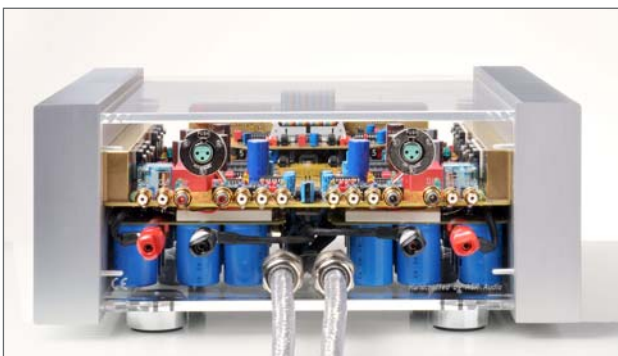




Emitter I

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Reviewer: Michael Bruss

Analog sources: J. Sikora Initial table with Kuzma Stogi Reference S12 arm and Transrotor Figaro cartridge

Digital sources: LinnenberG Telemann DAC, Norma Audio Revo DAC, Auralic Aries streamer, MacBook Pro

Integrated amplifiers: Linn Klassik Movie II

Preamps: Norma Audio Revo SC-2 line, Neukomm MCA112S phono

Loudspeakers: QIn Prestige Three, Nubert NuPro A100

Cables: Gutwire Chime 3, EON-Z and Synchrony 2 SE, Fastaudio Black Science, Audioquest Yukon, fastaudio Black Science Phono, Graditech Kide 3 und Kide, JIB Boaacoustic Silver Digital Xeno USB, AudioQuest Vodka, Cinnamon Ethernet, Carbon RCA, Graditech Kide Digital

Cords and grounding: Audioquest Tornado, Gutwire SV-8, Gutwire G Clef 2, AudioQuest NRG, Gutwire Ultimate Ground

Rack: Roterring Belmaro 33 customized

Sundry accessories: Tsakiridis Super Athena power filter, YDOL Relax 60 and fastaudio absorber, Acoustic System resonators, The Gryphon Demagnetizer

Room size: 24.5m², 2.7m ceiling

Review component retail: €8'500+

50 kg net loaner. 4th-floor reviewer. No elevator. Usually that'd call for a delivery guy with motorized stair devil. But the ASR Emitter I makes life easier. This classic integrated spreads its weight over two boxes, each sized like a sea-going trunk.

Anyone terminally infected by the hifi virus knows just why. First introduced in 1982 and *repeatedly* updated since, already by 1984 this model had split into at least two chassis, namely a head unit and one external PSU for the Emitter I, two PSU for the 150 kg Emitter, plus an optional battery bank for just the amp's input



Which version did I get? My loaner was an ASR Emitter I Basic with one upgraded WBT 210cu RCA pair (€125 surcharge) aside from the remaining standard gold-plated brass jobs, an extra XLR input (€375) plus 'Blue Display' trim (€375). Nomen est omen, that entails a blue display with blue LED. With the two latter options having no aural effect, we can fairly base this review's sonics on the bill for an Emitter Basic + WBT RCA. That's €8'625 and in my book a surprisingly attractive figure given the packed tech that stashed in my hifi rack. But first, let's back it back out for a good look.



At 32 kg, the external power supply hits the shipping tax hardest. Encased in immaculately worked thick steel sheet with a nicely engraved logo on top, the front is smoky acrylic to show off light-emitting diodes of different colors in the lower middle. For each channel, those indicate the operating voltages for the output, driver and input stages plus controller. These eight supply lines snake out from three transformers with 32 Schottky diodes for the regulators (56 such diodes with the Exclusive).



Connector envy? ASR have us covered.

