

# HI-FI CHOICE

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> AVP700/P1000 multichannel amps from Arcam

> DI 150 integrated amp from Gamut



### IN-DEPTH TESTS

> Model DAB digital radio from Tivoli



> Stellar 1 speakers from WEGG3

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## ULTIMATE GROUP TEST >>> SPEAKERS

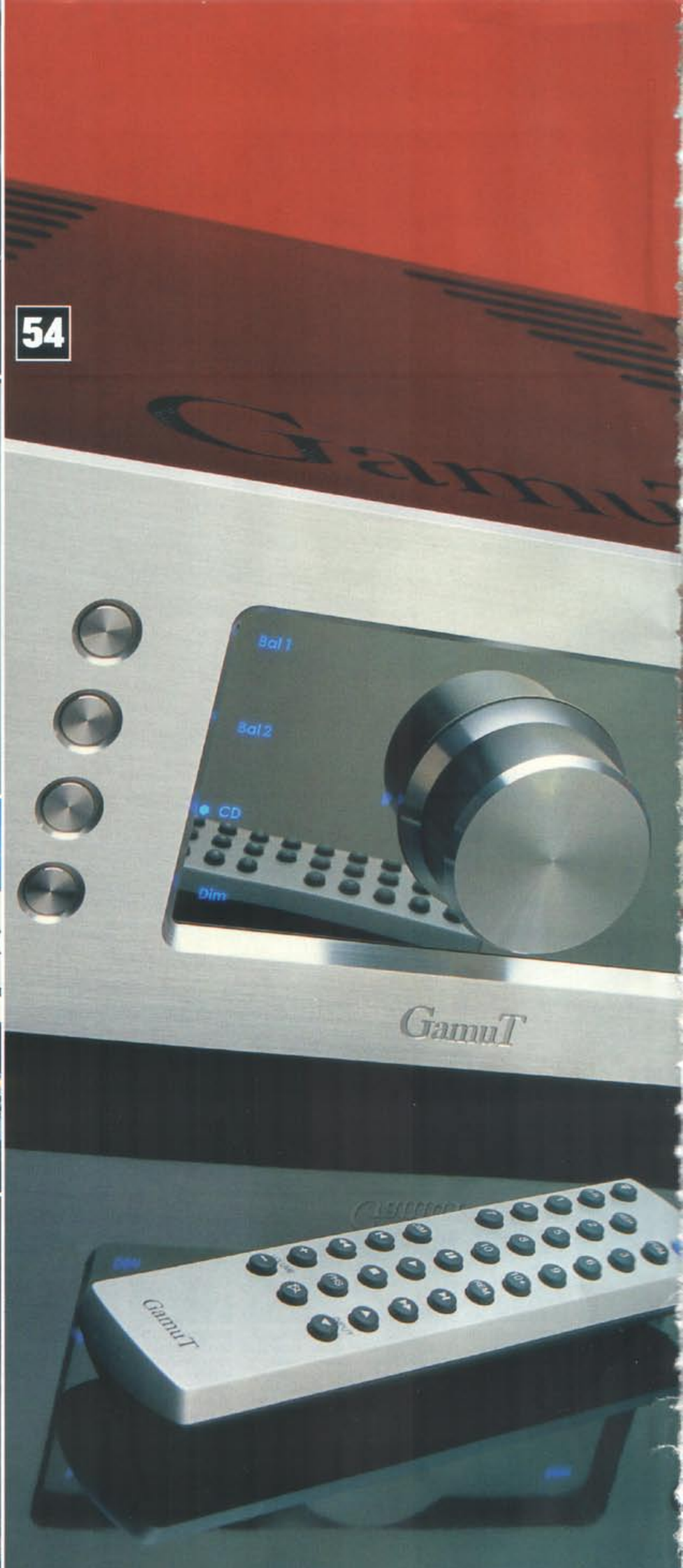
- FEATURING**
- > ALR Jordan Classic 5
  - > Chario Cygnus
  - > Dali Ikon 7
  - > Epos M22
  - > JBL Studio L880
  - > PMC TB2+

