Trends Audio

TA-10.1 Class-T integrated amplifier **$200**

The ever advancing trend to miniaturisation could hardly be more evident than in this diminutive Hong Kong-manufactured TA-10.1 from Trends Audio. It's hard to believe that this tiny aluminium box (the picture above is nearly twice its actual size) contains a complete integrated audio amplifier, even one putting out a relatively circumspect 15W per channel. The whole box weighs just 500g and measures 76mm wide, 46mm high and 114mm deep.

Packed into this available space is the amplifier circuitry and the requisite connections, those being one set of good quality stereo RCA inputs, the power adaptor input and a set of WBT-style speaker outputs (with hard-to-tighten transparently-sheathed binding posts). The TA-10.1 operates on 12V via the supplied power adaptor, and can also run on batteries with the appropriate optional adaptors.

Being rated at 10W into 8Ω and 15W into 4Ω means the little amp can drive a moderate load but may not suit hard-to-drive, low-impedance speakers. (Electrostatic speakers need not apply.) In addition, the modest power rating necessitates efficient speakers. Ball-park figures of 88dB and higher are preferred, if not essential. Total Harmonic Distortion (THD) figures are reasonable — 0.1% at 11W into 4Ω.

LISTENING IMPRESSIONS

The Trends Audio midget amplifier belies its size and output rating when it comes to sonic performance. The lower octaves emerge surprisingly robust, tight and punchy with good harmonic content and detail if not ultimate depth.

Higher up in the midrange, where the music lives, the Trends still doesn't disappoint. Female vocals are crystal clear and are projected into the room with strong presence and resolute separation from the backing instruments. There's no doubt that this mini-me amp is transparent to the input up the chain.

Acoustic guitars and piano fare well too. These instruments demand an amplifier that can control the leading transients of notes with speed and precision. The TA-10.1 delivers here too and has a nimble way with all music that enhances pace and speed. We partly ascribe this impression of speed to the slightly lean bass balance — a tightly detailed but not overtly deep low register.

Patty Larkin's *Re-Grooving the Dream* is a superbly-recorded CD that can be a challenge to reproduce due to its enormous dynamics and complex mix. At reasonable listening levels, the Trends copes with this material comfortably and nimbly but, when pushed hard, it begins to compress on the more boisterous passages. The track *When* contains powerfully-captured, simultaneously-climaxing manic guitar and drums. Although well handled up to a point, when asked to really pump out the volume, the little amp begins to break up into clipping. It's a mild form of clipping, though, without the common nasty high frequency distortion — probably a benign artefact of the technology. In fact low-note clipping may have artificially enhanced the impression of this amplifier's tightness in the bass.

Having said that, the whole *raison d'ëtre* of this amp is to co-exist with ultra-efficient speakers where clipping would be a moot point. Matched correctly the TA-10.1 could coast along without raising sweat.

CONCLUSION

From Albert King to Wishbone Ash, the Trends Class-T amp kept its grip on the music, proving to be a fast, tight, detailed and resolving little performer that impressed with a sense of effortlessness, and only limited at higher levels when using regular speakers (as its power rating would suggest). Small but powerful, the Trends TA-10.1 is the Napoleon Bonaparte of amplification.

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