Lindemann Musicbook Combo streaming integrated amplifier

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Trying to predict the future is impossible. The lack of lottery wins, flying cars, or dystopian post-apocalyptic hellscapes is a bit of a giveaway. But, when it comes to audio, predicting the near future is possible, and a big chunk of tomorrow's audio is very likely Lindemann Musicbook Combo shaped!

The Musicbook Combo addresses a gap in modern audio; the small, high-performance integrated amplifier that includes a good audio streamer. What the audio world needs is a box that's small enough to sit on a bookshelf rather than a dedicated stand. It also needs a product that's easy to install and operate. And it needs to sound good. The Lindemann Musicbook Combo does all those things.

Does it all
Lindemann's elegant little box is a deceptively powerful and flexible device. Delivering a healthy 70W into eight ohms, the amp includes a network player, DAC, and MM phono stage and two line-level analogue inputs. You can connect it to A2DP-compatible Bluetooth devices, local network, and online streaming services via a router, you can play thumb drives or even CDs from a CD-ROM drive inserted into the rear USB connector. There's a good quality headphone

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socket. Everything is driven from Lindemann's own iOS or Android app, and there's a healthily sized yellow OLED read-out on the front panel. Controls on the amp itself are minimal, just a power button and a jog wheel, but this last doubles up as volume and source selector. There is also a mini-remote with track handling functionality, but consider this an adjunct to the app.

It's once you go deeper that you begin to see just why the Musicbook Combo is so powerful. First, it upconverts any PCM signal to DSD as standard (using a AK4137 upsampler), but this can be deactivated and any PCM signals are kept bit-perfect to the twin AK4493 DACs and synchronised against an ultraprecise MEMS-Femtoclock. It can be run wired or wirelessly (within 10m from a wireless router) into your Local Area Network. It's fully Roon Ready, works with Tidal Connect, Qobuz, High Res Audio.com, Spotify Connect, Deezer and more. There is also a multi-room feature if you like the pitter-patter of tiny Lindemanns around the house.

Appiness is a warm iPad

While it's notionally possible to operate the Musicbook Combo without using a smartphone or tablet, to do so is like asking a ballet dancer to dance Swan Lake in leg irons. The real joy of the Lindemann design and why it justifies that 'it's the future' epithet is just how well it works with its own app (and apps like Roon). This is something we occasionally struggle to reconcile; a product like the Musicbook Combo must live in that app-based ecosystem today.

Sadly, too many audio companies seem to be more about 'pivoting' toward the place Lindemann already occupies. The industry is perhaps universally guilty of being behind the curve here; we as audio writers are more wrapped up in the hardware than we are the interaction between that hardware and app. In the real world, people

care more about how that app works and how the product interacts with the app. In our defence, often the app is still a work-in-progress when the product gets into our hands but again in the real world, such a half-way house is indefensible. Rant mode: disengaged.

Fortunately, the Lindemann app is a joy to use. It's just the right balance of 'informative' without being 'busy' and it responds quickly. Once set-up (no big deal), the Combo also handshakes with other apps like Tidal or Roon, meaning they do all the heavy lifting and the Combo reacts appropriately. I'd put this on a par with the better company-made apps out there; not as intuitive as Sonos (few are) but it's certainly easy to navigate and extremely reactive.

Wired or wireless

I tried connecting the Lindemann Musicbook Combo in both wired and wireless LAN settings, but in fairness my wireless router is only about 1.5m from the Combo's twin aerials. This means I could detect no differences in sound quality or latency between wired and wireless connections. If pressed, I'd opt for the wired connection, but that's more to do with personal preference than observed differences. The Combo seems to make no distinctions either way.

Running Lindemann's own Streaming 4.0 platform and app, the Combo worked like a charm. The app gently guides you to building playlists in a more considered way that just simply track aggregation, but only because I found playlist creation is more in retrospect and built from the last-played option. I prefer this more reflective approach and it acts in a manner a little more like Roon. Streaming 4.0 and Roon do work very nicely together too, and I found myself in that Roon space a lot here.

