

Singing The Blues



Blue Aura pairs its v40 amplifier with a new set of classy loudspeakers in a limited edition package. Jon Myles listens with pleasure.

Blue Aura's Blackline v40 integrated amplifier impressed us greatly last year (Hi-Fi World July 2016 issue). Here was a compact valve/transistor design offering a claimed 30 Watts per channel output and featuring an in-built DAC, aptX Bluetooth connectivity plus USB and analogue RCA inputs. As well as two gently glowing 12AU7/ECC82 tubes at the front it also featured a 6e2 magic-eye indicator valve to show volume level.

More importantly it also sounded exceptionally sweet with a dynamic, punchy presentation allied to a lush

midband. Just the sort of thing to introduce people to the joys of vacuum tubes.

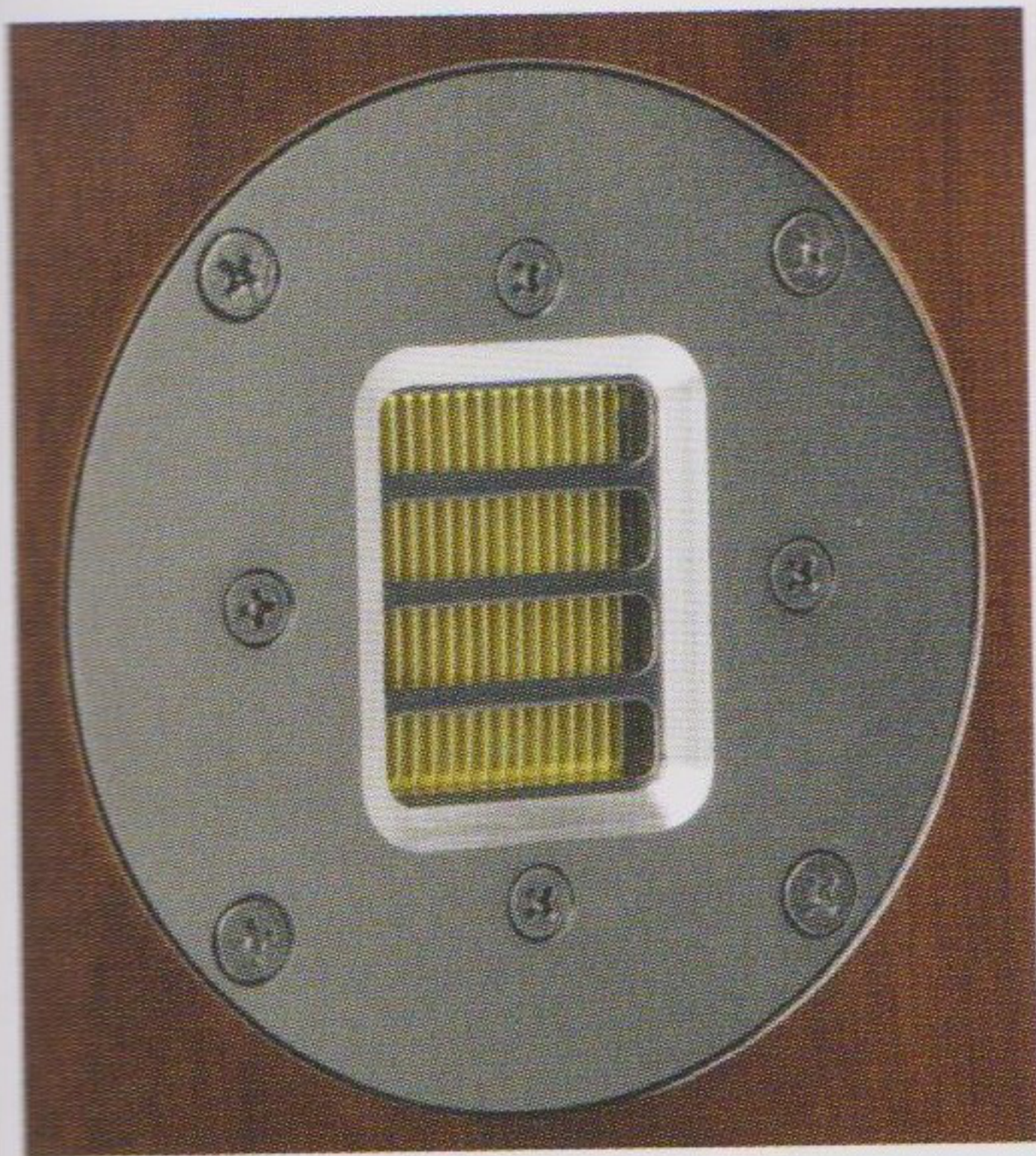
No surprise, then, that it proved a huge success - with Blue Aura soon discovering that dealers were pairing it with loudspeakers costing £600 and above so good was its performance.

