



REGA ELICIT MK5 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Ian Ringstead checks out the Rega Elicit Mk5 integrated amplifier for HiFi Pig.



IAN RINGSTEAD

I used to sell Rega turntables back in the 1980's and a lot has happened since then. When I moved to another retailer and not being able to sell some of my favourite brands, I had sold was a wrench and somewhat frustrating. Brands such as Rega had been our bread and butter products that you could rely on to keep you in business. We had a monthly waiting list for Rega 2 and 3 turntables and rarely did we have any spare to sell. Rega has always been about simplicity, value for money, and an alternative to the established way of thinking. The simplicity of the products should not be underestimated as that is the genius of Roy Gandy the founder and owner. HiFi had become very popular in the late 70's and early 80's and many people wanted a half-decent HiFi system. Records were the main source still and bands

sold albums in the millions. A good turntable was de rigeur and Rega provided a reasonably affordable starting point. So where does all this preamble take us? To the present time. Cheaper products still sell in HiFi but not in the quantities they used to, therefore, companies had to become smart to stay alive, and this is precisely what Rega has done.

REGA ELICIT MK5 BUILD

Rega produces a wide range of products and can provide a whole system from source through to amp and speakers. Japanese companies were masters at this back in the day but British brands were not so hot in this one-name fits all approach. The current product I am reviewing is the latest iteration in Rega's amplifier range. The Elicit MK5 follows the lines of simplicity with a clean and uncluttered design

REVIEW



but adds a twist with this new model by including a DAC with several inputs as well as a decent moving magnet turntable input. For Rega, adding a DAC is quite radical because they tend to major on analogue reproduction. It's a very welcome addition though as the competition have had built in DACs for some time. The DAC module is a hybrid design allowing processing up to 24 bit/ 192KHz PCM which will be fine for the majority of users, but some may wish for DSD as well. The inputs are COAX and optical but no USB or Bluetooth are included, so some will be disappointed.

On the analogue side there are five inputs, including the phono stage for moving magnet, and a single headphone output jack on the front panel. The integrated can even be used as a separate power amp, albeit with no level control.

The amplifier is solid and quite heavy with functional controls, but the input selection is via an input button you must scroll through which is a bit tedious as opposed to individual button selection. I noticed in use that the amp got quite hot after a few hours of use, especially if I drove it hard. Internally the amp is a clean modern design with a large toroidal transformer, a FET based preamp, and a solid power amp design. Output is rated at 105 watts per channel into 8 Ohms and it is remote-controlled - which is nice to have. The remote is a generic plastic unit but performed well.

HOW DID THE REGA ELICIT MK5 SOUND?

I used my resident Acoustic Signature NEO Double X turntable and an AT VM95SH moving magnet cartridge. CD wise I used my Gato CDD-1 and finally my Jern 12WS speakers with Way and Tellurium Q cabling. It took about an hour for the Elicit MK5 to warm up properly before coming on song. I found driving it hard got the best out of the amp, but that isn't to say it was lacking at lower listening levels and this was just my own personal taste. The sound was tight with good control and clarity. Whether I played rock, jazz, or contemporary music grip was admirable for a unit in this price range. Weather Report are a well-known Jazz/ rock band that had legendary bassist Jaco Pastorius in their lineup in the 80's. A sublime fretless

bassist the Elicit Mk 5 handled this musician's skills with ease. Along with Joe Zawinul's keyboards and Wayne Shorter's Saxophone the sometimes-shrill sound balance wasn't harsh on my ears with the Elicit in the system. Some systems haven't been as kind, so I soon tended to turn them off or try another album. A good unit will allow you to listen more freely to a piece of music and even discover new attributes one had missed before. The Elicit Mk 5 strode the line of good balance, controlling the overall sound well.

Female vocals fared well and I really enjoyed Stevie Nick's 24 Karat Gold tour album. Rhianon and Gold Dust Woman shone as standout tracks with thrashy guitars and shimmering cymbals. Live albums can be tricky to reproduce because unless the recording and mixing are done correctly then the results can disappoint. The Elicit MK 5 managed to reveal the details as intended and in conjunction with my Acoustic Analogue turntable was a successful outcome. The detail and layering were excellent, along with the raw excitement of the live event being portrayed well. I can hark back to my youth when I listened to vinyl exclusively and the detail I now hear is on a different level than then. It was always there on the record but the equipment wasn't letting it through - not so the case now!

If you substituted a valve amp instead then the sound balance would have changed to a smoother rendition, but that's down to personal choice again. I would caution listeners contemplating trying an Elicit Mk 5 out to have a good audition first and see for yourself if it will suit. As I suggest, some may find it a little bright tonally, but careful speaker choice and a smooth source also play their part here. CD sound was great, and I did try the DAC briefly as a comparison to my Gato DAC but the Gato is a much better DAC to be fair. I reckon a lot of people will not be buying this amp for the inbuilt DAC alone!

