

Press release

LEAK

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Above LEAK Stereo 230 integrated amp with optional walnut wood enclosure

Vintage style. Cutting-edge audio tech.

After returning to the audio scene following a four-decade hiatus, legendary British hi-fi pioneer LEAK adds a new, more powerful integrated amplifier to its current range

Cambridgeshire, England – One of the biggest names of the mid-twentieth century hi-fi scene, LEAK returned in 2020 with its first new products since the 1970s. The arrival of the LEAK Stereo 130 integrated amplifier and LEAK CDT CD transport rapidly became one of the most talked-about hi-fi events of the year, fusing the vintage appeal of classic LEAK design with state-of-the-art audio circuitry.

As 2022 ends and another year begins, the Stereo 130 and CDT are joined by a third new LEAK audio component – the Stereo 230 integrated amplifier. Designed as step-up model from the Stereo 130, the new amp features upgraded circuitry, delivers more power, and features an enhanced DAC stage for digital source components, whilst sporting the same vintage aesthetic that has proven so attractive to passionate music lovers more than half a century after it first appeared.

More about LEAK

Founded in 1934, LEAK is one of the most important names from the early years of the British hi-fi scene, responsible for many technological 'firsts' throughout the 1940s, '50s and '60s. For example, the Point One series of valve amplifiers introduced in 1945 were the first to reduce total harmonic distortion to 0.1 per cent, while the LEAK Sandwich speaker heralded true-piston cone action by sandwiching polystyrene foam between outer skins of stiff aluminium foil. Such was LEAK's engineering excellence that its 1955 Trough-Line is still considered one of the finest FM tuners ever made.

Although thoroughly modernised internally, the current LEAK Stereo 130's wood-clad external design is based on another LEAK classic – the Stereo 30 integrated amplifier, which was the first commercially available all-transistor amplifier upon its arrival in 1963. This groundbreaking amp was famously owned by Jimi Hendrix, among other '60s luminaries.



Left Jimi Hendrix turns up the volume on his LEAK Stereo 30 hi-fi amplifier in the late 1960s

LEAK Stereo 230

From the front, the new Stereo 230 integrated amp looks almost identical to the Stereo 130 – the same aluminium front panel and invitingly tactile controls, and the same optional walnut wood enclosure adorning its aluminium chassis to complete the classic LEAK look. Its width and height are also the same, but the new amp is 14cm deeper, reflecting its enhanced circuitry and greater power output.

Like the Stereo 130, the new amp's built-in DAC circuitry caters for digital sources such as PCs and Macs, smartphones and tablets, network streamers and CD players – including, of course, LEAK's own CDT transport. It also offers the convenience of Bluetooth reception, supporting the Bluetooth 5 standard for superior speed and range, and multiple codecs including aptX and AAC.

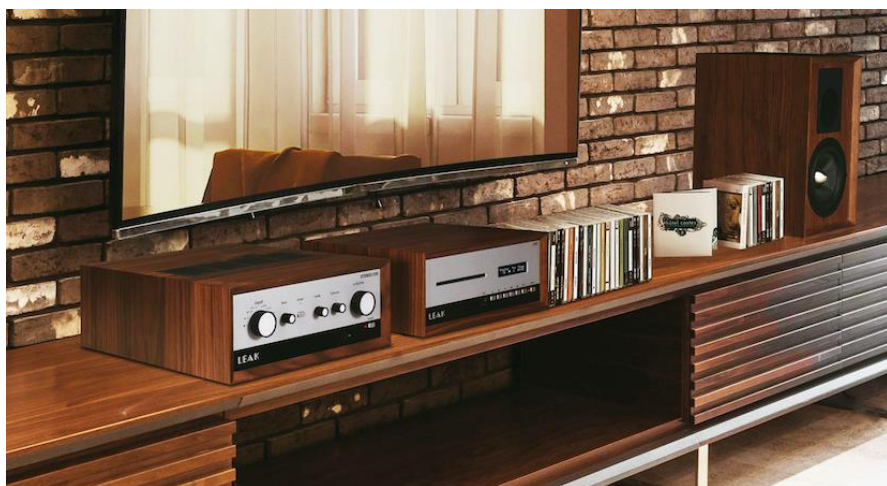
Digital inputs stretch to asynchronous USB Type B and two S/PDIF inputs (one coaxial and one optical), plus HDMI ARC. The latter option, which is an addition to the Stereo 130's specification, extends the Stereo 230's versatility for use with TVs to make an excellent stereo AV system.

On the analogue side are two line-level stereo RCA inputs, plus an MM phono input. Vinyl lovers benefit from the built-in phono stage's high-quality, low-noise, JFET-based circuit, digging lashings of detail from an LP's grooves.

DAC's a great upgrade

The Stereo 230 upgrades the ES9018K2M DAC chip used in the Stereo 130's DAC stage to a newer, top-spec chipset from the eminent 32-bit Sabre family – the ES9038Q2M. This is accompanied by proprietary circuitry to make the most of ESS Technology's HyperStream II architecture and Time Domain Jitter Eliminator for ultra-low noise and high dynamic range. LEAK's design team has paid great attention to the post-DAC active filter, using op-amps selected for their synergy with the Sabre DAC.

