Pathos Aurium

A distinctive **headphone amplifier** that doesn’t believe in compromise

**Profile**

**Price** £850 ★★★★★

**Highlight** Pathos’s distinctive hybrid electronic design that couples a valve preamplifier stage to a solid-state output stage

**Consider if** You value the headphone listening experience as a priority and are prepared to pair the Aurium with a source and headphones of comparable quality

Few companies combine style with substance as well as Pathos. Based in Vincenza, Italy, this hi-fi specialist has consistently turned out products that are as pleasing to the eye as they are sweet to the ear. We’re happy to report the Aurium headphone amplifier continues that fine tradition.

We had no reason to complain about Pathos’s build quality in the past and we don’t need to start now. The Aurium feels beautifully made and is as solid as you like – the company has taken great care in getting the fit and finish just right. Some may not take to the extrovert appearance, but for us it’s preferable to the usual anonymous black or silver box. If we were to criticise anything, it would be the volume control feel. We think it could do with more resistance in its movement to reinforce the product’s quality feel.

Pathos has long favoured hybrid amplification that mixes valve and solid-state electronics - the idea is to combine the sweetness of valves and the grip of solid state. In our experience, most components that try the hybrid approach never quite manage to pull it off. The Aurium, like most Pathos products we’ve heard, gets it right.

**Under the skin**

This distinctive headphone amp uses a pair of small 6922 valves operating in Class A to handle pre-amplification duties, while a solid-state output stage does the donkey work of actually driving the headphones. The power output is claimed to 3.6W in total into a 32 ohm load. We tried Beyerdynamic’s T1s, the Grado RS1s and Sennheiser’s HD595s, and didn’t have an issue driving any of them to high levels.

The Aurium’s power supply is an external unit that connects by a decently long umbilical cable. External power supplies are usually a good thing, because they take high currents and potentially large magnetic fields away from the sensitive audio circuits.

By headphone amplifier standards, the Aurium is well equipped. It has four line inputs, one of which is balanced. We’re glad to see a balance control, even if it is on the back panel, and wish more headphone amplifiers had a gain control like the Aurium’s. This lets us fine-tune the volume according to the sensitivity of the headphones being used.

We like this headphone amplifier a lot. Its sound is a wonderfully seductive combination of transparency and grip. From the midrange upwards the Aurium is as detailed as you like: listen to the violin in Arvo Pärt’s *Fratres* and the violin in…
That it would be easy for bass to dominate the proceedings, but that delicate and expressive midrange is perfectly in proportion. It's a neat balancing act. It's only worth spending this kind of money on a headphone amp if you've got a source and headphones worthy of such a product. That means a source of at least Audiolab 8200CD level and the likes of Grado's SR325is headphones as a minimum. With that good (or better) the Aurium will give you a large slice of high-end sound in a neat little package.

**Rating** ★★★★★

**FOR** Sweet, insightful midrange; bass power and grip; excellent build and finish; plenty of inputs; distinctive appearance

**AGAINST** If price isn't an issue, nothing

**VERDICT** If you're serious about headphones in the home this Pathos is a top class choice.