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Electrocompaniet AW 800 M

STEREO/MONOBLOCK POWER AMPLIFIER

The finest soup I ever tasted was served in Kamakura City, Japan, in 1992. After climbing a mountain to a shrine that held a lock of Buddha's hair, I descended to Kamakura and walked to its Great Bronze Buddha. By the time I had taken my fill of the image's 730-year-old wonders and the countless picture-taking tourists at its base—a mild precursor to “the world is a backdrop for my ego” snappers of the smartphone age—I noticed that my stomach was growling.

Exhausted, I walked back into town and descended stairs into a conveniently located corner restaurant. I had to eat fast because my train back was departing soon. Looking for something quick, I ordered miso soup and eel over rice. Imagine my surprise when I found myself gazing into the most wondrous bowl of soup I'd ever seen. Floating on top of its clear, brown broth were various vegetables and herbs, each perfectly positioned in relationship to the other, as in a handcrafted textile. I felt as though I'd been granted private access to a great work of art.

And the taste. Oh, the taste. It was as perfectly proportioned, complex, and multilayered as the soup's surface. If I had not been forced to eat fast in order to make the train—trains in Japan are never late—I would have spent 15 or 20 minutes eating slowly, savoring each mouthful and contemplating the myriad tastes and sensations.

What does all this have to do with the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M Reference mono power amplifiers (\$22,500/each) that are the subject of this review? You'll have to read on to find out.

Before the soup, there was Electrocompaniet

Fifty years ago—eight years before Krell issued its first solid state amplifier—Nils Bjarne Kvam founded Electrocompaniet in Norway. After attending a symposium at which a famed professor, Dr. Matti Otala, presented a paper on how to avoid the transient intermodulation distortion that prevented transistor-based ampli-

fiers from delivering credible high-fidelity sound, Kvam returned to Norway, joined up with PA systems manufacturer Per Abrahamson, and proceeded to build some amplifier prototypes. Three years later, in 1976, Electrocompaniet released its first power amplifier, a two-channel, 25Wpc model. *The Audio Critic* soon hailed it as the best-sounding transistor amplifier in the world.

In its 50th anniversary year, Electrocompaniet now consists of six employees who focus mainly on sales and development. Manufacturing takes place next door in a huge electronics production facility run by Electrocompaniet's sister company, Westcontrol, which manufactures audio products for only one company, Electrocompaniet.

“We had good distribution in the US back in the day,” Lasse Danielsen, Electrocompaniet's sales and marketing director, told me near the start of a chat during AXPONA 2023. When I sat down with Danielsen, Electrocompaniet CEO Bjørn Kindingstad, and Antal Distribution National Sales Manager Frank Gazzo, I had not yet heard the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M Reference monoblocks. “Then, when things weren't going great, we started to manage our own distribution for a while. That didn't turn out very well either, so we've teamed up with Antal to reinvigorate distribution in the United States.” At the time of our discussion, Electrocompaniet had 12 US dealers. Two months later, the number had grown to 15. Fifteen dealers for 15 Electrocompaniet models.

As I started learning then and continued to learn from a series of follow-up emails, the design of the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M Reference is new “from the ground up.” The amplifier first reached the market in January 2023, after three years of development. Danielsen described it as a fully discrete, true-balanced, class-AB design with approximately 10W in pure class-A. All the amp's pre-stages—everything before the output stage—runs in pure class-A. Output is a sizable 800Wpc into 8 ohms, 1500Wpc into 4 ohms, and a mighty 2200Wpc into 2 ohms.

