

HiFi Rose RS150B music server

by Jason Kennedy



High feature counts are not often to be found on audio equipment that wants to be taken seriously; less is more is a maxim that many brands have taken to heart because, in the analogue world at least, better sound should result if there are fewer switches in the signal path. It's also convenient that fewer features means lower manufacturing costs. For many this ethos has continued in the digital world but Korean newcomer HiFi Rose clearly didn't get the memo; the RS150B has so many features that it's positively baffling for the old skool audio enthusiast. However, those looking for a one box solution to most of their home entertainment requirements will find a lot that appeals.

The massive 21:9 style screen that takes up the majority of the front of the RS150B is not just a display, it's a touch screen that allows access to all of the features on this very slick media player. That's a phrase I haven't encountered for some time: there was a time when media players were very fashionable but the examples that existed were essentially computers attached to DACs and distinctly counter intuitive. The advent of app control has meant that such things are a lot more practical and capable today, this Rose is an Ultra HD 4K video and hi-res audio streamer, a fully featured DAC and a preamplifier. All you need is a power amplifier and some speakers and you're all set.

The build is as good as you get from far less heavily equipped audio equipment at the price, the case is in milled aluminium and there is a genuine plethora of high quality sockets on the back. The only connection I can't find is one for headphones, I did ask if it catered for Bluetooth types, but no, if you want this feature there's a cheaper Rose that fits the bill. The DAC is no slouch either with connections of virtually all varieties including AES/EBU in/out, I²S (with adjustable settings to suit different DACs) and both in- and outputs on USB. The streamer can access music files via ethernet, Wi-Fi, USB, SD card or with its own server software from an SSD drive installed in its dark underbelly. ▶

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► Specwise the DAC aims pretty high too. The B suffix in the name indicates that like many other brands Rose has had to switch from an Ashahi Kasei to an ESS Sabre chip that runs at up to 32-bits/384kHz and DSD512. It offers full MQA decoding and can stream from all the usual services with control by the Rose Connect app or Roon, and UPnP controllers too. For those who enjoy a proper handset there is a remote supplied, a Bluetooth one at that which means it doesn't need to be pointed at the box. The latter foxed me for a while until I was informed that you have to fit the Bluetooth dongle that comes in the box for any BT functions to work, presumably the solidity of the enclosure makes this a necessity. There is no specific Wi-Fi antenna as the BT dongle also provides this function; I note that the specs state “A few types of Wi-Fi is (*sic*) not supported”.

Having so many features does make the initial learning process a little steep for those of us not weaned on touchscreens; for instance, it took a while to notice that there are other icons than those initially shown on the home screen and that swiping sideways revealed more. I also got confused by the number of Rose apps available in the Apple Store, there appear to be at least three, two of which will operate the RS150B albeit one doesn't do half as much as the other. With a bit of RTFMing all of this was figured out and I was able to get its server to take a good look at the music on a Melco N10 music server. The result in terms of what was shown on the app wasn't terribly easy to navigate however as there is currently no way of showing just the albums made by a specific artist. Instead you get every track in order of album. The order in which the artists were listed was also unclear, fortunately there is a search

option and it proved fairly easy to track down the desired tracks. This is one area that will hopefully be improved over time via software updates to this Android-based device.

When you get it up and running the display reveals a pair of bright yellow VU meters that twitch in rather a distracting fashion. Delving into the menu I found numerous alternative styles of meter to look at as well as the option to get rid of them and see the artwork for the selected track instead, and this proved a lot more useful and appealing. There is also an option to defeat the display entirely but that would be a pity after the makers have gone to so much trouble. Volume can be controlled on the box, in the app or with the handset and I picked the option to have a numerical indication come up when changes were made. Connected via its RCA outputs to a Moor Amps Angel 6 power amp and PMC twenty5.26i speakers the Rose delivered a detailed yet fairly smooth presentation that was relaxing if not totally engaging, it's ►

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- a polished sound that has some similarities to the design of the casework on the RS150B.

