

Review: MOON 250i integrated amplifier

by Simon Wilce



This is a HiFi review of the 'entry level' MOON 250i integrated amplifier. Unlike recent amplifier reviews, the 250i is a purely analogue box relying on the rest of the MOON range to offer high-quality upgrades such as streaming, a digital to analogue platform or phono stages as time and the budget allows. This is an entirely rational and sensible idea, offering proper integrated amplification at a very competitive price point which is an entry into high-level performance at non-crazy prices.

Design

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this analogue platform offers an unrivalled upgrade path*

The MOON 250i integrated amplifier is a pure analogue with 5 RCA type inputs plus a 3.5mm input jack at the front for use with portable devices and other media players. There is no on-board DAC or Phono input stage in the 250i, however, given the quality in the MOON product catalogue, this analogue platform offers an unrivalled upgrade path. Output is to the usual speaker terminals as well as to a preamplifier RCA output and there is a 6.5mm headphone output at the front. The amplifier design is pure class A for the first 5W/ch speaker output, rising to 50W/ch into 8 Ohms as class A/B. The Moon



250i has 20,000µF of power supply capacitance as does the magnificent MOON ACE. The amplifier uses proprietary MOON bipolar output transistors. The claimed frequency response is 10Hz – 100kHz +0/-3.0dB with Total Harmonic Distortion at (20Hz-20kHz @ 1W) 0.015% and no more than 0.02% at higher output.

Quality

This is a very nicely presented box, with weight, and exuding pure quality. The brushed aluminium fascia is soft as in the ACE and although this is an 'entry level' model from MOON, there is absolutely nothing to suggest there are any corners or savings being made anywhere. It is worth noting MOON has one of the best remote controls going and it is here with this 250i. The MOON 250i weighs in at 10kg with dimensions (W x H x D) 42.9 x 8.9 x 36.6cm

Performance

Review Equipment

To be honest, I'd quite like the MOON 280D streaming DAC back at this moment but, on the digital streaming side, I'm using the Chord Hugo 2 with the 2Go which really is as good as it gets. As is my want, I've also been streaming with the equally excellent iFi Pro iDSD. Both streaming platforms are immensely clean and use mconnect as the interface. I have the 2Go/Hugo 2 combination on fixed output with minimal cross-feed and the first filter. I'm using a GroundARRAY in the Ethernet slot on the 2Go that I received at the PowerHAUS launch. For what it's worth, I think it helps a little to reduce high-frequency noise in this streaming bridge. I've also used the front 3.5mm input with a Pioneer XPD-100 portable music player for testing purposes, I've had that on fixed output as well; the normal listening volume was too low. I've had the excellent DALI Menuet SE loudspeakers with the MOON 250i too briefly. I've mainly been listening with the Acoustic Energy 109.2s and my own Jern 14DS loudspeakers with a REL S/510 supporting them.



Physically

On turning on and off, there is a very satisfying clunk as the respective relays move into place. There is plenty of room around the rear and front of the MOON 250i, and the RCA plugs are well-spaced and well away from the power input. The speaker terminals are offset in the middle of the rear panel. The front panel fascia is the brushed metal high quality I'd expect from MOON and has a feel of the ACE. The front is good looking in the dark with blue power lights and a red indicator on the volume knob which is super smooth to turn. I've got the various speakers about 2.5 meters apart and I'm about 3m away from them with the electronics on a solid table in the middle (I really do need a proper rack), with some acoustic diffuser panels to the rear. My bass traps in the corners are rudimentary, being the chunky empty Jern cardboard boxes with a ton of polystyrene inside, they're big and heavy!

DALI Menuet SE

In the brief crossover for a couple of days with the DALI MENUET SE loudspeakers, I was getting a very solid and spacious soundstage. It was a very satisfying sound, and the combination is worthy of both brands, it was very impressive. I would happily have settled down with this combination for the review period. Using the Hugo 2 is simply a joy and the mconnect App I find now to be fairly easy to navigate.

I've been listening to Japan's Ghosts (Tidal FLAC, 16-Bit, 44.1kHz) in the light of David Sylvian's new album, which is less interesting but nonetheless worth a listen. Ghosts is an older track from 1981, but Japan was always a bit further ahead in the production of their music back then. The recording is quirky but has a clean presentation and the MOON 250i is a lovely partner. Channel separation is silent left and right between the various cymbals and xylophones, synthesizers, and vocals. I end up playing Lloyd Cole's 1984 track Are You Ready to be Heartbroken? (Tidal FLAC, 16-Bit, 44.1kHz). The engaging guitar and intelligent angular vocals take me back to that period when I thought I was 'CLloyd' or Robert Smith and was dressed in black. Around this time, I was just about to get knocked out by The Smiths. Surely one of the greatest periods to be an early 'teen'?



