**Hi-Fi Choice**
**RECOMMENDED**

# Go your own way

A new Roksan amp is rare, but Attessa also marks the start of a new piece of technology sharing. *Ed Selley* judges the results

**B**ack in 2016, it made a lot of sense for Monitor Audio to buy the Roksan brand. For a company like MA, securing an up-and-running range of products that offered scope to partner its speakers made sense and gaining a well-respected brand name was logical too. For Roksan's part, the benefits of being taken over by a company with the resources of Monitor Audio gave scope for it to access technology and production processes that it would have struggled to achieve on its own.

The Attessa range features the first all-new products launched by Roksan since the takeover. The four-strong lineup includes a CD transport and turntable as well as two amplifiers, the more affordable of which combines digital and analogue inputs – although the more expensive of the two is the more interesting design. The Attessa Streaming Amp takes the same platform as the basic version, but adds on-board streaming and is equipped with the same BluOS interface that has underpinned NAD and Bluesound devices for a number

of years. On a pragmatic level, it means that Roksan gains access to a comprehensive, stable and effective streaming platform that otherwise would have taken a huge amount of blood, sweat and tears to try and develop in-house. It also means that the Attessa will happily join a series of existing BluOS devices. Like other BluOS devices, sample rate handling is limited to 24-bit/192kHz with no DSD support – but you do get MQA compatibility for both the streaming module and digital inputs.

The amplifier this module sits in is an interesting mix of traditional and more radical ideas. The amplifier itself is a Class AB design that delivers 80W into 8ohm, rising to 130W into 4ohm. There are two RCA line inputs; one of which has automatic input

### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**
Roksan Attessa Streaming Amplifier

**ORIGIN**
UK/China

**TYPE**
Integrated amplifier

**WEIGHT**
10.5kg

**DIMENSIONS**
(WxHxD)
432 x 76 x 373mm

**FEATURES**
● Quoted output power: 2x 80W (8ohm)
● Inputs: 2x stereo RCA inputs; MM phono stage
● Digital board: 2x optical; 2x coaxial; BluOS streaming; AirPlay

**DISTRIBUTOR**
Monitor Audio

**TELEPHONE**
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**WEBSITE**
roksan.com

detection, joined by a moving-magnet phono stage. There are then four digital inputs; two optical and two coaxial, with decoding of these and the BluOS module undertaken by an unspecified Burr-Brown DAC. As well as the BluOS streaming, you get AirPlay and Bluetooth to complete the feature set. Output is via a single set of speaker terminals and a 3.5mm headphone socket.

The manner in which all of this functionality is accessed is interesting and usefully flexible. The BluOS app can select any input and control the

## The Streaming Amp is simple to use, well laid out and also extremely well-made

volume as well as access your music library and on-demand content. For times when you don't want to fire up an app, Roksan has supplied a small remote handset. This is joined by front panel controls condensed into three buttons that will play, pause and skip tracks and a large, multi-function jog dial. This is both a volume control and – when pressed in and then rotated – an input selector, with the inputs themselves being shown via a row of illuminated icons. It works well in practice and keeps the front panel clean and unadorned. The slight catch with this lack of clutter is

that there are limited opportunities to ensure that the Attessa truly looks like what we've come to expect from a Roksan product. With the exception of the cut-in lower edges, there's very little here that would have you automatically concluding what it is were the badges to be removed. The counter to this is that visual identity is realistically less important than effective ergonomics, and the Attessa definitely possesses that. It's simple

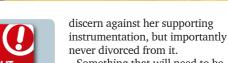## It's the sort of all-rounder you would happily place at the centre of a system

to use, well laid out and also extremely well-made.

Setting the Roksan up is every bit as straightforward as any other member of the Bluesound family although it is worth noting that, unlike a number of other BluOS-equipped devices, the Attessa must be powered on before the app can access the module. Once up and running, it feels as slick and stable as any other device so equipped. There are some detail aspects of BluOS that I'm not a huge fan of – mainly the queue system and the file cap for album art – but otherwise it's a fine platform to use.

### Sound quality

This is not an especially bombastic amplifier and if you're looking for something that grabs you in the first 90 seconds, it might not fit the bill. Instead, it reveals an unflappable but encouragingly musical presentation that works well across a wide selection of content and feels extremely hard to unsettle. With Little Barrie and Malcolm Catto's magnificent *Quatermass Seven,* the Roksan possesses a flow with Catto's jazz drumming which is unforced and beguiling; doing justice to the album without overcooking it.

This is helped by admirable tonality too. The Roksan is consistent across all of its inputs and handles the sparse piano work of Poppy Ackroyd's *Pause* in a wholly convincing way. The piano has the necessary weight and presence to sound like a believable presence in the room and notes decay naturally, further aiding the suspension of disbelief. Vocals are also something that the Roksan handles well. The haunting quality of Martina Topley Bird's performance in *Forever I Wait* is well captured and she is easy to

**HOW IT COMPARES**

The Roksan offers a similar concept to the Cyrus ONE Cast (*HFC* 464) that makes use of Google's knowhow rather than BluOS. The Cyrus is almost as flexible as the Attessa although the experience of streaming music that you own is more pleasurable on the Roksan. The Cyrus has fewer inputs, but it does have an HDMI ARC. While the Roksan is slicker to use and better specified, the Cyrus is able to deliver a livelier performance with a wider selection of speakers. One area that the Attessa has a clear advantage is the supporting products in the range, which makes system building a great deal easier.

discern against her supporting instrumentation, but importantly never divorced from it.

Something that will need to be considered with the Attessa is that it's sufficiently refined that a little care will need to be taken with speaker matching. Some testing takes place with the Fyne F500SP (*HFC* 486), which is also a supremely refined device, and the resulting combination is impressively composed but lacks a little bite and attack at times. Some brief tests with a veteran pair of Acoustic Energy AE1s are rather more potent and suggest that a speaker with a more forward balance will get the best results.
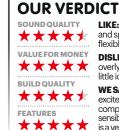
Do this and the Roksan does a fine job of being the sort of all-rounder you would happily place at the centre of a system. The phono stage is free from unwanted noise and has plenty of gain, ensuring that even the lower voltage that high-output moving-coil designs need shouldn't be a problem. AirPlay works seamlessly throughout and although I have a little trouble making an initial pair over Bluetooth with my Oppo smartphone, once done it re-connects each time. Absolutely crucial to how you perceive the Attessa is that it never feels like the BluOS module has been randomly bolted into a Roksan product. Instead, it's an absolutely

integral part of how the Roksan functions and the result is impressively cohesive.

### Conclusion

If forced to be unkind, I'd say the Attessa plays things a bit too safe. It's well specified, well made and utterly unflappable in use, but this has been achieved at the cost of it feeling slightly anodyne. A fairer appraisal might be that this new iteration of Roksan has avoided the quirks that can be superficially appealing but might grate over time. Where one person sees 'character' another will see flaws and the Attessa has been carefully designed to be supremely capable in this respect ●

**Hi-Fi Choice**

**OUR VERDICT**

**SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★✰

**VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★

**BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★

**FEATURES**
★★★★★

**OVERALL**
★★★★✰

**LIKE:** Refined, detailed and spacious sound; flexible specification
**DISLIKE:** Can sound overly smooth; lacks a little identity
**WE SAY:** It trades a little excitement for all-round competence, but sensibly partnered this is a very likeable amp