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New Zealand's hi-fi and home theatre resource

'Til Daddy takes the T-bird away

AMC's valve amplifier is fun fun fun!
By Michael Jones

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AMC 3030a valve integrated amplifier. \$2109



I'm sure I'm not the only one who has found that hi-fi just doesn't seem as interesting as it did a few years ago. The oddball products have been replaced by more carefully styled, better built and (often) well designed CD players, amplifiers and speakers.

It might make for better equipment for the buyer but (sob) the hi-fi writer is left with a never-ending stream of (almost) blandness.

So when the chance came to look at a valve integrated amplifier that retailed at a mere \$2109, I jumped at the opportunity.

I get around

There's a good chance you haven't heard of AMC before. Even I, a devourer of written material on hi-fi, had barely come across the name.

But AMC have been quietly expanding their product range and distribution. Reputably founded by the owner of one of the factories that once contract-manufactured NAD, many of AMC's range have a NAD-look about them.

But not the valve products.

In my room

The 3030a is the entry item in AMC's valve range. The rest of the range consists of a valve preamp, a 30-watt and 80-watt valve power amp and a CD player with a valve output stage.

Pick up the 3030a and you quickly realise that it's not a cheapie - for a start it's heavy! Pick up the AMC and you'll strain your wrists on the nearly 12kg weight.

You can also tell that it's not a run-of-the-mill modern amplifier because - well, it's not that pretty. It's big and boxy, with the controls on a curiously indented fascia.

But the 3030a is fully featured. There are



plenty of inputs (including a phono stage), tone controls for those who need them and a "direct" switch for those who don't. There's also a headphone output.



The interior is dominated by three large (and heavy!) transformers. All of the circuitry is solid state, except for the glowing EL34 tube output stage.

The two EL34s on each side are soldered to a small circuit board module which simply slides in. This allows replacement modules (\$249) of matched pairs.

Also inside were two "silent" fans to cool the interior. On my sample they weren't that silent, with a noticeable "whoosh". Check yours carefully.

Good vibrations

A traditional old valve amplifier from the golden age of valves reputedly sounds soft and flabby, sweet but lacking in detail, rotund rather than forceful in the bass.

The AMC didn't sound like this. 'Cause the AMC sounds like fun!

This is a really enjoyable amplifier for listening to music. The music comes alive in a way that helps you forget about hi-fi.

There is a vibrancy to the sound that is fully in line with modern tastes, but without the forward, sometimes aggressive sound so prized by the *What Hi-Fi?* crowd. There's no false aggression or edge to the sound - unless of course it's in the music or recording.

I can hear music

A good example of the 3030a's abilities were with Joshua Redman's *Moodswing* - one of the jazz albums of the 90s. The quartet recording captures - as the title suggests - a number of moods, portrayed by the superb playing of Redman (sax), ace bassman Christian McBride, drummer Brian Blade and pianist Brad Mehldau.

The emotions set up by the music come across really well, while the instrumental tones created by these four fine musicians helped set up an extraordinarily enjoyable hour of listening.

Valve amps have a bit of a reputation for falling down in the bass department. On *Moodswing* McBride's double bass was rich and full, yet full of the subtle intonation that makes the bass such a wonderful instrument. Where the AMC did lack was with the ultimate bass "slam". For that, you'll need a much heftier solid state monster.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the 30-watt 3030a and other amplifiers of around the same power is how the AMC behaves when pushed. A typical solid state amplifier can turn very nasty when clipping (running out of steam) - sounding harsh and potentially damaging your tweeters.

In contrast, when playing Mahler's second symphony at loudish volumes, the 3030a gently reigned in the dynamics, as if a gentle compressor was operating.

Of course, using more efficient speakers than my 87dB Epos ES14s would help increase the loudness capabilities.

Do it again

Let me repeat this: the AMC 3030a is fun, fun fun! When you listen through the 3030a, you'll want to - as the Beach Boys once sang - *Do it again!*

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