Voice box

With a look that’s sure to show up any kit it’s partnered with, the Röst is set to impress. Chris Ward finds out if beauty is skin deep.

The gently curved, solid aluminium facia is home to a 6.15mm headphone output and twin rotary controls that smoothly adjust input and volume. Around the back it accepts analogue signals via balanced XLRs or two pairs of unbalanced RCA inputs, one of which is configurable for fixed gain or variable line output. Digital inputs are generous with three optical, a USB and one coaxial input as well as an Ethernet network connection that enables the player to stream music files via UPnP/DLNA or AirPlay. Hegel imagines a highly connected future and envisages the Röst seamlessly fitting into a smart home environment, fully controlled by a phone or tablet. However, a quality streamer is provided that operates all functions and can even turn off the display. Connections are completed via a pre-out for the addition of power amplification or subwoofer and very sturdy speaker binding posts accept all connection types. Construction is of a very high quality.

The Röst could be considered the love-child of other well-regarded Hegel products. Broadly speaking, it has the chassis and power output of the H80 (HFC 391), the DAC and headphone stages from the H160 (HFC 394) and the connectivity and output stages of the H360 (HFC 401). This already compelling cocktail is then enhanced through the addition of silken new paintwork, a cutting-edge OLED display and the implementation of Hegel’s latest iteration of its patented SoundEngine technology that eschews the traditional use of global negative feedback to stabilise the amplifier, instead claiming to use a form of local ‘feed forward’ technology to achieve superior results. Put simply, this proprietary signal handling technology claims to achieve very low distortion and a very high damping factor, creating stronger grip and control of your speakers than the claimed 75W alone would suggest. The UK price of £2,200 places the Röst integrated amp at a slightly lower point than Hegel’s more powerful H160 (£2,450). Given the Röst has less power, but employs the latest SoundEngine technologies from the flagship H360 integrated, this feels like good value.

Digital signal processing mixes out at 24-bit/192kHz via coaxial, optical and network connections with the USB input able to handle 24-bit/96kHz files. OSD fans may be disappointed, but this specification covers the vast majority of listening habits.

I connect up reference Cadence Arca speakers to the amp’s beefy speaker connection with Black Rhodium Foxtrot speaker cable (HFC 412) and use my reference Shanling CD-T100 player to provide an analogue signal via Artisan Ultimate Silver Dream interconnects (HFC 390) and a digital coaxial feed via Missing Link Dark Art 75ohm cable to compare and contrast the Röst’s amplification and DAC.

With its off-white casework very refreshing. These clean black or silver boxes is a bit plain, you could well find its creamy, off-white paintwork very refreshing. These clean, silky new paintwork, a cutting-edge technology to achieve superior sound quality.

The Röst could be considered the veritable hub of digital connectivity. This serves to create a very wide and dynamic balance to the Röst’s amplification and DAC. Hegel claims that SoundEngine technology to achieve very low distortion and a very high damping factor, creating stronger grip and control of your speakers than the claimed 75W alone would suggest. The UK price of £2,200 places the Röst integrated amp at a slightly lower point than Hegel’s more powerful H160 (£2,450). Given the Röst has less power, but employs the latest SoundEngine technologies from the flagship H360 integrated, this feels like good value.

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Q&A

Anders Erzted
VP sales & marketing, Hegel Music Systems

CW: Who do you see as the customer for the Röst?
AE: We see two main types of customers. Firstly, people with an above average interest in music and sound quality, who want a high degree of connectivity and a contemporary look that will fit in a modern living room, but aren’t convinced that even high-quality Bluetooth speakers can meet this brief. Secondly, people using custom integrators to automate their homes. The Röst presents opportunities for control and integration that no other high-quality, two-channel amp on the planet has. It should be the obvious choice.

