

hardware review

## 250i V2: Moon quality for less

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## Moon 250i V2 integrated amplifier

If first impressions count, then Moon's new 250i V2 integrated amp makes a huge impact right from the start. It looks like a solid, well-constructed bit of kit from the Canadian company, and it's classy to boot. What I like the most about it is that it instantly comes across as a no-nonsense, straight down the line, old school amp.

Simplicity is the name of the game here, with the 250i V2 featuring five RCA analogue input sockets and a single pair of speaker terminals on its rear panel while the fascia includes a 1/4-inch headphone socket as well as a 3.5mm input socket labelled MP3 which is the amp's only nod to mainstream listening habits, although what we're really talking about is the ability to connect any device (such as your mobile phone) via its headphone or similar line output. Don't mistake simplicity for basic though. The back panel also features pre-out sockets to enable the connection of a separate power amp, thereby offering a future upgrade path. And when it comes to performance, the Moon really shines with a sophisticated sound that's packed full of excitement.

But before we go into all that, as reported earlier this year, version two of the 250i is now also equipped with a phono stage for turntables fitted with moving magnet (MM) cartridges. Now just to manage expectations before we go any further, I offer full disclosure here: because yours truly only has an ageing Linn LP12 with a moving coil (MC) cart to hand, I wasn't able to try the Moon's new phono stage for the purposes of this review.

Aside from the phono stage, this latest version is also said to include an upgraded circuit design, Moon's 'precision-matched' bipolar output transistors for what's claimed to be improved bass response and accurate sonic reproduction, and a new shield for the power supply. Designed and made in Canada, the 250i has a robust and rigid chassis that, according to Moon, minimises the effects of external vibrations. The company adds that the amp operates at a low temperature for what's described as 'ultra-long life expectancy', and backs it all up with a 10-year manufacturer warranty. Now, about that performance.

### Solid all the way

Not only does this integrated amp look and feel solid, but it sounds it too. I usually start my listening with something gentle and classical to ease myself into the aural experience, but with the 250i I just couldn't resist the temptation to get stuck in with something loud and thumping through my Q Acoustics Concept 50 speakers.

With Leftfield's 1995 debut album *Leftism* loaded into my trusted Marantz CD-17 CD player, I hit play and let the opening synths of Song of Life drift across the soundscape and then



waited for the lower frequencies; one minute, one second later, Wham! That super elastic bass bounces in with seismic impact and what made me raise my eyebrows even higher was that the Moon did it all without much effort. There's a truckload of power here, and you don't need to crank the volume too much to get the party started. I wanted more.

I segued into Massive Attack's Angel from their 1998 CD *Mezzanine*, and was blown away by how the low frequencies that are the hallmark of this track, rumbled their way through the air and filled the room with their sinister beats. All that and the volume level was barely up to the eight o'clock position.

Switching to something more modern, I hooked up my MacBook and tried the electronica of Back To You by Two Lanes (featuring Troves) from the 2019 album *Drifting* via Spotify. Once again, the bass digs deep but don't be deceived into thinking this amp is all about brute force rather than delicacy because nothing could be further from the truth. Percussive details and the richness of Troves' vocals are not swamped by the lower notes as upper frequencies come across with clarity, the midrange gelling to present a cohesive musical experience.

Turning now to gentler sounds, I spun up Helen Jane Long's 2013 Air Studios' recording of her CD album *Porcelain* and the beautiful piano and strings of Expression are set in relief with the Moon delivering the track with great precision and musicality. You hear it again with a







different pianist, this time Daniel Barenboim on a 2012 Deutsche Grammophon recording of Beethoven's Piano Sonata 14 'Moonlight', Presto Agitato. The piece comes across with supreme rhythm and timing that captivates the listener and certainly had me entranced.

Can this amp do anything wrong? Well, there were rare moments when I found some performances to be slightly cool. Bollywood tracks such as Bol Na Halke Halke with Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, Shanker Ehsan-Loy, Gulzar, and Mahalakshmi Iyer from the 2007 OST CD of *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* did not sound as warm as heard on other systems. And I also has struggled to engage with some classic jazz from the likes of Miles Davis and John Coltrane on Spotify which lacked a little of the lustre and energy experienced with other tracks.

#### Moon 250i V2 verdict

But these were very minor and very subjective issues and also probably because this amp sets such a high bar for itself that it cannot always weave its magic, especially when fed with recordings that lack the quality it deserves. If you are about to take the next step in your hi-fi journey and looking for an integrated amp to transition from a midrange set-up to the start of something more serious, Moon's 250i V2 is one you should definitely try. It's solid, dependable, and packs a powerful musical punch you'll find hard to resist.

