

Jadis I70 integrated valve amplifier

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Jadis is a French audio electronics manufacturer based in Villedubert, just to the east of Carcassonne in Southern France. It specialises in valve-based audio and as such has a strong focus on amplification. Next year, the company will be celebrating its 40th year, and if it makes something better than the I70 integrated amplifier to celebrate that anniversary, it's going to be one of the best products on the planet because this tidy one-box, line-level 50W amplifier is already one of the best in the business!

Jadis famously doesn't change its products frequently. In fact, there are still models from its early days on the books, where the only changes to the design are improved production control methods and minor component changes brought about because not every company makes the same devices they did 39 years ago. A big part of the reason for such consistency is that Jadis could almost be thought of as a transformer company that also makes amplifiers. The design and quality of transformers is pivotal in the performance of a product and as Jadis makes its own output 'traffos' it can control the lifespan of a product. »



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» Rolling its own transformers also gives Jadis an advantage when it comes to new valve designs. The new KT170 is a perfect example; the I70 uses four of them, with two ECC83s and three ECC82s, with an automatic bias circuit for the paired KT170s used for each channel. This circuit is capable of delivering a healthy 50W in Class A.

Those KT170 are a force to be reckoned with, but they are a new force at that; Jadis worked with the valve-designers to produce an output transformer that perfectly suits the characteristics of the valves, and the I70 is the result, and it's one of the first designs to use the valve. Other brands will invariably look to the KT170 as the output power valve of choice, but will ultimately have to wait until their transformer makers design a unit that suits the KT170, or go for an off-the-shelf kludge.

Of course, reverse-engineering the transformers from a Jadis amp isn't recommended, as they are sealed in potting compound resin; this is not an anti-piracy measure, however; the company does this to reduce the possibility of transformer hum and keep the amplifier as thermally stable as possible. This becomes especially important with Jadis' larger power amplifiers, many of which are a bank of hot-running valves, but even with the power valves of the I70, the more thermal control you get, the better.

Timeless looks

One of the other key parts of a Jadis amplifier is there is a commonality of design, and that design has remained unchanged since the earliest days of the brand. The I70 follows a long-standing Jadis tradition of point-to-point circuits on the inside and a chrome-finish stainless steel chassis, with 24ct gold-plated brass fixtures and panels and deep crackle-black squared-off transformer cans on the outside. In less careful hands, this could add up to a whole lot of 'bling', but there's something timeless and correct about the Jadis look. It's not 'understated', but the I70 manages to look expensive without looking garish in the process. Jadis also often features some exposed parts, such as tall capacitors poking through the top of the chassis, but here it's just a large heatsink.

Heat is a very real thing with the I70. I like to think of it as the Jadis giving you a taste of its homeland; the Languedoc region of France has long, dry, baking hot summers, and you will be reminded of such summertime heat every time you turn on the I70. It isn't running especially hot, just those KT170 output tubes pump out a lot of heat.

That much heat means two things; a valve cage and a thirsty amplifier that sucks juice from the wall. In fairness, in the latter case, Jadis quote a power consumption of 500VA, which by a very back-of-a-beermat calculation works out at roughly 15p on your fuel bill for every hour of music played. In all honesty, if you can afford nearly eleven and a half grand on an amplifier, you can run to less than £1 for an evening's listening session to feed it.

The amplifier is a simple joy to use. At the front, there's an on-off toggle switch with a green LED to denote power status (if the glowing tubes and the heat aren't enough clue for you). Then there is a volume control, a balance control and a source selector dial. At the rear there's an IEC power cable inlet, five RCA stereo pairs for single-ended, line level inputs, one output/throughput for recording or home cinema and two sets of speaker terminals. Where some valve amps use different taps from the transformer to connect to loudspeakers of different impedances, these are simply two sets of terminals for easy bi-wiring. There's no need for separate impedance taps because... you know, Jadis makes its own transformers.

Jadis' I70 is also extremely well built. I'd say nothing moves around inside the case (that should be a given, but it's a surprise just how many valve amps seem to have a rattle somewhere) but it's very difficult to determine this anyway because the amp weighs in at a super-healthy 40kg. That's 'muscular' for an integrated amplifier, whatever type of output devices it uses. That weight is also relatively unevenly distributed toward the rear of the amp. It's a two-person lift (or a one-person hernia). That shouldn't come as too much of a surprise as the amplifier is big and comes in a very big, very heavy box, but we still don't expect our integrated amps to be that 'husky'.

That's all you get!

Hot and heavy. That's it. That's the nearest we're going to get to criticism here. Because any criticism of the Jadis I70 sound quality is met with incredulity from the listener at best; at worst it's like telling a proud parent their kid is ugly. To listen to the I70 is to fall in love with music all over again, and even constructive criticism of that passion will likely end badly for the critic. And let's face it; the part of France where Jadis comes from was the scene of the sticky end of the Cathars and Knights Templar at the hands of the Inquisition. They aren't the sort of people who take criticism squarely on the chin.



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
Jadis I70



This is a wonderful sounding integrated amplifier, a near-perfect blend of insight into the system and into the music itself.



