

HIFI

i muzyka
PISMO AUDIOFILO I MELOMANA

Bose VideoWave

Minisystem

Cambridge Audio
One+/Minx

Wzmacniacze

MBL 7008
PrimaLuna
ProLogue Premium

Przedwzmacniacze gramofonowe

Primare R32
Manley Steelhead RC

Testy:

Kolumny

JBL Studio 190
Spendor SP3/1R2

Blu-raye za tysiąca

Hi-end:

Cabasse Iroise 3
Gato Audio AMP-150
Musical Fidelity
M6 500i
Soulution 540

Muzyka:

„Turandot”
Stefan Kisielewski
Yamaha
„The Wall” Rogera Watersa



Poul Rossing niemal całe życie poświęcił hi-fi. Zaczął jeszcze w latach 50. w warsztacie ojca. W tamtych czasach ludzie dopiero oswajali się ze stereo i długogrającymi płytami winylowymi, które zapewniały nieznaną wcześniej jakość dźwięku. Potem przyszła pora na handel grającymi precjozami i dystrybucję uznanych marek. W ten sposób Poul zaczepił się w środowisku, w którym tkwi do dziś i nadal potrafi zaskoczyć czymś nowym.

Maciej Stryjecki

Gato Audio AMP-150

Construction

Some will complain that AMP-150 is small, because you could expect a considerable size for this kind of money. Instead, the amplifier is heavy: so the kilogram to zloty ratio is quite favourable. Rationalists will smile to such a remark, but those can also be brought down a peg or two: some German magazines treat such “valuations” quite seriously.

As for the looks – well, I can say one thing: beauty is relative. The photos will allow you to see for yourselves whether you like the looks of Gato or not. I can only assure you that the quality of materials and craftsmanship are fantastic. Only after a close encounter will one realize what a decent piece of work this amplifier is.

The front panel is a 1 cm thick slab of ground aluminium. The curves and side openings were done perfectly. The points at which individual elements of the cabinet meet have been adjusted to the fraction of a millimetre. In the centre of the front panel you will find a milky-white display. It looks out of this world and draws attention to such an extent that even if you hung a collection of the French impressionists in your room, at the end of the day, Gato will be the object that wins all the attention. The analogue metre indicates what power is sent to the loudspeakers. It is not as accurate as the blue McIntosh “screens”, but is comparable fun to the user. I am already hearing the voices of those who consider both aesthetic solutions as an all-singing, all-dancing design, but somehow, people could not care less for such conclusions of the aesthetes. In my opinion Dinesen is a very gifted designer, and what he showed with the integrated amplifier and player deserves nothing short of praise. At least because of that little madness that surrounds minimalism.

Instead of boring source markings we get graphic symbols, resembling Egyptian hieroglyphs. Of course this is nothing new, as I have seen this type of decoration on other Scandinavian products a few times before. Next to the illuminated metre two aluminium buttons can be located. The one on the right is a “mute” button, and the one on the left – an interesting gadget. It is common knowledge that a warm amplifier

gives a better sound. Many audiophiles wait until the heat-sinks reach a pleasant temperature – just enough to give some warmth to freezing cold fingers. In fact, it is about bringing the transistors to the optimal temperature, at which they reach their maximum performance. This is when the currents stabilize, and distortions fall to the minimum level. Heating the amplifier up can last even a few quarters of an hour. Gato has a clever answer to that, which minimizes the time you need to wait. After powering the device, it is enough to press the “Heat” button and start a “booster” that can bring the amplifier to the desired state in a matter of minutes. Operation of the feature is signalled by a bonfire sign – the first one on the round display. I have tested this function. Fully recommended.

Apart from that the front panel was fitted with two stupendous knobs, resembling potentiometers in old, professional equipment. Similar ones are used by Primare and Copland, but the ones used at Gato are much more sturdy, and fit the cuts just as a piston fits its bearing in a

not easy thus I discourage anyone who would like to disassemble the amp merely out of curiosity. It is easy to damage the connections, as most probably you would lose your patience and refrain to brutal physical force. The decorative board is attached with six screws to an aluminium plate that is invisible from the outside. You can choose from two finishes with natural tree rings, or go for the traditional black finish. I hate black loudspeakers and amplifiers, but this time I must admit that I consider this version to be the most elegant. The top board, and the remote control, bear the GA logo. It resembles a lion that is bored to death that stares blankly with pure indifference, as if he was digesting one of the biggest meals of his life. I have no reservations about the design of the amplifier, but I think that the identification sign of the company was created hastily. A solitary “G” letter from any available set of fonts would do a better job.

Looking on the underside (and breathing heavily while doing so), we will see another aluminium plate and



Remarkably simple construction that gives a surprising effect.

Ferrari engine. When turned they move steadily, never losing a mere fraction of a radian of their balance.

