



Progressive electronica

Electrocompaniet has heavily revised its flagship integrated for the MkII version.
Ed Selley rings the changes

Electrocompaniet has been rather more active in the pages of *Hi-Fi Choice* over the last few year or so, but a major revision to a product in its 'classic' line is still sufficiently unusual to warrant us giving it some attention.

The ECI5 MkII replaces the ECI5, which in turn replaced the ECI4.7. Rather confusingly, the changes involved in going from the 4.7 to the 5 were generally considered detail ones, but warranted a new model number. The MkII, has virtually no components in common with the MkI, but retains the model number! This might prove a challenge to dealers and customers, but we are sure everyone will manage.

Classic look

The ECI5 MkII is a 120w per channel integrated amp finished in the

company's traditional casework, complete with a thick perspex front panel and a quartet of control buttons – left and right selecting inputs and up and down controlling volume. Aesthetically, this rather divides opinion with some people who love the rather retro-futuristic appearance and those who regard it as a fingerprint magnet and dust trap.

The MkII introduces a neat LED display to show the selected input in place of the older backlit 'block' design. This is easy to read and a marked improvement on its predecessor. We had hoped that this might have included the facility for the ECI5 MkII to default to the last selected input – something that the ECI5 and ECI3 cannot do – but the MkII selects the first balanced input on start-up, whether you use it or not.

The casework is comparatively large, with the ECI5 MkII nearly

▶ DETAILS

PRODUCT:
Electrocompaniet
ECI5 MkII

ORIGIN:
Norway

TYPE:
Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT:
20kg

DIMENSIONS:
(WxHxD)
483x135x405mm

FEATURES:

- 120w integrated amplifier
- Twin balanced inputs

- Proprietary floating-transformer technology

DISTRIBUTOR:
Electrocompaniet

TELEPHONE:
020 8893 5835

WEBSITE:
electrocompaniet.com

half-a-metre wide and over 400mm deep. This means that most equipment racks will struggle to accommodate it and you will most likely need to place it on a top shelf.

The fit and finish is extremely good with negligible panel gaps, excellent paint finish and the casework seems less resonant than on some older models. This also contributes towards the impressive 20kg weight. Mention must also be made of the excellent quality speaker terminals and input connections that feel superbly over-engineered in use.

Under the hood

Internally, the only major component retained from the older model is the transformer. This is understandable, given Electrocompaniet's use of their distinctive Floating transformer technology (FTT, see opposite). Otherwise, the MkII takes the basic premise of the original ECI5 and makes substantial improvements.

The MkII doubles the number of output devices used to improve bass control and stability when driving difficult loads. This is further improved by the larger bank of reservoir capacitors which allow for greater current delivery.

In practice, the ECI5 MkII is unlikely to struggle with any speaker design at a comparable price point, including electrostatic and planar designs. Like virtually every other Electrocompaniet component, the ECI5 MkII is a fully balanced design



and sports a pair of balanced inputs to take advantage of this.

Electrocompaniet make no apologies for preferring the balanced connections and, to this end, supply a set of RCA-XLR adaptors to allow any would be owner to experience at least some of the benefits even if he or she's source equipment is not equipped with XLR outputs.

The ECI5 MkII is also fitted with a balanced preamp output, allowing it to connect to a matching power amplifier, either in a bi-amping configuration or exclusively as a preamp. The other four line inputs are the conventional RCA type.

The ECI5 MkII has to be considered

“It takes many of the traditional virtues and builds on them, adding a sense of rhythm.”

relatively good value. The build quality is up to the standard we would expect and it supports a healthy number of inputs with full remote control.

Most importantly, the amplification stage itself appears to be well-thought-out and comprised of high-quality components.

The 120-watt output seems believable under the circumstances

and means that system building around the Electrocompaniet should not be very difficult.

The lack of internal phono stage places the ECI5 MkII at a slight disadvantage for vinyl fans, however, against some of similarly priced competition. But equally, the pair of balanced inputs is a useful feature for anybody with more than one suitably equipped source

Wide boy

Sonically, the ECI5 MkII is classic Electrocompaniet. The defining characteristic is an extremely wide soundstage, which seems to extend well beyond the physical placement

