

# Naim Ovator S600 et al at the Naim at TOM TOM Audio Road Show

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Invited to the St Albans TOM TOM Audio, James Almey - NAIM road show, also hosted by Naim staff including Doug Graham they were operating in a fairly representative high ceilinged room at the St Michael's Hotel. I took some music with me, but there was not time to try it. I take pains to point out that these observations are in no way a review of the new designs. We do look forward to a formal assessment of the Ovator S600 loudspeaker from one of our reviewers once production truly gets under way and the present model is said to be work in progress. While we enjoyed the chance to see and hear this floor standing loudspeaker, rumours are already flying that there may well be both a bigger and a smaller versions of this fundamental development.

Aspects of the concept which I see are crucial for Naim, regardless of the use of a new BMR planar, one piece mid-treble driver, are the low Q, almost non resonant low frequency range provided by a pair of 220 mm long throw bass units, these equivalent to a 12inch driver, operating under the traditional sealed box condition, secondly, the decoupled frame and integral stand, and finally the low resonant frequency, vibration blocking internal suspension system for the mid-treble driver including its integral damped alloy pipe enclosure.

In addition the decoupling technology which has been developed for the new mains cable terminations has been

applied to the new speaker to prevent cable vibration getting into the speaker vice versa, speaker vibration getting into the cable. Further, the crossover network, which may be also adapted for full three-way active drive (one amplifier channel for each driver), is itself decoupled from the vibration sources.

These aspects promise a low inherent noise floor with hopefully expressive dynamics and good transparency. Planar drivers promise time coherence with no cavity or cone type colorations so this aspect is hopeful too. With two bass drivers it should be able to kick harder than the single equivalent in the SL-2, but conversely the latter does benefit from the low frequency gain provided by its typical close to front wall location. The new speakers are quite large in the flesh, with bold, full sized, gently domed perforated grilles over each driver, but you got quite quickly accustomed to their looks.

The other models planned in this series include one with twin 6 1/2inch drivers for November, to join the '600, which is itself for release in September. One with a pair of 5inch bass is under consideration, with less isolation structures, one with twin 10 inchers and another even bigger flagship is on the cards. The '600 is no pipsqueak weakling, and with its multiple laminate carcass it weighs some 60kg a throw.

As is happened, listening from my central second row location, the mid bass in this room sounded rather excessive, slowing things down, and of sufficient magnitude to make any judgement of the speaker and room wildly unreliable. Early sessions were to show off the speaker and I patiently remained on my perch to wait and see. Even after nearly two hours I had not acclimatised to the sound, but did find that there was sufficient information to hear other differences which were being demonstrated.

I had talked earlier to a tall Swede, Hjalmar Nilsson, Naim's ace digital designer, about DACs, digital audio and filtering issues and he agreed that the commonly used FIR filters, with pre echo, do not sound that good and that he had taken pains with the new DAC to eschew off the shelf chip filter solutions and instead use the super power SHARK DSP engine from the multi-channel Bentley sound system in order to precisely generate custom, audiophile voiced replay filters for the new DAC. A low noise, classic Colpitts analogue local oscillator is fitted to increase transparency, with a special adaptive locking, no phase lock loop, to the SPDIF digital input, and with a large up front memory store. While Naim CD players have previously lacked a digital output on the grounds that it could detract from audio sound quality, there is now a Naim transport, the CD5-XS at £1700, and older NAIM CD players can be retrofitted with an SPDIF output as an alternative to the analogue output but

you can't have both. (However the latest CDX-2-2 £3,250 does have both, with an output format switchover)

Doug led with a demo of a the CDX-2-2, and then 'rebooted it' as transport driving the new DAC (£1,950), and the gain in quality was substantial, sounding clearer sweeter, more focused and articulate with crisper deeper bass. Then an XPS power supply was fitted to the DAC and the sound quality jumped again, this time showing noted improvements in subtly, dynamics, timing and grip. The DAC will do up to 24/19kHz music if you have it, play a USB stick file, but not a server connection though it will also digitally interface with gen5 iPods and their ilk.

I was interested to find that to find that the team were capable of so easily showing these obvious changes in sound reproduction, differences on which you could easily vote with your wallet. I could swear that the new DAC, inexpensive as it is, and un-augmented, sounded rather better than the HDX we had for review, though I understand that there have been some 'course of manufacture' revisions since then. I suspect it is time we had a catch up look at the current HDX to report on the present status. A review of the Naim DAC is clearly a must for HIFICRITIC.

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