

AVID Accent integrated amplifier

Chris Frankland

Although British hi-fi specialist AVID has been around since 1995, the Accent integrated amplifier is my first exposure to the brand. AVID started when CEO and founder Conrad Mas was 16 and was inspired “to produce a genuinely flawless turntable” on seeing a friend’s homemade design.

Mas says he soon realised turntable manufacturers were concentrating on rumble, wow, and flutter and ignoring what he considers the true problem: vibration. His first product, the Acutus turntable, was released in 1999, and the company now offers models ranging from £1,500 to £38,000.

Having started out with turntables, it was only natural that the company’s first electronics products should be phono stages. The Pulsare model debuted in 2010, and the Pellar phono stage, which is also used in the Accent integrated amp, came along in 2012.

Once Upon a time

Conrad Mas told me: “Once upon a time, every amplifier came equipped with a phono input. As a turntable manufacturer who expanded into designing amplifiers, we prioritised our customers’ needs by including a high-quality phono stage. This seemed like the logical step given the resurgence in vinyl sales.”

AVID’s first amplifiers were the Reference preamp and power amp, which sell for around £170,000 for a set. These were intended as no-compromise products, and many of the ideas and practices incorporated in them have trickled down to the range, including the Accent.

Mas explained: “Our design philosophy follows a cascading principle, where the advanced technology found in our Reference products is systematically integrated into our lower-priced products. When placed side by side, the vitally shared componentry, such as volume control and custom-made capacitors, becomes immediately apparent. >>



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
AVID Accent



» Smaller amplifiers require a reduced power supply, which lessens cost. However, we meticulously maintain a PSU/output ratio to ensure ample current delivery, which is crucial for driving speakers across their frequency spectrum with varying impedances.”

AVID Entry

The Accent integrated amplifier reviewed here was introduced in 2023. At £4,500, it is their entry-level model and is a fully discrete 70watt Class AB design deliberately kept simple. It has four line inputs, a moving magnet/moving coil phono input, a mono switch (unusual these days), a mute switch, and a headphone amplifier.

In line with AVID’s core philosophy, it has a beefy 617VA main transformer with 40,000µF of reservoir capacitance and a high-quality ALPS volume pot. It also uses its own custom polypropylene capacitors in all critical signal paths.

It does not have a DAC or streamer. As Mas says on AVID’s website, “We avoid the digital world.” He told me, “Our products have always prioritised sound quality above all else, steering clear of digital components that could compromise the purity of the analogue signal. By eschewing built-in digital features, we ensure our amplifiers remain timeless investments.”

The casework is solid, and the front panel has a distinctive letter A machined into it, which I think adds a touch of class. It is also reassuringly weighty, tipping the scales at 14.5kg.

On the rear panel are two sets of RCA sockets for the phono input; one is used for loading plugs to help cartridge matching. Above them is a ground terminal, and to their right are two DIP switches that adjust the phono stage gain for moving magnet and medium—or low-output moving coil. The manual clearly explains how to set these. It is supplied with 500ohm loading plugs, but other values are available through your retailer. The moving magnet input is fixed at 47k ohms.

E I E I o

I am currently using an Audio Note Iol1 cartridge on their TT3 turntable. This has a very low output of 0.04 mV. Typical moving coils are nearer 10 times that. As I have it paired with Audio Note’s S9 transformer, I could simply have played the output from that through the Accent’s MM input, but I was keen to see how it would cope with the Iol1 fed straight in.

The Iol1 also likes to see a low input impedance, so I got AVID to send me some 30-ohm plugs. The manual advises that if you must advance the volume control beyond halfway, you should select a higher gain setting, which I did. That turned out to be ideal. The Accent proved to have enough gain to cope with any cartridge you will likely throw at it.

A quick comparison of the 500-ohm and 30-ohm plugs showed the latter was preferable. Vocals were cleaner and better defined, while the leading edge and note shape on the guitar or saxophone were crisper. Percussion and cymbals rang out clearer with 30ohms, and I felt that the lowest notes on a bass guitar line were cleaner, tighter, and more tuneful, while body resonances and the lower registers of an acoustic guitar were also better.

Better step up?

