

The Electrocompaniet ECI 80D Integrated Amplifier is a £3000 amp that is well featured and looks rather splendid, Stuart Smith takes a listen.



The look that could only be Electrocompaniet.

There are some products that as soon as you look at them can only be from one brand and this integrated amp from Electrocompaniet is certainly one of those. The gold buttons and livery on black, plus the Perspex front panel could only be from this somewhat iconic Norwegian manufacturer – though it is also available in white.

In the UK this entry-level to the Electrocompaniet family of products will cost you £2899, whilst in Europe you are looking at €3090. That's a good chunk of money for an entry-level product and also places the amplifier in a fiercely competitive marketplace. However, for this money you get a well-specified and well-featured amplifier that is both designed and made in Norway. I do think it is somewhat disingenuous of some manufacturers to use "Designed in UK/EU/wherever" when all they are trying to do is cover the fact that the product in question is actually made in the Far East. I've no issues with a product being made there, but let's be honest and open about the provenance of products so that there can be no ambiguity. I also think that many consumers of quality audio are willing to pay a premium for products that are not made in China. However, you pay your money and you takes your choice. I digress.

BUILD AND FEATURES

Well catered for with regards to inputs, particularly digital inputs. There's also a MM phono stage and headphone sockets are round here too.



So what do you get for your three thousand beer tokens? Well, first of all, you get the usual excellent fit and finish that you get with all the Electrocompaniet products and secondly you get a well-featured eighty watts a side Class A/B integrated amp. Looks-wise, as mentioned, it could only be

Electrocompaniet and it carries over the design cues that are present on all their offerings. In this case, you have a central on-off button, a basic blue screen to the left to indicate input etc, and then

over to the right a series of four buttons for volume and source etc. Nothing out of the ordinary and all pretty straightforward so far.

It's only when you look around the back of the ECI 80D that you realise just how well featured this amp is. First of all you have an input for a record player that will support Moving Magnet cartridges, which to be fair at this level is what is likely to be used by most folk, though don't forget that there are some excellent high-output MC cartridges out there that will also work on this input.

Next along the back panel is the headphone and to be honest, I find this a bit of an odd place to put the headphone jacks, though there is provision for mini-jacks and quarter-inch jacks, which is excellent. Personally, I would much prefer to have headphone jacks on the front of an amplifier as I don't use them all that often and when I do I don't want to be fiddling around the back of the rack to plug them in. However, this amp does let you use both outputs at once should you want to use headphones with a partner – I'm not so sure this is something most folk would find useful, though thinking about it I suppose a couple with a newborn could enjoy listening to cans. I did speak with Electrocompaniet about the sockets being around the back and they told me that they had many discussions around this but in the end put it around the back so as not to break the clean design of the front panel. My personal preference would still be (I think) to have it on the front.



Another look round the back and underneath the amp.

You get a pre output so you can connect to an external amplifier and a couple of analogue inputs – all on RCA. Again, I'd have like to have seen the option for balanced inputs but that's the audiophile nerd in me coming out and most folk won't give two hoots that they aren't there.

Digitally you are well catered for with regards to inputs and there are no less than two coaxial and three optical inputs. This allows you to connect up to five digital sources so the amp can become the heart of your digital world. These will be useful for those who want to plug in gaming consoles, Blu-Ray players and the like – as well as the more usual CD player. Optical and coaxial inputs will play PCM files from 44.2kHz 16bit to 192/24 which should be enough for the vast majority of folk, though there is no DSD provision. This latter point on DSD is pretty moot to me to be honest and, whilst I know DSD has its fans, I never really bought into it and don't have more than a handful of files in that format.

What is interesting is that this amplifier does support Bluetooth, and whilst I myself don't use it very often, I do know that it has its fans and its convenience cannot be underestimated. Bluetooth BT5, A2DP, SBC, AAC, and aptX-HD are supported. Some audiophiles may scoff at folk using Bluetooth but there can be no denying its popularity and it is, in fact, very good for casual listening, though I wouldn't do any serious listening myself using this format.

As well as the two sets of binding posts for speaker cables you get a USB service port plus 12V input and output triggers.

The amp in the 80D puts out a healthy 2 x 80W into 8Ohms and 150 x2 into 4Ohms.

The small remote deals with all the usual functions plus Bluetooth pairing and dimming the screen.



Nothing fancy but fully functional. Acceptable at this price.

