



▶ **DETAILS**

PRODUCT

Cyrus Lyric 09

ORIGIN

UK

TYPE

One-box system

WEIGHT

9kg

DIMENSIONS

(WxHxD)

420 x 105 x 320mm

FEATURES

- Claimed 170W RMS per channel into 8ohms
- 24/192 upsampling DAC with digital, USB and Bluetooth inputs
- DAB, FM and internet radio
- App, remote and touchscreen control

DISTRIBUTOR

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Design for life

A serious hi-fi system squeezed into a single box? **David Price** finds himself unexpectedly serenaded by the Cyrus Lyric 09

It's official, and you heard it here first – we don't live in the seventies anymore. Like David Bowie, times have changed. He's no longer the Thin White Duke and the world isn't buying huge amounts of separates. Life moves on, and so does the way people play music. Which is not to say the specialist audio market is set to disappear; there are many companies that make a good living from a UK sector worth £200 million a year.

Trouble is, though, by its very nature the hi-fi market is rather exclusive. Audiophiles like their fancy gear and aren't too bothered if no one else does. On the other hand, most

people have never wanted anything more than a quality machine to play their music on. Cyrus' new Lyric 09 attempts to bridge this gap, bringing serious audio engineering to the stylish systems market in a people-friendly package. It's the top of the new Lyric range, the other being the £2,250 Lyric 05, which lacks some of the 09's special audiophile tuning.

This new Cyrus has a style all of its very own and has obviously been well made – and in Britain. It's a sort of one-box Cyrus 'greatest hits' package, containing much of the technology of the company's high-end separates in a single box. For example, its CD mechanism is effectively a rehoused

CDt, complete with slot-loading Servo Evolution II mechanism – claimed by Cyrus to be "the world's most accurate CD-reading device". It has been measured to have 20 percent fewer errors than the next best OEM kit available to the trade, the company says. The streaming section uses the engine developed for the Stream X, with 24/192 and wide codec compatibility. This feeds a preamplifier not a million miles away from the Cyrus Pre XP and a range of digital inputs which go through the company's 32-bit DAC, also seen in the Cyrus 8 DAC, and this uses high-quality op-amps and tuned audio circuits. The manufacturer is



CONNECTIONS



- 1 Speaker binding posts
- 2 DAB/FM antenna input
- 3 Mains power input
- 4 S/PDIF optical & coaxial inputs
- 5 USB input
- 6 Analogue input and output

proud of the headphone amplifier, which uses a circuit developed for a separate standalone headphone amp that never came to market. It has a dedicated power supply and is said to be very carefully laid out.

One key design criterion for the Lyric was that it needed to be able to drive practically any loudspeaker, but also use relatively little power doing so, and so a Class D output stage was chosen. But this was no simple implementation of any old chip; instead the company auditioned a large number, then set about perfecting it for the Lyric. Technical director Peter Bartlett is quite candid; he admits the company's expertise

The best thing about the Lyric 09 is that it sounds great across all sources

has traditionally been in coaxing the best out of Class AB amplifiers, with much of the tweaking process down to the choice of passive components in the signal path. But with Class D, an entirely new approach was needed, the learning curve that the R&D team found itself on explains the fact that this product took three years to get to market. It employs a development of the well-established Cyrus analogue power supply, which makes for an impressive quoted 170W RMS per channel.

Pull the Lyric out of the attractive packaging, and it won't take long to set up. The unit uses a single mains lead (heaven for those that don't like clutter), standard speaker binding posts (thankfully), and has a welter of inputs around the back. You'll need to screw in the wi-fi antenna and DAB aerial, and connect up its single RCA line input if you have an analogue source you wish to use. Those who play out computer audio will also wish to hook up a USB-B cable, and folks with iPods can also connect up

their gadgets via another USB-A input. There are electrical and optical digital inputs too, for TVs, PlayStations and suchlike. The Lyric also hooks up to Bluetooth devices (via the fine sounding aptX codec) and last but not least has uPnP streaming built in. In short, every base is covered with the obvious exception of a phono input. However, vinyl spinning owners can, of course, buy an offboard phono stage and hook it up via the RCA line input.

The Lyric has three main ways of working. First is the unit's own touch-sensitive front panel, which is a nice user interface and marries up well to the touch screen. The main problem is that there's also a swish remote control – complete with backlighting and a motion sensor that turns this on and off whenever you move it, that does the job even faster. There's also Cyrus' Cadence app (iOS or Android), which is easier still. Which to use?

