



Class warrior

Punching out serious amounts of power from a small box, the Cyrus Stereo 200 makes a big impression, says **David Price**

Audiophiles can sometimes be a bit snobby about Class D; they tend to be more interested in the As and ABs of this world, and feel D can sound a little opaque and musically unconvincing. Class D is an extremely efficient mode of producing power, though – and is surely the future in tomorrow's energy-saving world. Personally, I have always found the old adage that, "it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it" applies here – I'm all for a classless society!

The new Cyrus Stereo 200 is said to have started as one of the company's special projects, produced to explore if Class D could ever be developed into a power amplifier good enough for serious hi-fi listeners. For this reason, unlike practically all others on sale, it doesn't use a third-party off-the-shelf chip power module. Instead it's a hybrid of toroidal transformer with a custom Class D topology using an externally clocked PWM generation unit to insure that it performs at its best across the full

power bandwidth. The >475VA toroidal transformer plays a big part in this says Cyrus' R&D team, making for an amplifier with fine sound, high efficiency and low heat generation. It produces a claimed 2x 200W into a typical 6ohm load from the company's compact half-width casing, which is no small feat – a conventional Class AB amp in this box would surely make less power and run hotter.

One of the feistiest sounding Cyrus power amplifiers I have ever heard

The Cyrus even 'harvests' the energy used to stop the loudspeaker cone moving and puts it back into its power supply reservoir, making for very low current consumption.

The Stereo 200 has a heavily filtered mains power supply, and its microcontroller is powered from a separate supply to the other circuitry.

▶ DETAILS

PRODUCT
Cyrus Stereo 200

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Stereo power amplifier

WEIGHT
6.9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
215 x 73 x 360mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 2x 200W (6ohm)
- Speaker impedance detection system
- Balanced XLRs and unbalanced RCA inputs

DISTRIBUTOR
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Cyrus says it provides large amounts of burst power for musical transients by using a mix of electrolytic, ceramic and polypropylene capacitors, coupled to the custom low-noise toroidal transformer. All low-level audio signal carrying components get their juice from four independently regulated supplies, and the high current supply is separately fused and decoupled between left and right channels. The reconstruction filter in the Class D output section has a ferrite-shielded coil with oxygen-free copper and polypropylene metal foil capacitors for the lowest distortion; the company says that a lot of time was spent tuning this for the best possible sound.

The amp constantly monitors the circuit for errors in supply voltages, DC offset from the speaker outputs and also over current short circuit. The circuit will even detect a short circuited output without any applied audio signal. Speaker impedance detection is carried out on start up, so that every time the amplifier is powered up it automatically adjusts to the speaker load.

In other respects it is pretty conventional; it has a choice of unbalanced RCA inputs or fully balanced XLRs. There are standard 4mm speaker binding and power consumption is said to be a miserly 0.5 watt in standby mode.

Sound quality

As ever the Cyrus sports the company's classic non-ferrous aluminium diecast chassis, which is significantly less resonant than typical pressed steel wrapped boxes. Despite its unusual, bespoke design, the

Like a fly-weight boxer, the Stereo 200 packs a mighty punch for such a small unit

Stereo 200 still sounds spookily like a typical Cyrus product – one which serves up a smooth, tonally even sound with no particular emphasis on any part of the frequency range, and that has a crisp and propulsive feel to the way it plays music. Indeed, if anything the bass actually comes over as a little gutsier than some amplifiers from this stable – there’s a sense of solidity and weight to low frequencies that belies the size of the box. Moving up to the midband, and all is clean and tidy, with no sense of the upper midband being brightly lit or coarse. In the treble, it is crisp and detailed with a nice spry feel, even if it isn’t quite as silky or spacious as a Class A Sugden A21, for example.

With Isaac Hayes’ *Cafe Regio*’s from the classic Stax *Shaft* LP, the Stereo 200 serves up a rich and three-dimensional sound. This is just as it should be considering it’s a spacious and opulent-sounding recording. The amplifier also proves untroubled by the succession of quite hard to drive loudspeakers I try with it, from new ATC SCM40s to classic Yamaha NS1000Ms. The song’s wonderfully thick and fruity bass guitar sounds effortless, even at very high levels that would have many similarly priced products wheezing. It is also pleasingly tuneful and stops and starts in all the right places, giving the sound a rhythmic correctness that underpins everything else in the mix. Further up the scale, the piano is carried well with a natural sound that syncopates nicely with the lead electric guitar. Behind this, those gorgeous strings soar and the brass rasps; flute is breathy and the cymbals sparkle. The amplifier is able to blend everything together well, giving a detailed, multi-layered sound that is a pleasure to listen to, with little sign of muddle as the track grows in complexity. It is also good with

dynamics, seeming unfettered and well able to capture the subtle phrasing of these quite brilliant session musicians.

Jacqueline du Pré’s arresting playing on Elgar’s *Cello Concerto Op.85* (Barenboim/Philadelphia Orchestra) is also a joy. The Stereo 200 conjures up a spacious recorded acoustic, yet one that invites the listener right in. Again that strong bass is in evidence, and at high volume levels gives the amplifier a commanding sound. Du Pré’s cello is beautifully carried, with a lyrical presentation that fits seamlessly with the rest of the orchestra. The overall effect is stirringly musical, and when the massed strings come in you wouldn’t

There’s a sense of solidity and weight to low frequencies that belies its size

know that such power is emanating from such a small box. In absolute terms, the petite Cyrus doesn’t quite have the detail and air of some pricier power amplifiers I have tried, sounding slightly misty at the back of the hall, but it is still a combative performance from a mid-priced power amplifier. It images well up front, but becomes a little diffuse towards the rear of the soundstage.

Moving to less rarefied musical climes, the wonderful slice of new wave that is Nick Lowe’s *So It Goes* is delivered in a gutsy and muscular way. It’s a piece of music that’s right up the Cyrus’ street, giving it a chance to really show off its fine rhythms and strong dynamics.

American muscle car fans will tell you there’s no substitute for cubic inches to make real power, but the Stereo 200 begs to disagree – it sounds bold despite its diminutive

dimensions. Once again, its supple handling of the song’s bass guitar pushes things along with alacrity, while vocals are clean and expressive and guitars upfront and engaging. Unlike some Class D designs I have heard, this amplifier certainly does not have a sat-upon sound. Indeed, I think rock music best suits this amplifier’s nature; it is subtle and sophisticated enough to work well across the board, yet can tackle crashing electric guitar chords and drums with relish.

Conclusion

An interesting one, this. The Cyrus Stereo 200 doesn’t broadcast its mode of operation to the world; rather it transcends it to work as a highly enjoyable all-round solid-state power amplifier. You can’t immediately tell it’s a Class D design, yet you never forget the benefit conferred by this configuration – namely a lot of power in a small space. It’s certainly one of the feistiest sounding Cyrus power amplifiers I have ever heard, making it ideal for owners of this marque wanting to raise their roof or even just drive difficult loudspeakers. Yet it also has real appeal for those needing a fine-sounding powerhouse that doesn’t take over their living space ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Big power in a small package; gutsy, musical sound
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Subtle lack of fine detail and atmosphere
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Excellent value compact powerhouse
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL



CONNECTIONS



- 1 Balanced XLR input (right ch)
- 2 RCA input and chain output
- 3 4mm speaker binding posts
- 4 MC Bus connections