

# Naim Uniti Core

DESCRIBED AS A REFERENCE HARD-DISK SERVER,  
MARTIN COLLOMS EXAMINES THIS NEW NAIM COMPONENT

*“The Uniti approach assumes that the process of digital audio product design is rather more than simply supplying digital audio bits to a network and a DAC in a satisfactory order”*

This review ostensibly concerns Naim’s *Uniti Core*, a humble, rather unassuming looking device finished in anodised satin black. It might lack a front panel display, but it shares much of its technology and some of its functionality with other components in the new *Uniti* range. This *Uniti Core* is fundamentally a digital music controller and store and has no analogue audio outputs. It replaces the long lived *UnitiServe* which was in production for some seven years, and is now obsolete – it’s now a legacy product, complete with internal Windows XP programming and all. (The *UnitiServe* is also a compact, hard drive music server; an SSD option came later and in this instance that relatively small buffer SSD is then supported by a larger external network connected NAS drive music store.)

*Uniti Core* has both UPnP network, and S/PDIF outputs, the latter allowing it to drive standalone DACs and a network drive. However, its primary purpose is *servicing* to a streamer-DAC *via* a network, ideally using a CAT 6 or 7 wired connection, finally leading to the audio output. I have used a *UnitiServe* for some years, largely with a Naim *NDS* streamer/DAC and *555DR* power supply, and have maintained it with the latest software. I’ve contrived to achieve sound quality that approaches a serious audiophile level. (For reference, I connect a CD drive directly *via* S/PDIF to the *NDS*.) The server approach then provides unfettered access to my extensive music library *via* the Naim App running on an *iPad* or similar.

The *Uniti Core* is an audio component based on the radical design platform conceived for the new *Uniti* series. Long in development, it now has proprietary programming by Naim for system control and in-house processor software.

The massive problem faced by all such *Uniti*-series components (with or without amplification), is the heady pace of introductions and updates from the various streaming sources, each of which has its own particular programming needs. Spotify is certainly the most popular, but Tidal and Qobuz are becoming well entrenched for users interested in high quality. Meanwhile hardware makers suffer continuing nightmares trying to keep up, both with these developments, and also the evolving up-shifts in sampling rates (such as those for higher rate DSD formats).

Regardless of the convenience, accessibility, and the improving quality of live internet streamed audio, in my opinion the best audiophile quality continues to come from tracks stored on a local drive. These include HD downloads, and CD material that’s probably sourced from the owner’s collection, ripped at high quality using custom storage devices such as a *UnitiServe*. The new *Uniti Core* therefore continues to have a built in, easy to run CD ripper.

Often run 24/7, network hard drives can and will occasionally fail. Sensible backup strategies, such as inexpensive network-connected UPnP backup drives and programming must be put in place to allow convenient restoration after a hard drive failure and subsequent replacement. The *Uniti Core* is designed to deliver high quality audio data directly by S/PDIF, to a similar standard as a dedicated CD drive through served network streams.

The *Uniti Core* avoids potentially noisy and jitter-inducing switch mode power supplies. However, some internal customised switch mode low voltage supplies are necessary for the powerful math processors; these are specially filtered.

*Uniti Core* also employs extensive vibration and acoustic feedback countermeasures, which are largely lacking from other generic ripper/servers. Naim Audio well understands that digital audio components need similar vibration control and isolation countermeasures as have benefitted critical audio circuits. From the ground up, *Uniti Core* has been designed to handle digital audio files and data with great care, through refined digital clocking, multiple linear power supplies, and careful control of electrical noise. This extensive work is clearly evident.

*UnitiServe* already set a high standard for such devices, and it was deemed essential that the new model improve upon the old. This new model has carefully routed and dressed internal cables; internal framing and supports are of forged alloy to inhibit vibration; and the cassette for the critical hard drive installation is resiliently mounted to isolate these drives from external vibration but also to block vibration from the spinning drive reaching the other critical internals. (This aspect is less important when the solid state drive option is taken up.)

*Uniti Core* will have nowhere to hide when compared directly with the earlier server, feeding a reference grade streamer/DAC such as Naim’s