The machine generally feels very good to use. My biggest issue is that it introduces a new design language and form factor which isn't (yet) recognisably Cyrus. This won't be an issue for many, as I suspect the Lyric will pull a whole new type of buyer in – which is precisely what it has been designed to do. What you will discover, though, is that it's a lovely product to use.

Sound quality

The purist 'elephant in the room' is the Lyric's use of Class D power amplification. Some believe its sound is too compromised, but several days of continuous use disabuse me of this notion, at least as far as this Cyrus is concerned. Properly run in and warmed through, it proves a highly enjoyable sounding product across all sources. It's crystal clear that Cyrus has got Class D sounding right, indeed it's surprisingly close to the 'house sound' it gets from its



The closest rival to the Lyric 09 is Naim Uniti 2, £2,795. The two are very well matched, scoring points off one another tit for tat. For example, the more modern Cyrus makes the Naim look a little dull and boxy, but the Naim is truly beautifully finished. The Cyrus has a great slot-loading CD drive, but the Naim beats its number of analogue RCA inputs; five instead of one. The Cyrus has Bluetooth, but Naim has more digital inputs, too. Both have excellent app controllers, but the Cyrus' touch-sensitive glass panel is a bit more exotic than the Naim's push-buttons. They're also well matched sonically; the Naim has a slightly more immersive sound, but lacks the vast power reserves of its rival. Our best advice is to make sure you try them both out before you buy.

Class AB power amplifiers – a bubbly, rhythmically engaging sound with lots of life, fine dynamic accenting and lots of detail.

Starting with an external CD transport into the unit's coaxial digital input, the Lyric 09 pushes Donald Fagen's *Tomorrow's Girls* along like a steamroller. The power amplifier section proves really impressive driving a range of loudspeakers, from easy Focal 948s to tricky Yamaha NS1000Ms. In both cases, the result is surprisingly musical, with strong and articulate bass that is as able to play tunes as well as any good-quality integrated amp. There is absolutely no sense of it compressing the music, even at high programme levels.

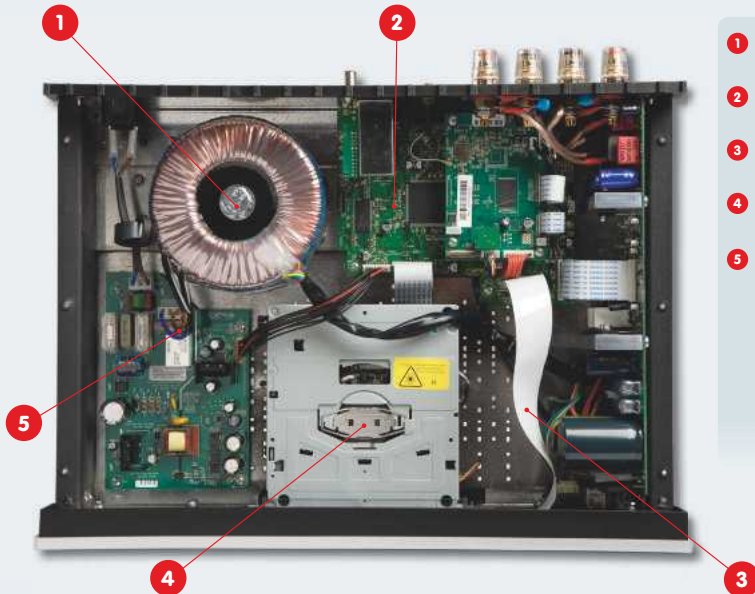
Running the system from the internal CD drive is particularly impressive; the disc transport is obviously excellent. Again it has that propulsive Cyrus Servo Evolution sound, one that shuffles the music along and ekes out loads of detail. As one-box systems go, this has to be one of the finest disc transports around. Fed from a MacBook Pro running Audirvana Plus, its USB input shows redoubtable ability. Via the streamer, Kate Bush's *Snowflake* at 24/96 is beautifully carried, with rich and engrossing piano work. Her voice – often a chore for solid-state amplifiers – is smooth and subtle, with no sense that the system is trying to flatten or harden it. Again, the lower frequencies amaze, with seemingly effortless reserves of power for those crashing piano cadences.

The Cyrus wows me from its analogue input, too. A Michell GyroDec turntable via a Trichord Dino phono stage makes a beautiful job of a rare and expensive 'blue triangle' first pressing of Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*. *Breathe* sounds enjoyably warm and mellifluous, and it throws out a wonderfully wide and deep soundstage, showing just how capable its amplifier section is. Fed an absolutely tip-top source, it rises to the challenge, and then some.

