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**Rega Aethos** Monday, December 9, 2019  
integrated amplifier Jason Kennedy

I originally heard about this beefy integrated in discussions with Rega's electronics guru Terry Bateman in mid 2018, but the Aethos didn't make a public appearance until the Bristol show in February 19, and even then was only at the prototype stage. It took another eight months to go into production, clearly Rega doesn't like to rush things. The Aethos occupies territory that while hardly exotic is pricey by Rega's standards when it comes to electronics. They have a bigger integrated in the range, the £6,399 Osiris, but that's a very different beast, the Aethos takes after its solidity of build but as far as the internal circuitry is concerned its more closely related to the Elicit-R at around half the price, essentially using the approach found in that and the Elex-R and substituting high quality components and a higher power output stage.

Aethos is specified as offering 125 Watts per channel from a dual mono circuit with that figure rising to 156W into a six Ohm load, so it's powerful for a British integrated but not excessively so. A lot of effort has gone into making the preamplifier stage and volume control as transparent as possible with FET input amps and a volume control system that uses feedback levels and input signal to deliver even handed channel tracking. Which means that levels in both channels should be identical down to very low levels.



Input wise the Aethos is very much a traditional analogue amplifier, while other brands are offering digital inputs on integrated amps at this price Rega is sticking with a sound quality first route that omits such niceties. It doesn't even have a phono stage which seems a bit odd given brand's reputation for building world class turntables. I put this to Simon Webster at Rega who gave this response:

"We wanted it to be the best amplifier it could possibly be at £2999. When built in, the sensitive electronics can be affected, a compromise we were not willing to make. Equally, the expense of adding a phono stage would directly take funds away from the amplifier circuit and compromise its performance. At this price point our research tells us that most people prefer an external dedicated stand alone stage and we feel strongly that an external stage will always offer better performance over an integrated one."

Which is in direct contrast to Naim's approach where a phono stage (MM only) was added to the latest iteration of the [Supernait](#), at an admittedly higher £3,499 price. The Aethos matches the Naim's headphone amplifier and has one extra line input, a higher power rating and is a more substantial amp. The Aethos is pretty beefy with thick aluminium casework, possibly because it runs surprisingly hot for a class AB design and uses the metalwork to achieve a degree of heat sinking.



As well as five inputs it has luxuries like a direct input for an external processor or preamp, a preamp output for use with another power amp and something that I thought had disappeared with the dodo, a record output. For the reel to reel enthusiasts perhaps. Input selection and volume can be controlled with the Solaris remote which also serves Rega's CD players. Volume control is not as fine as it could be with this, it takes a very light touch to get a small change in level, and turning the amp on the first is baffling, luckily a quick glance at the manual reveals where the switch is hidden in the fascia. Other than that the user experience is straightforward unless you can't remember which input number relates to which source, but that could be a curse that's specific to reviewers.

**Sound quality**  
Hooking the Aethos up to PMC fact.8 speakers and playing Radiohead's 'Ful Stop' on a streamer results in a tight, highly detailed sound that oozes tension. *Moon Shaped Pool* is not one of their more relaxed offerings and you know all about it. This is a fast and clear-cut amplifier that unearths an awful lot of fine detail and presents it in a waits and all fashion, so great recordings have excellent separation between instruments and voices, and, where available, reverts gives the soundstage a scale and depth that's almost walk-in deep. The spatial dynamics on Lefaur James' 'Red Sea' are fabulous and there is so much going on that it feels like you can hear all the layers in the mix. Another electronic release, 'Les Alpx' by Floating Point is also dense with detail, again it's a revelation to hear so much of the small sounds that make up the overall sonic picture.

