

Gold Note IS-1000 Deluxe Network streamer/amplifier

by Simon Lucas



Certain stereotypes are entirely and unarguably positive. The nation of Italy has more than its fair share of stereotypes attached, and to a lesser or greater extent they all suggest the same thing.

For example, think of the stereotypes around Italian cuisine. Or Italian shoes. Or Italian architecture, or Italian couture. Heck, even Italian haircuts. 'Italian' is a byword for smooth sophistication, aesthetic finesse, and unforced elegance.

To a lesser or greater extent, this complimentary cliché holds true for Italian hi-fi too – there are any number of high-end Italian brands to whom 'smooth', 'sophisticated' and all the rest apply.

Gold Note has only been crashing the high-end party since 2012. But in that time it's demonstrated the required dedication to engineering, styling, materials and, most of all, resultant sound for me to confidently say: yes. Yes, Gold Note can be counted as a stereotypically Italian hi-fi brand.

The all-in-one stereo item is a bit of a struggle for the high-end brigade, isn't it? It's all well and good sticking to established principles of separation and isolation of components in a drive for minimal signal corruption... let's face it, though, consumers have got used to being pandered to. Convenience may not be the be-all and end-all to the high-end hi-fi fancier, but *lack* of convenience can be a deal-breaker. Which is where Gold Note hopes to step in, its Italianate armour shining, with the IS-1000 Deluxe.

Gold Note's IS-1000 Deluxe is a 'just add speakers' one-box answer to the vexed question of convenience. In fact, there are two models, differing only in the type of DAC they employ (although the IS-1000 with its venerable Burr Brown PCM1796 is only available to special order in the UK), and this IS-1000 Deluxe model sports the equally venerable and undeniably superior PCM1792A). Having two similar models seems questionable – but then marketing was never my strong point. ▶



► Of course, an integrated amplifier/network streamer/DAC/phono stage all under one lid is hardly a piece of original thinking – but it's generally been considered Kryptonite to the hi-fi high end. The IS-1000 Deluxe, then, has its work cut out: it has to have the feature-count and seamless functionality of any number of one-box solutions, it has to sound like it's worth the money it costs, and it mustn't alienate the hair-shirt high-enders in the process.

Taken on an individual, stage-by-stage basis, the IS-1000 Deluxe would seem to have what's required to hold its head up in the Naim Uniti Nova-dominated arena of the Truly Pricely All-In-One Stereo System. Power, for example, is Class A/B and rated at an ample 125 watts per channel into an 8ohm load. In addition there's adjustable damping factor – 'high' is intended for bigger, less sensitive speakers while 'low' (which Gold Note claims enables the IS-1000 Deluxe to mimic a low-power tube amp) is for high-sensitivity/monitor-type speakers.

One of the two pairs of analogue RCA inputs is switchable between line level, moving magnet and moving coil – the phono stage circuitry is derived from Gold Note's PH-10. There's a balanced XLR input, alongside three digital optical sockets, a digital coaxial RCA input and a type-A USB socket. Digital audio files on a wider network are accessible using the Ethernet socket or integrated wi-fi. Some chunky speaker binding posts, and two pairs of RCA outputs (one variable, one fixed) complete the physical socketry picture.

The digital inputs feed the Burr Brown PCM1792A DAC – PCM up to 24bit/192kHz is available from the optical and coaxial inputs, while the USB and Ethernet sockets are also DSD 64-enabled. Streaming from Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer and Spotify is integrated, as well as Apple AirPlay (but not, as yet, AirPlay 2). The IS-1000 Deluxe is also Roon Ready, supports UPnP and DLNA, and has vTuner internet radio access too.

On the outside, the IS-1000 Deluxe is on the burly side of the Italian stereotype. It's a bit more Primo Camera than

Roberto Baggio – at 18kg, 13.5cm high and 37.5cm deep it'll completely occupy a kit-rack shelf. The aluminium casework is extravagantly vented in a manner mimicking the catenary curve that so preoccupies Gold Note, and allows oblique views of an extremely hefty toroidal transformer.

So far, so promising. The IS-1000 Deluxe, though, falls a little off the pace set by the Naim Uniti Nova when it comes to user interface(s). On the Gold Note's fascia there's a bright, crisp but undeniably small display – it gives a lot of relevant information, but stops short of displaying any album artwork or other metadata when streaming music. It's accompanied by a single large-ish turn-and-press control, through which it's possible to scroll laboriously through the display's menus and make selections and/or adjustments with a push.

Gold Note does have its own app (for iOS; Android users will need to rely on the more generic mconnect control app for a while). Unfortunately, this was not available at the time of review, but was is now available. We cannot therefore comment on its performance, and instead also had to rely on mconnect, which is packed with information and easy to navigate, although can be somewhat mercurial in daily use. We'd say go with the app, even purely on spec.

