



CAAS ELYSIAN100 MONO BLOCKS – THE ENGINEERS AMPLIFIER

Here we are then with a pair of Yorkshire born reference amplifiers from Caas Audio, the Elysian 100 mono blocks. The company was established over ten years ago now in 2006 when Carl and Neil Broomfield decided to team up. Since then, they have developed the Elysian Pre, the Elysian Server, Digital Audio Server and the Elysian Power Amplifiers. Caas are a company who want to 'leap ahead' of offerings from other companies with all their electronics, as most do, but with Caas, they seem to be backing that up with facts and numbers rather than marketing and fancy words.

I will just be covering the '6 years in the making' Elysian Power Amplifiers from their range, so without further ado, let's crack on.



Two Looks Better Than One

I'm a sucker for mono's, I just think there's something awesome about an amplifier (or plural) per channel. In my experience it doesn't necessarily correlate directly with sonic performance, but it does look awesome. Beyond this rather trivial fact, they are actually lovely to look at despite the fairly simple aesthetic. Nothing more than a well-engineered curved aluminium front plate and a black aluminium heatsink-edged main chassis. If it was me, I would have all black, sometimes I find the silver a little shiny and I think black would really suit this understated design.



It is worth noting that these aren't giant amps by any stretch of the imagination at only 260mm (W), 340mm (D), 140mm (H) and weigh in at 11kg per mono-block. They could quite easily have put some more 'space' in the chassis and increased the size to move with what seems to be a trend currently of bigger must be better, but they didn't, and I like that. The size makes them pretty discreet and means that you don't need a massive room just to have enough space for both your speakers and amps! In short, I think the whole form factor and design are really good, although slightly odd when amplifiers of this price and ability tend to be much bigger.



Worlds First

Right, this is where things get serious, I mentioned earlier that there is a lot of technical innovation and evidence in these amps, so I will cover that in a moment, but before that, the more simplistic specifications.

The mono's retail for £9000 a pair (£4500 individually) and as their name suggests the E100's are able to output just over 100W into 8 Ohm, 20 of which is pure Class A so realistically at normal listening volumes these are going to be running in pretty much pure class A. Once you push past this though, they are operating in class A/B and they are able to deliver up to 200W into 4 Ohms. For this move, they utilise something called OpBias which [can be read about here](#). As we know, operating in class A/B reduces heat and power consumption, although they do still get pretty warm!



Beyond this is where the interesting stuff starts. Here is a list of the things that Caas say are 'state of the art':

- DC coupled from input to output (NO capacitors in the signal path).
- Dual transformer supplies for near perfect circuit isolation.
- Ultra-low Transient Intermodulation Distortion (TIM).
- Linear phase response with zero feedback.

All of these are to be taken at face value but Caas are easily contactable for more information on these points. The following specs have a little more detail behind them! All of them are said to be world firsts in audio application so it's definitely worth taking note!

RWave – Ultra wide bandwidth circuit topology utilising microwave circuit design, layout and stability techniques providing superior signal path fidelity.

CSD – Open loop, voltage gain topology for perfect symmetric drive and outstanding distortion reduction.

TZFB – True zero feedback design (NO global feedback, NO local feedback) with "VAS Perfect Isolation (VPI)" system, producing zero VAS loading and unprecedented levels of THD for a zero feedback topology.

NIDS – Non-Intrusive DC Servo system.

Fastpower – 6 bespoke, discrete regulated power supplies with over 100,000uF of power supply capacitance for instantaneous current delivery.

Seriously, its well worth [following this link](#) and just taking the time to read about the tech in these amplifiers because it's not only impressive for the sake of being complicated, but it actually makes total sense from an audio perspective. It also shows just how clever and committed these guys are to bring awesome sound for a comparatively reasonable price in comparison to the vast majority of top quality amplifiers on the market. I'm not for a second saying they are cheap by the way!

Reference

It's clear the Elysium's are marketed as a reference mono block amplifier which is always a bold move, regardless of price. It also begs the question, what constitutes a 'reference' device? Are they talking measurements, sound signature or both? We know that technically these amplifiers are very good and that measurably they outperform a lot of others. But of course, we know measurements doesn't always equal good sound.

Just to be clear my idea of a reference sound signature is an amplifier that adds nothing and takes nothing away. It's only job is to amplify the signal and power of the loudspeaker as linearly as intended. All the details, speed and dynamics should be present and not exaggerated. An amplifier that doesn't hit all this criteria isn't necessarily a bad one either. The Jadis k88 is a prime example, it adds and takes away from the music, it isn't the quickest and nor is it the most detailed, BUT it sounds absolutely wonderful, while definitely not reference!

Before I go into depth about the sound, it is important to tell you that these amps MUST be warm when you listen because when they are cold they just aren't good, even more so than I would have expected. It would also be a good idea to have them sat on something solid and weighty whether that be a dedicated rack or stand or even a piece of marble/granite/brick. If you can satisfy these points, the Caas won't disappoint.

