

building bricks

Modular amplifiers are not a new idea. The most innovative was probably the Meridian modular system, but that has drifted, through lack of interest, into history. The

The Moth amplifier comprises a modest 30Wpc stereo power amplifier, a completely passive input switching/level control unit and a self-powered RIAA phono equalisation stage with provision for moving magnet and low output moving coil cartridges. Also available is a bridged monoblok version of the power amplifier at the same price as the stereo version (but you will, of course, require a pair for stereo) and under development is an active/passive control unit to add tape monitoring facilities and a headphone amplifier. The electronic design has an excellent pedigree — none other than Stan Curtis, one-time hi-fi reviewer in our predecessor, *Hi-Fi for Pleasure*, and designer of the original Cambridge Audio CD players.

Each Moth module is assembled on a long narrow chassis which is inserted into a sleeve of rectangular section aluminium tubing. The rear panel is formed by bending the chassis through 90 degrees and is inset for neatness. The diminutive front panels are crafted from wood, in an assortment of finishes. The modules can be stacked, one above the other, or placed side by side, without any unwanted interaction between them, so effective is the screening provided by the sleeved construction.

The internal construction is excellent, and the only weak component located (the volume control pot.) is to be changed for a more robust item. I particularly liked the use of plastic tubes, laid like drinking straws along the chassis of the control unit, as conduits for the delicate silver wires employed for all the signal hook ups.

I was less enamoured with the glued-on knobs for level and input selection. Both have a position indicating dimple, but there are no reference points on the fascia; and the selector switch positions bear no apparent relationship with the locations of the input sockets at the

principal advantages of the modular format are the complete isolation of the various sections — control unit, power amp and phono equalisation; and the versatility to vary the formula for individual applications. The Moth Series 30 is a revival of the concept, in a wholly new livery

The phono has a remote power supply and no mains switch. It is clearly intended that it be left continuously powered. The low current consumption should not provide major trauma upon the arrival of the electricity bill and you will avoid having to wait an hour or so until the best performance is attained.

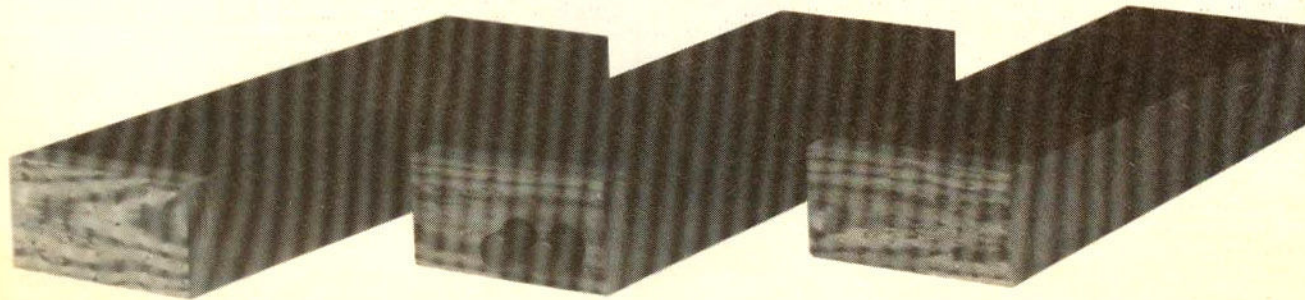
Inside, there are four daughter boards mounted, in pairs, on the main board. The outer pair is located very close to the edge, for no obvious reason. To enable the protruding components to fit down the aluminium sleeve, the taller components, and the board itself, have been bent, unceremoniously, to one side. A centimetre of extra clearance would have removed the appearance of a forest felled by a storm. It all works of course, but it's not very elegant. Cartridge selection is via a push and latch switch.

The power amp has its power supply, from which there was some minor mechanical noise, on board, and it may be switched off when not in use. It is a modest amplifier capable of adequately driving the majority of loudspeakers aimed at the domestic consumer. Speaker connection is via binding posts that will accept 4mm banana plugs.

The modules can be purchased separately or together. The phono stage may be added to an amplifier not so equipped, or to upgrade the facility provided. I used it to good effect with the Sansui AU-X911DG amplifier. The control unit may be used as a passive level control for a CD player and the power amp may be used wherever there is a requirement for a stereo power amp of modest proportions. With the spread of loudspeakers offering a bi-wirable option, a pair of Moth power amps could provide passive bi-amplification.