SOUND QUALITY

PHONOSTAGE

There was a time when it would be unthinkable to put out an integrated amp that had only line inputs and I'm very pleased that a good few manufacturers are thinking likewise and including them on their integrated amplifiers – what next, tone controls? Yes, it's likely you will get more flexibility and potentially better sound by spending around a grand on an external phonostage, but the truth is that most really don't want to get into the whole audiophile box collecting thing and just want a one-box solution that just gets on with letting them play their tunes.

The phono on the 80D is actually a very sweet sounding stage that worked very well with my Sumiko Olympia MM cartridge. It's a quiet stage that is dynamic and detailed enough to satisfy most people at this level. Imaging is stable and slightly less forward into the room than with the recently reviewed [QHW THE VINYL](#), and whilst both that and our LAB12 melto are clearly better and more detailed, the truth is that in the final analysis most folks are going to be well served with this built-in stage and will not feel the need to upgrade at any point. The inbuilt phonostage is balanced across the frequencies and doesn't seem to be emphasising any particular frequency band to make it sound more “impressive” – it's pretty much honest to the tunes you are playing, be they early jungle, 70's rock, or more folk and vocal style.

Electrocompaniet should be congratulated for developing a phonostage that is this good in a package that, whilst not being pocket-money accessible, doesn't break the bank when stacked up against its feature set.



The blue screen to the left is just about visible from across the room and is dimmable,

DIGITAL

First off let me say that I want a USB input for my tunes. The Stack streamer I've been using recently in the system down here in our main listening room doesn't have any outputs other than a solitary USB. Now that can be seen in one of two ways – the streamer should have more varied outputs, or the amp should have more. There are enough inputs on this to allow you to use it for the telly, games consoles and the like and I

think Electrocompaniet has been pretty canny in this respect given that the amp should have a pretty broad appeal.

So, the streamer down in the main room has (as mentioned) just a USB out and the 80D has no provision for this, so I unplugged it and took it upstairs to partner with the CD player and Auralic Aries G1. This was a fortuitous happenstance as the speakers I had in place up there were the excellent [Falcon LS3/51 \(Gold Badge\)](#) and it was immediately clear that these were a really excellent partner for the amp – they just seemed to immediately gel with one another.

Using CD as the source I first popped on the excellent Roy Harper's Flat Baroque and Broke album and it was immediately evident that this amp delivers detail by the bagful, particularly through the mid-band with the guitar on the first track being very (VERY) life-like and in-the-room. The jangly guitar really did shine through in this system, despite only using a pretty modest entry-level Leema CD player. I spent a good time listening to CDs on this little system and thoroughly enjoyed it, despite the apparent, by today's standards, modest resolution of Red Book CD. There was no harshness and no digitalness (if that can be said to be a thing) to the sound – it was natural and organic sounding.

Using the Auralic Aries G1 as the source you get more of the same character from the 80D. Playing higher resolution files you do appreciate the better file resolution, particularly in the upper registers, and, again, this resolution should be ample for pretty much everyone.

BLUETOOTH

I don't actually use Bluetooth very often and I do see it as a bit of a gimmick if I'm honest, but then I'm an old fart that rails against this kind of witchcraft. However, I do appreciate that there's a lot of folk out there that do use it, though I'd be very surprised if it was used by many as their main source. For the purposes of this review, I paired my Android phone with the amp. It's a piece of cake to sort, to be honest – hold the pairing button on the little Apple-style remote for five seconds, find the 80D on your Android device and pair it...simples!

Now, I didn't try this but the manual that comes with the 80D allows you to connect to wireless headphones. Put the 80D in HEADPHONE mode, put your headphones in pairing mode and press the pairing button on the remote for five seconds. This is pretty cool I thought.

I had a bit of a play streaming old radio shows of ours that are on YouTube and Bluetooth works fine. In fact, I thought it was pretty good fun to be able to do this – perhaps this old fuddy-duddy is waking up to these new-fangled things. Sound quality is what I'd expect for Bluetooth and I reckon quality-wise it'd be fine for parties and for less serious listening – actually the sound quality isn't all that bad at all and perhaps I've been a bit unfair on Bluetooth streaming in the past. Certainly, this amp is on par using Bluetooth with others I've heard.

HEADPHONES

I like having a mini-hack and quarter-inch jack in one unit. I don't like having them around the back of the amp. With that said, most will just leave their cans plugged in to save fannying about changing cables. I had a pair of Senny headphones plugged into the back of the amp and it drove them to high volume without a worry and will be all that all but the most demanding of headphone listener will ever need.



The headphone sockets are around the back so as not to spoil the lines of the front panel.

