



Tangent Ampster BT II integrated amplifier with Bluetooth

A REVISED VERSION of Tangent's original Ampster BT (*HFC 409*), the BT II's outward appearance looks much the same but the Danish maker claims improved digital amps and cooling to deliver 2x 25W into 8ohm (2x 50W into 4ohm). There's a good selection of analogue and digital inputs and as the name suggests, there's Bluetooth. This is v4.0 implementation with aptX (although there's no sign of AAC for iOS devices). This is joined by a pair of analogue inputs. One is a conventional RCA connection and the other a 3.5mm stereo input. There is then a single optical input that is 24-bit/96kHz-capable, giving

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the Tangent a surprisingly wide selection of supported connections to enable it to form a compact stacking music system when partnered with the matching CD II CD player and Tuner II with access to DAB and FM radio stations.

There's a single pre output for a subwoofer and a USB-A port for charging a phone or running a USB-powered device. As well as its ability to power on and off automatically, Tangent has gone to

considerable lengths to ensure that the Ampster can be controlled when not in line of sight. An IR extension cable is bundled and can be attached to the rear and will automatically power up when it detects an incoming signal on the Aux input.

The metal casework feels solid and the rear inputs are sensibly arranged and complemented by a sturdy set of binding posts. You get a system remote that works well and is usefully non directional. Pairing a device by Bluetooth is simple and proves entirely stable throughout testing.

Perfect timing

Initially using the Bluetooth connection and running into Polk's Signature S15e speaker (see p52), the Ampster BT II sounds extremely good. A Tidal stream of The Cinematic Orchestra's *A Caged Bird/Imitations Of Life* has pleasing energy and impact. The Tangent works well with the Polk's naturally upbeat presentation and combines to produce a performance that's weighty enough to convince but never at the expense of struggling with the timing of more complex compositions.

Beyond rhythmic capability, the most notable attribute it consistently brings to material is tonal realism. Voices are very impressive. There's no unnatural emphasis that makes them feel separated from supporting instruments, but they always come across as distinct and the focus of

attention. Other standard challenges like piano notes and strings come across well and sound right.

There is a surprising amount of headroom available from the 25W Class D output, but the performance starts to harden up a little at higher levels. The Bluetooth connection can also be momentarily upset by incoming phone notifications.

If anything, the optical input is more impressive still. Connecting Google's Chromecast Audio network player (*HFC 443*) and taking a feed from a Melco N1A NAS drive (*HFC 397*) sounds far better than a system that costs less than £500 really has any right to. The 24/88.2 version of Dead Can Dance's *The Ubiquitous Mr. Lovegrove* is rich, refined and impressively cohesive.

Moving away from hi-res and returning to Bluetooth, this time with Deezer instead of Tidal, the basic presentation of the Tangent doesn't really change. Some of the fine detail that accompanies the lossless stream is harder to discern, but the same richness and general musicality is unaffected. It works as effectively with compressed audio as it does with high-quality feeds even if that means that truly hi-res material is slightly compromised. At less than £200, the Ampster BT II sounds fun, confident and engaging. As the basis of a budget music system, it's impressive and has to be regarded as a bit of a star. **ES**

DETAILS

PRICE

£180

WEBSITE

tangent-audio.com

OUR VERDICT