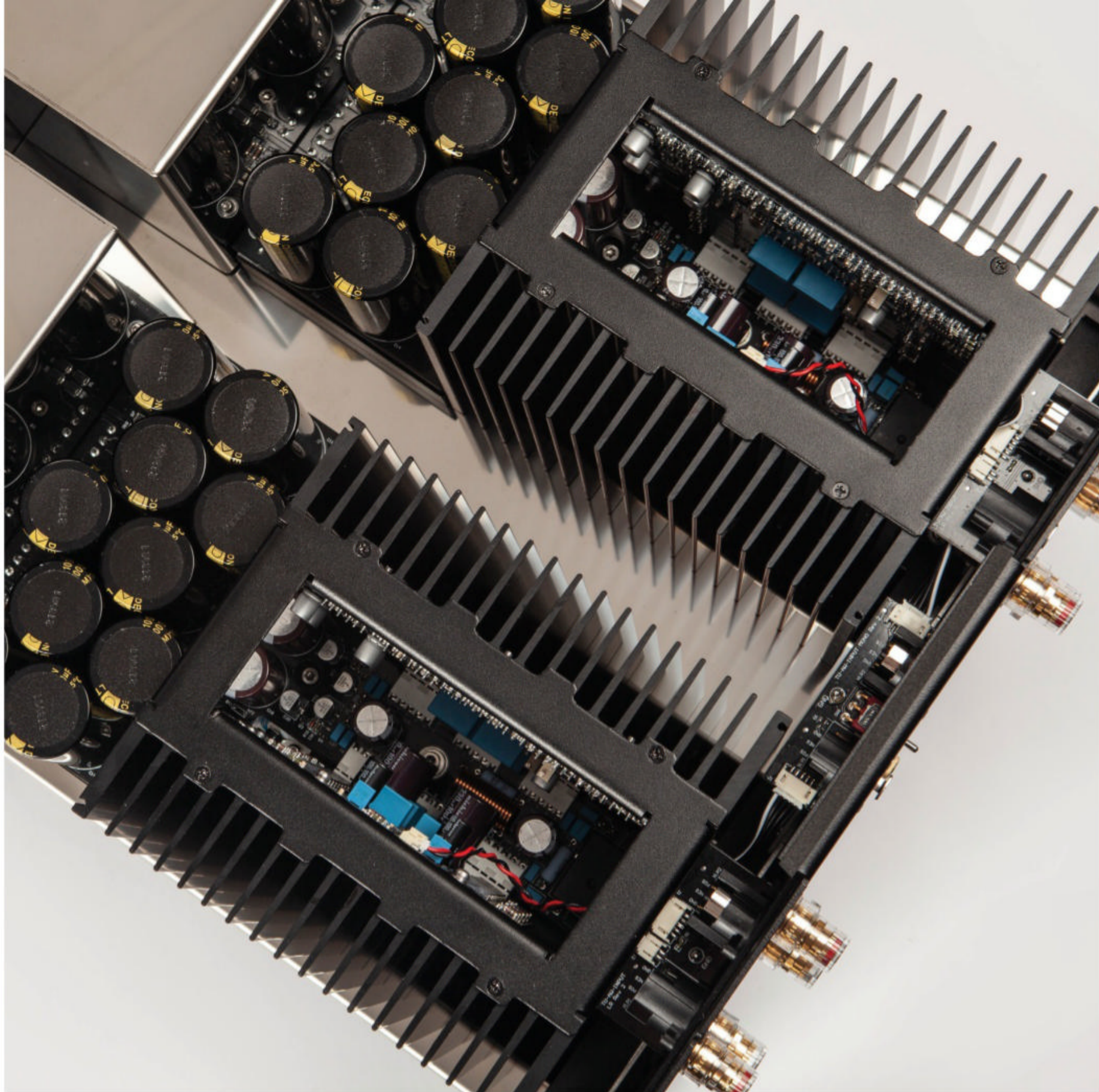
SPECIFICATIONS

Description Solid state, fully balanced class-AB mono/stereo power amplifier. Input: 1 balanced (XLR) mono, 2 balanced (XLR) stereo. Output: 2 pair binding posts per channel, 3 balanced (XLR) links. Rated output power mono 800W into 8 ohms (29dBW), 1500W into 4 ohms (28.8dBW), 2200W into 2 ohms (27.4dBW). Rated output power stereo: 300Wpc into 8 ohms (24.8dBW), 600Wpc into

4 ohms (24.8dBW), 1000W into 2 ohms (24dBW). Frequency response 0.5Hz–220kHz, ±3dB. Input impedance: 330k ohms. Signal/noise ratio (ref. 1W into 8 ohms, A-weighted): 95dB. THD+N (mono, 300W, 1kHz into 8 ohms): 0.0004%. THD+N (mono, 800W, 1kHz into 8 ohms): 0.0015%. THD+N (stereo, 300W, 1kHz into 8 ohms): 0.002%. Slew-rate (input filter disabled): 270V/μs. Voltage gain mono/stereo: 35/29dB.

Standby power consumption: < 0.5W. Auto power down delay time: 30 min. **Dimensions** 16" (406mm) W × 19.2" (488mm) D × 11.5" (292mm) H. Weight: 122lb (55kg) each. **Finish** Black paint with black anodized, brushed aluminum trim and polished acrylic front panel. **Serial numbers of units reviewed** 18323010027, 10028. Designed and built in Norway. **Price** \$22,500 each. Approxi-

mate number of US dealers: 15. Warranty: 2 years, parts and labor. **Manufacturer** Electrocompaniet AS, Teknologiveien 2, 4120 Tau, Norway. Tel: +47 51 74 10 33. Web: electrocompaniet.com. US distribution: Antal Audio, 32 Dix Ave., Glens Falls, NY 12801. Tel: (503)970-8531. Web: antalaudio.com.



“Every parameter inside the amp is way ahead of anything we’ve ever produced before,” Danielsen said. “It’s a dual-monoblock configuration with two amplifiers inside that are bridged. There’s a switch on the back to use it as two individual amplifiers in stereo mode, or with another in biamping mode. With everything redesigned, based on the same topology we’ve used before, it contains better components, a better transformer, and better mechanical and electrical isolation. The noise floor is extremely low; it’s the blackest-sounding amplifier we’ve ever made. It’s pitch black when you listen to the quiet parts of the music.”

“The amp includes an RF filter intended to remove common mode and differential high-frequency noise from the line. The transformers include an electrostatic shield that blocks noise from coupling as it moves between the primary and secondary wirings. An internal DC filter reduces asymmetric main AC voltage and prevents DC voltage from saturating the transformers and causing mechanical noise.” For these reasons, Danielsen said, Electrocompaniet had achieved the best results with the amplifier plugged di-

rectly into the wall rather than into a power conditioner. I decided to follow their lead.

