

# Group test

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS £1,200-£1,749

## Power players

With hundreds of watts on tap, today's top integrateds promise high-end punch without the high prices says **David Price**

**BACK IN THE** bad old days, if you wanted an amplifier capable of pushing out serious power, there was only one route open to you – to invest in a separate preamplifier and power amplifier combination. This involved spending large sums of money and having your listening room assaulted by two big boxes that reminded you of their presence whenever you looked in their general direction.

Nowadays however, with the rise of the 'super integrated', spending around £1,500 will get you over 100W per channel from an altogether smaller and more subtle box that won't dominate your listening room.

Does this mean that they deliver high-end sound without the tears? Well yes, the manufacturers of all the models here would doubtless claim this very thing.

But as ever with hi-fi, it ain't necessarily so. These six designs come at things from slightly differing angles. Some, such as the Cambridge Audio and Yamaha are dripping with facilities, with features such as tone controls, phono stages, fancy displays and so on. Others, meanwhile, such

as the Exposure and Onix integrateds, are stripped-down minimalist machines of the sort that were more fashionable back in the eighties. The claim made for these amplifiers is that more money has been spent on the circuitry and components, rather than concentrating on filling up the fascia with fripperies – but this doesn't always hold water.

**Spending around £1,500 will get over 100W per channel from a smaller box**

Finally, the Cyrus and Creek offerings tread a third path somewhere between the other two.

Ultimately though, what counts is the basic quality of the circuit design and how well it is executed – claimed power outputs and fancy features don't necessarily translate into excellent real-world performance. That's why, as ever, there's no substitute for listening to them in carefully controlled conditions!

### ON TEST



**Cambridge Audio Azur 851A**  
£1,200 p25

The baby of the group certainly doesn't look or feel like it – it is bristling with features, packs a huge power output and is built like the proverbial outhouse made from pre-constituted building materials!



**Creek Destiny 2**  
£1,749 p27

Top of Creek's respected line of integrateds, this treads a delicate path between 'less is more' minimalism and the feature-laden designs here. It's a gimmick-free design with the accent on sonics.



**Cyrus 8a/PSX-R**  
£1,749 p29

A brand that made its name in the eighties, this is the latest Cyrus amplifier and comes with the optional £500 PSX-R power supply, that's claimed to improve current driving ability and clean up the sound.



**Exposure 3010S2**  
£1,350 p31

From another eighties superstar – famed for its big pre/power amplifier combos – comes this one-box super integrated that puts out a serious amount of power and sports a stripped-down feature set.



**Onix A-65**  
£1,290 p33

This sparsely appointed, minimalist box has next to no facilities, with Onix claiming all the money has been spent on the high-quality components inside. It really looks the part, but does it deliver?



**Yamaha A-S2000**  
£1,499 p35

This amplifier has been on sale for a good few years now, but still looks as appetising as ever, thanks to its gorgeous retro styling, build quality, vast features and massive power output. But what about its sonics?





## Cambridge Audio Azur 851A £1,200



The state-of-the-art modern integrated with every convenience aside from the kitchen sink

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Amplifier  
**ORIGIN**  
UK/China  
**TYPE**  
Integrated amplifier  
**WEIGHT**  
5.9kg  
**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
430 x 115 x 385mm  
**FEATURES**  
• Quoted power output: 120W RMS per channel into 8ohms  
• Silver or black brushed aluminium finish  
• 6 inputs, inc XLR  
• 6.3mm headphone output  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Richer Sounds  
**TELEPHONE**  
n/a  
**WEBSITE**  
cambridgeaudio.co.uk

**T**his is the latest evolution of the company's flagship integrated, the original 850, which was a do-it-all design that sported a wide range of facilities, from user-configurable inputs and a lavish LC display to Class XD operation and a serious 100W+ of power. The 851A has all this, but boasts refinements to every aspect of the amp from the (now) shiny brushed aluminium fascia and 'inverse video' display to a revised Class XD circuit and improved passive components. Class XD (crossover displacement) is the name Cambridge Audio gives to its unique amplifier circuit design said to combine the best of Class A and Class A/B amplifier operation. Coupled to this is a claimed 120W RMS per channel into 8ohms, with 200W into 4ohms.

Substantial extruded heatsinking is on hand to deal with all this power, and twin audiophile-grade toroidal power transformers are fitted, one for the preamp and one for the power amp section. Separate transformer taps are also taken for left and right channels. The metal chassis is acoustically damped and it feels extremely impressive considering its price. In use, the volume control has a nicely sleek action, and the rear sockets are built to a high standard. There is also extensive remote controllability, including compatibility with the company's own iPod docking unit. Overall, then this is a solid, strong and sophisticated package.