Aluminium heat-sinks form the cheeks of the cabinet. Individual parts form a half-cylinder. Moving your hand along them you can feel how well the elements fit together, and the deep crevices provide good cooling performance for the transistors.

After unscrewing the back cover, the top plate slides off like a drawer. This is

four metal legs, lined with elastic dampening fabric. The biggest of the screws fastens the toroidal transformer; two smaller ones attach a shield for capacitors, finished underneath with rubber.

The back panel is also made of aluminium (you can see that the manufacturer was not trying to lower the costs). It is attached to the body with nine screws. You will be in for a surprise if you unscrew them, as they are not fastening the top board but a separate module, with sockets and integrated board with NEC relays and a Burr-Brown resistor ladder, as well as a TL072 signal symmetrizer. Thus you should treat the presence of

XLRs as a convenient option and not a promise of a symmetrical connection. The sockets are soldered into the PCB, connected to the amplification stage with short cables, and to the power supply with one long cable.

Speaker terminals are gold-plated and covered with plastic. This solution was invented by the Germans, and as could be expected of them, is refined, and at the same time practical. In the middle, there is a three-pronged power inlet and a mains switch. On the right, four pairs of spaciouly distributed RCA connectors can be found. This time the descriptions are traditional: CD, LP, Tuner and Tape. But do not be deceived by the second one. AMP-150 does not feature a corrective pre-amplifier, so if it is vinyl that you want to listen to, you will need to buy a separate preamp.

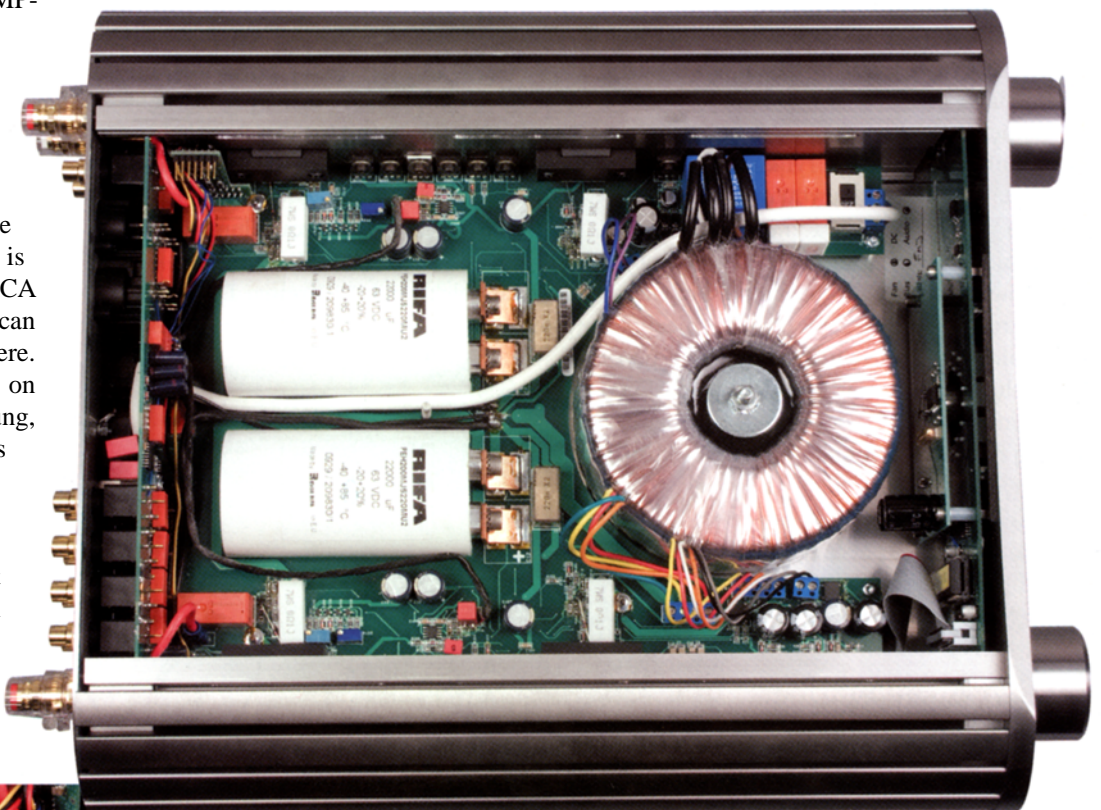
On the left there are the XLRs. One input should be enough. The second male pair is the output, mirrored in the RCA standard. I suspect that you can hook an additional amp here. Gato does not have them yet on offer, but the company is young, and will surely catch up on this quickly, also because this is the simplest expansion of the catalogue one can think of.