The Elysians are absolutely superb at doing what they do, but they won't be for everyone. They are fast (in the sense they can respond to tempo and dynamic shifts very well), fantastically detailed and have bags of dynamism, all great qualities. They are also a little on the lean side approaching the colder end of the spectrum, but not to be categorised as that, something that has both pros and cons. I would best describe these amplifiers as an audio tool that is more than capable of delivering the musicality and emotion of the music rather than simply a real musical and fun amplifier.



This fact means you need to be a little smart about what it is you are pairing them with. Something warmer and toe tapping like an Audioplan model would make a good pairing whereas going with a speaker a bit clinical itself would be a mistake in my eyes unless you wanted to really go all out for that signature.

It's so important to realise, these are an extremely transparent pair of amps so they actually pair beautifully with speakers that are on neither side of the spectrum. Once warm and properly stable the pairing with our Pearlacoustics was wonderful, a showcase for both products especially as the PA's have no electrical components at all. The Elysians were allowed to really

show how good they are on these, and even when I was playing with them on the great value KEF LS50's, they were truly awesome. The stability, control and ability to attack and relax at any given interval is truly a stand out feature of the E100's.

Although I have split up the sound into the three generic sections (as I tend to do), these amplifiers have a very consistent sonic signature which is exactly what you would expect from a top quality amplifier, anything else would be wrong. With amplification, consistency is key, and this is the most important sonic characteristic for me when it comes to amps; you don't want a long decay in the treble, recessed mids and really thin wispy bass do you?! But you may want a generally warmer amplifier or a more analytical one. Do you see what I mean? I don't see amplification as a 'tuning' tool really, I would understand wanting a speaker to be U shaped or whatever, but amplification would be my most solid and sonically reliable electrical component. My end game system goal would be to have the most transparent, natural and colourless system until my speaker and that would be my 'voicing' stage. I obviously enjoy systems that work differently to this, hence my fondness of the Jadis I mentioned earlier, but it wouldn't be my first choice. Others will see it differently, and I truly appreciate that, but that's where I am.

Anyway, on we go.

Down in the lower registers we are a little lighter in quantity and certainly shorter in decay than what I would consider to be 'natural'. Don't mistake this for lack of extension and range capability though, these can go deep and hold power just fine. There's great impact too, everything about the bass feels taught and full of intent, just don't expect huge, warm, enveloping bass notes. If I hadn't mentioned that a few times already!

Once you get used to the tonality of the Elysians, and start throwing your music library at them, you learn that they are able to dance through rhythmical passages with impeccable precision and instantaneous dynamic shifts, it's truly outstanding actually.

As I say, the main signature carries right on through. Vocals are gloriously open and unrestrained, there is no grit or unevenness it's just exceptional clarity and detail once again. The thing with amplifiers of this quality is that there becomes less and less to talk about sonically, which is a really good thing, trust me, but it does mean that it is harder to make criticisms. If I had to make one I would say that male voices don't have the last word in depth and timbre that I would like, but I am being super harsh here.

The focus and edges on the upper mid-range is fantastic, they offer a delicacy and finesse that really shows their class. Moreover, the separation between parts of the music is absolutely pin-point precise but the whole stage is brilliantly knitted as well, which is aided by the great dynamics. Sometimes clinical amplifiers can be missing that characteristic of 'togetherness' and this is one of the more crucial factors that takes this from being 'just' a great detail freak amplifier and makes it a whole lot more than that. A great showcase for this is with artists like The xx and James Blake who take a very atmospheric influence in their music. The E100's sing in this regard because the staging is just so solid, more on this in a second.

Sparkle, shimmer and great extension, what more do you want on the top end?! It's a truly top to bottom capable amplifier and the treble continues to exhibit the signs of a real flagship. The definition and timbre are superb, a real display of precision and insight in to the treble of your music. Of course, the signature dishes of clarity and detail are still very much present, so poorly recorded records can suffer the wrath of being ripped to shreds by the E100's technical capabilities.

As I've touched on, and I'm sure you would expect from a more detailed analytical style amplifier, the imagery is extremely precise and very well portrayed across the board in width, height and depth. It isn't the biggest though. Don't get me wrong it is really well defined, excellently in fact, but it isn't a massive stage like the Jadis integrated or even the NAD M22 (which is a great amp, but nothing on these).

Truly though the spatial precision is outstanding and is my favourite aspect of the Caas, any music that atmospherically immerses you is executed fantastically because it just sounds so real! It also helps that they extend really low so there is a great foundation to the sound.



Finishing Thoughts

Caas have really impressed me with these amps, they are a company with little exposure to the wider industry but now they are distributed under Auden Distribution I think the future could be great for them, we've seen what's happened with Amphion!

They are what I would call a proper High-end amplifier, very transparent, powerful, super detailed, dynamically great and completely unrestrained, they are great.

They aren't the most musical, warmest or the most indulgent, but Caas are not about that, they are what they say on the tin, a reference quality amplifier.



Josh fell in love with these extremely clean and articulate amps. They provided the power his speakers needed in a well sized package and therefore will be the sites reference for this type of product going forward.