





Integrated Class A/B amplifier. Rated at 2x135W/8ohm
 Made by: Bryston Ltd, Ontario, Canada
 Supplied by: PMC Ltd, Luton
 Telephone: 0870 4441044
 Web: www.bryston.co.uk; www.pmc-speakers.com
 Price: £4900

AUDIO
FILE



Bryston B135 SST²

If proof were needed of Bryston's mettle for embracing the modern world beyond purist two-channel analogue pursuits, it's the B135 SST² C-Series Integrated Amplifier. While the unit reviewed here is two-channel, purist and analogue, it can be fitted with a DAC module for £1575 that adds two coaxial and two Toslink inputs.

Other options include a £500 universal remote and an MM-only phono stage for £650. Bryston offers neither MC nor USB.

Yet even without any options, the B135 is so comprehensively equipped that it will challenge you to find omissions. Minus the digital option, you still have a half-dozen line inputs at the back, a tape loop and pre-out facility. The five-way, gilded speaker terminals are among the nicest we've seen: robust and able to accept fat cables.

Because Bryston supports home integration and home cinema the unit is adaptable for all manner of automation. The unit also features a pass-through facility, an RS232 port

'This amp is so smooth it should be called "The Nigel Havers"'

for control and software upgrades plus two 12V output triggers, one of which is programmable.

One of the first details you notice when removing the unit from its box are the nicely integrated heatsinks in the side sections, the edges well protected and unlikely to catch you unawares. Across the

fascia, the company has shown further restraint by providing a dual-purpose row of buttons to access the sources, sensing when digital inputs are in use. LEDs light up to indicate the source chosen and the two balance buttons. Plus there's a 1/4in headphone socket; the headphone amp is superbly controlled, quiet and detailed. Insertion of the jack automatically mutes the speaker outputs.

Once switched in, the B135 takes a few seconds to stabilise. You then take it out of mute, thus avoiding nasty switch-on thumps.

Features mean little if the underlying engineering is lacklustre, and Bryston ensures that it is anything but. There's over 30,000µF of filter capacitance per channel, part of a power supply that contains three ultra-low-noise transformers – two for the analogue section and the third for the digital, with discrete ground paths.



SILKY SMOOTH

Listening via Wilson Sophia 3s, the immediate reaction was to succumb to a silky smoothness. We won't call it 'valve-like', and some might prefer a sharper sound, but the lack of aggression was doubly appreciated with

music comprised of forceful brass sections – like the backing for Nancy Wilson's *Son Of A Preacher Man/Hurt So Bad* [SoulMusic Records, from 1969].

The Bryston grabs the whole of the title track and balances a multitude of textures, keeping the bass tight and fast. It underscores

ABOVE: One row of dual-purpose buttons selects analogue or digital sources; LEDs indicate choice. Note the refreshingly retro rotary volume control and 1/4in headphone socket. At the rear there's a full complement of analogue inputs and home integration connections, with digital inputs pre-fitted awaiting the optional DAC module

the slickest of horn sections, like a sonic version of Fowler's Dictionary: a lesson in punctuation and usage. Best of all, Wilson's honeyed voice, notorious for its complex tapestry of tones, comes through unhindered.

Tom Jones's 'Delilah', from *True Sixties Love* [Spectrum], is almost laughable in its intensity. What a barrage of wonderful clichés! Tinkling bells, mariachi horns, Broadway-style backing vocals, country-style redneck bass... Never does the Bryston lose the plot. Admittedly, Jones was able to command the best of Decca's producers, musicians and engineers, so nothing he released once stardom was achieved was ever less than of audiophile grade, but this is just spectacular.

From the same box set is the consummately irritating 'Cinderella Rockefeller' by Esther and Abi Ofarim, with as odd an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach as 'Delilah', nonetheless enjoyable for its mix of ragtime piano, banjo, tuba and other 'comical' instruments, with a vaudeville feel provided by the vocals. Again, the Bryston kept the balls in the air, excelling for the attack and the tone of both the melodic and abrasive instruments.

While we did mainly indulge in rock, the B135 invites a more considered listening session: it errs toward the genteel. Indeed, this amp is so smooth it should really be called 'The Nigel Havers'...

VERDICT

Every high-end maker offers a circa-£5k integrated. But the B135 has sonic finesse, clever ergonomics and a form that lets you buy only what you need. That may be enough to simplify your choice. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

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| Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm) | 170W / 275W |
| Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm) | 220W / 410W / 665W / 445W |
| Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz) | 0.023–0.095ohm |
| Frequency response (20Hz–100kHz) | +0.04dB to –4.05dB |
| Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/135W) | 25mV / 292mV |
| A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/135W) | 76.8dB / 98.1dB |
| Distortion (20Hz–20kHz re. 10W/8ohm) | 0.0012–0.003% (0.028%, left) |
| Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p) | 61W/497W |
| Dimensions (WHD) / Weight | 433x116x353mm / 13.6kg |