



# ONE amp to rule them all

Cyrus' new precious has a familiar ring to it, **Chris Ward** takes a listen and finds out if it is worthy of the number-one spot

**B**ack in 1984 a small, fledgling audio brand launched the Cyrus One – a stylish integrated amp that sought to re-write the rulebook and deliver exceptional value and performance for consumers putting together a quality system on a budget. The eighties may be back in vogue, but the new Cyrus ONE is clearly a 21st-century product that hopes to achieve exactly the same goal.

This ONE sports a new look for the brand. The deep, half-width 'shoebox'

proportions are recognisably Cyrus, but gone is the cast magnesium alloy casework, replaced by a sharp-edged acrylic fascia and folded aluminium bodywork. It's not as bombproof as previous designs, but feels sturdy enough. On the front, an on/off button and 6.35mm headphone output are joined by two rubberised rotary controls for source selection and volume adjustment. Cyrus claims that the high-current headphone stage will surpass many dedicated rivals. Plugging in cans re-routes all

## DETAILS

- PRODUCT**  
Cyrus ONE
- ORIGIN**  
UK
- TYPE**  
Integrated amplifier
- WEIGHT**  
5.6kg
- DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
220 x 85 x 390mm
- FEATURES**
  - Quoted power output: 2x 100W
  - Inputs: 4x RCA analogue; MM phono stage
  - AptX via Bluetooth
  - Class AB headphone amplifier with 6.35mm jack output
- DISTRIBUTOR**  
Cyrus Audio
- TELEPHONE**  
01480 410900
- WEBSITE**  
cyrusaudio.com

power supplies to focus on driving headphones, and claims to drive loads from 8ohm to 10kohm impedances.

Around the back there are two sets of speaker binding posts enabling bi-wiring. A moving-magnet phono input, complete with grounding post means you can connect a turntable directly. Four line-level inputs are provided, with one configurable for AV bypass, so the amp can be integrated within a home cinema system. There are no digital source inputs, but wireless operation is enabled via aptX Bluetooth so you can stream music from phones, tablets and computers. A 'pre out' connection means power amplifiers can be added further down the line, while a micro USB input facilitates potential future firmware changes.

Under the hood, the toroidal transformer dominates over a relatively sparse four-layer PCB that claims to use short signal paths and extra-thick copper tracks. Cyrus describes the amp as "third generation, 'hybrid' Class D power", and it follows in the footsteps of its Lyric one-box system (HFC 384) and Stereo 200 power amplifier (HFC 398).

A plastic, credit card-sized IR remote control handset is included, but this feels somewhat of an after thought. It provides control of volume, mute, source selection, balance and LED brightness effectively enough, but can all too easily be lost down the back of the sofa. I'm advised, however, that dedicated apps will soon be available

**Size can be deceptive and this half-width hero packs one hell of a punch**

allowing owners to control the amp using either a smartphone or tablet.

Connecting up my Cadence Arca loudspeakers via Black Rhodium Foxtrot speaker cable (HFC 412) I power up the ONE. A short, funky display of bright LEDs lights up the arcs around the front rotary controls. It's a lovely sight but also signals the ONE is already at work, implementing Cyrus' Speaker Impedance Detection (SID) system. This is confirmed by a small click through the speakers that indicates the amp is sensing the impedance of the speakers and cabling it is presented with and

## The ONE relishes fast transients, without breaking into a sweat

optimising the performance of the hybrid Class D amplification that's employed within.

Class D power has been celebrated for high efficiency, although it has historically had weaknesses around variable frequency response with different speaker impedance loads. Here, the ONE works backwards from your speakers to configure itself to maximum advantage. Done right, this should ensure connected speakers are powered to reveal their optimum performance and along with the ability to adjust channel balance from the remote control, confirms that designers at Cyrus are thinking about real-world solutions.