OVERALL

I'd say the 80D errs on the warmer side of neutral, but whilst that may suggest slow and sluggish, it's not. No, the amp doesn't have the lightness of foot and clout as, say, the big Krell but it's certainly no slouch and deals with dynamic changes in music adeptly. That slight warmth is an easy going kind of sound that is likely to appeal to a broader spectrum of music lovers than an amplifier with a more incisive and "cut-glass" kind of sound. This characteristic also makes for an amplifier that is very easy to get along with when listening for extended periods. This may well be a canny move on the part of the Norwegians given that broader appeal I mentioned. With that said, I enjoyed listening to a good deal of drum and bass on this amp, a style of music that is all about the bass (the clues in the name) and incisive hats and snares (for me anyway) and the warmth inherent in this amplifier didn't get in the way of my enjoyment at all. With regards to the likes of more folky/singer-songwriter this slightly fuller/warmer presentation makes for a great big hug of a presentation that draws you in and envelops you in its embrace – or less flowery put, it's a very pleasant and enjoyable experience that isn't at all taxing on the old lugholes. With that said, detail through the guitars of Roy Harper using the LS3/5A speakers was stunningly good and so don't think that mid/upper-bass warmth is achieved at the expense of top-end detail – it's not.

The LS3/5A speakers from Falcon on the end of the 80D was a very good match and I do think that this pairing would really suit those looking for a relatively compact and yet highly enjoyable system. It's difficult to put my finger on, but something just sounded right with this partnership. I also put the amp to work on the [Diptyque dp77](#) speakers that are a bit of a handful to drive properly, and whilst I have had better results with more grippy amps the 80D performed pretty well, though perhaps not the ideal match.

With regards to bass control this amp delivers really well with the right speakers and deals with dynamically demanding tracks excellently, but also with detail and finesse (if that's the right word to use when discussing bass). I did think it struggled a little with more demanding loudspeaker loads and this became evident particularly through the lower registers, though I must stress that the dp77 can be a difficult speaker to drive properly. With techno and more demanding bass music, it has good control and speed. It may lack the overall whoomph of, say, our Krell amp.

When matched with the right speakers the amp presents a very believable soundstage with rock-solid imaging and a really “connecting” quality. I sat and listened after well after I’d stopped taking notes during listening sessions.



The amp is standard width and fairly shallow, It should be easy to accommodate on a rack or on home furniture.

CONCLUSION

This is a very accomplished and well-featured integrated amplifier. It will appeal to music lovers that are not hung up on wanting a gazillion and one boxes but do demand excellent sound quality.

Get the speaker partnering right – I got excellent results using the Xavian Perla and Falcon LS3/5A models – and the amp should last you pretty much forever. And in many ways that’s how I see this amp and its audience – people that aren’t afraid to spend a little extra to get what they want, but at the same time appreciate longevity in a product.

Personally, I’d have liked to have had a USB input included as it restricts the streamers you can use to some extent. I’d also liked to have had the headphone sockets accessible on the front panel rather than round the back.

The 80D isn’t a cheap amplifier and its price point puts it in a very competitive marketplace. However, it does feel that it offers good value for money in many ways – it’s made in Norway, very well finished with great pride of ownership, it’s well specified, and, perhaps most importantly for readers of HiFi Pig, it sounds very good.

AT A GLANCE

Build and Features:

Could only be Electrocompaniet

A well-featured proper integrated amplifier including phono, digital, and analogue line inputs

Headphone amp but with outputs around the back rather than on the front panel

Very good but moving magnet only phonostage

No USB input for streaming

Nice and simple remote

Sound Quality:

A detailed and dynamic sounding amp that errs on the side of warmth

Get the right speakers and you will be well rewarded

Big and solid soundstage without over-exaggeration

Value For Money:

I actually think that this, given what I've outlined as for whom this amp is intended, offers good value and will be a "buy it once and don't think about upgrading" choice for many. It offers a clear upgrade from entry-level integrated amps and has enough features for it to last for many years to come.

We Loved:

Its looks

Warm and inviting sound that manages to be tempered with bags of detail

Bass control with the right speakers

A wonderful match for the Falcon LS3/5As we have

We Didn't Love So Much:

I'd want a USB input

Looks may be a bit blingy for some

Can struggle with more demanding loudspeakers

Headphone sockets round the back

Price: £2899 - €3100

Elevator Pitch Review: The ECI 80D from Electrocompaniet is a very well put together, good looking, and well specified integrated amplifier. Everything about its feature set and sound suggest a product that is built for those who want simplicity and accessibility, but without major compromises in sound quality. Its sound is warm yet detailed, controlled and emotionally connecting. Simply put, this amp offer a fantastic opportunity for those wanting to put together a quality system but who are happy to pay for that quality. It delivers well on all inputs and is simple to set up and use.