The sound of the Combo is exceptionally clear and clean, cutting a fine balance and always staying on the right side of 'clinical'. Perhaps most noticeable is that this 'spring »

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» water' sound applies universally; there's no point where the sound warms up or blurs across the board. While that might sound like it would deter valve-amp users and their seeming love of euphony, I think they would like the clarity and focus of that Lindemann sound.

Go-to albums

My go-to albums for testing midrange clarity and bass – *Stella di Napoli* by Joyce DiDonato [Erato] and *The Last Resort* by Trentemøller [Poker Flat] – highlighted precisely what the Lindemann Musicbook Combo does so well, as it delivered all the detail and insight required to make the former album come alive and all the precision and drive needed to make the latter sound scary. But, in fairness, what the Combo did right, it did right universally.

There's a reason we use these discs over and over. While hugely enjoyable to hear, I'm not going to extract review-grade information from a Half Man Half Biscuit album, but *Achtung Bono* [Probe Plus] needs something accurate to serve up the lyrics of 'Joy Division Oven Gloves' without it sounding too spikey and raw while retaining the wonderful belt-fed surrealist sarcasm dripping from every line. And Lindemann's Combo makes short work of lines like 'Nero fiddles while Gordon Burns/In his Joy Division Oven Gloves.'

It's the clean, precise sound that makes the Lindemann so musically flexible. I went from operetta to electro to sarky post-punk from the Wirral and then to Bach inventions, back via Dylan's *Desire* [Capitol], over to some classic early 1990s Acid Jazz and so it went on. Everything I played was given a fair hearing by the Lindemann Musicbook Combo, which is extremely rare at this level.

Class act

Getting that much from a small box without it going into melt-down mode can only mean one thing – Class D power amp operation. And this is going to cause some audiophiles to press the ejector seat on principle. More fool them; what they are missing is a sound that is precise, accurate, musically focused, detailed, articulate and extremely dynamic, especially when the target loudspeaker audience is considered.

With spiralling fuel bills meaning the running costs of a pure Class A amplifier begin to get a little noticeable, the great sound and cool running Lindemann makes an exceptionally strong case for itself. I feel what's inside the box is functionally unimportant so long as it works well; it's how it sounds and how it operates that matters.

Don't diss

So, are there any downsides to the Musicbook Combo? Surprisingly few, unless you are in the habit of 'dissing' things for being something they weren't intended to be. It's not meant to drive £300,000 tower loudspeakers with an impedance plot that eats amplifiers, but I used the Combo with KEF's LS50 Meta and the two worked together so well, I felt no need to look further. I'd like moving coil compatibility alongside moving magnet, but not if it sacrificed the performance of the MM stage as it stands. I'd also prefer if its Bluetooth connection included aptX HD (which can support up to 24bit, 48kHz PCM) alongside A2DP, but this is far from a deal-breaker. And realistically, that's about it!

The Lindemann Musicbook Combo is one of the ways good audio reaches those it presently cannot. It's small enough to be domestically acceptable. It's powerful enough to drive the loudspeakers it will most likely partner with and sounds good while doing so. It's made to be not just app-chummy but live happily in that domain and the app itself works extremely well. If this is the face of audio's future, it's a bright and rosy one! ✚

Technical specifications

Type streaming integrated amplifier

Power output 2×130W into 4Ω, 2× 70W into 8Ω

Analogue inputs MM cartridge (RCA), two line-level (RCA)

Analogue outputs 1 line-level (RCA), 6.35mm headphone jack, 2× BFA speaker terminals

MM specifications 47kΩ, 150pF, 40dB gain

Digital inputs Coaxial and optical S/PDIF, USB 2.0, 100Mbits/s RJ45 LAN, 2× antenna (Bluetooth, WLAN)

Bluetooth 4.2, A2DP

DAC resolution up to 768kHz, 32bit PCM and DSD 512

Supported codecs WAV, FLAC, AIFF, ALAC, MP3, AAC, Ogg Vorbis, WMA, DSD

Network UPnP and DLNA support

Dimensions (W×H×D) 28 × 22 × 6.3cm

Weight 3kg

Price £4,490

Manufacturer Lindemann Audio

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