It's that fact that explains this new limited edition package from the Cambridgeshire-based company. They've taken the original v40, given it a cosmetic makeover, and paired it with a set of new speakers named ps40 LE engineered to bring the best out of the classy little amplifier.

Both amp and 'speakers are available separately priced at £549 and £499 respectively but are ideally meant to be sold as a package which costs a wallet-friendly £999.

The v40 LE is technically similar to the original but gains a high-gloss walnut fascia that matches the finish on the loudspeakers. You get the same valve complement, behind sitting two small transformers for the signal and power circuits.

Rotary controls handle volume and source selection, replicated on a credit card-sized remote control unit. Rear inputs consist of a single set of unbalanced RCAs, a micro-USB for



The new ps40 LE loud-speaker uses a Heil-type Air Motion Transformer for its high-frequency driver which brings added air and atmosphere.

connection to a computer, a 3.5mm mini-jack analogue input, and a socket for attaching the included Bluetooth antenna.

There's also a subwoofer output and the 'speaker connections accept both spades and banana plugs.

As for the loudspeakers, they are ostensibly a development of Blue Aura's existing ps40 standmount but are so heavily revised as to constitute a new model.

The cabinet is larger at 253mm x 145mm x 205mm (H/W/D) while the drive units are completely new – a 4.5" hemp-integrated mid/bass driver allied to a Heil-type Air Motion Transformer for the high frequencies.

A single pair of 'speaker binding posts sit on the rear, below a small reflex port for added bass response.

Fit and finish is exemplary for the price, the gloss walnut finish and gold logo plate beneath the main driver giving them a decidedly upmarket look. Paired with the v40 LE amplifier you'd be given for thinking this package was selling for at least 50 per cent more than its asking price on looks alone.

SOUND QUALITY

I already knew the qualities of the Blue Aura amplifier from previous experience but combining it with the ps40 LE 'speakers served to accentuate those abilities.

Their Air Motion Transformer tweeter is clear and insightful with plenty of high-frequency information. The cymbal work on John Coltrane's 'Interstellar Space' possessed finesse and detail without any trace of harshness. The improvised saxophone lines also floated free of the cabinets with a good sense of scale and height.

Down below the mid/bass driver

has a firm, punchy low-end for its size and a speedy presentation that matches well with the extended highs of the tweeter.

Obviously they don't produce earth-shaking bass but there's never a feeling you are missing out on any essential musical information. Indeed, the thundering tympani parts on 'Widow's Peak' by Bat For Lashes came across with surprising force – encouraging me to push the volume up a few notches.

