



# RENEWABLE RESOURCE

AVM's new PA 8.2 premium preamp is a modular design, whose expandability can keep pace with the requirements of its owner.

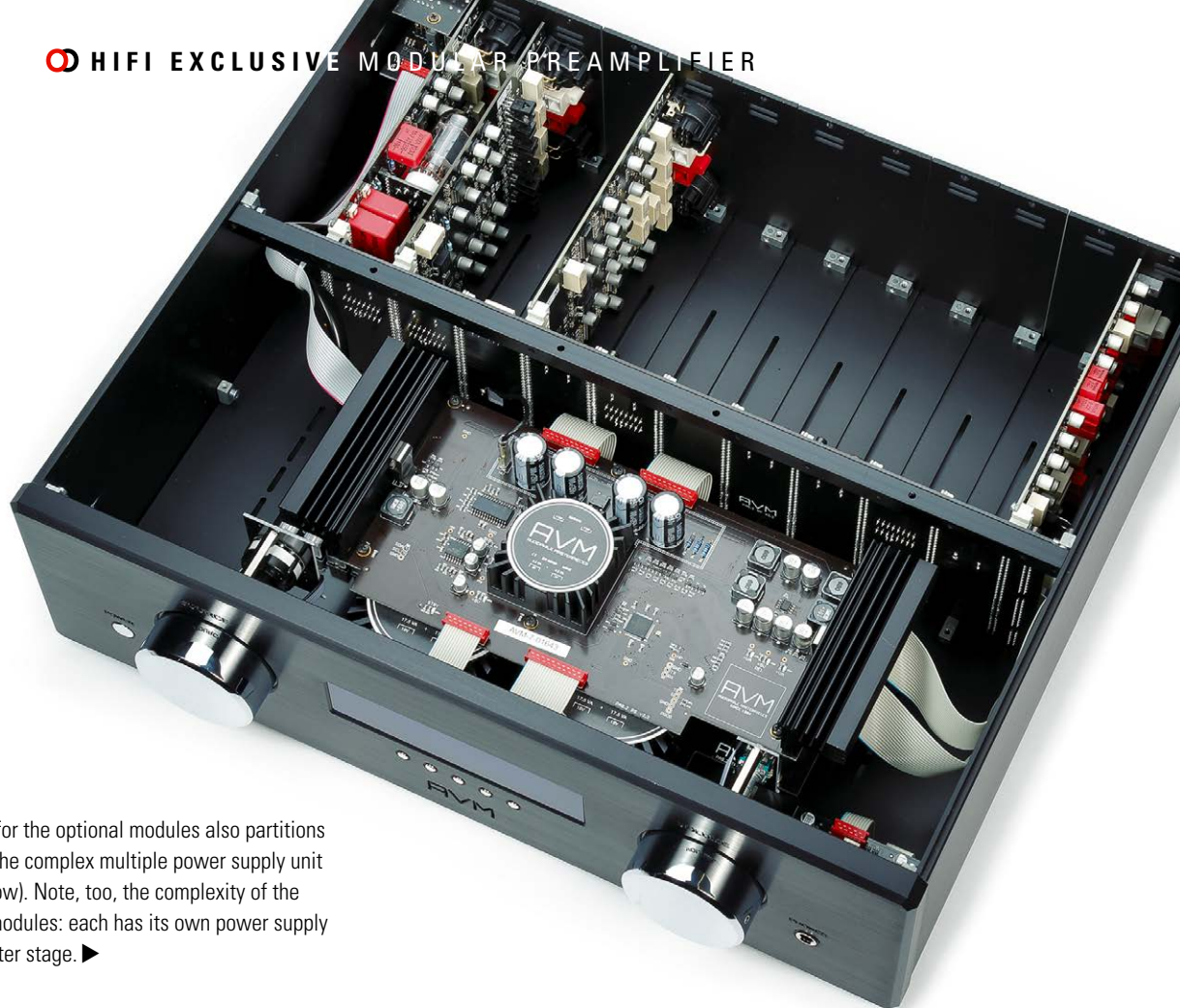
**W**hat would your dream preamp look like? We don't just mean how many inputs it should have, but something more fundamental: should it be of a purist analog construction, or with a DAC onboard? Does it need a phono stage, and if so should that be MM, MC or both? And finally, there is the absolutely basic question of preamplifier technology: should it use transistors or tubes? All these tormenting aspects require careful consideration, and especially so as you move higher up the price spectrum.

Or you could simply opt for AVM's new PA 8.2 preamp, which has all the bases covered...

You see, the team led by AVM supremo Udo Besser has come up with an ingenious trick for this omnipotent preamp, the top model in the company's flagship Ovation series. That means that, in its most basic form, the PA 8.2 is more or less an empty 'rack', selling for €5990 in its aluminum casework, on whose front there are two large detented potentiometers, running smoothly on ball-bearings, and an easily readable display.

Of course, you shouldn't take the term "empty" too literally: the generously-sized multiple power supply unit contains two toroidal transformers with complex filter stages, which can supply analog and digital circuits separately and are also optimally insulated from each other. A third power supply unit is mounted above, supplying the peripherals – display and system control – and this triple power station takes up half the volume of the housing and is shielded from the signal processing by a partition wall.

