



Quad Elite Pre/Mono **£850/£650**



Quad's new Elite series may appeal strongly on visuals and simplicity, but we found lots to like sonically too

DETAILS

- ORIGIN:**
UK/China
- WEIGHT:**
4.5/6.5kg
- DIMENSIONS:**
(WxHxD)
321x70x310mm
each unit
- FEATURES:**
- Preamp: Inputs: Phono (MM/MC)
 - Four line level
 - Ampbus
 - Record output
 - Line output
 - Power amp: Phono input
 - Nominal output: 150 watts
- DISTRIBUTOR:**
IAG
- TELEPHONE:**
01480 447700
- WEBSITE:**
quad-hifi.co.uk

With its track record in audio now exceeding three-score years and ten, Quad remains true to its original aims in offering unique audio products that are immediately recognisable. The Elite range, which over the last year or so has replaced the respected 99 Series, aims to incorporate audiophile design in small, smart and easily connected matching units, with source and amplification components sharing a basic case design. They can all be connected with the usual phono sockets, but Quad's default hookup is the 'Ampbus', a 15-way D socket on the back of each unit which is connected to the next unit in the chain with a supplied ribbon connector, carrying balanced audio (and control) signals.

There is a stereo power amp in the range, but for this test we chose a pair of mono amps, each rated at 150 watts output. There are few things simpler than a mono power amp, but these have one unusual feature in the rear-mounted switch which selects their channel from the six potentially available on Ampbus – you need to set one to '1' and one to '2' for stereo

or you'll get mono sound. (Or use the phono input.)

The preamp features three phono-socket line inputs, as well as Ampbus, plus an RIAA phono input. Internally it's very well filled with high-performance op-amps and electronic switching and attenuating components, the complexity partly due to the inclusion of tone controls (defeatable, of course) as well as the comprehensive in and out options. Both pre and power amps are neatly built with entirely through-hole components of good quality.

Sound quality

This is another amplifying ensemble where subjective performance seems to be dominated by perceived minor irregularities in the treble. In unusually analytical vein, one listener suggested that there is, paradoxically, less edge and bite to the sound, but slightly more sibilance. Impossible? Perhaps not, if one accepts that the treble is actually quite a broad band and 'edge' and 'sibilance' belong to different parts of it.

Our experience is that sibilance is a function of the octave below the very top one, while the highest octave of hearing can often manifest as subjective 'edge' – and also, on some occasions, very much further down the spectrum, having a knock-on effect on bass.

If there is any effect on the bass here, then it's clearly very minor. There's an unfussy approach to bass that works well. When we made a point of listening for low-frequency sounds, we found they were invariably strong, clearly focused and well-pitched, too when appropriate, but they never leap out.

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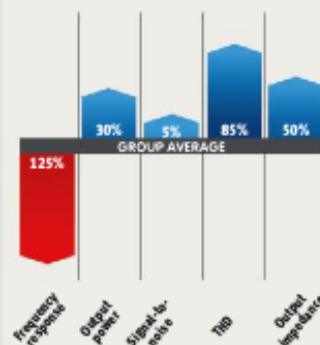
Midrange is also very well balanced, while imaging is wide, deep and well defined. And then there's the question of dynamics, which is complicated by the treble character noted above. Longer-term dynamics work very well and low percussion fares best in this regard, but sudden loud sounds from bright melodic instruments do seem a little polite by comparison with more overtly dynamic amps. The sound has good detail, though and overall this is a pleasing and rewarding combination for long-term listening.

TECH LABS

Considering the output stages for two channels in the Quad Elite system are discrete modules, the channels were very well matched. Our frequency response plotted only a 0.003dB difference between them. IMD measured -76dB (with only 0.6dB difference) and crosstalk measured -82dB left and -77dB right. Signal-to-Noise measured within 0.4dB between the two stages and our THD+N matched the channels with 0.03% THD+N difference. Power output also measured only 3W difference and between 164W and 161W. Output impedance is 0.02 ohms out, which was no more than any of the other products in the group. Admirable measurements.

