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The phrase 'traditional values in a modern setting' best describes AMC's remarkable CVT3030 valve amplifier, says David Price.

It's surprising that AMC should go the way of the dodo. Their £750

CVT3030 integrated valve amplifier was a cracking product, one that deserved to succeed more than most. The truth is that its concept was probably just a little too ahead of its time.

If NAD had ever made a tube amp, then this would have been it. Designed by Peter Bath (who worked for Dolby, AR and indeed NAD), and manufactured by IEEE in Taipei (makers of Cambridge Audio, Luxman, Proton and indeed NAD products), it shared considerable DNA with the ubiquitous 3020.

While the technical design was different, the concept was remarkably similar - an innovative, beautifully built, plainly styled, no-nonsense integrated amplifier with focus very much on sonics. This time though, valves were used to deliver the sonic goods.

In 1992 tubes were about as trendy as 1970s fashion. Despite the efforts of - among others - this magazine, the joys of the thermionic valve weren't as universally recognised back then as now. Many were mystified then when the CVT3030 appeared on the scene. It looked like a transistor amplifier, worked like a transistor amplifier (in terms of its reliability, low noise and user-friendliness) but certainly didn't sound like one!

Its construction was a sublime mix of the old and the new. The boxy, dark grey 430x115x285mm case housed a sturdy metal chassis, explaining its considerable 12kg weight. Beautifully laid out inside, it featured separate pre and power amp sections.

The latter was split into discrete left and right sides, each running two fixed bias EL34s complete with their own thermostatically controlled silent running cooling fans, plus seven high voltage MOSFETs. Each output transformer was a large, generously specified affair with both 4 and 8ohm taps, while extensive attention was given to power supplies.

Despite its sparse aesthetics, the AMC was as generously specified as many early nineties midi systems. A phono stage was provided (and very good it was too), along with inputs for Phono, Tape, DAT, CD, Tuner, Video and Aux.

A switchable Tape Monitor, Source Direct switch, headphone socket and even Bass and Treble controls were provided. Round the back, there was no less than three high quality gold plated speaker binding posts per channel.

The result was a convincing musical performer which sounded quite unlike any of its price rivals. Its warm, big hearted nature made the most of music from any source. Bass is strong (if a little loose) with a very fluid and supple feel, midband lacks the clarity of its transistor rivals, but is very smooth and even handed without the slightest hint of an edge.

Treble is sweet and silky, but still spacious and detailed. The result is an amplifier which drives most modern loudspeakers as effortlessly as any solid-stater, yet invests the music with a delightfully natural, organic sound.

Of course, the AMC's sonics weren't perfect. Although nowhere near as coloured as the Quad IIs or Leak TL12s of yore, it certainly isn't as neutral as its (then) contemporary rivals like

Cyrus's 3/PSX-R or Exposure's XX. Dyed-in-the-grain tube aficionados won't like it either, because it lacks the languid, rose tinted presentation of the likes of Leak's Stereo 20.

In truth, it should be judged as an attempt to bring some of the musicality of valves together with the user-friendliness of solid-state - and on those terms at least, it succeeds admirably. Although something rare these days, there are more CVT3030s around than you'd think.

Look hard and you can pick one up for as little as £250, although you should expect to add another £100 to that for a mint, boxed example. Even at this price though, you've got yourself a timeless bargain.

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