Danielsen sent information from Electrocompaniet’s engineer and augmented it by email over time. In edited form, it reads: “The AW 800 M utilizes Electrocompaniet’s direct-coupled high open-loop bandwidth topology, further enhanced by a high slew-rate and very high-bandwidth amplifier stages. Our topology has always been called ‘Ampliwire,’ aka ‘AW.’ In this new amplifier, AW technology is further enhanced to a level we call ‘Ampliwire 2.’ The idea behind the term is that the amplifier ‘amplifies the wire’ from the source without altering or coloring its sound in any way. So the sound remains as close to the original as possible.

“In addition, a brand-new output stage with 32 high-bandwidth, high-current bipolar output transistors heavily shields the input and driver stages from the load and makes the output extremely stiff, unaffected by the connected load. This has the added benefit of significantly simplifying the workload of the feedback system, which is already working gently, thereby providing vanishingly

low distortion figures.

“To feed the output stage, the greatly updated power supply now has a total of 210,000 μ F supply filtering. The mains power input is DC- and RF-filtered. The upgraded twin toroidal, wire gauge transformers are magnetically and electrostatically shielded to prevent any noise intrusion. The internal ground reference has been vastly enlarged and kept fully free of rectifying and output currents. The result is a very clean, noise-free output signal regardless of output power, providing a very stable soundstage with the blackest background possible at any sound level.

“The AW 800 M also features design upgrades including a new front plate design with a 3D logo and a new power button design. The chassis has been re-engineered from the ground up. Its new modular design construction has been enhanced by two black, brushed-aluminum rods over the top that make the chassis much more rigid and contribute to its aesthetic appeal.”

The Electrocompaniet signature sound

Kindingstad said that the new design wasn't motivated by unhappiness with the performance of previous amplifiers; “We just knew we could do it better.” The portal to “better” was opened by the arrival of a new engineer who had fallen in love with Electrocompaniet's sound and had studied its engineering since he was a young kid.

“Soundwise, we think there's a warmth to our sound,” Kindingstad continued. “That doesn't mean that it's wrong or colored in any way. Just like one singer has one voice and the other singer has a different voice, different amplifiers have different voices. That doesn't mean that one is out of tune; they just sound different.

“We want people to focus on and enjoy music. We think you can listen to the warm, natural, and organic sound of our amplifiers for a long time without ever getting fatigued. You won't get tired, espe-

cially when it gets loud. And there's no noise floor that you can hear.”

As I wondered what words I might eventually use to describe the sound of an amplifier I would encounter for the first time later that day at AXPONA, Kindingstad characterized the sonic signature of Electrocompaniet components as “the Nordic Tone” or “Nordic Sound.” “Our sound is a little bit soft, but it is also crisp, very nice, and very detailed. I think of it as something organic and light—like going into the woods and listening to a creek.” I've spent time along the Olympic Peninsula's Quilcene River, listening intently to the sound of the water with a dB meter in my hand. I was intrigued.

“It's like a nature sound,” Danielsen offered. “One of the most



MEASUREMENTS

Because JVS auditioned the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M as a pair of monoblocks, I performed a complete set of measurements of the amplifier in that mode with my Audio Precision SYS2722 system.¹ I confirmed the results with the higher-performance APx500, then repeated some tests with the amplifier operating in two-channel mode.

I preconditioned the AW 800 M by following the CEA's recommendation, running it at one-eighth the specified power into 8 ohms for 30 minutes. At the end of that time, the top panel above the internal heatsinks was hot, at 117°F (47.3°C). The Electrocompaniet needs to be ventilated well.

The AW 800 M's input impedance was a very high 280k ohms at 20Hz and 1kHz, dropping to 44k ohms at 20kHz. The balanced input is wired with pin 2 hot and preserved absolute polarity. The voltage

gain in mono mode at 1kHz was 32.3dB. In stereo mode, the gain was 29.3dB, 3dB lower rather than the expected 6dB.

The output impedance in mono mode was 0.11 ohms at 20Hz and 1kHz, 0.18 ohms at 20kHz, all these values including the series impedance of 6' of spaced-pair cable. The stereo-mode impedances were not significantly lower, at 0.09 ohms at low and middle frequencies rising to 0.13 ohms at the top of the audioband. Even in mono mode, the variation in the small-signal frequency response with our standard simulated loudspeaker² (fig.1, gray trace) was minimal. The response into 8 ohms (blue trace) and 4 ohms (magenta trace) is flat in the audioband, neither reaching -3dB until 100kHz, but the increase in output impedance at high frequencies reduces the 2 ohm bandwidth (red trace), the output at 20kHz lying at -0.5dB. The Electrocompaniet's reproduction of a

10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms (fig.2) was excellent, with very short risetimes and no

