



Art + kraft

David Price samples T+A's finely designed network music receiver partnered with its compact floorstanding loudspeaker

There's something about T+A design that reminds me of those classic Dieter Rams Braun products of 50 years ago. Perhaps it's the clean look – a general sparseness and lack of frills – allied to the superb build quality. The R 1000 E receiver seems to have a certain timelessness, and could easily have come out a decade ago. The look might be a fraction out of time, but the spec is utterly contemporary. This is a bang up-to-date receiver that does everything you could ask and more.

It sports a DAC preamplifier and a number of analogue and digital inputs. At the same time, there's full hi-res network streaming using T+A's own Broadcom processor-based platform, and an optional phono module (£323 either MM or MC). It's almost easier to explain what it doesn't play, given the built-in CD drive, aptX Bluetooth and digital tuner that does FM and DAB. Oh, and don't forget the front-mounted USB socket. The power amp section comes from the PA 1000 E amplifier and pumps out 115W RMS per channel into 8ohm, which to use understatement is 'not inconsiderable'.

Using it is a breeze. The display isn't brilliant; older eyes will think it a little too small, but there's a smartphone control app that may well end up being most people's point of contact with the unit. Setting it up isn't especially difficult, although using the fascia buttons and menu system is a little more tiresome than some.

The Pulsar ST 20 is a small footprint floorstanding loudspeaker, running a three-way configuration with a reflex-loaded cabinet. A 25mm aluminium dome takes care of treble duties, and this transfers down to a 120mm midrange driver at 2.2kHz. Below this, two 150mm bass units take over from 300Hz downwards. The crossover has separate grounds for bass and mid/high range, making the speaker ideal for bi-wiring. Power handling is quoted at 130W RMS, and nominally rated at 4ohm. Claimed frequency response is 32Hz to 30kHz, with a quoted sensitivity of 87dB/1W/1m which is good if not outstanding for a box of this size.

Sound quality

The R 1000 E seems to have forgotten that it's a receiver, and performs like a big, mid-price integrated amp. It sounds extremely clean, with no sense that it's adding harshness, grain or muddle. Nor is there any feeling that the power amplifier section isn't up to the job. There is enough oomph to drive practically any loudspeaker, outside wildly inefficient ones, and/or those placed in an enormous room.

Now, I know what you're thinking – it's German so while it may be strong, it's going to be a sterile and cerebral performer, without much feel for the music. Well, that's not true – it turns out to be very well balanced and even handed. You'd never say it's gushingly emotional, but it's still nuanced enough to satisfy musically. The more I use it,

the more I enjoy its clean, purposeful and punchy sound – one that's easily good enough to hold its own with the best £1,500 integrations. Cue up some classic electro from Japan, in the shape of *My New Career*, and you're greeted with a strong and confident sound that's finely balanced tonally. Via its analogue line inputs, it doesn't add any undue warmth, yet nor does it light up the midband like others can. This track sounds highly composed yet doesn't plod; there is space for the music to breathe, with all the different elements of the mix playing together naturally. You'd never call this one of the world's greatest recordings, yet the T+A is subtle enough to resolve a wealth of inner detail which brings it alive.

The Smiths' *Headmaster Ritual* on CD proves impressive. It's not as good as

It pulls the listener into the recording, without adding or subtracting much

the best £1,500 CD spinner, but isn't a world away – so the disc transport isn't an afterthought. The receiver really takes up the baton and runs with it, deploying its muscular bass to give the song great force and drive. This track can sound a little brittle, but the R 1000 E renders it in a balanced and enjoyable way, underpinned by what feels like a backbone of steel. The amplifier section never gets breathless, and remains composed at high levels.

Some systems that do well with music such as this tend to fall over with jazz, so I cue up Herbie Mann's *Summertime*. This is a very supple and fluid live recording with a spacious and atmospheric feel, which the T+A captures very convincingly. The recorded acoustic is carried very well, giving a surprisingly immersive rendition. Tonally it's pretty much perfect, possibly just a little grey but

DETAILS

PRODUCT
T+A R 1000 E
ORIGIN
Germany
TYPE
Network receiver
WEIGHT
13kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
440 x 115 x 370mm
FEATURES
• Quoted power output: 2x 115W RMS (8ohm)
• Inputs: 4x digital, 1x USB; 2x RCA analogue
• AptX Bluetooth; UPnP network
• Optional MM phono stage
DISTRIBUTOR
Kog Audio
TELEPHONE
0247 7220650
WEBSITE
kogaudio.com

DETAILS

PRODUCT
T+A Pulsar ST 20
ORIGIN
Germany
TYPE
3-way standmount loudspeaker
WEIGHT
17kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
190 x 920 x 320mm
FEATURES
• 25mm tweeter
• 120mm mid driver
• 2x 150mm bass drivers
• Quoted sensitivity: 87dB/1W/1m (4ohm)
DISTRIBUTOR
Kog Audio
TELEPHONE
0247 7220650
WEBSITE
kogaudio.com

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Analogue inputs
- 2 Turntable inputs and grounding
- 3 Pair of USB inputs
- 4 Ethernet network input
- 5 Coaxial and optical digital inputs
- 6 Loudspeaker connections

Q&A

Lothar Wiemann

Head of research & development, T+A



DP: What would you say the aim of the R 1000 E receiver was?

