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**Moon Neo Ace | Streaming system | £2500**

# Ace: ace

**FOR** Engaging sound; good control app; excellent build

**AGAINST** A little more definition would be good



Control the Ace using its remote or brilliant MiND Controller app



**If you're going** to have 'Neo' and 'Ace' in your product name, you'd better be aiming high. Moon has certainly aimed for the stars - all five of them - with this all-in-one.

Ace stands for 'A Complete Experience', and that's exactly what Moon is offering. It has everything you need from a modern hi-fi, packed into one box. It's an integrated amplifier with a high-resolution DAC and streamer. It has Bluetooth, wi-fi and internet radio. And it has a phono stage.

All you need to do is add your favourite pair of speakers and - *voilà!* - you can start playing music from virtually any source.

## All you need in one box

Inside, there's a Class A/B amplifier that outputs 50W per channel into 8 ohms. Then there's a hi-res DAC that supports everything from Spotify streams and MP3s to 32-bit/384kHz and DSD256 files. We don't know anyone with hi-res files that high but rest assured the Moon will play all your 24-bit WAV, FLAC and AIFF tracks.

The streaming section is where the Ace is at its most interesting and versatile. You can stream all songs from your laptop or NAS, as long as they're all connected to the same network. You get access to vTuner's internet radio stations, and there's also native Tidal support for streaming CD-quality music. With AptX Bluetooth, you can ping songs from your smartphone or tablet. You'll have to pair your device through the Moon's menu, but it connects swiftly.

Connecting the Moon to your home network can be done via wi-fi or, for a more stable connection, the ethernet port. It connects instantly too, and we don't experience any dropouts in testing - which is excellent news if you'll be streaming a lot.

In terms of physical connections, there's a good spread of analogue and digital inputs at the back of the unit. There are two pairs of RCA inputs (and one output), two inputs apiece for optical and coaxial, and a USB type-B for connecting your laptop.

Vinyl hasn't been forgotten: a built-in moving-magnet phono stage means you can plug your turntable directly into the Ace.

At the front, there's a 3.5mm input to plug in music players, and a 6.3mm headphone port.

One of the most crucial things for a successful hi-fi system is how easy it is to live with. For a networked product like the Ace, which aims to play and stream everything, it becomes all the more important that simple operations don't frustrate you before you even have the chance to enjoy listening. The Moon gets that absolutely right.

## A dream of a control app

Everything just works. Connecting to the internet is done instantly. Changing volume using the remote or the unit's dial is smooth and instinctive. The MiND Controller app works like a dream.

MiND stands for Moon Intelligent Network Device, and it's the control brain of Moon's streaming module. The remote control is nicely built and works intuitively with the unit, but it doesn't get you very far when you want to access all the songs in your vast networked library.



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**"Everything just works. Connecting to the internet is instant. Changing the volume is smooth and instinctive. The MiND app works like a dream"**

## IN DETAIL...

**1** Supports wired and wireless, AptX Bluetooth and Tidal

**2** Enjoy DSD256 and 32-bit/384kHz files via either of the coax inputs, USB or wi-fi

**3** Rated power is 50W into 8 ohms



"The Ace has all you need in a modern hi-fi. It's an amplifier with a hi-res DAC and streamer. It has Bluetooth, wi-fi, internet radio and a phono stage"



## KEY FEATURES



50W per channel

32-bit/384kHz

Hi-res playback



Control app

That's where the MiND Controller app comes in. With it, you can select songs from every source - across the analogue inputs, your NAS library, your smartphone, Tidal and internet radio. It's fast and plays songs without delay.

The app doesn't try to be too clever. The interface is simple but neat, with menus and albums organised in a logical way. Album artwork pops up as you smoothly scroll through the list. We don't encounter any hiccups or lags, even after a full week's use. That's impressive for any app.

### Smart and effective

The design of the Ace is similarly unfussy. It's smart, elegant, and sturdily built. The aluminium chassis and brushed front are reassuringly solid and of a high standard.

The curved edges make it look a tad more interesting than your standard rectangular box. The neat fascia keeps things uncluttered, with only a handful of buttons, a responsive volume dial and a prominent, easy to read OLED display. Even from an angle you'll easily be able to read the song/artist name, volume level, time lapsed and file type.

The buttons on the front panel allow you to delve into the Ace's menus, from where you can connect to wi-fi, turn off the display, check for firmware updates and more. Other buttons let you select the input, dim the display and mute the sound.

### You'll be listening long...

The Moon Neo Ace is an inviting performer that makes you want to listen to every single song in your library all over again. We start by streaming from our NAS drive, and five hours later we've pretty much gone through all our favourite albums.

The Ace uncovers loads of detail. You can easily place every instrument in the wide, open soundstage. Play Alice in Chains' *MTV Unplugged* on vinyl and it's obvious they're performing to a live audience. Conversely, Nick Cave's vocals on *(Are You) The One That I've Been Waiting For?* sound intimate in its studio recording.

It may present like an easy-going, smooth presentation, but the Ace also handles dynamic shifts with great control and subtlety. The slow, melancholy build up of the piano and strings in Ólafur Arnalds' *Raein* is communicated beautifully, with the piano notes sounding solid and the music unfolding delicately to tell its story.

The top end soars high with sweetness and sparkle in the dreamy-folk-indie-pop songs from Of Monsters and Men, never sounding too bright or coarse. The more aggressive notes in Rage Against The Machine's songs are delivered with punch.

Some might want a touch more attack and authority to the Moon's presentation. The stop and start of notes could be that bit more definite. Nick Cave's voice has slightly more grit and gravitas when we use our reference (and much more expensive) Naim streamer as the source.

### A captivating listen

That said, the Ace remains a pleasant and captivating listen, but what makes it special is just how smooth and engaging it sounds, regardless of file type or recording quality. Of course, that means the Moon cannot reveal every flaw in a recording but it doesn't trade any of its alacrity, detail definition or fluid dynamics to achieve its wonderfully balanced but exciting sound. It's a tricky thing to get right but the fact Moon has been able to employ that sonic

character across all of the system's inputs - wired and streaming - means that it intends every input to be used.

We can imagine doing so. The streamer section, the phono stage and the USB inputs all have similar tonal characteristics. The biggest surprise was vTuner internet radio. It's usually on the lowest rung of the ladder when it comes to sound quality, but when a hi-fi can make old Savage Garden and Cardigans tunes sound so good over the radio, you know you're in for a treat.

### Musical enjoyment a priority

You won't be surprised to read that we're rather taken with the Moon Neo Ace. It's a wonderfully tuned system that puts enjoyment at the top of its priorities, regardless of what's being played. We love how easy it is to get along with. Its controls and network features work seamlessly and we'd happily live with it in the home.

There are very few systems that combine all your separate hi-fi components so effortlessly in one box. If you're looking for a new hi-fi system but can't bear the thought of filling your home with multiple boxes, the Moon Neo Ace is for you.

## WHAT HI-FI? says

Rating ★★★★★

PERFORMANCE



FEATURES



BUILD



**VERDICT** The Moon Neo Ace is a superb, versatile all-in-one system that will have you playing your favourite tunes for hours