1 See stereophile.com/content/measurements-maps-precision.

2 See stereophile.com/content/real-life-measurements-page-2.

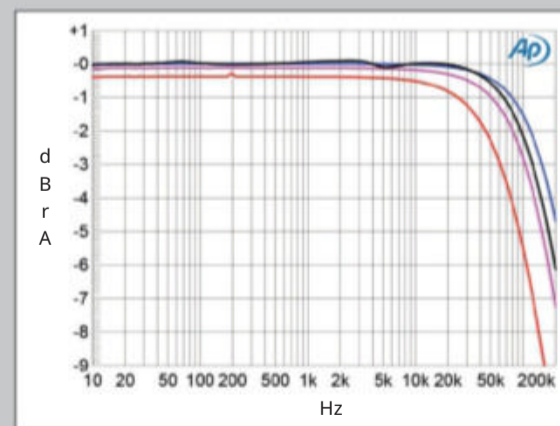


Fig.1 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, frequency response at 2.83V into: simulated loudspeaker load (gray), 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), and 2 ohms (red) (1dB/vertical div.).

famous Norwegian landmarks is a few miles from our office. It's a very wild landscape over a fjord, and you can see the sunset over the fjord and the big mountains beyond. It's quite soft, but it's also a little deep as you experience the depth of the fjords and the height of the mountains. And, as much as we love the light, smooth aspects of nature, we also embrace the ruggedness of the rough mountain terrain and the dramatic nature of our part of the world. We try to re-create this entire atmosphere."

Classical music lovers may not be surprised to learn that when asked if there was music that exemplifies the Nordic Tone, Danielsen cited "Morning Mood" from Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. "It starts with the sun rising," he said. "There's a bit of dew on the grass, and you can hear the small birds and insects waking up. Then you have this glorious music when the sun breaks out in full. You should listen to it, because it captures that very nice, smooth Norwegian atmosphere with the darkness of the trolls in the ground and the glories of the sun coming up."

As I thought to myself how different the sunrise in Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* is compared to Grieg's depiction, I asked if Danielsen had favorite recordings of *Peer Gynt*. I received several recommendations by email and resolved to listen to at least one of them.

Setup

As I placed the amps on my Grand Prix Monza amp stands, I noted their special feet, from SuperSpikes, a Norwegian company owned by Norwegian speaker-driver manufacturer SEAS. "You are

free to change these to whatever you are familiar with or keep the original ones," Danielsen emailed after our talk. When I listened to the same recording and switched between those spikes and Wilson Audio Pedestals, the latter supplied a bit more air without changing the amp's sonic signature. I went back and forth between these supports during the review period.

Electrocompaniet's well-thought-out manual offers seven clear-



measurements, continued

overshoot or ringing.

The unweighted, wideband signal/noise ratio (ref. 1W into 8 ohms), taken with the input shorted to ground, was an excellent 79dB. This ratio improved by 10dB when the measurement bandwidth was restricted to 22Hz–22kHz and by another 3dB when A-weighted. This is a quiet amplifier.

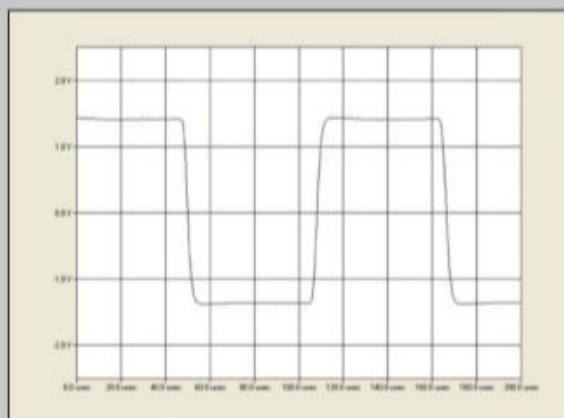


Fig.2 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, small-signal 10kHz squarewave into 8 ohms.

Spectral analysis of the low-frequency noise floor while the Electrocompaniet drove a 1kHz tone at 1Wpc into 8 ohms (fig.3) revealed extremely low levels of both random noise and power supply-related spurious at 60Hz and its odd-order harmonics. The random noise and the spurious were even lower in two-channel mode.

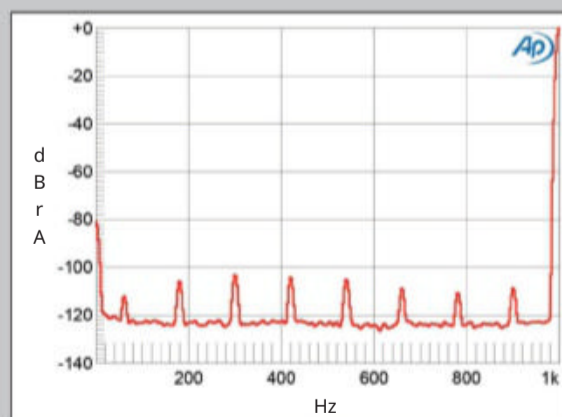


Fig.3 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, spectrum of 1kHz sinewave, DC-1kHz, at 1Wpc into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

Electrocompaniet specifies the AW 800 M's maximum power in mono mode as 800W into 8 ohms (29dBW), 1500W into 4 ohms (28.75dBW), and 2200W into 2 ohms (27.4dBW). With our usual definition of clipping—when the THD+noise reaches 1%—the AW 800 M exceeded its specified maximum power, clipping at 1000W

