

Accuphase A-300 Test in LP 12/2023

The Divine Ones

This is an opportunity I have been waiting for for a long time: a look at the Accuphase product range from a perspective that is normally denied to those on average incomes. I'm talking about the flagship amplifiers from Yokohama.

History

The large mono power amplifiers are pretty much the end of the line for almost every electronics manufacturer. This makes perfect sense, because at a certain point, it just doesn't make sense any more to house a power amplifier design in a single enclosure; space and weight constraints simply put a stop to it. Naturally, the masters of fine amplifier technology at Accuphase also bow to such adversities. Until recently, the company even had two such elaborate twin packs on offer, one with a little more output power, yet a slightly lower quiescent current, and a Class A model uncompromisingly tuned for sound. On the occasion of the company's 50th anniversary two years ago, a whole range of new models was presented, and finally it was the turn of the Class A monos to get a brush-up. The A-300s now stand unchallenged at the top of Accuphase's power amp hierarchy; Class AB monos are currently no longer available.

My last intense contact with Accuphase amplifiers of this caliber was almost 25 years ago. Back then, the objects of desire were called M-2000, and I can well remember spending many enthusiastic hours with them.

A quarter of a century later, surprisingly little has changed in terms of appearance: the A-300 also has the typical 'form factor' and the unmistakable 'face' which characterize these amplifiers. Although the central display instrument no longer has a pointer, it still maintains the classic look in an exemplary manner. While power amps from almost all manufacturers have become larger and larger, and it's now almost impossible to get around tower-like designs, the extremely ambitious new Accuphase monos likewise

still claim that classic quarter square meter of footprint and make do with a height of 24 centimeters. These are by no means small amplifiers but offer even in this respect the subtle understatement which has always distinguished Accuphase products.

With a price tag of approx. € 46,000 per pair, these units are certainly not a bargain, but in line with the price level of their predecessors, the A-250, and thus far from those prices which are nowadays called elsewhere for comparable equipment.

Basics

Traditionally, the manufacturer is very cautious to specify the output power values. The A-300 indeed delivers a solid 200 watts at eight ohms and a whopping 370 watts at four ohms. If that's still not enough, you can bridge two monos and thus jolt even the most poorly designed speakers into action. A quiescent current loss power of 226 watts (per channel!) is a sure indication that this design is definitely run in a wide Class A range. In metrological terms, the A-300 is simply the best I've ever had on my lab bench – see 'Measurements'. Of course, the A-300 can also be used to drive extremely low-Z speakers; the manufacturer rates the amplifier as suitable even for 1-ohm loads.

Operation

The feature list that Accuphase offers in what is essentially a simple mono power block is impressive – if you want to slave the signal through to a second mono block in bridge mode. Reverse polarity for the XLR connectors? Sure. Visually, a new housing lid also catches the eye. As with all anniversary models, Accuphase has opted for a black anodized finish on a gently brushed surface.

Tech Talk

The A-300 is a careful refinement of the A-250. Each unit is powered by 40 meticulously selected MOSFETs, 20 of which are arranged on each of the mighty lateral heat sinks. In fact, Accuphase created two largely complete power amplifiers here the outputs of which are combined only at the speaker terminals. In the latest incarnation of this concept, the voltage amplifiers were moved to the power amplifier boards so that these are now equally provided in duplicate, which further reduces₂

noise compared to its predecessor. Accuphase calls this 'double multiple current summing'. In principle, it should be possible to convert the power amplifier into a stereo version with just minimal changes. By the way, a careful look into the brochure for the brand-new A-80 confirms this assumption.

Once again, improvements in details were made at all fronts. Accuphase has long stopped using relays for switching amplifier output signals and now uses low-loss, wear-free MOSFETs instead. Here, they rely on even lower-impedance types to further improve the amp's damping factor.

The power supply has undergone a 180-degree turnaround. Whereas the A-250 still had its huge transformer at the rear side of the housing and the two powerful filter capacitors were sitting at the front behind the face panel, things are exactly reversed in the A-300. I could well fancy that this has also helped to gain one or two more little decibels of signal-to-noise ratio.

Of course, there have also been a few minor improvements to the current-coupled architecture of the input amplifier module – all in keeping with Accuphase's careful evolutionary approach. Probably I don't need to mention that every detail has been considered and implemented with extreme consistency, as this is standard practice at Accuphase and also applies to the entry-level integrated amplifier. What is not the same, however, is the result which can be achieved that way.

Soundcheck

There was a specific reason for testing the A-300, i. e. the presence of several demanding loudspeakers in the editorial office that require a relentlessly controlled drive. I was particularly looking forward to pairing it with the Wilson Audio Sasha V which are presented to you elsewhere in this issue. And no matter if it was this one, the Fink Team Borg Episode 2, or the mighty Fyne Audio Vintage Fifteen (the high efficiency of which is actually a lot over the top for such power amplifiers) – the result was always the same: it sounds incredibly liquid, smooth, polished, and completely detached. The last time I had experienced a similarly dense atmosphere in the sound,

spectacle on 'Codona 2' was with the 211 monoblocks from Air Tight, which left a very lasting impression on me. I find it very surprising that two solid-state powerhouses can get down to work in such a delicate and soulful manner. Forget all the attributes commonly associated with the term 'high-performance amplifier'. The A-300s are exactly the opposite. Here every watt is dedicated to musical expression and relaxation exclusively. And so even extreme jazz from the Japanese cult label Three Blind Mice doesn't sound particularly brutal or energetic, but simply realistic – the approximation to a real live experience works amazingly well. The A-300 deliver their unique emotionality also with musically much less refined stuff: just how much density and energy can be packed into one single riff, is showcased by the axe slinger of the Swedish stoner rock experts from 'Truckfighters', perhaps over his Orange stack right in front of the stage, yet otherwise only through these incredible power amplifiers, please.

Holger Barske