

Pathos Logos integrated amplifier

Discover the word from this distinctive valve hybrid

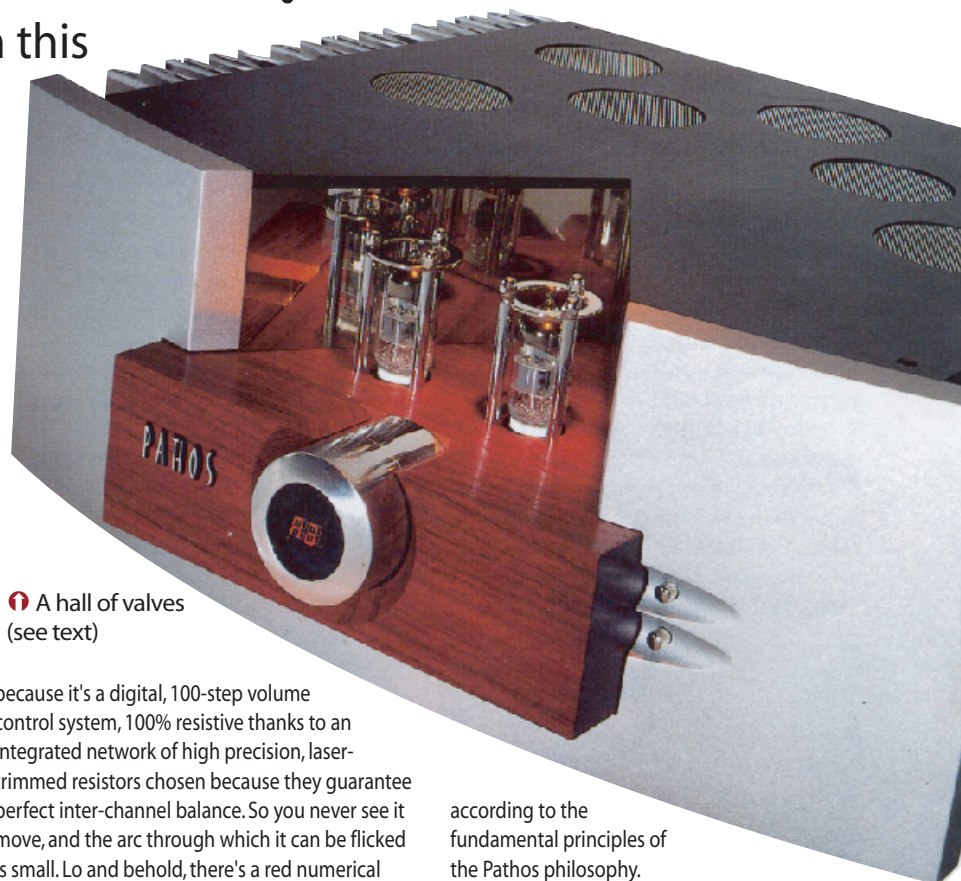
PRICE	£2495
SUPPLIER	UKD
SUPPLIER	01753 652669

Italy's Pathos is doing for metal what their neighbours at Sonus Faber have been doing for wood. Each amp they produce boasts some new layout unseen elsewhere, they marry wooden trim with the shiniest of chrome — they're redefining ergonomic sensibility. They're so Italian that it hurts.

Looks may not be everything, but you can sympathise with distributor Nick Green, who was raving about an unusual visual effect he noted at the recent hi-fi show at Heathrow: the chrome-caged valves on the Logos are positioned in a 'cove' formed by the angled, mirror-finish sheets which intersect behind them. Look at the valves at eye level, and they seem to go on into infinity, reflected into the hundreds.

Such is the concern for every visible part of the Logos that the visual thrills never end. There are contrasting metal finishes of chrome and matte, polished and cast, grey and black. No detail is too small to enhance: the venting in the top plate consists of seven circular holes, each filled with fine wire mesh. There's the slim rosewood remote control, with a mere four buttons for Source Select, Level Up/Down, and Mute. The company fitted a chunky rosewood block to surround and protect the massive Volume control.