The Fact.8s are a little bit lean for my room so I tried the twenty.22 standmounts, these aren't as revealing but have a (slightly) fuller bottom end and a mellower balance that makes Nathan Salsburg's guitar playing (on *Third*) sound beautiful. This was the first time I'd heard it on vinyl rather than Qobuz and the upgrade was not subtle, it sounds so much fuller and richer even on the fat free Rega [Planar 10](#) turntable. Yet there was something missing, it wasn't until I moved the phono stage (Tom Evans Groove SRX) that I discovered it was a timing thing, the stage had been on a reasonably well isolated rack but switching it to the main and better isolated Townsend alternative made a huge difference, one which the Aethos made abundantly clear from virtually the first note.



In search of more bottom end I brought in a pair of Bowers & Wilkins 802 D3 speakers, which are overkill for an amp at this price but let you hear what's going on very effectively. This increased the sense of three dimensionality in the sound with Olivia Trummer's album *Fly Now*, her song 'Sharing My Heart' is revealed to be very precise in tempo terms and again has a distinct tension to it by the Aethos' ability to shine a light into all aspects of the recording.

Over to vinyl and Weather Report's early album *Sweetnighter* where the opener is deeply funky with some really juicy bass. Miroslav Vitous was possibly better at this than Jaco Pastorius but he had other strengths of course. The highs on this could be cleaner but that probably reflects the vintage nature of the vinyl, and it doesn't stop you hearing right into the mix and being able to enjoy what each musician is contributing.

Esperanza Spalding's *Emily's D+Evolution* has a much thicker sound, the amp reflecting the powerful bass and clean midrange on this relatively recent recording, controlling the bottom end well and delivering real weight through the 802s. The clarity is huge, allowing you to enjoy the inspired nature of the composition, arrangement and production on the better tracks, though some, 'One' for instance, suffer from high compression rather obviously. The Aethos is powerful but doesn't have the grip that you get with a Supernait 3 or a Leema Tucana (£3,995), instead the emphasis is on control with flow, arguably you don't want to hear an amplifier's power you want the power in the music and the two are not quite the same.



I tried a rather different speaker in the form of Living Voice's R25 Anniversary and played some Beethoven Quartets which were beautiful, open, dynamic and effortlessly fluent. Material with more low end on it didn't fare quite so well and added to my feeling that this speaker is really more at home with class A and preferably tube amplification. That aside I got some excellent results with the pairing, musical coherence in particular was excellent as was a sense of ease at higher playback levels. Fink and Lana del Ray both worked a treat with strong imaging and a room filling sound stage.

Back with the 802 and Keith Jarrett's latest release *Munich 2016*, the amp revealed a distinct one that on one side of the stage and it possible to sit through the first two rather challenging pieces prior to enjoying the rather more charming ones that followed. In truth this large expensive speaker isn't the best match for the Aethos which would be better suited to a range of alternatives with a more relaxed balance. PMC 25 series models spring to mind as do Focal's Aria models. Rega's speakers are another obvious choice and will certainly match the Aethos when it comes to timing but you'd need to look at the largest to hear the full potential of this amplifier.

The Rega Aethos has a very similar character to the Elex-R and Elicit-R but is more revealing and powerful which opens up a wider range of loudspeaker options but does place higher demands on the source. Essentially it won't gloss over anything coming from the front end, be that the hard- or software. But it is a very musical and compelling amplifier that makes you want to listen longer and, dare I say it, louder, which is one of life's great pleasures after all. Add to this very high build quality, a good selection of analogue in- and outputs and you have a classic amplifier, built for sound quality first. What more do you really need.

**SPECIFICATIONS:**  
Type: Solid-state, 2-channel integrated amplifier with headphone amplifier and remote control  
Analogue inputs: 5x single-ended line-level, direct  
Analogue outputs: 2x record out, preamp out  
Headphone Loads: 32 Ω 2.7 V, 54 Ω 4 V, 300 Ω 9 V  
Power Output: 125W into 8 Ohms, 156W into 6 Ohms  
Dimensions (HxWxD): 95 x 433 x 360mm  
Weight: 17.5kg

**PRICE:** £2,999

**MANUFACTURER DETAILS:**  
Rega Research  
T 01702 333071  
[www.rega.co.uk](http://www.rega.co.uk)

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