Jern 14DS loudspeakers (with REL S/510)

The departure of the DALIs was not too much of a blow as I hooked up my own Jern 14 DS loudspeakers with the Kudos KS-1 cable and also use a REL S/510 through the MOON RCA Pre-Out (I would normally use a high-level connection here) at the rear to support the frequencies below 100Hz. The Jern speakers are that bit crisper and brighter but the support of the REL takes the fatigue out of the room and I can relax at length with this setup.

At this time, I'm very taken with the lyrics, composition, and rhythm in Taylor Swift's autumnal All Too Well (10 Minute Version, Tidal Master, 24-Bit, 48kHz), it is a real storytellers track, rising to a crescendo of feeling. It is a fine piece and the 250i does a solid job of conveying the obvious emotion, rhythm and pace across an expansive sound stage. There are clearly no timing issues with the REL on RCA Pre-Out. It is quite something to offer a 10-minute song these days and for the track to keep your attention so that you get its best line and still smile is impressive. Often, I find the most effortless performances, in all areas, to be the best ones, and here in tandem are the MOON and Taylor Swift.

That line, by the way:

There we are again, in the middle of the night. We're dancin' 'round the kitchen in the refrigerator light

Checking with some more standard review tracks on my side, I widen the genre to listen, necessarily, to Burn It to the Ground by Nickleback (Tidal FLAC, 16-Bit, 44.1kHz), not something I'd relax to but useful for seeing what happens. Here the presentation is not quite as accurate, or spacious as I'd, expect or like but the 250i does a manful job of high volume 'metal bashing', if that is your thing, it is not mine.

However, being slightly disconcerted I go about gently setting up the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon EVO turntable with my modest Musical Fidelity Phono Stage and this yields a delightful and considered run-

through of 'The Dark Side of the MOON'. The pulse and the bass at the start of the album are startling. Cymbals are always crisp in the Jern 14DSs and I'd consider this presentation by the 250i to be quite natural, cymbal-like, let's say. Again, I note channel separation and the stereo image is prominent.

Acoustic Energy 109.2

Turning to the same album without the subwoofer, I wanted to hear if the bass is being translated by the 250i. In Time, that low-end intro rumbles nicely in the 109.2s and the 250i has plenty of satisfying low-end delivery. The 109.2 have stepped up a notch, interestingly, and this is quite a nice pairing.

3.5mm input

I have a Pioneer XPD-100 portable music player which is good enough for portable listening and it has a 3.5mm output which is helpful. For me, in this 3.5mm input, the Micro SD cards in the Pioneer XDP have my Radiohead Hacked Minidisc copies from Bandcamp (though I'd prefer to use the 2Go slots) so this is handy for this setup. The supplied 3.5mm – 3.5mm cable for this purpose is long enough to play music and not have to get up but I happen to have 3 meters worth of Atlas Xenon cable that I'm using which is even better (or maybe run in properly is more accurate). With the Pioneer on fixed output, I take a listen through the Tidal App to The Chromatic's Sound of Silence (Tidal FLAC 16-bit, 44.1kHz). The presentation is very effective and the analogue crackle at the start is very clear (it's part of the track). The MOON 250i delivers the bass very effectively

Headphones

The headphone stage is interesting, plugging in a proper 6.35mm headphone jack does not cut the speakers out as you may expect and you do need to hit the SPK Off button on the front panel, no problem (except I have the REL output on the Pre-Out at the rear rather than the high level on the speaker terminals, so I have to turn off the REL). The Focal Radiance headphones retain their stunning resolution, and the bass response is solid. Switching to a pair of decent Sennheiser Apollo planar magnetic headphones, their characteristic warmth and clarity are easily on show. It hears like the headphone stage is a good one and certainly does not let this package down in any way.



Thoughts

If I were at the start of an audiophile journey, in hindsight, I would have started at entry-level MOON, instead of the Naim starter journey I ended up in. It feels this MOON 250i could take you on your journey for a good few years. With the ability to add a MOON MiND 2 streamer and/or a MOON 110 LP v2 Phono Stage incrementally you would have the opportunity of upgrading your system with high-quality separates for years. If you're looking for an integrated amplifier with the digital platform and phono stage, of course, the 240i looks to have your bases covered but this simpler 250i analogue package offers greater upgrade scope. I note further the MOON ACE/Voice 22 synergy would surely translate well

if it was a 250i in place of the ACE where many of the headline specs seem equivalent (for example power output, capacitance, frequency range, etc.).

Overall

This is a fine amplifier; we need to forget the 'entry level' tag. I have repeated many times on this site, as a Naim pre and power owner with various power supplies, I would probably wish to undertake my audio journey now with MOON. And at this price, this is the integrated amplifier to start with, not only is the upgrade path of high quality, but it is as clear as it can be with MOON's excellent product catalogue.

Love

- MOON catalogue
- Upgrade path
- Thumping sound
- The remote control

Like

- Understated
- Simplicity

Wish

- At this price, it is hard to think of anything.