However, this partition wall is also literally the backbone of the PA 8.2: eleven narrow plug-in rails on its rear side can accommodate expansion boards. And fitting them is easy: remove two small Allen screws on the back of the housing, take off the cover plate and push the extension into the housing in the correct orientation, AVM providing a narrow groove in the bottom of each slot as a guide rail for the plug-in modules. It's a neat design, and it took us therefore less than a minute to install our chosen DAC plug-in.



The “rack” for the optional modules also partitions them from the complex multiple power supply unit (shown below). Note, too, the complexity of the individual modules: each has its own power supply including filter stage. ▶

Each board is equipped with its own micro operating system, meaning it’s ready to go as soon as it’s installed. Five small buttons below the display allow access to the individual functions, their operation reconfiguring to suit the currently selected input. For example, if one of the line inputs is activated (using the analog module at around €1290), the set-up offers a balance and simple bass/treble tone controls with “True Bypass” option. The analog modules each have one RCA and one XLR connection pair, these being listed as two separate connections in the source selection, so that two components can be connected per module.

Similarly the DAC module (around €2490), which has one optical and two electrical digital inputs in addition to asynchronous USB, extends the PA 8.2 by a total of four inputs. This module uses the same focused and agile high-bit converter also found in the flagship Ovation series CS 8.2 streaming CD receiver and the MP 8.2 media player and,

as the DAC chip is mounted on a small sub-board, it could later be exchanged to update the digital section without replacing the entire board.

The digital menu also allows the user to choose a fast, impulse-oriented filter, or the clean and linear frequency-optimized one, and you can also specify whether incoming signals are processed **natively** or with fixed upsampling.

**KEYWORD**

**Native:** Incoming signals are processed with their own clocking, and in the format in which they are received, without sampling or format conversion.

Even more complex is the optional phono module (around €1750), switchable between MM and MC mode via the menu. In further submenus you can activate a sub-sonic rumble filter and fine tune the equalization, with capacitance and gain settings instantly transferred to the phono circuits. That means you can actually adjust this detailed and extremely open-sounding equalizer by ear – a feature that’s unfortunately far too rare.

Analog radio fans will also be happy to know there’s an FM RDS tuner card available, selling for €1290, and those with a range of sources will be pleased

that the input sensitivity of each input can be adjusted by +/- 10 decibels, and this value stored.

**Transistor vs. tube**

There’s choice, too, when it comes to the output stage, with an option of two boards, which ultimately also determine the charm and character of the preamplifier, AVM offering one with transistor output stages (around €1290) and one with tube technology (around €2490). We have to admit we’d find them hard to choose between: the transistor board sounds gnarlier, more controlled and extremely direct in the bass, while the tubes have an unbelievably velvety charm, more color and a deeper and wider soundstage.

With the tube stage in place, the floating, billowing, panoramic wandering soundscapes in the intro of Jean-Michel Jarre’s “Oxygène II” seemed to leave behind the bounds of the listening room when played via the B&W 800 D3 speakers, creating an effect that would hardly be more dramatic with a surround system. Then again, David Bowie’s vocals

on “Space Oddity” had even more focus, sharpness and bite via the transistor stage.

As long as slots are still available, these modules can be combined as desired, so vinyl extremists could equip their PA 8.2 with three differently-tuned phono modules, while customers with a comprehensive digital set-up could use several DAC modules in parallel. Incidentally, the number and plug-in order of the modules has no influence on the sound: each expansion board is equipped with its own voltage stabilization, a complete miniature power supply unit with an additional filter stage, making the boards completely electrically independent.

This is an effort that AVM could have saved itself, since only the module that is currently in use as input is active: all the others automatically go into standby mode, making this preamp set new standards when it comes to discrete design.

Such subtleties are controlled by a communicative operating system, which carries out a quick inventory and system check of the individual slots during start-up. This process was indicated on our tube-loaded sample with the lower-case “warming up tubes” message gradually increasing to an upper-case