The sound of the IS-1000 Deluxe, though, its overall authority and fidelity, is enough to make grumbles about the control interfaces seem the smallest of beer. This is a big-boned and lithe listen, with more than enough flexibility to do justice to any type of music via any of its many inputs.

From a 200gm reissue of Fripp & Eno's (*No Pussyfooting*) [Opal] to a tragically thin original pressing of Rickie Lee Jones' *Pirates* [Warner Bros], the moving magnet phono input handles the input of a Clearaudio Concept turntable in fulsome manner. There's shine and bite at the top of the frequency range, depth and texture at the opposite end, and (in the case of Rickie Lee Jones, at least) brilliantly communicative levels of detail and character to the voice in the midrange. ►

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► The Gold Note's rapidity and grip contribute to unforced, virtuoso timing, and while there's stereotypically Italian richness in the midrange, the IS-1000 Deluxe nevertheless gets through a Tidal/MQA file of Karen O & Danger Mouse's *Turn the Light* [BMG] at quite a clip. What at first might seem like a slightly matter-of-fact presentation is revealed, in pretty short order, to be a combination of surefootedness and command that makes the IS-1000 Deluxe's reproduction sound effortless.

The fairly iffy Dolby Digital soundtrack to Andrew Lau's *Infernal Affairs* [Tartan Asia Extreme] input via one of the IS-1000 Deluxe's Toslink sockets is served up in equally forthright fashion. The Gold Note delivers brooding atmosphere and pyrotechnic Hong Kong cinema excesses with deft manoeuvrability – pleasingly, the scene in the hi-fi shop near the beginning of the movie is given all the detail it needs to describe the size of the shop floor explicitly.

The Gold Note maintains its broadly neutral tonality, its effortless momentum and its pin-sharp soundstaging across all of its inputs, both physical and wireless. Perhaps the most concise illustration of its specific strengths comes from a CD copy of Joni Mitchell's *People's Parties* [Asylum] via the IS-1000 Deluxe's balanced XLR inputs. Guitars shine weightlessly, the harmonies Joni sings with herself are lustrously detailed – and Wilton Felder's exquisite bass guitar cascades like a waterfall, the entry into and exit from each individual note absolutely distinct and square-edged. The low-level dynamic ability required to make a pacy bassline flow this naturally is not to be understated.

It's possible some listeners will question the lack of Bluetooth connectivity. It's not easy to get music out of the IS-1000 Deluxe in a hurry, because its interfaces aren't that rapid. Some listeners may crave a little more excitement, a little more lapel-grabbing, from their expensive all-in-one than is on display here, too – which is a perfectly valid position to take. But the Gold Note IS-1000 Deluxe is a more considered, and more considerate, performer than that. It's not an undemonstrative listen, but it's not about to put a rocket up your favourite recordings unnecessarily. Instead, it sounds smoothly sophisticated and authentically elegant – in the manner of all the best Italian paraphernalia. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Solid-state two-channel integrated amplifier

Analogue inputs: One switchable MM/MC phono input (RCA), one single-ended line-level input (RCA), one balanced input (XLR)

Digital inputs: Three digital optical inputs (Toslink), one digital coaxial input (RCA), one USB input (type A), one ethernet (LAN), wi-fi (dual band)

Analogue outputs: One line-level unbalanced (RCA), one line-level balanced (XLR)

Supported sample rates:

Digital coaxial and optical: up to 24bit/192kHz

USB: up to 24bit/192kHz

Input impedance:

High-level: 22k ohms

Phono: 47k ohms (MM), 470 ohms (MC)

Power amp: 22k ohms

Output impedance (preamp): 100 ohms

Power Output: 125wpc @ 8 ohms

Bandwidth: 20Hz–20kHz

Distortion: THD </+ 0.015%, 20Hz to 20kHz; IM </+ 0.015%

Signal to Noise Ratio: 100dB, (phono stage)

Type: Solid-state, switchable MM/MC

Input Sensitivity: 3mV for full power

Input impedance (MC): 47kOhm

Input capacitance (MM): 220pF

Output impedance: 100 ohms

Output level: 1V for 3mV input

RIAA linearity: +/- 0.1dB, 20Hz–20kHz

Distortion: </= 0.015% THD

Signal to Noise Ratio: 80dB (DAC)

Type: Solid-state high-resolution PCM and DSD-capable Burr-Brown digital-to-analogue converter

DAC resolution/supported digital formats: All PCM from 44.1KS/s to 192KS/s with word lengths up to 24-bit, DSD64 (2.8224MHz)

Frequency Response: 20Hz–20kHz ± 0.005 dB

Distortion: (THD + Noise): <0.00015%, 20Hz – 20kHz at 0dBFS

Price: £4,718

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