It is quietly enjoyable, however; not drawing attention to itself but delivering the soul and groove of whatever is played. As the onboard volume control is often a limitation in DACs, I bypassed this by choosing from one of many fixed output voltage settings and connecting the Rose to a Townshend Allegri Reference preamplifier. This had a distinctly appealing effect and revealed the RS150B to be a rather more subtle performer than it first appeared. I used it to listen to the new Esperanza Spalding *Songwrights Apothecary Lab* album reviewed at the back of this magazine, and found clear differences in the results delivered by Tidal's Master and Qobuz's 24/48 stream, with the latter being clearly more relaxed and three dimensional, thus much more easy to enjoy. The vocal imaging in particular was excellent on 'Formwela 4', and the way that the backing vocal is used to extend the sense of stage width also came across well.

I found the DAC filter settings page in the menu and used one of the two linear phase options to get a more engaging result with better timing, albeit only when I remembered to press 'apply'. Anyone looking to get the best out of this Rose should listen to several of the options here as they make a clear difference to the sound and give it a degree of transparency that the default setting lacks. I listened to a variety of material this way and while it didn't quite hit the highs that can be achieved with a more dedicated audio streamer the results were impressive for such a comprehensively equipped device. Chick Corea Akoustic Band's 'On Green Dolphin Street' [*Live, Concord Jazz*] has plenty of energy and snap while John Fahey's *Your Past Comes Back to Haunt You: The Fonotone Years, 1958–1965* [Dust to Digital], containing lo-fi recordings of acoustic guitar, proved to be highly engaging thanks to the way that the Rose puts flow before detail.

I tried another filter setting, it's hard to choose when your favourite NOS (non oversampling) option isn't available, and alighted on minimum phase, slow roll off, which turned out to be a little on the polite side. However combine this balance with the emotionally and musically raw 'Pensacola' by Joan Osborne [*Relish, Mercury*] and you have a surprisingly gripping, clear and powerful sound. This track often sounds too raucous and edgy but the Rose delivered its intrinsic message rather well, proving that full on exposure can mask the message if that recording isn't cut for revealing systems.

You can get a better streaming DAC for the Rose RS150B's asking price but not one with anything like the feature set on offer here, nor the video processing powers. It's sheer flexibility is remarkable in itself, never have I seen different levels of fixed output before nor has filter setting been so straightforward. It would be nice if more of these changes could be made with the app but I suspect that the app applies to more than one Rose device. All in all however this product sounds as good as it looks, and it looks pretty slick. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: AV streamer, DAC, preamplifier

Analogue Inputs: One single ended (via RCA jacks)

Digital Inputs: One coaxial S/PDIF (via RCA jack), one TOSLink, one AES/EBU, one USB B, one HDMI ARC

DAC Resolution/Supported Digital

Formats: FLAC/WAV/MP3, etc.

Sampling rate for D/A conversion
384kHz/32 bit, DSD512

Music services/Wi-Fi inputs: Spotify
Connect, Bluetooth, Airplay,
Tidal, Qobuz

Analogue Outputs: One stereo
balanced (via XLR connectors),
one stereo unbalanced (via
RCA jacks)

Digital Outputs: One coaxial S/PDIF
(via RCA jack), one TOSLink, one
AES/EBU, one I2S (via DVI), one I2S
(via RJ45)

Frequency Response: 20Hz to 20,000
(+/-0.5dB)

Distortion (THD + Noise): 0.0003%
(balanced, 1KHz 6.5Vrms), 0.0004%
(unbalanced, 1KHz 2.2Vrms)

User Interface: 14.9inch touch screen
display (on main unit), Rose
application software for iOS, Android

Dimensions (HxWxD): 123 x 430 x 316mm

Weight: 13kg

Price:

Manufacturer: Citech Co., Ltd

URL: eng.hifirose.com

Distributor: Henley Audio

Tel: +44(0) 1235 424637

URL: henleyaudio.co.uk