



One-two punch

The new flagship amp from Rega splits into two boxes for the first time in a while.

Ed Selley checks them out

It's been a busy few years for Rega. The company has introduced a huge spread of products and pretty much all of them have been very well received. While it has released a complete range of amplifiers, however, the flagship Osiris offering has been left to get on with being excellent in much the same way as when we reviewed it all the way back in *HFC* 329.

And now, with both the Naia and Aura (*HFC* 446) phono stage needing

a suitable partner, Rega has decided to nominate the Osiris as a starting point and taken the engineering to its logical conclusion. First and foremost, this has meant splitting it into separate pre (Mercury) and power (Solis) amplifiers. In the case of the latter, if you're looking for a huge increase in power over the Osiris, you're going to be disappointed as the Solis delivers exactly 6W more into 8ohm than the integrated.

What Rega has done, however, is beef up every aspect of the circuit.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rega Mercury
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
Preamplifier
WEIGHT
14kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
435 x 97 x 380mm
FEATURES
• Inputs: 4x stereo
RCA; XLR; 2x
optical; 2x coaxial;
USB-B
• Record in/out
• XLR/RCA pre out
DISTRIBUTOR
Rega Research
WEBSITE
rega.co.uk

The Solis increases the number of output devices from four to six per channel and ups the rest of the output stage to match. The input amplifier in turn uses two low-noise, LED-referenced current generators. Nichicon audio-grade capacitors have been chosen for critical bypass and decoupling positions, and electrolytic capacitors have been bypassed with polyester capacitors where necessary. Power is via two low-noise, custom-designed, 330VA toroidal transformers that use high-grade, fully bonded core material in an effort to reduce mechanical noise from the transformers when they're operating where any mains distortion might be present. In short, the Osiris might be the starting point, but the Solis builds on it in every way.

The Mercury, meanwhile, is no less comprehensive. It is designed to be as quiet as possible operationally and uses a discrete, differentially driven, fully symmetrical, high-linearity and bandwidth-common base voltage amplifier with high current drive capability and complementary Class A output stage. Key amplification stages use Linear Systems' ultra-low noise

FET (Field Effect Transistor) transistors in the differential quad pair input stages. This is technology that first appeared in the Aura phono stage and contributes to it being extremely quiet, so it's a very logical place to employ them.

The Mercury also emulates some more recent Rega integrated amps by incorporating a DAC. This is a five input (two coaxial and two optical with a single USB-B) design built around a pair of relatively venerable Wolfson WM8742 DACs. Sample rate handling is PCM to 24-bit/192kHz and DSD64 (itself a first for a Rega product). These aren't amazing numbers, but enough for the vast bulk of commercially available music and Rega is betting most owners will have a turntable as their main source.

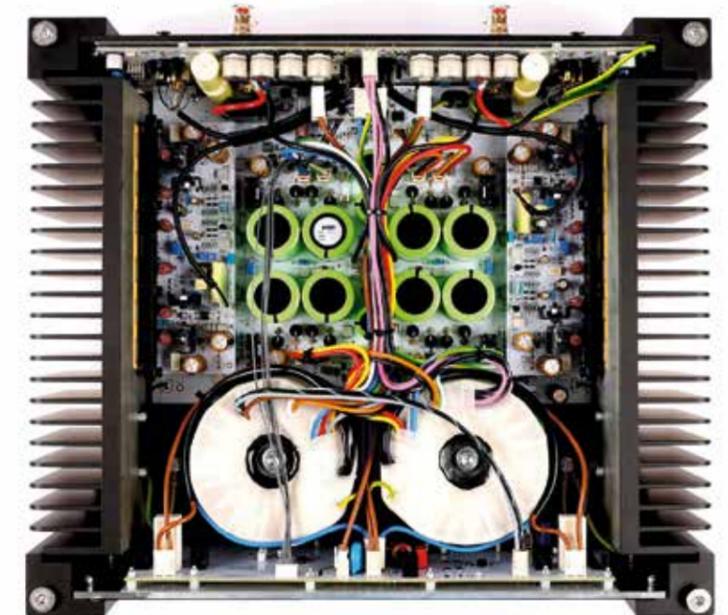
The digital inputs are partnered by four RCA line inputs, one tape loop and a single XLR in. There are XLR and RCA pre outs and matching inputs on the Solis with Rega strongly

After an hour you'll realise you are in the presence of a very special pairing

preferring RCA. The company argues that the core of the Mercury and Solis is single-ended and purposefully so. They have balanced connectivity in addition to their single-ended connections to simplify their use in systems where products from manufacturers with a more pro-balanced outlook are involved, but Rega's position on this is that the two units should be connected over RCA and it goes to the effort of including a suitable cable with them.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rega Solis
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
Power amplifier
WEIGHT
24.8kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
435 x 140 x 385mm
FEATURES
• Inputs: stereo
RCA; XLR
• XLR/RCA pre out
DISTRIBUTOR
Rega Research
WEBSITE
rega.co.uk



Both units use the reference-level version of Rega's current casework design. What I find very clever about this is that you can place an io (*HFC* 492) next to them and – despite the 13 grand price difference – can clearly see they are from the same company. The Mercury and Solis balance this familial resemblance with a level of fit and finish that justifies their asking price; helped by details like an all-new remote that allows for direct input selection.

