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APRIL 2013



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7 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF
KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)





Commitment anxiety

Rod Alexander enjoys a 'commitment free' valve amplifier

My other half has occasionally accused me of having 'commitment issues'. She's right - but not in the way she thinks. You see, I adore valve amplifiers - the directly-heated triode variety in particular, but valve amplifiers tend to require a degree of 'commitment' that I just can't muster. For starters, with woefully insensitive loudspeakers like mine, monoblocks would be compulsory, then there's the issue of living room real estate to consider, as well as occasional 'burnt fingers' epi-

sodes and the regular chore of bias adjustment as so many valve amps require. It's a 'til death us do part' scenario that scares me...

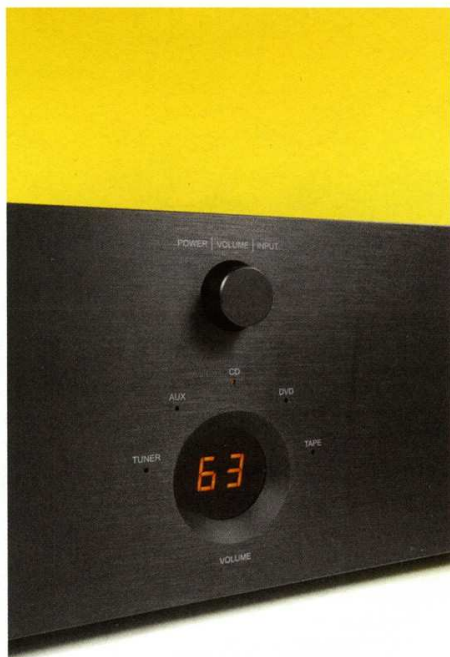
So the opportunity to review Canor's reasonably proportioned, conventionally boxed (if uninspiringly named) TP-134 integrated amplifier, was too good to miss. Could it provide the sonic advantages of valves, with the hassle-free, 'fit and forget' functionality of solid state?

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

As conventional integrations go, this is a large amplifier. Measuring 435 x



EL34 power pentode output valves operate in ultra-linear mode to minimise distortion.



A single push-knob switches inputs and controls volume.

170 x 390mm (W x H x D) and featuring a 10mm thick anodised front panel, it tips the scales at a hernia-inducing 22kg. Construction is firmly in the 'battleship' class.

Finished in black anodised aluminium, rather than the alternative silver finish, the review sample had a certain Darth Vader air. The front panel, featuring just a circular display window, displaying signal attenuation in dB steps and a single encoder knob for controlling switch-on, standby, input selection and attenuation is a model of minimalist chic. It oozes class.

TECHNOLOGY

Using four EL34 output valves, in ultralinear configuration, 35 Watts are on offer – the first 10 in Class A. The output transformers are relatively conventional, multi-section, bifilar wound affairs – with the usual 4 and 8 Ohm taps.

The toroidal mains transformer features an electrostatic screen and a separate winding for the comprehensive control electronics.

Chosen after extensive listening tests, the TP-134 utilises a relay-based attenuator (rather than a traditional potentiometer) providing 1dB attenuation steps and a claimed 0.05dB channel balance. An order of magnitude better than the 2dB or so, typical of standard pots.

So this is no slavish homage to the past, but a very modern implementation of an EL34 based, ultralinear mode configured amplifier.

In fact, the only nod to the past is Canor's use of good old fashioned valve shields for the small signal valves in an attempt to minimise crosstalk, resulting in a claimed 6dB improvement in channel separation.

IN USE

Canor have really committed to the whole user-friendliness agenda. At switch on, the amp runs through a 15 second warm-up routine after which it is ready for use (though as expected, in practice, it took the best part of 30 minutes before it really revealed its true sonic character).

The amp comes complete with a svelte system remote with more than a hint of Bang & Olufsen about it and the 1dB volume steps provide adequate fine control of volume. Given the generally faultless build quality and implementation, I was disappointed by the slightly loose encoder knob on the review sample.

The TP-134 was fundamentally faultless in operation, despite my repeated attempts to get it to protest, playing piano concertos on the remote and deliberately sloppy connection and disconnection efforts, it steadfastly refused to misbehave or protest.

LISTENING

It's confession time. EL34 valves are my guilty pleasure. No, they don't have the coherence, clarity or cachet of exotic (and expensive) power triodes like 300Bs 211s or 845s, but triode

connected, they deliver a wonderful, lush, captivating sound. Inaccurate, yes, but with a well designed example of the breed, listening is so much fun, I just don't care.

So given my bias for EL34s in triode mode, the idea of reviewing an EL34-based amplifier configured in ultralinear mode didn't exactly get my heart fluttering. Worse still, as a user of electrostatic hybrids so inefficient I daren't put their sensitivity figure in print, I had low expectations of this amplifier/speaker pairing. Though several solid state amps of less than 100 Watts have managed to bring my regular loudspeakers to life, the measly 35 Watts on offer here was surely a recipe for disappointment...