The power supply incorporates active AC filtering and a separate DC blocker for each transformer winding. ASR thus strongly recommend that we do not add AC filters, conditioners or line-voltage regenerators ahead of their machine. Their slit-core power transformers look like standard EI issue but hide exotic cores. According to ASR, this material is seriously expensive and typically seen only in small toroidal types. [One suspects nanocrystalline, amorphous or FineMet material – *Ed.*] Due to their bigger cores, efficiency and impulse behavior are said to far exceed standard toroids yet create fewer stray radiations than the donut types.

stage. If you aim for an Emitter I with batteries, you should eye the Emitter I *Exclusive* (54 kg, €11'625) or the version which integrates them [80 kg, €14'750]. But that's not the end of your decision-making decisions. To pick from, there's a blue front with matching LED, extra i/o, additional XLR, a see-through acrylic housing like above, chromed footers, upgraded line- and speaker-level connectors, gold-plated fuses and higher capacitance banks. If you can think of it, they probably already have it.

ASR consider filter capacitance *mujo importante* so already the base model gets a high-voltage 404'440 µF capacitor array. The Exclusive version hits 604'440 µF, battery power exceeds a million for a whopping 1'0302'440 µF. Such copious filtering and – since 2016 – new filter parts have optimized dynamics and micro resolution. Explains ASR boss Friedrich Schäfer: "For our power rating, a fraction of these capacitors would suffice. Our extreme filtering together with dedicated voltage rails for each gain stage secures highly stable imaging even during colossal mayhem and a perfectly



neutral tonal balance down into the infra bass. Take a very subdued voice surrounded by copious bass energies. Many amps will lose their spatial plot, give up focus, let images drift and make the voice jump. Our Emitter maintains unconditional stability. Also, capacitance plus inductive speaker loads tend to create a resonant loop. So typical smaller filter arrays will over-emphasize the 80-120 Hz range. Bigger arrays extend bass response and deliver more articulation and pressure well below 30 Hz.”

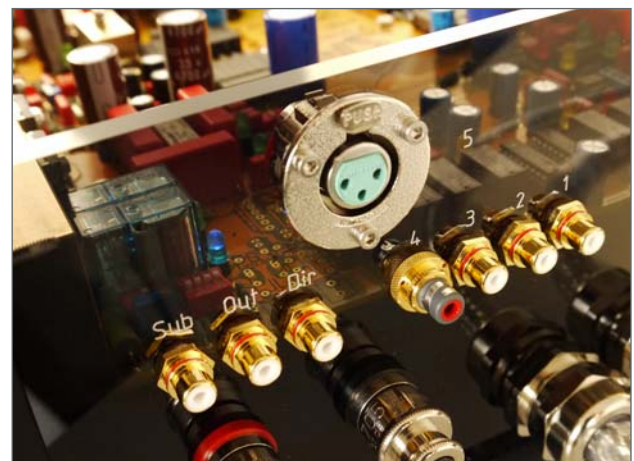
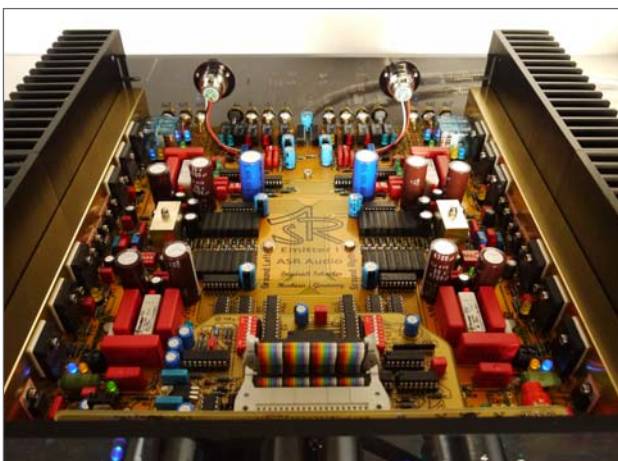
Perhaps no surprise given the high currents involved but still impressive and probably very rare in home hifi are the massive industrial Harting couplers making the power umbilical connections. One 24-pin copper conn alone weighs at least half a kilo, is a solid 15 cm wide and jacks into the back of the PSU with a bomb-proof locking mechanism. The attached cable itself is a 2.5m long quite thick double-shielded affair.

