

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



Audia Flight FLS9

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Audia Flight has been building preamplifiers and power amps in Italy since 1996, the company is well known in France, Netherlands, Germany and even more so in the Far East. Three ranges of product are available: the Strumento series, the FL Three S and the FLS range. The FLS9 integrated amplifier is capable of delivering a sturdy 150 Watts into 8 Ohms and up to 500 Watts into 2 Ohm loads. In its elegant brushed and anodized aluminium chassis, resting on NBR rubber spheres, it is a classic class AB design with Audia Flight specialities. Not only does it look extremely nice and play music that's delicate to the ear, it is powerful enough to handle any kind of music, be it a large orchestra or hard rock.

Build

On the front panel a large OLED display forms a smile, showing the volume setting and source. A large volume control is coupled to an analogue chip to make small steps of 0.5 dB in gain possible over a range of 0 to 100. Small buttons for on/off, input, settings, mute, phase and speaker on/off are next to a headphone output. An aluminium remote adds options to dim the display or use balance. At 45cm wide in a hefty of 25.5 kg chassis the amp looks impressive in silver or black anodised finishes. On the back are five inputs, three RCA and two XLR. Beside the loudspeaker terminals there are outputs for recording and for pre-out, the latter on RCA and XLR. Mains power inlet and triggers almost complete the back. Two slots are available for optional cards: one for phono, one adding two RCA inputs and another one for digital inputs and D/A conversion. A streaming board is also in the pipeline.

On the inside the preamplifier board is fully balanced carrying Audia Flight FLS CFA15 modules, hiding one of the secret ingredients of the design. Each channel uses 12 power transistors, fed by 8 power supply circuits with 120,000uF capacity and a large, fully shielded 1kW power transformer. Audia power supplies have a high slew rate and wide frequency response for speed, for the FLS9 the range is 0.3 Hz to 500 kHz. The circuits uses transimpedance amplification and current feedback only, since Audia feels that voltage feedback harms performance. The feedback is closed before the output stage. Control circuits protect against faults and uses less than 1 Watt in stand-by mode.

Sound quality

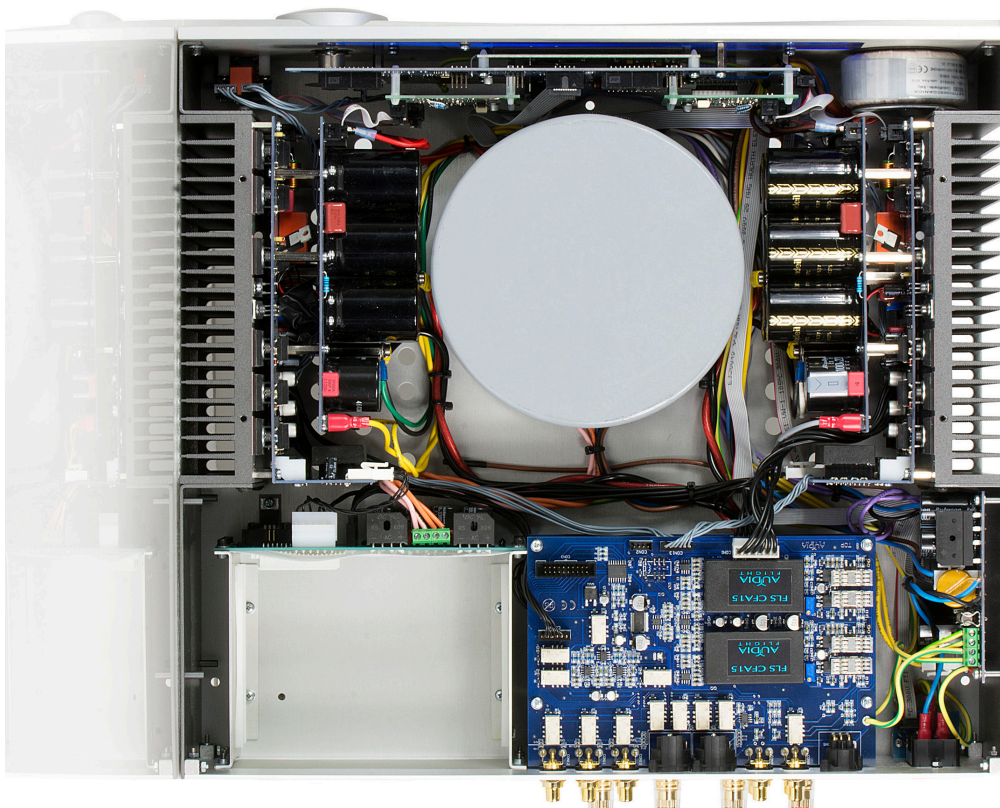
Being happy with my own Audia Flight Strumento No.1 preamp for eight years and a recently added FLS4 power amplifier, I was eager to hear whether the Audia signature has found its way into this more affordable integrated amplifier. For this I used it my smaller room, a set-up with a pair of Falcon LS3/5a Gold Badge loudspeakers, an Auralic Aries G2.1 streamer and a Metrum Acoustics DAC. All powered by AudioQuest Niagara 1200 mains filter and Monsoon cables. Interlinks and loudspeaker cables are Inakustik AIR Helix. I stream my music with the help of

Roon software over ethernet cables from AudioQuest, connected to Silent Angel and Melco ethernet switches, while music is stored on a Melco N10 digital library.

