

hardware review

Pink Faun Scion: the secrets of streaming success

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Pink Faun Scion server/streamer

Pink Faun is dedicated to digital streaming to greater extent than most other companies in the niche within a niche that is high end audio, and there are many that claim to be streaming purists. Pink Faun was originally created by the owners of Triple M, an audio shop in Rhenen, the Netherlands, whose owners decided to make their own gear and developed a range of electronics. They got into streaming early on when it was known as computer audio and we reviewed one of their combinations ten years ago, the 3.4 streamer and 3.32 DAC looked good at the time but do not compare with the Scion you see before you.

The reason is Jord Groen, a customer who became so enthused by the Pink Faun electronics that he joined the business to help build and sell the equipment and ended up becoming its owner in

2019, since that time his aim has been to make it the best streaming electronics brand on the market. Out went the relatively basic casework around repurposed computers of the early years, in came high end build and a proprietary operating system developed by the company with the sole aim of maximising streaming sound quality. It's worth noting that very few companies of Pink Faun's scale have created their own OS because it is a hugely time consuming business and there are well regarded systems available off the shelf that do a very good job.

Jord had greater ambitions than that however, he wanted to make the best and decided that a ground up OS that was designed to work with their own electronics was the only way to achieve his goals. The Scion has a low-noise linear power supply with independent outputs of the digital outputs which they say improves stability, minimises noise and as a result preserves timing accuracy.

The Scion is the entry level server and streamer in Pink Faun's small catalogue and as you can see it is built and finished to an exceptionally high standard with none of the frippery found in many more affordable alternatives. There's no screen because you can see everything you need to on the tablet or smartphone that you are using to control it, there are only three outputs; USB alongside S/PDIF via RCA and AES/EBU connections. There isn't even a power switch in the normal sense just a button under the front panel that takes the Scion in and out of standby, it is effectively always on but remains cool when in standby.

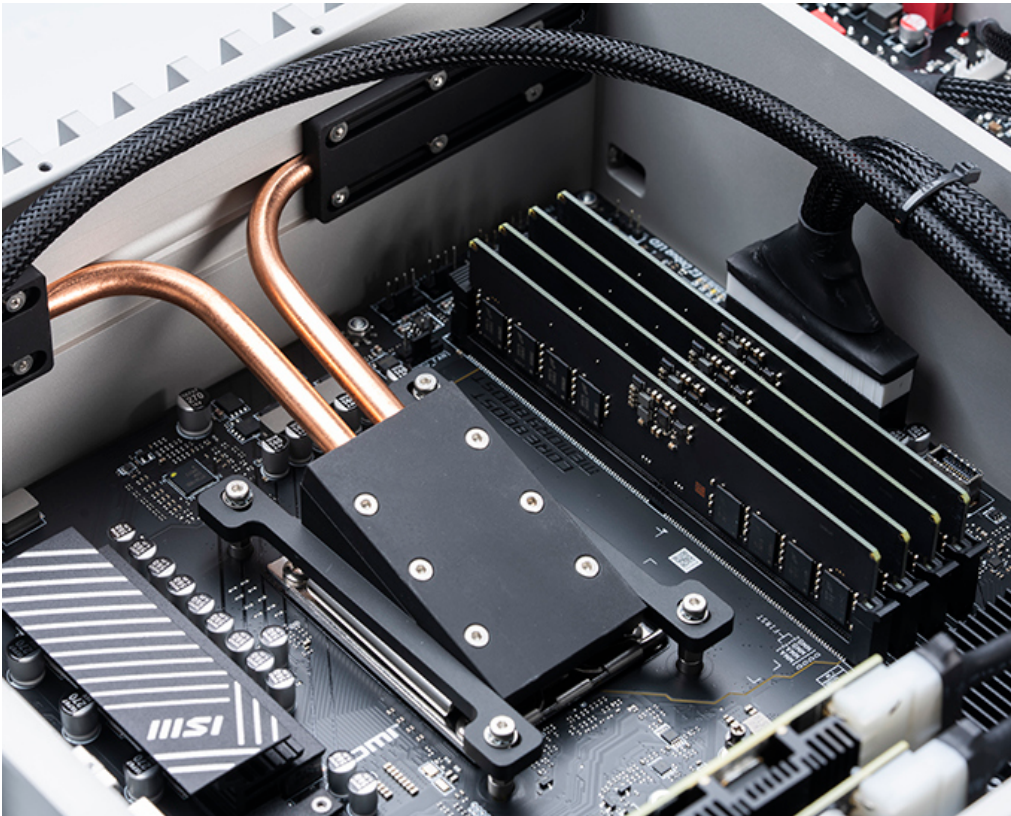


Perhaps surprisingly the Scion can only be controlled by Roon. Pink Faun developed a way of having Roon control playback whilst its own OS runs the processor within this server/streamer, which they way means that Roon does not affect sound quality in the way that it can when it is busily running the whole show. I appreciate that Roon is one of the most popular control systems available in high end streaming but my experience with it in the past has been that while the user experience is very rich it can have a negative effect on sound quality compared to less complex alternatives.

While you can access all the key streaming services via Roon the Scion also offers Qobuz Connect which essentially bypasses Roon altogether, this is the only Connect service available and needs to be selected via the machine's online interface where you have a choice between Roon and Qobuz Connect, essentially it's for those who don't have their own libraries. As a server the Scion comes with a terabyte of SSD storage as standard but can be supplied with 4TB or 8TB for larger collections.

In terms of digital numbers it is good for up to 32-bit/768kHz PCM and DSD512, some systems go higher with DSD but they are not usually high end brands but specs war contenders. Network connection is by ethernet only because wi-fi connection is a great way to get noise into any device. The Scion was supplied with braided Pink Faun cables for power, ethernet and USB, my sample came with a Schuko plug on the power cable and I was able to use this with the Ansuz Mainz8 distribution that feeds my system, these cables are not included in the price below however.

