



# Rega io £380

Though Rega's amplification starting point is analogue only, its sonic talent is no surprise

**► DETAILS**

- PRODUCT**  
Rega io
- ORIGIN**  
UK
- TYPE**  
Integrated amplifier
- WEIGHT**  
2.9kg
- DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
180 x 68 x 290mm
- FEATURES**
  - Quoted power output: 2x 30W (8ohm)
  - Inputs: 2x RCA, 1x MM phono stage
- DISTRIBUTOR**  
Rega Research Ltd.

**I**f you're tempted to infer from the io's name that the little amp is half a Brio (*HFC 422*), the model one tier higher up the range, that would be selling it somewhat short. Sure, it's quite a bit smaller and some £220 cheaper but, truth is, it's a Brio with a few strategic cost-saving revisions in a smaller, cheaper chassis. Arguably, this makes it even more cost effective than its thoroughly excellent sibling, and that's saying something.

The io made its debut as part of Rega's System One, three components in a synergistic alliance – a Planar 1 turntable, a pair of Kyte speakers and the io – for just £999. But it can also be purchased separately and only the AXA35 costs less in the group.

Power is limited to 30 Class A/B Watts, down from the Brio's 50W, because of changes to the power supply, a simpler power transformer without isolated windings and more affordable op amps. The lower power permits smaller, simpler casework which, realistically, necessitated fewer inputs, too: MM phono, two line-level

and a 3.5mm jack on the front is your lot, but it's enough to build a perfectly respectable system around.

The front panel is straightforward and neat, but obviously built to a price. Both the volume knob and input selection button are plastic, as is the fascia border. But the red backlit graphics are clear and smart while the metal casework feels solid and both the inputs and the speaker terminals on the admittedly rather cramped rear panel are of good quality. What's more, Rega hasn't stinted on the remote, which is mid-sized, clearly laid out and covers just about everything – so there's no need to get up close and personal with the fascia's not-so-pleasingly tactile controls.

**Sound quality**

There's a whole list of things the Rega io isn't. It isn't the cleanest-sounding amp in the group or, indeed, the smoothest. It doesn't have the most expansive soundstage or the kind of detail retrieval that makes you wake up in the middle of the night and shout: "Wow!" It's neither

conspicuously fast nor cosily warm. And while it goes loud enough to annoy the neighbours, there are other amps here that go louder still. Yep, even taking its digital feed from the famously on-it Hugo 2, none of the above applies.

Perhaps its greatest attribute is that when you listen to it you couldn't give a flying donut. It's because – like the Brio it's based on and all Rega amps – the io is almost spookily at one with music and seems much less concerned with ticking boxes assigned to specific hi-fi metrics.

A supple fluency and rhythmical literacy informs everything it plays. McDonald's *Motown II* workout is less obviously taut and strictly metered than it is with the Marantz and Cambridge, but it has more musical mojo and juice, sounding bouncier, looser and more fun from beginning to end. In the same vein, Elvis Costello is more in the room, more palpable, more intimate, more affecting. As you'd hope, the phono stage is very good indeed, releasing Joni Mitchell's voice from the NAD's benign smothering and allowing it to regain its natural edge and purity. Once again, it's the subtle intricacy of the musical message that hits home. The io doesn't have quite the weight and colour of the Edwards, but it is a little lighter on its feet. Both stand out from the assembled talent, albeit as analogue-only propositions ●



**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

- SOUND QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Outrageous musicality for the money; size and simplicity
- VALUE FOR MONEY**  
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing of note at the price
- BUILD QUALITY**  
★★★★★ **WESAY:** If it's musical communication you value above all else, look no further
- FEATURES**  
★★★★★

**OVERALL**

