



Tangent

Ampster BT mini stereo amplifier

I MUST CONFESS to being rather surprised by the diminutive dimensions of Tangent's Ampster BT integrated amplifier. How can a box that measures only 190 x 52 x 139mm (WxHxD) and weighing 1.85kg manage to deliver a claimed 50W per channel into a 4ohm load?

Aside from its impressive power output specs, the rear panel is fitted with speaker binding posts that will accept 4mm banana plugs. There are two line-level inputs – one is via a pair of standard RCA phono sockets while the other is a 3.5mm stereo jack socket, and there's another RCA phono socket for connecting an external subwoofer. Digital inputs are available as optical Toslink for connecting an external DAC or CD player as well as Bluetooth 4.0 connectivity – the BT bit of the model name.

The front of the Ampster has the volume control on the right, which also incorporates a push-button for input selection. Although it is a rotary volume control where adjustment is made by rotating, there is no minimum or maximum position and no visual indication of the actual volume level, which may be a bit disconcerting for some users. By pressing and holding the volume control, you can switch the amplifier in and out of standby mode and a row of five LEDs indicates the selected input and standby mode.

Slim fast

The remote control is a slim unit powered by a CR2032 lithium battery and provides typical features of input selection, volume control, mute and on/off functionality. When Bluetooth input is selected, the remote also gives basic playback control from the paired device including play, pause and track selection, and if the Tangent is left inactive for a period of time, it will go into standby and then automatically wake up once the source starts playing again.

After hooking up my speakers, I pair the amplifier with a smartphone via Bluetooth and it connects



instantly, with no need to enter a passcode. Signal range is excellent and there are no issues with drop out, and even when I move my device into a different room it remains connected.

Starting off with some baroque concertos by Charles Avison, I am greeted with a sound that is rich and full. The instrument positioning is

Bass has impressive depth while the top end is extended and yet smooth

very good left to right. To be fair, there is not a huge amount of depth on show, but what is there is behind the plane of the speakers and this, combined with the left-to-right imaging, gives a very satisfactory stereo soundstage from a source connected via Bluetooth. Thanks to the Ampster BT's Class D amplifier, there is plenty of volume, even when hooked up to my relatively inefficient transmission line loudspeakers. Bass performance reveals impressive depth and the top end is particularly noteworthy as it is extended yet

smooth and performs better than I expect from a Class D amplifier.

I switch to a line input on the Ampster and feed it the output from my phono stage playing an LP to test out the performance with a superb direct-to-disc audiophile recording of the Syd Lawrence Orchestra playing Glen Miller's *American Patrol*. The Tangent certainly swings along with great exuberance and pace. The brass section is clear and not at all strained or squeaky, which is a pleasing discovery and gives much better performance than I have experienced in the past with some low-cost amplifiers.

Easy listening

Vocal performance is also very respectable and a recording of *How It Feels* sung by Sophie Zelmani is effortless and easy to listen to. The bass response is very much in evidence with this recording and the Ampster shows its full might.

There are plenty of mini amps designed to fit with music fans looking for compact solutions. The Ampster BT is one of the best I've heard at the price and beats some models costing a good bit more. **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£150
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OUR VERDICT