This allows setups where the power supply goes into hiding like behind the dress covers of my Roterring Belmarro 33 rack.

The PSU draws utility current from your wall socket via the included 1.5 m ASR Magic cord with 21A plug (longer lengths by request). Obviously that cord is marked for proper power polarity. Inside the PSU, an especially low-loss Neozed circuit breaker is allied to a variator which triggers a small standby transformer to shield all circuitry from intermittent dangerous voltage/current conditions.

Such comprehensive protection and power delivery pursue optimal operating conditions. Incoming AC should be maximally clean, quick and non-lossy since the music signal merely modulates it. ASR remind us that mechanical transformer vibrations undermine this process. It’s what led them to their divide’n’conquer scheme of multiple chassis in the first place. For thermal and mechanical purposes, the ASR enclosure design is arguably the most distinctive on the market aside from perhaps McIntosh. Based on a 42 cm² footprint, two massive heat sinks of 17cm height – 18 cm with footers – flank the slightly lower chassis in dark or clear acrylic (the latter for a surcharge) which then lets the eye roam over an arsenal of electronic weaponry inside [see below].

The visual leitmotif of not just the face plate is *symmetry*. A fat chromed knob occupies fascia central to regulate volume with a switched resistor array across 1 dB increments. To the left sits a smaller rotary knob for off,



standby and on. It can also select the optional second speaker outputs. To the right sits a selector numbered 1-5 for the standard RCA inputs and 'D' for 'direct'. Unlike the others which work through a relay, input D connects directly to the attenuator matrix via massive silver wiring. This is the best socket to use for single-source systems but cannot be switched. One could thus theoretically listen to two sources simultaneously but that's obviously not recommended. In fact, ASR explicitly warn us that whilst using the 'D' input, the optional XLR input may *not* be selected. Also standard is an RCA fixed tape out. Optional again is a pre-out/sub-woofer output [€ 250].

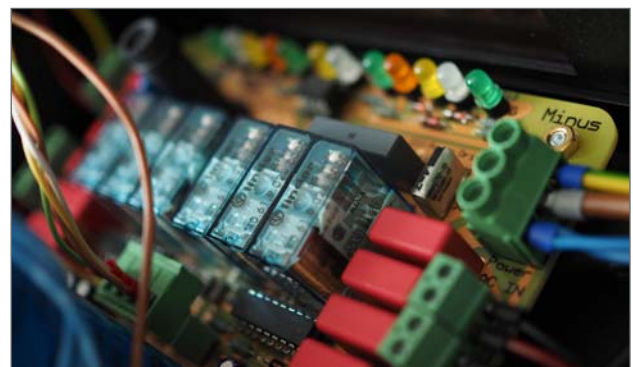
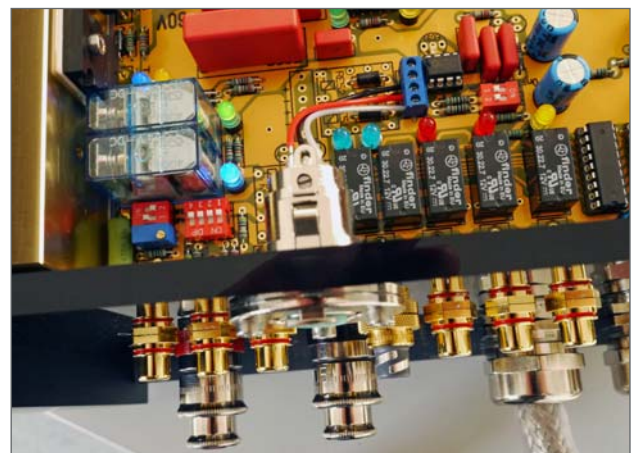
Hard facts served up as entertainment. On circuitry, there's very little ASR won't talk about. They're unusually forthcoming about their IP. Already the basic specs are impressive. Class A/B output power into 4 Ω is 250 wpc. Your speaker cables will dock to 60-ampere terminals which wire up internally with massive pure silver cabling. Right beneath the volume controller sits a large display to show chosen volume and confirm operational status. Stacking next to it on either side are those old-school 'idiot lights' for source selection, headfi, short circuit, overheating, over voltage, DC offset and other information.

