



# Flowering beauty

HiFi Rose has already shown it can make a fine digital source. Now, **Ed Selley** sees how it does with an all-in-one system

**T**he massive rise in popularity of all-in-one systems has been one of the key characteristics of the last decade and it's easy to see why. The best of the crop don't simply offer a range of features that are hard to match for the same price with separates, they can do things that simply cannot be replicated by more conventional equipment. In a keenly contested category, it can be a challenge to stand out, but South Korean company HiFi Rose has done a better job than most with the RS201E.

This all-in-one takes many of the features that are present in the recently reviewed RS150 (HFC 477) but where that's a piece of source equipment, this self-contained component needs only a network connection and a pair of speakers to function. The power available is quoted at 100W available between 4 and 16ohm, which should be sufficient for most speakers that a device of this nature is likely to

encounter. Output is via a single set of sturdy speaker terminals.

The amp is mated to a digital streaming platform that is closely related to the one in the more expensive RS150. PCM is supported to 32-bit/384kHz and DSD to 256. This can access material over UPnP or you can install a hard drive, SD card or external USB drive and have it operate in a more self contained way. MQA is supported too, allowing the RS201E to fully unpack Tidal with no supporting hardware. As you might expect, Tidal is supported natively along with Qobuz and you can also use Spotify Connect. No other services are supported which leaves it a little limited compared with some rivals. The decoding hardware is built around an ESS Sabre DAC.

Built on a customised Android 7 operating system, the control interface feels different to most other devices of its type. If you want to, it's perfectly possible to control the HiFi Rose exclusively via the 8.8in touchscreen that makes up the bulk of

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
HiFi Rose RS201E  
**ORIGIN**  
South Korea  
**TYPE**  
Network streaming all-in-one system  
**WEIGHT**  
2.3kg  
**DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**  
278 x 76 x 202mm  
**FEATURES**  
● 32-bit/384kHz and DSD256 capable with MQA rendering  
● Line in/out and optical in/out  
● Android 7-based OS with full-width touchscreen  
**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Henley Audio Ltd.  
**TELEPHONE**  
01235 511166  
**WEBSITE**  
eng.hifirose.com

the front panel and, furthermore, it's actually fairly pleasant to do so. In terms of additional connectivity, it's a little more limited than some rivals with a single RCA and optical input. AirPlay and Bluetooth are also supported, but the latter is very limited with no extended formats included. What you can also do is play video via the specially curated RoseTube app to both the front panel and at resolutions up to 4k from an HDMI output on the rear panel. For some people, this is the bicycle your fish has always needed but, in a setup

## The control interface feels very different than most other devices of its type

integrated with a TV, it's potentially a rather entertaining extra.

Something that's hard to convey in the pictures is quite how pleasant the HiFi Rose is to use. As noted, the display makes it easy to set up on the front panel alone, but what is admirable is just how flexible your other options are. A remote handset (that connects via Bluetooth so isn't dependent on line of sight) is provided as is a very comprehensive and slick app that closely mirrors the same layout as on the unit itself. The RS201E is also fully Roon compatible. Often, a device with as few hard controls as this one – limited to a power button and volume slider – can feel fiddly and compromised to operate, but that isn't the case here.

The casework is solid and extremely well finished. As an offshoot of a rather larger organisation that

produces hardware that works in commercial spaces (where reliability isn't simply a desirable benefit), the RS201E leverages that experience to feel bespoke but not 'artisan' (or any other word politely justifying the odd rough edge here and there). The combination of the streaming front end and internal amplification works like an absolute charm.

## Sound quality

Everything feels like it was designed to work together and the result is very enjoyable. The power output might struggle with something truly demanding, but a significant amount of testing takes place with the Focal Kanta No1 (HFC 454), which doesn't prove a challenge for it at any stage. Furthermore, the forensically revealing speaker doesn't reveal anything significantly amiss with the way that the RS201E makes music.

Where this is most apparent is the balance between energy and refinement that the HiFi Rose straddles very effectively. The 24/96 Qobuz stream of The National's *Trouble Will Find Me* is wonderfully refined, but the angst and potency of *Fireproof* is reproduced with impressive intensity. Voices and instruments are entirely convincing and there's a compelling sense of order and space to how it recreates even fairly large-scale recordings. This isn't dependent on the naturally spacious Focal either. Using the smaller (and rather more price commensurate) Spondor A1 (HFC 460) sees the RS201E keep pushing information well beyond the confines of the cabinet.

It hammers its way through the magnificent Philly Soul of Billy Paul's *Let The Dollar Circulate* with an assurance and togetherness that means you stop listening to the critical features of the product and simply listen to the music itself. Some of the speed and agility that is



Around the same price are NAD's M10 (HFC 451) and the DTS Play-equipped Quad Artera Solus (HFC 434). The RS201E can't match the connectivity of the Quad or the streaming service support of DTS Play. However, the RS201E is much nicer to control and use than the Quad – it's streaming platform in particular is a great deal slicker. It also offers the video integration that none of its rivals feature and the unique aesthetic is arguably nicer too.



on display here can be associated with a very slight lack of bass heft, but choosing the right partnering speaker should avoid this being a significant issue. That choice should be fairly broad too because it's hard to provoke into sounding bright or aggressive. Even a serious torture test like Placebo's eponymously titled debut album is kept listenable.

This forgiveness doesn't seem to have been achieved at the expense of the ability to sound glorious when given suitable material. The exquisite 24-bit/96kHz stream of *Three Dots And A Dash* by Punch Brothers is something that flows in a gloriously and unambiguously real way from the opening plucked strings to the final crescendo. The RS201E might not look like a more conventional audiophile product, but it knows how to behave like one. It's also worth noting that, while watching music videos might not be my standard way

of listening, The RS201E can bring all of these sonic qualities to those as well. In fact, other than the Bluetooth input, which really should be considered a choice of last resort, this is admirably source agnostic.

## Conclusion

This quirky but talented all-in-one does an awful lot more right than it does wrong. If you need to connect vast swathes of equipment to it, the HiFi Rose might be a little limited in terms of inputs, but judged by any other metric this is a tremendously accomplished device that leverages all of the considerable promise of the company's streaming front end and turns it into something that works very well indeed. This still might not be the most recognisable brand name currently in this category, but the virtues of this innovative little box are considerable and it deserves to be on any shortlist at the price ●

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## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★  
**BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★  
**FEATURES** ★★★★★

**LIKE:** Forgiving yet entertaining presentation  
**DISLIKE:** Some operational quirks; rather limited additional connectivity; poor Bluetooth  
**WE SAY:** An innovative and highly talented all-in-one solution

### OVERALL

