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£1,600 020 8893 5835 www.electrocompaniet.com

ELECTROCOMPANIET PI-2

Expensive amp with a distinguished track record

Despite rather patchy UK distribution in the past, Electrocompaniet is a company with a long and honourable history. As long ago as 1976, one of its products was described as 'the world's best sounding amplifier' and the brand has enjoyed a strong core following around the world ever since. It's decidedly not one of those brands that likes to introduce a new product range every time the wind changes, but as it happens, its recent reappearance in the UK coincided with a new range, the 'Prelude' line, of which this is the more powerful amp. There's also a PI-1, which is rated at 50 watts per channel.

Construction and features are not wildly out of the ordinary, though the input lineup is a little unusual in having two balanced inputs alongside the two unbalanced ones (all line level – there's no phono option). These days, a total of four inputs isn't that generous, but for most conventional stereo systems, it will suffice. Output is via a single pair of terminals per channel. But if Electrocompaniet has saved money on the connections, it has spent it inside the amplifier. The mains transformer is quite sizeable and the circuit board is very well filled with components. The vast majority are surface-mount parts (including integrated-circuit volume controls from Wolfson), but a few good-quality plastic film capacitors stand proud of the circuit board, and power supply smoothing has a very generous provision of electrolytic capacitors.

The circuit seems to be largely dual-mono, with separate heatsinks for each channel on opposite sides of the chassis. These run warmer than most (see lab report) so a decent amount of space around the amp for ventilation is not an optional extra. Output stages use bipolar transistors, with two pairs for each channel providing safe operation into low-impedance

loads. Operation is simple and hassle-free with one small exception: the first press of a volume button (front panel or remote) can sometimes lead to volume changing by one step in the wrong direction, though subsequent steps will be correct.

SOUND QUALITY

Our listeners agreed strongly that this amp was the star of the group – between them they hardly managed a single criticism. Just about the nearest to that were a couple of comments about the last (operatic) track, which didn't seem to have quite the scale, nor the level of detail, that one or two others in the group managed. Overall, though, the PI-2 made an overwhelmingly positive impression thanks not least to its bass, definition and dynamics.

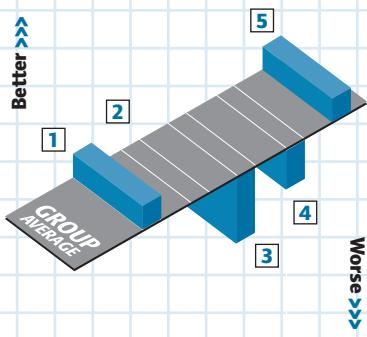
What's perhaps particularly noteworthy is that praise was distributed across the various musical extracts, which varied widely not only in musical style but in approach to recording. The Led Zeppelin number, in particular, is not by any stretch a 'clean' recording but, heard through this amp, it had plenty of detail, good soundstaging and a lively quality that made everyone wish for more of it. By complete contrast, our baroque chamber piece is a very detailed and 'pure' bit of recording art but it still attracted similar comments about musical flow, good dynamics and realistic soundstage.

That's not to say that this amp is rose-tinting everything. One listener commented that in the baroque track the violins sounded a little over-bright at times. That said, Electrocompaniet seems to have mastered the elusive art of maximising the good points of a recording without losing its particular flavour. As a result, music becomes engaging, vigorous and persuasive, with plenty of detail, but above all, a real sense of direction. **HFC**

LAB REPORT

Electrocompaniet's rating of 100 watts is bang on, with just a little more (about 110 watts) available for peaks. It's delivered from a low source impedance, which will help preserve the admirably flat frequency response under real-world conditions. Distortion is mostly low and predominantly second- and third-harmonic in nature: it reaches about 0.005 per cent at high output, pretty much independent of frequency, and disappears into background noise below about two watts output with no obvious sign of crossover distortion. We were slightly surprised to find residual noise higher than most amps these days achieve, though it's still low enough to disappear unless one uses particularly sensitive speakers (not that likely with a 100-watt amp). Volume steps are mostly 1dB, but occasionally 0.5dB. Given this and the reverse step direction issue noted, it seems there's a software glitch, but it doesn't impact on sound.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> +10%
- 2] Frequency response >> 0%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -40%
- 4] Distortion >> -20%
- 5] Output impedance >> +10%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	100W	98W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.006%	0.005%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-	±0.1db

VERDICT

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



VALUE



A superb all-rounder, with insight and analysis on one hand, and effortless musical flow on the other. Strong and clear bass is no less welcome on this amplifier. No frills, just great sound!

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE