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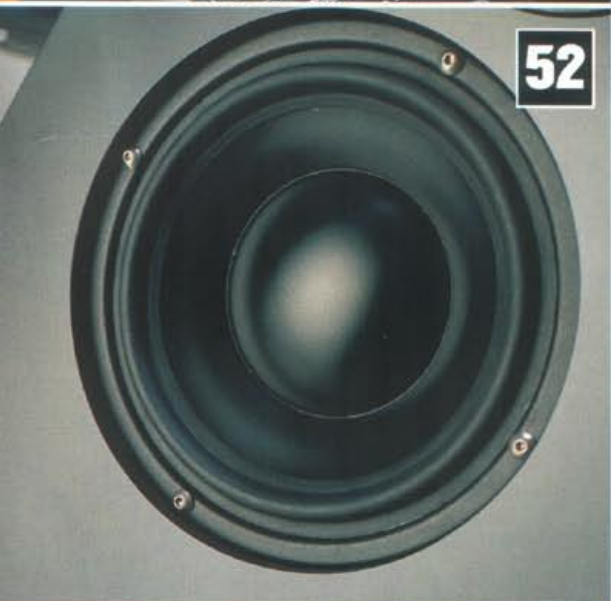




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Inside your free 2nd-hand hi-fi mini-mag...

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# Two become one

What happens when you mix the essence of a Gamut D3 preamp and D200 power amp?

**PRODUCT** Gamut DI 150

**TYPE** Integrated stereo amplifier

**PRICE** £5,700

**KEY FEATURES** Size (WxHxD): 43x15.5x44.6cm

• Weight: 31kg • Inputs: four single-ended, two balanced, tape loop • Balanced and single-ended pre-outs • Power output: 180W per channel (eight ohms)

**CONTACT** ☎ 01252 702705 • www.gamutaudio.com

**G**amut recently branched out into loudspeakers, to run alongside its range of high-end electronics (see *HFC* 274 for a review of the L5). Now, Gamut has decided to combine two of its finest amplifiers into one and produce its first integrated design. In doing so, it follows some of the most

respected names in the business into one-box terrain. This is a place where even the most die-hard audiophile is being forced to visit, now that big ain't domestically so beautiful anymore. Let's face it, it never was... but they didn't have so many home interior make-over programmes in the 1980s, so we could get away with a bit more than we can today.

The DI 150 was created in an attempt to build a lower-priced amplifier that retained the Gamut sound. By their own admission, Gamut's designers failed in one respect – this is far from being a lower-priced amp – but they felt the result was exciting enough to put on the market nonetheless. Apparently, a genuinely more affordable Gamut integrated is planned, although it's unlikely that Gamut will produce

an amplifier that takes on the likes of Creek, or Arcam's entry level. 'Affordable' here is relative, like the 'affordable' Porsche Boxster.

The DI 150 is based on the circuitry found in two existing Gamut products: the D3 preamplifier and the D200 MkIII power amplifier (reviewed in *HFC* 265 and 247 respectively). Those two components combined would set you back £7,440, so this £5,700 integrated is a bargain, in purely relative terms, although we admit it's a tough call trying to claim nearly six grand of amp a bargain. Regardless, it certainly feels as substantial as a D200 and has almost as many features and in and outputs as a D3, but it looks quite different to both in all but the heat sinking that flanks the casework.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

HI-FI CHOICE  
magazine







The front panel is stylish and colourful if you have the input names illuminated, or stylish and relaxed if you don't. The odd thing is that at night you don't see the mirror effect on the central panel, regardless of whether the 'dim' button has been used. Unfortunately, the remote – which is of the prosaic system operating variety – does not have individual inputs upon it, so you need to use up down arrows and squint at the display. One nice touch is that volume is indicated by a light behind the panel rather than the usual indent, so the level is always clearly shown.

