



**CONTROLS:** Hardly bursting with features, the Caspian amp's interface is distinctive yet user-friendly. The input selector and volume control have a precise, well-oiled feel, echoed in the excellent illuminated status indicators. The semi-transparent turquoise remote control is something of a stylistic mismatch, but is practical enough in use and allows control of a full Roksan system.

**CONNECTIONS:** Back panel provisions are fairly standard, but include two pairs of preamplifier level outputs – for a tri-wired system perhaps?

£895 ☎ 020 8900 6802 🌐 www.roksan.co.uk

# ROKSAN CASPIAN MKII

Second generation Caspian excels in most areas – given time

The Caspian (with a silent 'amplifier' suffix) is a straightforward, modestly specified amp, with a power rating of 70 watts per channel from a 350VA toroidal transformer. Launched less than a year ago, this MkII version features new input-switching relays, and is suitable for line-level sources only – turntables will require a separate stage.

The amp is supplied with a spectacularly inappropriate-looking semi-transparent remote control, but is otherwise fairly frugally equipped, with a grippy volume control with an LED indicator, -20dB mute switch, and two sets of preamp-level outputs. The current version is based around a new, wider bandwidth circuit, with updated, ultra-low noise input components, better drive and output transistors, improved power supply caps and Filmic coupling caps.

There are improvements to the remote to prevent spurious interaction with other products using RC5-coded infra-red control, and an output protection board run from its own dedicated power supply replaces the belt and braces protection previously provided. The amp is solidly built and well finished, and is well protected against overheating and abuse.

Previous, rather dated, experience of an earlier version of the Caspian suggested a competent but unexciting amplifier, and initial results were consistent with this. But after a few days under power, performance improved remarkably. Any suggestion of greyness or granularity simply disappeared, leaving a clean, solid-sounding amplifier which seems to illuminate the music from inside. It's not perfect – it lacks a certain gravitas thanks to a rather lightweight lower

**VERDICT**

**SOUND**  
★★★★☆

**FEATURES**  
★★★★☆

**BUILD**  
★★★★☆

**VALUE**  
★★★★☆

Bold, outgoing amplifier with matching refinement, grip and timing, and a supreme indifference to the nature of the loudspeaker load. An excellent and safe choice at the price.

**CHECKLIST**

LINE INPUTS	6
PHONO INPUT	X
PREAMP OUTPUT	✓
MAIN AMP INPUT	✓
HEADPHONE SOCKET	X

midband, and the treble region doesn't have the refinement or 'hear through' quality of the best in the group. But set beside the strengths, these shortcomings are minor league stuff.

The Caspian has a very coherent, together quality. The bass is solid and propulsive, with good timing, and a bouncy, rhythmic quality that brought Tracy Chapman's *Mountains O' Things* startlingly to life. One of its more surprising qualities is its ability to play with the big boys at high volume levels. It's not just that it goes loud; it does so in a consistent matter, and just doesn't seem willing to let go. The Caspian was happy with the various loudspeakers used in the course of the test – it sounded in command, and unfazed in every case. The Massive Attack album sounded truly massive, but with excellent instrumental separation at most volume levels, and a deep, positive and tuneful bass to match. Only when the volume was turned right down to 'don't wake the children at midnight' levels did the Roksan betray a noticeable loss of presence and detail when compared to the best of the rest.

With this one exception, the Roksan distinguished itself by its easy resolving power, its sharply etched midband which helped instruments and voices live independent lives, and by its ability to get to grips with complex, difficult material. The Caspian sailed through the Bruckner test piece, marshalling the massive forces at the end of the first movement of the *Ninth Symphony* without any strain of loss of euphony. It comes across as confident and alive, as well as being muscular and dynamically sound over a wide range of volume levels. It cruised through most of the tests, planting its imprimatur near the top of this month's group. 📍