Hi-res digital audio support is state-of-the-art, handling PCM up to 32-bit/768kHz and DSD to 22.58MHz (DSD512). MQA – the hi-res streaming technology used by Tidal's 'HiFi Plus' tier – is also supported, with full decoding enabling the complete 'three unfold' decoding process to be performed internally, as opposed to just the final unfold in the manner of an MQA 'renderer'. The Stereo 230 is officially 'Roon Tested' too, ensuring it works seamlessly in a Roon audio environment.



Left Despite its vintage look and classic hi-fi controls, the Stereo 230 offers a state-of-the-art specification and performance

More power to ya

The Stereo 230's innate musicality is hardly surprising given the hi-fi handiwork involved. At its core is a Class AB power stage arranged in a dual-parallel configuration, drawing on many decades of amplifier design experience to deliver 75W per channel into eight ohms, and 115W per channel into four ohms. A substantial low-noise 270VA toroidal transformer is followed by 2x15000uF reservoir capacity, helping the amp to maintain firm control of the music whilst enabling excellent dynamic range.

Bass and treble tone controls – a feature passed down from the original Stereo 30 to the Stereo 130, and now the Stereo 230 – enable sound to be tailored to suit the varying characteristics of different analogue and digital sources. If preferred, these tone controls may be bypassed to deliver the shortest possible signal path to the precision analogue volume stage, which is controlled by a high-quality motorised ALPS potentiometer.

The Stereo 230's output power and sonic ability make it a perfect partner for all manner of loudspeakers, not least the Heritage Series models from LEAK's sister-company Wharfedale – the much-admired Linton, for example, which shares the Stereo 230's classic 1960s-inspired design and walnut wood finish. The forthcoming Windsor speakers from Castle Acoustics, set for launch in early 2023, are also a fabulous match.

Headphone listeners are equally well served by the Stereo 230's dedicated headphone amp. With its current-feedback design and high slew rate, a dynamic and detailed performance across a range of headphone types is assured.

Much effort has gone into the physical layout of the Stereo 230's circuitry, protecting the sensitive preamp section from noise interference. This, plus the use of independent low-noise power supplies for all critical stages, helps the amp to excel sonically across a range of digital and analogue sources.



Left, The LEAK CDT CD transport is the perfect CD-spinning companion for the Stereo 230 integrated amp, both seen here without their optional walnut wood enclosures

Classic hi-fi for modern music lovers

When LEAK returned in 2020 with the Stereo 130 and CDT, the fusion of vintage aesthetic, contemporary features and state-of-the-art technical proficiency heralded a new and unique addition to the hi-fi separates scene. The arrival of the Stereo 230 integrated amplifier takes the revived LEAK brand to new levels of power and quality – the epitome of classic hi-fi for the modern age, ready to deliver everything from vinyl and CDs to music streamed from computers and smart devices, through all manner of speakers and headphones.

Yet for all its versatility, this is an amplifier that puts the music first. Whatever the source, its virtuosic performance is consistently engaging; foot-tappingly lively yet maturely refined, richly detailed, and fluidly dynamic. The LEAK Stereo 230 is available from January 2023, with or without the optional walnut wood enclosure at RRP's of £1,249 and £1,099 respectively.

KEY SPECIFICATIONS	
Digital audio Inputs	1x USB-B; 1x HDMI ARC; 1x optical; 1x coaxial; Bluetooth 5
Analogue audio Inputs	2x RCA line-level; 1x MM phono
Digital audio outputs	1x optical; 1x coaxial
Analogue audio outputs	1x RCA pre-out; 1x headphone out; speaker binding posts
Other inputs/outputs	1x USB-A firmware update port; 12V trigger in/out
Hi-res support – USB input	PCM 768kHz; DSD512; full MQA decoding
Hi-res support – S/PDIF inputs	PCM 192kHz; full MQA decoding
Power output	2x 75W RMS (8Ω); 2x 115W RMS (4Ω)
Dimensions with wood enclosure (WxHxD)	328x147x414mm
Dimensions without wood enclosure (WxHxD)	300x115x414mm

LEAK

Founded in 1934 by Harold Joseph Leak, pioneering British hi-fi manufacturer LEAK was a mid-twentieth century trailblazer in the field of high-performance audio equipment.

LEAK has been responsible for many technological firsts. For example, the Point One series of valve amplifiers (1945) were the first to reduce total harmonic distortion to 0.1 per cent, and the ground-breaking Trough-Line FM radio tuner (1955) is still considered one of the finest FM tuners ever made. LEAK's Sandwich speakers (1961) heralded true-piston cone action by sandwiching polystyrene foam between outer skins of stiff aluminium foil. And the Stereo 30 all-transistor amplifier (1963) spearheaded the use of transformerless transistor output stages over then-standard transformer-coupled designs, thus paving the way for future solid-state amps.

In 2020, following a 40-year hiatus, LEAK – now part of the International Audio Group alongside Audiolab, Castle Acoustics, Luxman, Mission, Quad and Wharfedale – launched two new audio components: the Stereo 130 integrated amplifier and CDT CD transport, fusing retro design, classic analogue engineering, and the latest digital technologies. Two years later, these components are joined by a new step-up integrated amplifier, the Stereo 230.

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