

# Monomorphonic marvel

**Slim, cool-running but with a devastating punch, Rotel serves-up another slice of ICEpower. Paul Miller orders six...**

It's third time lucky for *HFN* readers as we present the last in our exclusive trilogy of Rotel's new Class D power amplifiers, a short series that began with the seven-channel RB-1077 (Dec '05) and stereo RB-1092 (Apr '06) models. The £1000 RB-1091 is the most affordable but simplest of the trio, employing just one of B&O's

ICEpower1000 modules in a minimalist, monophonic chassis that's rated at 500W/8ohm but capable, as my Lab Report illustrates, of delivering in excess of 600W/8ohm. The fact that Rotel uses this technology to deliver such power while maintaining a cool ambient temperature makes the slimline RB-1091 perfect for custom installations where multiple boxes will be

tucked away in a cupboard. It's also possible to mix-n-match the RB-1091 with the stereo RB-1092 for five or seven-channel applications as both amplifiers have the same gain (+27.15dB, to be precise).

#### HIDDEN DEPTHS

That these amplifiers are based on ICEpower modules is thoroughly appropriate because, like the apocryphal iceberg, the deceptively small chassis of both the RB-1092 and

DETAILS	
	Rotel RB-1091 power amplifier
	£1000
	<a href="http://www.europe.rotel.com">www.europe.rotel.com</a>
	01903 221600
	Effortless, speaker-wrestling power
	Treble could be sweeter

RB-1091 amplifiers is no real indication of their hidden depths. Hook either amplifier into almost any speaker, play fast and loose with the volume control and you'll be picking bits of tweeter out from under your eyebrows long before the 'berg has worked up a sweat. You also need to be



ABOVE: Slim, immensely powerful, and with a sound able to bring out the best with plain vanilla CD, multichannel DVD-A/SACD and movies, Rotel's RB-1091 could be the home cinema bargain of the year

**DETAILS**



**REAR PANEL**

The RB-1091 is about as close to plug-and-play as you'll get with a single phono input and a choice of twist-and-lock Speakon plus parallel pairs of (mono) speaker outlets. In keeping with Rotel's policy of home integration, the RB-1091 is also equipped with 12V triggers to remotely switch this, and other, components.

cautious of the 4mm speaker outputs, which are floating (balanced). Do not, under any circumstances, connect them to a loudspeaker with an earthed chassis/crossover/treble

quality, the crisp transient attack of each note followed by a collapse into silence that seems to suck the air from the room. An analysis of the electrical signal reveals transients

**'Living with a six-pack of RB-1091s is akin to experiencing your very own Tango advert'**

unit, rare though these are. For a description of Class D amplification and ICEpower, please refer back to the sidebars in our last two reviews.

**SOUND QUALITY**

As a stereo pair, the RB-1091 is typically very easy-going, painting its musical canvas with a garrulous spirit, a boundless enthusiasm barely contained by its kilowatt capacity. Living with a six-pack of RB-1091s is akin to experiencing your very own Tango advert – often surprising if not shocking in its liberation of great slaps of multichannel power. But let's kick off with CD and even a slightly compressed recording like the Kaiser Chiefs' *Employment* has a weight and eagerness that belies the grungy quality of the bass, allowing you to get to grips with the sparkling electricity of the music.

Then again, while the RB-1091 is never phased by busy-sounding material, the latent headroom of the ICEpower module is only truly revealed by music populated by substantive, dynamic contrasts. It need not be a complex orchestral CD, for even the steel strings of Michael Hedges' guitar (*Breakfast in the Field*) take on a truly stunning

lasting 50msec or less, during which time the RB-1091 could be sustaining clean peaks of several hundred watts within a mean output of just 10W.

A conventional amp would simply clip, blunting the impact of these instantaneous dynamics. You'd not hear a burst of distortion, but neither would you experience the very clean and crisp articulation of these notes. And the tougher the load or less sensitive the speaker, the more apparent is the scale of the 1091's advantage, whether you are listening to plain vanilla CD, multichannel DVD-A/SACD or settling back to have your cage rattled by a good movie.

**CUTTING-EDGE CINEMA**

And it's in this guise where a clutch of five or more RB-1091s has the capacity to evolve a very good home cinema into an experience that's truly state-of-the-art. Take my favourite chase sequence (Chapters 22 onwards from *The Island*) where Ewen McGregor rolls those iron rail carriage wheels from off the articulated trailer into the path of his pursuers. Now the '1091s might not sound quite as sweet or well-rounded as the six Arcam P1s that populate the

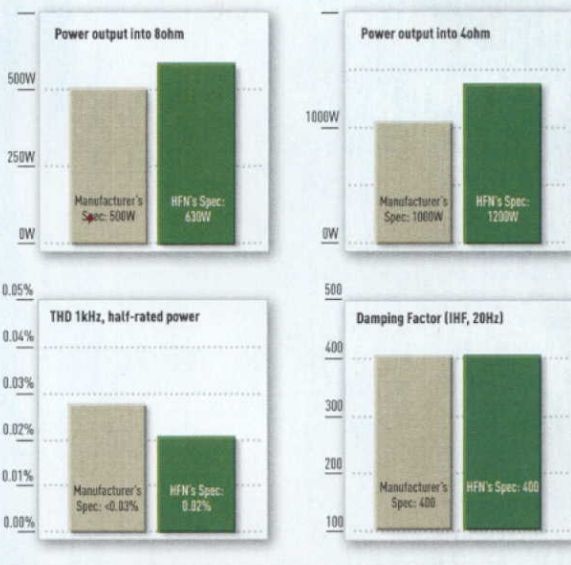
**DATA FILE**

**SPECIFICATIONS**

Design .....	Class D
Power .....	500W per channel
Dimensions .....	432 x 92 x 407mm
Weight .....	7.8kg

**LAB REPORT**

As if to demonstrate that the performance of B&O's ICEpower modules is truly consistent, regardless of how many are stuffed into one box, the technical specification for this mono RB-1091 is almost identical to that of the RB-1092 reviewed last month. You may compare for yourself by downloading the QC Suite reports from [www.milleraudioresearch.com/avtech](http://www.milleraudioresearch.com/avtech). Specifically then, this mono chassis still delivers the same 630W/8 ohm output (unchanged under dynamic conditions) which increases to 1.2kW and 1.58kW into 4 and 2ohm, respectively. Furthermore, with a mean -0.02 ohm output impedance up to 10kHz, this means the RB-1091 will continue to deliver its flat 20Hz-30kHz/8 ohm response into real-world loudspeakers and with a distortion (in the midrange at least) that's <0.1% from 1W to 600W. As is the nature of Class D amplifiers, distortion does increase at higher frequencies (-0.3% at 10kHz and -0.6% at 20kHz) but noise is low and the A-wtd S/N ratio very wide indeed at some 117.5dB (re full output).



**HI-FI NEWS VERDICT**

The RB-1091 is, in every respect, the answer to every custom installer's prayers – easy to accommodate, cool-running and monumentally powerful. And, pound-per-watt, it might easily become the home cinema bargain of the year.

AVTech cinema, but no other amplifier has delivered the gut-wrenching impact of several tonnes of rusting iron bouncing off the tarmac with quite this deft efficiency. I challenge anyone not to at least flinch from these images, seemingly hurled by the '1091's inexhaustible energy out of the screen and into the room. □

**REVIEW SYSTEM**

- Sources:** Denon DVD-A1XVMk II Universal DVD player
- Amps:** Arcam AV9 processor/pre-amp
- Speakers:** B&W Nautilus 802/804 loudspeakers
- Cables:** Townshend interconnects and QED speaker cable