Power supply is what draws attention on the 'main

board'. It comprises of a humongous toroid (Noratel), with four windings, mounted right behind the front panel. Electricity is stored in two, even greater capacitors. This is a rather rare sight, as the majority of manufacturers would most probably go for a set of a few, or even above a dozen of smaller capacity units. GA trusts in the configuration used for instance by Accuphase, and installs two can-size Revox-Rifa capacitors (22000 uF/63 VDC each). Over them an aluminium shield is screwed, as I already mentioned above. There is no internal wiring. What you see is nothing else but power supply.

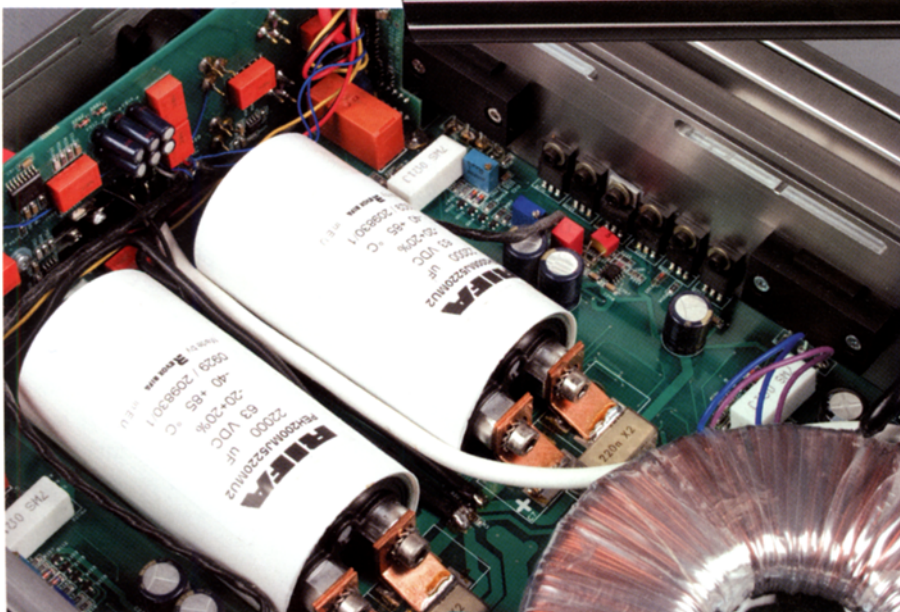
The most important part of every amplifier is its power output stage. The one under investigation is based on MOS-FET PolarHT transistors, mounted on heat-sinks with clamp-enclosures. Two pieces per channel.

The remote control is superb. Made of aluminium, heavy (but small) and manufactured with the same precision as the lush Colibri or Sarome lighters. It's a pleasure to hold. This must be one of the sturdiest controllers I have seen so far. It has all the basic buttons that enable control over the amplifier and CD, as well as an interesting volume control. It is a wheel, as on an ancient amplifier. Turn it



Two atomic bombs instead of a set of capacitors.

Logics and symmetry.



to the right – volume up, and to the left – to turn it down. Simple, isn't it.

Configuration

The power Gato possesses is considerable (150 W/8 ohms, 250 W/4 ohms), and so is its power efficiency. It should easily allow configuration with any loudspeaker set. There should be no problem with choosing the right speakers, as the amplifier is quite neutral. I would look for transparent loudspeakers and source. Such setup will bring out the most of the

AMP's virtues.

The system I used for testing Rossing's amplifier seems to be perfect for it and equally well adjusted pricewise. Actually, I do not mind if you copy this setup.

The only problem would be in the source: i.e. the CD-3 by Gamut. It is no longer produced – which is quite sad because I had trouble finding something better (and more to my taste), at a comparable price. Of course there is always the choice of the dedicated top-loader; after all, it comes from virtually the same manufacturer. The loudspeakers I used were Tempo VI from Audio Physic. You can listen to the more expensive Virgos, but I would strongly advise you to pay attention to the trebles, because those produced by the traditional Vifas seem to me to be healthier than those from the new AP tweeter made in China.

All the cables were from Fadel (Aphrodite). Only one mains cable broke away from the monopoly – the Neel N14E Gold. Power was conditioned via the Gigawatt PF-2 power strip. The equipment was placed on the StandArt STO platform. The amplifier reached me in virgin state, thus I dedicated about 50 hours to get it going. It is possible that after a longer usage it will produce even better results.

Sonic impressions

It is a rare experience to feel ready to start writing a review after listening to only one record. But equally rare is a situation when it sounds like a dream and you do not feel like correcting anything.

"Heligoland" by Massive Attack is the perfect material for Rossing's equipment. If I was to describe music reproduced by the Danish integrated amp with only one word, I would have no problem with that: it is great. On the one hand I would not say that this amplifier is perfectly neutral. On the second hand, I must quickly add that all the 'colora-

tions' used served it right, giving it character. Its outlines are quite vivid, but tasteful. The majority of departures from a 'pure line' add the necessary polish that will leave no one indifferent.