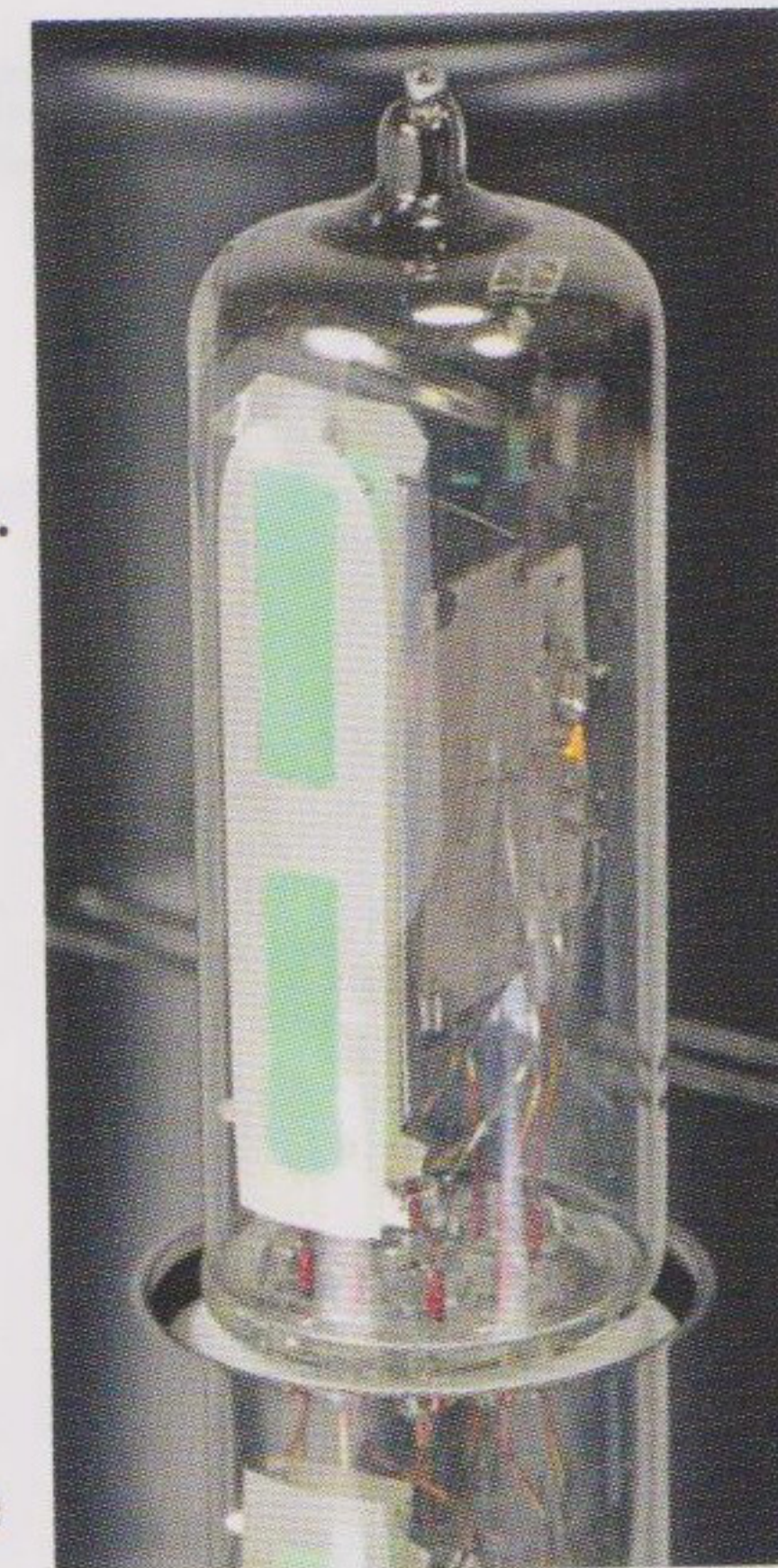
That done the sound swelled to easily fill Hi-Fi World's large listening room. The v40 LE may not be the most powerful of amplifiers but it is essentially refined and has enough grip to push the ps40s sufficiently loud without the sound collapsing in on itself.

Replacing the standmounts with a pair of similarly-priced Yamaha NS-F330 floorstanders (see review forthcoming issue) showed just how well matched the Blue Aura combination is. The Yamahas did bring some extra bass depth but lacked the refined, detailed mids and treble of the ps40 LEs.

Streaming Bluetooth via an iPhone 7 Plus proved easy with pairing taking place in seconds. The internal DAC is limited to 16bit/48kHz which isn't a problem via this mode of replay and the sound was again full and vibrant

with a healthy amount of detail and good rhythmic drive. Undoubtedly, it's a handy feature to have.

Taken individually the v40 LE and ps40 LEs are impressive performers at their price with a good range of features. Put together, though, they are undoubtedly more than the sum of their parts, possessing a natural synergy that elevates their abilities to something rather special.



A 6e2 magic eye indicator valve sits at the front of the v40 LE amplifier to give a visual indication of volume level. A real eye-catching feature.

CONCLUSION

This is one impressive little system for just £999. The valve section of the v40 LE amplifier doesn't just look good but also brings a lovely, rich, organic flavour to the sound while the ps40 LE loudspeakers are as musically coherent as any you'll find at this price. It's a package that comes highly recommended.

BLUE AURA V40 LE/PS40

For a chance to win this limited edition Blue Aura package see our Bristol Show preview on page 48.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Blue Aura ps40 LE loudspeakers have a very smooth response characteristic, especially from the ribbon tweeter.

Our third-octave pink noise analysis was taken 30 degrees off axis; on-axis treble rose by a greater degree. This characteristic, taken in conjunction with an over-damped bass response where bass falls away below 200Hz, means the speakers have been designed for wall standing, not toed-in toward listeners but firing straight down the room. The small port adds to bass around 50Hz, our red trace shows.

