

Perreaux Radiance R200i



Now here is a familiar brand that made waves in the mid seventies, faded away for a while, came back in the eighties, faded away again and now has re-entered the market under new management. Perreaux is now run by Managing Director Martin van Rooyen, heading a team of designers whose ambition seem to be high-end audio—classic, no-nonsense equipment with the contemporary touches of the 21st century. The company was established by Peter Perreaux in 1974 and sold to van Rooyen in 1999.

This integrated amplifier is part of Perreaux's Radiance Series, the top line of three series of products. The other two lines are the entry level E Series and the more upscale Reference Series.

Appearance:

The Radiance R200i is a beautiful, modern design with striking, clean lines and is a pleasure to look at. The omission of knobs and switches lends the amplifier a look of sophisticated contemporary elegance. Its face plate is made of

10 mm thick milled aluminum with an elliptical inset window at its centre. A blue alpha-numeric fluorescent display and five small (backlit) push buttons located in the window allow operation and monitoring of the amplifier at a glance. Upon switching the unit on, a series of rotating stars slowly turn into the word "Perreaux", indicating that the unit is ready to operate. A modern, logically designed, ergonomic remote control of substantial weight hints at the quality of this component. It is made from zinc alloy and matches the faceplate of the amplifier (available in black or satin electroplated chrome).

On the rear, four RCA and one XLR (balanced) inputs as well as a pair of RCA pre-out and direct output RCAs are provided (the R200i can also be used as a preamplifier). Two sets of 5-way binding posts allow for loudspeaker connection. Provision for a phono stage or a DAC is provided.

Although a power house at 200 watts/channel, the unit measures a mere 16.9"

Source:
Higher Fidelity Corp.

Price:
\$13,000.00 Cdn

Rating: ♪♪♪♪

x 4.1" x 13.4" (W x H x D) but weighs a hefty 30 lbs (13.5 kg).

Technology:

The R200i is a genuine dual-mono design, that sports two large toroidal transformers for the amplification circuits. A separate smaller toroid is used for all the control circuitry. Four filter capacitors are coupled in parallel to provide 40,000uF per channel. Dual-sided fiber glass printed circuit boards accommodate the circuit tracks which are made of 2oz copper. No point-to-point wiring is used in this design.

The preamplifier section in and output sockets are directly soldered to the printed circuit board. The volume control appears to be of superior quality, featuring 60 settings with the use of an electronically controlled resistance ladder. This eliminates moving parts and provides signal integrity without measurable distortions. Each output stage uses three pairs of Toshiba high-current MOSFETs with a current capacity of up to 36 amperes. The power output is 200 watts/channel into an 8 ohm load and 360 watts/channel into a 4 ohm load (loudspeakers). The unit runs in Class A up to about 10 watts and then operates in Class A/B to the specified power. The amplifier's heat sinks are located on left and right sides and work in conjunction with thermal sensing circuitry. Should the unit get too hot (when the heat sinks exceeds 85 degrees Celsius) a message will appear on the front display and the unit will shut down until cool enough for further operation. However, we couldn't confirm this as the amp never exceeded its "normal" operating temperature, even when playing at very high volume levels. The R200i's specifications read like a dream: signal to noise ratio is 95dB across the entire frequency band at rated output; current output is 36 amperes; frequency response is from 5 to 30kHz at <0.025% THD; at 1kHz (the usual measurement) THD is <0.005%; channel separation is 120dB; damping factor is <2000 (amazing); smoothing capacitance is 80,000 µf for both channels. Now to the most important...

The R200i's power amplifier section is quick in response to signal, melodic and full-bodied like a good vacuum tube amplifier

The Sound:

For our listening sessions, we used a number of different loudspeakers—all of super quality: The Coincident Grand Victories and the Angstrom Obligato II (both reviewed in this issue), the Wilson Benesch (review in the next issue) and the PSB (reviewed in our last issue). Though different in design, we consider these loudspeakers all worthy and a demanding test for any amplifier. Our usual source components included our in-house Audio Aero Capitole CD player (reviewed in Vol. 15#2) and Magnum Dynalab MD 108 tuner. Wiring was accomplished with Nordost Valhalla and Valkyrja cables.

After a couple of days of burning in the amplifier, we began with the Obbligatos connected to the R200i. After having heard but a couple of bars of music, we looked at one another with amazement and disbelief, as the system sounded much like our separate (and expensive) components: lush, dynamic, resolute and musical.

Some modern, mostly British, high-end integrated amplifiers provide an output for power amplifier(s) and the Perreux offers this function as well. To determine the level of quality of the R200i preamp section, we connected it to the Wyetech Labs Sapphire monoblocks (reviewed in this issue) as well as the Bryston 7B SST monoblocks (reviewed in Vol. 15#1)—both designs with which we are intimately familiar—and listened to all the loudspeakers mentioned earlier, using our regular source components. Two elements came to light:

a) the R200i's power amplifier section is quick in response to signal, melodic and full-bodied like a good vacuum tube amplifier; and...

b) the preamplifier section is free of impurities, operates quietly and allows dynamics as well as subtleties to coexist without degrading sonic quality. It matches well with power amplifiers of different persuasion and offers sufficient sonic neutrality to allow listeners their

choice of power amplifiers (although the unit's own power amplifier is superb).

All in all, the Perreaux didn't sound like a powerful solid state amplifier, but rather, it provided the lush, musical sound of tubes—almost a 300B sound—while maintaining dynamics akin to powerful solid state designs. We'd like to call this unit's sound a marriage of technologies, whereby it delivers the best of two worlds: refined highs, blossoming midrange and rather full-bodied bass—all packed with complex harmonics, making it totally musical.

The price to pay for musicality is routinely a slight deficiency in the resolution of fundamental notes. While this applies here as well, it was never missed by our overly critical panelists. This amp simply spells music, music and more music—what else is important?

Synopsis & Commentary:

We understand that the R200i was three years in development and, judging by its performance, it was time well spent, for this is one of the best integrated amplifiers we have come across and it performs much the same as some very expensive separates. Those who believe that the Perreaux is expensive should remember that a good power amplifier/preamplifier combination and the necessary interconnects could run quite a bit more than the R200i. We believe that this integrated amplifier's performance

is not only comparable with high-end separates, it will match or outperform many amplifier/preamplifier components even when they are carefully matched. However, the unit's design does allow upgrading (or changing) an audio system by simply adding another power amplifier. We see no reason to change the preamplifier which, in our opinion, is an outstanding design which measures up to any high-end preamplifier of which we know. In addition, a phono stage, or other upgrades can be accommodated by this cleverly designed unit. If you are in the market for a high-end audio system, but do not wish to complicate your life, audition the R200i—it delivers a lot of bang for your hard-earned bucks. Just take this integrated amplifier to any high-end system, replace amp and preamp with this one component—and try to hide your astonishment!

This amp simply spells music, music and more music—what else is important?

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