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Published by

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Printed in the UK by
 Premier Print, London

HIFICRITIC is a printed publication available by subscription only.

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I think we at *HIFICRITIC* may well have a little local difficulty, which probably comes down to our various and sometimes very different lifestyle choices. I recently purchased a Naim *NAC S1*, as I've always used Naim's top pre-amp. Now that it's installed I'm well pleased with the sound quality, but find myself a trifle discombobulated by a couple of its features.

When I looked back at MC's review I found that he described the fact that the *NAC S1* has eight line-level inputs of various kinds, but failed to mention that only five of the eight are actually available at any one time. My previous *NAC 552* (and its '52 predecessor) had six inputs and even then I found myself struggling (and could happily have used seven). I then discovered that the new pre-amp didn't have any form of 'record out' option (the '552 had three!), which is a feature that I occasionally find useful too (admittedly usually when reviewing amps without remote control!).

The third demerit concerned the handset, which MC described as: "a superbly engineered, illuminated milled alloy remote control". Although I like the button illumination, I would have described it as pretentious, too heavy and too bulky. My ultimate handset is the dinky little device used to control Apple TV. It measures just 120x30x5mm (LxWxD), weighs next to nothing, and has just seven buttons (arguably only five are really needed for a pre-amp).

Don't get me wrong. I'm not in the least unhappy with the new pre-amp. It sounds quite lovely, but its arrival does mean that I'll have to make some adjustments to my lifestyle. I reckon I can live with the lack of 'rec out'; I may well be able to find a way round the handset problem too; and the acquisition of a couple of leads will probably sort out the input limitations.

However, the latter has drawn attention to a point that I've been pondering since I reviewed the excellent Audio Music *R-T1* two-box valve pre-amplifier (distributed by LW Audio) for another magazine a year or two back. That device certainly sounded very good indeed, but because it had just three line inputs it was quite impractical from my point of view.

But not from everybody else's perspectives it would seem. A couple of our contributors tend to use just one input on their pre-amps, at least partly I believe because they have a dedicated 'music room' which is separate from the rest of the house. One even told me that a single connected input is the route to the finest sound quality, which may indeed be the case, but is it real-world relevant?

Now that tone controls have lost their audiophile credibility, the only real point of having a pre-amp (or one that's built into an integrated amplifier) is to change volume and switch between inputs. I guess we'd all like to be able to have a separate music room in our lives, but to omit one of these functions purely for audiophile reasons does seem uncomfortably close to suffering from an OCD.

Paul Messenger
 Editor