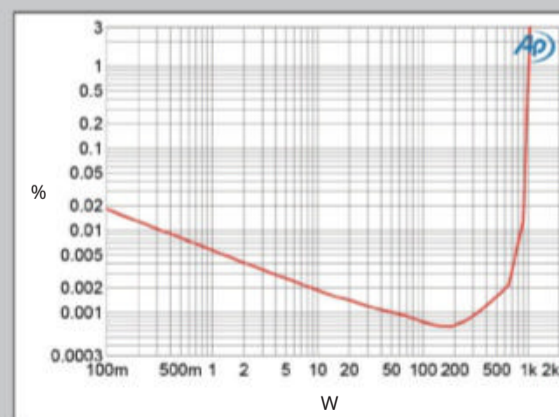


Fig.4 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 8 ohms.

ly illustrated setup scenarios that allow you to connect up to four AW 800 Ms in various mono, stereo, and biamp configurations. Connecting speaker cables for mono use is simple if you follow the hook-up instructions for “mono” on the back of the amp. I have little fondness for the European Union-mandated plastic safety shields on speaker cable connections, which on my review pair forced me to insert spades from below. I got it done.

It is generally unwise to plug a power filter into a power filter, and the Electrocompaniet amps have their own RF and DC filtering. So I ruled out plugging them in to the AudioQuest Niagara 7000 power conditioner I use for the front-end components. The remaining choices were directly into the wall or into the Stromtank S 2500 Quantum MK-II, which is not a filter but a battery power source/AC regenerator that can operate disconnected from the electrical grid. The S 2500, though, is not equipped to power two monoblocks that deliver 800W each into 8 ohms or 1500W into 4 ohms.¹ Wall power was the only way to go.²

Amplifier operation was as simple as flipping the main power switch on the amp’s rear to “on” then depressing the front power button. Warm-up is said to take about an hour. I always gave it more time to ensure that my listening impressions reflected optimal performance.



Listening

*The sound / the mystery
The watery suns /
Of those hazy skies
Hold for my spirit / The same
mysterious charms
As your treacherous eyes /
Shining through their tears ...
The world falls asleep /
In a warm light.
There, there is nothing except
order and beauty,
Luxury, calm, and sensual
pleasure.*

Those perfumed words, imperfectly translated from Charles Baudelaire’s poem “L’invitation au Voyage” and translated into music by Henri Duparc in his unforgettable

setting of two of its verses, sang in my head as the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M mono amplifiers wove their spell. On *Bach Trios* (24/96 FLAC, Nonesuch/Qobuz), Yo-Yo Ma’s cello sounded warm, beautiful, full, and uncannily real as he played J.S. Bach’s “Wachet auf” (“Sleepers Awake”), with Edgar Meyer (bass) and Chris Thile (mandolin). I felt I was in a dream state. Coltrane’s sax sounded so gorgeous on his performance of “Nancy (With the Laughing

¹ Stromtank’s Wolfgang Meletzky believes that his S-4000 and S-5000 models can power high-power amps without a problem.

² It’s worth mentioning that a single 120V circuit, even one rated for 20A, can only supply 2400W continuous, insufficient to support the maximum rated output power of two AW 800 Ms. If you want to drive both amps to full power, you’ll need two circuits.

measurements, continued

(30dBW, fig.4). However, when I repeated this test into 4 ohms, the 10A fuse on the rear panel blew at 1300W (28.2dBW), which is why the trace in fig.5 stops when the THD+N was <0.01%. In stereo mode with both channels driven, the AW 800 M didn’t quite meet its specified power of 300Wpc into 8 ohms and 600Wpc into 4 ohms (both powers equivalent to 24.77dBW), clipping

at 290Wpc into 8 ohms (24.6dBW) and 460Wpc into 4 ohms (23.6dBW). At these high powers, the shortfall will be inconsequential.

The downward slope of the traces below 100W in figs.4 and 5 indicates that below this power, actual distortion lies below the noise floor. I examined how the percentage of THD+N in both channels varied with

frequency at 28.3V, equivalent to 100W into 8 ohms, 200W into 4 ohms, or 400W into 2 ohms (fig.6). While the distortion rose as the impedance decreased, the THD+N percentage was still very low. More importantly, it didn’t rise significantly in the top audio octaves.

The distortion waveform in mono mode was predominantly the third harmonic

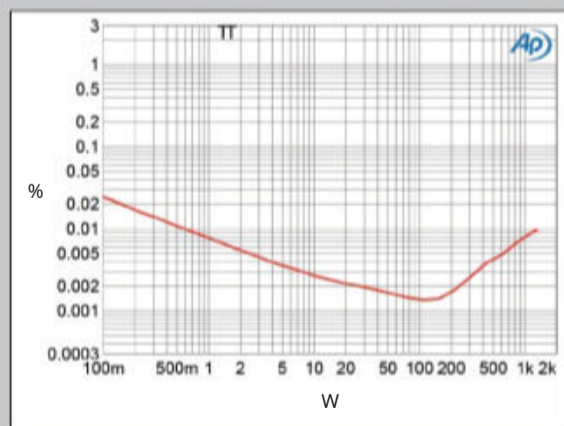


Fig.5 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, distortion (%) vs 1kHz continuous output power into 4 ohms.

