

hi-fi news

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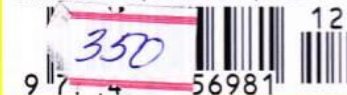
Your guide to the
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UK £4.50 US \$10.99 Aus \$10.50






Valve integrated amplifier. Rated at 2x75W
 Made by: Icon Audio, UK
 Supplied by: Icon Audio, UK
 Telephone: 0116 2440593
 Web: www.iconaudio.com



Icon Audio Stereo 60 MK III (IIIIm) (£2220)

Over the years Leicester's Icon Audio has established itself as a small company building rugged, well-made valve amplifiers that offer great value for money: it's no wonder its demonstration rooms at hi-fi shows are packed with enthusiasts. The amp here is the largest integrated in Icon Audio's wide range of hand-made valve amplifiers. Revised last year, the Stereo 60 has improved transformers and, while compatible with KT88/6550 power valves, it now ships with the new, higher output Tung-Sol KT120 tubes that

'Free's "Soon I Will Be Gone" was full-bodied, and gloriously analogue'

are being manufactured in Russia by New Sensor.

Its Class A front end employs two 6SL7 triode first stage tubes, with two 6SN7s used as drivers. The Stereo 60 III's output stage can be switched to give the user a choice between ultralinear and triode modes. Output valve idle current uses the fixed bias method which must be adjusted via trim

pots set into the top plate (Icon Audio supplies a multimeter and full instructions for the task). However, as we go to press Icon Audio has just announced the '60 IIIIm' version of this amplifier which features a built-in bias adjustment meter.

Internal assembly is entirely point-to-point, the only circuit board being a small one for the remote control receiver/decoder. Passive components include brand-name polypropylene capacitors, metal film and wire-wound resistors and an ALPS motorised potentiometer. Source switching is manual, the handset simply having gain up/down buttons and a mute button that fades the volume down.

A further feature is that sensitivity may be switched from 'high' to 'low' allowing the unit to function as a power amplifier fed from another preamplifier.



HOLOGRAPHIC

Immediately the acoustic guitar began strumming in 'Soon I Will Be Gone' from Free's *Highway* album of 1970, re-mastered for CD in 2002 [Island IMCD 283/586226-2], it was obvious that the Icon amplifier serves up solid, holographic sound

ABOVE: A copper alloy top plate adds a touch of luxury. Front panel has standby, tape monitor and ultralinear/triode mode switches. Three line inputs (four with the tape loop) are provided at the rear. A high/low sensitivity switch allows the integrated to be easily used as a power amplifier

images. Some amplifiers can make this vintage recording appear a tad thin and dated, but the Stereo 60 III made it sound full-bodied and gloriously 'analogue' – despite the fact that we were listening to a digital remaster for CD! Instruments were projected into the room with three-dimensional presence.

The Icon delivered tremendous bass power along with a sense of effortless cruising, even with the in-your-face recording of Donald Fagen's 'Ruby Baby' [*The Nightfly* – 24-bit/48kHz DVD-Audio disc], which can manifest a steely edge. High frequencies were smooth and extended, especially in triode mode which added a touch of warmth and air, although we generally preferred the crisper focus and greater power on offer with ultralinear.

It doesn't reveal quite the speed and detail possible from much costlier tube amps, but despite sounding just slightly thick in the bass through our large Townshend monitors it could still deliver thunderous pressure waves. (Our test tracks included Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in D*, BWV 532, performed by Michael Murray in the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, and released in 1983 [Telarc CD-80088] – its ascending passage on the pedals towards the end of the fugue will sort out the men from the boys!)

VERDICT

The Stereo 60 III sounds luxurious, its ultralinear and (lower) triode output modes allowing one to experiment at the simple flick of a switch. By the way, while not shown in our photograph here, the Stereo 60 III and 60 IIIIm do come provided with a Plexiglass valve cover. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	83W / 80W
Dynamic power (<2% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	95W / 95W / 75W / 20W
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	2.9–4.1ohm
Frequency response (20Hz–20kHz)	–0.55dB to –0.90dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/75W)	42mV / 375mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/75W)	86.9dB / 105.7dB
Distortion (20Hz–20kHz, 10W/8ohm)	0.065–2.3%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	200W / 380W
Dimensions (WHD)	440x230x400mm