

AUDIO FILE

Integrated amplifier. Rated at 200W/8ohm
 Made by: Citech Co., Ltd, South Korea
 Supplied by: Henley Audio Ltd, UK
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 Web: <https://eng.hifirose.com>; www.henleyaudio.co.uk
 Price: £5499



HiFi Rose RA180

South Korea's HiFi Rose sure knows how to capture the attention of audiophiles, first by launching do-it-all streaming players featuring huge touchscreens and options galore, and now this 'steampunk' integrated amplifier with no fewer than sixteen loudspeaker terminals.

Yet unlikely as it seems, the RS150 network player [HFN Jun '21], with its massive 14in display, and the all-analogue RA180 amplifier share a common denominator. The giveaway is the seventeen buttons, knobs, and sliders on the front fascia, together with some VU meters and cogs thrown in for good

'You'll be tempted to crank the volume high and let the RA180 rock'

measure. Whatever industrial design eccentricities HiFi Rose might embrace, the brand is all about offering a multitude of features.

The RA180 also offers something 'different' by housing four GaN (gallium nitride) transistor-based Class D amp modules under its precision-milled bonnet. The higher switching speed and power handling of these transistors improves the linearity of HiFi Rose's homebrew modules, a claim reinforced by its invention of the term 'Class AD' operation. Class A distortion at low levels with the efficiency of Class D? That's what the creative licence would suggest.

The amp's retro-futuristic styling features myriad dials and controls, combined as if by a Swiss watchmaker's atelier taken over by a Red Bull promotional team. The diversity of control types initially looks chaotic, but there's a form of organisation that divides the front panel into functional zones, and once mastered, using the RA180 is a wonderfully tactile experience.

Some controls are typical, such as those for input selection, volume, and (defeatable) tone control. More unusual are ones in the phono stage and high-pass crossover zones, which let you dial in a variety of pre-RIAA equalisation curves. Wouldn't it have been more useful to offer variable MC loading?

The aforementioned four identical amp modules claim a total output of 4x200W, and thanks to the sixteen speaker terminals, they can be used together when utilising one of the RA180's specialised modes, either to bi-amplify a pair of speakers (two amplifiers per channel) or bridging each pair into a higher-powered stereo configuration, where the output becomes a whopping 2x400W.

DRIVING ABILITY

The unusual design and feature-rich specification of the RA180 almost hide the fact that this is, at its heart, a punchy, authoritative and thrilling-sounding amplifier. It has a slightly warm character that pairs nicely with revealing loudspeakers, and a strong sense of driving ability. For an

ABOVE: The RA180's substantial ~17kg weight is almost entirely due to its thick alloy chassis – the standard of fit and finish is superb while inbuilt Wi-Fi allows app control. On the fascia a geared dial drives a high quality volume control, discreet meters provide an indication of output while a selection of levers, knobs and a slider cater for balance, input, tone, HP filter, phono amp settings, mute and more

integrated design, there's plenty of grunt on tap, and a sound signature that's somewhat reminiscent of the pre-HyPex Marantz units of yore.

Massive Attack's 'Angel' [Mezzanine; Virgin 7243 8 45599 2 2] remains a track to challenge claims of amplifier power, and the RA180 handled this moody piece, and its complex deep percussion, without stress. There was also no lack of energy playing Jack White's 'Fear Of The Dawn' [Third Man Records TMR-752; 96kHz/24-bit]. This features overdriven guitars and a relentless drumkit, and the temptation is there to crank the volume and just let the RA180 rock out – which it does, ably. Using a Pro-Ject X1 [HFN Aug '19] with mid-output MM pick-up, it also steered the vinyl version of the album with confidence. Tracks were presented on a quiet background, dynamically and rhythmically assured.

Changing over to a discrete, bi-amp configuration didn't add much to our enjoyment of these pieces, but the difference was more apparent on the contemporary folk of Lizz Wright's *Grace* [Concorde 0888072028654]. Here the four amps within the RA180 drove our pair of Canton 7K floorstanders [p97] with ease, ensuring the drums in 'Barley' resounded through the room, while increasing soundstage scale and separation. In this instance, HiFi Rose's quest for extreme versatility really paid off.

VERDICT

Even if you don't relish the eccentric but well thought-out fascia of this feature-packed integrated, the Class D topology, with four GaN transistor amps, offers oodles of power and an engrossing performance. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	260W / 275W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	255W / 483W / 296W / 167W
Output imp. (20Hz–20kHz/80kHz)	0.04-0.38ohm / 22ohm
Freq. response (20Hz–20kHz/100kHz)	-0.04dB to +0.04dB / -2.8dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/200W)	140mV / 1970mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/200W)	67.5dB / 90.5dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10W)	0.0008-0.045%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	45W / 255W (one channel)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	430x110x350mm / 16.7kg