The process of moving music files onto the Scion involves an extra step over the usual, that being a visit to the unit's .local webpage where the NAS mode needs to be enabled, and finally disabled once the files have been transferred. This has been done in order to minimise noise by



reducing the amount of processing activity whilst in playback mode, which is the ultimate aim of Pink Faun products. Unlike some competing servers moving files onto the drive is a fast and painless experience.

Sound quality

Soon after I started using the Scion a fellow enthusiast asked me what it was like, I said that it's 'immensely calm'. The massive effort the Pink Faun put into reducing noise in all areas of this device pays off with a sense of quiet solidity that means that the music appears from a background that seems totally still, like a large expanse of flat water, able to absorb any amount of outside interference and not have it effect the result.

Which means that the Scion amplifies the difference between recordings dramatically, familiar piece of music turn out to have so much character not only in the playing but the recording that they are almost reborn. Putting another similar piece of music on afterwards is like entering another world, the degree of compression, the naturalness of the acoustic or otherwise, the band width and dynamic range, all these factors are magnified to an extraordinary degree.

The better examples feel like they could be wound up to max volume and still remain clean, with a huge soundstage and a sense of depth that is uncanny. I don't play the live recording of Ryan Adams and the Cardinals at Das Haus in Germany very often these days but the Scion made me think that I should do so every night. Roon's auto selection 'Radio' mode chose his Dear John from the *Jacksonville City Lights* album which is also live but streamed from Qobuz, this sounded a lot more raw and gritty, with a smaller venue scale and more up front presentation that lacks the ease of what is apparently an audience recording at Das Haus.



Pink Faun Scion

I switched to Patricia Barber playing *Subway Station #5* which has a slightly thick sound but is such a powerful piece of music that it warrants more air time. Here I was impressed by the way that the Scion presented this dynamic piece, it was not rushed and everything was laid out clearly. All of which made the intensity of the piano playing in particular that much more powerful, Barber is truly on fire on what was presumably a live studio recording. It made me seek out live versions of this piece but that proved fruitless, maybe it's so heavy that it didn't make the cut alongside her more refined 'hits'.



The Scion reveals big differences between recordings because it reveals so much detail within each piece of music, the richness of musical information far outweighs the richness of metadata presented by Roon. This makes the better examples sound even better than usual and drew me down an ECM label rabbit hole that I have a tendency to explore at the worst of times and was positively a festival of delights here. *Diamond Cut Diamond* from Arild Andersen's *Achirana* has relatively sharp leading edges by ECM standards, possibly to highlight the dexterity of the upright bass player's hands but it's a spectacular capture of great musicians at work and the Scion makes this abundantly clear.

It had me up late exploring the many great works from the label but I was lured away by guitarist Bill Frisell's *Beautiful Dreamers*, this is a little more compressed and sounds more forward but the music is so wonderful that it doesn't matter. The same can also be said of Frank Zappa's *Chunga's Revenge* which sounds so grungy and raw that it's shocking, yet the live and direct nature of the performance makes it totally glorious in its own filthy way.

I used both the RCA coax and USB outputs from the Scion and both delivered very high resolution and musically enthralling results via my Bricasti M1 DAC and the Cinnamon Galle that I have had access to of late.

In the past I have noted that Qobuz Connect tends to sound better than regular Qobuz does on JPlay which I use control my own streamer. I thought it would therefore be interesting to contrast Qobuz on Roon with the Connect option via the Scion. While I got a highly engaging and musically coherent result via Roon switching the Pink Faun over to Qobuz Connect did result in a fairly big improvement in terms of imaging which gained a three dimensionality and leading edge definition.

Conclusion

The Pink Faun Scion has proved to be a voyage of discovery through my digital music collection, revealing dimensions and details that few components have managed in the past. The company's dedication to quiet operation and low noise pays off with massive amounts of detail about the performance, the recording, the mastering which means that you hear the differences between recordings that the myriad variables in that field should create.

This doesn't make bad recordings sound bad, *Chunga's Revenge* was one of many

examples where more of the original can be heard, it may not be pretty but it isn't supposed to be, it's vital and real, it gets you to into the mastering room where such things were finalised before release. The Scion gets you closer to the original and that's what high fidelity is supposed to be about.

The Pink Faun Scion is expensive but that is what it costs to make a no compromise, state of the art server/streamer in the sort of numbers that are likely to sell. If you want to hear your music files as they truly are there isn't much competition.

Pros

Extremely low noise floor gives an "immensely calm" sound, letting recording character come through

Reveals fine detail and real differences between recordings and masterings

High-end build and a proprietary OS built purely for sound quality

Handles high-res formats (up to 32-bit/768kHz PCM, DSD512)

Qobuz Connect option adds extra imaging and three-dimensionality over Roon

Simple, no-frills design focused entirely on performance

Cons

Expensive

Roon-only control (aside from Qobuz Connect) won't suit everyone

Loading music requires an extra NAS-mode step via the unit's webpage

No screen or standard power switch — everything relies on an app

Ethernet only, no wi-fi

Specifications

Type: solid-state music streamer and server with SSD storage.

Storage: 1TB SSD hard drive (optional 4TB or 8TB).

Network connection: RJ45 ethernet.

Digital Outputs: USB, coaxial RCA, AES/EBU XLR

Operating system: Pink Faun OS

Formats supported: not specified

Data rates: up to 32-bit 768kHz PCM, DSD512

Streaming services: Roon, Qobuz Connect

Finish: anodised silver or black

Dimensions (HxWxD): 120 x 450 x 355mm

Weight: 15kg

Warranty: 3 years