### Sound quality

This is the least expensive of the group, but doesn't sound it. Indeed in terms of refinement it isn't far off the likes of the Creek and Cyrus, costing a good £500 more. The 851A has a lovely, lilting, spacious sort of nature that makes any music you play through it a pleasure. Tonally it is clean and smooth, without any obvious bias towards the treble or bass, and rhythmically it's nicely engaging too – albeit not quite one to give you a white knuckle ride. Factor in oodles of effortless power and it makes for a brilliant value performer, rather than something that advertises its low price.

Kicking off with Central Line's *Walking into Sunshine*, the Azur gets the chance to show off its vast power reserves, not blinking even at high levels with the song's flare-flapping bass line – instead staying clean, calm and poised. It gives more of a lean and taut sound than the tonally sumptuous Creek, but never feels artificially dry. It's pleasantly tuneful too, although it is a relaxed music maker; it strings the song together in a calm and conscientious way rather than spitting out masses of speed and detail. That's not to say it isn't precise. REM's *Maps and Legends* reveals rather impressive instrumental separation with the 851A letting all of the elements of the mix play separately, but together in a way that other less expensive designs in the group, like the Onix, don't.

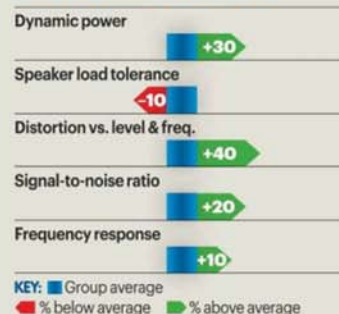


### ON TEST

In terms of raw power, the 851A not only smashes its 2 x 125W rating, but also exceeds the continuous power output of the other models here by delivering 2 x 155W/8ohm and 2 x 260W/4ohm. The dynamic headroom is more measured at 185W/8ohm and 305W/4ohm while the 851A is 'limited' to 310W/2ohm. The wide 91dB A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW) is second in specmanship only to the Yamaha. Via its balanced inputs, the overall amplifier gain (amplification factor) is sensibly limited to +33dB, where +40dB might be more common.

Cambridge Audio's Class XD technology has always delivered low levels of distortion and this is especially true here as the 851A holds THD to within 0.0003-0.0005% from 1-100W/8ohm through the midrange. Distortion also increases rather less at higher frequencies than its peers as the 851A suffers a mere 0.0055% at 20kHz (10W/8ohm). **PM**

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



The only real downside of the Cambridge is its depth perspective, which can't quite match the likes of the pricier Creek; it tends to bunch things around the plane of the speakers, even though it's very wide from left to right. This is most apparent on classical music, such as the Scottish Chamber Orchestra's rendition of Mozart's *29th Symphony*. It is big and breezy, but lacks depth; also there's an ever so slightly well-lit quality to the upper midband, which gives violins extra bite but isn't quite accurate. Still, don't let that put you off – you could easily confuse this for a £2,000 product, such is its excellence at the price ●

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

**LIKE:** Powerful, musical sound; lots of detail; build; features  
**DISLIKE:** Not quite as organic sounding as some rivals  
**WESAY:** A brilliant package with so many boxes ticked, at a fantastic price

#### OVERALL







## Creek Destiny 2 £1,749



This range-topping amplifier from one of the UK's favourite electronics makers should be good

### DETAILS

#### PRODUCT

Amplifier

#### ORIGIN

UK

#### TYPE

Integrated amplifier

#### WEIGHT

10kg

#### DIMENSIONS

(WxHxD)  
430 x 80 x 360mm

#### FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 2 x 120W RMS into 8 ohms
- Silver or black finish
- ALPS Blue Velvet volume control
- 4 RCA line inputs + optional Sequel MM/MC board

#### DISTRIBUTOR

Creek Audio

#### TELEPHONE

01442 260146

#### WEBSITE

creekaudio.com

**H**ere's a company with a great pedigree for affordable integrated amplifiers. It all started with Creek's CAS4040 some three decades ago, which wowed the budget hi-fi scene with its heavenly sound quality.

Since then the British company has gone from strength to strength, but has continued resolutely making products with 'real world' prices; this latest Destiny 2 is the company's most expensive ever. It's a well specified, nicely made amplifier with four inputs, a tape loop and an AV loop – plus there's also the option of Creek's Sequel MM/MC phono input board; two pairs of speaker outlets are additional fitted as is a headphone socket.

