

Subjective Sounds

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It's quite useful to have this back page available as a rolling diary, catching up with recent experiences and updating some of the things I might have overlooked. Saying that, this particular past quarter has been traumatic, thanks to multiple power amp failures. To summarise, I've been using a Naim *NAP500* with total reliability for around fifteen years (and *NAP135s* and *NAP250s* before that, going right back to the 1970s, again with utter reliability). However, I sent it back for a *DR* upgrade in mid-June, mindful of the fact that it would need 6-8 weeks running in after re-fettling, but unhappily, a week after it came back (and with Spendor's Philip Swift sitting right next to me), smoke arose from the power supply unit, due to a faulty component.

The '500 went back to Salisbury for repair, which took a week (thanks to an intervening bank holiday), so I installed an NVA *The Second Statement* as a replacement. Everything seemed to be working fine for a few days, but then the B&W boys arrived. Everything went swimmingly for an hour or so, and I was perfectly happy using the NVA amplifier as a substitute. Until, that is, Steve Pearce slipped a techno disc into the CD player. I then got carried away with the volume control, and I blew one of the NVA's channels. Timing couldn't have been worse as the 500 was already sidelined, so I had to dig out a very old (but recently serviced) *NAP250*, which happily worked out fine.

The 500 came back and I used it for another three weeks before I discovered another problem. This only revealed itself when I wound up the wick and started using serious power, whereupon one channel showed signs of instability. It was back to Salisbury for another week or so, and the problem this time turned out to be faulty soldering of a power transistor in the amplifier itself.

I'm not going to complain, as this is the first (and second!) time I've encountered any reliability problems with Naim components in forty or so years. And the *NAP500 DR* certainly sounded particularly good when it came back the second time. But the toing and froing has certainly chucked an unexpected spanner in the running-in and hence the reviewing procedures, for which I should apologise.

Why do I always discover niggles with digital audio devices after I've already written about them? I was certainly happy enough at getting Arcam's little *irDAC-II* to sort out my digital sources when it came to writing last quarter's *Subjective Sounds*, especially as it seemed to have sorted out the mild irritations I'd encountered with the *MkI* model.

Now I've found a new niggles that certainly affects the practicality of the *MkII* version. It doesn't seem to affect the co-ax or optical inputs that are used for my server and TV respectively, but the problem seems to involve the USB input which is normally used for my lap-top. If I switch the DAC on after the lap-top, all is well, and the lap-top recognises the presence of the DAC. However, when I shut down the lap-top and go to bed leaving the DAC on, the lap-top sometimes no longer recognises the Arcam DAC. In practice this can be rather inconvenient, as I tend to leave the DAC permanently 'on', but shut down the lap-top overnight, with the result that it sometimes (and somewhat unpredictably) loses the connection.

I also owe Andrew Rothwell an apology, for completely ignoring the M-C cartridge loading adjustment that is available on his *Headspace* step-up. It was only after we'd gone to press that I found the little bit of paper that told me to open up the unit and make the required adjustments to match cartridge and load...