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## ELECTROCOMPANIET ECI 3

*Sophisticated style and sonic assurance, Scandinavian style*

**E**lectrocompaniet has been seen before in these pages, but not since 2001.

Surprisingly for a brand with a substantial worldwide following, it lacked UK distribution for several years, until Castle Acoustics picked up the reins recently.

The ECI 3 integrated amp is one of two currently available; the other Electrocompaniet model offering nearly double the power. Both share some visual characteristics with the rest of the EC range, the basic look being at once distinctly retro and aesthetically pleasing – a design that stands the test of time.

Power is typical of the group at 70 watts, as is the provision of six line inputs (though the one balanced pair is unique), two tape outputs, a preamp out (for bi-amping) and remote control. In contrast to many remote-controlled amps, volume control is handled by a good ol' potentiometer, so there's no balance control or input sensitivity adjustment. You still have to use push-buttons to adjust volume though, as the control is internal and not accessible – but in a nice touch its shaft is extended to the front panel and a blue LED indicates volume setting.

Internal construction is likewise not unusual, though it's certainly smartly and professionally done. Most of the donkey-work is performed by discrete transistors with only a small handful of integrated circuits in evidence. On the operation front, the only beef is that the unit defaults on power-up to the balanced 'CD' input, though it remembers its volume setting.

### SOUND QUALITY

On two separate presentations to the listening panel, this amp made a fine impression. Apart from a lone complaint about a slightly dead presentation in the Miles Davis track, it attracted almost uniformly favourable comments compared to the other contenders. It had, our panel judged, good bass weight and presence, good imaging and a good line in detail, too. There was also plenty of life, attack and a fearless, clear-sighted approach to



complex music. It captures subtleties and gives an excellent sense of the air and space surrounding a musical performance.

Listening over a more relaxed time-span confirmed all that... and added some further insights into what is with little doubt a highly capable amp. There's some real insight in its musical outpourings, and detail that could teach some much dearer pre/power separates a thing or two. There's also a distinctly laid-back character, not so much in any direct tonal sense but in the way the amp presents the information at its disposal. Recordings are not thrown at you – they are served with great refinement and an absolute absence of overstatement. This could count as criticism to listeners who rate raw excitement highly, but makes for pleasant long-term listening. In fact, exciting recordings are presented as such; it's just that slightly dull ones get no help.

In the end, it's probably true that this isn't an amp for all tastes. It suits classical music very well, especially when playing through refined, neutral speakers. It can give an excellent account of jazz but its performance with rock may leave some listeners cold. Nevertheless, it is a fine example of musical truth and accuracy and in addition is well made and smart. It well deserves a Best Buy. **HFC**

### VERDICT

**SOUND >> 88%**



**FEATURES >> 82%**



**BUILD >> 86%**



**VALUE >> 86%**



The considerable size and retro looks may be a drawback for some, the impeccable manners for others. But on the whole this amp scores very highly for natural, uncoloured and informative music-making.

**HI-FI CHOICE**  
OVERALL SCORE **87%**



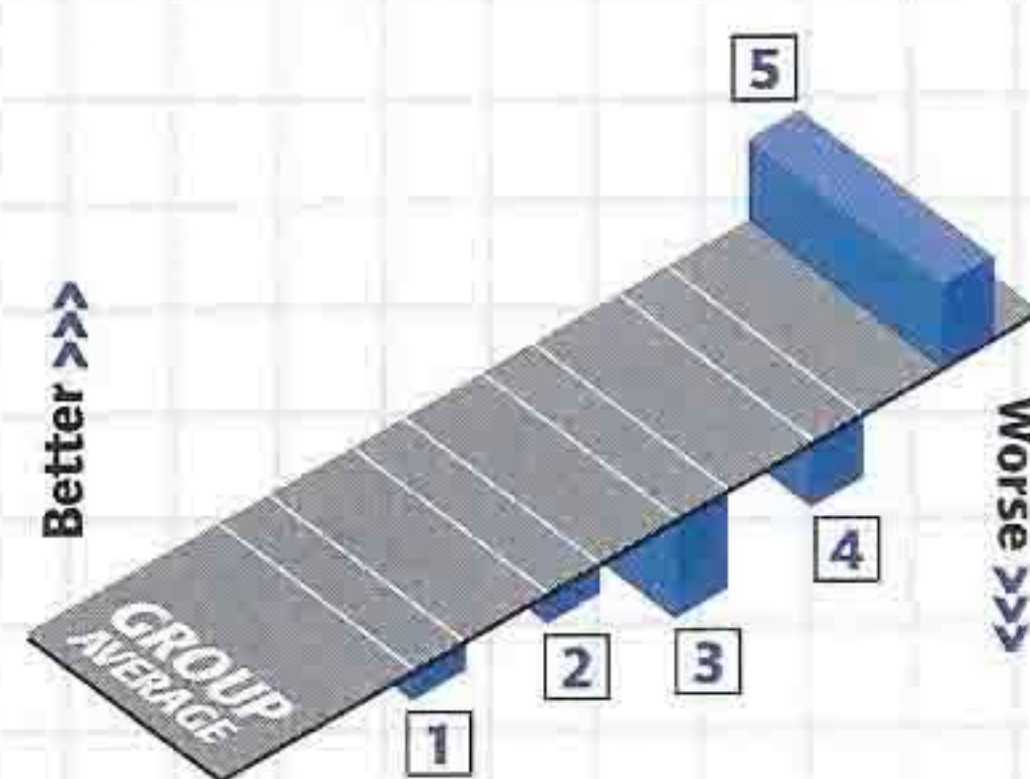
### LAB REPORT

Though beaten over certain parameters by others in this strong test group, this amp presented generally convincing measurements overall. The power supply measures very well, producing a maximum output of 22A into our stress-testing jig, with voltage clipping taking place at 23V (8-ohm simulated load).

The indications from this are that it should be capable of driving a two-ohm load quite competently, showing signs of stress only when the volume is set at its very highest – the very low output impedance (0.032 ohms) further reinforces these measurements.

The frequency response measurement figures cast a slight shadow over things, with variations of up to 0.4dB having been measured. This is tempered slightly, however, by the fact that the deviation from perfect is fairly smooth, without any peaks or spikes in the readings. The upper frequency response limit measures at 72kHz, more than sufficient for CD replay and almost up to SACD's upper limits.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Dynamic power >> -10%
- 2] Frequency response >> -10%
- 3] Dynamic range >> -30%
- 4] Distortion >> -20%
- 5] Output impedance >> +25%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	70W	64W
Distortion (1 kHz/8 ohms)	0.006%	0.009%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	n/s	+/- 0.4dB