

# Edwards Audio IA1

The high-value Edwards Audio range from Talk Electronics now includes no fewer than four integrated amps, the IA1 also equipped with motorised volume and remote control  
Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

While there is a drive to bring (hi-fi) manufacturing back home to Blighty, some brands never left. One such stalwart is Edwards Audio, a sub-brand of the longstanding Talk Electronics range of full-width components [see boxout, p75]. The Edwards Audio IA1 integrated amplifier on these pages is handmade in the UK – yes, designed, engineered and assembled here – and yet costs just £430. Still not convinced? Well, you can have a simpler version of the same amp, shorn of remote control, for £60 less, and you can even buy both versions in red, white or blue – but not all three at once – as part of a range of six acrylic colours in which Edwards Audio offers its full stable of products.

If the Edwards name rings bells for those with long hi-fi memories, then that's because the company takes its inspiration from founder and owner Kevin Edwards. The man, and brand, has never been afraid to tackle the establishment, whether challenging the legendary QED 79-Strand speaker cable with his original Cable Talk wiring, going after the likes of Arcam and Audiolab with those Talk Electronics amplifiers, or taking the fight to Rega and Pro-Ject with the current lineup of no fewer than seven turntables. The latter range starts with the Prodigy model at £300, complete with cartridge, and goes all the way up to the TT6 SC at £1800.

## ONE OF MANY

The full Edwards empire follows the same path, as is clear from the entry-level version of the amp tested here: the £350 Apprentice IA is the start of a five-strong amplifier range running up to the £1250 IA6, plus the C6 preamp and P6 power amps, at £750 apiece. There are three standalone MM phono stages,

**RIGHT:** One pair of power transistors (per channel) are bolted between the IA1's small internal heatsinks [centre], all fed from a beefy linear PSU [top/right]. Daughter PCB [lower right] handles inputs and MM phono

starting with the £100 Apprentice MM, a trio of MC models beginning at £180 for the MC1, a choice of two offboard speed controllers for the turntables, and even a headphone amplifier, the £180 HA1.

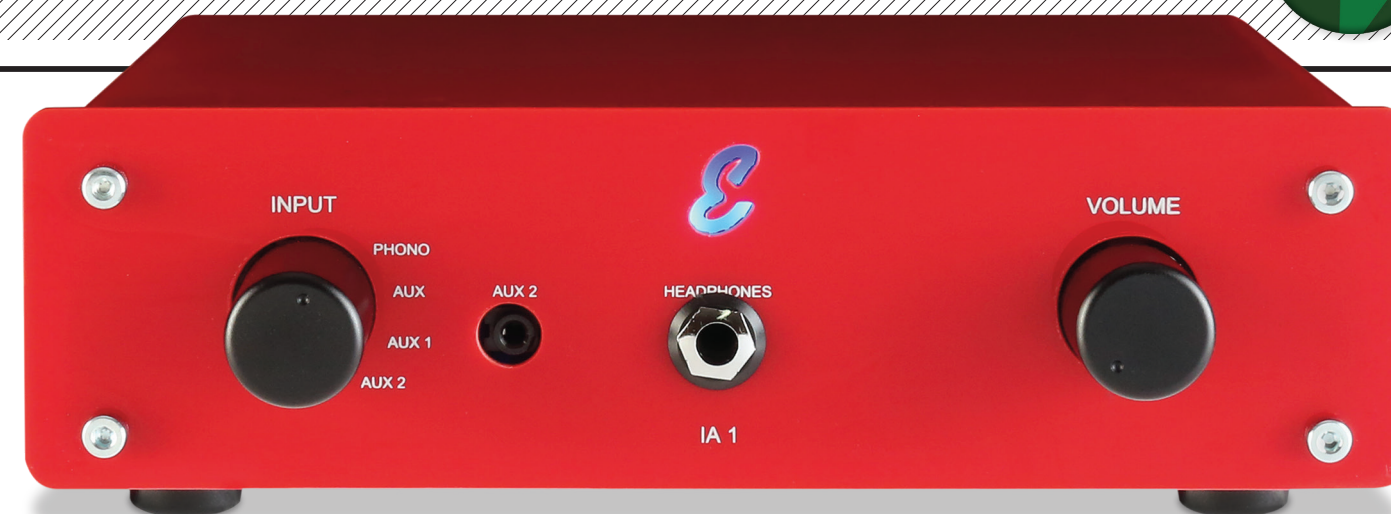
If the HFN abacus isn't letting me down, that's something like 23 models from what is ostensibly one of the UK's smaller hi-fi companies – and that, by any standards, is going some. There are sensible production economies – for example, the entry-level amplifiers share a back panel [see p77] with the pricier IA4 model, but with unused inputs blanked off. There are also bays for future add-on modules, including a USB DAC, to expand the functionality.