## Sound quality

Somewhat fittingly, playing a CD of *You're The One* by Kaytranada on my reference Shanling CD-T100 transport instantly portrays the virtues of the Cyrus ONE. The track

opens with a simple, incisive clicktrack/clap beat. It's notable here because it's presented so cleanly and with such speed, accuracy and control that the sound has a realism and presence that modest amps rarely extol. The bass line joins with real power and control and I need to do a double take that I'm listening to reference speakers I know so well. The lower octaves are superbly defined with proper starts, stops and wonderfully fulsome body in-between. This bass power and accuracy feels like the amplifier has a tight grip on the drivers, but not in a dry, overly taut way that removes the emotion from the lowest registers. Instead the bass just blossoms with an organic fluidity, free to reach seismic depths, but with the agility to change direction on a pinhead. The vocals come in and the ONE proves it's just as talented with voices. Sometimes Class D power can feel accurate, but uninviting. Cyrus has fixed this, big time. I suspect that significant attention to power supplies and over specification of key output components is vital to achieve this magic. Fizzing treble detail layers over luscious voices and warm retro keyboards as the deep, agile bass strides forward.

Spinning *Twin Rocks, Oregon* by Shawn Mullins on 180g vinyl shows the ONE has a fine phono stage. The inspired vocals have excellent presence and imaging is strong. It's easy to imagine that having large reserves of clean power on tap is all about drive and volume, but here the ONE shows that it's fast – dynamic reserves are brilliantly suited to reveal the most subtle nuances, that actually give intimate performances their emotion and believable three-dimensionality. Bass quality stands out again as firm and well controlled, ▶

## CONNECTIONS



- 1 USB port for firmware upgrades
- 2 Bi-wireable speaker connections (left channel)
- 3 MM phono input
- 4 Choice of four line-level inputs
- 5 Preamplifier outputs

## Q&A

**Simon Freethy**

Managing director, Cyrus Audio



**CW: Who do you see as the customer for the ONE?**

**SF:** There are swathes of consumers who want high-quality hi-fi without having to pass an initiation test to understand what they are buying. Cyrus ONE is the first of many products that will use our engineering expertise to bring the joys of high-quality sound to a much wider audience at a very affordable price.

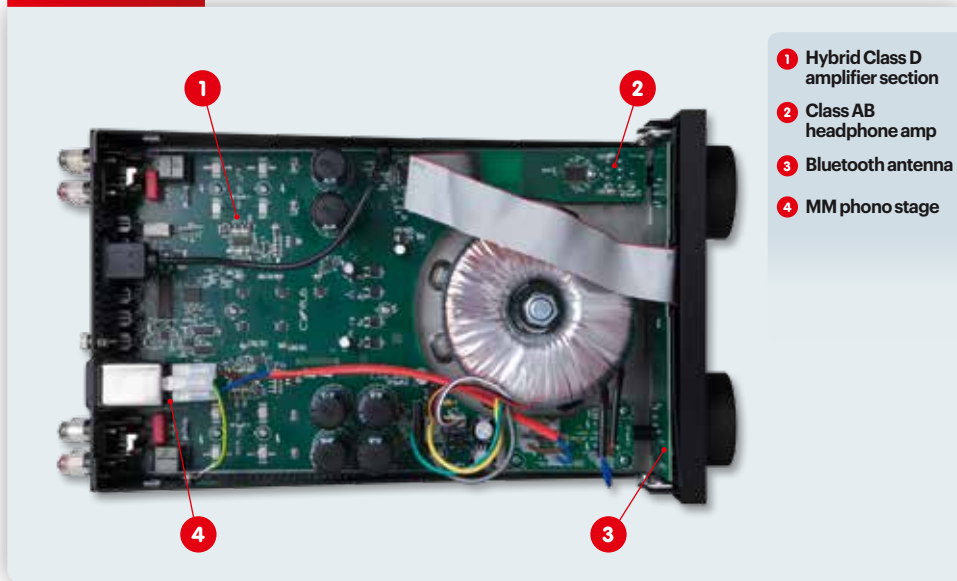
**Why did you decide against including a DAC?**

When we first sat down to create the ONE's specification, we agreed the core purpose had to be creating a 100+W, highly dynamic, emotionally rewarding, integrated amp at an excellent price. A tall order, but one that would create a real wow factor. A good onboard DAC would come at a price, but was unlikely to advance sound quality much. We decided, however, that pushing the boundaries of what Bluetooth could achieve would seriously advance ease of use for users with digital files. Our Bluetooth solution can approach CD quality, has excellent range and even employs a fully balanced connection to the preamp stage.