The Destiny 2 sports a special Creek MOSFET power amplifier section, pushing out a claimed 120W per channel at 8ohms (180W into 4ohms). A magnetically shielded 300VA toroidal transformer with separate windings for high and low current analogue circuit requirements is fitted, with two separate low-loss Schottky diode bridge rectifiers to separate left and right channel power supplies. Multiple small, low impedance 2,200uF capacitors are paralleled together for superior smoothing and there are separate feeds for all low-voltage circuits. A 50VA auxiliary toroidal mains transformer powers the microcontroller circuitry when in

standby and all the digital circuitry for better sound.

### Sound quality

There's something very right about the way that this amplifier makes music. It is of course a solid-state design, but doesn't sound like one. But then again, it doesn't sound like a valve amplifier either. Rather, the Destiny 2 resides in a wonderful world of its own, where music just floods out of the speakers in a gloriously unselfconscious way.

Tonally, it is neither light and bright like the Yamaha, or as syrupy as your average £1,500 tube amp – rather it's just a little on the warm side of neutral, preferring to stand back and not force itself on the proceedings. The Central Line track shows this to great effect, with a searching, insightful sound that seems to pull the listener right up to the quarter inch jack sockets coming out of the studio mixing desk!

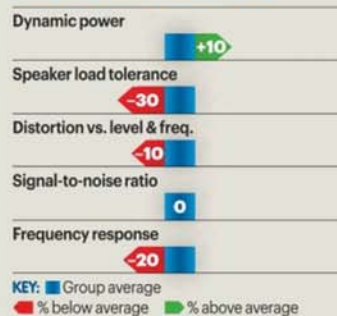
The contrast between this and the Jam track is staggering; suddenly I find myself being transported from that deliciously fat and fulsome Central Line studio sound to a scratchy sort of acoustic, which easily could have been the band rehearsing in a phone box. The Creek signposts this with complete clarity, while pogoing along to the beat and spitting out Weller's edgy vocals with gritty intent. Even though the recording is poor, it just doesn't seem to matter, so fine is its innate sense of rhythm.

### ON TEST

Although this is an improved v2 model, the latest Destiny's power output is on a par with the original amp at 2 x 115W/8ohm and while its output is healthier into 4ohm at 2 x 180W, a tighter 10.5A current limit restricts dynamic power to 200/110W into 2/1ohm loads. The Destiny 2 may seem more powerful than Creek's new Evolution 50A (which has a 65W/100W 8/4ohm output) but the latter is more capable into lower impedances.

The Destiny 2 offers bass and midrange distortion that's uniformly low at -0.01% from 1-100W/8ohm, only increasing to 0.045% at very high frequencies (20kHz). The A-wtd S/N ratio is also wider than average at 87dB (re. 0dBW) though it's not quite the 'wide open window' of the Cambridge or Yamaha. Output impedance is moderate at 0.055-0.075ohm (20Hz-20kHz) while its frequency response precisely matches Creek's ±1dB specification from 1Hz to 30kHz. **PM**

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



The Mozart piece is amazing; suddenly the recorded acoustic seems to swell in size and I find myself pulled into a completely different environment, with a full orchestra heaving away in my midst. String tone is excellent, the Creek captures every last sinew of the violins, yet never gets edgy unlike the Yamaha or Onix. Spatially, instruments are superbly located and the Creek is exceptional in this group by being able to dissolve the loudspeakers out of the room – whereas many others make the sound cluster around them. Overall, a brilliant performance from this enduring integrated amplifier – overlook it at your peril! ●

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>SOUND QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>LIKE:</b> Crisp, enjoyable sound; superb packaging; great facilities; style       |
| <b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b><br>★★★★★ | <b>DISLIKE:</b> Absolutely nothing even at the higher price                          |
| <b>BUILD QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>WE SAY:</b> If you want a big sound in a small package, this is a great way to go |
| <b>FEATURES</b><br>★★★★★        |  |

#### OVERALL







# Cyrus 8a/PSX-R **£1,749**

This amplifier with add-on power supply package shows that less can sometimes be so much more

## DETAILS

### PRODUCT

Amplifier

### ORIGIN

UK

### TYPE

Integrated amplifier/power supply

### WEIGHT

5.9kg

### DIMENSIONS

(WxHxD) 8a/PSX-R  
215 x 73 x 360mm

### FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 70W RMS per channel into 8ohms
- Quartz silver or brushed black finish
- 6 RCA line inputs
- Headphone output

### DISTRIBUTOR

Cyrus Audio

### TELEPHONE

01480 410900

### WEBSITE

cyrusaudio.com

**B**ack in the mists of time, in the early eighties, Mission's Cyrus One and Two amplifiers were massively popular budget boxes. But then the famous speaker company's electronics brand split from its parent, and the result was the Cyrus 3. Impressively, it used the same elegant diecast casework that you see before you in this, the latest in a long line of Cyrus integrated amplifiers, some two decades later.

