



## ICON AUDIO STEREO 20PP £500

**S**panning 200x310x270mm, this new amp is based upon the classic Leak Stereo 20 design; utilising EL84 and ECC83 valves, this 15W unit also includes a built-in headphone amp. Well made and solid, the Stereo 20PP feels like a piece of engineering. Good first impressions, then...

### SOUND QUALITY

Driving my reference Quad ESL-57 electrostatics proved a difficult task – the Icon sounded like it was pushing a large boulder up a steep hill. So I scaled down the load with AE Radiance One standmounters, a much easier load to handle...

Offering a fine sense of transparency without a hint of forwardness, the Icon first tackled some badly recorded pop CDs. Here, its smooth midrange took the more offensive frequencies off the table. Dynamic CD rock tracks like Skunk Anansie's 'Hedonism' may lack a guttural low frequency punch on the Icon but the amp responded to this well recorded disc by glorifying in its melodic, rhythmic musicality, displaying a well integrated midrange.

On vinyl, the jazzy Ella Fitzgerald rendition of 'I Love Paris' was a revelation. The Icon focused on the vocal, lifting

delicate tonal details off the disc, providing not only nuance and shade to the upper mid but a well balanced presentation. With the Yes track 'Going For The One', the warming aspect of vinyl helped to enhance what little LF was available, while the Icon's upper mid performance

allowed the amp to give a toe tapping, high energy performance. With smaller speakers in a compact room, you can enjoy its peerless midrange abilities which make for a sophisticated and involving listen, but it's ultimately limited in power and punch.

### MEASURED PERFORMANCE

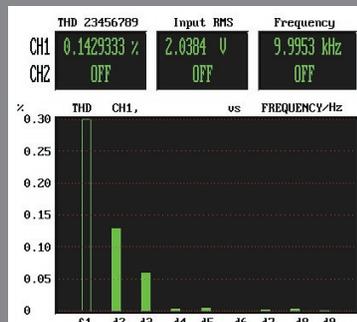
Rated at 15 Watts per channel the 20PP managed 12W at a generous 3% distortion limit, working into 8 Ohms. It manages slightly less, just 10 Watts into 4 Ohms, so the optimal load would appear to be between these values (i.e. 6 Ohms as claimed) and into 6 Ohms it may just make 15 Watts. Overload is relatively soft though, making the precise overload point academic; this is a low power amplifier. With sensitive loudspeakers like the Tannoy DC6Ts reviewed this month it will still go loud. Bear in mind the EL84 output tubes are inexpensive and known to sound sweet. Brute power is not what the 20PP is really about.

Damping factor was low at 6 so fairly well damped loudspeakers are the best match; here Triangle Antals would be better than the Tannoy DC6Ts. Input sensitivity was high, noise low and bandwidth just wide enough, bearing in mind little feedback is used. Distortion levels were low all round and the amplifier had a very stable distortion pattern where second harmonic dominated up to high output levels, whereupon third harmonic from the output transformers appeared. Bass distortion was low up to full output

(0.33%) though, a very good result. The 20PP is a nicely proportioned low power valve amplifier that is simple, cheap to run and will have a lovely sound, if not powerhouse dynamics. NK

Power	12 Watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	10Hz-22kHz
Separation	54dB
Noise	-96dB
Distortion	0.14%
Sensitivity	240mV
Damping factor	6

### DISTORTION



### VERDICT

Small form factor valve amp with refined midrange performance and great value for money.

**ICON AUDIO**  
**STEREO 20PP** £500  
 Icon Audio UK  
 ☎ +44(0)1162 440593  
[www.iconaudio.co.uk](http://www.iconaudio.co.uk)

### FOR

- midrange subtlety
- clarity
- value

### AGAINST

- light bass
- runs hot
- needs careful matching