

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



ABOVE: One of the four line inputs has a unity gain bypass, and there are MM phono and USB digital inputs, plus decent speaker terminals and fixed/variable preamp outs

Polydor/Universal 0602537100064]. The opening synth flourish of the title tracks swaggers from the speakers before the bass-line kicks in with metronomic precision, helped by the amp's speed and definition.

A FINE PHONO STAGE

But it's not all about bass. With the acoustic version of 'Lessons In Love' on the second disc of this set, the M5Si delivers a sparkling view of the guitar and King's voice, in stark contrast to the Shep Pettibone remix – all syndrums and processed handclaps – of the same track on the same disc. It even did a fine job when I fired up my Rega turntable, dug out an older vinyl copy of the original album and gave it a spin, for the phono stage here is as precise and musical as the rest of the amp.

Speaker-driving ability? For much of the review period I had the M5Si running into B&W 803 D3 floorstanders [*HFN* Mar '16], which are quite demanding but shine on the end of an amp with good grip, and whether with these speakers or my usual PMC OB1s the impression was that the amplifier had things fully under control without ever seeming to be holding back.

This mix of 'go for it' brio and refinement serves the Musical Fidelity amplifier well, as is clear with the San Francisco Symphony's own-label recording of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 4, with Emanuel Ax [96kHz/24-bit download from www.downloadsnow.net]. Recorded live in 2009, again what comes over so well through the MF amp is the entirely natural balance between solo piano and orchestra, plus the way the acoustic of the Davies Symphony Hall plays its part in creating an experience way beyond a dry studio-bound recording.

Given company founder Michaelson's listening priorities – 'I'm not really an audiophile' he said to me when we discussing

that digital input limitation, before making the point that he listens to music, not the hi-fi – it's hardly surprising that this amplifier performs so well with music such as this, even when fed directly from a relatively modest digital 'source' in the form of my MacBook Air.

Still, it's very refreshing to revel in the sense of a live performance in one's listening room with all the ambience of a large hall, without any need for surround trickery to create the illusion. The combination of delicacy and dynamics does a particularly thrilling job with the closing *Rondo*, where the piano and orchestra are beautifully balanced.

Oh, and in case you were wondering – yes, the M5Si can rock out too when required, as was clear from some time spent with the live 'off the desk' recordings by Gov't Mule [www.muletracks.com 48kHz/24-bit downloads] which demonstrated the amp's ability to drive hard with the band's good-time rock/boogie style. They were clearly on good form in Eugene, Oregon, back in February 2015, joined by guitarist John Scofield, and all that excitement and fine musicianship was freely on tap through Musical Fidelity's M5Si. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The M5Si's USB input, though limited, will be more than adequate for most. Regardless, this is a pretty special amplifier for the money, with a winning combination of refinement and sheer power enabling it both to drive hard and sound mature and involving at the same time. Forget the idea that Musical Fidelity amplifiers have 'a sound' for this powerhouse just shows real all-round ability, and is a must-listen.

Sound Quality: 83%

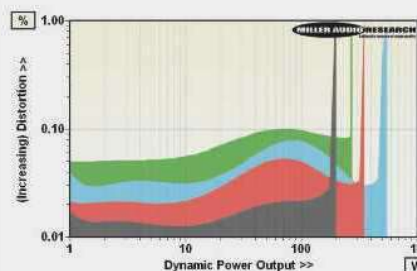


MUSICAL FIDELITY M5SI

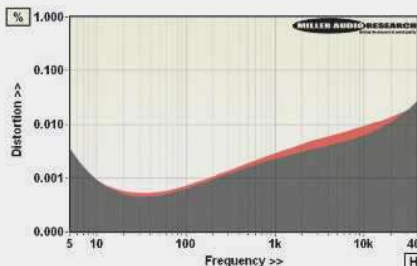
Rated at 150W/8ohm, the latest in Musical Fidelity's 'super integrated' amplifiers achieves 2x165W/8ohm and 2x265W/4ohm with 200W, 355W and 545W possible under dynamic conditions into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads, respectively. The output impedance is a little higher than with previous MF amps at ~0.2ohm, which may influence the system response when driving low/variable impedance loudspeakers. Similarly, while its output into the lowest 1ohm loads is protected at 275W or 16.6A [see Graph 1, below], the M5Si still looks capable of grappling with any likely partnering loudspeaker.

Despite its moderate output impedance the M5Si does not lack for compensation (feedback) judging by the controlled levels of distortion. This falls from a minimum of 0.00045% through the low bass before climbing gently with frequency to reach a perfectly acceptable 0.01% at 20kHz [see Graph 2, below]. Versus output power, distortion remains impressively consistent and hovers at ~0.002% from 1-100W through midrange frequencies, increasing marginally to 0.005% at the rated 150W/8ohm.

Into 8ohm loads the M5Si's frequency response is flat and extended, reaching -0.2dB/20Hz and -0.1dB/20kHz with -3dB points at 4Hz and 105kHz. This is a sensible tailoring if the M5Si is being used with 'hi-res' (wide bandwidth) digital downloads where the useable musical output rarely extends beyond 70kHz [see p92]. However the M5Si's USB implementation has been used in earlier MF amps and is suitable for files up to 96kHz only. Readers may view an in-depth QC Suite report for Musical Fidelity's M5Si's integrated amp by navigating to www.hifinews.co.uk and clicking on the red 'download' button. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (cyan) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Maximum current is 16.6A



ABOVE: Distortion versus extended frequency at 10W/8ohm (5Hz-40kHz, left = black; right = red)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	165W / 265W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	200W / 355W / 545W / 275W
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	0.15–0.24ohm
Freq. response (20Hz–20kHz/100kHz)	–0.15dB to –0.15dB/–2.6dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/150W)	21mV / 270mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/150W)	86.4dB / 108.2dB
Distortion (20Hz–20kHz re. 10W/8ohm)	0.00045–0.011%
Power consumption (Idle/rated o/p)	36W / 480W (2W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	440x100x405mm / 15kg