Of course, it has evolved quite considerably in the intervening years, with a plethora of upgrades and add-on card options now available. In its standard form it pumps out a claimed 70W RMS per channel at 8ohms, thanks to a revised power supply boasting a pair of transformers designed to separately feed 'digital' and 'analogue' sections – and there's also the option of a separate £500 PSX-R power supply (not shown), which is also used in this round up.

The Cyrus 8a can be fitted with a wide range of upgrade options, from a standard DAC card, which brings five additional inputs, to the high quality 24/192 DAC Qx card that offers reclocking and upsampling.

The amplifier's preamp section can be used with one of the wide range of Cyrus power amplifiers for more power to spare. In the standard spec that's tested here, the 8a offers six analogue line inputs, a tape-out, preamp out and headphone socket.

## Sound quality

From the opening bars of the Mozart Symphony, the Cyrus marks itself out as an enjoyably fluid performer – even by the high standards of the group. There's an intrinsic rightness to the sound that lets you relax into the music, and enjoy what you find, without intellectualising it too much. Compared with the Creek, the Cyrus combo is just a little two dimensional spatially; the Scottish Chamber Orchestra spans out wide and tall, but doesn't quite have the depth of the best of the rest. Not to worry though, because images are very strongly rooted; there is a solidity to the sound that belies the small size of the boxes that are making it.

Tonally, the Cyrus combo treads a clever line between hard and soft; it's intrinsically on the warm side of neutral, but you'd never mistake it for a valve amplifier. Its lithe sound captures the leading edges of REM's heavily strummed guitars very well, making for an animated performance without lacerating your lugholes in the process. Treble proves clean and smooth, one of the best here in some respects, giving a lovely metallic sheen to the ringing ride cymbals on *Maps and Legends*.

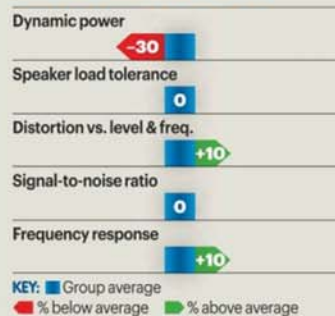
Good rhythmically, this pairing nevertheless has its own way of doing things, sounding positive and propulsive, but lacking the delicacy and subtlety of the Creek. Compared with the Exposure, it's not quite as

## ON TEST

Don't be fooled by the 8a's compact form factor because it's a very beefy performer. Rated at 70W, it delivers closer to 2 x 90W/8ohm with 105W, 200W and 325W under dynamic conditions into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads, suggesting a very good tolerance of difficult speaker loads. Nevertheless, its limited heatsinking can get very hot indeed with 60°C being recorded at 10W output over 30 minutes.

The 87.5dB A-wtd S/N (re. 0dBW) is well judged, on a par with the Creek, and distortion is very low at 0.00015-0.01% (re. 20Hz-20kHz at 10W/8ohm). Importantly, the output impedance is low and consistent at -0.045ohm (20Hz-20kHz) which helps maintain a predictable system frequency response regardless of variations in speaker load. Into 8ohm, the Cyrus 8a offers a near-DC bass extension with a gentle treble roll-off (-0.2dB/20kHz to -3.2dB/100kHz). **PM**

## RESULTS AT A GLANCE



fast sounding either. It's down on power compared with most others here, but you'd never know it unless you're ready to blow the roof off your house – what power the 8a/PSX-R has, it makes the most out of, and in practice shows little real handicap. Only if you're running especially inefficient speakers would you really want more.

Overall it's hard to see how anyone would be unhappy with this dinky duo – it performs really well across the board. Although not quite coming top in any particular respect, it still shows an accomplished face to the world – one that is stylish, flexible and fun to listen to.