Even the Volume control is novel. It doesn't rotate: you just flick it left or right for up or down



➤ A hall of valves (see text)

because it's a digital, 100-step volume control system, 100% resistive thanks to an integrated network of high precision, laser-trimmed resistors chosen because they guarantee perfect inter-channel balance. So you never see it move, and the arc through which it can be flicked is small. Lo and behold, there's a red numerical display to tell you the level from 0-99.

To the left of the knob is a Pathos logo; to the right, an On/Off press button and another button which scrolls through its inputs. Simple, elegant and minimalist yet in no way self-abnegating.

This piece of sculpture measures 430 x 400 x 172mm (wdh) including any protruding bits. It's a line-level integrated amplifier rated at a seriously useful 110W/ch into 8 ohm, doubling into four. As the literature states: 'The electric network has been laid out in a feedback-free "natural" way

according to the fundamental principles of the Pathos philosophy.

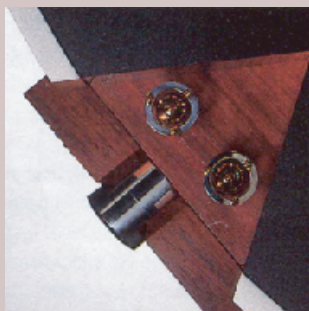
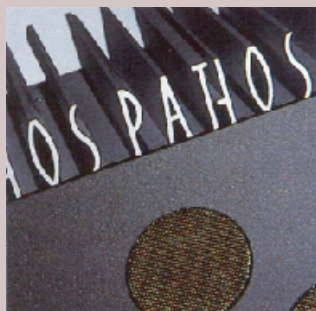
The pre-amplification stage is all-valve, fully-balanced, fed by a dedicated, stabilised power supply. Its large, complementary pair MOSFET output stage is true dual-mono and equipped with oversized transformers and power supplies, so current should never be an issue, regardless of load.

Just as the Volume control is a bit 'trick', so too is its only other control. The Input selector operates through 'high-tech miniaturised relays', originally developed for very high frequency telecommunication applications. Operating this is a joy, especially as the remote provides its own tactile thrills. You gotta admit solid rosewood beats the hell out of injection-moulded plastics.

No clutter upsets the back panel either. Inputs 1 and 2 are fully-balanced, through XLRs. Above them are phono sockets for five line inputs, plus a tape output. In the lower left-hand corner is an AC mains input; the speaker terminals — stout, multi-way posts — flank the inputs. That's all there is, bar the user-replaceable AC fuse.

Pathos doesn't believe in revealing too much,

➤ As the pics show, the Logos' main design fillip is a pair of heat sinks which read 'Pathos', which is about as nifty a way of disguising the necessary ankle shredders as any I've ever seen.



so specs are limited to the aforementioned power output figures and frequency response of 20Hz-20kHz $\pm 0.5\text{dB}$, an input impedance of 100k ohm, total harmonic distortion of <0.05 and an s/n ratio $>90\text{dB}$. Unlike the bigger, dearer and heavier Pathos models, this unit doesn't employ INPOL technology; instead, its circuitry is derived from the more, er, classic Classic One.

Reticent with specs or not, I kinda figured that nothing in my arsenal bar perhaps Apogee Scintillas would cause any problems. As it turned out, the Logos loved the Wilson WATT Puppy System 6, but it positively adored the Sonus Faber Guarneri. Could it have anything to do with the two companies breathing the same oxygen?

It was one of those blissful moments that makes a reviewer's life so easy, one of the natural, if not blatantly obvious, pairings I wrote about a few months back with the Pathos slotted in between the Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 3D CD player and the Guarneris, with lots of vinyl via SME Series V on the SME 10 deck, the Transfiguration feeding the Musical Fidelity X-LP. There was an overall warmth which belied the system's hybrid nature, and I simply didn't expect it. After all, I was coming off of a run of all-valve pairings — McIntosh and Audio Research — and it's rare when a hybrid manages to fool inveterate tube crazies. At least, it has been since the Radford TT100...

What the Pathos does, and which is reminiscent of the TT (formerly the Twin Towers), is produce a satiny sheen, a smoothness of so little grain that one can only be reminded of those hoary old analogies likening the lack of texture or granulation to the effect of cleaning a lens. What's so pleasant about this trait being the domineering sonic fingerprint is that this of-a-whole consistency defies the mix of technologies which are valves and MOSFETs. I realise that it's not the same level of incongruity as one would find when, say, bi-amping with a tube amp above and solid-state below, but the lack of texture is something I associate almost exclusively with valves. Rare solid state exceptions include the Halcros and precious little else.

