

First NAIT

MARTIN COLLOMS REVISITS THE ORIGINAL NAIM *NAIT*,
ORIGINALLY INTRODUCED SOME THIRTY YEARS AGO

Spurred by the considerable success of Henry Azima's compact Cyrus *One* integrated amplifier, Naim's designer Julian Vereker came up with his own compact 15W/channel design in 1983. This original *NAIT* was Naim's first integrated amplifier, and by far its smallest and least costly model.

Unable to obtain a loan sample at the time, I decided to purchase one to review it for *Hi-Fi News*. At the time it cost £170 (about £550 now), and perhaps a little to my chagrin I found that I really liked its sound, despite a couple of small technical errors in my very early example. It had an exuberant and lively sound that reached well beyond the expectations from the rated power or measured performance, and clearly outclassed larger and more costly competition in listener appeal.

A succession of budget Naims has followed, like the *NAIT5 XS* that was reviewed in *HIFICRITIC Vol3 No4*. The current full width *NAITs* now comprise a basic *NAIT 5si* selling at about £950, and a rather more capable *NAIT XS 2* at close to £1,600. However, our *NAIT* is the size and shape of a small child's shoebox. It has a U-shaped alloy chassis in a substantial alloy box-section extrusion, and sits on rubber feet. Pushbuttons select inputs and power; a large rotary controls volume; and a much smaller rotary adjusts balance. Speaker outputs are Naim's spaced 4mm sockets; disc inputs are phonos; and the line and tape sockets use 5-pin DINs.

Sound Quality

As it hadn't been used for a while, the *NAIT* took a few days to settle in with background material before we got stuck in. We connected it to the Wilson *Sophia 3* loudspeakers (arguably a massive mismatch) and the PMC *fact.12s* using 5m *NACAS* cables. An *NDS* digital audio streamer fed the line input via a stock DNM DIN cable. LPs were played from a Linn *LP12*/Naim *ARO*/Shure *V15V* (dust collector raised).

First impressions were of some cloudiness, and the stereo image was clearly not as explicit or as deep as many modern amplifiers manage. However, I was quickly taken back 30 years by this little firecracker, which grabbed hold of both the Wilsons and especially the PMCs with a lively and

involving musicality – the same quality that had so impressed me in back 1983.

It played louder in my 8x11m room than I had any right to expect, delivering deep and well timed bass lines with a forthright exposition of complex rhythms. The *NAIT* was seriously entertaining and great fun to be with, so that conventional notions of high fidelity went straight out the window. It's a little depressing to recall many subsequent listening sessions where products in a similar class have gone through the motions, but all too often failed to generate equivalent excitement and satisfaction.

Vinyl replay was considered a little dry in the bass, but this arguably helped match its tonal balance more closely to digital sources, and it sounded similarly upbeat and involving. (The original review probably used tape and tuner line input sources and a Grado induced magnet cartridge; CD players were rare, costly and had yet to convince many listeners.) I was not surprised to find our panelists happily scoring this cheerful amplifier at around 31 marks – a worthy result regardless of rated power or age.

A quick lab check on 239V mains showed a miserly (if now fashionable) standing power consumption of less than 4VA; a better than expected maximum power of 19.5W/ch for perceptible clipping into 8 ohms; and a cruising 10W power distortion level of just 0.03% in the midband. At an average power for music of 1W, distortion was more than respectable: 0.012% at 1kHz, 0.05% for 20Hz and 0.12% at 20kHz. The frequency response measured -1dB at 10Hz and 12kHz, with a characteristic mild treble cut of 2.2dB by 20kHz (not noticed on audition). At 1W the signal-to-noise ratio was fine at 76dB (79dBA weighted). Following the convention at the time, input sensitivity was a high 0.1V for full power (nowadays 0.5V is more typical). Crossover distortion was negligible; the dominant second harmonic was -70dB at 10W; third was -78dB and fourth -80dB, monotonically decrementing thereafter. In all, these are perfectly respectable results.

No wonder the secondhand price of this little marvel has held up so well. Despite 30 years of 'progress' in amplifier design and prices, there would be no difficulty in recommending it for smaller systems even now.

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