How does the Röst take this kind of seamless, smart control forward?
The Röst is an IP-controllable unit with a fairly large memory. It is the first of its kind to have Control4 (a leading home automation manufacturer) software built in. And one can write two-way drivers to use it with any kind of device, or even, via a server, devices like Amazon Echo.

Is high damping factor an important part of Hegel’s philosophy?
In our view, a high damping factor simply means you have a stable amplifier. Without a stable amplifier you lose bass control. Hegel knows how to achieve bass control without also getting distortion issues into the bargain. Our SoundEngine technology delivers a high damping factor, without high distortion and ensures the very dynamic and rhythmic Hegel sound.

What led to the naming of this amp and the new white finish?
Röst means voice, and this Röst is the voice of modern Hegel. It is also an island at the Westernmost part of the Lofoten archipelago. In actual fact, all Hegel products start with baby names during R&D. Most of them have been characters from Winnie the Pooh! Re the colour: we wanted it to stand out, and white goes very well with wood furniture and the décor of the Pooh! Re the colour: we wanted it to stand out, and white goes very well with wood furniture and the décor of many modern homes. The colour also signifies the purity of Scandinavian style.

unecessarily drawing attention to itself. The piano joins the ensemble and feels like a full-scale instrument. Hi-fi often struggles to give credible piano performances, but here the timbre and scale of the keyboard is reproduced very well. Melodies from the piano, vocals and strings blend and counterpoint each other in a very balanced and even-handed way. A beguiling and subtle performance, stunningly portrayed.

The network connection is simplicity itself, with the Röst easily discoverable as an output device once connected to my network via the Ethernet input. I experiment with AirPlay, signified by the word appearing ticked on the display. Care is needed after connection as volume control can now be shared between the amplifier and your playback software of choice, so just check levels before you press play. Selecting a 16/44.1 file of Dice by Finley Quaye from a connected NAS drive reveals the Röst is adept at making modest files sound very good. The opening, high frequencies feel sweet and well extended as they dance across the wide soundstage. Solid bass notes reach seismic depths, but have loads of fine detail, control and agility. Quaye’s voice has a rounded warmth, yet plenty of fine filigree detail and the pictpium strokes on guitar have a crisp, incisive snap without ever sounding brittle or sharp. This track builds with many lush and complex layers and rhythms, but the Röst is never wrong footed.

Conclusion
Hegel has brought together many fine qualities from across its product range in one slim, modern, eye-catching box. The amp punches well above its modest power output and is comfortable driving tricky speaker loads. The Röst has a generous array of inputs and can be considered a veritable hub of digital connectivity, with the possible exception that the absence of DSD processing could be considered an omission by those seeking greater future-proofing. That said, Hegel is masterly at integrating DACs within integrated amplifiers, seeming to have a real talent for making even the most modest music files sound very refined. Music lovers with a flair for understated interior design and a desire to control everything from a single smart device now have a product that ticks all their boxes. It’s easy to see how many prospective customers will delight in plumbing the Röst with a network connection and a couple of other discrete sources to create a modern hi-fi setup that looks very elegant and understated but sounds extremely accomplished. The Röst looks and sounds great and is a joy to use.

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HOW IT COMPARES

Exposure’s S101S2D (HFC 397) is a strong all-round integrated at £2,060, including the optional DAC module. It achieves a great balance between connectivity, power and musicality. The Exposure has slightly more power but the Hegel has a cleaner, more dynamic delivery. The Röst also takes smart control to brand new heights. The Cyrus Lyric 09 (HFC 384) in its optional ‘stone’ colour is possibly the closest competitor in terms of balancing an elegant design with high-fidelity sound credentials. Both amps have a very fresh appearance that may win over customers that want style and substance. As always, use your eyes and ears at a quality dealer.

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

VALUE FOR MONEY

BUILD QUALITY

FEATURES

OVERALL

Clean delivery; bass control; connectivity, aesthetics
Can make partnering electronics look a bit dated
Advanced amplifier and digital hub that deserves to be shown off

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