

Our Golden Boy

Making excellent things even better, this is the hallmark of Japan's luxury brand Accuphase.

Revolutions such as the changeover from the ultra-grade conventional volume potentiometer to the "AAVA" level control with switchable fixed resistors launched in 2002 do happen, but normally the company from Yokohama rather trusts in the ongoing evolution of their products.

Certainly it's been purposeful that the E-360 introduced in 2012 is now succeeded by the E-370, which – and this is no surprise, either – shows hardly any visual difference to its forerunner. That's typically Japanese: always stay in line. However, something's different at this premiere. The excitement! Three dealers whom I had contacted for other reasons were asking if we had already gotten hands on Accuphase's new one. Because it's quite a stunner that bears no comparison to the recently discontinued 360. And on top far it is less expensive – in this price category – we don't want to sue the word "cheap".

Everything as usual? Sure, but ...

Stimulated in such a way, we wanted to see and hear for ourselves what was behind the industry talk. Since I've been dealing with hi-fi, that is for 35 years, I've followed the development of Accuphase, personally reviewed countless components from this brand founded in 1972 by former Kenwood founder Jiro Kasuga under the highest quality demands, thereby witnessed the ongoing improvements and subtly uttered more than once the thought: where will all this lead to in the end?

Well, obviously to devices like the E-370 which at first seems to have nothing special about it. It's just the new kid on the block. If it weren't for the model name on the slim cover which slides down smoothly upon a soft push and conceals most of the controls for the – according to today's standards – extensive user comfort, the changing of the guard might just as well have gone unnoticed. Essentially these two can be distinguished by a little switch on the right side of the lid. Moreover, the defeatable digital level indicator between the prominent level meters is now orange rather than red. That's it!

Behind the finely brushed front panel, which shows the usual immaculate workmanship, more novelties can be spotted. For instance, one of the changes that are gradually implemented in the amps is the changeover from relays to FET switches in the speaker output. As customary with Accuphase, the E-370 features connections for two speaker pairs that can be run together or separately. The contactless switches are supposed to offer both increased long-term stability and an even better coupling of the solid binding posts to the power electronics with its strictly dual-channel design. The E-370 is even a trailblazer in that the required circuit board and the speaker terminals are now firmly connected where they used to be mounted only side by side before.

Apart from that, the new amplifier offers exactly the topology we have known for decades in Accuphase amps: in the middle of the housing sits the hefty power supply consisting of an encapsulated transformer and the primary caps, framed by the power amps including heatsinks. On the back the inputs are switched, behind the front panel are the control plus AAVA electronics. Of course, the E-370 also has the detached shaft for the recommended phono MM/MC, the highbit-capable D/A converter or the line-level modules (AD-30, DAC-40, Line-10 at about 1000, 1185, 160 euros). Even two of them will fit in, expanding the amp to directly wiring a turntable and/or become a digital center.

Taking a straight look at the differences compared to the replaced E-360, we should also mention the use of even lower noise circuits – Accuphase components have always impressed by their excellent signal-to-noise ratios – for the innovative, ultra precise "Vari-Gain" volume control. Furthermore, the designers claim to have doubled the damping factor which is vital to a controlled bass. How fitting that also the transformer was beefed up and the filter capacitance of the power supply augmented from 22,000 to 30,000 microfarads. As if this weren't enough, the push-pull power amps are said to have a more stringent symmetrical circuit layout now.

In order not to get lost completely in the numerous details, the consideration of which is important to a perfect appearance, let me pick here the "High Carbon" feet, which consist of cast iron with a high proportion of carbon and so shall keep off vibrations effectively from the device, as well as the high-grade, because low-Z and strong headphone output, which can drive even top-class headphones adequately and thus in most cases will supersede the purchase of an external solution.

Listening room performance

In fact the Accuphase should have gone to the measuring lab first, but we simply couldn't wait and wired it to the B&W 803 D3s only just put up in the listening room. The Accuphase DP-550 SACD player had already done its warm-up. Quickly dialing the correct input via the left big rotary knob – and there it was: the cultivated Accuphase sound image, like sorted by delicate fingers, with details finely dusted like icing sugar, a nimble timing which,

however, never seems agitated or hectic, and a distinct sensitivity for nuances of any kind.

At that time it was already clear that the E-370 was an excellent amplifier and also a genuine Accuphase. But how good is it in actual fact, and notably how far from its forerunner? To find this out we let it run against its predecessor. We have done such exercises frequently before, and each time – small wonder! – the relief could outperform the governor. This time it wasn't any different, and yet the distance was more dicey than otherwise. One could easily get the impression to skip not just one, but three or four generations. Apparently our trading colleagues had not exaggerated.

After replugging the HMS "Gran Finale Jubilee" speaker cables into the E-370, which was connected via an identical power cable, "More an You Know" from the new, great sounding album "Interludes" by Lyn Stanley appeared to have a much wider stage, thereby sounding more spacious and generally way more three-dimensional at the same volume level. Miss Stanley's voice seemed to be more natural, and the delicately woven mesh of vocals and instrumental accompaniment with its incredibly authentic timbres was richer in facets.

Things got pretty hot then with Monty Alexander's highly dynamic "Moanin'" from our review CD VI. No matter what level, the new Accuphase dished out explosive drum kicks with pinpoint precision and chiseled contour while still sounding effortlessly relaxed, although the needles were flying frighteningly towards the "0 dB" mark. No doubt, the E-370 has power and knows how to use it with consistent accuracy.

The E-370 sets benchmarks

Now the E-360 had to climb down. True, it also impressed with vigour and discipline, but couldn't keep the same relentless grip on the lower floors and was also a fair way off the naturalness, the tender melliflousness and the self-evidence of its follow-up which stood its ground very well against other contenders of the premium league of amplifiers, too. As a result the E-370 doesn't only set benchmarks within the Accuphase range and in its price category. It should be hard to find a better amp for your bucks.

Matthias Böde
