



(and as will be the case with Genesis, the newly-announced offshoot of Korea's Hyundai/Kia, and the latest to take a tilt at Audi, BMW and Mercedes).

Thus, while the MkII Rotel amplifiers look very much like the models they replace, the Michi integrateds have a new design language of their own – and somewhat different from anything else on the market. They're all about cool sophistication, from their large, 'visible from across the room' displays to their minimal fascia layout, while the mixture of gloss and matt black makes them at once understated and eye-catching.

Not huge, but substantial

The Michi X3 may not be as huge as some high-end one-box amps – at 48.5cm it's a little wider than the 44cm-ish hi-fi 'standard', though it's only 15cm tall – but it's certainly substantial, tipping the scales at a shade under 29kg. True, that's less than the senior Michi X model, which stands almost 25% taller, and weighs 43.8kg, not least due to that extra transformer, but it still bodes well for the quality of engineering and build here. All of that's borne out on first acquaintance – and I don't just mean hefting the X3 from the box and onto a rack! – in the almost hewn-from-solid feel of the amplifier, backed up by the precise feel of those minimal controls, which extend to just a source selector and a volume control, the only other front-panel features being an on/standby button and a headphone socket, above which sits the little receiver window for the just-as-classy RR-RH6 remote handset supplied.

Just for once, the remote doesn't just duplicate the fascia controls, but adds substantial flexibility: aside from volume and source selection, plus muting, it has an 'audio' button to allow on-the-fly adjustments of bass, treble and balance, and a 'setup' button which works alongside up/down and enter keys to allow the amp to be configured. Among the facilities on offer are the ability to disable inputs, for faster scrolling through those in use; to rename them to reflect what's connected;

to set a fixed level (for example when an input is used with an external processor or source having its own volume control); and to decide whether tone controls can be applied to a source.

On the subject of inputs, as already mentioned the X3 is pretty lavishly equipped in this respect: as well as the moving magnet phono stage, there are three sets of unbalanced line input, and one balanced (on XLRs), while the digital section runs to three optical inputs and three coaxial, a USB Type B port for the direct connection of audio from a computer, and a fixed Bluetooth antenna on the rear panel. That should be more than sufficient for most users, and only those who glance at the rear panel and jump to conclusions are likely to be disappointed: yes, there are Ethernet and USB Type A ports, but these are for network control and to power external devices respectively, with no audio capability, although they can also be used to update the X3's firmware when required.

Custom installation appeal

In common with other amps these days, the Michi has also taken onboard the kind of system remote/custom installation connectivity once the preserve of big AV receivers: in addition to that Ethernet control port, there's also an RS232 for system integration, along with two 12V trigger outs to switch external devices, and an infrared remote sensor input should you feel the need to hide the X3 away in a cupboard – although that would be almost heretical, given its looks.

Two sets of speaker terminals – 'custom-engineered Michi rhodium-plated' terminals, no less! – are provided, although these are designed for biwiring a suitable pair of speakers rather than operating two speaker systems; they're both permanently powered, which also means the preout sockets here are best considered as a means of adding on a power amplifier – an S5, for example – to biampify speakers, rather than enabling the X3 to be used purely as a preamp. The two subwoofer