

Rega Elicit-R | Integrated stereo amplifier | £1500

Stereo sound that's simply stunning



This is one of the best stereo amps we've heard at this price. It's staggeringly agile

We think it's as attractive to look at as it is to hear, too. The case is finished in black satin metal, and at 13kg the build is as sturdy and solid as ever. Gone is the swooped-in effect on the former Elicit's top panel - it's altogether a much neater look, while retaining the excellent build quality and distinct look of a Rega amplifier.

A lovely amp to use

There are satisfyingly audible clicks when pressing the buttons and turning the dial to select one of the five inputs - a single LED shows which has been selected.

The volume dial is surrounded by 20 LEDs that light up as you turn it too, although we wish the stepped attenuator control had a touch more resistance.

The Elicit-R comes with a remote control (hence the 'R'). The included Solaris system remote can control this amp and all other Rega R-series products - which does explain why it has a lot of buttons that don't really apply to this product. The volume buttons will get the most use, and they're nicely responsive, even if they are easy to get confuse with the similarly styled input buttons near the top of the remote.

This really is one of the best stereo amps we've heard at this price. Its staggering agility and ability to reveal the subtlest detail is admirable, but what makes it truly impressive is how musical and interesting it sounds. Make no mistake, this year's Awards will be interesting...

When we encountered the Rega Elicit integrated amp in 2008, it didn't quite set our senses tingling. Rega's cheaper, half-width Brio-R, on the other hand, impressed us time and again to become a multiple Award-winner. When it came to building its Elicit-R, then, it made perfect sense for the company to look to the Brio for cues.

Building a £1500 integrated amp with circuitry based on a £480 unit might seem odd, but it's paid off. The Elicit-R is a big improvement, and one of the best stereo amplifiers we've heard at this price.

Immediately engaging

With an increased power output of 105W per channel into 8ohms (the Brio-R has 50W per channel) and improved power supplies, the increased potential of the Rega Elicit-R is instantly apparent from the spec sheet.

What immediately captures your attention is its surefooted sense of timing - its agility and control is hugely impressive. Play Kate Bush's *Watching You Without Me*, and this complicated arrangement is kept splendidly cohesive. It's particularly talented with vocals: Bush's voice sounds ethereal and delicate. There's an incredible amount of subtle detail here, too.

While the older Elicit might have shown some restraint, the Elicit-R is much more demonstrative with its dynamics. The depth of detail lets songs reach their peaks and troughs, and it's particularly talented at delivering the quieter moments.

Some might find the Elicit-R to have a slight leanness, and a hint of brightness to the treble, compared with amps such as the Roksan Caspian M2 or the Heed Obelisk si. However, the Rega makes no attempt to smooth things over. It trades that warmth and smoothness for a revealing and transparent character that doesn't shy away from conveying all the flaws in a recording - so it won't be forgiving with poorly recorded or low-resolution songs.

This is brought home with a David Bowie record played through the built-in moving-magnet phono stage: if you love hearing the organic fluidity of vinyl, this Rega amp is well worth a listen. Sweeter sounding amps might be easier on the ears, but few can keep you interested over such long periods as the Elicit-R.

Round the back

1 Phono stage

There's a built-in MM phono stage alongside four other line inputs. You can also switch between the phono input and a special isolated line-level input to add an external MC stage.

2 Direct link input

You can bypass the preamp section of the Rega and use it in a home cinema set-up to power the left and right and channels, controlling the volume on the AV receiver as normal.

3 Record output

There are two record outputs on the Elicit-R: one for recording, and another (Record Output Link) for feeding a line-level output to a headphone amp, say.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb timing; detailed and dynamic; precise and composed; good build and finish

AGAINST Some might prefer a more easy-going sonic character

VERDICT Full of revealing detail and superb rhythms, this is a truly fantastic amplifier

Also consider

Roksan Caspian M2
£1650 ★★★★★

A long-standing Award-winner that delivers a full-bodied, warm sound - but it doesn't quite have the Rega's depth and precision



System builder Total build £4695

Stereo speakers
Totem Rainmaker
★★★★★ £1200

Not just a cool name, these speakers surprised us with their ability to serve up a remarkably insightful and musical experience.



CD Player
Naim CD5si
★★★★★ £995

There's so much to love about this enthusiastic player, and its dynamic subtlety and surefooted handling of rhythms make it an ideal match for the Rega amp.



Turntable
Rega RP6/Exact
★★★★★ £1000

It makes sense to pick a turntable from the same family: the beautifully finished RP6 is wonderfully engaging and transparent.



WHAT HI-FI?

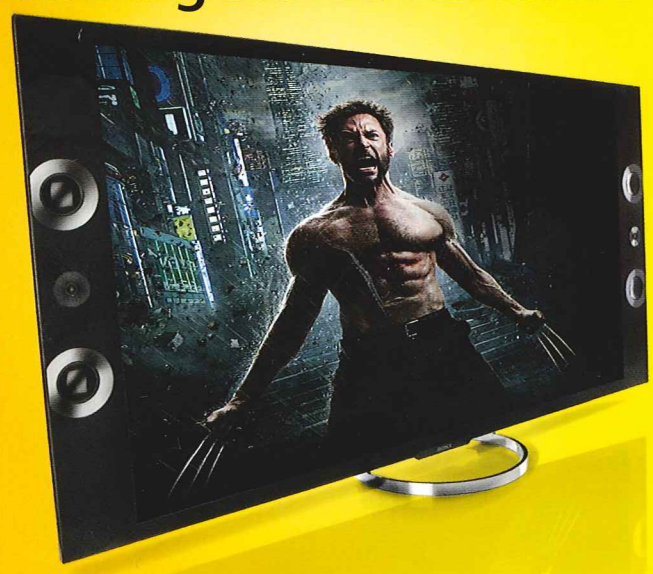
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