

# Hi-fi's true Elite

Quad ownership is in reach for all thanks to the new, affordable Elite range. *Jimmy Hughes* auditions hi-fi royalty for the modern age

**Q**uad is audio royalty, one of hi-fi's oldest and most iconic brands. Conservative in the best sense, Quad equipment is solid, stable, well-engineered and free from gimmicks. Its famous slogan "the closest approach to the original sound" reassures you that fidelity – nothing added, nothing taken away – counts above all else.

Quad's Elite is a keenly priced compact separates system that replaces the company's popular 99 series. The new kit features improved audiophile-grade components, superior power transformers and multi-layer circuit boards – designed using some of the most advanced software available.

The Elite line-up consists of a CD player, (or combined CD player and preamp), optional FM tuner, preamp, plus a choice of power amps – 80 watts stereo, or 150 watts monobloks. The beautifully finished 111 Classic compact two-way loudspeaker completes the set-up.

Each individual component is a separate self-contained entity, but crucially, the various Elite components work extremely well as a team – not least, because the whole system is wired together via dedicated Quadlink multi-pin interconnect cables.

This greatly simplifies connection, while providing balanced signal operation, which should improve sound quality. There's more: using Quadlink cables enables system control, which allows each individual component to communicate with the others.

As Quad supplies a full set of Quadlink cables with the Elite system, it makes sense (technically and economically) to use these rather than regular interconnects. Speakers connect via the usual 4mm/Spade connectors and bi-wiring is possible. With the stereo power amp, output is conservatively rated at 80 watts,

for those needing more, there's a monoblok version of the power amp delivering 150 watts. However, the basic stereo power amp sounds solid and powerful, creating an impression of weight and dynamics. It sounds as though there's power to spare – useful, given the 111 Classic's 87dB sensitivity.

The promotional material mentions that these new products deliver "classic Quad sound, while adding increased clarity and definition". Really? But we think we understand what they're getting at!

## Tilt for beginners...

One link the new Elite system has with older classic Quad products is the unique Tilt tone control. This was introduced on the 44 preamp back in the late '70s – at a time when

"For those wanting something that looks good and delivers excellent sound."

tone controls were fast becoming deeply unfashionable. Many amplifiers had dispensed with tonal correction altogether, but Quad stuck to its guns.

However, rather than just providing conventional bass and treble adjustment, the company came up with a single control which it called Tilt. Turned clockwise, it boosts bass while cutting treble. Turned anti-clockwise, it lifts treble, while cutting back the bass. Think of it as a sort of lightness/darkness control.

Quad's reasoning is that 'bright' recordings are often deficient in bass, as well as having too much treble. Conversely, 'dull' recordings are often balanced away from the treble towards the lower frequencies. So, effective correction of these faults requires a two-pronged

## COMPONENTS



### 1 ELITE PREAMP £850

Stereo preamp with four adjustable-sensitivity line inputs, phono (MM/MC) input and tape output. Tilt tone control gives bass/treble lift/cut, with high and low frequency filters and a switchable bass boost.



### 2 ELITE CDS COMPACT DISC PLAYER £800

Bespoke transport, with low-jitter master-clock and Crystal 24-bit/192kHz upsampling DAC. It has a single set of analogue outputs and an optical digital output. Multi-layer circuit boards used.



### 3 ELITE STEREO POWER AMP £700

Stereo power amp offering around 80 watts RMS output per channel. Single set of inputs and loudspeaker outputs. 150-watt monoblok version also available.



### 4 CLASSIC 111 LOUDSPEAKERS £380

Compact two-way design featuring a Kevlar-coned bass/mid driver with improved motor and a 25mm fabric-domed tweeter with unusual sunken wavefront surround. Bass/mid and tweeter crossovers kept physically separate. Two rear-facing ports.



Text





**LEFT:** The Quad 11L loudspeaker is a third-generation two-way design  
**RIGHT:** The classic heat-dissipating chassis remains unchanged  
**BELOW:** The minimalist fascia of the stereo power amp

## Two flavours

The Elite CD player is available in two flavours: the basic CDS (reviewed here), or the CDP, which can function as a CD player/digital preamp, with three digital inputs (coaxial or optical) and sets of fixed and variable analogue outputs – the latter for direct connection to a power amp.

Each Elite component has a very simple fascia plate, with buttons/controls kept to a minimum. You can access most of the important functions without the remote, but the latter is needed for things like the EQ (Tilt and Filter) controls. Presentation and build is of high quality, with thick cast-alloy casework.

Quad's 11L Classic loudspeaker is a compact third-generation two-way design that follows in the footsteps of the well-regarded 11L2, which launched in 2007. The new Classic version features an improved motor system for the Kevlar bass/mid driver, said to reduce cone breakup and distortion, while allowing the speaker to play louder.