**Are there many trickle-down benefits from other products?**

This is now our third generation of hybrid Class D technology. We've taken many of the learnings from our groundbreaking Lyric and Stereo 200 products and found ways to achieve similar qualities at a lower price. Similarly, the ONE's phono stage borrows many of the qualities from our flagship Phono Signature stage. What's less obvious, are the deep insights we have learned around power supplies over many years. In order to make a beautifully clean and clear output signal you need beautifully clean and clear input current. Even the world's best Michelin star-winning chefs cannot make gourmet food if they do not have great ingredients to start with. The ONE uses no less than 13 high-quality power supplies to serve up what we believe is a truly emotionally rewarding musical experience.

### IN SIGHT



- 1 Hybrid Class D amplifier section
- 2 Class AB headphone amp
- 3 Bluetooth antenna
- 4 MM phono stage

making turntable set up and cartridge selection doubly important to make sure you don't have too much of a good thing. The chorus changes up a gear and the rising power of Mullins' voice is given masses of headroom to breathe. The acoustic guitar rings cleanly alongside tiny finger picking sounds and the attack and fast muting of the guitar reveals just how much the ONE relishes fast transients, without ever breaking into a sweat.

Finally, I stream a modest file of Sonny Rollins playing *St Thomas* from my MacBook Pro. Connecting via Bluetooth is simplicity itself. The opening drums have real verve and sit at the back of a deep soundstage as the rasp from the saxophone takes centre stage. Some amplifiers around this price could subjectively be described as having a greater 'swing' factor, but they are unlikely to reproduce the texture of breath control on the sax reed, the shimmering energy from dazzling cymbals, the punch from the bass drum and the sheer electric energy around jazz performers that the ONE delivers here with such casual aplomb. Bluetooth range is good – with the receiver positioned right at the front of the amplifier – and the signal doesn't drop out until I'm almost 10m away.

### Conclusion

Cyrus has returned to first principles to design and build a brand new product for sensible money. Subtlety and power rarely come together in modestly priced products, but the ONE sets the bar high on both counts at this price. Some may prefer a little extra warmth from more traditional

Class A or AB integrated amplifiers, but I've been won over by the way the innovative ONE presents music with addictive dynamics, deep transparency and refined timing. Smaller, less efficient speakers should sing like never before and larger, more sensitive transducers will relish the power and grip. The line-level inputs are excellent, the phono stage is very refined, the headphone amp exceeds expectations and the Bluetooth connectivity is a joy to use. You could easily spend most of your budget on each of these items individually and be very satisfied, so taken together the ONE must be considered a bargain.

Cyrus may have been inspired to appeal to a new, younger 'enlightened' audience that wants plug and play simplicity for vinyl, streamed and line sources, but the level of performance it has achieved within a single svelte box for a modest price, means seasoned audiophiles should be tempted. Thoroughly recommended ●



#### HOW IT COMPARES

Rega's £898 Elex-R is another fine-sounding amplifier, with similar spec, including a strong integrated MM phono stage, but it has no headphone output or wireless capabilities. The Rega has beefier construction and classical and jazz fans may prefer its rhythmic presentation, although the ONE has more transparency and dynamic control. Arcam's £849 FMJ A29 employs innovative Class G amplification and has excellent power reserves. It has a decent phono stage and headphone output, but no wireless connectivity. The Arcam is beautifully built and a great all rounder, but may not quite achieve the ONE's 'wow' factor.

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



OVERALL



**LIKE:** Clean, dynamic power; innovative SID system; epic bass; value for money

**DISLIKE:** Tiny remote feels temporary

**WE SAY:** Upmarket audio credentials at a starter-system price