hi-finews YEARBOOK 26 OUTSTANDING PRODUCT

Integrated amplifier. Rated at 300W/8ohm
Made by: Audio Group Denmark, Aalborg, Denmark
Supplied by: Signature Audio Systems, Westerham, UK
Telephone: 07738 007776
Web: https://audiogroupdenmark.com; www.signaturesystems.co.uk
Price: £15,000

AUDIO FILE



Aavik I-188

One of three integrated I-x88 amplifiers from Aavik, the I-188 doesn't implement the upgraded power supply and discrete op-amps of the I-588 flagship, nor match the mid-level I-288 in its number of 'active Tesla coils', Aavik's proprietary noise-reduction scheme. Beyond that it is identically styled and offers the same number of connections and features.

That includes its unusual chassis design, where titanium and copper sheets, with a laminated fibreboard 'filling', form a 'sandwich' for the top plate – Aavik has designed the entire structure to deliver maximum EMI/RF screening. On the side are impressive-looking alloy heatsinks, yet these are largely decorative as the I-188's cool-running Pascal Class D amplifier module, promising a 2x300W/8ohm output and fed by a 'low-noise' switchmode PSU, sits on the bottom plate.

'You know the drill... the sax seemed to leap from the speakers'

While the amp boasts a glass front panel with touch operation for power, mute and input/menu selection, plus a rotary control, it is surprisingly minimalist – no onboard DAC, phono stage or streamer, and no balanced inputs. Instead, you get a rear panel that could have come from 1977. At either end are multi-way binding posts, and between them are five pairs of line-level RCA inputs and pairs for pre-in or main-out operation. There are also 12V DC triggers and RS-232 sockets for system integration, plus two pairs of RCA line outputs marked 'Low Pass' and 'High Pass', which are configurable for using Aavik's amplifier with a subwoofer.

We ran the I-188 'straight'. Setup is a breeze, helped by the supplied remote control handling all operations. The menu provides access to altering the preamp gain – we used the +9dB setting – plus balance, pre-out mute, display brightness/dimming, operating temperature status, home theatre settings, and more.

GREAT DANE

For all their high efficiency, switchmode PSU/Class D amp combos can generate more HF/VHF noise than would a more traditional linear PSU/Class AB design. Ridding the audio environment of such noise is core to the 'thinking' behind Aavik's I-188, both via those Tesla Coils (which are claimed to send pulsating, anti-phase signals 'at precisely defined frequencies' that eliminate 'background noise'), and its absence of any digital/network stages. And, yes, this purely line-level integrated amplifier possesses a quietness that allows you to focus solely on the music, and the inherent flavour of your source(s) and speakers.

A reel-to-reel tape of sibilance-free strings revealed only one small area to criticise. At very high levels, the I-188 exhibited a slight rawness or roughness in the mid-to-upper reaches, a reduction in the sweetness of and rasp added to the Melachrino Strings and Orchestra's *The Music Of Jerome Kern* [RCA]. Otherwise, while nobody would mistake its sound for a quartet of KT88s per channel, the I-188 exhibited air, sufficient warmth, and enormous scale. The massed strings on the Melachrino tape formed a wide, lush wall of sound, with superb front-to-back depth.

Playing Joni Mitchell's *Hejira* on both Mobile Fidelity's SACD and One-Step vinyl releases, the crystal clarity and utter transparency of this Aavik amplifier exposed the differences between the two formats. The album's gorgeous, lush title track oozed 'liquidity' from both, but the LP's warmer bass shone through, as did the SACD's slightly cleaner and deeper lows. Mitchell's voice was clean, distortion-free and sounded... real.

'The Door Is Still Open' by 1950s R&B group The Cardinals [Collectibles] marries the exceptional vocals of Ernie Warren with an absolutely remarkable saxophone solo from jazz legend Johnny Griffin. You know the drill: the sax seemed to leap from the speakers, while the detail was borderline clinical. For a 70-year-old recording the sound quality is almost embarrassing – and through Aavik's I-188 was as vivid as ever.

ABOVE: The I-188's casework is slim but deceptively heavy, its fascia dominated by a huge, dot-matrix style display flanked by a titanium rotary encoder [right] and touch-sensitive option buttons [left]. The internal, copper-plated chassis plays host to a Pascal Class D amplifier module with its own switchmode PSU

VERDICT

This amplifier defies convention not just in its left-field circuitry, but in eschewing an onboard DAC, balanced inputs, *etc*. Instead, it's a lean, mean machine with immense power and clarity, bank-vault construction, and gorgeous looks.

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	390W / 770W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	425W / 850W / 1.55kW / 980W
Output imp. (20Hz–20kHz/100kHz)	0.015-0.12ohm / 1.45ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz–20kHz/100kHz)	–0.1dB to –0.1dB/–5.6dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/300W)	41mV / 706mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/300W)	86.2dB / 111.0dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 1W/10W)	0.0005-0.026%/0.0009-0.06%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	13W / 700W
Dimensions (WHD) / **Weight**	440x118x394mm / 23kg