

# Eastern

**Qinpu is the latest name from China to proffer high power, low(ish) cost audio amplification. Dominic Todd listens to the mid-price A-8000 Mk2 integrated and comes away suitably impressed...**



**P**ick up this curiously named unit and place it on a shelf and two factors immediately suggest this is expensive. First is the sheer weight which, at over 20kg, must mean there's some serious engineering involved. Second is the shape and size. With a depth that's far greater than its width, it has the stature of countless exotic and expensive valve amplifiers that cost well over £2,000. Under closer examination the A-8000 Mk2 in fact turns out not to be of the tube variety but actually transistor: more of which later...

Amplification type aside, it can't be denied that the Qinpu (pronounced "Chin-poo") is exquisitely built. The chassis is made from aluminium and capped by solid, drilled aluminium billets that act as heatsinks. This and the 'dripping' wood fascia bring to mind the similarly sumptuous Pathos Logos amp' which

costs a not inconsiderable £2,750.

Many Chinese amplifiers have mimicked the best from the West before, but where the A-8000Mk2 really scores is in the detail execution. Take a close look at the imprinted legends and you'll see that they're sharp, neat and even. The panels all fit together immaculately and a look inside reveals a quality of construction that's well above norm for a Far Eastern amp of this price.

Whilst inside, it's worth taking a look at the rest of the components. As mentioned, this is a transistor amp' that uses a dual mono, heavily Class-A biased, format to produce a claimed 100W. The twin transformers,

which account for much of the weight, make this figure look highly feasible, whilst the other components should ensure decent quality. Four Sanken A1215/C2921 output transistors and no fewer than six, per channel, Rubycon output capacitors show that the quality of materials is more than skin deep. Closer inspection reveals a quality ALPS volume control and Burr Brown op-amp. After scouring the electronics for a good half hour the only fault I could find was a misaligned input switchboard, yet even this is more cosmetic than engineering flaw.

In addition to the solid heat sinks, the amp' is kept cool by twin mini fans located on the unit's base. These help extract the warm air downwards, where the substantial, aluminium with rubber insert, feet ensure a good distance is kept between amp' and shelf.

If the A-8000 Mk2 has a weakness, then it's with the feature count. Unlike more expensive rivals there is no remote control. You'll also have to make do with just four

# Promise

line level inputs and no tape loop or headphone socket. This aside, the top mounted controls have a beautifully linear and well-damped action to them and my only operational niggle concerned the blue LED. Although suitably classy in hue, I found its brightness to be so strong that I could see many covering it up in order to avoid distraction. So to the price; I would have thought between £2,000 and £3,000 to be about right, so at just £1300, then, this is one exceptional value amplifier, in material terms. Whether it can put this advantage to use sonically, remains to be seen...

## SOUND QUALITY

Listening to Kate Bush's, 'Somewhere in Between', I immediately found the sumptuous styling to be matched by an equally luxurious sound quality. The staging was broad and bold, much like a similarly priced Marantz integrated. Vocals had a great sense of body and were projected with confidence and weight. Whilst lacking the final degree of impact and control of some, the bass response had both depth and solidity in equally impressive measure. Although not as smooth as a pure Class-A amp', such as the Sugden A21a, the balance was pleasantly free from grain and smear. Overall the sound was most involving, if not without some colouration. There were times when I suspected a degree of bloom in the upper midrange could just tinge the vocals thereby preventing first class transparency.

Perhaps contrary to its looks, the A-8000 Mk2 works extremely well with fast paced Rock or electronic music. With Daft Punk's, 'Aerodynamic', loaded into the CD drawer, the Qinpu drew upon a deep reserve of power to offer an uninhibited dynamic range. The electric guitar sounded raw, but was alive with vitality and remained on just the right side of being over exuberant. Unlike some similarly priced Class-A and tube designs, the A-8000 Mk2 won't overly smooth the sound, but neither does it sound brash. It remained true to the music.

This sense of realism continued with Johnny Cash's, 'Hurt'. This is a recording where the volume noticeably increases towards the

end of the track and the sound does harden. The Qinpu was faithful to this but, yet again, didn't have me reaching to turn down the volume as some harsher sounding rivals can do. Although the music did harden, it was as a result of the recording alone and not emphasised by the amp'. In other respects I did notice that there wasn't quite the focus of sound that some offer. It seems that in a bid to provide such an expansive sound stage, some of the precision of rivals has been sacrificed slightly.

A feint lack of precision was also detectable with Joe Jackson and Marianne Faithful's 'Love Got Lost'. Whilst having decent presence and fine decay the percussion just missed the final edge of attack and resolution that could be taken for granted with Naim's similarly priced Nait pre/power rival. Yet, despite this, I still came away feeling that the A-8000Mk2 was a well-balanced amplifier. A slight degree of edginess was always there to remind the listener that this isn't a pure Class-A design, but then again no Class-A amplification at this price could match its sheer dynamic power. In all honesty, they'd also struggle to get to the core emotion of the music quite as well as the Qinpu managed so effortlessly.

Where a well-designed Class-A, such as the Sugden A-21, would score over the A-8000 Mk2, is in terms of flow with Classical music. Whilst the Qinpu provided a sweet and smooth top end, particularly benefiting violins, it didn't quite have the seamless ebb and flow of the very best. There was some colouration around the cellos that hindered this and also meant that the A-8000 Mk2 wasn't quite as transparent as the best. On the plus side, the excellent dynamic reach and scale meant that

"no Class-A amplification at this price could match its sheer dynamic power"

even the largest orchestral pieces could be reproduced without fear of compression or unduly limited bandwidth. Once again, whilst not perhaps scoring top marks in terms of technical presentation, the Qinpu remained a thoroughly engaging listen.

The Qinpu A-8000 Mk2 is no giant killer. Whilst its construction is as good as that of amps costing twice the price, the sound quality isn't. Putting things into perspective, though, at £1,300 the A-8000 Mk2 is still an immensely impressive and capable amplifier. The balance between a raw earthy sound and refinement is extremely well judged, and there can be few that could fail to warm to the Qinpu's emotional and powerful response. What this amp' lacks, though, is the final polish to truly make it first among equals. Still, there is still very much to recommend the A-8000 Mk2 - its intimate relationship with the recording alone is enough for me.

## VERDICT

Amazingly well built for the price, with arresting aesthetics and highly engaging sound.

**QINPU A-8000/2** £1,300

Shadow Distribution

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## FOR

- engaging sound quality
- superb construction quality
- excellent value

## AGAINST

- colouration
- limited features
- overly bright LED!

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Qinpu A-8000 delivers a hefty 120W into 8ohms and 196W into 4ohms, helped out by massive heat sinks down each side. This looks like another amplifier carefully designed to produce only low order distortion products, and an even distortion pattern (i.e. stable transfer function) under all conditions of output, frequency and load. Our distortion analysis interestingly shows innocuous sounding second harmonic of just 0.005% at 10kHz. Normally, the crossover distortion that usually dominates here produces a varying pattern of higher order harmonics, but not in this amplifier. So I would expect a smooth sound at least, free from all forms of edginess, or greyness of colour.

Frequency response was wide, stretching from 5Hz up to 136kHz, within 1dB. There's no band limiting here and feedback may be high.

Sensitivity was mediocre at 510mV for full output, adequate for CD but a bit low for sources giving 300mV maximum output.

The Qinpu looks to be well designed. It is a powerful, low distortion amplifier that should sound at least smooth and civilised. NK

Power	120watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	5Hz-136kHz
Separation	92dB
Noise	100dB
Distortion	0.005%
Sensitivity	520mV

