

AMPLIFIERS WITH ADDED VALUE





ACE UP ITS SLEEVE

Simaudio's Moon Neo Ace comes damn close as to being the do-it-all integrated amplifier for the audiophile

The finest sounding and most complete [all-in-one] available" is the kind of statement that grabs the attention, and with the Neo Ace the Moon brand – and Simaudio, the manufacturer behind it, claims to have a music system of the Extra class. Which, for 3500 euros, you should probably expect it to be.

What we have here is a high-performance and moderately powerful integrated amplifier, into which the Quebec company has added its MIND (Moon Intelligent Network Device) technology. This encompasses a network player with a graphical user interface and, in addition to the streaming client, an HD DAC, which handles PCM data up to 32 bits/384 kHz and DSD256. It also supports even the most demanding streaming service, Tidal.

Five digital inputs are provided plus Bluetooth (aptX), WiFi and Ethernet/LAN, and there are also two analog line-level inputs (with an addition 3.5mm analog input on the front panel for portable devices), and a headphone output along with the speaker connections. The analog inputs are configurable, so that you can set one for example at fixed level for use with a home theater processor.

There's no radio or CD drive, cementing the role of the Ace as an integrate amp with benefits, as described in the headline of this article, but there is a high-quality phono preamp. So the ACE also works with turntables, adding to its living-room appeal in this age of the 'vinyl revival'.

There's a superb OLED display, and the Ace can be used directly or via the remote supplied, or controlled from a

smartphone or tablet using its own MIND app.

Of course, it's not news that Moon can build amplifiers. Previous models we have tested from this 'stable' have all performed way above average, and the Canadians even had their fingers in first Magnum Dynalab receiver, which was our top stereo receiver reference for years. And the ACE – its stands for 'A Complete Experience' – feels promising even before you listen: 11kg of weight suggests that the 2 x 54/82 watt (into 8/4 ohm) amp is more than moderately

FORMATS & SERVICES

Supported formats: WAV, FLAC and ALAC to 32/384, DSD 64, DSD 128 and DSD 256 as well as MP3, AIF, AAC, Ogg Vorbis, WMA

Web Streaming services: Tidal

Network: Detects UPnP and DLNA data sources on the local area network, LAN, WLAN, Bluetooth

Control: Remote App for iOS and Android

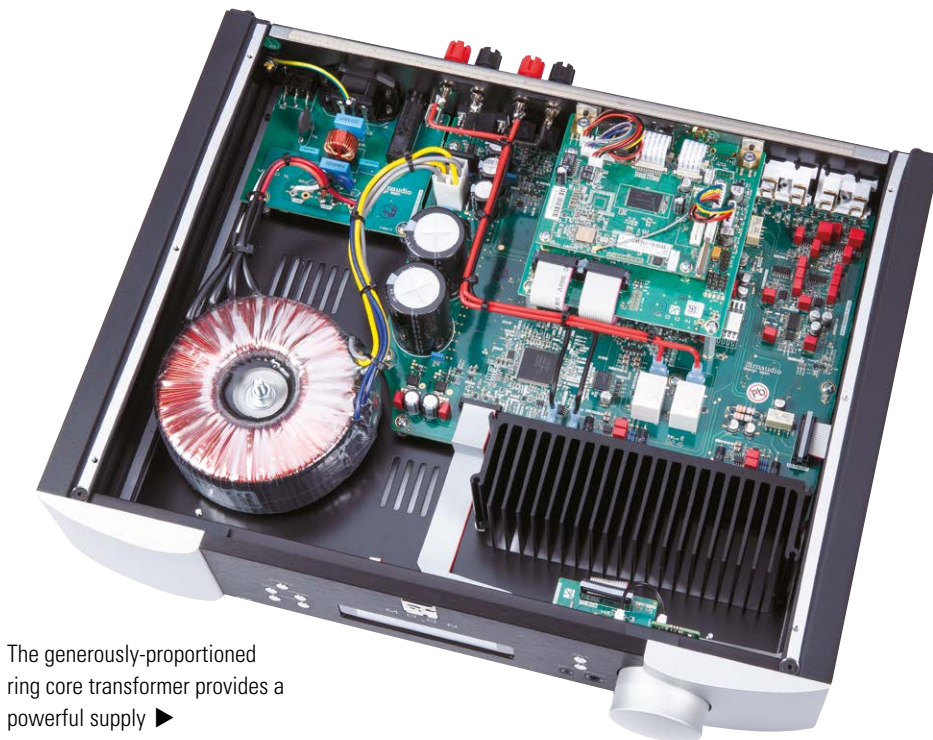
strong, and that its broad-band design will offer a serious challenge to its rivals broadBand designed amp a very serious gauntlet for competition.

In the listening, we exchanged the moon initially against Symphonic Lines' Outstanding RG-14 edition, a comparably priced integrated amp of purist design – without the network functions or DAC – but with twice as much power, with the Canton Vento 896 speakers. Unlike with other comparisons, this was no demolition job, with the Moon offering a very high standard of competition to what is already a highly-accomplished integrated.

Moon in Listening

The Moon, initially fed by the STEREO Listening Test CD played both via a Rega player and then from the network, drew up a well-layered, clearly defined sound-stage imprinted with vigor and rich timbres, filling the room with sound. The presentation was emotional and music, but without being overblown, underpinned as it was with a solid foundation of bass.

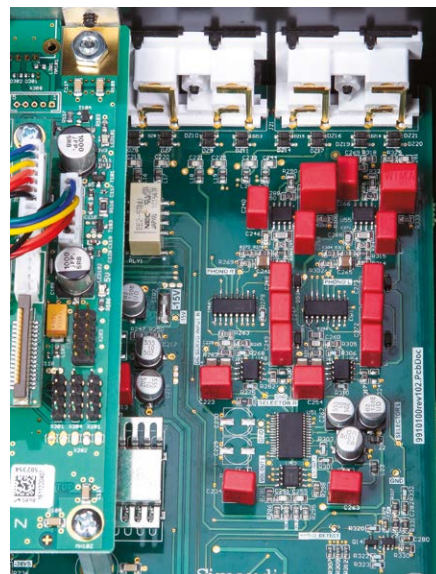
With the change to Norah Jones's debut album, the singer was delivered in an almost sculptural, believable three-dimensionality and so finely depicted in the microdynamic details, that with eyes closed one could almost imagine her standing in the room inviting the listener to "Come Away with Me".



The generously-proportioned ring core transformer provides a powerful supply ▶

The Moon was wonderful with the rather large, potent Canton loudspeaker, keeping it on a short leash, but it worked just as well with the compact B&W 805 D3. All the way up to massive levels, the sound of Pink Floyd's "The Wall" remained stable and audible, rarely leaving us wishing for even more performance. And while the amplifier here is of exquisite quality, neither the DAC nor the entire network-compatible digital part hampers these qualities, the sound quality being just as impressive. One cannot fail to give this ultimately inexpensive all-rounder a judgment with distinction – "Moon cum Laude". Musicality, equipment and technology are in harmony with each other.

Long-time, passionate staff currently own Simaudio, including audiophiles and experienced engineers, and one can only hope more such convincing products follow from Quebec! **Tom Frantzen**



▲ The material and workmanship quality of the Moon are high, the internal layout being both multi-layered and functionally divided for optimal sound quality.



◀ The remote control sensor is good, but it does not work as well as the device itself.

The moon has connections for up to four analogue and five digital devices, preamplifier and speaker outputs plus Wi-Fi, LAN and Bluetooth. ▼