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>SOUND QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>LIKE:</b> Crisp, enjoyable sound; superb packaging; facilities; style             |
| <b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b><br>★★★★★ | <b>DISLIKE:</b> Lacks the subtlety and speed of rivals in this round up              |
| <b>BUILD QUALITY</b><br>★★★★★   | <b>WE SAY:</b> If you want a big sound in a small package, this is a great way to go |
| <b>FEATURES</b><br>★★★★★        |  |

### OVERALL







## Exposure 3010S2 £1,350



A great integrated from a great British amplifier brand, this sparsely appointed product promises much

### DETAILS

#### PRODUCT

Amplifier

#### ORIGIN

UK

#### TYPE

Integrated amplifier

#### WEIGHT

12kg

#### DIMENSIONS

(WxHxD)  
440 x 115 x 300mm

#### FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 2 x 110W RMS into 8ohms
- Silver or black finish
- Preamp output
- 6 RCA line inputs + optional MM/MC board

#### DISTRIBUTOR

Exposure

#### TELEPHONE

01273 423877

#### WEBSITE

exposurehifi.com

**B**ack in the heady hi-fi days of the eighties, Exposure made its name for cleverly designed, sweet-sounding high-end transistor amplifiers that were just a little bit more palatable than the rival big Naim's of the day. The company is now focused more on the affordable end of solid-state amplification, which warrants the inclusion of the 3010S2 here. This is the second incarnation of Exposure's top integrated, and it comes with six line inputs, a MM or MC phono module option, and there's a separate preamplifier output for biamping via an Exposure power amplifier – this is an obvious and easy upgrade path to take when funds permit.

The claimed 110W RMS per channel (into 8ohms) power output is very healthy in this group, if not quite exceptional. The company says much attention has been paid to the circuit design. This includes high-quality capacitors used in the signal path, a printed circuit board that is "uniquely tuned" with short signal and power supply paths, and cascode circuitry for improved power supply immunity, plus a fast bipolar transistor output stage. This all slots into a very attractive aluminium casing with a clean-looking, extruded front panel. Overall fit and finish of the amplifier is excellent, extending to the cleanly laid-out back panel – although gadget fans should look elsewhere; this is about as minimalist as they come.

### Sound quality

From almost the first bar of the Central Line track, it is clear that this is one of the best amplifiers here. The sound is big, bold and musical, but never harsh or uncouth, meaning the Exposure plugs right into what's going on in any recording and has a whale of a time – as indeed does the listener. Whereas some musical sounding designs achieve their speed and pace by forwardness of tone or even grit and naked aggression, the 3010S2 is a model of sophistication – showing you really can have it all!

REM's *Maps and Legends* is a thick, gloopy sort of recording, but the Exposure cuts through it like a knife through churned milk. It serves up a vast soundstage with guitars and vocals wide left and right, inside which large amounts of detail bristle out. Compared with the equally impressive Creek, there is less sense of space around the instruments, with images pushed a little closer to the plane of the speakers instead of hanging back, but the 3010S2 makes up for it with a slightly stronger and purposeful bass line, which hooks up with drum-kit work much better. Both are wonderfully expansive and vast in scale.

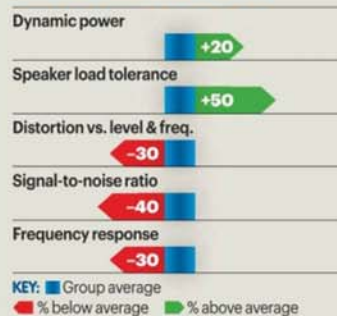
The rich Central Line track shows the Exposure to have a slightly less warm sound to the Creek, but it is nowhere near the Yamaha which errs too far in the opposite direction. Along with a marginally thinner upper midband, treble comes over

### ON TEST

Distortion really does decrease as the 3010S2 is left to warm up – from 0.015% to 0.010% over 30 minutes at 10W/8ohm. Once toasty, the 3010S2 holds to ~0.01% from 1-100W/8ohm although THD in our sample did increase more sharply through the treble via the right channel (0.020% vs. 0.10%, L/R).

As for power output, the 3010S2 beats its rated 110W at 2 x 135W and 2 x 225W into 8/4ohm with sufficient dynamic headroom to accommodate 175W, 325W and a huge 555W into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads. Output is short-circuit protected to 335W (18.3A/1ohm), but it's still the most tolerant here of difficult speakers. Output impedance is also lower than earlier Exposures at 0.015ohm and the frequency response consistent at 8Hz-23kHz (±1dB). The 80dB S/N ratio (re. 0dBW) is lower than average, but this is white noise rather than hum and likely to have a flattering subjective influence. **PM**

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



with a touch more sparkle via the 3010S2. This works particularly well with classical music, giving a slightly more breezy, atmospheric presentation than the Creek, even if the depth perspective isn't quite there. Dynamics are excellent, and the Jam track shows that the Exposure can go loud or quiet quicker than a blink. Overall, this is a slightly rockier, although less polished and nuanced version of the Creek, which itself is often the best here – making the 3010S2 an absolutely fabulous performer across the board.

