

[English Translation Test Accuphase E-5000 / LP 02/2023]

The Power

With the presentation of the Accuphase E-800 they could just as well have declared the end of the development road for the integrated amplifier – from there any further improvement is hardly imaginable. But maybe a slightly more suitable solution for special needs?

Hierarchical Stats

We may breathe again: the E-800 (currently 15,500 EUR) is still and remains the biggest integrated amplifier Accuphase has ever built. And with its peerless smooth and intense reproduction, it stands like no other as a symbol for how far one can get if you know how to dose the class-A mode so finely like the engineers from Yokohama. Although the E-800 will not seriously threaten to surrender to any speaker load, Accuphase pursues a two-way strategy with both their power and integrated amplifiers. There are sound transducers out there which can be handled in a better way with a little less quiescent current and higher output power. In order to put an adequate device from the class-AB domain next to the jubilee class-A model E-800, likewise still under the 50th anniversary flag, here comes now the E-5000 for 13,900 EUR.

Class Distinctions

And this one is a real blockbuster, that much I can already tell you. De facto we see here the most powerful integrated amplifier the Japanese have ever designed. As to its power specifications, one exercises discreet restraint as usual, but our measurements speak for themselves: 250 watts of continuous power into eight and 400 watts into four ohms – this is quite a statement for an integrated amp. And it has consequences for the physique of the apparatus: with 211 millimeters of design height the E-5000 surpasses the previous AB top-of-the-line model E-480 by 30 millimeters in height and only has to subordinate to the E-800 in this respect – by 28 millimeters. And yes, I'm very sure that this well visible gradation is not just due to technical circumstances, but purely intentional.

In the brochure of the unit I am sorely missing the block diagram that's otherwise customary with Accuphase. From a technical viewpoint, no other manufacturer has dared in the past to drop their pants so low like the Japanese. And still there's no lack of detailed information: rumour has it that the power amp section is based on the mighty P-7300 stereo power amplifier which, interestingly, boasts a lower nominal output power into "normal" speaker impedances and is said to have an edge with unrealistically low-impedance loads only.

Operation

In terms of operation and features the newbie follows, what else would you expect, the Accuphase tradition which has stood the test of time for so many years. As always it's nuances where newly developed appliances differ from their predecessors, the E-5000 doesn't make any difference here. It's such little details like the now golden glossy "collars" around the volume control and the input selector switch that impart a touch of even more luxury. Or the brand-new pointer instruments which allow an even better reading of low-level output values than in the past. An interesting detail in this context: when setting the output power of the amp to exactly one watt into an eight-ohm load (our Audio Precision Analyzer is incorruptible here), both instruments of the E-5000 will show one watt. Precisely. This doesn't matter in practical use, but gives me that immensely reassuring feeling of precision down to the smallest detail as it can only be found with Accuphase. Big Accuphase amplifiers have always been known as highly qualified partners for handling large equipment parks. In the case of the E-5000 this means: nine source devices (two of which balanced) plus one recording device can be connected. Of course, there are connections for the preamp outs and the power amp ins. Balanced and unbalanced – sure thing. And all the things which might interfere with the wonderfully clear front panel are stashed, of course, under the smoothly opening cover cover flap: tone controls, speaker selector switch, every imaginable mode selection as well as the parameterization for the optional input modules: currently the AD-50 phono module, the DAC-60 D/A converter and the AD-10 line module are available. And, very clear, there is also a remote control that fits perfectly in the hand and allows to command from your armchair a large part of what is provided. All of this is on an equal footing with what the E-800 has to offer.

Technical Details

Also in technical terms there are parallels between the two devices: both feature an almost completely balanced circuit design and rely on very similar circuit topologies. Right after the input switching (of course directly on the spot via high-grade relays) a discrete instrument amplifier assembly prepares the way for the uniquely elaborate electronic AAVA volume control which is even used twice here. That's why it also generates balanced output signals in one go which are then passed on to the (naturally defeatable) tone control network, a buffer amp and finally the power amp section with the well-known, fully discrete dual-channel layout. Each of the modules forms a compact unit with its heatsink and is equipped with ten bi-polar power transistors which have no problem whatsoever to deliver the requested output powers. The required energies are provided by an absolutely noiseless toroidal transformer that's been potted with a dampening substance; two impressive 40,000-microfarad electrolytic capacitors take care of the filtering and smoothing of the operating voltages.

Behind the front sits the abundantly space-consuming volume control, doing its job well protected from all possible noise sources there. Under the volume control knob we find the probably most sophisticated rotary encoder the hi-fi world has ever seen. But its "rotary feel" is also very unique indeed.

With their power amplifiers the Accuphase engineers have always attached great importance to a maximum damping factor. And they come up with a lot of ideas for that. In the E-5000, too, there are no more relays in the protective circuit; tiny SMD MosFets have been used for some time to switch the output signal. In their latest version their internal resistance is now only a petty 1.9 milliohms.

So the big revolution in circuit design is not happening here, but it wasn't necessary, either. It's rather the sum of many small improvements which are supposed to lift the E-5000 to the top rank in its category.

Sound

If there is one loudspeaker which requires an amplifier with such performance specifications, it will be the time-honored Dynaudio Consequence from the early 1980s. The passive 5-way design with two 12" woofers in a compound configuration is regarded as probably the most power-hungry construction produced by the market back then. As luck would have it, a pair of these challenges was at our disposal, and certainly the E-5000 had to demonstrate if it could fire up the Danish ladies adequately.

The result was nothing less than a shock. After all of what I had found in the house for comparison hardly produced more than academic boredom, the E-5000 was like a highly dosed shot of adrenaline. I'd never had guessed how incredibly forcefully and energetically this woofer alignment can get down to bass business. What a superb authenticity legendary double bass player Ray Brown can unleash with his friends of LA4 via this arrangement – hats off. Rumbling, mighty, solid, but still fluent and delicate, I've never heard this performance in a much more compelling way.

Stage. The second major conspicuity the E-5000 is capable of producing. To a degree that it is imposing itself even without using the meticulous "inner folding ruler". Authority in all room dimensions, perfect detachment from the speaker plain – the big Accuphase does it with no sweat. At the same time the sound image always remains tonally precise, sovereign and straightforward. Firmly convinced that the whole thing would topple with high-efficiency transducers, I connected a pair of 2-way field coil loudspeakers with 15" woofers by Wolf von Langa. Topple? No way. Until today I have never gotten so much energy, perseverance and vividness in all its colours out of this 96-decibel speaker. For the horn tweeter, which is faltering a little with top-end level weakness, the vigorous E-5000 was just the right means, as I have learned since.

Good to know that with the E-5000 there is now a tool available for those where things don't work out perfectly with the incomparably smooth and open E-800.

Holger Barske