

THE ART OF NATURALNESS



With the just renewed team of PLAYER I and POWER I, Accoustic Arts increases the performance of their „Top-Series“ – in a very „natural“ way.

Matthias Böde

It sounds so simple and yet it is quite difficult: hi-fi components should not interfere with the given sound. In the STEREO laboratory, especially high or low values for a wide range of parameters regularly indicate that everything should be just fine! However, in the listening test, even devices whose measurements hardly deviate from each other can show an individual sound character, which surprisingly often runs through a manufacturer's entire program.

Accoustic Arts' sound character very closely approximates the ultimate hi-fi goal of perfect neutrality. For this reason, many of their components occupy our reference league. The Germans have just replaced the representatives of their „Top-Series“, which includes not only the combined CD player/DAC PLAYER I, but also the POWER I integrated amplifier. Contrary to their names and the very committed price, these actually mark Accoustic Arts' entry-level.

Only the names remained. Technically, almost everything is new with the PLAYER I and POWER I.

TEST-COMPONENTS

Turntables:

Perpetuum Ebner PE 4040 MKII

Phono-Preamp:

Brinkman Edison

Media-Player:

T+A MP3100HV

Integrated Amp.:

Cambridge Audio Edge A, Pathos Kratos, Symphonic Line RG9HD

Pre-/Power Amp.:

Accustic Arts Tube PreampII-MK2/-AmpII-MK3

Speakers:

B&W 800D3, DALI Epicon 6, KEF R11

Cables:

HMS Gran Finale, Jubilee and Supreme (Line + Speaker Cable)

KEY WORD

Pre-Levelling

Depending on the base volume of individual source devices, the sensitivity of the inputs can be adjusted to each other, which avoids annoying level jumps while switching.

The risk of confusion with the almost identically named predecessors is low, because much more than plain cosmetics was done here. The PLAYER I is now much higher and, like its amplifying brother, has the company logo milled into the thick cover plate of its all-metal exterior – modelled on Accustic Arts' „Reference Series“. In addition, striking chrome-plated turn/push buttons are now proudly emblazoned on both sides of its front panel, which have long been a trademark of the brand.

With its narrow display showing the selected input plus the set volume, but also signalling the numerous menu options, the Amp appears more modern than its direct ancestor. The new design's deliberately sober, austere note is supported by two narrow grooves that visually divide the face of the devices into three sectors. One can also purchase the devices in black at an identical price.

Comfort plus Precision

The technical concept lives up to the promise of the significantly changed appearance. Here there is no old wine in new bottles. A pure update would have been anything but a faux pas due to the high standard of the predecessors. Nevertheless, the Swabians updated and improved upon several parts. For example, they distributed the power supply of the PLAYER I to two 25-watt transformers in order to prevent the mutual interference of the digital and analogue circuits, which are spatially separated from each other via the already multiply buffered energy rail. In addition to the drive optimised for CD playback by specialist Stream Unlimited, four digital inputs are now available, including the USB interface, which process PCM data streams up to 32 bit/384 kilohertz (USB) or DSD 64. Just like the sturdy drive, they are first chosen via the left button and selected by a short press. On the right it works the same way with the drive commands. The latter also follow the included remote control.

Regarding the predecessor of the POWER I, no stone was left unturned. So, instead of the former four MOSFETs per channel, six selected bipolar power transistors each now provide sensible yet striking power. Instead of the conventional potentiometer, an electronic, microprocessor-controlled volume

control by means of fixed resistor banks took its place, allowing individual pre-leveling of each of the five inputs. Their value is determined via the menu of the amp, which also allows the adjustment of the balance, the initial volume after switching on or the display brightness. You can also change the Cinch output from variable to fixed, bypass the volume control for use in AV chains or individually switch the speaker and headphone outputs on and off. Of course, the amplifier remembers the last settings before it is switched off, which is done by pressing the left front button for a longer time on both devices.

Master of the Midrange

As far as the amp is concerned, we got new technology, increased comfort and, what's more, around 100 watts more continuous power at four or eight ohms per channel at a slightly reduced cost. If the sound is equally great, Accustic Arts' „Top Series“ would have successfully renewed its claim to a leading role in this high-end price class.

And it does, with the "how" being the most important aspect. While the set masters the general parameters of resolution, impulsiveness and width already at a very, very high level, there are two parameters through which the Swabians distinguish themselves in particular: on the one hand that is their exceptional three-dimensionality. The realistic staggering from the front edge of the stage to the rear „horizon“ does not only go deep. Rather, instruments and voices of



Two 25-watt transformers separately supply the digital circuits of the PLAYER I including drive and control as well as the D/A converter and output stage.



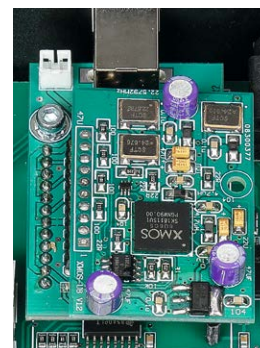
Six power transistors per channel are located on the heat sink. The 500-watt transformer is buffered by capacitors with 54,000 microfarads.

different depths are set off plastically and with clearly defined distances from each other, making the reproduction appear extraordinarily natural.

Almost even more lasting in this way was the incredibly delicate and graceful appearing midtone, which performed without the slightest hint of artificiality. Whether Vincent Bélanger's shaded cello playing or Anne Bisson's intense timbre - the duo reproduced it in bright colours and creamy enamel but did not apply any oily make-up. Better still, where the predecessors slightly emphasized the foreground, thus producing a crisp, shimmering, fine dynamic, the current „top“ components succeed in combining

a pronounced liveliness and openness with more closed homogeneity from a more opulent low-frequency range, whereby this merit goes equally to the player DAC and amp. Just great!