The IA1 amplifier isn't alone at or around its price point, with the likes of the £420 Rega io and Pro-Ject's £539 MaiA S3

being in the same 'compact, frill-free and affordable' arena, but Edwards Audio's amp has a charm of its own. For a start it's very compact, at just 22cm wide, just a little deeper and 7cm tall, and looks attractive whether you go for a sober or colourful choice – both the red and white versions have a definite visual appeal, their striking casework offset with black controls.

## BACK TO BASICS

What's more, in the manner of a stripped-down sports car or bike, it's instantly apparent what does what and how to use the amplifier. There's a real sense of back-to-basics purity here, with rotary input and volume controls on the front panel, the latter motorised in this IA1 version for remote control. There's also a



3.5mm line input and a full-size 6.35mm headphone socket. The central 'E' logo lights blue when the amplifier is powered up via a push-button on the rear panel, and turns red when muting is engaged via the remote handset [see p77].

That's about all you need to know, beyond the fact that plugging in a pair of headphones will mute the speaker outputs, these offered on 4mm 'banana' sockets rather than the more traditional binding post/socket combination. Inputs to the rear accommodate MM phono and two line sources, the second of which is shared with that front-panel 3.5mm socket, and there are blanks for both optional preamp outputs and the anticipated digital module.

As mentioned, the casework here is acrylic over a metal chassis, but there's nothing 'plasticky' about the build. Edwards Audio has got the measure of

working with a material used extensively across its range, and the amplifier feels solidly constructed, this also being borne out by the neat, logical construction within [see inside picture, p74].

## LITTLE AND LARGE

The IA1's performance lives up to all that promise, being both quietly confident and surprisingly gutsy – at least provided you don't ask too much of what is, after all, a relatively modest 30W-rated design. As PM's Lab Report reveals [p77], its measured output falls a little shy of that figure, but the IA1 fights back with a generous power supply that lends it more than a little dynamic capability.

In other words, keep the loudspeaker choice sensible, with reasonable sensitivity, and you won't go far wrong. Well, I got it half right with one of my choices: the hefty-sounding, and heavy, MartinLogan Motion

*'It played on in a meditative, contemplative fashion'*

**ABOVE:** Red plastic bonnet and fascia sit over a metal chassis with rotaries for volume [right] and input selection [left]. A 6.35mm headphone socket and extra 3.5mm aux input are included

F10 floorstanders. At just under £3000 a pair these might not seem an obvious partner, but with their claimed high sensitivity they were a temptation – and one to which I was pleased to succumb.

Chugging out Elvis Costello & The Imposters' live 'Every Day I Write The Book', from 2011's *The Return Of The Spectacular Spinning Songbook!!!* [Hip-O Records; 96kHz/24-bit download], the IA1 showed both fine grip on the powerful, tight bass and Pete Thomas's drumming, plus excellent character in both Costello's voice and long-term partner-in-crime Steve Nieve's keyboards. Mind you, the amplifier pulled off the same trick when switched from 'main system' duties to desktop use – obvious really, given the diminutive size – driving Neat's little Iota speakers.

