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Electrocompaniet ECI 80D

£2899

WHAT HI-FI?
 ★★★★★


It's been over a decade since we last reviewed anything from Norwegian company Electrocompaniet, so we weren't quite sure what to expect from the ECI 80D integrated amplifier. As things turn out, it's an impressively polished performer that's brimming with useful features.

Plenty of grunt

We can't imagine too many occasions where this integrated amp will be caught short in a price appropriate two-channel set-up. It has a good range of digital and analogue inputs, including a moving-magnet phono stage, multiple coaxials and opticals, as well as two-way Bluetooth in high-quality aptX HD form.

Those hardwired digital connections will accept up to 24-bit/192kHz PCM files, though the lack of a USB input means there's no option of playing DSD or PCM files of higher sampling rates. We suspect that won't be a major issue for most potential buyers.

There's a basic set of multi-way speaker terminals, 6.3mm and 3.5mm headphone outputs (inconveniently placed on the rear) and a dedicated preamp connection for those who need more muscle than the ECI 80D delivers.

Electrocompaniet claims 80W per channel into an 8 ohm load, with that output almost doubling to 150W per channel as the speaker impedance halves. It's enough grunt to power most

TECH SPECS

- **Power output** 2x 80W
- **Coax** x2
- **Optical** x3
- **Headphone out** 3.5mm and 6.3mm
- **Remote** Yes
- **Dimensions (hwd)** 9 x 47 x 26cm

speakers to decent levels in all but the largest of rooms.

Consistent results

The amplifier's build quality is nice and solid but perhaps lacks a little slickness compared with the best at this level. The ECI 80D feels like a good example of a product from a small-scale specialist manufacturer. We don't feel so generous about the remote handset, though, while admirably simple, it does feel cheap.

Any amplifier at this level deserves good quality partners. We use our usual Naim ND555/555 PS DR music streamer for both analogue and digital signal feeds, with a Technics SL-1000R/Goldring 2500 MM turntable package backing it up. We also use more price-compatible sources in the form of the Clearaudio Concept Active MM record player and Cyrus CDi CD player.

The ECI 80D proves unfussy with speakers, producing consistent results

across the ATC SCM50, KEF LS50 Meta and Triangle Borea BR08. We also use an iPhone XS Max as a Bluetooth source and a pair of Beyerdynamic T1 Mk2 to test the headphone output. And finally, we use a pair of Bose Noise Cancelling Headphones 700 to give the Electrocompaniet's Bluetooth transmission capabilities a thorough workout.

Refined presentation

In use, this is a wonderfully capable amplifier for the money. It majors on delivering an open and spacious sound brimming with subtleties. Give it a low-key album, such as *Found Songs* by Ólafur Arnalds, and it shines, rendering nuanced soundscapes that are populated by expressive instruments and sounds. We're impressed by the resolution on offer and the way this amplifier organises all this information into a cohesive and musical whole.

The EC80D feels nice and solid but lacks slickness





It has a refined presentation that's free of any unwarranted hard edges, yet there's enough in the way of bite when the music demands. This is made clear when we switch to Holst's *Mars*. We enjoy the Electrocompaniet's stereo imaging here, particularly the way it layers the sound and prevents instruments from sounding cluttered, or as if they are having to jostle to be heard.

Larger-scale dynamic shifts are handled well, though if you switch to rivals such as the cheaper, purely analogue Naim Nait XS 3, you'll notice that the ECI 80D doesn't convey the same sense of muscularity and punch. Equally, the Electrocompaniet delivers a sense of insight and sophistication that the Naim struggles to generate, so it's a case of horses for courses rather than one being notably better overall than the other.

Tonally, the ECI 80D sits on the slightly smooth and rich side of neutral - but not so much that it unduly affects the amplifier's overall transparency or smothers the sonic characteristics of individual recordings.

Playing *Watch The Throne* by Jay Z and Kanye West through the digital inputs proves that the Electrocompaniet's

"It majors on delivering an open and spacious sound brimming with subtleties, and has a refined presentation free of any unwarranted hard edges"

cultured presentation doesn't stop it from being an entertaining, enthusiastic listen. While lacking the Naim's rhythmic drive and attack, it still has enough in the way of power and punch to keep us listening. We love the way it conveys voices and the passion and meaning behind the words so effectively. This DAC module is broadly as good as the better standalone choices that cost around a quarter of the amp's asking price.

We're pleased to report that the built-in moving-magnet phono stage is surprisingly capable too. Usually, such things sound like they're a bit of an afterthought, a box-ticking exercise rather than something to really get excited about. But it's different here. This phono module retains a good deal of the

clarity of the line stages and works well with everything from Bob Marley's *Exodus* right the way through to Orff's *Carmina Burana*. We're similarly positive when we try the headphone outputs. The sonic character is just as engaging as through the speaker outputs, and that's not as common as it should be.

Impressive Bluetooth

The Bluetooth input gives more good news. This is one of the best implementations we've heard in a product such as this. While the wired inputs are our go-to choice for absolute performance, the ECI 80D's Bluetooth sound is impressively effective.

Electrocompaniet has done an excellent job here. The ECI 80D is a well-specified amplifier where all the key features work really well - and, in our experience, that's a rare thing. Add to that sound quality that is comparable to the best of its rivals and it's quite clear that this amplifier is an excellent buy.

WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Fluid and articulate presentation
- Impressive detail resolution
- Well equipped

AGAINST

- No USB digital input
- Cheap-feeling remote

VERDICT

This entry-level integrated amp is a generously equipped and sophisticated-sounding performer

RATING ★★★★★