Back on the order menu, I'm not familiar with *any* hifi machine that offers the buyer this many options. There's basically nothing that's not already on this table. To arrive at one's personally ideal configuration will take some time and consultation with a good and patient dealer. What's more, I've never yet taken receipt of an equipment loaner that arrived with such comprehensive documentation.

This review doesn't lend itself to scope out the depths of the ASR catalogue. But relative to the Emitter models, I *should* mention that 2016 saw their biggest overhaul yet. The motherboard with 2 x 110 μm thick traces is completely new and at 2.5 mm thickness more rigid than the precursor. New input selection with double-contact relays now also switches signal ground. In- and output stages gained new high-voltage capacitors and input impedance became selectable as 470 Ω or 22 k Ω via dip switch. The optional XLR sockets are of higher quality and the front and rear plates renewed to improve cosmetics. All Emitter Basic models run an

Elma rotary switch which drives an optical Copal encoder for the volume and the active power filtering. The included remote wand (a € 500 value when purchased separately) is machined from solid Corian and fitted with stainless steel buttons and a Lithium-Ion battery. It duplicates the front panel commands and can volume match individual inputs.

Not your usual integrated. That's the ASR Emitter. So it's not a conventional preamplifier with tacked-on current-gain block. Instead it's a power amp with volume control and input selector. The reason is plain. The output voltage of today's sources is high enough to drive amplifiers to full output directly. One only needs attenuation, not more active gain for now superfluous *pre*-amplification. According to ASR, the best solution is their 12-relay switch to insert resistors coupled to another four relays for gain matching. A volume readout up to 50 implies just signal cut. 51 equals unit gain or source thru-put. Only 52 begins to add some gain which, with speakers of standard efficiency, will take

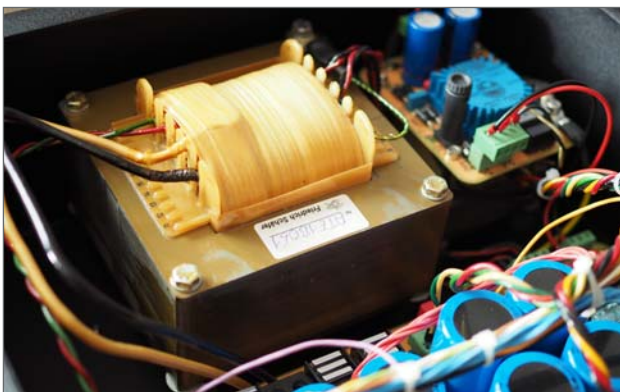


fortitude because that gets *really* loud. The ASR concept also liberated its designers on where to place the input switching. They use individual relays directly at each input to eliminate potential cross talk.

Powerhouse. A further bonus for power brokers is the optional bypass input to eliminate the volume control entirely; and bridge mode to about quadruple the output rating, netting $\sim 1 \text{ KW}/4 \Omega$ for the Emitter I. The II version almost hits the 2'000-watt mark. Members of a fabled secret society whisper of a Thai installation which – depending on who whispers, is either madly glorious or ridiculous overkill – runs 5 x *bridged* ASR Emitter II into an actively crossover'd big Wisdom Audio panel setup. $5 \times 2'000 = \dots$ hmm... 10'000 watts. Cough.