LW: We wanted to create a versatile and easy-to-use device giving access to all of today's music sources, together with a state-of-the-art D/A converter, a very good analogue preamp and a stable, powerful amp. All packaged in a neat, compact enclosure. It was designed to replace a big stack of traditional, one-purpose devices saving a lot of space and worries about cabling, etc. There are no compromises by this approach. All sources profit from our sophisticated quadruple DAC concept and the very precise jitter attenuator/reclocking circuit.

Another advantage is that we have short signal paths for all sources to the DAC, and further on to the analogue amplifier. This, together with separate power supplies for the digital and analogue parts of the unit, helps keeping interference and jitter low.

What are the design priorities of the Pulsar ST 20 loudspeaker?

We wanted to complement our speaker line with a model for a smaller budget, but still high acoustic quality, excellent workmanship and beautiful design. We developed new baskets, which are optimised for low flow resistance behind the cone and efficient air flow cooling of the voice coil. The magnet system of all drivers is FEM-modelled with a main focus on long throw (woofer only), low inductance and perfect symmetry, therefore low distortion. The surround is new too, and designed to act very linear in the working range and providing a soft clipping when overloading the excursion capabilities of the woofers.

A two-way design is always flawed when it comes to distortion and directivity. The woofer will always intermodulate low and mid frequencies, thus limiting the useful sound pressure level. Adding a dedicated midrange driver as we do reduces intermodulation distortion.

CONNECTIONS



- 1 120mm mid driver
- 2 150mm bass drivers
- 3 Bi-wireable speaker terminals
- 4 25mm tweeter

accolade goes to its built-in DAC. Via its USB input, driven by my MacBook Pro running Audirvana, it makes a great fist of Herbie Hancock's *Rockit!* at 24/96. It sounds most entertaining, and really lets loose with all that power under the hood. Bass is tuneful and animated, yet never thick or gloopy. It works great streaming too, again showing its innate clarity and poise.

As a system, the T+A receiver and speakers work very well together. I'm always a little suspicious about partnering electronics with same-brand loudspeakers, which are often there to make up the numbers, but T+A has long been making them and it's obvious that this isn't the case here. Tonally pretty well balanced, they make the most of the receiver's solid bass, and deliver a detailed midband and crisp, if slightly well-lit treble. Sat around 25cm from the boundary wall and toed-in slightly, they give a commanding rendition of the opening movement of Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* (Karajan, Berlin Philharmonic). Imaging is strong, instrument placement accurate, and depth perspective decent if not exceptional. It is well able to pull the listener into the recording, without adding or subtracting much.

Conclusion

The T+A R 1000 E is a great receiver, but then so it should be given its price. If you want a really good one-stop music maker, without having to fiddle around with wires, and one that you won't have to upgrade in a year's time, then give it an audition. The partnering Pulsar ST 20 is a fine floorstanding loudspeaker, but I'd say a little less obviously distinguished – there's an awful lot of choice around, and people have varied tastes and expectations. Anyone looking at either of these products won't be disappointed – they make a very nice pairing ●

HOW IT COMPARES

Few companies make do-it-all one-box stereo network receivers, which just goes to show what a unique product the T+A R 1000 E is. Maybe the closest thing to it is Naim's SuperUniti (£3,785), matched to speakers from sister company Focal, in the shape of the Aria 926 (£1,899) (HFC 384). This is a charismatic combo, not least because the Naim source/amplifier is so versatile and has such an excellent streaming and amplification pedigree. The T+A goes louder and is gutsier sounding – which is surprising – although the Naim has a lovely lithe musicality and you certainly couldn't say it lacks grunt. The Focal speakers are more efficient and capable of generating a bigger, more commanding sound but the Pulsars are no slouches either.

only very slightly so. It's not one to inject artificial warmth into recordings, yet you don't get a cold, steely sound either. Rhythmically it's a capable performer, if not outstanding – it doesn't drag you into the performance, yet it has an intrinsic rightness to the way that it times. There's a calm and assured feel to whatever it plays, even if you don't get as dramatic a sound as some separates systems.

You hear this across its range of sources; for example, even the Bluetooth input impresses, making short work of Rush's *The Enemy Within* from my MacBook Pro. The tuner is also good – although you wouldn't say it was the strongest source because that

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT T+A R 1000 E

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

LIKE: Clean styling; powerful, musical sound; versatility

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

DISLIKE: Display is not the best that we've seen

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

WE SAY: Excellent premium-priced receiver

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT T+A R PULSAR ST 20

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

LIKE: Crisp and detailed sound; styling

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

DISLIKE: Faces stiff competition at this price point

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

WE SAY: A fine floorstander with a solid performance

EASE OF DRIVE
★★★★★

OVERALL