Allied to this is an effortlessness which I suppose I should have expected. An advertised 110W (or double that with the lower impedance) is nothing to sneeze at, and the Pathos is capable of going loud enough to anger the neighbours. It is, conversely, no animal, and it lacked the almost brutal sense of power imparted by the Audio

Analogue Maestro at the same price, or the dearer Musical Fidelity Tri-Vista 300. I did, however, break with tradition and whack up the Pathos to a point beyond where I feel comfortable, even with something as intrinsically kick-ass as the new, remastered The Who best-of and the title track of the new Jimi Hendrix collection, Voodoo Child. No amount of Keith Moon's or Mitch Mitchell's drumming could catch the Pathos out, which exhibited control, extension and — best of all for jazzers — convincing recovery and decay. Indeed, the bass was so blindingly authentic that I even listened to a Rob Wasserman CD...

At the risk of boring all of you to tears, I must confess that, however stellar the performance at

— is a reliable indicator, then the Logos scores repeatedly and consistently. It wasn't just the hurt factor in female voices. There seemed to be more palpable power in gospel recordings, including some vintage Pilgrim Travellers and Swan Silvertones where the sound quality was of the worn-out-on-a-jukebox variety, and Johnnie Taylor's scream on 'Who's Making Love?' exhibited even greater exuberance. Uncanny, but repeatable.

More traditionally verifiable was the soundstage, in the Pathos' case a vast open arena, of merely better-than-average image height, but creating an extremely wide and deep lateral plane. Naturally, the Guarneri excels at this, too, but I even noticed it with Anthony Gallo's minuscule Dué and the Loth-X Ion Amaze. All in all, the Pathos sounds big both in terms of space and in the way it handles dynamic extremes. I just won't rock the rafters when faced with a hungrier-than-usual speaker such as the Guarneri.

Working of its best required using the Pathos in balanced mode. I know that there are engineer-types out there who swear blind that balanced operation is meaningless with cable runs as short as those found in domestic audio, but there was no escaping the perception of quieter silences between tracks and behind instruments, of a reduction in treble edge, and a perceived increase in the speed of transient recovery. There was less smearing of all sorts, the balanced path seeming more precise. (And, yes, I had the same make and model of interconnect for both ? Transparent Ultra ? plus a digital meter to set levels.)

With my current fave demo track to hand, 'Down To The River To Pray' off of the soundtrack CD to *O, Brother Where Art Thou?*, I was able to kick back and wallow in sound splayed out in front of me in a massive arc. It's all-embracing, devoid of any inconsistencies or gaps which would diminish the ability to convince. The sound is slinky, sexy. Above all, it appears to do this effortlessly, despite being a 'compact' compared to some of the integrations I've played with this past year.

Which brings us to its place in the KK Super Integrated Amp Bake-Off. While I'm still hooked on the McIntosh 6900 for cost-no-object, and consider the Unison Research Unico at the other end to be one of the World's True Bargains, the Pathos has upset the appletart. If you heard it even in the most elevated company without being told the price, you'd think it one of the top three. When I tell you that it retails for £2495, then you have to accept that the goal posts have moved in favour of affordability. No question: the Pathos Logos does for the £2000-3000 sector what the Unico does below £1000. I'll take that a stage further: if you're considering an integrated amp up to £4000, listen to the Logos after everything else. Then spend the £1500 you saved on a decent wristwatch worthy of a Logos owner.

WORDS: KEN KESSLER



➔ Wood-encased remote control (top) takes care of the usual trim functions; two balanced inputs for the XLR crowd

the frequency extremes, this amp could have been made for monitoring vocalists, especially distaff. Quite chillingly, this amplifier extracts more of that elusive sonic characteristic — emotion — with a grace which I found baffling.

Regular readers also know that I'm sceptical about stuff such as PRAT (pace, rhythm and timing), so the notion that this amplifier made Juice Newton's anguish somehow greater when singing 'Break It To Me Gently' is both worrying and confounding. Attributing this to an amplifier is almost perverse, but my ears think otherwise.

If the chill factor — that tingling up and down the spine when you swear that the sound is real