A compulsory product for prospective purchasers to audition, don't let this pass you by! ●

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

##### SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

##### VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

##### BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

##### FEATURES

★★★★★

##### OVERALL

★★★★★

**LIKE:** Delightfully open, expansive and enjoyable sound; superb build and finish

**DISLIKE:** Nothing

**WESAY:** A wonderful sounding amplifier that makes listening to any kind of music a real pleasure







## Onix A-65 £1,290

With its clean, minimalist fascia this amplifier advertises its audiophile intentions, but does it deliver?

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Amplifier  
**ORIGIN**  
China  
**TYPE**  
Integrated amplifier  
**WEIGHT**  
10.5kg  
**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
430 x 109 x 401mm  
**FEATURES**  
• Claimed power output: 66W RMS per channel into 8ohm  
• Black finish  
• 5 RCA line inputs + bypass  
• 6.3mm headphone output  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
UKD  
**TELEPHONE**  
01753 652669  
**WEBSITE**  
ukd.co.uk

**D**espite having a name that dates back to the eighties, this amplifier has come a long way from the shoebox-shaped Onix amplifiers of yesteryear. Manufactured in China, the A-65 sports a glitzy fascia panel and gold knobs, which will delight some while others will find it all a bit gauche for their tastes. Whatever your take on this, there's no doubting the fact that it's well screwed together though, with a lavish gloss-black perspex fascia panel that makes using it a breeze compared with the complex Cambridge.

The main volume control sits in the centre beside the source selector, to the left of which is a row of input selection LEDs (there are five, plus a preamplifier bypass mode). Placed to the right is a gold-plated 6.3mm headphone socket output.

Under the hood, it's obvious the designer has taken care to use a good selection of components, often from well-known names. The high-quality ALPS Blue Velvet volume potentiometer is but one example, yet there are others too, from the 300VA toroidal transformer to the ultra-fast rectifier diodes and Nichicon capacitors. The Onix puts out a claimed 66W RMS per channel into 8ohms, and nearly twice that at 2 x 125W RMS into 4ohms – a healthy figure for sure. With little to fault at its price in terms of build and finish, how then does it fare when switched on?

### Sound quality

Don't let the gold knobs fool you, there's nothing chintzy sounding about the Onix. Indeed, it's an honest and even performer, one that doesn't seem showy or particularly artificial.

Instead, it presents the music in an enjoyable, matter of fact way that doesn't draw attention to its own or the recording's failings. Considering its modest price tag for this test, it does very well. The Central Line track kicks off the proceedings with a bang, this amplifier serving up a fast and fulfilling sound that shows considerable refinement and a decent amount of rhythmic drive; I particularly like the way it picks out the accenting on hi-hat cymbals, which is better than most of the other offerings on test here.

Tonally though, when I move to the REM track, I'm surprised to hear it sounding just a little less different than I'd expect. The former is a warm and sumptuous recording, the latter a little dark and dour, and the A-65 doesn't contrast them as explicitly as it really should.

Having said that, it is an enjoyable listen, with decent smoothness and a fair amount of pace. Compared with the Creek and Exposure however, the A-65 doesn't quite capture the passion of the playing or the pathos of the vocals, instead giving a less poignant and moving delivery.

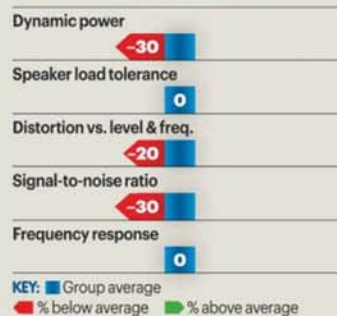
With Mozart's *Symphony No.29*, the opening Allegro Moderato is nicely carried, again this amplifier never

### ON TEST

Glitzy though it looks, the Onix A-65 is the least powerful amplifier here, though it's not the least tolerant of tough loudspeakers. The 2 x 65W/8ohm and 2 x 120W/4ohm specification is sailing fairly close to the wind as it achieved 2 x 80W/8ohm and 2 x 118W/4ohm on our test bench, with headroom for 108W, 185W and 280W into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads. So the A-65 is hardly spineless!