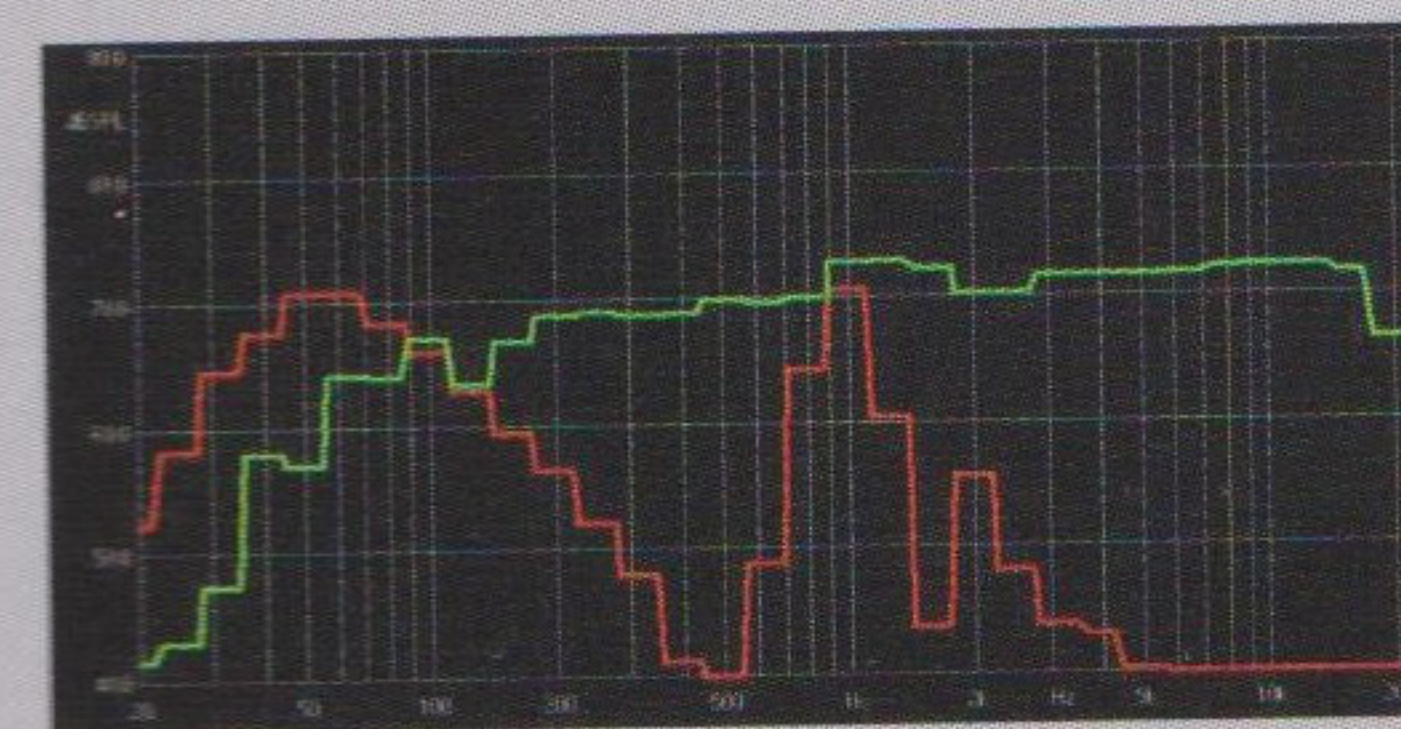
Sensitivity was surprisingly high too, at 87.5dB from one nominal Watt (2.8V) of input, even with a 6 Ohm dcr bass unit. The only small issue is an internal box modal resonance making itself known through the port and through forward output around 1kHz, that may well be heard as a small amount of box colour. The ps40 LE 'speakers will sound very smooth and highly detailed all the same.

The Blue Aura V40 amplifier produced 10 Watts into 8 Ohms and 15 Watts into 4 Ohms, from what is a solid-state amplifier fronted by preamp valves. Distortion levels were well under control, measuring 0.1% in the midband and around 0.2% at high frequencies.

The amplifier remains a fascinating and innovative design, whilst the ps40 LE loudspeakers are superbly engineered little wall standers with a folded ribbon tweeter of outstanding performance. They will shade many larger and more expensive alternatives., measurement shows. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Green - driver output
Red - port output



BLUE AURA v40 /ps40 LE £999



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.

VALUE - keenly priced.

VERDICT

A talented valve/transistor hybrid amplifier with a pair of sonically assured loudspeakers at a bargain price. Luxurious looks with a sound to match.

FOR

- rich, warm sound
- valve input stage
- Bluetooth
- refined 'speakers with good bass and extended treble
- quality looks
- price

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

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