

## INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Tube hybrid integrated amplifier. Rated at 70W/8ohm  
Made by: Supravox, Montévrain, France  
Supplied by: VAL Hi-Fi, Ashford, Kent  
Telephone: 07717 477994  
Web: www.supravox.fr; www.valhifi.co.uk  
Price: £3350

AUDIO  
FILE

hi-finews  
HIGHLY  
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# Supravox Vouvray

This famous French brand was launched in 1956 – the very same year as *Hi-Fi News* – and continues to cut a very distinctive path. We test its latest tube/hybrid integrated Review: **Tom Anderson** Lab: **Paul Miller**

**W**hen your brand has been around for over 60 years, designing a new integrated amplifier becomes a matter of balance. You need to weigh up the company's rich heritage with electronics that compete with the best new kids on the block. Perhaps something to caress the ears with valve warmth and character, combined with the grunt of a transistor output to drive even the most reticent of speakers? Enter the Supravox Vouvray.

This hybrid integrated amplifier blends a 12AU7 triode-based preamp stage with a Class AB power amp based on rugged Toshiba devices. It is not a revolutionary approach to blending the strengths of tubes and transistors, but there is a certain elegance to the architecture that is reflected in the neat internal layout and screening [see pic, below right].

### GOOD AS GOLD

Inputs and outputs are stoically analogue across a trio of line-level RCAs, a moving-magnetic phono stage with grounding post and a single suite of speaker binding posts at the rear. Your output options are doubled thanks to a headphone socket up front. All terminals are extremely robust, gold-plated for key signal connections and leave plenty of space for the most outrageously chunky interconnects and speaker cables. There's nothing 'digital' to see here and certainly no Wi-Fi passwords or Bluetooth pairing required!

The front fascia is nostalgia realised in aluminium. Smooth-turning aluminium knobs sit below slots in the robust face plate, affording the triodes a window to show off their mellow glow – a golden hue neatly replicated by the VU meter illumination. The fascia's legends are inked with an italicised serif font straight out of the 1960s and, to my eyes at least, only

**RIGHT:** Shielded transformer and PSU [left] occupy a large portion of the enclosure. Triode line stage [lower right] feeds power amp with pairs of devices on heatsink [top]. MM phono stage sits right behind the RCAs [top right]

the over-sized Supravox logo detracts from what is otherwise a sophisticated retro-cosmetic. It's a bit of a looker, then.

### COOL HAND

Yet the industrial design here is not all sepia-filtered imagery from circa 1956. The absence of retro lever switches, and addition of an obvious IR eye and orange LEDs for power and volume, bring the overall design a little more up to date, and the heavily machined aluminium remote handset would look just as cool with a 21st century Class D integrated. Better in many cases, even if the handset's only features are volume adjustment, mute and the ability to withstand small nuclear strikes.

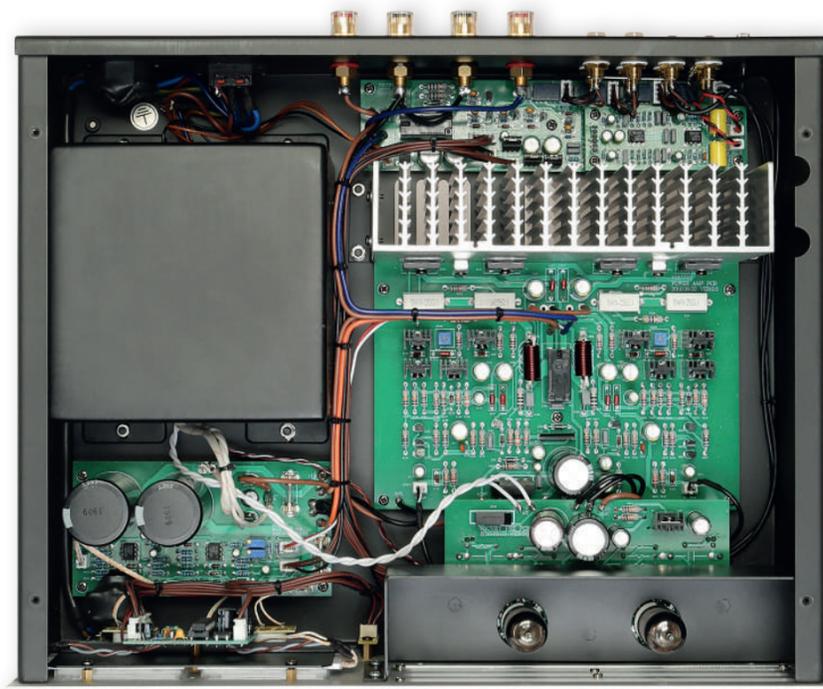
And then there is that sumptuous casework. It comprises a lacquered MDF shell that wraps completely around the top, sides and underneath, hinting at the wood-cheeked audio components of

