



Quad goes Platinum

Iconic hi-fi brand Quad has spent seven years developing its new top-of-the range Platinum series – and Jon Myles says it's been well worth the wait.

Regular Hi-Fi World readers will know we are big fans of Quad's Elite series of electronics. So much so, in fact, that the company's supremely musical Elite QMP monoblocks have won the Amplifier of the Year Award in this month's issue.

But hard on the heels of that success Quad has looked



The Platinum Digital Media player (top) has a wide array of digital inputs on its back panel, including professional AES/EBU balanced S/PDIF digital. Together with a CD player and USB, it caters for most digital audio sources. It outputs analogue to the Platinum Stereo power amp (below) through normal phono cables, or fully balanced XLR cables.

to raise the game again – with the launch of a range-topping Platinum series of separates.

At present that means a one-box digital media player with a choice of mono or stereo power amplifiers – with all the units priced at 5p short of £2,500 each.

There's also a Platinum pre-amp in development to enable the connection of analogue components – with release slated for early 2014.

Housed in purposeful but defiantly unflashy slate-grey casings, the Platinum DMP (digital media player) and Platinum Stereo power amp on test here offer impressive specifications on paper.

The DMP is a CD player/DAC/pre-amp - aimed firmly at being the centre for all your digital music playback needs. It features twin Cirrus Logic 24bit/192kHz Delta-Sigma D/A converters – one for each channel – run in dual differential mode, and a high-precision master clock to minimise jitter.

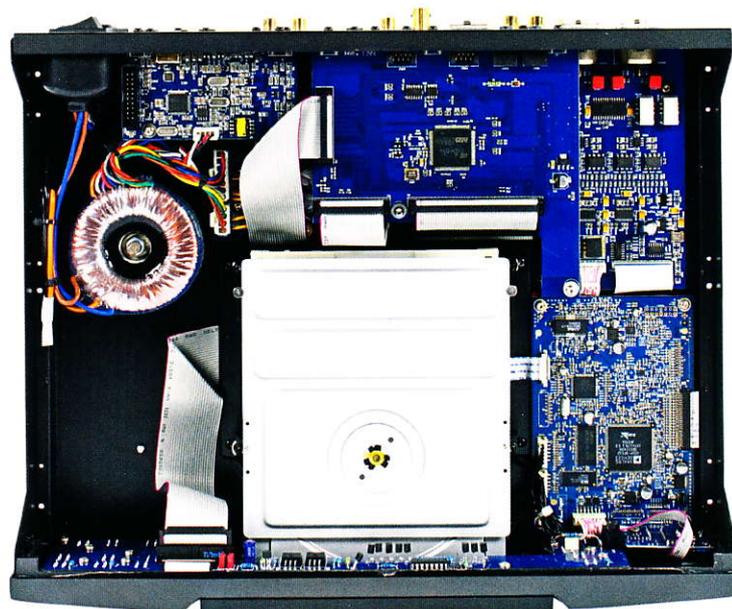
At the back are six digital inputs – three optical S/PDIF, two RCA and one asynchronous USB – and four digital outputs, as well as balanced XLR and singled-ended RCAs for connection to a power amplifier.

The CD transport is impressively

constructed. It's made from a die-cast aluminium and ABS compound, with a disc tray supported by steel rods running through sintered bronze bearings. Quad says this reduces noise and vibration through

critical damping of the mechanical components – allowing the laser to read the disc with better accuracy. It also means the sled slides in and out with a pleasing solidity, a world removed from the wobbly plastic

Inside the Platinum DMP digital media player lies a linear power supply, and Quad's customised CD player mechanism, with smooth acting disc tray.



trays of cheaper machines.

The front panel features a large display window above the CD sled with input connection indication lights and control keys arranged either side.

The matching Platinum Stereo power amplifier is rated by Quad at 150 Watts per channel into 8 Ohms but our measured performance shows it easily beats this at 190 Watts and a whopping 324 Watts into 4 Ohms – fully justifying Quad's claim that it has the ability to drive any loudspeaker.

Inside, the output stage is built around a large number of output transistors with each one driven from its own driver transistor to maximise linearity. Quad says this enables virtually flat output impedance to be presented to the loudspeaker across the frequency band – leading to a more natural dynamic performance throughout the audio spectrum.

Each amplification stage is fed by its own power supply while the use of a servo to remove unwanted DC voltage means there are no potentially sonic deleterious capacitors in the signal path.

Other features include new PCB layouts to screen signal paths and custom-made transformers.