Glass, steel and aluminium combine to great effect to make this a beauty



INSIGHT



- 1 Low-noise toroidal transformer
- 2 Streaming modules
- 3 Front panel touch control connector
- 4 Slot-loading disc drive
- 5 Standby board and feed to multiple sub-regulation stages

ON TEST

Rated at 170W/8ohm, the Class D amplifier inside Cyrus' Lyric 09 system continues to deliver as much as 2x215W/8ohm and 2x370W/4ohm. Protection limits its output into lower impedance loads so 'tough' speakers are best avoided. The performance of the Lyric 09 is best divided into 'digital' (CD, coax/optical in and

network/USB audio) and 'analogue' (line in/power amp out). The latter has some typical Class D attributes including a load-sensitive frequency response that rises to +1.4dB/20kHz into 8ohm, but dips to -0.45dB/20kHz into 4ohm and a slightly lower-than-average A-wtd S/N ratio of 75dB (re. 0dBW). Distortion also climbs at very

high frequencies, from a low 0.003% at 1kHz to 0.12% at 20kHz (all at 10W/8ohm). The 'digital' performance is quite clean for a heavily integrated solution - the A-wtd S/N is 100dB, jitter modest at <600psec (all sample rates) and distortion between 0.0005-0.0015% over the top 30dB of its dynamic range. PM

Tonally the Cyrus isn't a radical departure from the company's separates amplifiers, meaning it's on the spry, crisp and dry side of neutral - you'd never confuse it with a sumptuous, warm tube amp. But it is open and transparent enough to let the full flavour of that original and beautiful EMI *Abbey Road* recording flood out, and the result is a mesmeric sound. This is quite a contrast to the Bluetooth input - which gives as good a sound as I've heard playing a 256kbps AAC file of Scritti Politti's *Perfect Way* from an iPad, but it's never going to match vintage vinyl via a top turntable!

The really impressive thing about the Lyric 09 is it sounds great across all sources. The streamer and CD drive are superb, the sensitive DAB radio doesn't let the show down and the analogue input is excellent. It underlines the fact that the Lyric has been designed as a complete package that uses the technology and philosophy behind Cyrus' popular range of separates. Spending the same amount of money mixing and matching components from a range of manufacturers might give a slightly superior sound, but not by much. I suspect many would regard it more as different, rather than better.

Conclusion

The intention of the Lyric 09 to give serious grown-up hi-fi sound in a scaled-down single-box package, across a wide range of family-friendly sources has been achieved. It might not quite have the operational sophistication of designs from, say, Bang & Olufsen, but it isn't far behind and the sound quality is dramatically better, as is the build.

If you're an audiophile looking to downsize, or a music lover with an understandable aversion to hi-fi clutter, then this is an excellent package - and indeed one of the very best of its type yet offered ●

Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Excellent sound across all sources; versatility; ease of use

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** More analogue inputs wouldn't hurt!

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Nothing less than a superb high-end one-box hi-fi system

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL
★★★★★

Q&A

Peter Bartlett

Technical director, Cyrus Audio



DP: Why has Cyrus gone into one-box 'style systems'?

PB: Separates sales are what the company is known for and I did not want to follow other brands by chasing new demographics by diluting our core products. Rather I want to maintain the specialisation of the Cyrus brand, possibly becoming more so, and create a new parallel brand for the emerging 'quality lifestyle' consumer. Sure we incorporate our audiophile knowledge in Lyric R&D, but the needs and desires of this consumer are different. It's also a superb place to develop technologies, and I'm confident Lyric R&D will flow into our specialist models.

Would you say that the priority here is sonics or packaging?

Sound is at the top of any development planning, but where Lyric did head down a new path was that the product had to be intuitive to operate and non-threatening for the non-enthusiast. Lyric needed development from one of the UK's most advanced industrial design teams to help us make a box of high-performance electronics look classy and have enough subtle detailing to keep owners interested over the years. This is the beginning of a range of Lyric models that could well last alongside Cyrus separates for another 30 years.

How did you implement Class D power amplification?

Tuning this sort of amplifier is completely different from tuning a Class AB design such as a Cyrus 8, and closer to our zero feedback mono amps in that both the Lyric 09 and the ZF mono amps possess such enormous dynamic ability, power and subtlety that top-quality loudspeakers are required to ensure subtle qualities are not overlooked when progressing through the tuning process. The amp provides very strong bass control and I recommend partnering with speakers costing £10,000 or more. Clearly most owners will choose more affordable speakers, but we believe it is also capable of getting the most from more serious speakers.