old. Yet, even here the Vouvray delivers contemporary flair with a rich black piano lacquer finish, buffed to an orange-peel free mirror that would leave several high-end loudspeaker manufacturers blushing. The visual depth of the paint is eclipsed only by the surface's truly class-leading ability to attract dust from every corner of the room and possibly beyond...

### REAL KEEPER

Despite the lack of traditional top vents, cooling seems not to be an issue. In practice, its combination of heatsink, front fascia slots, rear panel ventilation and a small vent on the underside manage to keep the rig no toastier than 'mildly warm' even through a fairly adventurous evening of Amsterdam Trance Radio via a streamer.

Which brings us neatly on to the elephant in the music room. In an age when stored and streamed content is



replacing physical music media, the Vouvray's shunning of all things digital could be perceived as a bit of a howler. Yet, I'm not sure it is. The whole ethos and design of this gorgeous hybrid makes it a timeless 'keeper' against an ever-evolving digital landscape. Simply get a good streamer and hook it up to the Vouvray's line level input. In a few years' time, when the streamer will be looking long of tooth and lacking current features, this amp will serve you just as well for the next gen of digital player and quite possibly a few generations beyond.

### STRIKING IT RICH

Thankfully none of that really mattered as I carefully placed Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love* [EMI 062-24 0384 1] on my Michell Orbe turntable [HFN Mar '03] and lowered the SME/Goldring combination into place. Bypassing the Vouvray's on-board phono

stage with a Primare R32 [HFN Jan '12], the character of the French fancy shone through with an immediately engaging sound free from overt character or bias. Given the tubes on show I was expecting something altogether more colourful, yet

*'I was dealt yellow cards from the spousal noise police'*

Kate's pitch and timbre on 'And Dream Of Sheep' was natural and accurate with a rich, breathy quality that effortlessly scaled with her high notes on the track.

Imaging in the centre of the soundstage was particularly strong, with pin-point positioning of instruments and vocals between the speakers. While I have heard wider and more spacious presentations, the rock-solid central presence and enviable front-back depth more than made up for any limitations in sheer airy scale.

The multitrack vocal and distinct right/left channel separation of 'Under Ice' can easily sound a little thin, but with the

**ABOVE:** The polished wooden cabinet is a blast from the past but sets off the illuminated 'VU' meters, partially exposed triode tubes and chunky rotaries to grand 'retro' effect

Vouvray it only served to solidify Kate's voice, lending it a believable three-dimensional quality, albeit constrained between the left and right speakers.

Importantly, the Vouvray's phono stage does not disappoint, with the amp's even-handed and musical presentation remaining intact. Sure, my costlier outboard R32 offered a little more sparkle at the top and a more dynamic midband against the Vouvray's weightier and slightly thicker presentation, but even comparing the two favourably is a nod to the quality of the built-in eq stage. You'll have to dig deeper in the purse to make an effective MM upgrade, but those with a penchant for MCs will need extra kit from the outset.

