



# Music streamer with video on its mind

South Korean corp HiFi Rose arrives in the UK with a just-add-speakers streaming amplifier that aims to be a little different to the norm. **Ed Selley** investigates

**IN SPACES WHERE** a multichannel setup might be seen to be overkill, all-in-one style systems to which you add a pair of speakers can make a lot of sense. Typically, they offer the ability to handle an audio signal from a TV or set-top box, along with excellent music performance.

On the face of it, the £1,750 RS201E from HiFi Rose looks like more of the same. But there are some unusual differences here compared to the competition, not least the ability to *provide* content for your TV as well as decode it.

Don't fret if the company name is unfamiliar to you. Headquartered in the Songpa-gu district of Seoul, in South Korea, HiFi Rose has only arrived in the UK and Ireland this year, via distributor Henley Audio. In addition to the RS201E, Henley is also bringing in the higher-end RS150 streaming amplifier (£3,900), and the *sans* onboard power RS250 network player (£1,950).

## Digital diva

The core specification of the RS201E is standard for the genre. It has a UPnP streaming module supporting sample rates up to 32-bit/384kHz PCM and DSD256/11.2MHz. Tidal and Qobuz are supported natively (with MQA unpacked onboard to further help Tidal users), and you can

also stream to the RS201E over AirPlay and Bluetooth (although the latter does without either AAC or aptX).

A front-mounted headphone socket caters to 3.5mm connections, above which is a slightly unusual looking up/down volume control, which doubles as mute button when pushed in.

Around the back, you'll find an RCA analogue input (and RCA pre-amp output); optical digital audio input and output (the latter enabling hookup to a soundbar); two USB ports (one v3.0); microSD card slot; and Ethernet as an alternative to the RS201E's built-in dual-band Wi-Fi connection.

What you'll also find is an HDMI output. This isn't fitted for Audio Return Channel (ARC) purposes, which feels like a missed opportunity, but can instead send video files, in resolutions up to 4K, to a connected display through the RS201E's 'Video' app. Supported formats include VP9, HEVC and AVC.

## Down the Tube

And there's more. The RS201E uses a customised Android (7.0) interface rendered on its 8.8in colour touchscreen. This will display the embedded Qobuz and Tidal apps, plus

something called 'Rose Tube', which collates music-related video content that you can search through using the front panel or (extremely good) Rose Connect control app. The video is then shown on the front screen or sent to your TV, while the RS201E gets on with the business of decoding the audio. It's an interesting, rather than essential, feature.

The RS201E's internal amplification produces a claimed 100W per channel, and connects via a single set of

**'A musically minded stereo amplifier and streamer contained in sleek, well implemented casework'**

good-quality speaker terminals. These complement a square-edged chassis that might appear a little more prosaic than some similarly priced competitors but feels superb. HiFi Rose is the audio offshoot of a much larger South Korean electronics outfit that makes a variety of systems including point-of-sale equipment (which needs absolute software stability) and the RS201E seems built and engineered to a very high standard indeed.

A Bluetooth-based remote handset is supplied as an extra control option should you not favour the Rose Connect app (iOS, Android, Windows, Mac) or the front panel interface. Performance on both wired and wireless network connections was impressively stable throughout my audition.

## Top of the pops

Connected to Focal Kanta No1 standmount speakers – both more expensive than the RS201E and very revealing of flaws in equipment – this well-featured media spinner puts on a more than solid show. It takes something upbeat and immediate like Emily Wolfe's *Outlier* (Qobuz, 24-bit/88.2kHz) and balances the energy and boisterousness of the recording with a civilised and refined top-end. Even when you push volume levels towards domestically unsuitable, everything stays perfectly listenable.

There's surely ample power here for most use cases – I'd imagine this machine being partnered mainly with desktop and standmount models – although the absolute bass depth of the RS201E is a little more limited than some rivals. Countering this is the sense of detail and control it brings to low frequencies. And if you find yourself needing more shove, you can always add an active subwoofer via the amp's pre-out connection.

Its performance with TV material is also convincing. On the understanding that the RS201E will need to use its own volume control, rather than syncing over HDMI ARC, the way that it gets stuck into the 'not a *Dr Who* episode, honest' experience of the third instalment of *Loki* (Disney+) is very entertaining.

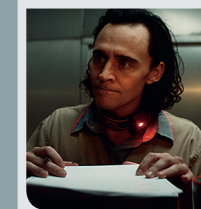
Dialogue is locked to the screen and fulsome rather than thin, and the vastness of the calamity that faces Lamentis and its inhabitants is well conveyed. So long as a modicum of care has been put into the placement of your speakers, the RS201E creates a stereo

## SPECIFICATIONS

**ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 2 x 100W **CONNECTIONS:** Stereo RCA line input; stereo RCA pre-out; optical digital audio input; optical digital audio output; HDMI output; 2 x USB (1 x v2.0, 1 x v3.0); microSD card slot; Ethernet; 3.5mm headphone jack **INTEGRATED SERVICES:** Tidal; Qobuz **AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:** MQA; WAV; FLAC; WMA; MP3; APE; AAC; PCM (to 384kHz/32-bit); DSD (to DSD256/11.2MHz); and more **VIDEO FORMAT SUPPORT:** MKV; MP4; WMV; MPEG-1; MPEG-2; MPEG-4; H.263; H.264; H.265; VC-1; VP9; and more **REMOTE:** Yes, plus Rose Connect app **DIMENSIONS:** 76(h) x 278(w) x 202(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.3kg

**FEATURES:** Android based interface; 8.8in touchscreen/display; UPnP streaming with integrated Tidal and Qobuz; AirPlay; Bluetooth; dual-band Wi-Fi; Rose Tube music video player; 4K/60fps output; 32-bit ESS Sabre DAC

## TESTED WITH



**LOKI (DISNEY+):** The third of the Disney+ MCU series to launch (following *WandaVision* and *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*), *Loki* puts the God of Mischief in a six-part time-hopping story that offers plenty of standalone thrills while setting the scene for Marvel's next batch of Phase Four feature films. See p98 for more.



soundstage that allows for the suspension of disbelief. Binge-watching many (many) episodes of *Air Crash Investigation* has seen the amp be entirely effective, too.

And the Rose Tube app? As one of the more determinedly traditional contributors to this magazine, I can't say it would ever form the backbone of my usage but it is unexpectedly good fun. A quick search through the app found a live concert from the band My Baby (the best band that absolutely nobody seems to have heard of) in 1080p. The video quality of the RS201E is largely governed by the quality of the videos on the app, but it was more than watchable. Likewise, the audio quality of most videos is nowhere near as good as from Tidal and Qobuz, but the ability to enjoy a band I like in a different context to the albums I own – and via a screen on my amplifier if I wish – is welcome.

## One to watch

Even if you don't see yourself using the video functionality very much, the RS201E still has plenty of appeal. It takes a more than decent streaming interface and a musically minded stereo amplifier, and contains them in a sleek and well implemented casework. There's generous connectivity – although the absence of HDMI ARC is a bit of a downer – and the video playback elements give it a leg up. This brand isn't well known, but based on the RS201E, it's certainly one to watch ■

## HCC VERDICT



**HiFi Rose RS201E**

→ £1,750 → eng.hifirose.com

**WE SAY:** A novel but rather impressive take on a 'just add speakers' system, combining a slick interface, useful features and sparkling performance.

1. The RS201E's 8.8in LCD display offers touch control and video playback

2. Connections include analogue and digital audio, HDMI, USB and microSD