There's a new 25mm fabric-dome tweeter with a slightly 'sunken' front that functions like a shallow horn or waveguide. Bass/mid and tweeter crossover networks are physically separate, with proper star-earthing to the terminals and drive units.

attack – a boost at one end, coupled with a cut at the other.

The amount of correction offered here is fairly modest. The tilt function has six settings (plus off) with a maximum of 3dB boost/cut with the control set to its most extreme. As a result, tonal balance corrections are fairly subtle. Another long-held Quad belief is that filtering is useful with recordings of lower quality.

Consequently, its Elite preamp offers high and low-frequency filters to curtail the response at frequency extremes in order to reduce things like hiss, scratches, and rumble. Additionally, the Elite preamp features an optional bass lift setting – to help bolster the limited deep-bass response of many small loudspeakers.

Bass cut and boost settings hinge at a frequency of 300Hz, delivering a lift of about 3dB at 60Hz, or a reduction of -4.5dB, around 30Hz. Again, these are fairly modest adjustments – unlike amplifiers from the '70s which often gave up to 12dB boost or cut. The HF filter rolls-off the highs gently from about 7kHz.





High-quality components are featured in the crossover.

The cabinets are made from two different types of material – a combination of high-density chipboard and fibreboard is used to break-up the common resonant modes that can lead to coloration and tonal balance shifts. Quad claims that this results in a solid, rigid, inert cabinet that has less 'signature' than cabinets made from pure MDF.

### Make mine high gloss

A choice of finishes is available, including high-gloss piano black or cherry and these look gorgeous. However, for those wanting something simpler/cheaper, Quad offers a non-lacquered finish at a saving of about £50. Given that the high-gloss piano black/cherry models only cost around £380, the 11L Classics offer fabulous value.

We sampled the electronic components separately before listening to the system as a whole, and early impressions were very favourable. All three deliver a sound that is smooth, clean, natural and very open. Initially, a degree of tonal thinness was apparent, but this soon disappears with extended use as the units burnt-in.

The 11L loudspeakers sound crisp and detailed, with a lively top-end, and plenty of bite and immediacy. At the same time, the tonal balance strikes the ear as open and natural, with low coloration. The sound is nicely forward and crisp, but without any sense of emphasis that might create a 'peaky' sort of result.

Bass is very good for the size of cabinet and while (inevitably) the lowest frequencies are not reproduced with the fullness and weight of a big floorstander, the bass output is surprisingly good down to about 40Hz. Bass sounds clean and nimble, and very clean, with no smearing or overhang.

Clarity is very good and the sound never seems to 'crowd up', even during loud complex pieces of music. There's good portrayal of depth and ambience, creating a plausible soundstage that has width and space. Stereo imaging sounds clean and precise, with solid placement of instruments and voices.

Although the 11Es measured sensitivity is only 'average' at about 87dB, subjectively the sound is surprisingly lively and dynamic. The music confidently projects out from the boxes and doesn't sound over-damped or 'held-back'. At the same time, there's good integration between mid-range and treble.

The tonal balance is crisp and forward, but not obviously 'toppy'. On classical music, the lack of coloration creates a result that sounds smooth and natural. Rock reproduces with speed and attack, and plenty of forward-momentum. Timing is good and the music always sounds coherent and integrated.

### Speakers' corner

Quad recommends placing the speakers at least 0.5m from rear walls and 1m (or more) from side walls. Placing the speakers well

away from walls should increase openness, but at the loss of bass output. Bass will increase as you move the speakers closer to rear and side walls, but watch out for loss of clarity/boominess if too close.

Using the bass lift feature on the preamp helps bolster the low frequencies, but (as so often with controls of this type) the effect produced tends to emphasise frequencies in the lower midrange. We experimented with bass lift, but eventually preferred results with it off. If you want a bit more grunt, consider adding a sub-woofer.

Operationally, the system is straightforward and pleasant to use, but one slight foible is the excessively swift default back to original settings as soon as a button is pressed. For example, when selecting a disc track, you need to press Play within a second or two – otherwise your selection will be forgotten.

The press-button volume control is a matter of taste too – we prefer a normal rotary analogue control – but the Quad system works well enough. Aside from these minor grumbles, the Elite is a pleasure to use – and a delight to listen to. It delivers a sound that is smooth and natural, yet dynamic and immediate.

For those wanting something that looks good and delivers excellent sound in a small, stylish package at an attractive price, Quad's Elite system is an enticing package. It's genuine hi-fi separates, but without the fuss and drama. It's simple to connect and set up, and easy-to-use. Best of all, it sounds superb! ●



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