## CARRYING THE CANS

Quite apart from the fact that the finish of my time-served Iotas matched the white amplifier I had to hand, the IA1 slotted into this function superbly, also proving a credible partner for some of the headphones used, from my reliable Bowers & Wilkins P9 Signatures [HFN Mar '17] to the ever-so-precise Austrian Audio Hi-X55 cans. It drove headphones and speakers alike with real conviction, ably tackling everything from Rias Kammerchor's set of Handel's 'Coronation Anthems' [Harmonia Mundi HMM902708], which had just the right combination of spaciousness and drama, to the intense focus of Kristoffer Hyldig's piano playing across two-plus hours of Messaien's 'Vingt Regards Sur L'Enfant-Jesus' [OUR Recordings 6220677; DXD]. With the latter in particular, the IA1 made it more than tempting to just let the music play on in a suitably meditative, contemplative fashion. ☺

## TALK ELECTRONICS

My first meeting with Cable Talk, as the company then was, came decades ago in the basement of a hi-fi shop in Woking, Surrey. I was collecting some speaker cable for review, and there was founder Kevin Edwards making up said cables at a bench. By the time of my next visit, the company was in much larger premises, with huge drums of cable waiting to be cut and made up, the result of the success of Cable Talk's interconnects and speaker cables as cost-effective upgrades. The move from cables to full-sized hi-fi electronics in the late '90s was a bold one, carried off under the auspices of spin-off brand Talk Electronics. Several iterations of the Hurricane preamp and Tornado power amps [HFN Dec '98], together with the Thunder CD player [HFN Aug '98], maintained Talk Electronics for the next decade.

Edwards founded the company that now bears his name in 2009, starting with the MC1 phono stage [HFN Aug '09] before developing a range of turntables. Everything remains resolutely 'in-house', from the design and machining of components to the final assembly and manufacture of its turntables, the unipivot arm, the amplifiers and other electronics. The company remains a family concern, also supplying components to other hi-fi manufacturers as well as exporting to many countries. And all this is from an entirely British operation, located in Royal Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire.





**ABOVE:** Two line inputs and an MM phono, all on RCA, are hosted adjacent to blanked-off inputs for a preamp output and forthcoming/optional digital modules. Speaker outputs are on PCB-mounted 4mm sockets for banana plugs only

Yes, there's always a small voice muttering the old 'memento mori' when playing music at a decent level with an amplifier claiming 'only' 30W a side, and if you get silly it's not hard to sense that Edwards Audio's little box is running out of puff, but it sounds so much gutsier than one might expect. Okay, so I'd probably rule out the likes of the flagship Bowers & Wilkins 801 D4s [HFN Nov '21] in a room the size of a barn, but for most obvious speaker choices in more conventional listening spaces, and especially for the kind of efficient set-ups in smaller rooms for which its physical dimensions make it especially suited, the IA1 has much going for it.

## SYSTEM BUILDING

The thing is, for an amplifier with so much 'only' about it – its size, its power output, its limited inputs, its price – this one requires very few allowances, let alone excuses, to be made. The IA1's MM phono stage is as good as one might expect, given its provenance as an amp from a turntable manufacturer, as proven with a spin of some favourite vinyl, notably Supertramp's opulent prog rock classic *Crime Of The Century* [A&M Records AMLS 68258] and Café Society's eponymous album [Konk KONK102], on my trusty Rega deck. And that points to the fact that the IA1 could easily form the heart of a cost-conscious record-playing system



**LEFT:** Talk-branded remote offers control over the IA1's input selection, motorised volume and mute

with Edwards Audio's Prodigy or Apprentice turntables and a couple of hundred quid spent on some speakers. Well, this is a 'Budget Esoterica' review, after all...

## LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU

The beauty of the IA1 is that it isn't just 'the little amplifier that could', because it goes beyond that to be a little bit special. Over the time of my audition, it was fronted by everything from a long-running Marantz CD63 KI-Signature CD player [HFN Jul '96] to iFi Audio's NEO Stream [HFN Mar '23], not to mention a full-house Naim ND555/2x555PS network player [HFN Apr '19], while driving a selection of speakers far beyond its pay grade. In every case it over-delivered in a very pleasing manner.