» Fortunately, I've no need to hold back on criticism because there's nothing but good here. This is a wonderful sounding integrated amplifier, a near-perfect blend of insight into the system and into the music itself. It doesn't lay either bare, but neither does it throw the equipment or the music into soft focus. There's a sense of rightness about everything from the imaging to the dynamic range to the vividness of those living souls that seem to appear in front of you whenever the I70 is playing. Whether the Jadis is tasked with playing the most saccharine of Mozart confections or some heads down banger Techno, whether it's the focus of a string quartet or a raw and raucous 1970s proto-punk band just being angry for a few minutes, the I70 handles that music like a conservator; just letting the music be itself for a while. It doesn't fall into that warm and softly spoken sound we associate with valve amps and it doesn't sound slow, stentorian and statesman-like; it's fast, resolving and most of all fun.

Yeah, not much to criticise here.

The track that sealed the deal for me was 'Piece of My Heart' from *Cheap Thrills* by Big Brother and the Holding Company; where Janis Joplin's mesmerising vocal power just steamrollers you. It's an easy track to get wrong, either making it all about her vocal assault on your ears, or making her voice more controlled and constrained. She needs to be able to sing at full throat and the sheer dynamism and energy of the I70, coupled with its outstanding speed made that happen so perfectly, it was one of those "let's just play that again" repeat moments.

Another, resolutely no audiophile track that I play for the sheer enjoyment is Louis Armstrong's 'West End Blues' (from the Hot Fives and Sevens compilation). From the fanfare at the beginning to the slow fade, the intervening 96 years since the recording just fade away, but they fade a lot easier if the system is really communicating the energy of the music and not simply some textbook accuracy.

I'm making this sound like the I70 is only good for dynamic, powerful musical performances, but that's





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» absolutely not the case. I fed so many different pieces of music through this amplifier just for the fun of it. That I did this during the height of summer which made for a sweltering experience at times was simply the price I paid for the enjoyment. The fact that earlier I dismissed a lot of Mozart as 'saccharine' suggests I am not a big fan, but I played his Horn Concerto No 4 and thoroughly enjoyed it in a way I rarely do (OK, I didn't 'air canter' around the room at the start of the last movement, but I was tempted).

It's not just the soundstaging, or the dynamic range, or the detail or the articulation (all of which are superb). It's not about the micro-dynamics and filigree bits of music that are communicated so well here. It's not even about that outstanding leading-edge precision and speed. It's how all those things combine in an organic manner to make so satisfying a musical experience you just want more.

We're very much into the whole 'metropolitan' experience here. We want to be able to squeeze that quart into a pint pot; the ability to make the sound you might get from large loudspeakers and multiple-box amplifiers in a package that someone might be able to use in a typical New York apartment or Parisian *pied-à-terre*. And in that light, the I70 is nigh on perfect!

Isn't She Lovely?

In playing the Jadis, I realised that I'd unconsciously ignored all my usual test recordings. This wasn't some kind of Freudian avoidance technique, but I just didn't feel the need to reach for them, in part because music that hadn't been worn down to the nub through endless evaluation was so uppermost in my listening sessions. Instead, some of the old classics came out, played after enough fallow time to make them musically inspired as well as useful for audio testing. Stevie Wonder does feature strongly in those tracks in their fallow seasons (as do Pink Floyd and even Simon and Garfunkel, but let's not go there). And it dawned on me that 'Isn't She Lovely?' from *Songs In The Key of Life* fitted the bill perfectly. The music is joyous, the sound it makes is joyous, and the way that sound is reproduced through the Jadis I70 is pretty damn joyous too. It all fits. Isn't She Lovely? If an amplifier is a 'she'... absolutely!

OK, so 'hot and heavy' probably isn't me doing my job to its fullest extent, but everything I put in the notepad was so unusually upbeat and positive, it's difficult to find those downsides, especially when you put the I70 into some kind of context. As suggested earlier, this is a metropolitan

amplifier, and dragging out the full-range big guns is unnecessary here; no one is going to hook the I70 to a pair of Wilson Chronosonic XVX, after all. Personally, I suspect the I70 would acquit itself well under these circumstances, but having to force a product well out of its comfort zone to find criticism isn't really fair. Neither is criticising a 50W amp for not being a 1kW amp. In its context, with loudspeakers like my Audiovector R1 Arreté stand-mounts or even the discontinued Wilson Audio Duette 2s that I cannot part with, the sound is sumptuous as it is precise. In fact, the only observation made during the listening process is that the Jadis I70 might not live up to preconceived notions of what a valve amplifier is supposed to sound like, simply because it doesn't do that soft and soggy, sugar-coated interpretation of music. Instead, it just makes music the way you always expected it could sound when played through damn fine audio equipment; with panache, energy, speed, precision, detail, scale and dynamic range. Cor!

I've often joked that the hottest amplifiers arrive in the height of summer and during the coldest months of winter, all you get to review is Class D ice-boxes. That is certainly true of the Jadis I70; it rocked up as the temperature started to rise, and I didn't give a damn. The sound it makes is so beguiling, so enjoyable and so musically 'right' that I simply couldn't help listen no matter what the ambient temperature. This is quite simply one of the best sounding amplifiers I have ever heard. +

Technical specifications

Type Integrated Amplifier with remote control
Inputs/outputs 5x stereo RCA, 1x bypass stereo RCA, 2x loudspeaker outputs
Tube/valve complement 2x ECC83, 3x ECC82, 4x KT170 (automatic bias)
Power Output 50W
Frequency Response 10Hz–36kHz
Sensitivity 150mV
Dimensions (WxDxH) 40 x 40 x 25.5cm
Weight 40kg
Price £11,498

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