A good moving coil input will save you money on a separate step-up device, but will it be better? I had a transformer to hand that sells for around £400 and briefly compared that with the MC input of the Accent. On the track ‘Hello Tomorrow’ from Larry Carlton’s *Discovery*, I preferred the Accent MC input as it conveyed the note shape and voice of his guitar better, while the bass line was more fluid and tuneful and drum and percussion snappier and more dynamic. The music just flowed better. So clearly, the Accent phono stage is more than good enough to see off many less expensive step-up devices. Which is a bonus. I listened to the amp using an Audio





I had a similarly priced, well-respected competitor amp to hand, and there is no doubt the Accent was cleaner, more dynamic and more musically coherent.

» Note CDT Five transport and DAC Five Special converter through Russell K. RED 120Se and Audio Note's own AN-J LX Hemp loudspeakers.

A complex jazz instrumental track from one of my favourite sax players, Dave Koz, was sure to put the Accent to the test. From the first few bars of *The Bright Side from his The Dance* album, the amp's musical integrity, detail, dynamics, and rhythmic grip were clear. Koz's sax had great bite and presence with good insight into how each note was played, while drums and percussion were animated, dynamic and yet still with the delicate touch needed on some cymbal strikes. The bass line was tuneful and well-controlled, and the rhythmic ebb and flow of the track was nicely captured. I had a similarly priced, well-respected competitor amp to hand, and there is no doubt the Accent was cleaner, more dynamic and more musically coherent.

Female vocals are a true test for any hi-fi component, and next up was the *Good to be Back* CD from the late Natalie Cole, one of my favourite female vocalists and daughter of the legendary Nat King Cole.

Emotional Impact

On the track 'I Do' – a stunning duet with Freddie Jackson and a contender, in my opinion, for one of the best duets of all time – the Accent conveyed the song's emotional impact and the versatility and range that both signers have. The nuances of their delivery were well presented, and when they turned up the power, the Accent was more than up to the challenge.

The Accent did equally well on Linda Ronstadt's ballad 'Lo Siento Mi Vida' from her *Hasten Down the Wind* album. It conveyed the sensuality and power of her vocals while vividly separating out the various guitar parts and delivering drum rimshots with a real crack. The Accent conveyed this track's emotional impact and dynamics very well, eclipsing that competitor I mentioned.

Since the manual states that the Accent has a high-quality headphone amp, I just had to plug in some Focal Clear headphones to check it out. I am pleased to say what the manual claims is not an empty boast, and the built-in headphone amp drove the Clears well. 'On No One Emotion' from George Benson's superb *20/20* album, the sound was detailed, punchy, and clean, and the various strands of the music were separated well. The deep, driving bass line had good energy, and the super-fast tempo of this track was well conveyed. So, the

headphone output on the Accent is no afterthought and will keep the user happy when circumstances demand a quieter home environment.

Lots for the money

The AVID Accent is a good amplifier for the money. Others may have DACs and streamers, but their inclusion often takes money away from what matters—the amplifier itself. Including a versatile phono stage capable of handling any cartridge you throw at it is a huge bonus, especially since so many amps don't have one at all these days.

In use, the Accent was a joy. Its sound was detailed, musical, dynamic, and powerful, and it gave great insights into the music of whatever I chose to play, whether hard rock, jazz, soul, album or CD. At its modest asking price of £4,500, I rate it an excellent buy and recommend it enthusiastically. +

Technical specifications

Type: Class AB, 2-channel integrated amplifier

Analogue inputs: Four line inputs. One phono input with adjustable gain for MM or MC

Digital inputs: None

Power output: 70Wpc @ 8 ohms

Harmonic distortion: 0.03% at 80% power, 8ohms, at 1kHz

Phono input:

Gain: 48dB, 60dB and 70dB

Input resistance: 47k ohms (can be adjusted with loading plugs)

Input capacitor: 100pF

Distortion: Less than 0.03 %

Noise: MM -81dB MC -67dB (high setting)

RIAA accuracy: +0.5dB, 5Hz-70kHz (Neumann HF correction)

Line input:

Input impedance: 82k ohms

Frequency response: 5Hz->80kHz ±1dB

Signal-to-noise ratio: 97dB at 50watts, A weighted

Headphone load range: 20-600 ohms

Headphone maximum output: 9V rms into 600 ohms

Dimensions (WxHxD): 470mm x 110mm x 410mm

Weight: 14.5kg

Price: £4,500, \$5,500, €5,200

Manufacturer: AVID Hi-Fi Ltd

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