Eco freak. To improve Emitter I's green footprint, an energy-saving circuit only taps a portion of the over-spec'd power supply until SPL exceed its current. Only then do six relays open to unleash the two main power transformers into full-power mode which two blue lights confirm behind the acrylic face plate.

Sonic comparisons. Meeting a legend can be wobbly. What if reputation and expectation miss each other like two ships in the night? Thankfully not today. When did I last think that *everything* came off just so from the very beginning? That question presented itself after the first few bars of Swedish singer/songwriter Lisa Miskovsky's *Bottenviken*. The first guaranteed head turner was the incomparable bass. I'm not aware of any pre/power combo or integrated below € 10'000 which could take on the Emitter I's massively elemental yet adroit pep-in-its-step infra bass with full control.



Heavy-duty circuit breaker inside the PSU.

It reads impossible but, my QIn Prestige Three two-way towers suddenly seemed to run an extra 30 cm active woofer. That's how perfectly integrated unfamiliar extra bass showed up without any boom or bloom, inside a room that's usually quite critical across this band.

Nicolas Jaar's "Colomb" flooded my room with gentle bass waves without suffocating me with room-lock pressurization. Definition of the lowest synth bass was exceptional despite the attendant fulminance. Likewise for bass reach and stability. The balance of Jaco Pastorius' fretless bass seemed as natural as one might claim for an amplified instrument. Coincident with obvious speed on the LF impulses was a silky signature so "slamming" is not how I'd describe these textures.

Taking over for what in the best sense was *substantial* bass was a surprisingly linear, tonally neutral and transparent lower midrange/upper bass transition. That did *worshipful* well on the plucked upright on "Gamut Warning" of the Helge Tien Trio's *Hello Troll* album. In concert with color-strong but fundamentally neutral mids came vocals that weren't unduly chesty but admirably open even if a € 9'500 BAT VK-3000 SE will peel out singers with a bit more presence and brilliance. It was nevertheless easy to follow Jacintha's head movements before the microphone on "Danny Boy". The Emitter I rendered sibilants with a bit less hiss than my € 10'000 Norma/LinnenberG combo. Naim's € 4'300 Supernmait 2 gets harder and less sunny but none the more detailed for it.

Here in fact the ASR walked a rare balance by coupling well-lit nuanced detail with an upper mid/presence band which on first listen felt more contemplative than



Ground lift switch

maximally lit. Objectively speaking, the German actually revealed more detail than the Naim. On that quantity, it would only be edged out by my residential pre/power combo. Here the Emitter's audibly low distortion had much to say. The resultant cleanliness made it child's play to follow the rapid rapping on *A Tribe Called Quest* with their "We've Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service." I could follow all their jackhammer lyrics.

The same absence of dirt spelled out a treble that was fantastically silken. Here too I'd refrain from hyper adjectives like 'shiny' or 'glossy'. With my QIn's Scan-Speak tweeter rather ruthless, any absence of hardness registers immediately. But still did the Emitter I unearth truly minuscule stuff like the cymbal tickles of the earlier Helge Lien Trio. It simply presented it by-the-by casual. This was so natural that after a few minutes of mental adjustment, one might well wonder just why other amps must get on so *ringy* in the treble.

Bathory's *Blood on Ice* would seem to be an album well off the beaten audiophile track but listen to the chain-mail warrior stomp through icy snow and over the Emitter I, I could nearly 'see' individual snow crystals compress. The only competitors I know for such dynamic and textural finesse in the micro domain would be the dearer muscle amps from Norma like their IPA-40, PA-150 and PA-160 MR.

How to answer a legitimate question of why anyone could possibly want something other than today's machine? Some listeners might prefer even pluckier string attacks or faster more impulsive percussion hits on Kuniko's "Pleiades: II Metaux" or "Pleiades: IV. Peaux" from the *Xenakis IX* album. They might prefer my hard-

er-hitting LinnenberG amp or Naim's Supernait 3. But wait. Via internal dip switches, the Emitter's sonic profile can be tweaked by varying the output stage's HF compensation. Less compensation gets more forward and brilliant. This possibly unique feature also adapts to the impedance/capacitance behavior of speakers and cables.

