 Weight: 2.8kg
 Manufacturer: Quad Electroacoustics Ltd., Huntingdon, Cambs PE18 7DB.
 Tel: 0480 52561
 UK retail price: £489

their new tasks by pressing the adjacent Radio button. A maximum of 19 transmission frequencies can be stored, either by sequencing from on air programmes or frequency-hopping in 25kHz steps; a five-second press on the Store button then puts them in the memory in any order you wish. The numbers 1 to 19 appear in a row behind the plastics panel insert and the one selected is indicated by an arrow and a box around its number; at the same time this same number appears in a truncated inverted 'V' dark section of the panel along with the station frequency. Between these two displays a sloping bar-graph indicates the strength of the received signal and there are also Stereo and Mono indications. Once allocated (in the UK it would make obvious sense to put BBC 1, 2, 3 and 4 in the first four spots) the display will cycle round the chosen 19 in either direction at the behest of the Track buttons; when switched on, the tuner will always return to the last station in use before it was turned off.

How it performed

Adding this tuner to your Quad 66 system is very simple; two connecting leads are provided, a twin phono to phono to carry the audio and an IEC power link. Both plug into appropriate sockets recessed in the die-cast rear panel and there is also a standard coaxial aerial socket. The interior layout is deceptively simple due to the use of a single printed circuit board as home to a number of integrated circuits which include the Quad designed front-end—an acknowledged tricky area which so many manufacturers dodge by buying-in a proprietary article. The development of this new tuner, which is now able to incorporate much of recent thinking and freshly available components, in so short a time speaks volumes for Quad's new team, with whom I found it easy to establish a speedy rapport. During a recent visit I was taken through this revised tuner circuit by Derek Jones, their new design chief and later in the lab shown a number of mouth watering projects—but you will have to be patient while marking my words that this old established marque is due for something of a renaissance. Already this smart new

66 series is putting them back on the map. I noticed that several companies were using them at this year's Penta Show—something not seen in recent years when pretentious exotica was more the order of the day.

It occurs to me that I have said nothing about how the 66 FM sounds, but then I don't have to do I? I am quite confident that this tuner gives out a creditably exact version of what is transmitted. It certainly was indistinguishable from my reference Sony ST-J75, now rather old hat but chosen with much care and yet to be surpassed from the sound point of view. That said, I must express disappointment with our broadcasters who are rapidly moving away from any serious attempt at "the closest approach to the original sound", the slogan on which Quad have always based their philosophy. BBC Radio 3 in particular, on which we once doted, is now all too often compressed, confused and congested.

This year's Promenade Concerts have been generally flat, short on dynamics with a vague and shifty stereo image, not at all the sort of thing to hold one's attention. Continuity announcements are on the whole muddy and completely unrealistic, especially so the female voices, sounding as though they are using a velocity microphone six inches from the back of their neck. Pull your socks up please, chaps—a quick listen to some old Proms tapes will show how you are letting standards slip. Perhaps it is the dreaded competition from Classic FM which has rocked the boat. Certainly a few comparisons between a CD from my shelves and as broadcast by them shows differences, as can be expected, but they are not unmusical ones.

However, GRAMOPHONE is not a radio magazine so I must try to curb my feelings on the subject, and in any case as I write tonight happens to be the last night of this year's Proms and that remarkable Russian lady, Tatyana Nikolaeva is due to play Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto. Broadcasting shortcomings apart, that is the best possible excuse for concluding this report, which I will do by remarking that the Quad 66 FM instruction book is a model of its kind. GEOFFREY HORN.