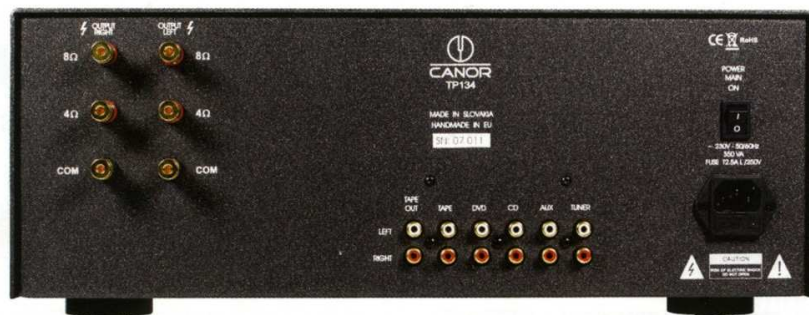
In the event, I needn't have worried. My time with the TP-134 proved that as is so often the case, power output figures reveal precious

little about valve amplifiers' real-world loudspeaker driving capability.

Inspired by the Darth Vader appearance, there was nothing for it – I kicked things off with the City of Prague Philharmonic's recording of some of the key music from the Star Wars saga. 'The Flag Parade', a stern test of an amplifier's dynamic ability, was thunderous and powerful, with timpani, tuba and string sections all incredibly visceral, yet high frequency percussive instruments – cymbal work and bells, for example, not just clearly discernable, but



The amplifier has an electronic management circuit to control switch-on, biasing and other functions. Remote control is provided.



8 Ohm loudspeaker outputs with 4 Ohm taps are fitted, connection being through gold plated 4mm terminals.

beautifully resolved. 'Yoda's Theme', a real showcase for the Prague Philharmonic's incredible string section, had poise and flow, while retaining real bite – a wonderful result.

'Lazarus Man' from Terry Callier's 'Timepeace' album is an incredibly busy track, with layer upon layer of instrumentation, featuring bass, guitars, drums and additional syncopated percussion. With many amplifiers the instruments seem to be fighting for attention. Here, they were all as large as life, but so easily discernable from each other I couldn't resist constantly turning up the wick, in order to be more and more immersed in the experience.

Soundstaging wasn't of the superficially impressive, 'forward' variety and may take some initial readjustment. Set back toward the plane of the speakers and perfectly proportioned, players and instruments are locked in defined space – no doubt partly due to the exacting care Canor have taken with regard to channel balance and minimising crosstalk.

Nits worth picking? Well, given the transparency on offer, its easy to say that Canor's decision to implement a relay-based volume control solution was a good one – but every silver lining has its cloud and so it was here, with the price to pay being the most incredible 'clackety-clack, clackety-clack' as the attenuator does its thing.

CONCLUSION

With wonderfully transparency, and none of the exaggerated lushness of triode connected EL34 designs, this is an amplifier for lovers of valves, but with a level of robustness, reliability and operational sophistication that puts many solid state power amps to shame. It's hard to imagine a better introduction to valve amplification. The commitment-phobic should take note...

"reliability and operational sophistication that puts many solid state power amps to shame"

THE EL34

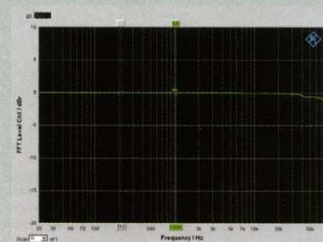
EL34 output valves are inexpensive, up to £50 for a matched pair. In this amp they are biased from an automatic bias circuit, so bias does not need adjustment. Expect 2000 hours or so life before replacement is needed. The EL34 is known for a sweet, detailed sound.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

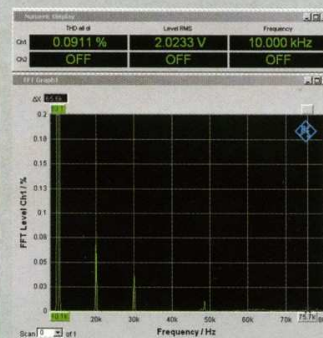
The TP-134 delivered 36 Watts into 8 Ohms, and the same into 4 Ohms, showing coupling of the 4 Ohm tap to be efficient. These are fairly conservative power figures for EL34 power pentodes; they are not run hard and this extends life. Under-running reduces temperature, electrode deformation and failure.

A key feature of the TP-134 is very low distortion by valve amplifier

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



standards, especially at high and low frequencies. Unusually wide bandwidth of 2Hz-74kHz points to high quality output transformers and a fair amount of feedback, although there's only so much that can be applied unless tertiary windings are used to avoid the inevitable phase shifts in a full loop. This helps keep distortion down to around 0.1% at 1 Watt, second and third harmonics rising progressively to around 1.4% at full output, a good result.

Noise was low at -98dB, helped by low-ish overall gain, input sensitivity being low at 380mV. That's fine for silver disc players, but unsuitable for low gain external phono stages.

With a modest damping factor of 5 and low bass distortion the TP-134 should have clean and reasonably well controlled bass, although it won't control under-damped loudspeakers.

The TP-134 turns in a good measured performance and will likely sound clean and precise, due to the way its EL34s have been exploited. **NK**

Power	36watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	2Hz-74kHz
Separation	88dB
Noise	-98dB
Distortion	0.1%
Sensitivity	380mV

CANOR TP-134 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER £2,495



VERDICT

With great build quality and sonics - and conventional appearance to boot, this is hassle-free, sophisticated valve amplification. A bargain.

FOR

- transparency and resolution
- impressive control circuitry
- build quality

AGAINST

- noisy relay controlled attenuator

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