



The ONE and only

David Vivian was looking forward to the Cyrus ONE's follow-up, but didn't think it would look quite so familiar

Expectations are easily dashed. If I was a betting man I'd have had a small wager about the name of the follow-up amp to 2016's well-featured Cyrus ONE (HFC 420), seeing as 'ONE' was a nod to the company's first product back in the mid-eighties. Sticking with the theme, I reasoned, a current tech homage to the company's second model would be next up and called the Cyrus TWO. And I'd have lost...

Instead, we have the Cyrus ONE HD, a DAC-enabled, souped-up Cyrus ONE ushering in a whole new world of digital connectivity, uprated Bluetooth and a claim for superior sound all round. If you've just bought a plain vanilla Cyrus ONE, this is probably the last thing you want to hear, but the HD checks in at £999, £300 more than the official retail price of the now 'basic' ONE, which continues in production and is still, in my opinion, a cracking starter amp.

The HD (for High Definition) suffices a tiny orange 'HD' logo to the 'ONE' on the otherwise identical glossy black fascia and manages to apply extra socketry to an already crowded rear panel that, impressively, boasts two sets of speaker terminals to make bi-wiring that much easier. The additions are all digital and comprise optical, coaxial and Type-B asynchronous USB inputs, extending hook-up potential to laptop, TV and games console. These inputs all route to the new 32-bit on-board DAC.

The amp is still rated at 100W per channel into 60hm, toting fourth generation Class D topology, while the Bluetooth spec goes from aptX to aptX HD for 'better-than-CD' sound quality from a wireless connection (see feature on p64). There are three line-level analogue inputs, one of which can be configured with fixed gain to allow integration with a separate AV amplifier should you want to use the ONE HD as part of a

home cinema setup. The provision of a separate Class AB headphone amp with a 6.35mm jack remains.

Likewise, the moving-magnet phono stage, which is based on the internals of Cyrus' outboard Phono Signature (HFC 408). It's isolated from the rest of the electronics, which have been treated to upgrades to complement the fourth-gen Class D implementation.

The ONE HD, as with its progenitor, isn't aimed chiefly at hardcore audiophiles, but young people who might just be the ones to bring some much-needed new blood to the

The ONE's speed and precision is joined by greater depth and steadfast conviction

'proper hi-fi' movement. Despite having the same 'shoebbox' form factor as every other Cyrus component, it perpetuates its older sibling's unique style, fronted by that inscrutable glossy black plastic fascia with its brace of large, LED-garlanded, low-inertia matt black rotary knobs. Build quality remains a mixed bag. The metal casework and rear panel are solid enough, the protruding sharp-edged plastic fascia that sets the cool aesthetic tone not so much. The credit card-style remote control just about passes muster functionally, but isn't great to use.

As with the regular ONE, the HD has SID (Speaker Impedance Detection), which, on power up, measures the impedance of the

connected speaker and optimises its output to suit. A meaty toroidal transformer takes up most of the space inside, but the limited room also favours the four-layer PCB that claims to use short signal paths and extra-thick copper tracks.

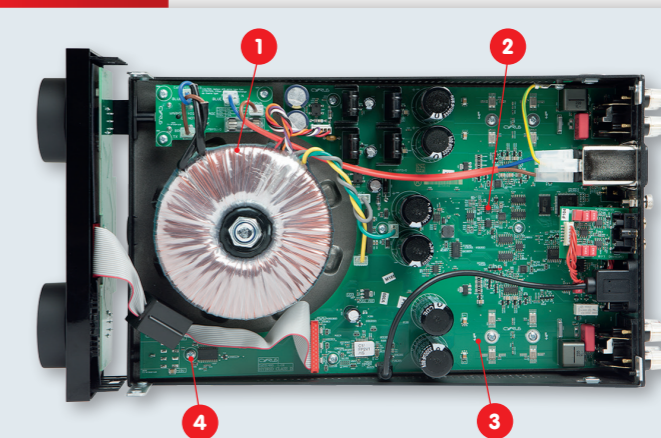
Sound quality

It would be a little pointless continuing this review without a Cyrus ONE refresher. So, first on the rack with a Cambridge Audio CXC CD transport (HFC 401) and CXN V2 network music player/DAC/preamp (HFC 437), Chord Electronics Hugo 2 DAC (HFC 428) and Elipson Omega 100 Carbon Black turntable (HFC 427) is a Cyrus ONE from late 2016 driving a pair of Acoustic Energy AE100 standmounts (HFC 430).