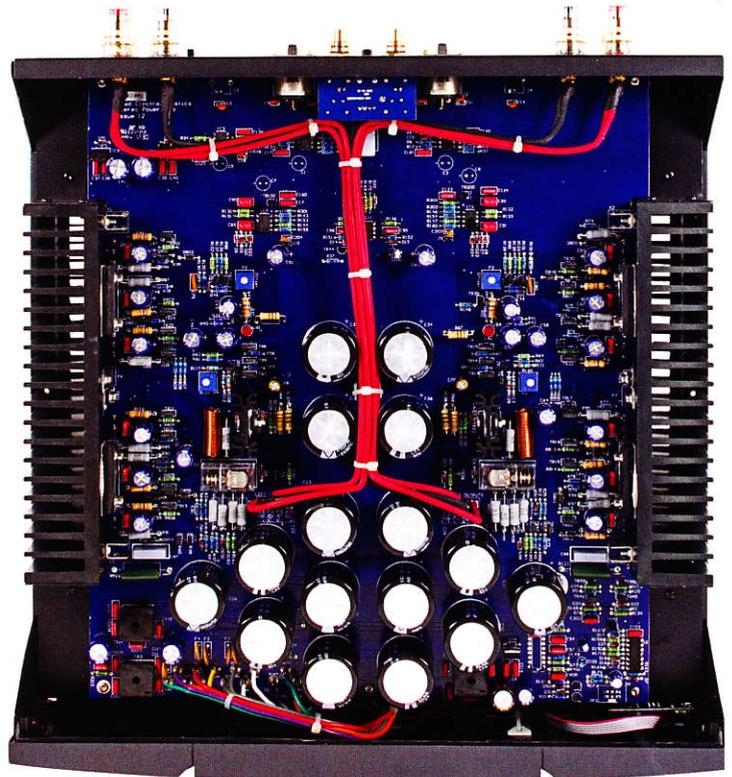
At the back are both RCA analogue and balanced XLR inputs as well as twin pairs of WBT speaker binding posts to facilitate bi-wiring. Finally, a 3.5mm lead (supplied) allows the DMP and power amp to be tied together so the on/standby feature for both units can be operated by the remote control.

And that remote control deserves a special mention. It's large, heavy and extremely well laid out with its own integrated stand. This is one remote you'll find extremely difficult to lose behind the back of a sofa!

Taken as a package the Quad Platins may lack the sheer bling factor of something like, say, a Chord amplifier and CD – but their understated look oozes quality and they look purposeful in the hi-fi rack.

SOUND QUALITY

It takes just a few moments after hitting the play button for the realisation to dawn that these new Quad components are really something rather special. We're all creatures of habit to some extent and recently much of my listening has been through streaming and computer USB with rather less via



Inside the Platinum Stereo power amplifier lies a modern Class A/B power amplifier utilising vertical heat sinks at either side of the cabinet. Banks of smoothing capacitors suppress noise.

the venerable CD.

But connecting the DMP to its matching stereo amplifier via a pair of Chord Anthem XLRs and slotting in Led Zeppelin's remastered 'Mothership' collection was a revelation.

Drum cracks were firm and solid with detail better than I've heard from any other CD player

registers are crisp and clean.

And the detail the DMP manages to extract from CD is exceptional. Listen to Joy Division's 'She's Lost Control' and you can clearly hear that Ian Curtis's vocals are subtly multi-tracked – whereas on lesser players the effect comes over as simply an echo.

The trademark smooth, assured,

"the company's engineers have subtly extended the bandwidth of its Elite series of components to produce a more all-encompassing musical presentation"

and separation between instruments exemplary. What's more, there's a propulsive drive above and beyond anything I've heard from a Quad amplifier/CD combination before.

Led Zeppelin's 'Black Dog' positively hammered out of a pair of Spendor's diminutive A3 floorstanders with a big, wide and deep soundstage. Bass is deep but well-controlled with no sense of thump, while the upper

confident Quad sound is all present and correct but there seems slightly more bite to the top end and a touch more rhythmic drive to proceedings. It's as though the company's engineers have subtly extended the bandwidth of its Elite series of components to produce a much more all-encompassing musical presentation.

It means the Quad combination

simply revels in big orchestral and choral pieces. The Turtle Creek Chorale's rendition of John Rutter's 'Requiem' is nothing less than visceral, yet still anchored in a deep acoustic space that retains the ambience of the venue. What's more the Platinum Stereo's power reserves means there's no hardening of the sound as you push the volume control on the remote. Indeed, your loudspeakers will probably give up the ghost well before the Quad is even breaking a sweat.

But it's not all about power. There's also a delicacy and fleet-footedness about both the DMP and Platinum Stereo that works well with gentler selections.

Kate Bush's '50 Words For Snow' (24/96) is suitably ethereal and haunting via a MacBook Pro into the DMP's USB input – vocals floating free and clear of the speakers with the piano anchored centrally in the soundstage.

