

TEMPTATIONS

Designer's notes

"The Ethos is our attempt to attract lifestyle enthusiasts while still delivering a quality sound"



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Pathos Ethos

This **integrated amp's** style might divide, but its sound is truly divine

Profile

Price **£3800** ★★★★★

What makes it special? A distinctive hybrid electronic design, with dual-mono power amplifier sections and valve pre-amplification working in Class-A mode

Tempted? With those eye-catching looks and Pathos's habit of turning out great-sounding amplifiers, you bet we are

Italian brand Pathos doesn't do ordinary. Simply feast your eyes on the distinctive Ethos integrated amplifier and you'll see what we mean.

Astonishingly, this is one of Pathos' more conventional-looking products. Even so, we still think it would feel more at home in *Battlestar Galactica*, discreetly tucked onto the flashy control panel of a Cylon spaceship.

With Pathos, it's never been just about looks. In our experience, top-quality engineering, brilliant build and engaging sound has always added substance to the company's style-led designs.

As is the way of Pathos, the Ethos features a hybrid electronic design. We're not usually lovers of mixing valves with solid-state. The intention is to combine the sweetness and fluidity of valves with the grip of transistors - the reality, however, is usually a soggy mess. But that's not the case here.

Hybrid design hits a hot streak

The two valves visible on the top panel are a pair of ECC 88s working in Class-A mode. Class A is a condition where a high amount of current flows constantly through the circuitry, regardless of what the music signal requires.

The upside is superior performance, normally. The downside is high energy consumption and excess heat.

In this case, the relatively low power requirements of preamplification means heat isn't an issue from the valves - however, that role is taken up by the

dual-mono power amp sections. These run hot enough to require the large expanse of heatsinking on both sides of the Ethos. Those showy heatsinks get rather hot, so make sure there's plenty of ventilation before buying, as reliability will suffer otherwise.

That power section has some decent muscle too. While an output of 100 watts into 8 ohms is no great shakes at this price, the fact that it doubles as impedance halves is a sure sign that this amplifier won't wilt when taxed by difficult loads.

We had some memorable listening sessions with B&W's mighty 800 Diamonds (reviewed on this issue, p86), and these are a pretty demanding load as far as speakers are concerned. We got similarly positive results with our resident ATC SCM50s, as well as Neat's entertaining Ultimatum XLs (reviewed in our September issue).

By the conventional stripped-down standards of high-end stereo amplifiers, the Ethos is well equipped, too. It's got plenty of line level inputs (balanced and unbalanced), a remote control, and our version came with a built-in digital-to-analogue conversion module (buy the amp without a DAC and it'll cost £3250).

You'll need to load special driver software onto your computer, whether PC or MAC, to make the digital link work. We got this on a USB stick, but it's also available as a download on Pathos's website, www.pathosacoustics.com.

Once the USB software drive is installed, your computer will recognise the Ethos as a means of playback. The amplifier has coaxial and USB inputs, and will happily accept 24-bit/192kHz resolution files through both.

Sweet spot for Pathos

As far as functionality goes, things could be a touch smoother. While that large volume control feels nice and positive, we're not particularly fans of the other front-panel switches. They feel vague in action, as do the remote control buttons.

Pathos hasn't labelled its quirky handset's buttons for style reasons. Sure, it looks classy - but it's a pain to use until the purpose of each button is well and truly memorised.

Any doubts raised by the amplifier's ergonomic oddities, however, evaporate like a politician's promise once listening starts. This is one sweet amplifier.

The Ethos's presentation is supremely refined and full-bodied. It rounds off

Any doubts raised by the amplifier's ergonomic oddities evaporate like a politician's promises after a general election when listening starts



Memorising those remote buttons might be a problem, but the Ethos's flexibility won't be

TECH SPECS

Type Integrated
Power 100W
Inputs Line level x 7, USB, RCA, XLR
Outputs Preamp
Remote control Yes
Finishes 1
Dimensions (hwd) 15 x 43 x 49cm

harsh edges in recordings and delivers a rich, nicely textured bass. The same could be said of the many hybrid designs that have entered our listening rooms - but where the Pathos differs from those designs is in the way it preserves the energy in a performance.

Despite the integrated amp's lovely manners, it's still capable of delivering hard-charging music, such as the apocalyptic anthem *I Wanna Be Your Dog* from The Stooges' first album, with a sizeable dose of potent punk-rock venom.

There's plenty of musical momentum and no loss of organisation, even when - as with many of the punk rockers' tunes - things seem to get out of hand, sonically speaking. That combination of aggression, refinement and vice-like control is as rare to find as it is extremely welcome.

Move on to the likes of Beethoven's grandiose *Symphony No.5* and the Pathos simply revels in the huge dynamic sweeps and complex

Offbeat style, yes, but it's a bang-on performance thanks to the Ethos' unusual hybrid design



instrumentation. There's plenty of insight without the overtly analytical nature of most high-end integrated amps getting in the way. You can add fine, stable stereo imaging and a sure-footed delivery of rhythms to the growing list of plus points, too.

Put it all together and you have an uncommonly talented integrated amp that's as capable of putting a wide smile on a hardcore audio enthusiast's face as it is grabbing the attention of a flamboyant interior designer. That's certainly not something most high-end competitors can boast about.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR A brilliant mix of sonic sweetness, insight and control; fine build; distinctive styling

AGAINST Runs hot; the remote handset and front panel buttons are imprecise in use

VERDICT The Pathos Ethos mixes style with substance better than any rival we can think of