

[English Translation Test Accuphase A-48/ LP 01/2020]

The Feelgood Machine

Alright, this is my number 3 third smallest power amplifier from Accuphase I've received for a test over the past years, which can barely be distinguished from its precursor. I don't care because: it's an Accuphase power amp.

It's name is A-48, and it's a cautious development of its precursor A-47, which in turn was a cautious development of its predecessor A-46. Article completed, all said?

Not at all. If one product in this often a little quirky industry should deserve our attention, it would be a new amplifier model made by Accuphase. The "Series 40" from Accuphase is the third smallest (or fourth largest) of currently seven models in their product range. Four of these are sailing under the prestigious class-A label, here the A-48 ranks on the second smallest position.

To me unboxing and connecting it and putting it into operation is like embracing an old friend whom I haven't met for a long time. Everything on this power amp seems familiar, starting with the vibration damping crossbars above the massive lateral heatsinks, which are also extremely practical as carrying handles. Champagne-colored front panel? Oh, come on – we don't have to discuss such self-evident details. An alternative color is not available, of course, and this is a good thing. Actually we won't have to talk about the two fine pointer instruments on the A-48's front which are probably the only ones in the world of pointer instruments to deserve the title "measuring devices". Personally, I like to have a quick squint to the bigger A-75 which features pretty red seven segment displays on top. Modern wizardry, but I'm loving it.

There's one detail that sets the A-48 apart from its precursors, i.e. the enclosure lid of all parts. It is now made of way more solid aluminum and structurally reminds of that of the larger models. To what extent the brushed, anodized surface visually blends in with the remaining exterior of the power amp, particularly the heatsinks in their velvety gray finish, is a question I leave up to your appreciated assessment. Judging by the manufacturer specifications, the new power amp has gained about 900 grams (2 lbs.) in weight, probably due to the increased input at this point.

Any other external differences? Switching between the display modes is now done via two pushbuttons, on the previous model it was a rotary switch. The rotary switch is still seen on the A-48, but here it serves to switch between the two speaker pairs. On the A-47 that was done – yes, you’ve guessed it – by means of two pushbuttons. This may seem to be meaningless, but in practical use it has the disadvantage that the speaker outputs can no longer be switched off completely which, in my capacity as a “multiplugger“, I comment with a little regret: turning a power amp with such a high quiescent current permanently on and off isn’t a good option, so you need to be extra careful when running it.

Of course, all that sounds a little nitpicky, which it is indeed. You’re going to forgive me that because for me Accuphase devices are a hugely emotive subject where I am super sensitive to any putative disturbance of absolute perfection. And presumably there’s no such here, except for the author’s headiness. And that’s why I want to point very briefly to the fact that some LED indicators for the input configuration (stereo or mono bridged, balanced or unbalanced connection) have moved from the middle of the front to the right.

Likewise, the changes under the lid are only moderately dramatic. One detail that stood out already with the upgrade of the big E-600 integrated amplifier to the E-650 model are the new power transistors. Whilst proven MOS-FETs from Toshiba were formerly used, we now meet equivalent parts from Fairchild who, by the way, were bought in some time ago by On-Semi that we still know by the name of Motorola. You see, there’s a lot happening on the semiconductor market, hence also the new transistor types.

Only little has changed regarding output configuration and performance; the A-48 delivers more than sufficient power for all situations. Its double-six parallel transistors put out a good 100 watts into eight and about 200 watts into four ohms, which coincides strikingly precisely with the manufacturer’s specifications. By the way, such findings are always a little, yet welcome evidence that a manufacturer knows to convince by actions rather than by making empty promises. In class-A mode the A-48 delivers a more than sufficient share of it.

For the input section Accuphase relies on a proven instrument amplifier configuration which is especially suitable for an equal treatment of balanced and unbalanced input signals and also extremely unsusceptible to interference. As of now Accuphase uses the A-75’s input stage here and could thus push the weighted signal-to-noise ratio from 116 to 117 decibels(A). Which may appear to be ridiculous, but in those spheres it’s a remarkable technical masterstroke where our measurement technology has to admit defeat: our equipment simply produces some more decibels of noise. More brains has been invested into the protection circuit which is supposed to save this gem even more reliably from adversity. Electromechanical output relays are things long gone by for Accuphase - here the latest generation of ultra tiny, yet tremendously powerful MOS-FETs serve as switches to disconnect the speakers much faster, much more dependably and, above all, with much better long-term stability from the amplifier in case of emergency. Accuphase employs types with a

contact resistance of only one milliohm. Thereby the A-48's damping factor could be raised to a considerable 800 – twenty-five per cent above the predecessor's value. Soundwise this will definitely not make the difference between weal and woe, but it's a nice feature which pleases the engineer's mind not only in Yokohama at least.

Traditionally Accuphase power amplifiers are very load stable: the manufacturer specifies the amp even for one-ohm loads, thus making it capable for such, in this respect, bad designs like e.g. old Apogee ribbons or Infinity Kappas. We don't want to burden our guest with such hardship, first of all because our gear pool doesn't have any of these. But instead a pair of the proven Audio Physic Avantera III, slightly custom modified for us in its bass response. With its four lateral woofers certainly not a load for outright wimps, yet a dream in terms of dynamics, deep bass and balance when correctly driven. That's the easiest exercise for the A-48. Already after a few warm-up minutes it's playing with a wonderful warmth, brilliance and a fabulous depth gradation. For this the manufacturer deserves praise as well; some amplifiers with a high quiescent current need hours to develop their sonic potential.

But here it comes practically out of the box, the modern Accuphase sound: smooth-edged and in control at any time, so very fluent and agile. Nothing's conspicuous, no aspect is pushing in – it's just playing and makes us forget the utterly well presented technology. Is this better now than over the A-47 or the A-46? I'm stuck for an answer because I'm lacking a direct opportunity to compare, but the degree of satisfaction I feel while listening is definitely the same. And this is what it's all about in the final analysis, isn't it?

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