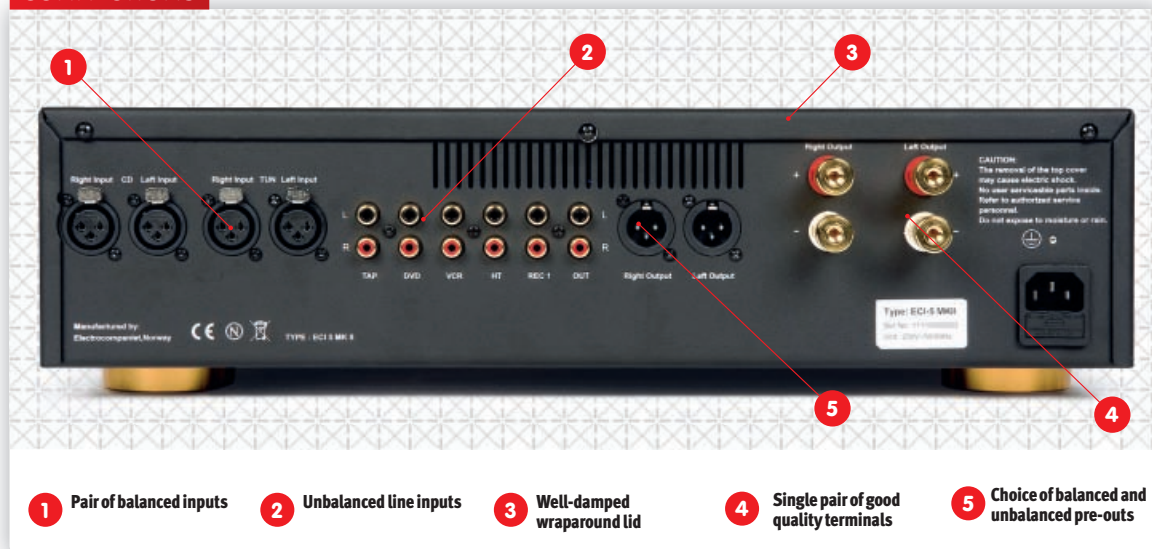


ELECTROCOMPANIET are particularly proud of their Floating Transformer Technology (FTT), that features prominently in the ECI5 MkII, as it does in virtually all other products in the range.

The technology essentially involves not connecting the connection point of two windings of the power transformer directly to ground. Instead, Electrocompaniet use one bridge and capacitor for each winding of the transformer and ground the bridge. This keeps the earth and signal ground separate and – so goes the theory – results in quieter and improved performance.

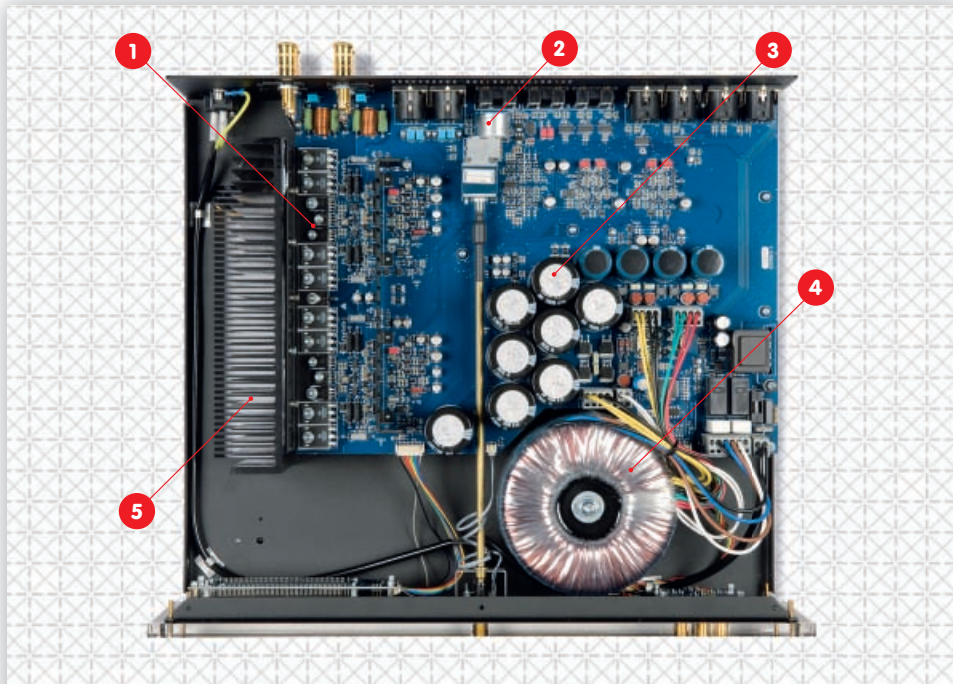
It is telling that this transformer is one of the few components from the original ECI5 that has made it into the MkII version and is some indication of how important Electrocompaniet regard FTT in terms of overall performance.