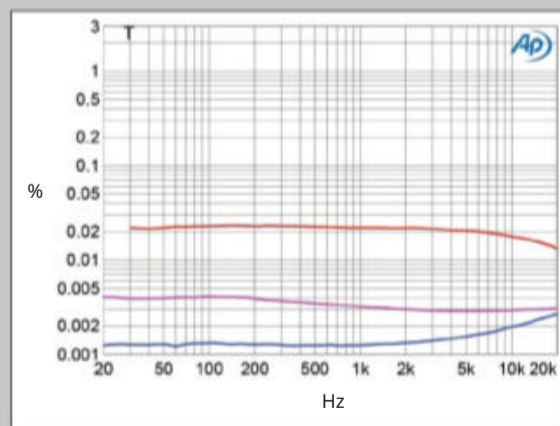


Fig.6 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, THD+N (%) vs frequency at 28.3V into: 8 ohms (blue), 4 ohms (magenta), and 2 ohms (gray).

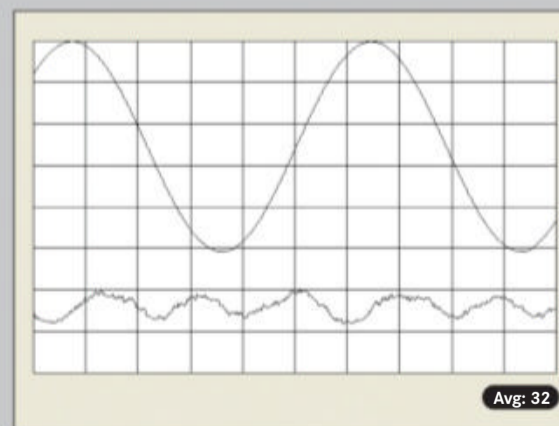


Fig.7 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, 1kHz waveform at 100W into 8 ohms, 0.00085% THD+N (top); distortion and noise waveform with fundamental notched out (bottom, not to scale).

Face),” from *Ballads* (24/96 MQA, Impulse!/Tidal), and the core of Matthias Goerne’s baritone was so filled with marvelous warmth and beauty in his recordings of “Schlafen, schlafen, nichts als schlafen!” (“Sleep, sleep, to do nothing but sleep!”) from Alban Berg’s *Songs (4) for voice & piano, Op.2* with Daniel Trifonov (24/96 FLAC, DG/Qobuz) and Beethoven’s “Adelaide” with Jan Lisiecki (24/96 FLAC DG/Qobuz) that I felt I could sink into their sounds forever and live the rest of my life in a suspended state, bathed in sonic warmth.

I noted other qualities, including the sense of power and rock-solid, marvelously strong bass at the start of Iván Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra’s recording of Mahler’s Symphony No.3 (DSD128, Channel Classics CCS SA 38817). But it was the nonfatiguing, “I could listen to this forever” beauty of the AW 800 M’s diaphanous, impressionistic rendering of music that continually entranced me. I felt as though I was floating in an opium-induced haze³ from which I was occasionally jolted by the kind of superb bass that leaves a lasting impression.

Another wonderful taste of these amplifiers’ outstanding bass arrived at the start of Raphael Payare and the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal’s recent Pentatone issue of Mahler Symphony No.5 (24/96 FLAC, Pentatone PTC5187067). When my friend Scott and I listened, we turned to each other and uttered “Wow!” simultaneously. Not since the mighty (and mighty heavy) Karan monoblocks had I heard bass this rock-solid and top-to-bottom firm. Some instrumental lines were less clearly delineated and discernible than with my almost-twice-as-expensive D’Agostino Momentum M400 MxVs (\$79,950/pair), but the bass was *so* superb that it left us wanting more. So, I turned to Patrick Mulcahy’s prominent bass in Patricia Barber’s “This Town,” from *Clique* (24/352.8 MQA, Impex Records/Tidal).



Through the Electrocompaniets, Mulcahy’s instrument seemed to grow in size, moving a bit closer to the awesome bass I’ve heard through larger Wilsons with bigger bass drivers.

Nonetheless, at the New York launch of the Wilson Alexia V at Innovative Audio, I was blown away by the strength of percussion Peter McGrath had drawn from the orchestra on his private recording of John Corigliano’s rage-filled Symphony No.1, performed by James Judd and the Florida Philharmonic (16/44.1 MQA).

³ Baudelaire became addicted to laudanum, an opium derivative.

measurements, continued

(fig.7), lying close to -110dB (0.0003%) with the amplifier driving 28.3V into 8 ohms (fig.8). While the third harmonic rose to -90dB (0.003%) at the same voltage into 4 ohms (not shown), this is still extremely low. As expected,³ the second harmonic was higher than the third with the amplifier in two-channel mode (fig.9),

but both harmonics were still extremely low in level. With the AW 800 M in mono mode driving an equal mix of 19 and 20kHz tones at 200W peak into 4 ohms (fig.10), the level of the 1kHz difference product was negligible, and the higher-order intermodulation products all lay below -86dB (0.004%).

With its very low levels of noise and distortion and its very high powers, the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M is a veritable paradigm of modern solid state amplifier design.—John Atkinson

³ The two channels’ outputs are bridged in mono mode, which, with perfect matching, will eliminate even-order distortion.