The moving magnet phono stage was very good as you would expect from a seasoned analogue company. Moving coil would have been a nice addition, but at this price point serious enthusiasts would probably have a separate dedicated preamp, anyway - as I have. Moving magnet has a lot going for it still



and although moving coil is generally the preferred choice, many will be more than happy with the results on offer. The noise levels were good and although you get more hum/hiss from a phono input compared to a standard line level the performance was fine.

I played a lot of earlier Steely Dan albums that are musically fab and thoroughly enjoyed the rhythm and pace the Elicit Mk5 put into vinyl. Hall and Oates are another of my go-to bands on vinyl and always deliver on quality and enjoyment. Their album 'Voices' highlights a turntable's ability as it is superbly recorded and the Elicit Mk 5's abilities came to the fore here. It reminded me of how fantastic vinyl really is still - ignore at your peril. The space and detailing were sublime on this album.

Using a turntable costing three times the price of the Elicit Mk 5 may seem daft, but I didn't have a Rega P3 or P6 (for instance) to hand, but these would be the more likely companions in everyday use, and, anyway, it showed how capable the Elicit Mk5 phono stage was.

Top to bottom end was clean and fast with good

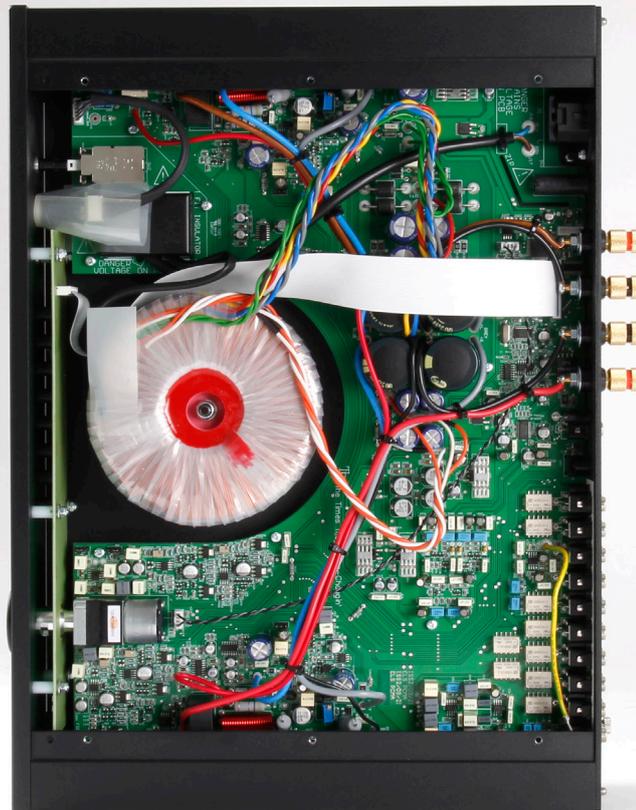
space and realism which vinyl always tends to deliver even on a cheaper setup.

The headphone output was the usual 6.3 mm jack socket and worked well on my Sennheiser HD 580 and Beyer DT880 headphones. There would be no point overspending on headphones with this amp and I doubt that the output will be used that often. A serious headphone user will get a good headphone amplifier and spend a lot more money for that purpose. I started out with headphones as a teenager because I couldn't afford speakers in my first system, but as soon as I could afford speakers I did and never looked back. Headphones either solve a problem of privacy or preference.

CONCLUSION

It's 30 years since the original Elicit integrated amplifier appeared but Rega has managed to update it for the modern era and provided us with a top-rate, mid-priced integrated to rival the competition out there. This is a hotly contested price point at £2000 which British rivals excel at as well as foreign competition. The choice for music lovers has now got better!

REVIEW





AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Solidly made and functional, this slimline amp will blend in easily into any system where space is a premium and long-term reliability is a must. I liked the red display against the black case-work

Sound Quality:

Upfront is the word I would use. It's not a shy-sounding amp and it will freshen up any system that may have lacked some oomph

Match carefully to not end up with a harsh-sounding setup

Value For Money:

In a competitive area and the Elicit Mk5 has tough opposition, especially from these shores and so the potential customer may want to compare a few options if possible. It's an area we Brits seem to excel in

We Loved:

Sleek design that is functional and has flexibility with plenty of inputs and a built-in DAC

Remote is very handy

We Didn't Love So Much:

Plain in looks it won't impress the glitterati brigade

Gets hot so keep well ventilated and don't stack with other components

Price: £2000

Elevator Pitch Review: Rega knows its customers well and continues to impress. British design and build are a bonus you don't get too often these days, so to keep competitive is not easy to achieve. Some companies have resorted to building their products in China to keep costs down, but Rega remains resolute to its mantra of British all the way through from design to production.