Enough said, it's time to describe some of the music I played over the last weeks. Anette Askvik's Liberty is a current favourite that gives me a good idea of what's going on in this amplifier. The way the first and second voices are separated shows how easily the FLS9 brings out small differences. It also shows that a better amp like a Strumento puts more distance between them. Which is unexpected since the FLS9 stereo image is completely free from the loudspeakers, it is wide, wider than the actual set-up, and has enough height and depth. The image is a sound bubble in the space in front of me. Although these small Falcon's won't deliver



deep bass, the sound does not suffer since the FLS9 is easily able to push the LS3/5a to its limit. Of course, voices are beautiful and alive on these monitors, the FLS9 does not add nor subtract information. The saxophone comes in powerfully, surrounded by detail, with a lot of air in the mouthpiece and horn. Life is just a bowl of cherries by Holly Cole is joy to listen to as well. Clear, controlled, fast, detailed, pure to the bone, combined with an image to die for. No way can I get a better Holly into the room within the limits of this system. Moving my musical taste to Italy I use *Le Quattro Stagioni* by Vivaldi, the Dutch Combattimento orchestra made a beautiful recording of it in a church in Amsterdam, the FLS9 makes sure the acoustics of the church are regained. With very delicate playing, tender and soft, on occasions muscular and rich. It's a pleasure to listen to the FLS9 and I cannot conclude other than that the DNA of the Strumento series is not only outside but also inside this amplifier. Vivaldi's music is excellent for this purpose since some parts are tender and soft, while the presto of Summer needs enough



power to show the danger of a thunder storm. Turning up the volume is no problem not even for the Falcon, listening late night at a much lower volume it keeps pushing detail from the cones and domes. This amplifier has a natural flow without stress or hardness, neither is it dull, the sound is always engaging, it's well behaved, balanced and always in control. Listening on headphones you lose the beautiful stereo image, but my simple Sennheiser HD414s are limited in this respect. Don't forget to switch of the speakers when using headphones though.

Moving

Moving the Audia Flight FLS9 to my main system I used it with Spondor Classic 2/3 loudspeakers, Auratic Aries G1 streamer and another Metrum Acoustics DAC. What an expensive preamp adds to a system is clear when swapping the Audia Flight Strumento No.1 for the FLS9. The basic design principles of the FLS4 and FLS9 power amps are the same, a close result between those is normal. Nevertheless, with the FLS9 music is very enjoyable through Spondor speakers with deeper bass extension and greater dynamic capabilities. The soundstage with the FLS9 is still fine, with the more impact from bigger speakers, albeit the quality of voices isn't quite as good as the Falcon BBC monitors. The FLS9 behaves excellently, maintaining full control over the bass, delivering open midrange and very detailed treble that's easy on the ear. Playing Nathalie Darché on solo piano shows how easily the FLS9 handles dynamics. There's never a dull moment. More piano is played by Jan Gunnar Hoff on *Quiet Winter Night: An Acoustic Jazz Project* where male and female singers sound very sweet. The speed of the FLS9 is clear with drums and hi-hats, along with transparency in the bass lines and tenderness in voices. A trumpet hangs in the air behind a singer, airy with long notes slowly decaying till they fade out, only leaving an echo behind. Again, the music flows into the ears in an easy



way. Longer listening is guaranteed without any irritation, no matter whether it's being played loud or at low volume level late in the evening. The FLS9's 150 Watts are more than sufficient to feed the 88dB efficient loudspeakers in a 33 metre square living space (350 foot square). The FLS9 sounds like it hardly leaves the class A state. Tin Pan Alley played by Stevie Ray Vaughan is limited in dynamics says my Roon App, but the FLS9 makes it very enjoyable thanks to the transparency on the guitar strings. My Spondors love this amplifier and work as hard as they can to project Stevie Ray into the room.

Conclusion

Audia Flight might be less well known than American equivalents, but they produce some very fine amplifiers at prices ranging from the affordable to very high end. Over the years I have used Strumento No.1, Flight 50 and now FLS4, so I know these are built to last. The FLS9 is new and has to prove itself in this respect, but seeing the quality of the boards and the components used I am sure it will do so. The most important aspect is of course the sound quality of the amplifier and its ability to drive a pair of speakers to their own acoustic limits. The FLS9 behaves well in every aspect. It is fast, it controls the bass, it is transparent and detailed, never sharp neither dull, and naturally balanced over the entire frequency range. Add to that the very low noise floor, that reveals the long, long decay of notes. Its flawless operation with 0.5 dB volume steps is a gift. Overall, the FLS9 is a high class amplifier with a lot of DNA from the more costly amps in the Audia Flight catalogue. Hand built in Italy, it's a good looking design with enough features and space for additional input cards in the back panel all add to the appeal. I wouldn't mind keeping it in my smaller room for a very extended period of time. Recommended? It sure is.



The ear is all about great music and great sound. It is written by hard bitten audio enthusiasts who strive to find the most engaging, entertaining and great value components and music of the highest calibre. This really is what living is all about.