The slick jazz of Trichotomy's recent *To Vanish* set [Earshift EAR070] was delivered with crisp clarity and rhythmical acuity, and the scale and detail of the Vienna Philharmonic/Maazel reading of Sibelius's 'Karelia' [The Seven Symphonies, Decca 4788541] was immensely satisfying. Edwards Audio's no-frills IA1 might not be a giant-killer, but it's certainly an entertaining little amplifier. ☺

## HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

That word 'honest' keeps coming back to mind when listening to the IA1. This is an amplifier with an exceptional degree of musical communication for the money and – with just a little common sense in the choice of partnering equipment – could sit at the centre of a very cost-effective system. It's easy to understand and use, won't take up much space, plays its socks off and looks good, too. Go on, pick a colour...

Sound Quality: 83%

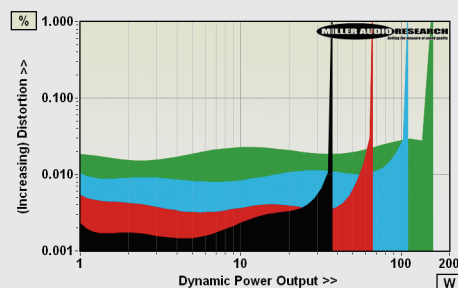


## LAB REPORT

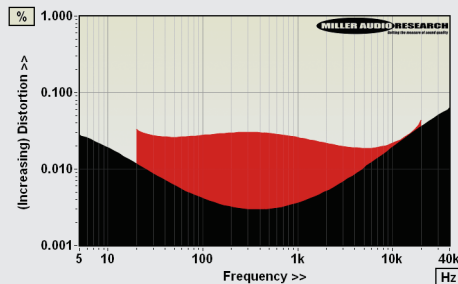
### EDWARDS AUDIO IA1

While Talk Electronics' entry-level Edwards Audio IA1 is rated obliquely by the statement 'at its heart it has a 30W fully discrete class AB power amplifier section', in practice it manages a little less at 2x26W/8ohm and 2x39W/4ohm, the latter limited by electronic/relay-activated protection. But will the IA1 'sound' louder than this? In reality, yes, because under dynamic, music-like conditions there's sufficient reserve in the PSU to support 36W, 66W, 108W and 150W into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads respectively (re. 1kHz/10msec/<1% THD). This is illustrated in Graph 1, below, along with the low 0.0025% distortion at 1W, increasing gently to 0.004% over the first 25W of its range. Distortion increases with decreasing load impedance – a not untypical behaviour – but still remains impressively consistent with increasing power output. Versus frequency there's the expected, but well governed, increase in THD at very low and high frequencies [see Graph 2], peaking at 0.035% at 1W and 0.08% at 10W (all re. 20kHz/8ohm).

The IA1's 0.02-0.08ohm output impedance maintains a response that's flat to within –1dB from 10Hz-22kHz/8ohm, rolling off (quite sensibly if used with DSD64 sources) to –11dB/100kHz. The plastic bonnet and fascia, while facilitating the option of different colours, is not as effective a screen as the traditional metal box! So residual noise is a moderate –65dBV and the A-wtd S/N ratio a very 'average' 85dB (re. 0dBW), all this from a full gain of +38.3dB, requiring 35mV to raise 1W/8ohm (0dBW). Finally, any DC offset is kept well under control at just 1-2mV, rounding off a very 'well sorted' performance from this compact but still fairly punchy integrated amplifier. PM



**ABOVE:** Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 12.2A



**ABOVE:** Distortion versus frequency at 1W/8ohm (black, 5Hz-40kHz) and 10W (red, 20Hz-20kHz)

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Continuous power (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	26W / 39W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	36W / 66W / 108W / 150W
Output imp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	0.021-0.075ohm / 0.10ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	–0.3dB to –0.85dB / –11.1dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/25W)	35mV / 175mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/25W)	85.0dB / 98.9dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 1W/10W)	0.003-0.035% / 0.022-0.080%
Power consumption (idle/rated o/p)	9W / 87W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	220x70x250mm / 3kg