### SOLID PUNCH

There was some irony in that my streamer needed a firmware update and the fickle Antelope Audio Zodiac DAC [HFN Feb '15] needed rebooting before I could get either to work. Yet the combination of components here is far from a sonic culture clash. From the outset, the Vouvray does a superb job of turning streamed hi-res audio into the same eminently enjoyable, musically engaging and foot-tapping experience that it does with vinyl.

There's no hint of sluggishness, with plenty of dynamic power and a rather lush top end that manages to dance the fine line of extension and clarity without becoming brittle. This is one of those amplifiers that makes it easy to stop analysing and, instead, lets you immerse yourself in the tune rather than the sonic machinations of the system as a whole. ➔

### FRENCH CONNECTION

Supravox is one of France's most venerable audio brands with members of the founding Dorliac family developing drivers for radios in the 1930s and full-range AINiCo transducers in the 1940s. The Supravox brand was formally registered in 1956 by Madame Dorliac when the company began supplying drivers for the growing TV market. That led to RTF (Radio Télévision Française) commissioning Supravox to develop drivers for its recording studios, and in 1964 the 215mm RTF64 was born. This found favour with DIY'ers of the day and was also used in Elipson's famous spherical BS50 speaker with its shell-like acoustic reflectors.

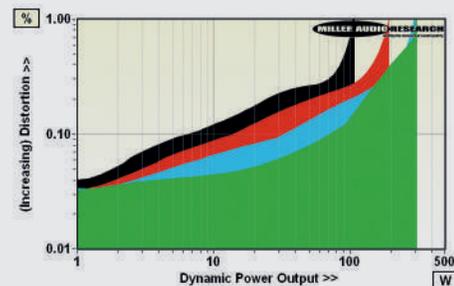
After a change of ownership in the late 1970s, the brand produced its own audiophile loudspeakers while continuing to advance its portfolio of full-range drivers. However, as the hi-fi market moved firmly into two-way and three-way designs, Supravox fell into a fallow period. Fast forward to 2017 when a cash injection from new owners Akylis Capital reinvigorated the brand, resulting in Supravox's current lineup of loudspeakers, drivers, speaker kits and its first foray into electronics, the Vouvray integrated amplifier.

# LAB REPORT

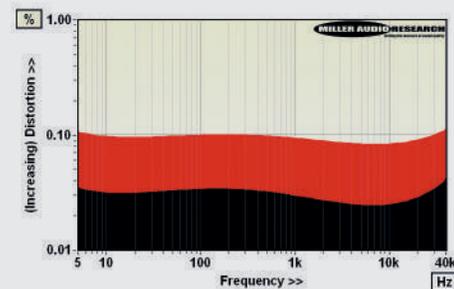
## SUPRAVOX VOUVRAY

'The VU meters', says Supraxox 'indicate the peak power output of each channel'. As ever these are largely decorative with a 1W/8ohm output indicated by the number '20' on the display's lower scale, increasing to the maximum '140' at just 10W/8ohm. The amplifier's *real* maximum output is higher than the rated 70W/8ohm at 2x85W/8ohm but the 120W/4ohm specification is not met simply because the Vouvrays protection activates above 85W/4ohm. Under dynamic conditions, however, the amplifier's full capability is revealed at 110W, 195W and 300W into 8, 4 and 2ohm loads and 310W/1ohm (or 17.6A at 10msec/1% THD). This is illustrated in Graph 1, below, alongside the steady increase in distortion with output from 0.04%/1W to 0.12%/10W and 0.3% at the rated 70W/8ohm. However, and in marked contrast with almost all other amplifiers, this classic application of Toshiba 2SC5200/2SA1943 output devices sees a *reduction* in distortion with decreasing load impedance, falling to 0.03%/1W, 0.04%/10W and 0.1%/70W into 1ohm. This atypical THD vs. load behaviour is nonetheless consistent with frequency [see Graph 2, below] which, from a subjective standpoint, is likely to be very positive.

