

AUDIO
FILE

Pre/Power amplifier. Rated at 50W/8ohm
 Made by: International Audio Group, China
 Supplied by: Quad Hifi, IAG House, UK
 Telephone: 01480 452561
 Web: www.quad-hifi.co.uk; www.internationalaudiogroup.com
 Prices (pre/power): £1199/£1199



Quad 33/303

The new Quad 33 and 303 have big shoes to fill, being resurrections of one of the best-selling pre/power amp combinations of all time [*HFN* Apr '68]. Retaining the original model designations and dimensions is a start, but that's pretty much where the resemblance stops – the 33 and 303, priced £1199 each, sport a renewed look that feels familiar yet completely fresh, and have undergone updates outside and in.

On the 33, modernisation includes not just MM/MC phono and three RCA line-level inputs, but a balanced XLR input as well – bye-bye DIN sockets. Quad hasn't added an onboard DAC, but that's a good thing as many digital products have the shelf-life of a banana.

Outputs, too, have been dragged into the 21st century, with XLRs for balanced operation joined by 12V triggers so you can switch on the

'A soundstage wide enough to unleash the scale of a Decca Gold'

303 at the same time. On the front, meanwhile, a motorised volume control dominates the 33's left side, while the right has flush rotaries for balance and Quad's signature variable tone controls. Above these, a new orange-lit display helps you keep track of source, MM/MC operation, tone, etc.

As the partnering 303 is so well-designed, you can probably hook it

up without checking the manual. Rear-panel push-buttons choose between RCA and XLR balanced ingress, while the multi-way binding posts are clearly marked for stereo or bridged mono operation.

We were supplied with two 303s to test the bridged performance, and found a second amp increases not just the available power but also bass solidity and speed. Quad rates the amp at 2x50W/8ohm (the original was 45W), while its modern complementary Class AB design offers more dynamic punch, far lower distortion and noise, and a flatter, more extended bandwidth. Our Lab Tests revealed the stereo separation, frequency response and distortion of the 33 preamp have been similarly finessed.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Forget everything you know about the sound of the original 33/303.

We played old and new side-by-side, and while the 1960s pairing still sounds wonderfully warm, it lacks the precision, bass control and extension at the frequency extremes. The originals were voiced first and foremost for Quad's ESL 57. The new 33/303 has to face a world of lower impedance if typically higher sensitivity designs if they're to succeed. And they do, not subjectively appearing short of power with a variety of speakers.

Via the 33's MC phono stage, The Animals' 'House Of The Rising Sun' [self-titled, Parlophone] sounded crisp, with 'twang' on the

ABOVE: Quad's original bass and subtle 'tilt' tone controls are resurrected here above clearly marked buttons for input and standby. The orange backlighting can be adjusted

guitars and a tactile presence to the organ and vocals. This was mono – moving to stereo material, Quad's pairing exhibited a blessedly wide soundstage, enough to unleash the full scale of a Decca Gold cartridge as well as the glories of *Bob And Ray Throw A Stereo Spectacular* [RCA] on open-reel. To savour this early champion of stereophonic sound, one needs cavernous openness and scale – these new amplifiers sounded 'huge' in the literal sense.

The resolution of the 33/303 system will satiate listeners eager to compare different sources and pressings, and the built-in phono stage – while lacking adjustability – will challenge standalone rivals around the £500 mark. Howard McGhee's *Maggie's Back In Town* [Craft] offered punchy brass and well-defined 'walking bass'. This combination is hard to resist.

VERDICT

The buzz in the hi-fi community around the new 33/303 was wholly justified – in a market of integrated amps or pre/power systems under £2500, this duo stands out. ⚡



HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	56W / 83W
Dyn. power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	72W / 125W / 145W / 85W
Output imp. (20Hz–20kHz; 33/303)	54ohm / 0.053-0.11ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz–100kHz; 33/303)	–0.0dB to +0.1/+0.0dB to –1.7dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBV/0dBW)	211mV / 1523mV (balanced in)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV/0dBW)	93.7dB / 92.1dB
Distortion (20Hz–20kHz, 0dBV/10W)	0.00007-0.0003%/0.0005-0.025%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	12W / 165W (6W preamp)
Dimensions (WHD; 303) / Weight	120x176x325mm / 8.4kg