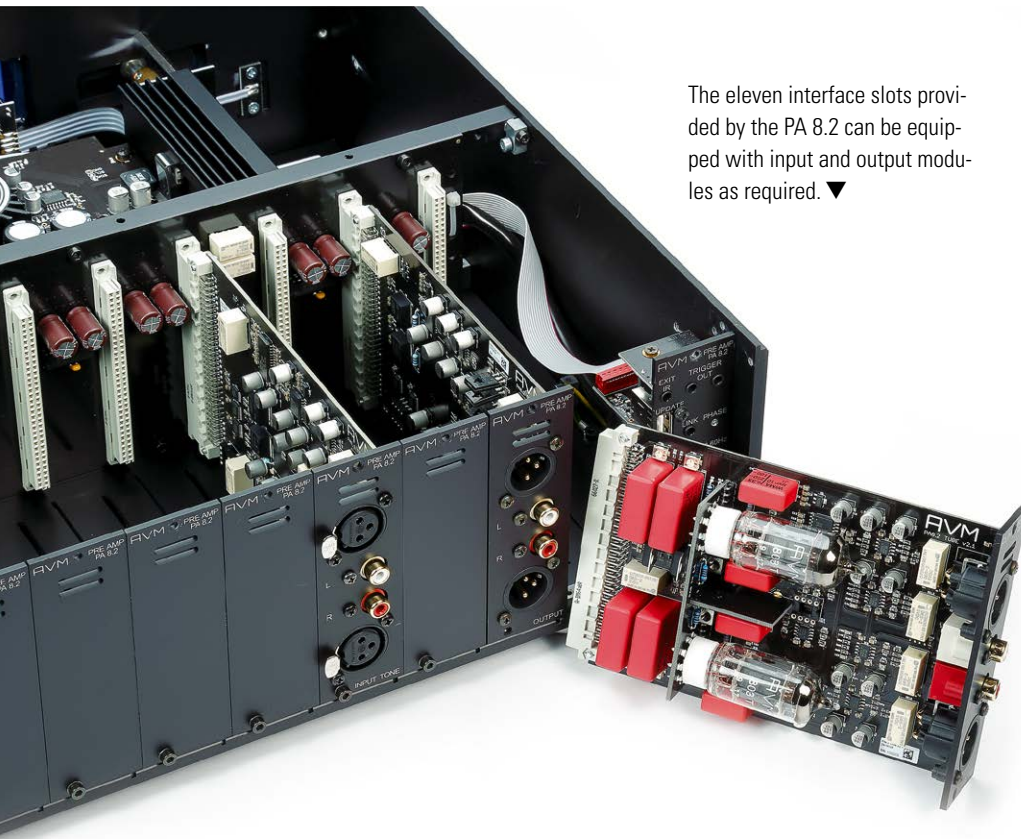
“WARMING UP TUBES” until the PA 8.2 was good to go.

In just under two weeks of intensive testing with the AVM, it delivered exactly what we appreciate about the company’s Ovation products: it has a powerful character with a silky fine timbre, sometimes perceived as “creamy”, and delivers even the smallest tonal details into the listening room with an exceptional clarity. Its agility means it succeeds in dissecting complex ensembles such as the RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra playing Liszt’s “Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2”, fanning them out and clearly distributing the individual instrument groups on a huge soundstage, a trick in which it excels even our editorial reference Acoustic Arts Tube Pre II.

Or then again, you could just use the transistor output, with compact and focused imaging, or even both valve and solid-state stages – just as you please.

And if you are confused by all the options offered by this extraordinary preamp, AVM also offers a starter package pre-fitted with a line module, phono input and the tube stage for €9490, which is a tempting €2000 saving compared to the individual modules.

*Carsten Barnbeck*



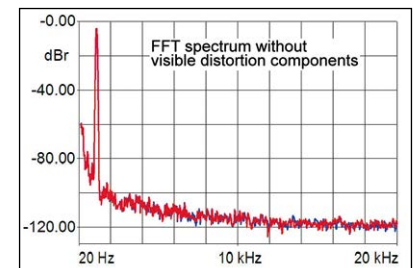
The eleven interface slots provided by the PA 8.2 can be equipped with input and output modules as required. ▼

**AVM PA 8.2**

from €5990  
 (incl. phono, line and tube module €9490)  
 Dimensions: 43 x14 x 39 cm (WxHxD)  
 Warranty: 3 years  
 Contact: AVM  
 Phone: +49 7246 309910,  
 www.avm-audio.com

Exciting modular concept, with superb processing and a sound, especially via the tube output, that’s excellent and able to break entirely free from your speakers. In short, AVM has done everything right with this flagship preamplifier.

**MEASUREMENT RESULTS**



Maximum output voltage (1% THD)	5.6 V
Gain from high level input	23.7 dB
Distortion factor at 0.03/0.3/1 V	0.01 %/0.002 %/0.001 %
Intermodulation at 0.03/0.3/1 V	0.006 %/0.0004 %/0.001 %
Signal to noise ratio at 0.3/0.03 V	94.0 dB(A)/76.7 dB(A)
Input sensitivity for 1 V output	62.5 mV
Output resistance RCA/XLR	47 Ohm/90 Ohm
Output voltage RCA/XLR	5.6 Volt/5.6 Volt
Upper cut-off frequency	>80 kHz
Volume control tracking error at -60 dB	0.1 dB
Stereo channel separation at 10kHz	89.2 dB
Standby power consumption	<2 W
Power consumption idle	26.2

**LAB COMMENTS**



„Clean as a measuring instrument,” our measurement technician said. The PA 8.2 excels, with its good lab results attesting not only to its low distortion, but also its high bandwidth of over 80kHz.

**FEATURES**

Aluminum remote supplied as standard with base model; line inputs (€1290), phono (€1750), DAC (€2490) and FM tuner (€1290) can be fitted, along with tube (€2490 €) and transistor (€1290) output stages.

**STEREO-TEST**

**SOUND QUALITY 100%**

**PRICE/PERFORMANCE**

★★★★☆

**EXCELLENT**