



**"You can't see past a pop star's image"** An intimate chat with David Sylvian



**"Phenomenal!"** Cambridge Audio's MXW70 power amp

# Hi-Fi Choice

**PASSION FOR SOUND**

Issue No. 531

September 2025

## BACK IN BLACK

**Unison Research's Simply Italy BE tube amp – a stylish, affordable classic**

**BUYING GUIDE**  
100+ Essential Components p104

**"BRILLIANT UPDATE"**

**Cyrus Audio's 40 PPA phono stage**

**GOLD STANDARD**

**Devialet's Astra 'Opéra de Paris' streaming integrated amp**

**UK Hi-Fi Show Live!**

**Revealed – brands to experience, p46**

**NEWS SPECIAL:**

**Launches from Unutra, Majority, Bang & Olufsen, Audio-Technica, FiiO, Pro-Ject, Quad, Clearaudio, iFi Audio & more...**



**COMPANY CONFIDENTIAL**

**How Hegel grew from DIY to hi-fi renown**

**HANDSOME TOWERS**



**Revival Audio's Sprint 4 2.5-way floorstander**

**ACTION-PACKED**



**Eversolo's DMP-A6 Gen 2 streamer/DAC/preamp**

**BOOMING GREAT!**



**Q Acoustics' Q SUB100 active subwoofer**



SEPTEMBER 2025

PRINTED IN THE UK



# Simply read

**Mark Craven** gets to grips with the darker version of this new, wallet-friendly tube integrated amp

**U**nison Research, the self-proclaimed “Italian leader in the production of tube amplifiers”, has an extensive portfolio with no fewer than 15 such units across pre, power and integrated categories. It also sells two CD players with tube-based outputs, plus solid-state amplifiers incorporating tubes in their input stages. In short, you might say it loves tubes.

The Simply Italy Black Edition is its most wallet-friendly tube integrated, £2,300 standard iteration aside. This is a compact amplifier boasting a quartet of tubes – two Gold Lion KT77 power devices, operating in single-ended ultralinear mode and two Gold Lion ECC82s in the driver stage. All four are protected by a black metal grille. The tube complement is one area

where Unison Research has revised its entry-level amp, switching from EL34s. The claimed Class A power output of 2x 10W remains, but the manufacturer says it has optimised performance from the new tubes via upgrades to the transformer. The auto-biasing regime of the original Simply Italy has also been replaced by electronic polarisation that the brand says: “allows us to extract the best performance from the KT77 valve and provide maximum power”.

A major change to the specification is the addition of digital connectivity. Previously, Simply Italy owners could pay extra for an optional DAC module, but this is now built in. Back panel inputs are therefore split between three sets of line-level RCAs and a digital section with optical, coaxial and

## ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Unison Research  
Simply Italy  
Black Edition

**ORIGIN**  
Italy

**TYPE**  
Integrated tube  
amplifier

**WEIGHT**  
15kg

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
260 x 180 x 400mm

**FEATURES**  
• 2x 10W rated  
output from 2x  
KT77 power tubes  
• Integrated USB  
DAC (384kHz  
PCM/DSD256)  
• Adjustable  
negative feedback

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Karma AV

**WEBSITE**  
unisonresearch.  
com/en/  
karma-av.co.uk

USB-B. The later handles PCM to 384kHz and up to DSD256 (and DSD128 via DoP) while optical is limited to 192kHz – conversion is by an ESS ES9018K2M chip. The Simply Italy BE also now has an unfiltered stereo subwoofer pre-out.

Unison Research bundles its RC3 remote control with the unit. This full system handset features 30 buttons in total, of which only two (volume up and down) can be used to set the Simply Italy BE's motorised volume control. Still, props to UR for designing the remote so that it can be stood upright on your coffee table...

**The Simply Italy BE is focused and lifts and separates different elements in a mix**

Otherwise, you'll need to get up to switch between sources – the amp's control knob gives a satisfying click as you move through USB, optical, coaxial and the three line-ins – and to make use of the Simply Italy BE's ‘sound tuning’ option, in the form of 4dB and 3dB negative feedback settings. These are selected via a switch located between the tubes, which means audiophiles who like to tinker during listening sessions will need to remove the amp's grille cover. An Allen key is provided to unfasten four small screws,

after which you'll probably leave the cover in the box, unless you have inquisitive children/pets to consider.

Everyday operation is as simple as it gets, thanks to the remote, basic features and electronic biasing. The digital stage works without fuss – when I connect the amp to a Macbook running Roon, through USB-B, the music software immediately recognises the Unison Research's USB DAC. The speaker binding posts are reassuringly solid and overall build quality also impresses. My only niggle? The on/off switch feels counter-intuitive as it needs to be flicked to the left to power up the amp.