Through the bass and midrange, distortion is low and consistent at -0.002% from 1W to 25W, but increases slightly thereafter to 0.003% at 40W and 0.006% at 65W. Versus frequency, THD increases as expected from 0.002% to 0.01% at 20kHz and a controlled 0.02% at an ultrasonic 40kHz. The response is very extended (-0.15dB/20kHz to -1.5dB/100kHz into 8ohm), but there's a greater roll-off into lower impedance loads. The A-wtd S/N ratio is not dissimilar to the Exposure, but there's more hum here. **PM**

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



disgraces itself in more expensive company. String tone is good, with plenty of vibrancy to violins, although again it lacks the shimmer of some of the pricier products here. Indeed, tonally the Onix is on the brighter side of this round up, contrasting the rich fullness of the Creek, for example. Its bass reflects this, being just a touch light when called upon to push a song along, especially at high listening levels; The Jam's *News of the World* sounds anticlimactic for this very reason, the band thrashing around while the Onix fails to drive the point home. A decent sounding amplifier then, but others on test here do so much better ●

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

**LIKE:** Smooth, pleasant sound; decent build and finish  
**DISLIKE:** Not quite as powerful or as insightful as some others here  
**WE SAY:** A decent value, high-quality integrated amplifier

#### OVERALL







# Yamaha

## A-S2000 **£1,499**

How much will this veteran big bruiser give away to its younger, fresher upstart rivals here?

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Amplifier  
**ORIGIN**  
Japan/China  
**TYPE**  
Integrated amplifier  
**WEIGHT**  
22.7kg  
**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
435 x 137 x 465mm  
**FEATURES**  
• Quoted power output: 100W RMS per channel into 8ohms  
• Black or silver finish; wooden side cheeks  
• 6 inputs inc. balanced XLR  
• MM/MC phono stage  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Yamaha UK  
**TELEPHONE**  
0844 8111116  
**WEBSITE**  
uk.yamaha.com

**D**espite having been on the market now for a good five years, this huge Japanese integrated has aged well. That's probably because it didn't look 'of its time' back then and so doesn't now – rather it has something of a 'post modern' seventies feel to it. You can stand it next to a classic Yamaha amp from nearly 40 years ago and there's amazingly little stylistic difference. The control layout is pure retro, from the knobs for balance, bass and treble and volume to the straight-bar source selectors for its four line inputs. It even boasts a phono stage with switchable MM and MC inputs, the latter through a proper discrete circuit. Wooden side cheeks, meanwhile, cement its clean but classic look.

The pre and power amplifiers are separable and the Yamaha uses fully floating and balanced pre and power amplifiers, which makes it much less sensitive to noise. The power amp section boasts 100W per channel into 8ohms and 160W into half that (claimed), aided and abetted by a massive power transformer and 24,000µF worth of capacitance. Unusually these days, two pairs of loudspeakers are independently switchable. The Yamaha is a joy to use; it's much nicer twiddling knobs than being all 'fingers and thumbs' trying to click through fiddly sub menus, as you have to on the likes of the Cambridge Audio offering.

### Sound quality

There's no mistaking this veritable power station of an amplifier; it never misses an opportunity to grab the loudspeakers by the short and curlies to remind them just who's in control.

Central Line's *Walking into Sunshine* could have been written as a demonstration track for the Yamaha, with its thundering synth bass line that's hardly easy to miss. The A-S200 sounds strong and taut too, showing the fine control it excerpts on loudspeakers. And up above this, the midband sparks with detail, while a well-lit treble fires out like lasers into the night.

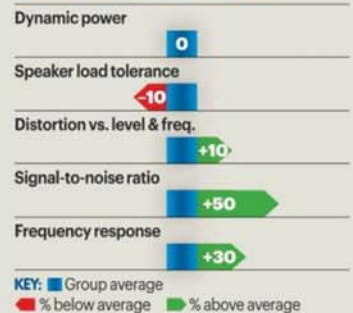
You'd never confuse it with the wonderfully dextrous and delicate sounding Creek, however, and as I discover with the less sumptuous sound of the The Jam – which jars (if you'll excuse the pun)! This track isn't exactly flattered by the Yamaha, which seems to be hellbent on exposing it as a nasty recording rather than trying to bring out the great song inside. The big Japanese amp stumbles and falls at this hurdle, in marked contrast to the Creek and Exposure which tend to be far more forgiving. Additionally, I find a tendency for the A-S2000 to come over as slightly opaque and fuzzy on lesser recordings, whereas the bright light it shines on richer ones is highly enjoyable. As such, it will prove just a touch too music genre-sensitive for some people.

