



# Power to the people!

A compact power amp to complement CA's small devices, but **Ed Selley** thinks it's so much more than that

**T**wo-channel audio is developing into something quite different to how it was at the start of the century. On the one hand, we have devices that do an astonishing amount of things; streamers that are fully functional system front-ends, integrated amps that are all-in-one systems in all but name and active speakers that are complete systems.

These multifunction devices are complemented by more function-specific products than intended. The Cambridge Audio MXW70 is a case in point. It's a compact power amplifier that is designed to partner the company's MXN10 (HFC 503) network streamer and DacMagic 200M (HFC 484) DAC, turning them into complete systems. There is a plethora of other devices that it could reasonably be partnered with, however, so it looks like a fairly savvy piece of development on the part of the company.

The MXW70 is not a clean-sheet design, making use of existing Cambridge Audio engineering. It uses the amplification from the Evo 75 all-in-one system and repurposes it for use on its own. The amplifier in question is a well-regarded Hypex

NCORE Class D module capable of very decent performance. Cambridge Audio is at pains to stress that both the Evo 75 and MXW70 don't simply plonk this module in the casework, instead making use of a bespoke output stage that more closely follows CA design practise.

Power is quoted at 70W into 8ohm, which should be enough to handle most speakers of rough equivalence. If you do feel the need for more

**There is a richness and warmth to vocals that is hugely beguiling**

grunt, the MXW70 can be bridged whereupon it will deliver a considerably more hefty 250W into a single channel – which should be enough for any sane domestic requirement. Relatively unusual is the fact that it is equipped with balanced and unbalanced inputs, which also expands the scope of its usefulness. Cambridge Audio has fitted it with 12V trigger connections to power on and off with the connected device. It also supplies a USB-to-jack trigger

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Cambridge Audio  
MXW70

**ORIGIN**  
UK/China

**TYPE**  
Power amplifier

**WEIGHT**  
1.65kg

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxDxD)  
215 x 57 x 215mm

**FEATURES**  
• Quoted power  
output: 2x 70W  
(8ohm)  
• Connections: 1x  
stereo RCA; 1x XLR

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Cambridge Audio  
**WEBSITE**  
cambridgeaudio.  
com

that can perform this function from the USB port of the MXN10.

This is a good thing because the power on and off characteristics of the front panel button are a bit on the weird side. On this sample at least, from the moment the mains lead is connected to the unit, the white light on the power button glows. Somewhat confusingly, it glows with the same intensity whether the MXW70 is on or off. Disconnect the power and this light glows for a disconcertingly long time afterwards. You get used to it, but it's not perfect. I can also hear a hum in standby connecting an Eversolo DMP-A6 Gen 2 (p64) over RCA, but the XLR connections are silent in all cases.

The fit and finish is solid, but a little prosaic. Compared with Wiim's integrated amps at this sort of price, with their rounded corners and lovely paint finish, the MXW70 comes across as a bit more rough and ready, although it feels very solid and well bolted together. Once again, the specific grey colour that now adorns all Cambridge Audio devices isn't necessarily a brilliant match for other components. This isn't a problem in itself, but both the identically coloured MXN10 and DacMagic 200M have limitations as partnering equipment (lack of additional inputs with the former, absence of remote with the latter) that means some suitable partners for the MXW70 won't be a perfect visual match.

## Sound quality

Happily, the MXW70 does enough that many people will be quite prepared to put up with a little visual mismatch. It is something of an article of faith when a manufacturer says it has tweaked an off-the-shelf component like a Class D module, but the MXW70 does share an impressive number of sonic attributes with the

resident (and not in any way Class D) Edge A integrated amp.

This means that as the wonderful *Crash* by Craig Armstrong builds from its gentle beginning to its more rousing crescendo, the power amp is able to handle the potency and scale without any perceivable compression but, every bit as importantly, there is a richness and warmth to the way that Brett Anderson's vocals are handled that is hugely beguiling. It means that what the MXW70 is doing is never a simple presentation, but a performance that pulls you in and engages at an emotional level. With less-than-perfect recordings, this means that it is the sort of device that has you winding volume up and enjoying the content rather than backing off and grimacing at the mastering.

This sweetness never comes at the expense of timing and drive, however.

## The MXW70 shares a number of sonic attributes with the Edge A integrated

The pounding *Signal by Scratch Massive* is delivered with deep, controlled low-end that moves with genuine fleetness of foot and exerts an impressive level of control over the connected speakers; in this case Neat's IOTA II (HFC 530) standmounts. Maud Geffray's gentle vocal turn is delivered with a warmth and vibrancy over the top.

This performance occurs in a soundstage that performs the neat trick of ensuring that there is enough space and air around large-scale material to enable it to sound convincing and uncongested. When this scale isn't required, though, the Cambridge Audio is no less able to deliver a presentation that is much smaller and more intimate. What I find interesting about this attribute is that it is consistency repeatable regardless of what I use as a source. While this is a usefully transparent amplifier, certain aspects of its



There are not very many small power amps to compare the MXW70 with, but if you attach it to Bluesound's NODE ICON (HFC 527) over XLR, you have a £1,400 balanced digital streaming system that has a selection of digital inputs as well as the on-board streaming and room correction. This makes for a great comparison with a NAD C700 V2. The NAD is £100 more expensive and has a phono stage that the MXW70 does without, but it cannot match its sample rate handling and, despite the power outputs being similar, the Cambridge Audio's greater input sensitivity gives it more head-room and a sweeter overall presentation.



performance are extremely consistent. During the time that the Cambridge Audio is up and running, it becomes apparent that the input sensitivity it offers over both RCA and XLR is enough to ensure that it has excellent reserves of gain – which in turn helps it to convincingly drive less sensitive speakers like the IOTA II. This also means that the MXW70 partners well with everything I use as a preamp. However, if you have the choice of using XLR, I would recommend that you do so as it improves the already-good bass response and ekes a little more fine detail out of material, possibly as a result of reducing the noise floor.

## Conclusion

It's the sheer breadth of choice of kit that will work with the MXW70 that

is its greatest strength. In testing here alone, I partner it with the Cambridge Audio MXN10, WiiM Ultra, Audiolab D7, Eversolo DMP-A6 Gen 2 and Bluesound NODE ICON and barely scratch the surface of the choices available. What the MXW70 does effortlessly well is turn a huge selection of devices into a complete system that takes up very little space. Not only does it do this with technical assurance, it does so with a genuinely impressive level of musical engagement as well. It might a single-function device, but the MXW70 is a brilliant missing piece for a host of components and could be exactly what you need ●



## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★

**LIKE:** Sounds superb; connectivity; build; size

**DISLIKE:** Odd power on/off; colour doesn't match all the things it works with

**WE SAY:** A brilliant way of turning a digital preamp into a musical and engaging system