Even Accoustic Arts' exquisite pre-/power stage duo, which ran as a reference and appeared even more dominant, expansive and stoic, could not really catch up with the performance of the POWER I in this point. It even looked great against its more than three times as expensive family members outside the championship for natural mids. Although this sounded easy and unstrained, it must have been very difficult to achieve in development! ■



TRUMP CARD

The USB interface has a small circuit board with chips and other components for the requirements of Android and IOS computers as well as various file formats.



Two examples from the Amp menu: At the top, the headphone jack is activated; at the bottom, the balance is shifted to the left by the value „4“.



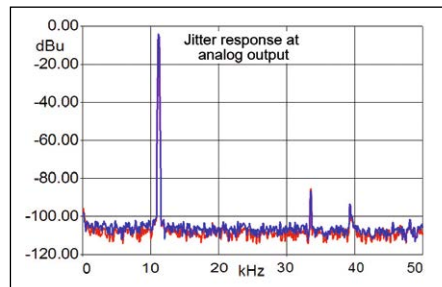
On the digital side, the PLAYER I offers a wide range of inputs and outputs, including - of course - a USB interface.

Accoustic Arts PLAYER I

Price: around 6900 € (in black or silver)
Dimensions: 48x13x39 cm (WxHxD)
Warranty: 3 years

A modern player DAC with an elaborate technical concept, extensive equipment including a USB interface, a drive optimized for CDs and a high-bit capable D/A converter. First-class, due to amazingly three-dimensional, colourful and powerful sound.

Measurement Results



| | |
|---|---------------|
| Signal-to-noise ratio digital zero | 101,5dB |
| Quantization-noise ratio 0 dBFS | 95,7dB |
| Output resistance Cinch/XLR | 10 Ohm |
| Output resistance Cinch/XLR 0dBFS | 2,4V |
| Signal-to-noise ratio referred to 24 bits | 102dB |
| Signal-to-noise ratio referred to 16 bits | 98dB |
| Distortion factor at -9dBFS | 0,006% |
| Distortion factor at -60dBFS | 1,1% |
| Converter linearity at -90dBFS | 0,1dB |
| Jitter | 2,5ns |
| Deviation from fs | -39ppm |
| Information track interference | 0,9mm |
| Power consumption Stby./idle | (at) <2/12,7W |

Lab Comment

Mains phase at tested device There were no abnormalities in the laboratory passage. In addition to the high signal-to-noise ratios, low distortions were also observed. The jitter is also very low. The fact that the sampling frequency loses almost 39 units per million is irrelevant in practice. Their pleasantly low impedances of just 10/19 Ohm (cinch/XLR) prove the stability of the output stage..

Features

One Cinch and one XLR output each, four digital inputs (optical, 2 x coaxial, USB) as well as two outputs (optical, coaxial), remote control

STEREO - TEST

SOUND QUALITY 95%

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★☆

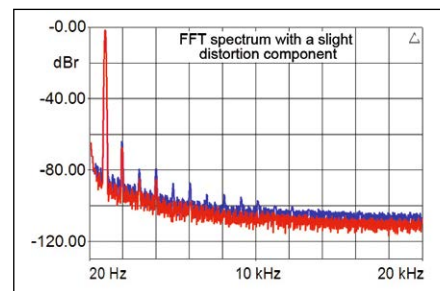
EXCELLENT

Accoustic Arts POWER I

Price: around 6900 € (in black or silver)
Dimensions: 48 x15 x41 cm (WxHxD)
Warranty: 3 years

The new POWER I shines with rich power, extensive equipment and tonal performance. Its ability to stagger the outstandingly homogeneous sound images plastically in their depth relief is captivating, promoting their naturalness and spatial ambience. The price seems more than reasonable.

Measurement Results



| | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Continuous power (8 Ohm / 4 Ohm) | 174W/267W |
| Pulse power 4 Ohm (1kHz) | 337W |
| THD at 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax | 0,07%/0,05%/0,06 |
| Intermod. 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax | 0,08 %/0,04 %/0,3 % |
| Signal-to-noise ratio at 50mW/ 5W | 62 dB/81 dB |
| Attenuation at 4 Ohm (63Hz/1kHz/14kHz) 1 | 66/160/142 |
| Upper cut-off frequency (-3dB/40hm) | 65 kHz |
| Crosstalk Line 1 > Line 2 | 80 dB |
| Synchronization error Volume at -60dB | 0,001 dB |
| Max. output voltage (1% THD) | 7,8V |
| Output resistance RCA/XLR | 10 Ohm/- |
| Stereo channel separation at 10kHz | 46 dB |
| Power consumption Stby./idle | (at) <2 W/39 W (224 Volt) |

Lab Comment

Mains phase at tested device Exuberant performance, especially for practical impulse measurement, acceptable distortion values. The precision of the volume control is excellent, the channel separation okay, as is the upper cut-off frequency.

Features

Five high level inputs, two of them in XLR; one cinch output (either fixed or variable), balance, initial volume, input level adjustment, display brightness, loop-through option, on/off option for speakers and headphones via menu, remote control.

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EXCELLENT



REMOTE CONFERENCE

The subject of remote control is a chapter in itself. In the box of the amplifier is a plastic transmitter for loud/quiet, which is usually sufficient. With the CD player/DAC comes the middle model, which can also control the volume of the amp. However, the offered buttons for the automatic playback (scan) and shuffling (shuf) are not supported by the PLAYER I, nor is the repetition of individual music passages (A/B) or the programming of a track sequence (prog). This is not possible even with the optional metal system remote control (r. around 300 Euro), which allows a change of the inputs as well as the display brightness of the player and amplifier and allows access to the amp menu from the listening chair.

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