



# Aethical Considerations

**Chris Frankland checks out the powerful new Aethos integrated amplifier from Rega.**

**W**hen I borrowed one of Rega's Elicit-R amplifiers some time ago I found it a tad lacklustre. And so when a retailer friend of mine suggested I ought to hear their new Aethos I was initially a little sceptical – but I trust his ears and

decided to do so.

During a brief phone chat with Terry Bateman, Rega's electronics guru, he told me that the Aethos is based around the same basic core circuitry used in many of its amps, such as the Brio, Elex-R and Elicit-R, but with a better regulated power supply, better quality transistors

and discrete circuitry throughout. It also has an Alps RK27 Blue Velvet motorised volume control as opposed to the standard item found in the Elex-R amp – because it sounds better, said Bateman.

The 125 Watt dual-mono design uses a fully discrete FET-based line amplifier with polypropylene capacitors



throughout the signal path, K-Power reservoir capacitors in the regulated power supply and a high current (16 Amp) output stage using four 160 Watt Sanken Darlington output transistors per channel. It is rated at 125 Watts into 8 Ohms and 156 Watts into 6 Ohms.

The Aethos is pretty solid, weighing in at 17.5kg and measuring 95mm high by 433mm wide by 360mm deep. It uses a combined feedback with passive volume control plus line amplifier, originally developed for the Elex-R, but with discrete FET input op amps using Linear Systems LSK389 FETs.

It also – somewhat unusually these days – has a headphone output, but despite plenty of inputs (five line inputs plus tape), there are no balanced inputs or outputs.

Controls are minimal, the front panel sporting a simple row of buttons for record, mute and input selection. On the far right is the large motorised volume control knob.

### SOUND QUALITY

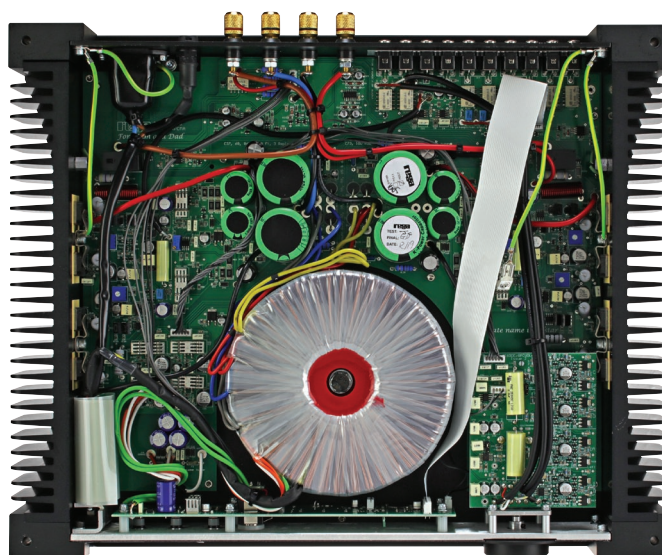
To listen to the Rega amp, I hooked it up to my Audio Note TT3/PSU-3/Arm2/loI turntable fed through an Audio Note S9 transformer and Puresound P10 valve phono stage. Speakers were the Audio Note AN-J LX Hemp. For CD I used an Audio Note CD4.1x, while hi-res files were

played from a Pro-Ject Stream Box Ultra and Pre-Box Digital RS2.

I love the style and sound of guitarist Jonathan Butler, so I was keen to hear how the Aethos would portray his guitar prowess. On the title track from his Deliverance CD, from the first few bars I breathed a sigh of relief, simply relaxed into the music and enjoyed the detail, tunefulness and dynamics of this great little amp. Percussion and drums were detailed, articulate and

had good snap and power, while the note shape and body of Butler's guitar were beautifully conveyed.

Enthused, I reached for the Days Like This CD from Van Morrison. On the title track, I was very pleased with how clean and intelligible his vocals were, how well separated the backing vocals were and the bite and power of the horn section without the stridency that can plague some components. Percussion and drums were again excellent and had plenty



*Large heat sinks at either side and a massive toroidal transformer (centre) of the linear power supply can be seen here.*



The rear panel offers five line level inputs, plus tape in and out and a preamp output, all through RCA phono sockets. One set of loudspeakers only, so no loudspeaker switching. No balanced inputs either.