CONNECTIONS



- 1** Pair of balanced inputs
- 2** Unbalanced line inputs
- 3** Well-damped wraparound lid
- 4** Single pair of good quality terminals
- 5** Choice of balanced and unbalanced pre-outs

HIDDEN TECH



- 1** Output stage with additional output devices
- 2** Volume pot mounted on rear plate with long pole to display
- 3** Larger bank of reservoir capacitors
- 4** Toroidal PSU casing
- 5** Internal heatsink

of loudspeakers. This enormous sense of space gives the EC15 MkII a relatively easy job of placing musicians and instruments coherently in relation to one another within it.

The large soundstage does have a habit of persisting, even when listening to small recordings, so there can be slight loss of intimacy to their reproduction as they are given more space than perhaps they had in reality. Many will accept this trade off for the sense of realism that the EC15 MkII can bring to proceedings with larger scale recordings.

This performance is complimented by excellent bass response. The bassline of any recording is presented

with a force and weight that helps the overall sense of realism greatly. This low-end force is deceptive, because despite the considerable heft that the Electrocompaniet has, there is no sense that it overwhelms the more delicate upper frequencies, or is out of proportion to the rest of the performance. There is also a useful speed to the bass response – it starts and stops with commendable speed and helps give the EC15 MkII a sense of timing and poise that we have not experienced with older designs.

In terms of tonality, the EC15 MkII is a strong performer, if not a perfect one. The amp can sound fabulously real with vocals both solo and group,

but instruments can occasionally sound fractionally flat and recessed by comparison. This is not hugely pronounced and may simply be a reflection of how adept the EC15 MkII is with vocals, but it can contribute to a wider sense that like some other Electrocompaniet designs, there is a slight sense of smoothing off absolute detail and losing some excitement and vitality as it does so.

Depending on what you are looking for, this need not be a bad thing. It helps the Electrocompaniet stay entirely listenable even when playing back poor or harsh recordings and the overall performance is so civilised that you can listen to the EC15 MkII for hours without it ever becoming grating or tiresome. Equally there will be those who would prefer a little more excitement in their replay and are happy to accept that their listening may not be so even-handed, here the Electrocompaniet may prove too smooth and relaxed.

Fit and finish

The EC15 MkII has much to commend it. It takes many of the traditional Electrocompaniet virtues and builds on them, adding a much-improved sense of timing and rhythm, that gives a greater sense of life and enthusiasm to complex material. This is coupled to a useful power output that should handle most loudspeakers that it is likely to be partnered with in most domestic listening environments and a useful selection of inputs and outputs.

The calm, unforced presentation may prove too laid-back for some and this lack of perceived excitement may put off those who want a more forceful performance. Others will enjoy the way that the EC15 MkII goes about making music and find it exactly what they are looking for. ●



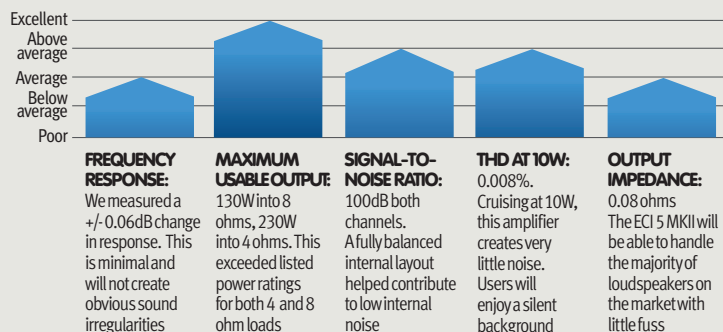
THE SLIGHT tendency towards smoothness that the EC15 MkII can demonstrate would be most easily alleviated with a slightly more upfront CD player.

A fine choice to this end would be the Moon CD3.3 HFC 321. This is an especially capable machine in terms of detail retrieval and would partner well with the Electrocompaniet – especially if the optional balanced outputs are specified.

The substantial power output of the EC15 MkII places few constraints on speaker choices, so an interesting choice would be the Acoustic Energy AE1 MkIII (HFC 337). The Electrocompaniet has the power to make these little boxes sing and the results should be impressive.

TECH LABS

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Big unflustered sound with excellent bass and timing. Beautifully built
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Huge size may prove difficult to accommodate
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Big, characterful amp, with equally big and unforced sound that will appeal to many listeners
- FEATURES** ★★★★★

OVERALL