As with the D3 preamp, the DI 150 has an HTH (home theatre) bypass input. This is a means of using the power amp section in the context of a multichannel system, with a surround sound processor. So you can use the DI 150 and the speakers connected to it for your stereo listening, and also use those two channels as part of a 5.1 (or more) system. This input can also be switched to operate as a normal line input, but be very careful – a line level signal without a volume control is a dangerous thing for ears and speakers, too.

One oddity with the volume control is that it seems to operate in a non-logarithmic way and it's difficult to make small changes to level with the remote. Apparently, this is due to a small mistake on the first batch of amplifiers that makes the volume knob spin too fast. It has now been rectified.

## “The Gamut delivers a level of insight that can transform a decent recording into a gripping musical journey.”

The range of socketry on this amp's broad back includes four RCA phono inputs and two XLR inputs alongside pre-outputs in both single-ended and balanced varieties. Speaker cable connectors are chunky WBT devices with the ability to take spade lugs, banana plugs or bare wire. The power on/off switch is nowhere to be seen, but those familiar with another Scandinavian electronics brand, Primare, will soon find the rocker switch under the front panel. It must be a design thing, over there.


### SOUND QUALITY

We used this Gamut with a pair of B&W 802Ds, a speaker design that is in some respects the antithesis of the speakers that Gamut makes, and as such possibly not the perfect partner. It's the approach to midrange drivers that varies between these two brands and you can hear that the DI 150's midband would probably benefit from a more obviously 'open' mid than that offered by the big B&W.

Nonetheless, the Gamut/B&W pairing sounded damn fine and extremely revealing. Transparency is the word here. Recordings are

laid bare for better or worse, so you can appreciate how well the dynamics are captured or compressed, how wide a bandwidth there is and how much acoustic is present.

The contrast between albums has rarely been as clear as it is through this amp – ECM's Keith Jarrett recordings sound simply magical in their sense of the occasion and atmosphere, whereas older albums such as Captain Beefheart's *Clear Spot* could definitely be more, er, clear. But, the important aspects of that album are plain to hear. The Gamut may highlight recording quality, but the great sense of timing and quality of musicianship, not to mention the lyrical surrealism, of the Beefheart album shines through.

Other recordings give up a whole stack of detail that is usually not apparent. We were taken aback at how much is going on; tunes that usually roll along in a vaguely entertaining way suddenly turn in an energetic and engaging performance when played through the DI 150. You get a level of insight that can transform a decent recording into a gripping musical journey, thanks to a 



**Q & A**

We spoke to Frederik Johansen, Gamut's electronics project manager, to find out more about the design innovations that went into the new DI 150 integrated amplifier



**HFC:** Why did you decide to build your first integrated amplifier now?

**FJ:** First and foremost, the basic idea was to bring the Gamut 'sound' down in price and to offer a single box solution. Secondly, we wanted to bring the appearance to a level that matches the sound quality that Gamut amplifiers are known for.

This amp is based on the D3 and D200 models, but apart from the slight drop in output, what are the main differences in approach?

The DI 150 is basically built around the input stage of the D3 preamp and the output stage of the D200 power amp. The main difference is the compromise of having small signals in the same 'room' as high power signals and power supplies. On the other hand, this solution makes a number of cable and solder connections unnecessary. This counterbalances some of the compromise.

The slight drop in output power is caused by the less powerful power transformers, enabling lower noise, but also a little less power compared to the D200 power amplifier.