### ON TEST

Yamaha's heavyweight A-S2000 more than meets its spec with a solid 120W/210W 8/4ohm power output and sufficient headroom to accommodate clean peaks of 155W and 290W under dynamic conditions. With a maximum current of 13.5A (<1% THD), it also delivers 350W into low 2ohm loads with little progressive increase in distortion. Into a gentler 8ohm load, distortion hovers around 0.01% over a full 100W range, increasing slightly to 0.025% at low bass and 0.05% at high treble frequencies.

Yamaha amplifiers and AV receivers typically have very wide S/N ratios and the A-S2000 is no exception at 97dB (re. 0dBW), a full 12dB 'wider' than the average amp. Throwing the window open this wide, however, may not prove so pleasing in all systems especially as the A-S2000 also offers a very extended 5Hz-85kHz (±1dB) frequency response. **PM**

### RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Classical music from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra sounds good, but again the Yamaha seems a little lost without a big, crunching bass line to play with. The subtle orchestral playing exposes it as a little wriggly and fidgety, seemingly unable to settle into the subtle counterpoint of the music – it makes it perfectly clear it's happier down at the disco. And that's the problem with the Yamaha – point it at the right programme material and it's almost unassailable, but with others it simply lacks the delicacy of soundstaging, depth perspective and insight to capture the nuances of many musical genres. One for party people, then! ●

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★  
**FEATURES**  
★★★★★

**LIKE:** Lots of power; great styling; fantastic feature count  
**DISLIKE:** Slightly mechanical and analytical sound  
**WESAY:** A fine package if you want a good all rounder, but sonics are not the match of others here

#### OVERALL





# Group test verdict

The verdicts are all in and it's down to an amped up **David Price** to reveal the final results of this month's impressive integrated sextet...

**THE ONIX A-65** is a nice integrated amplifier that has been well made and will drive most loudspeakers well in an average listening room. If you like its looks audition it, as you can do a lot worse at the price.

Yamaha's A-S2000 is getting on a bit now, but still has a lot going for it. It's hard not to love the retro styling. It's also got enough power to fill the average village hall with sound and it's decent to listen to, too. Trouble is, it's a quite expensive design in a group where some rivals do it better, and that's why it hasn't come further up the rankings.

Now to the tricky bit – we have four excellent British-badged amplifiers, all with competing strengths. The Cyrus 8a/PSX-R comes next – it sounds great, has that iconic design and is built superbly. It's a bit expensive for what it does compared with the Cambridge Audio Azur 851A, which is why it comes fourth.

The 851A is amazing at the price, with a massive amount of facilities and convenience features, and it has a really nice sound, too – there's oodles of power and it is genuinely musically satisfying to listen to. It's only the ever-so-slightly mechanical

feel compared with the next two competitors that marks it down.

The Creek Destiny 2 is a gorgeous sounding device. It doesn't win prizes for finish or features, but you'll soon forget about such fripperies as it is the best music maker in a number of respects. It has sumptuous tonality that imbues everything with an uncanny realism – it is also the least processed-sounding amp in the group. Its soundstaging is sublime, wonderfully wide and unusually deep, making instruments float in space like nothing else here.

**WINNER**

The Exposure 3010S2 is a worthy winner. At the expense of a tiny bit of depth and space compared with the Creek Destiny, it brings an increased impetus to the music, pushing things along with great energy. Factor in fine finish and build, and it's great value for money.



Make/model	Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	Creek Destiny 2	Cyrus 8a/PSX-R	Exposure 3010S2	Onix A-65	Yamaha A-S2000
<b>Price</b>	£1,200	£1,749	£1,749	£1,350	£1,290	£1,499
<b>Sound</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Value</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Build</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Features</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
<b>Overall</b>	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	Fantastic value, do-it-all integrated amplifier with great sound and loads of power	Gorgeous-sounding premium priced integrated with a wonderfully rich, natural tone	Svelte, stylish integrated package that plays music in an unerringly satisfying way	Brilliant sounding integrated amplifier design that makes every kind of music you play a real joy	Neat looking well made integrated with a decently musical and nicely smooth sound	Big, powerful and highly flexible high-end integrated amplifier with a solid sound

## Key features

<b>XLR inputs</b>	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Headphone out</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>2 speaker outs</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Remote control</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Phono stage</b>	No	No	No	No	No	Yes