

AMR AM-777 VERSTERKER & CD-777 CD-SPELER

Our readership is made up of pleasant readers and long may our loyal readers continue to be so...the reward for our readers in this review is something a little bit different. Those that wish to know more should read on. This test is of a very nice set of audio components: the AMR AM-777 amplifier and CD-777 CD player. These machines are a direct derivative from two years ago of the set that I tested, the AMR-77 series.



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Anyone who has read the foreword by Ivo, with the short preview of the Oracle CD player, has seen that there is something special going on. The success of Audio Emotion is largely thanks to our readers who have from day one, been enticed and have embraced the ethos of our magazine wholeheartedly. This magazine would like to return this favour: I am able to confirm that after I having had one for some time, an AMR CD-777 player will over the next month, be raffled among Music Emotion's subscribers. If this is not a kind gesture, then I don't know what one is! And believe me, anything free is nice, but to receive the CD-777 for nothing is surely one of the nicest things that can happen to any audiophile.

AMR CD-777 dac / drive combination

In the past I have favourably reviewed the AMR CD player, the AMR CD-77, which now, several years later, has evolved into an even better player. And it was not just a player, but a device which the designers incorporated into it, maximum flexibility to the benefit of all types of listeners. Some basic principles have remained true, since this is what the company stands for. The user will see the newer approaches both of which are of benefit to the user. Through the remote are a number of filtering functions which enable the player to change from a filter-free basis to a high upsampled filter and everything else in between: two or four times oversampling and upsampling to 96 or 192 kHz. The sound will of course, always change.

In the AMR CD-777, all its filters and some design principles have been derived directly from its bigger brother. Also the CD-777 uses an output stage that shuns



opamps or transistors, but instead, uses valves. This is based upon the belief that this is still, the only way of approaching the sound reproduction level set by a vinyl turntable. But there is nothing wrong with this approach. I like turntables. Due to my hefty record collection, I just waver slightly in light of convenience and storage space requirements. I need to slightly adjust the height of my tone arm every time I play a vinyl record, I have to make the necessary adjustments. But that's just splitting hairs...

Back to the AMR set and especially the CD player. Like the CD-77, based upon the 1541A Philips's Prince of 'Multibit' DAC's, the CD-777 also has a Multibit DAC - which again was specifically chosen for its analogue and musical character. Also, it should be stated that during my listening sessions, both the CD-77 and CD-777 machines sound most analogue when no form of oversampling and upsampling is used.

USB

Note, this is a really fun story. At AMR they designed to take into account future trends in these times of ever-changing digital applications and in this regard, they certainly did not put a foot wrong. Thus, the DAC has the built-in possibility to process signals from a USB port. Hence, an external digital source such as a computer audio source may

feed its signal in without significant loss or increased jitter. According to AMR, this is through their cleanly clocked signals that seem the norm for their standard level of digital execution.

The drive: dot the i

Conversely, the transport can be used stand alone; with an external dac connected to it. Therefore, whichever trends develop, the analogue section to this player may still be used. Other features of this machine may go unnoticed: I think the look, above all is of a nice, robust appearance that rests comfortably with most if not all users. So not something that appeals to one "Who does a nice box?", but something more in the direction of: "What is a functional wardrobe with this device?" And then you see that there is no CD drawer tray but a solid drawer door. The running gear is built on a suspension that further improves operation and performance.

Valves produce heat, so there are ventilation slots over where the valves are situated. The buttons are very functional and are a simple push button type. Nothing is not without design and while we're at it, they must have thought this through well at AMR, as they also throw in a touch screen remote control that stands upright nicely so that the screen can be seen and is visible from several meters. Each device comes with its own remote. Voila, one for the



set and one at the listening position!

As if all this is not enough, significant attention has been paid to the components, with a conductive gold layer circuit board and all high quality capacitors. The transformers are made in-house, an expensive approach but it seems only the best is good enough...

And then actually the strangest part of this story: the price. A product of EUR 3600 should not look and feel like this. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that assembly occurs in China, but there are almost no parts sourced from China, only the chassis and the transformers.

AMR AM-777

Then there is also the amplifier in the same housing as the CD player.

Almost identical except for a row of mysterious buttons at the back, which I will come back to because "there is more than meets the eye", as our English neighbours are so fond of saying. Since AMR is firmly rooted on English soil, this is a most appropriate turn of phrase.

Again, a beautifully constructed aluminum chassis that looks seamless when placed side by side to the CD-777. Inside is a 2 x sixty watt hybrid dual-mono amplifier that amplifies the signal -

with both valves and transistors. The pre-section has an ECC88 valve and the power section is the same as the AM-77 bigger brother with the use of bipolar output devices, again in a hybrid reinforcement principle.

The AMR has a neat display on the front that notifies you to the nearest second of how long you should wait for this creature to feel comfortable enough to play. It takes its time but this is of a relaxing type. Then everything works flawlessly using the included touchscreen remote that can also stand upright so that it is more visible. The amplifier has four different inputs and a separate phono stage may yet come out. Alongside the RCA outputs are balanced outputs. The price of all this beauty is significantly lower than that of the larger sibling set i.e. EUR 3600 each.

