

Node to joy

With a unique approach to an all-in-one music system, **Ed Selley** thinks Bluesound's updated Powernode 2i is just the ticket

One of a selection of updated models unveiled in October last year, the next-gen Powernode 2i is part of Bluesound's Node subset range, which includes the Node 2i streamer (£499) and the Vault 2i server/player (£1,099). The Powernode 2i is perhaps the most unusual of the three, taking the streaming facilities of the Node 2i and adding amplification to create a component sat somewhere between an integrated amp and an all-in-one system. The amplifier section uses a Class D Hypex module and claims 2x 60W output via a set of sturdy binding posts. It has the same half-width footprint as the standard Node (HFC 402), but is taller to fit the amplification components.

Incorporating the same streaming front end as the Node 2i, the Powernode 2i is a 24-bit/192kHz-capable system that will read a connected NAS drive or other library and compile its own index, although it's not a true UPnP networking protocol system. There's no support for third-party app control, but this isn't a problem as the Bluesound app is a brilliant piece of software that makes operating multiple devices simple. Everything works with a slickness and logic that makes this one of the best interfaces we've seen.

With the exception of the Apple Music streaming service, there's support for all the major providers as well as some lesser known ones thrown in for good measure. Internet radio streaming is available as is AirPlay 2 – enabling it to be networked with other AirPlay 2 devices – and there's Bluetooth with aptX HD support along with physical connections in the form of a multi-functional 3.5mm jack socket that can accept both analogue and optical audio signals.

Although made of plastic, the Powernode 2i manages to feel usefully solid and – in the white finish especially – looks clean and modern. A set of controls on the top panel provide some convenient functionality without having to activate the control app.

Sound quality

Setup is easy with simple app-based prompts backed up by a clearly visible status light. With this done and the Bluesound connected to a pair of Spondor A1 standmounts, there are some immediately appealing aspects to its presentation. The Bluesound uses a Burr-Brown DAC, which gives it a slightly different sonic signature to devices that use other chipsets. Listening to Emily King's *Scenery*

shows this off to good effect and the wonderful vocal is rich and has the weight the track requires, although the last ounce of fine detail is traded for a richer and less forensic style.

The Bluesound's commendable sense of soundstage takes the deceptively complex arrangement of Fink's *No Sleep* and creates a convincing and cohesive sense of space in front of the listener. The Spondor A1 undoubtedly helps here, but the Powernode 2i demonstrates that it is extremely capable of making sense of any recording and even the challenging *Dionysus* by Dead Can Dance is delivered in a remarkably engaging manner. Having said that, the larger scale of this album does reveal the Powernode's limitations and it begins to sound a little strained as the volume level increases and it may also struggle with less forgiving speakers or to drive larger rooms.

Working within its comfort zone, however, the Bluesound makes for a consistently engaging listen. It has a good grasp of rhythm and timing and delivers a sonic performance that does a fine job of ensuring that less up tempo material flows precisely as it should while also letting the joyously exuberant *Tokyo* by White Lies move with the pace and impact it deserves. While bass depth is never truly seismic, there is enough pace and detail to connect with and engage any listener.

Conclusion

Provided that you don't need a plethora of inputs for connecting up additional music source equipment, it is hard to argue with the value that the Powernode 2i offers. As one of the best streaming platforms currently available at the price mated to an amplifier that does a fine job when carefully partnered with a pair of loudspeakers and when used in a sensible space, it delivers a highly engaging performance ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Bluesound
Powernode 2i

ORIGIN
Canada/China

TYPE
Integrated amplifier
with streaming

WEIGHT
1.7kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
220 x 70 x 190mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 2x 60W (8ohm)
- 24-bit/192kHz-capable DAC
- Inputs: 1x 3.5mm jack (analogue/digital)
- AirPlay 2; aptX HD Bluetooth; Spotify; Tidal; Qobuz; internet radio

DISTRIBUTOR
Sevenoaks
Sound & Vision Ltd.

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WEBSITE
bluesound.com



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Refined and engaging sound; streaming platform

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Limited physical inputs; needs careful speaker matching

BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



WE SAY: An easy to use compact solution that matches flexibility with decent sound

OVERALL