## Sound quality

The Simple Italy BE's tubes get hot real fast and the manufacturer says the amplifier should be "fully warmed up" after only 15 minutes – handy, as the more time you can spend enjoying this little integrated, the better. It sounds pretty sensational across both analogue and digital inputs, those expected tube qualities of warmth and richness coming to the fore. The modest power rating will make it 'off-limits' for big spaces or demanding loudspeakers, but there's plenty of punch and dynamism here. Ultimate resolution and filigree detail isn't a strong suit, but the slight lack of sharp edges plays into its listenability. There's an appealing 'rightness' to the Simply Italy BE's sound.

Playing Alice Cooper's *Welcome To The Show*, from the 2023 *Road* album via Qobuz (24-bit/48kHz), the amplifier reveals its energetic demeanour as it powers out the opening riffs – from two distinctly different guitar tones – and renders the kick drums with impressive depth and impact. Cooper's vocals, all snarl and menace, are instantly recognisable and held above the riotous instrumentation. It's immensely fun, foot-tapping stuff.

This sense of dynamism and grip pays dividends with Harry Gregson-Williams' title theme to Denzel Washington flick *The Equalizer*, although here the Simply Italy BE



Integrated tube amplifiers around this price aren't ten-a-penny, but PrimaLuna's Evo 100 (HFC 460), for £2,500, is an obvious rival. Claiming a higher output of 2x 40W from its EL34 bottles and offering a high bias mode supporting use with KT88s if you're in the mood for tube rolling, plus headphone amp and separate 4ohm/8ohm output taps, this entry-level model from the Dutch brand will win any specification sheet battle. It also offers an MM/MC phono upgrade path, but misses out on the digital connectivity of the Simply Italy BE. A demo of the two is absolutely essential.



has to dive deeper into the electronic bass effects and synths. Particularly noteworthy is how it combines this low-octave control with a sweet, flowing delivery of the track's undulating strings and picked guitar.

Where things fall short of the pricier Triode 25 Black Edition, which ups the power output to a claimed 50W (in pentode mode) and 30W (triode), is most obviously in the soundstage presentation. The Simply Italy BE is focused and able to lift and separate different elements in a mix, but its

(4dB) position, enjoying the tighter, more controlled sound. Lower feedback will lower the amp's damping factor and increase distortion, and here results in a performance that, while appearing more forward and – subjectively – powerful, lacks composure and feels a little too loose.

Sticking with the higher feedback mode, the Simply Italy BE gives a mesmerising portrayal of Rickie Lee Jones' lilting *The Last Chance Texaco*, with authentic, plump weight in the bass and crisp, nuanced treble. The vocal, spotlighted in the centre but still intertwined with the rest of band, oozes from the speakers full of emotion and timbral detail.

## Conclusion

Although the specification of the Simply Italy BE might imply it's only good for owners of high-sensitivity speakers, this little bulldog of a tube amplifier should appeal to a wider audience. Shake off any '2x 10W' worries and enjoy its combination of deep-reaching, robust lows and gorgeous midband presence, allied to an effortless way of making music. The icing on the cake? With its DAC stage, Unison Research's entry-level amp is ready for your modern sources ●

## Previously, Simply Italy owners had to pay extra for the DAC, now it's built in

performance overall isn't massively expansive – Eagles' *Life In The Fast Lane* sounds crisp and on point, thrillingly so, but I've heard it painted on a bigger canvas. This amp is therefore best suited to small-to-medium spaces, as reflected by its price.

Jay Z's *99 Problems*, with its retro hip-hop beats and distorted guitar riffs, fizzles with energy and snap through the Simply Italy BE, but its chaotic production and harsh edges are perhaps outside of the amplifier's comfort zone. Much more suited to the tube-coloured sound is The Allman Brothers Band's *Rambling Man*, where the rolling piano, up-tempo bassline and shimmering guitar licks sound gloriously smooth and naturalistic.

What of the amp's negative feedback setting? This can be switched on the fly, so is good for A/B comparison, although Unison Research is at pains to point out that its impact will be dependent on the characteristics of the partnering loudspeaker. With a pair of B&W 705 S2 Signature standmounts, I quickly settle on the higher feedback



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Natural, flowing, warm performance; surprisingly punchy
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Remote only handles volume
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> D/A conversion meets tubes in style in this superb upgrade of Unison Research's entry-level integrated
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

### OVERALL