Mysterious buttons

As stated earlier, on the back are a number of mysterious buttons that one does not find in an ordinary integrated amplifier: I will reveal a secret because this feature really appeals to me. The circuit at the rear gives the user access to a number of amplification options. First, there is the default option: as integrated amplifier with a large capacity. But it is possible to pair the AMR AM-777 amplifier with another brand as the preamp or use two

AM-777 amplifiers which then opens the option of bi-amplification to one and all. In certain situations, this may result in a very large difference in sonic performance such as dynamics and low bass control.

But that's not all. The amplifier can also perform as a stereo amplifier, without the preamplifier. The principle is that if you are looking for an improvement as you deem appropriate, it is there to be found. This is impressive, but this is not all. The built-in power amps have to the option to be mono switched so you can play two as mono-blocks. Or three amplifiers: two monoblocks and one stereo such as for separate bi-amplification of treble and bass.

Yet still, we are not finished as you will find a button to switch the AM-777 into 4 ohms or 8 ohms mode for different speakers. You guessed it: these are precisely things that I really appreciate in a product. If conditions change (much larger room or a really difficult speaker is purchased), the client can simply note these changes and carry out the changes without the need to meddle with his system. According to AMR, many types of speakers may be easily controlled by this amp.



First up is “Jewel in the Jet” and with the right speaker, this exudes a serenity and warm glow and is certainly covered by the AMR machines. In particular, the voice is something that is very human. Another striking point is the quality of the percussion. It is not of the usual very detailed and highly etched kind, “so many small rifles and rafjes” as we say. The quality of the music signal shows itself by being very relaxed, complete, without any trace of hardness. It will also decay, in the right manner, a feat that is not often achieved, but is here in spades. Further, the width and depth of the soundstage projected is definitely a strong point.

USB input

But we are still not there yet. The integrated amplifier has a separate connection where with the bulk of other amplifiers you will search in vain, namely a USB input. Suppose you cast your eye over this amplifier and then note that the economic crisis has struck you significantly harder than your first thought, then is fear not.

Why? Well very simply put, because almost everyone in the Netherlands has an mp3 player and audiophiles with the better models, you simply connect a cable from your iPod to the AMR. This opens you to a complete library of songs you can play directly through the amplifier! According to the manufacturer, this internal DAC performs on a par with external DACs in the price range from 1000 to 1500 euro. And now ladies and gentlemen we have really a complete package as a solution, because the experiments I did in the past with non-rotating sources, have given very encouraging sonic results.

Topset

In conclusion there is plenty to say regarding the AMR set. The title is very neat story, because I have seldom come across such a complete set within a brand. As a user you can start with an iPod and an integrated amplifier and then you only have need to add a pair of speakers. Then when funds permit, you may budget for a serious upgrade with an additional amplifier so that your system can be bi-amped. Do you as a reader feel that you could possibly wish

for more (as we all like to do)? then you may use the amplifiers as mono-blocks or a pre-amp may be added. All within the same system setup: a gradual build-up to a super system is highly unusual and is what I call a clever concept!

Listening

Then comes the most pressing question: what are these AMR machines in relation to their big brother and at what level are they playing that? In order to responsibly address this I have a pair of speakers that I have listened to a lot which come highly regarded: Von Schweikert VR 4 jr. The wiring alone uses the expensive Crystal Reference speaker cable and Ultra interconnects runs between these two machines. This is not normal and is not in proportion to the cost of these AMR machines but this is an exercise is to see how far one may go in a system test setup as this is one demanding approach.

The set is placed on a Tabula Rasa, which makes the system complete. With a pack of discs and my laptop, we are ready to go. Unfortunately, with only two more years to go, I am fast approaching the full state pension...so for me, the world of computer audio is not quite here quite yet, even though the AMRs are both ready to take this in their stride, I am less so.

I give the components a few days to warm-up to get used to one another and then I narrowed my collection of CDs down to a few for critical evaluation.

A second CD is slipped into the slide drawer and this time I have let loose Karl Orf in my listening room. Well, this is again handled in its stride. Again the projection of warmth and placement in time goes well behind the speakers. Then I do something that puts me at odds with my nice neighbours because I increase the volume and pay little attention to the neighbours and sink into the music. The AMR amplifier does not shrink away: instead, it effortlessly delivers the power and drama of the music which remains transparent and does not change in character. Again, convenience and warmth set in a very large soundstage.

Third, the song which is played throughout the entire VAD Show, namely Chris Jones: a great recording with voice, acoustic guitar playing a major role. On the AMR set, the sound is flawlessly good: Chris sings up a storm without overdoing it, I'm suitably convinced. Then just a small test: reviewer or not, I decide to damp the brightly lit suspended CD-well with a graphite mat. The Mat 1 from Boston also seems to work well. More detail and a slightly tighter focus are my reward. I have enough information.

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Conclusion

It's again been a pleasure to work with such beautiful equipment. The finish is great and ease of use is second to none. Valves are often seen in a high-end set, I would say, otherwise this would be an incomplete set. Valves are used and this set is as complete

as you could possibly wish for; an amplifier or two, or an amplifier in stereo and two mono-block mode. Everything is possible; even add a separate preamp or phono stage. Seldom is a complete product offering so 'complete'. And the wonderful warm sound that keeps me floating on cloud nine leaves

me enjoying my time spent with these machines. AMR, continue with development and keep up the creativity as these are real assets!

Jo Mullers

Prices

AMR AM-777 amp € 3600

AMR CD-777 CD Player € 3600

Available in silver and black

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