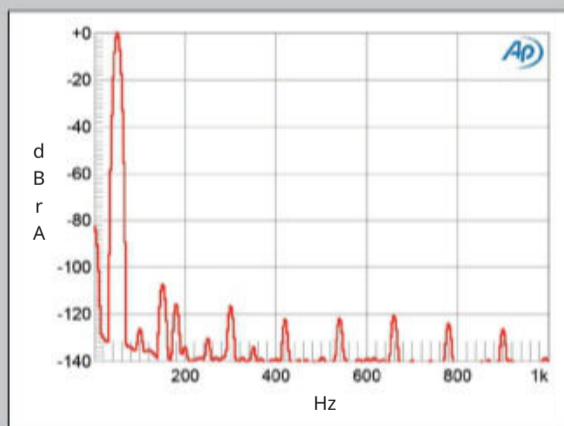


Fig.8 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC–1kHz, at 100W into 8 ohms (linear frequency scale).

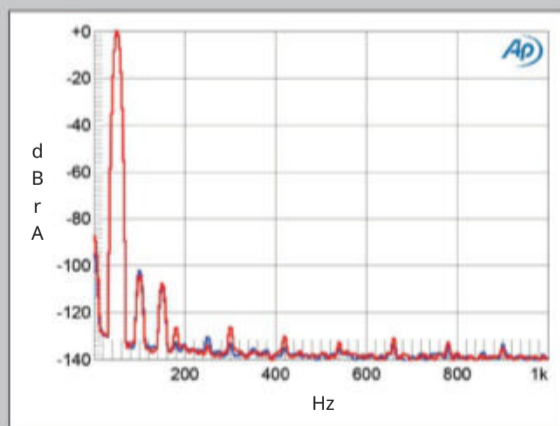


Fig.9 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, stereo mode, spectrum of 50Hz sine wave, DC–1kHz, at 50Wpc into 8 ohms (left channel blue, right red; linear frequency scale).

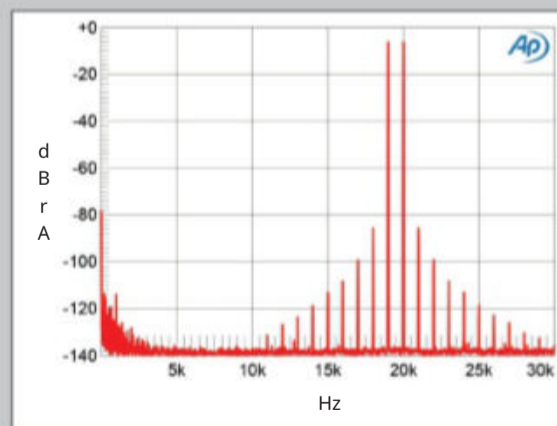


Fig.10 Electrocompaniet AW 800 M, HF intermodulation spectrum, DC–30kHz, 19+20kHz at 200W peak into 4 ohms (linear frequency scale).

Returning to that recording again, I was delighted to hear the best rendition of that pounding bass drum I'd ever heard on my system.

After we shared a 6-mile hike, my friend Anna Frank requested Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* (24/192 MQA, Legacy Recordings/Tidal). We reveled in the strong, resonant bass and warm and smooth middle on the 2023 50th Anniversary remaster. Neither DSotM nor Giles Martin's acclaimed 2017 remix of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (24/96 FLAC, UMC/Qobuz) sounded as transparent as I'm accustomed to, but the surprising warmth of "When I'm 64" warmed the cockles of my aging heart.

As arresting as the Electrocompaniets' bass jolts were, I longed to return to the mysteries of their warm, seductively veiled sound. I did not wish to awake from the dream. Turning away from percussion-rich music, I delighted in visits with singers and songs I cherish. Through the AW 800 M monos, soprano Véronique Gens had never sounded so plush, or the violin in her string quartet accompaniment so warm, as on her recording *Nuits*, with I Giardini (24/96 FLAC, Alpha/Qobuz). Turning back the clock more than 80 years, I found myself more enchanted than ever by the sound of the great, precious Elisabeth Schumann's "My Lovely Celia, heav'nly fair" (16/44.1 FLAC, Warner/Tidal), from her priceless *Icon* collection. I was so astounded by the dynamic variation and nuance the AW 800 M monos extracted from this less-than-great digital transfer from an old 78 that I kept on wanting more.

Late on a full-moon night proved the perfect opportunity to revisit Duparc's setting of "L'invitation au voyage." Sopranos Maggie Teyte and Victoria de los Angeles both left unique versions of this song with haunting orchestral accompaniment. Searching Tidal, Qobuz, and my own music library, I discovered what is undoubtedly its first recording of the electrical era: Charles Panzéra's, with Piero Coppola and orchestra, from 1926. As I continued to explore, the first verse of baritone Pierre Bernac's 1945 rendition (with Francis Poulenc on piano) stood out as the epitome of refinement and elegance. Among modern versions, François le Roux's won me over. Electrocompaniet's magic carpet ride delivered joy upon joy.