LISTENING

The amp was used to drive the revealing ProAc Studio



rear. For example, sockets marked AUX1 and AUX2 are adjacent to one another, but are found at opposite ends of the switch's range.

The operating instructions were missing from the review sample, and the socket layouts printed on the undersides of the cases take some studying before you can appreciate what is required. (Purchasers will, of course, receive full operating instructions.) If you are not careful, it is easy to get the connections wrong — particularly on the RIAA stage, where, logic would suggest, the turntable earth point would be adjacent to the input sockets and not, as in practice, against the output sockets.

That earthing point too is small and the attachment of turntable earths is tricky with spade ended wires — more so if you have to contend with a bared wire termination. In practice, this sort of thing tends only to upset reviewers who have to make changes frequently. In any case, neither of the turntables I used for the review required the connection of the earth lead.

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Tower loudspeakers via QED79 strand cable, which suits it well. The amp runs quite happily on 'two star' cables, but for the connection of the Marantz CD94 compact disc player (using separate D to A converters from Marantz and Deltec) I stayed with my preferred choice of Monster Interlink Reference 2. To test the efficacy of the phono module I used an AT-OC7 cartridge mounted in a Pink Triangle PT T00/SME 5 combination; and an AR EB101 with its supplied Glanz moving magnet cartridge.

The overall impression is of a delicately crafted sound which trades incisiveness for homely warmth. This is an amplifier with the warming qualities of a Radox bath!

The music can be played loudly, but without the amplifier ever displaying the sheer weight of sound that suggests a bottomless well of reserve power, and certainly not the obesity to which the Sansui amp is prey.

High frequencies are sweet and delicate; the midrange expressive without forcefulness. You would require an assertive loudspeaker, like the AR Red Box 2 to make the combination really kick, but there are plenty of smaller

MOTH MODULAR AMPLIFIER

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loudspeakers with aggressive mid and high frequency ranges for which a palliative like the Moth amp would bring a welcome tranquillity.

The bass is a bit soft and slow, especially when used from a vinyl source, for best results with a large speaker like the ProAc; but, in practice, it is unlikely to be so partnered. The speakers were employed to establish the limits of the amplifier's performance, not as a recommendation of the combination for use in the real world.

The phono input, designed primarily for use with low output moving coil cartridges, is one of the quietest I have ever encountered, with no trace of hum at full gain, and barely a whisper of hiss. There was, however, a hint of a problem, in that with the Audio Technica AT-OC7 moving coil cartridge in the driving seat, switching to the moving magnet setting caused the unit to become unstable.

This could have been something to do with the low inductance characteristic of moving coil cartridges improperly loading the MM circuitry. Moving magnet cartridges did not excite the same problem. Although, used as intended, it should not prove a problem, it is something that might worry purchasers. Moth are now aware of the phenomenon, which will be eliminated for future production versions.

CD sound is crisp and tight within the general characteristics I have described; but, mellifluous is the adjective that best describes the vinyl sound of the amplifier. It is the sort of sound for curling up in a soft chair in front of a warm fire and burying yourself in the sorts of seductive late night music that seems to have *Which CD's* disc reviewers rushing to embrace the lavatory pan.

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REVIEWER:
GRAHAM MAYOR

ON TEST

MOTH MODULAR AMPLIFIER

RATING

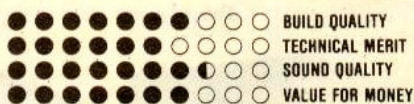
PROS:

Unusual, elegant appearance with a finely crafted sound quality

CONS:

That same unusual appearance will not have mainstream appeal with the generally unadventurous buying public

Moth Marketing Ltd,
10 Dane Lane,
Wilstead, Bedford



VERDICT

This was never intended as a mainstream product, but as a simple elegant amplifier that can be mixed and matched to suit individual requirements, while offering a relaxed sound quality of greater refinement than would be expected at the price. With very few reservations, Moth have achieved what they set out to do. All you have to do is listen to it. You won't be disappointed.

THE ESSENTIALS

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| Price | 30Wpc (60W mono version available) | Tone controls | no |
| passive control unit | £129.00 | Variable turnover | n/a |
| RIAA module | £169.00 | Balance | no |
| Power amp module | £199.00 | Cartridge inputs | 1 switchable MM/MC |
| Width | 100mm per module | Tape inputs | no |
| Height | 52mm | Line inputs | 4 |
| Depth | 340mm | CD Direct | |
| Colour | black with choice of wood finished fascia trim | all inputs direct-passive control module | |
| Power output/8ohms | Mute | | |