

Simaudio Moon Neo 240i

By Hi-Fi Choice

The hi-fi market hardly needs another amp with digital connectivity but we have a strong hunch you'll want this one



Despite the burgeoning popularity of the one-stop shop hi-fi

component – to which one need only add speakers for a complete system covering all modern, non-physical digital media requirements – not

everyone wants that degree of convergence and will happily settle for an integrated amp with on-board DAC and a decent phono stage.

Canada's Moon by Simaudio has, perhaps inevitably, just cracked that particular nut with the introduction of the Moon 240i integrated amp/DAC – essentially the company's highly regarded Nêo Ace streaming integrated amp minus the streaming bit and a helpful £710 from the Ace's asking price. As such, the £1,990 240i represents a new entry point for Moon's neatly tiered integrated amp range, which peaks – via the 340i and 600i – with the 2x 175W 700i.

We're some way from that with the 240i, which quotes a more modest 50 Class A/B Watts per channel but, as ever, this is only a rough guide to speaker-driving ability and no guide at all to sound quality, an area in which Moon amps usually excel. *Sans* streaming it may be, but the 240i is still a sophisticated product with the high standards of design, engineering and build associated with the brand.

The thick end of £2k is by no means a modest investment for an integrated amp with digital connectivity, but the 240i looks and feels just as classy as Moon's more expensive offerings. The slim, rack-friendly proportions are appreciated, as is the reassuringly meaty (rather than wrist-wrenchingly heavy) 11kg weight. Moon designs have the knack of looking highly distinctive yet sensibly smart and neat, and the 240i is no different.

The fascia, while not as pared back as some, is a pretty straightforward affair. The flat panel section (elegantly flanked by curved cheeks available in chassis-matching black, as here, or a contrasting silver finish) hosts the nicely responsive key function buttons and crisp OLED window, which confines itself to displaying just the chosen input and status of the finely stepped gain level, set either by the large, smooth-acting volume knob to the right of the panel

or with the stylishly flush-buttoned but fiddly remote. There's also a 6.35mm jack for plugging in your headphones. The set-up menu is accessed by the front panel buttons and can be used to rename inputs, set their volume levels and even extinguish the display and little blue LED beneath the Moon logo – something of a must if you like listening at night in a darkened room.

Digital duties are handled by the 240i's asynchronous DAC, which supports hi-res files up to 32-bit/384kHz and DSD256. The usual input playback hierarchy has to be considered, though: DSD and 32-bit files through the amp's USB Type-B port, 16 and 24-bit files through the amp's four additional digital inputs, evenly split between coaxial and optical. The coaxials are good for up to 192kHz, while the Toslink optical inputs don't allow anything above 96kHz. That said, all digital bases are covered including, of course, streaming. Moon makes an excellent one called the Nēo MiND (*HFC 427*), which potential 240i customers may already own. But it would be pointless buying both from scratch, as the Nēo MiND's streaming tech is much more cost effectively incorporated in the all-in-one Nēo Ace.

The analogue section has two pairs of RCA line-level inputs plus a high quality moving-magnet phono stage (no amp manufacturer would dare exclude turntable users these days), and there's a 3.5mm input at the front – next to the 6.35mm headphone jack – so you can plug in your portable music player or smartphone. As with other Moon components, there are SimLink, RS-232 and IR ports for custom-install environments and the analogue inputs are configurable to a 'pass-through' mode for use with a home-theatre processor, allowing its own volume control to be used.

I've been fortunate to have a number of seriously talented amps pass through my listening room of late. Some pure analogue, others with built-in DACs – all a tempting chunk less expensive than the Nēo 240i. A few have kept me close to the edge of my seat with their whip-crack speed, brio and enthusiasm, others have been so smooth and refined that they've come close to seeing me nod off. I've become accustomed to swapping between them depending on my mood and the music I fancy playing. Extreme audiophile behaviour, I know, but, if nothing else, it reinforces my belief that, contrary to what the scientists among us assert, amplifiers that measure well within certain tightly defined parameters do not all sound the same.

Some, however, do get their act so together, their balance of attributes so finely tuned, their ability to play without favour or prejudice so sorted, that the sonic outcome – whatever my mood, whatever the music – is just right. Like planet Earth itself, they're in the Goldilocks zone. And, to date, for me the Moon 240i is among the very best of those.

Sound quality

Starting, as usual, with my regular Cambridge Audio CXC CD transport (*HFC 401*) connected to both the 240i's internal DAC and a Chord Hugo 2 (*HFC 428*), and with the amp driving ATC's three-way floorstanding SCM40 (*HFC 389*), Michael McDonald's first new studio album in 17 years, *Wide Open*, is first in the tray. Despite being in possession of one of the great soul voices (getting thicker and more soulful with age, I'd say), it isn't always easy to work out what he's singing. Ol' cotton mouth is a cruel but apt nickname. His singing on the more melancholy of the two ballads on the album, *Honest Emotion*, is a case in point but perfectly illustrates why the 240i is so special.

With some amps, Rotel's excellent RA-1572 (*HFC 428*) for instance, I find myself leaning forwards, drawn to the indistinct parts of McDonald's delivery, trying to unpick the syllables at

the expense of the music. The Moon amp is no more articulate, no better at deciphering the lyrics. Point is, you don't care. You could be sitting next to MM in the recording studio and his muffled enunciation would be no easier to understand. The 240i doesn't sweat that, it takes you straight to the lilting beauty of the song, the honest emotion, the bucolic feel to the arrangement with its gently clucking banjos and silky strings. The result is that you feel relaxed and satisfied at the end of the track, not slightly bemused.

And it's this ability, time and again, whatever the format or genre of music, that pulls you in and makes you want to keep listening. The Moon Nêo 240i isn't prescriptive, it doesn't try to impose itself on the music. In this respect, it's not unlike the £1,500 Hegel H90 (*HFC 427*) I also have to hand. Where it leaves the Hegel behind is in the quality of its on-board digital decoding (a lot closer to the Hugo 2's) and a generally more expansive, three-dimensional and dynamically expressive presentation. With the Hugo 2 in play and David Gilmour's *Live At Pompeii* CD in the tray, however, you won't wish you were there – simply close your eyes and you will be.

Conclusion

Here's an integrated amp for the long haul. From the moment it lands on my equipment rack, I feel no desire to remove it. But for the merry-go-round that is reviewing, and purely for the purposes of listening to and enjoying music, it could stay there period. It's the Goldilocks factor that's so appealing – the ability to make whatever you play sound natural, believable and just right – that's so alluring, and a rare quality at any price. Very highly recommended. *DV*

DETAILS

Product: Simaudio Moon Nêo 240i

Origin: Canada

Type: Integrated amplifier

Weight: 11kg

Dimensions (WxHxD) 429 x 89 x 366mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 2x 50W (8ohm)
- 32-bit/384kHz and DSD256-capable DAC
- Inputs: 2x RCA; 1x USB; 2x coaxial; 2x optical
- MM phono stage