Teamed with a talented front end and speakers, as it is here, the ONE is an amplifier that immediately sounds clean, crisp, spry, grippy and interesting. That is, it makes you interested in what's going on musically rather than trying to accumulate demo room brownie points. It's transparent, fast and, unusually at the price, has excellent powers of low-level resolution that renders fine detail missed by some rivals in a natural and unforced manner. Tonally, it can sound a tad lean but it has a deft way with dynamics combining explosive muscle and nuanced delicacy in a very grown-up, cohesive, high-end lite sort of way. Great stuff for a £700 amp.

Switching to the ONE HD is quite a step change. Streaming from Tidal, Paul Brown's version of Burt Bacharach's *I Say A Little Prayer* lends Jesse J's tasteful vocal more body, colour and tonal texture and places it in a plusher yet more intricately resolved setting. None of this slows up or blurs the amplifier's temporal skills one jot. A core Cyrus ONE HD skill. Moving on to a spot of gallery-

IN SIGHT



- 1 Toroidal linear power supply
- 2 Digital section
- 3 Fourth-generation 'hybrid' Class D amplifiers
- 4 Class AB headphone amplifier



HOW IT COMPARES

The ONE HD represents stiffer competition for more established rivals like the (all-analogue) Rega Elex-R and Audiolab 8300A, both £900 and reviewed in HFC 420. It's even good enough to have a pop at the £1,500 Hegel H90 (HFC 427), which boasts a more extensive set of digital connections. All three are worth auditioning against the Cyrus. Both the Audiolab and Hegel have a silkier, warmer presentation and the Rega remains the rhythm king, but the ONE HD holds its own. It's a very close call.

pleasing, show-off, hyper-space drumming with Carl Palmer from his *ELP Legacy Live* set on CD, that solid pace and precision that I first admired with the ONE stays exactly where it is. The surviving P's snare drum chops and tom-tom sweeps are as blistering as ever.

Bassist/singer/songwriter Esperanza Spalding's quirky and compellingly off-kilter jazz stylings on *Emily's D+Evolution* – so hard to deliver without it sounding a little messy and confused – is an easy win for the Cyrus ONE and in turn a glowing triumph for the ONE HD, which homes in on Spalding's relentlessly potent performance on *Earth To Heaven* with still greater zeal and exuberance, but without making a big deal of the less than immaculate recording. Yes, the ONE's speed and precision is preserved, but, remarkably, with greater depth and steadfast conviction by the newcomer.

Connecting the CXC CD transport and CXN streamer to the ONE HD's internal DAC instead of the Hugo 2 isn't the let down it might have been, making it a real credit to Cyrus' technicians. Even in a direct

head-to-head comparison the Cyrus' meagre sins are merely those of omission. In isolation, the extra weight, body and colour the HD brings to the table is delivered with the ONE's signature pep, pace and transparency, just as it was with the Chord taking care of the digital decoding. The phono stage is a joy, too, giving a spot of pre-Randy Crawford Joe Sample a rich and harmonically replete rendition of his artfully tinkled ivories that's simply lovely. Arguably the biggest revelation, however, is Bluetooth aptX HD, which lifts Radio 4 on BBC iPlayer – although passable with the ONE's ordinary aptX – to a whole new level of intimacy.

Conclusion

Well, maybe this is the all-singing amp the Cyrus ONE should have been in the first place. There can't be any denying that the hike in connectivity and sound quality is significant (and possibly worthy of that Cyrus Two status). If you've a grand burning a hole in your back pocket and are in the market for an integrated amplifier with the right smarts and great sound, HD is the way to go ●

CONNECTIONS



- 1 Bi-wireable binding posts (left channel)
- 2 Optical and coaxial digital inputs
- 3 USB Type-B port
- 4 Preamp outputs

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★
FEATURES ★★★★★

LIKE: Fast, clean, musically engaging sound; features; style
DISLIKE: Fascia feels too plasticky
WE SAY: The HD fully realises the ONE's potential and is a very talented all-rounder

OVERALL