Sound quality

The other justification for the existence of the Mercury and Solis is the performance. Again, something that this duo does a quite brilliant job of is delivering many of the same performance attributes that have won

people over to the Rega cause at lower price points. Give the Mercury and Solis Jorge Ben's sensational *África Brasil*, and all of the joy and intensity that permeates this album is beautifully reproduced. There isn't a time signature or beat on this long player that the duo doesn't nail with an assurance that can only be fully appreciated when listen to something less talented.

Don't go thinking that the flagships don't bring anything of their own to the party, though. There is effortless power on hand here, the sort that ensures that kick drums have the impact you feel while orchestral swell is a visceral, room-loading presence. Running into our resident Kudos Titan 505 (*HFC* 451), the Solis takes the already superb low-end of the





standmounts and ekes some extra heft without interfering with its superb definition and agility.

The tonal realism that's available is also profoundly impressive. The sensational *Trumpets Of Michel-Ange* by Ibrahim Maalouf truly comes alive via the Mercury and Solis because the duo combines the ability to define each instrumentalist as a presence in their own right and then ensures that each of them is an absolutely believable part of a sensational recording. These are not devices that

The effortless power on show ensures that kick drums have impact you can feel

go in for the 'blow you away in the first 15 minutes' approach to performance, but after an hour you'll be absolutely convinced you are in the presence of something very special.

Testing the two units split up from one another suggests it's the Solis that is the true star of the show. It combines unburstable reserves of power with a sweetness and overall forgiveness that allow it to tackle a truly huge spread of genres and recording qualities. This is a subtly



HOW IT COMPARES
Close in price to the **Bryston Bi200 (HFC 535)** and **Chord Electronics' Hugo TT2 (HFC 468)** I used with it when reviewed, the division of labour is different (one-box amp with separate decoding versus pre/power with onboard digital). At the most basic level, it's the Bryston and Chord's job to tell you what the problem is and the Rega's job to fix it. The Bryston and Chord are more revealing and detailed but more ruthless, while the Regas are able to keep material that reveals itself as somewhat grim on the Bryston and Chord sounding enjoyable. Both options are superb, but the Rega is the easier to live with.

different approach to some rivals in that it's not here to tell you everything that is wrong with the music you love. Instead, it's here to ensure that what you listen to is delivered in a way that makes you want to hear more.

The Mercury is, in most regards, every bit as talented as its sibling. Used via the analogue inputs with various turntables, even via a comparatively lowly Cyrus Phono Signature (HFC 408), it demonstrates the same effortless transparency and forgiveness, and it's also a pleasure to live with thanks to a beautifully judged volume ramp. The digital board is a fractional bottleneck to the capabilities of the Mercury, though. It's extremely musical and usefully forgiving, but there are external options that can deliver more; both in a technical and detail sense. However, used as an analogue preamp, the Mercury is very special and anyone combining it with a Naia and Aura front-end is very likely to use the digital inputs fairly infrequently.

Conclusion

It's worth noting that the whole design ethos of the Mercury and Solis speaks to Rega's understanding of its customers that rationalises its decisions around specification and what they are likely to need them to

do. The pair needs to do justice to a serious vinyl front-end. It needs to be able to handle some streaming and possibly a library of ripped CDs (or potentially a CD transport). It also needs to handle pretty much any sub-£20k speaker without complaint as this is an area where Rega will have no say in the customer's choice. The Mercury and Solis nail the brief with absolute assurance; delivering a Rega experience honed to perfection. They represent the culmination of a remarkable few years for the company, which suggests it has no intention of slowing down ●

Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT: MERCURY

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Exceptional transparency and engagement; build; connectivity

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Digital board has some performance limitations

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Flexible and exceptionally capable, particularly via the analogue inputs

FEATURES



OVERALL



Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT: SOLIS

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Powerful yet forgiving sound; easy to partner

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Very heavy

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: A sublime combination of power and delicacy that makes for one of the very best power amplifiers anywhere near the price

FEATURES



OVERALL

