

Naim NAP 500 - the DR upgrade

THE EDITOR IS STILL WAITING FOR HIS NAP 500 DR-UPGRADE (SCHEDULED FOR JULY), BUT MARTIN COLLOMS HAS MANAGED TO BLAG A REVIEW SAMPLE OF NAIM'S LATEST TWO-BOX POWER AMP

"I knew instinctively just how good it was on a familiar CD track, from the very first note of percussive bass"



When I reviewed the original *NAP 500* for *Hi-Fi News* in August 2000, tagged with 'Naim's long awaited all-new flagship power amplifier sets the pace for the 21st Century.' Looking back, it was a good review: I applauded the notable qualities of pace, rhythm and timing, particularly when used with the high end Naim *NBL* loudspeakers that were on hand at the time. However, in the context of the international audiophile scene, driving speakers such as the Wilson *WATT Puppy-6*, I also felt that it just missed out on the last measure of slam and dynamics that I experienced from the bigger Krells. That review *NAP 500* was an early sample and very soon afterwards the protection circuit was revised to optimise power delivery into more awkward speaker loads. Also, we were probably insufficiently experienced with the almost inordinate time many Naim products take to run in fully (sometimes months) at that time.

In a Naim system context the *500* was very well received. It has sold well over the past 15 years despite premium pricing, and was described as a design assault on the state of the art. Considerable electronic circuit expertise was applied to minimise both steady state and dynamic related noise. In its way it was the *Statement* design of its time, much of the design and construction steps taken then were also employed to create the *Statement* power

amplifier itself, including the balanced output stage, albeit more recently and ambitiously applied.

The dramatic redesign applied to the *DR* version of the *NAP 500* means that it is effectively a brand new amplifier and much more than just a 'discrete regulator' upgrade. Indeed, those returning a *500* for revision will discover that there's a waiting list for the work (*too true* – *Ed*), and the radical changes required will cost £4,200 and take several days to complete. Major circuit boards are exchanged, and the new and more powerful *NA0009N*-series power transistors must be fitted, for both the amplifier outputs and the multiple high power regulators. This two-box amplifier is not configured as two monoblocks; rather the larger case contains the stereo power amplifier, while a smaller, plainer unit contains the power supply components. The larger unit has centralised grounding for maximum operating dynamic range, and an attractive sculpted appearance thanks to a heavily finned central heat-sink. If the going gets tough, for example through supplying sustained high power into lower impedance loads, a near-silent two-speed fan takes care of the excess heat. The plainer looking power supply should be placed adjacent to the *500DR* rather than stacked, to minimise any magnetic and vibration interference. This slim but heavy power supply is linked to the amplifier by a pair of huge, high current, locking Burndy connectors, with hawser like multi-core cables. These industrial grade connections are vibration- and environment-proofed, and have a high current capacity with stable and ultra-low contact resistance.

The power supply may be factory set for 220V or 110V operation, and is protected by a user-replaceable fuse. The amplifier runs cool at idle, and in fact stays quite cool when running hard. Although this amplifier has XLR balanced type input sockets, the inputs are intrinsically single-ended. The left channel uses pin1 for signal and the right channel signal is on pin3; pin2 carries the ground for both XLR inputs. Just to confuse things, the speaker