Here individual ears will make their different choices. But already the central setting of the HF compensator had the marimba and vibraphone of *Kuniko Plays Reich* so magically elastic, color strong and believable that I spent hours getting lost in this hypnotic sonic scenery with its drifting sounds. For that wandering, the instruments had plenty of space on the Emitter's broad virtual stage. Lateral reach well eclipsed the outer boundaries of my speakers. They disappeared even more from any mental attempts at physically calling out their locations than they do over my LinnenberG Liszt. All of that happened exactly 12.7 centimeters behind the speakers' backs. Only kidding. I just meant to suggest that image placement with the Emitter I was ultra specific and didn't drift or change in size no matter how much infernal thunder and lighting the amp had to dispatch simultaneously in the nether regions.





This calibre of spatial steadfastness under all conditions was remarkable. I'd previously only heard it with the big €14'000 Norma monos preceded by their €5'400 Revo SC-2 preamp. When an orchestral player pursues his work at the very back of the concert hall, *that's* where the ASR placed him. Here the Emitter I nearly eclipsed my own combo and certainly did exceed the BAT. The far more aggressive and forward Naim Supernait 3 doesn't even belong into the same sentence except to say that playing it in full frontal attack mode isn't really the thing of the more relaxed self-assured ASR as it is that of the hotblooded Brit. The Emitter's very generous soundstage width stole just a *tad* from ultimate edge limning of vocals and instruments vis-à-vis a Norma Revo IPA-140. But that's nearly academic hairsplitting.

In short, here we really have an amplifier for the ages. Honest fascination begins with unmistakable optics and comprehensive often unique technical features under the hood. Sonics will particularly appeal to pleasure listeners who don't need or want artificial adrenaline or flashy special effects. Fans of freaky Gabba Techno might desire a firmer task master for their speakers but mature classic and Jazz fans as well as rockers and metal heads will find the ASR Emitter I a perfect partner for life.

With the Emitter I, the music rests in itself and speaks for itself. What moves and stimulates us is its *presence*. The listening room feels transformed into a warm bath which envelops, fills the space, rest on an unshakable foundation and holds insane power reserves whose presence one intuitively feels at all times. That overly hard and edgy attacks would thus render slightly mellower fits perfectly with the gushier core signature that stays clear of bared exhibitionism.

Electrically the ASR Emitter I should handle most all loads. I'd only want a personal audition for particularly bass-endowed speakers with minor dynamic reticence in the mid and high bands to insure that two good things together don't end up being too much.

Psych profile for the ASR Emitter I...

- Sonically *warmish* with exceptionally pressurized authoritative bass whose full reserves will never be tapped. This sonic V12 gifts the Emitter I with rarely heard big-bore ease and clarity.
- Neutral yet color-strong mids.
- Exceptionally resolved whilst super-silkily textured from bottom to top. The treble is slightly soft rather than straight-line neutral.
- Categorical absence of hardness anywhere.
- Highly clean and distortion free.
- The presentation floats disconnected from the transducers, gushes magisterially and ultra stable to be utterly unfazed by dynamic challenges. The sonic panorama happens behind the speakers without razor-sharp outlines.
- Great microdynamic chops and zero macrodynamic limits.

Facts.

Concept: Power amp with variable gain and multiple inputs.

Inputs: 5 x RCA (add €100 for one luxu WBT pair), 1 x XLR (add €375)

Output: 250 wpc into 4 Ω

Weight and dimensions: 19 kg and 42 x 42 x 18 cm W x D x H main unit, 32 kg and 46 x 42 x 16 cm PSU

Other: Exceptional breadth of order options

Warranty: 2 years, 3 years with registration