The combination of poise and power shows itself to full effect on Edgar Varèse's percussion-heavy 'Ameriques' where thunderously dynamic passages intermingle with delicate interludes. The Quads fly through it completely unfazed – able to switch between dark and light passages without missing a beat.

Briefly separating the two units served to highlight each one's innate quality. Feeding the DMP into a NuForce IA-18 (slightly dearer than the Platinum Stereo at £2,899) revealed all the Quad unit's openness, clarity and detail retrieval, if shorn of the rich, smooth element its matching power amplifier brings to the proceedings, because the IA-18 is very lucid, but dry.

Similarly, pairing the Platinum Stereo with a Naim CD player brought a touch more pace to upbeat material but at the expense of the DMP's ability to seemingly dig out that last bit of information from CD and high-resolution files.

Putting the DMP back together with the Stereo power amplifier, all the elements fell into place again. Elements which meant I quickly found myself stretching out listening sessions into the early hours of the morning, finding new and unexpected details on even the most familiar recordings, or even simply getting carried away by the flow of the music.

If there's any criticism to be made it's purely the fact that at

present there's no analogue input and no way of adding one apart from using a separate analogue pre-

evidence, but with an added bite and punch that makes music truly exciting, without adding undue colouration.

The DMP is a master at detail retrieval and could easily shame some CD players costing twice the price. Add in its welter of digital inputs and it's the ideal hub for anyone mixing CD and computer-based music replay.

Its partnering Platinum Stereo amplifier offers prodigious grunt and enough voltage swing to drive even electrostatic loudspeakers, while never sounding anything less than silky smooth and polished. Also,

it's at home pumping out beat-driven heavy rock tracks as it is handling orchestral crescendos or delicate, shimmering musical pieces.

Admittedly, the combined cost of £5,000 is not exactly pocket money – but considering what these offer for the price, I'd say they are value for money. Put simply, they come very highly recommended.



The Platinum remote control is big and chunky – and very difficult to lose!

amplifier to feed the Stereo – but hopefully that will be remedied in the near future. Apart from that, there's nothing to criticise here.

CONCLUSION

Quad says the new Platinum series has been some seven years in development – and once you listen you can understand why. The company's smooth, rich and assured house sound is still very much in

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

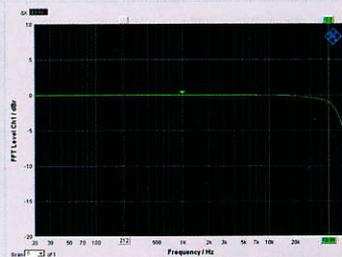
The Stereo power amplifier delivers a massive 190 Watts into 8 Ohms and 324 Watts into 4 Ohms, and with relatively little distortion, just 0.03% at 10kHz. The Stereo will go very, very loud without strain and has sufficient voltage swing

– around 37V – to drive even insensitive electrostatic loudspeakers. A 1.4V input signal is needed for full output, through either the unbalanced line inputs or the balanced XLR inputs.

The DMP digital preamplifier (there are no analogue inputs) works up to 192kHz sample rate through all inputs and with a 24bit signal produced just 0.036% distortion at -60dB, a very low value, so the internal DAC is very linear. As a result EIAJ Dynamic Range measured a high 116dB. Maximum output was 2.8V but the Platinum power amplifier needs just 1.4V and the DMP delivered this at 69 (of 100) on its volume control, so there is 'gain' to spare. High frequencies rolled off slowly above 25kHz with 192kHz sample rate digital and the filter will likely give a well damped, ringing free sound.

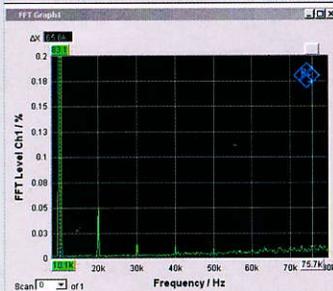
The Platinum measured well in all areas and will likely give a typically smooth Quad sound. **NK**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION

THD all id	Level RMS	Frequency
0.0733 %	1.9161 V	10.000 kHz
OFF	OFF	OFF



Power	190watts
Frequency response	1Hz-68kHz
Separation	99dB
Dynamic Range	116dB
Distortion	0.03%
Sensitivity	0.2FS = 1.4V out

QUAD PLATINUM DMP DIGITAL MUSIC PLAYER
£2,495

QUAD PLATINUM STEREO POWER AMPLIFIER
£2495



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VERDICT

The best solid-state components Quad have ever produced. Combine power, poise and control with superb musicality.

FOR

- detail retrieval
- range of inputs
- pre-amp functionality
- tuneful, deep bass

AGAINST

- no analogue inputs

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