

hardware review

## Auralic Vega S1 invades the stage

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### Auralic Vega S1 & S1 S1 Purer-Power

Auralic's range of streamers and related ancillaries has been growing in quantity and price over the dozen or so years since the brand launched with the original Aries streamer in its curvy plastic case. Today's top Auralics inhabit machined aluminium casework and sit on sprung feet and this has made them expensive in the overall scheme of the streamer market, a market that has seen the entry of bigger brands with flashy boxes that are taking a sizeable chunk of sales. Something had to be done if Auralic was to regain the customers at the more affordable end of the scale. Enter the S1 series, a range of two streamers and a power supply that were not even hinted at when Auralic unveiled the G2.2 and G3 models at the Munich High End show last year.

The series consists of Aries S1 streamer and Vega S1 streamer with DAC plus the S1 Purer-Power external power supply, the streamers come in at just under £2,000 while the PSU is nearly £1,000. To put that into context the Aries G1.1 costs £2,783 and does not offer the same range of features as the incoming models, its days look to be numbered. Those features are pretty well all in software but as that's what streamers run on they are not insignificant, for instance previous Vegas have not offered the Lightning server software that reads all the metadata in a library, catalogues it and presents it in various forms on the Lightning control app. This will apparently be coming to the Vega G2.2 when Auralic's v10 software update appears in the near future.

The Vega S1 omits wireless connectivity in favour of ethernet, this cuts down on costs and should reduce noise in the box but also reduces ease of install which might be an issue at its price. But it's the box that makes the biggest saving, this is no longer a multi-piece machined

enclosure but a more conventional rectilinear design that is very clean and not entirely dissimilar to rather more pricey offerings from a certain British digital specialist. UK Auralic's Richard Bates is a former Meridian man and I did wonder if he had shown Auralic's Xuanqian Wang some of that brand's creations, it seems not but there is a similarity. The glass front and discreet buttons on the top make for a very clean design that looks even better with the display lit up but sounds better with it turned off.

The connections on the back run to digital inputs for external sources such as CD players and PCs, but the HDMI on the Vega S1 is not for AV purposes. This connection is included so that the streamer can be upgraded with an S1 Purer-Power power supply, which takes over all



power duties within so that the environment is quieter in terms of electrical noise. Both the Vega S1 and Purer-Power S1 have linear supplies but the one in the external box is bigger and thus has an easier job running the processors inside the Vega S1.

One part of this is 512MB of solid state storage which is used to hold the incoming data so that it can be clocked into the Tesla G3 streaming platform with the minimum of jitter. The streamer runs dual 60Fs Femto clocks for maximum accuracy and the whole process is galvanically isolated so that the minimum of noise gets into the circuitry. The Vega S1 includes an analogue volume control and preamplifier so that its RCA and XLR outputs can be





connected directly to a power amp or active loudspeakers. Its Fusion DAC integrates discrete ladder and delta-sigma technology and runs at a maximum of 32-bit/384MHz (DSD512) and the processor multiplies the incoming sample rate 32x prior to conversion.

Features not seen on previous Auralic streamers include Clear and Mellow tone modes, the first is the default and does not alter the signal while Mellow introduces the extra harmonics typically found with tube/valve designs to produce a more relaxed and smooth sound. Alongside this are four filter settings of which Smooth is usually the most appealing, however the introduction of the tone modes means that a wider range of presentations/balances can be achieved with the eight combinations.

### Sound quality

Initial listening was done in Clear and Smooth settings without the external power supply via the very revealing Oephi Immanence 2.5 floorstanding speakers and matching speaker cable, a test for any source and amplifier but one that the Vega S1 passed rather well. It is not perhaps as sweet as its G2.2 relations but is clean and open with an excellent sense of timing, I frequently found myself listening to the end of test tracks that would usually only be on for the first few minutes. This is partly a reflection of the Oephi speaker effect but not one that I got with all the sources tried. It was not dissimilar to the Rega sound, not super smooth but extremely engaging, the Vega S1 gets to the parts that other streamers fail to reach with a wide variety of musical styles. Even tracks like Melanie de Biasio's We Never Kneel to Pray, which often fails to inspire, came across with an intensity and presence that was thrilling.

That old review favourite Babylon Sisters (Steely Dan) is a good test of timing and can all too easily sound polished and slick but devoid of a pulse, here it was fast, tight and clean with quiet backgrounds and a strong shuffle beat. This too encouraged further listening even though I've heard it hundreds of times, a sure sign that the Vega S1 is doing the important things right. It may not have the density of resolution found with the bigger Auralics but focuses on what really matters extremely well. Tonally it could be more relaxed but that is by comparison with more expensive alternatives; refinement is usually what you get with greater expense in the streaming world.

Back in the regular system with PMC twenty5.26i speakers, Allegri Reference pre and Moor Amps Angel 6 power amps the qualities of the bass became more apparent, which is appealingly articulate and powerful. Not as rounded as it might be but it's this definition that



## Auralic Vega S1

makes the timing so strong, and brings out the immediacy in the music. Tension is well resolved, The God in Hackney's prog-esque vibes being delivered with a crackling electricity that means that you really feel the music. I also had a fabulous time listening to the Keith Jarrett Trio playing Flying Part.1 (*Changes*), where the interplay of piano, bass and drums was totally intuitive and fluent, giving the performance a life and energy that is uncommon with digital sources of any stripe.



Adding the S1 Purer-Power supply and removing the power lead from the Vega S1 proved to be pretty dramatic, it was not unlike going from regular video to 4k with a good source, the amount of perceived information seemed to double. Now every note had depth and shape, this did spectacular things for imaging which expanded in every dimension and filled the room in a way that made the self-powered streamer seem inhibited. It also felt like the level had increased and the quality of recording likewise, if you like the colours and shapes of stereo sound then this power supply is less of an option and more of a necessity. Detail that had previously been hinted at became solid and real and the presentation relaxed in the process.

### Conclusion

Auralic are to be congratulated on what they have achieved with the Vega S1, it has been a long time since I heard a Vega G1 but can say with some confidence that this new Vega is in a different league. Not only does it have virtually all the features found in the Vega G2.2 but when combined with the S1 Purer-Power it approaches its sound quality too. Getting the best out of any streamer depends on how well sorted the back end of the system is and you will need to pay attention here if you want to hear it at its best. Either way I am confident that the Vega S1 will be a thorn in the side of shinier boxes from bigger brands because it proves that when you get the fundamentals right great sound quality and high value follow.