Noise, on the other hand, is a little higher than average – a mix of hum and midband noise rather than HF hiss – and the A-wtd S/N ratio is necessarily compromised at 77dB (re. 0dBW). The response rolls away below 20Hz to a sensible -3dB/3Hz and reaches out above -0.17dB/20kHz to -2.8dB/100kHz – figures that will see only mild modification with low/variable impedance speaker loads courtesy of the amplifier's moderate ~0.09ohm source impedance. Finally, overall gain is quite high at +42.9dB (just 20mV required for 1W/8ohm). PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 17.6A



ABOVE: Distortion versus frequency over an extended 5Hz-40kHz range (1W/8ohm, black; 10W/8ohm, red)

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Continuous power (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	85W / 85W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	110W / 195W / 300W / 310W
Input sensitivity (re. 0dBW/70W)	20mV / 174mV
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.084-0.100ohm
Freq. response (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	-0.08 to -0.16dB/-2.8dB
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/70W)	77.1dB / 95.6dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz; 0dBW)	0.027-0.040%
Power consumption (idle/rated o/p)	41W / 270W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	430x188x358mm / 19.5kg



ABOVE: No 'digital' here – just one MM phono and three line inputs on RCA with single sets of switched speaker outputs on 4mm sockets/binding posts

The super-taut beat at the beginning of David Bowie's 'Dollar Days' from the album *Blackstar* [ISO/Columbia; 96kHz/24-bit] hits home with a solid punch and surprisingly robust LF extension. As the track progresses, the bass develops a more complex character, with a loping tempo that's presented without congestion. If this track can sound muddled through amps with less control, or underwhelming and cool via amps with excessive damping, then the Vouvrays strikes a happy balance of weight and textural detail throughout the bass.

### DOUBLE DOWN

Nevertheless, I did discover some subtle differences in perceived bass reproduction depending on the partnering speaker. While my large Tannoys would normally out-bass any standmount, the Vouvrays really gelled with Fyne Audio's diminutive F1-8 at the low end, the pairing plumbing greater depths than the floorstanders could reach.

We are not talking scuba-gear deep either way, but this amp certainly has a snorkel and decent free diving range when it comes to exploring the lows. As the volume

increases, there appears to be plenty of grip and control on the driver cones with no overt boom or overhang too – not a comment you would likely level at any

LEFT: Plus/minus buttons on Vouvrays remote govern the motorised volume knob while mute switches off the speaker outlets



amplifier running purely tube-power I'd wager. Moreover, the Vouvrays' sweet balance encourages that very behaviour, egging me on to generous volume levels that put a significant dent in my weekly allowance of yellow cards from the spousal noise police.

Mind you, raising the volume significantly isn't a quick process if you use the remote control as there is no acceleration to the volume knob's fairly sedate rotational pace. Yet give the chunky knob a few seconds to reach 12 o'clock or beyond and you are rewarded with wildly swinging VU meters and sound that packs serious enough power for ASBO level SPLs with all but the most insensitive speakers [see PM's Lab Report, opposite].

With even modestly efficient speakers the Vouvrays is more than happy to indulge party-level sound pressures and it didn't hold back on the dancefloor when I spun up the anthemic 'We Come 1' from Faithless's seminal *Outrospective* [Cheeky 74321 86555244/16]. If an amp can make me leap off the chair to thrust a pointed finger in the air and belt out the chorus like I am at Glastonbury, it's a good 'un in my opinion. Job done, Supravox. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

Rarely have my prejudices been so comprehensively dispelled by audition. For all its triode glow and retro looks, the Vouvrays is a rich, powerful, and articulate amplifier that forgoes clinical detailing and ultrawide imaging in favour of an infectious musicality that'll get you bobbing and rocking to the widest variety of music. The Vouvrays may buck the digital trend, but it is arguably all the better for it.

Sound Quality: 80%