One cannot remain forever with a song composed in 1870. Changing course, I turned to a new recording of Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra performing Jessie Montgomery's "Hymn for Everyone," one of three pieces on *Contemporary American Composers* (24/96 WAV, CSO Resound CSOR 9012301). As much as I loved the recording's excellent bass and natural timbres, I discovered, behind the AW 800 M's seductive haze, a midrange with less black space between notes than I prefer.

Nonetheless, the Electrocompaniets proved ideal for Grieg's "Morning Mood" from *Peer Gynt*. I auditioned two renditions: one of Danielsen's recommendations, performed by Oivin Fjeldstad and the London Symphony Orchestra on *The 50 Greatest Pieces of Classical Music* (16/44.1 FLAC, X5 Music Group/Tidal) and a newer version of the *Peer Gynt Suites* from the Bergen Philharmonic under Ole Kristian Ruud (24/44.1 FLAC, BIS/Qobuz). Both sounded gorgeous, although the newer recording had a far wider soundstage, fuller midrange, and better dynamics. For atmospheric music of this nature, the Electrocompaniet was a winner. It didn't do as well on "All Blues" from Miles Davis's classic *Kind of Blue* (24/192 MQA Columbia/Tidal). As much as I loved the seductive midrange warmth of the presentation, that omnipresent veil smoothed out color contrasts and diminished transparency.

Back in the soup

"Just like one singer has one voice and the other singer has a different voice, different amplifiers have different voices," Danielsen explained before my first listen to the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M mono amplifiers. "That doesn't mean that one is out of tune; they just sound different.

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Digital sources dCS Vivaldi Apex DAC, Vivaldi Upsampler Plus, Vivaldi Master Clock; Innuos Statement Next-Gen Music Server; Small Green Computer Sonore Deluxe opticalModule; Uptone Audio EtherRegen with SotM sCLK-OCX10 Master Clock and sPS-500 power supply; Nordost QSource linear power supplies (2); HDPLEX 300 linear power supply; Synology 5-bay 1019+ NAS powered by Ferrum Hypsos linear/switching hybrid power supply; Linksys mesh router and Arris modem; Apple 2017 iPad Pro and 2017 MacBook Pro laptop with 2.8GHz Intel i7, SSD, 16GB RAM.

Preamplifier Dan D'Agostino Momentum HD.

Power amplifiers Dan D'Agostino Momentum M400 MxV monoblocks.

Loudspeakers Wilson Audio Specialties Alexia V.

Cables Digital: Nordost Odin 1, Odin 2, and Valhalla 2 (USB and Ethernet), Frey 2 (USB adapter); AudioQuest WEL Signature; Wireworld Platinum Starlight Cat8 (Ethernet), OM1 62.5/125 multimode duplex (fiberoptic). Interconnect: Nordost Odin 2, AudioQuest Dragon. Speaker: Nordost Odin 2, AudioQuest Dragon. AC: Nordost Odin 2, Valhalla 2; AudioQuest Dragon and Firebird. Umbilical cords: Ghent Audio Canare for HDPLEX 300 LPS and NAS; QSource Premium DC cables with Lemo terminations for QSources; SotM sPS-500 umbilical cable for SotM Master clock.

Accessories Grand Prix Monza 8-shelf double rack and amp stands, 1.5" Formula platform; Symposium Ultra Platform; Nordost 20-amp QB8 Mark III, QKore 1 and 6; Titanium and Bronze Sort Kones, Sort Lifts; Stromtank S 2500 Quantum MK-II power generator; AudioQuest Niagara 7000 and 5000 power conditioners, NRG Edison outlets, JitterBugs; ADD-Powr Sorcer X4; Environmental Potentials EP2050EE surge protector/filter; Wilson Audio Pedestals; A/V RoomService Polyflex Diffusers; Resolution Acoustics room treatment; Stillpoints Clouds (8); HRS DPX-14545 Damping Plates; Marigo Aida CD mat.

Dedicated listening room 20' L x 16' W x 9'4" H.

—Jason Victor Serinus

"We want people to focus on and enjoy music. We think you can listen to the warm, natural, and organic sound of our amplifiers for a long time without ever getting fatigued. You won't get tired, especially when it gets loud. And there's no noise floor that you can hear."

The AW 800 M's unique voice is perhaps best described by returning to where I started, with soup. In the most miraculous miso soup I ever tasted, meticulously cut, carefully proportioned, and impeccably arranged vegetables and herbs floated free from each other in a clear, savory broth. Each morsel had its own unique flavor, as did the broth itself. Because no taste overpowered any other, the entire bouquet of flavors was there to savor.

Many humans would gladly exchange that miso masterpiece for a bowl of the Atlantic Fish Company's finest Boston Clam Chowder. Need I begin to recount how different they are in taste, consistency, subtlety of flavors (or lack thereof), and appearance?

Which is superior? Our frequent online critics will be all too eager to either supply a definitive answer or to state that only by measuring certain viscous parameters can you be sure which soup is best. I, in turn, would advise you, unless you have specific allergies or sensitivities, to stick with taste. As different as they are, you may find you crave both. And even if you prefer one over the other, you'll be richer for the experience—as you will for tasting the Electrocompaniet AW 800 M Reference mono. ■