**Remote control works well and gives you all the functions you need at your fingertips.**

Always rock solid, never overpowering or flabby.

### CONCLUSION

The Aethos is detailed and tuneful throughout the entire frequency band. It is dynamically stronger than the Elicit-R I mention earlier – by large margin – yet subtle and well balanced at the same time. For the money, the Aethos is difficult to fault. Well worth an audition.

### NOEL SAYS -

I had to have a quick listen to Rega's Aethos amplifier. Chris Frankland recommended we get it in after he and his local dealer had both been impressed.

The Aethos has massive bass power, making it dynamically strong, plus a wonderfully dark and deep midrange. I heard some upper mid-band glare through our Martin Logan ESL-X electrostatics, but was uncertain whether this was simply treble revelation, bearing in mind that digital treble commonly has "glare", or running in was needed. Whatever, the Aethos was both punchy and revealing, that's for sure. NK

of subtle detail as well as punch and dynamics.

Next I tried Lambert Hendricks and Bavan's live LP from the Newport Jazz Festival 1963. On Herbie Hancock's Watermelon Man, the Aethos conveyed the atmosphere and delicacy of this lovely mono recording well, perfectly capturing Yolande Bavan's gorgeous vocals, the superb sax of Coleman Hawkins and eloquent trumpet of Clark Terry. Drums were delicate yet powerful and the whole track flowed well.

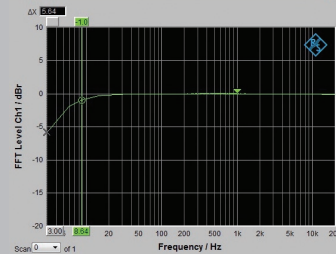
For a bit of hi-res DSD, I chose Stevie Wonder's Master Blaster from Hotter than July. The Rega really nailed its punchy, staccato rhythms, conveyed his vocals eloquently and captured the pace and life of the track convincingly.

On all of these tracks, another impressive aspect of the Rega was its bottom end performance. Bass lines were full, powerful and tuneful.

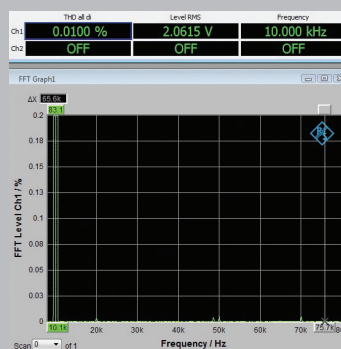
## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Rega Aethos produced 136 Watts into 8 Ohms and a massive 240 Watts into 4 Ohms. That comes out at 170 Watts into 6 Ohms, which most modern loudspeakers nominally are, meaning the Aethos will go very loud indeed.

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



Frequency response ran flat to 80kHz, making this a wide-band amplifier, courtesy of Sanken Darlington-configuration output transistors. At the low end there is a roll off of subsonic output below 8Hz.

Distortion was very low at all outputs and frequencies, measuring 0.003% in the midband (1W, 4Ω) with no rise toward full output. At 10kHz there was a minimal increase to 0.01% (1W, 4Ω) as shown here and just 0.01% 1dB below full output. So a very low distortion amplifier under all conditions.

Sensitivity was high, just 230mV of input being needed for full output (33V), giving a voltage gain of x143 (43dB). Noise was low at -98dB, considering high gain.

The Aethos measured well all round, having no weaknesses. It has massive power and low distortion. NK

<b>Power</b>	<b>136W</b>
<b>Frequency response (-1dB)</b>	<b>8Hz-80kHz</b>
<b>Distortion (10kHz, 1W)</b>	<b>0.01%</b>
<b>Separation (1kHz)</b>	<b>90dB</b>
<b>Noise (IEC A)</b>	<b>-98dB</b>
<b>Sensitivity</b>	<b>230mV</b>

## REGA AETHOS INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £2999



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.**

### VERDICT

Powerful, well balanced, tuneful, dynamic and enjoyable.

### FOR

- will drive even tricky speakers to high levels
- detailed, dynamic and tuneful sound
- well balanced throughout frequency band

### AGAINST

- no balanced inputs
- no phono stage

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