



Four-play

The Elex is the latest Rega amp to receive a refresh and **Ed Selley** can't help but wonder if it's the company's best update yet

Now that we have seen two examples of Rega's recent integrated amplifiers in the form of the newly developed Aethos and revised Elicit MK5 (HFC 457 and 490), it isn't too surprising to find models further down the range undergoing an update. While the nature of the changes and improvements that the company has sought to make is starting to become more predictable, in the case of the Elex MK4 there's an intriguing plot twist...

At first glance the new model has received the logical and welcome updates we saw on its bigger sibling. The most significant of these is the inclusion of a pair of digital inputs; one optical and one coaxial, and both capable of supporting PCM to 24-bit/192kHz, thanks to a Wolfson DAC. This board is lifted in its entirety from the Elicit MK5 and gives the Elex a useful extra piece of functionality over the preceding model. This joins four RCA analogue line inputs and a moving-magnet phono stage, which means it should handle most connection requirements without issue. A 6.35mm headphone output is also included on the front.

This is made available to an amplifier that is more closely related to

the Brio (HFC 446) than it is to Rega's larger models. Power is quoted as 72W into 8ohm and 90W into 6ohm. No figure is given for 4ohm operation and the company also warns the amp will run hot into sub-6ohm loads (although it doesn't run especially warm during testing and there is a thermal cut out built into the circuit if it does). The extra space that the Elex MK4 has over the Brio allows for it to be laid out in a more logical and optimal way. It also employs the

It feels like a bargain and perhaps the most complete Rega amplifier yet

power supply arrangements of the Elicit MK5, with more galvanic isolation than before and a separate tap for the digital board.

Quite how much you are going to miss the extra power that the Elicit MK5 has will depend to a significant extent on your speakers, but the on-paper numbers do not tell the whole story. The output stage of the larger amp delivers more current into tricky loads, but it would be a stretch to call the Elex MK4 under powered.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rega Elex MK4

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
11kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
432 x 82 x 340mm

FEATURES
● Claimed power output: 2x 72W (8ohm)
● Inputs: 4x stereo RCA; 1x MM phono; 1x optical; 1x coaxial
● 6.35mm headphone output

DISTRIBUTOR
Rega Research Ltd.

WEBSITE
rega.co.uk

Cosmetically, it gains the same alterations that we have seen on other recent Rega amplifiers and this is no bad thing as the basic layout is logical and easy to use. I'm not a huge fan of the absence of direct input selection; it is a single cycle on the front panel via a button or bi-directional on the remote, but this is not the end of the world so long as you group the inputs you choose to employ in a logical way. Cosmetically, the only major difference to the Elicit MK5 is the volume control, which is simplified and has the level indicator on the knob itself rather than on the front panel. I'd argue that the simpler arrangement of the Elex MK4 looks better and I prefer using the smaller remote handset over the larger 'Solaris' controller that comes supplied with Rega's bigger amps.

Something more intangible about the Elex MK4 is that, in feeling so close to the Elicit MK5, it comes across as a great deal of amplifier for the asking price. The build is absolutely superb and the metalwork feels significantly more expensive. Rega has acknowledged that it has swallowed most of the cost rises for the new model itself. As well as being a welcome recognition that things are fairly tough at the moment, it leaves the Elex MK4 feeling like an enormous amount of amp for the money.

Sound quality


This is further emphasised when you begin listening to it. Initially using a Chord Qutest (HFC 436) as a source in the same test space (which in the interests of full disclosure is a relatively modest 4x3m room) as the Elicit MK5, the power deficit of the Elex MK4 simply doesn't make itself

felt. Running into the superlative Neat Petite Classic (HFC 495) standmount, the Elex MK4 delivers *All Of It Was Mine* by The Weather Station in a supremely satisfying way. The gentle flow of *Chip On My Shoulder* with its distinctive start/stop timing is captured with total assurance, walking a perfect balance between avoiding forcing this relatively delicate piece of music and ensuring that it never sounds slow.

The tonal realism is outstanding. Rega has long excelled at producing amplifiers that manage to sound lively and energetic without tipping over into stridency. Matched with a complete lack of mechanical sympathy, I am sure the Elex MK4

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could be made to sound slightly forward, but with any more conventional combination the results are exceptionally even handed. The incredibly vivid Gaelic vocals of Talitha MacKenzie in her eponymously titled debut album leap out of the recording and she never sounds anything less than invigoratingly real throughout. The Elex MK4 does a fair bit of running with the considerably more costly Bowers & Wilkins 705 S3 standmount and works exceptionally well partnering its tonal richness and refinement with the speaker's formidable detail retrieval.



HOW IT COMPARES

The Rega is £300 less than Roksan's capable Attessa Streaming Amplifier (HFC 487) and the critical difference between the two is the latter can act as an all-in-one system in all but name. The Rega has no answer to the well thought-out Blu OS streaming interface of the Roksan and adding streaming to it – even making use of the digital inputs on the Elex MK4 – probably won't make enough of a saving. But if you already have source equipment, the Elex MK4 is better across all its input options than the Roksan. If you simply need an amplifier, the Rega has the Roksan royally trumped.

Connections are well spaced for easy hook up of larger cables



Switch to the digital inputs and, while the built-in DAC can't challenge rivals that cost more, the results stay very listenable. Like on the Elicit MK5, I feel the company views these connections as support for dedicated source equipment and for tasks like decoding a TV signal, and they are more than up to the job. I suspect it will also be more capable when connected to one of Rega's recent CD transports for cost effective and enjoyable disc replay, too.

The phono stage is far more than a convenience feature, though. Tested via an AVID Ingenium (HFC 379) and Nagaoka MP-200 (HFC 434), it puts in a performance with *Never Going Under* by Circa Waves that is beyond pretty much anything else I've heard

at the price. This is not a recording for the ages, but the Elex MK4 works diligently to find the musical brilliance it contains. The pounding euphoria of *Carry You Home* is delivered with impressive low-end heft that never takes the edge off the speed that is delivered. It's a level of performance that will need an adept external phono stage to better. Against this, the headphone amp has to content itself with 'merely' being pretty good. It doesn't have quite the same level of effortless heft as the bigger Rega amps, but it is more than up to the job of some occasional late-night use.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most positive thing about the Elex MK4 is that it doesn't feel like a lesser version of the Elicit MK5 for less money. This is not to say that the latter isn't the better amp – it most definitely is and can deal with speakers that the former tends to struggle with, but in a great many situations the Elex MK4 feels like an absolute bargain and perhaps the most complete Rega integrated yet ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Engaging and musical performance; connectivity; build

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No direct input selection

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WESAY:** The Elex MK4 gives the majority of more expensive amps a run for their money – it's a fabulous bargain

FEATURES ★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★