It's a shame that the frequency response failed to stand up to that of the other amplifiers in the group. With a drop by 20kHz of only 0.3dB the plot was still very good, but with the other units securing even stronger frequency response plots, it failed to stand out as an all-rounder.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

LIKE: Clear and well focused bass which never becomes excessive

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

DISLIKE: Slight sibilance which may bother some listeners

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

WE SAY: Sound isn't always the most exciting, but it has a high degree of simple honesty

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

Lab conclusions

Battle lines were drawn and the technical results can finally be revealed, but is performance better with one box, two or even three? asks **James Waldron**

TECH LABS

Within this selection of modular and integrated pre and power amp stages, we are afforded some insight into the considerations of the design engineers when they approach each paradigm.

The Quad Elite, for example, has discrete power stages for each channel and so measured good crosstalk. However, keeping the pre/power stages separate still requires compromises. The Quad system measured the worst frequency response of the selection, while the Densen B-200/B-310 power stage introduced almost all of our measured distortion.

A fully integrated system such as the Moon i3.3 introduces design

constraints that need to be accommodated. Cross talk becomes a more obvious concern and the i3.3 compensated to measure the lowest of the group at -85dB. Similarly the Electrocompaniet ECI 5 MKII integrated amplifier measured the lowest distortion. The best frequency response was plotted by the modular Densen.

Input sensitivity seems to be becoming a factor in differentiating between product performance. We adjust our signal level and use distortion as our reference for some of our tests. In some of these products we need to deliver nearly 2Vrms in order to achieve our reference distortion of 0.05 per cent

THD+N. This means that adjusting the unit's own volume control introduces too much distortion and so we increase the input signal level.

An interesting characteristic became evident with the units using digital volume controls, where they maintained exceptional distortion measurements up until a point where the very next notch increased THD ten-fold. Any further gain is surely redundant, although it does allow manufacturers to claim some stunning signal-to-noise figures. Our S/N measurements are given relative to our reference 0.05 per cent THD+N for a 0dB signal, compared to a -60dB signal and are surely impressive enough.



TALKING POINT

WE'VE MENTIONED the possibility of siting power amps – especially monoblocks – remote from the main electronics stack, probably nearer the speakers. We also feel that speaker cables are liable to have a more pronounced effect on sound than interconnects and keeping them short is no bad thing. You might have to hunt a little for long interconnects as typically their price goes up relatively slowly with length.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Make/model	Densen B-200/B-310	Electrocompaniet ECI 5 Mk II	Moon i3.3	Quad Elite Pre/Mono	Rega Elicit	Rotel RC-1580/RB-1582
Price	£1,400/£1,450	£2,750	£3,000	£850/£650x2	£1,595	£995/£1,095
Sound	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★☆	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Conclusion	Different visually from the run of the mill, but even more so sonically. Audition with care!	Admirable in very many ways and nonetheless so for its slightly unusual character	A good performance, but not outstanding. An amp that might inspire more respect than love	Good value. Sound isn't always the most exciting, but it has a high degree of simple honesty	A likeable amp whose vitality never verges into aggression. Good bass, imaging and detail	Value is enhanced by high power, but the sound doesn't have the appeal we'd like

Key features

Line inputs	6	6	5	4+Amplbus	5	7
Phono input?	Option	No	Option	MM/MC	Option	MM/MC
Headphone output?	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Remote control	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Notional output	80W	120W	100W	150W	80W	200W

Lab conclusions E = Excellent | AA = Above average | A = average | BA = average | P = poor

Frequency response	+/-0.061dB E	+/-0.1dB E	+/-0.122dB AA	+/-2.7dB A	+/-0.08dB E	+/-0.082dB E
Output power	75W BA	130W AA	110W AA	160W AA	26W P	235W E
Signal-to-noise	87dB AA	98.6dB A	105dB E	100dB E	86dB A	100dB E
THD	0.1% A	0.006% E	0.01% E	0.004% AA	0.03% AA	0.02% AA
Output impedance	0.23 ohms BA	0.03 ohms AA	0.05 ohms AA	0.04 ohms AA	0.08 ohms A	0.03 ohms E

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