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The business of reviewing hi-fi products might seem straightforward enough, but actually it's riddled with politics. This issue includes the reviews of two interesting and inexpensive valve amplifiers, under the Apollon and Jolida brand names, though there should have been three.

A friend reckoned that a new *Stereo 20PP* was a cracking integrated amp that we ought to review, and since I've long admired the sound quality of my own carefully restored Leak *Stereo 20* power amp, this seemed a very good idea.

I approached the company responsible at the Whittlebury Show, who seemed perfectly happy with the idea, and we confirmed this later over the phone. However, the anticipated delivery never took place, and when we asked what had happened, we were told that the amplifier wouldn't be submitted for review because we'd been critical of its *Stereo 300* model in a previous review (nearly five years ago).

True, we had criticised the original *Stereo 300*, because our lab tests had revealed evidence of 'DC bounce' which might well have been responsible for some subjective effects. But we'd also praised its "magical tonality, delicacy and transparency through the midband". That's surely the true purpose of any worthwhile magazine review – to provide balanced criticism that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of a given product. If we only include the positives, we might as well be writing press releases. On the price list, I notice that the *Stereo 300* now has a *MKII* suffix, so maybe the problem we identified has been sorted – but I guess *HIFICRITIC* is unlikely to have the opportunity to find out.

FIELD-COIL SPEAKERS

This issue includes two features on full range drivers powered by field-coil motors. We've been there before (well I have anyway), writing a feature on the almost-antique Voigt *Domestic Corner Horn (Vol4 No2)*, and a review of the Featrex *Nf5ex* drive unit (*Vol5 No1*). I was well impressed by certain qualities these speakers possessed, and was gratified to find that Chris Bryant was just as enthusiastic about the Supravox drivers he reviews in this issue.

Right now, field-coil drivers are exceedingly rare, very costly and rather inconvenient. They represent a tiny proportion of the full range drivers out there, which are themselves a tiny proportion of the speaker market as a whole. But they also sound decidedly special and, to paraphrase that time honoured ad tag, 'refresh the parts other speakers do not reach', which is very good reason for a magazine like this to pay them undue attention.

The interview with Voxativ's Ines Adler is particularly revealing, demonstrating how a serious engineer has applied first principles and experimentation in order to upgrade the performance of the full range driver. And the fact that Voxativ's *Ampeggio* speaker (which uses a conventional permanent magnet full range driver) has been awarded 'Product of the Year' by the prestigious US magazine *Stereophile*.

Now we just have to wait and see whether any of the leading conventional hi-fi speaker brands take the field-coil plunge. Focal already uses the technique for the bass units of its top models, so I'm awaiting further developments with considerable interest.

Paul Messenger

Editor