The sound has a perceptible warmth, and sweetness to it, with exposed mid-range. An analogy with a tube amp is immediately obvious. It is so strong that it will accompany you not only while listening to Massive Attack, but also with other recordings. To anyone who wants to see this as criticism I will say, not mincing my words, what my colleague's grandfather told Adolf Hitler: "whoa, whoa, you evil man!" I just do not want to belittle Gato in any way. What is more, I would recommend it to everyone who feels a little uneasy about owning a tube amp

Small work of art and a benchmark of functionality.

– or in other words, would like to own one, but gets a funny fluttering in the gut about it. Because there are the distortions, and it is also about the dynamics, and worse still, your fists are getting rather tight, when you think about the day when the glass tubes will need replacing – worn out on trying to convince yourself that it was a good decision. Here you have it all – the best of both worlds.

The midrange is charming. Virtually overpowering with warmth and directness. Open and memorable after the very first few seconds. Similar sensations can be experienced while listening to the tube, and even though it does not offer similar detail in the midrange, aesthetically it is really close – almost a touch

Quality paired with simplicity.



of reality. Another benefit of the tube is the microdynamics, striking everyone who had enough time and sensitivity to concentrate on the subtleties of human voice. Every sound is uttered with stage delivery of an actor who lives and breathes theatre; the attack of a violin, or the sound of a metal string plucked by a rosin covered bow, is so vivid, as if you were playing yourself, with your ear not further than half a meter away from the

bridge of the instrument. I was sawing away the strings of a cello for 15 years, so I know this sensation very well – so you can either take my word for it, or say that it is too much. Interestingly, no aggressive trebles are needed to achieve this.

These are under control, one could say that the trebles have been smoothed out, but not on the end of the range (that would be absurd), but in the noisy neighbourhood of 8-12 kHz. This is where they are tamed and the atmosphere is getting even warmer. Despite this you can hear everything, and even a little more. You can really busk in this sound and relax as in a bathtub full of water. Ultimate relaxation. Add to this your favourite read – our monthly, for instance.

Gato makes your dream about a tube come true, giving at the same time a peace of mind, as there are also the benefits of a transistor.

First of them is the dynamics. Many times I have wondered, what power output really means. On the one hand you need at least 500 W to feel the power, but sometimes you encounter a device that can reproduce the atmosphere of a concert at a fraction of this. That was exactly what happened in the setup with Spectral; similar was the story with the one hundred watt more powerful Mak MA7000 (finally, because all other models lacked energy). Gato pulsates with energy, and it seems that it does not matter how loud it is playing. You are doomed to feel those calories. An analogy with A class Accuphase amps becomes obvious here. It could be attributed to the large capacitors, although that theory may be a little forced.

The second benefit is in the bass. It is huge, it surrounds every recording with a huge cushion (there is enough of it to make it happen), offering such comfort



and amiable warmth that one could easily rest one's head in it and fall asleep. The problem is that you will not get a wink, because the energy of the impulses and their intensity will not allow you to count sheep. Any excess in this range can lead to satiety. I had this feeling when listening to a small integrated amp from Gryphon. But here, even if Rossing overdid it a little, it is not a problem. He still managed to combine tube softness with the ferociousness and instantaneity of the attack. Every burst and thud on "Heligoland" is really spectacular. It has energy and something I would call eagerness to play. It has been a while since I last heard

young man (loved it then, like still)?

Sometimes the sound between mid-range and top could be brighter, even at the price of a little sandiness right from the belly of an old Technics. At the moment I am listening to "Hergest Ridge" and am wondering if it is possible that what I hear is in fact better than what I remember from my youth. After all, those were the days when champagne tasted like strawberries and strawberries tasted like champagne. Anyway, some more character in this section of the range would work a treat. All in all, there certainly was nothing that could compare to such magnificent bass and chorus (although sung terribly off-key, which makes them the more "real"). Bliss.



It does not always have to look the same.

such good bass. I do not know if Spectral could be as impressive on first encounter. It would present this range differently; with tempo but more sparingly. You can choose what you like, but remember that the competitor costs at least three times as much.

In terms of space, Gato is well beyond its price-range, but will not compete with the best tube amps. This is simply a good level.

Despite the warmth and valve-amp'esque presentation of the midrange, nothing becomes blurred. The sound is clear and shaped with proportion.

This is how it sounds on "Heligoland", on the whole Stockfisch catalogue, Reference Recordings and arrogantly – on "Komeda – Inspirations". Perfect recordings are made for AMP-150. Squeezing them like a lemon will turn a one-minute-listening into a powerful performance that will not be easily forgotten.

But how about older recordings? With Tori Amos or the oddities created by Mike Oldfield that I listened to as a