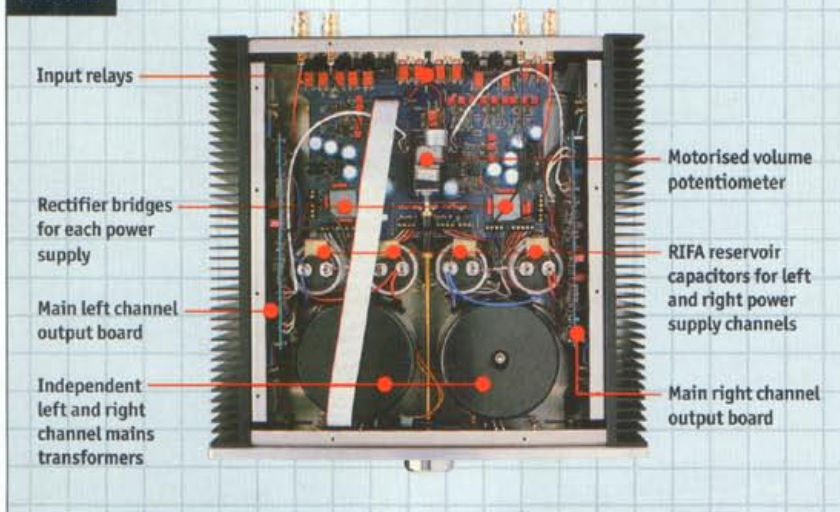
Does the DI 150 use a single pair of output devices like the original D200?

This amplifier uses the same very high power MOSFETs as the D200. The output stage is made from two identical N channels formed in a special push-pull coupling. In more common MOSFET amplifiers, one N and one P channel (or more) is used for making the push-pull output stage. However, it is very difficult to make two very different MOSFETs operate identically. This means that you do not have a symmetrical handling of the positive and negative side – not a good thing!

Is the DI 150 dual mono or is there a shared mains transformer?

The DI 150 is a true and all-the-way-through dual-mono construction. From the input stage to the output stage, the signal is fed by power that is specified for that particular channel and stage. Each of the encapsulated transformers has special windings for the low power and high power signals.

**Detail**



combination of acute sensitivity to timing, timbre/tone colour and detail.

Acoustic guitar sounds particularly rich with microdynamic variation, each string plucked that much harder or softer than those around it. This, combined with the depth of tone and buzz of new steel strings, makes for an engrossing experience.

The bottom end is equally ear-pleasing, allowing bass lines to lock the tempo down superbly. The nature of the bass is a little softer and more rounded than that produced by our D200 Mk1 power amp, and in some instances during our test period the D200's more taut bottom end had the upper hand. But the integrated has the edge in the mid and high frequencies, where its clarity and lack of mechanical edge mean you hear more of the recording and less of the electronics.

There is also no shortage of weight and texture at low frequencies. Even with largely acoustic material, the bass grumbles in highly distinctive fashion. The D200 has a very mild tendency to add its own bite to the proceedings, which can help mediocre recordings, but it's not necessarily as true to the original signal as the DI 150.

This integrated amplifier can sound soft and warm with one disc and then hard edged with the next. It's a very clean and smooth design, but that doesn't mean that it always sounds that way – it's all down to the recording.

The DI 150's grasp of timbral subtlety and dynamics became immediately apparent when our vdH Condor's stylus dropped into the groove of *Drummer Man*, a Gene Krupa mono LP recently reissued by Speaker's Corner. Freed from the strictures of stereo, the energy and vibrancy of the brass section sounded remarkably real. And when Anita O'Day started singing, we were back there in the day.

This is clearly a gorgeous amplifier. It has its ergonomic peccadilloes, but these can be forgiven, simply because of that sound quality delivered from a single, rather attractive box.

The Gamut is an undeniably expensive design, but you're effectively getting a dual-mono preamp and a 180-watt power amp of equally stunning transparency to timing, imaging, timbre and all-round detail. It's a pairing that seriously challenges the notion that you have to split an amp into separate boxes to achieve the best results. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



**VERDICT**

**SOUND >> 95%**



**FEATURES >> 82%**



**BUILD >> 93%**



**VALUE >> 87%**



**PRO**  
All-round transparency to the source and plenty of musical power. Attractive and solid build, plus the practicalities of a one-box approach.

**CON**  
Remote feels a little cheap by comparison to the sheer quality of the amplifier itself. There's no digital input option and input names can be tricky to read at a distance.

**CONCLUSION**  
A serious contender for the best integrated amp ever, the DI 150 will take on pre/power combos of at least equal price on their own terms and win. Cast aside your prejudices and revel in genuine high-fidelity amplification.

**HI-FI CHOICE** >> **91%**  
**OVERALL SCORE**