

AUDIO REVIEWS

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JULY 2013

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Revo DS-1 & IPA-140

ITALY

Reviewer: Srajan Ebaen
Financial Interests: click [here](#)
Source: 2TB iMac 27" quad-core with 16GB of RAM (AIFF) running OSX 10.8.2 and PureMusic 1.94g in hybrid memory play with pre-allocated RAM, Audirvana 1.4 in direct/integer mode, Metrum Hex, SOIM dX-USB HD with Super-clock upgrade & mBPS-d2s, AURALIC Vega, Apple iPod Classic 160 AIFF-loaded, Cambridge Audio D100, Pure i20
Preamplifier: Nagra Jazz, Bent Audio Tap-X, Esoteric C-03, TruLife Audio Athena, Burson Conductor
Power amplifier: FirstWatt S1 monos, SIT2, F5, F6; Job 225, ModWright KWA100 SE, Bakoon AMP-11R, Clones 25i [on loan]
Loudspeakers: German Physik HRS-120, Boenicke Audio B10., AudioSolutions 200, Zu Audio Submission
Desktop: Wyred4Sound mINT, Gallo Strada 2 + TR-3D
Cables: Complete Zu Event loom, KingRex uArt split USB cable optionally with Bakoon BPS-02 uninterruptible battery supply
Powerline conditioning: GigaWatt PF-2 & Vibex Two 1R DC filter on amps, Vibex Three 11R on front-end components
Equipment rack: Artesania Exoteryc double-wide three tier with optional glass shelf, Rajasthani hardwood rack for amps
Sundry accessories: Extensive use of Acoustic System Resonators, noise filters and phase inverters
Room size: 5m x 11.5m W x D, 2.6m ceiling with exposed wooden cross beams every 60cm, plaster over brick walls, suspended wood floor with Tatami-type throw rugs. The listening space opens into the second storey via a staircase and the kitchen/dining room are behind the main listening chair. The latter is thus positioned in the middle of this open floor plan without the usual nearby back wall.
Review component retail: starting at €4.950 for the integrated; €3.790 for CDP/DAC



The problem with audio is proof. Or rather its absence. One can't *prove* superior sound. Try. Play someone a system you've spent ten years comparing and meticulously refining. You're convinced of its quality. But if that person doesn't like it, nothing will convince them. There's no proof that your system is better than theirs. This drives engineers batty. If they design the fastest race car, get the best driver and have just a bit of luck, they win the race. Posting the best time proves that their car was fastest. Zero ambiguity. But hifi is full of it. Ambiguity. And the other stuff.

Aperto - speaker isolation stands

Adamante

Absolute CABLES

Daydream

Naturally marketers don't capitulate so easily. They exploit our human desire for proof and certainty with snazzy figures. With hifi amps that used to be power. More was better. Eventually that got ridiculous. Who really believed they needed 2 kilowatts? Then the game became a bit subtler. Now it was about total harmonic distortion or IMD. The more zeros behind the decimal point the better. Once that game was up—people soon realized they couldn't hear the difference between 0.0001% and 0.000075% THD—marketers aimed for the still empty space in front of the decimal point. Hello sampling rates. At press time we already had three D/A converters—Antelope Audio Zodiac Platinum, Gryphon Kalliope, exasound e20—which could do DSD 256 at 11.28MHz. No such software exists. Yet. No matter. It's basic psychology. Higher numbers win.



Norma at Munich HighEnd 2013

	NORMA IPA-140	Soulution 710+720	Dartzeel CTH-8550
Power @ 8Ω	140	100	220
FR (-3db)	2Mhz	1 Mhz	100Khz
Slew Rate (V/μs)	175	na	88
Current (Peak)	150A	60A	na
Power Supply (VA)	2@400	2@1 K	1 @?
Sound/Noise (db)	115	108	90

Jim Ricketts of TMH Audio applies this type of proof again to the pre-decimal space but now amplifiers. He focuses on their slew rate and bandwidth. His comparison table lists Soulution's 710 and 720 models and the dartZeel CTH-8550. At 100kHz the first Swiss amp gets clobbered by the second Swiss which offers 1MHz. That one gets hammered by the Norma with 2MHz.

It also annihilates the dartZeel's 88V/μs slew rate with 175V/μs. Soulution's isn't available. Norma for office! What does slew rate sound like? It's all very suggestive, no explanations required. Like that 2MHz is just an octave over 1MHz. Or that human hearing cuts off at 20kHz. Two bands below. Why would you want such excessive bandwidth? Never mind. The biggest numbers win. Welcome to hifi marketing 101. Flip a page in Jim's book and you get to the equally Italian Alef brand. That weighs in with 6MHz bandwidth. "Think Soulution but executed at a *much* higher level!" That's how he puts it with a capitalized emphasis. Naturally Alef didn't make it on his Norma comparison chart as this might steal sales from himself. Plus Alef's 180μs just five more than Norma—could raise uncomfortable questions when this type of math finally hits its limits. Are we dazzled yet?

Having talked with Norma Audio's Enrico Rossi through a translator at **Munich HighEnd 2013**, I'd come away very impressed. His bonnet-up gear oozed obvious quality and showed very well-considered featurization, immaculate industrial design all accompanied by what seemed to be very fair Euro pricing. Without turning his uncommon specs into any primitive marketing stunt, Enrico had solid design reasons and was most happy to explain them.



Norma at Munich HighEnd 2013

Because two other wide-bandwidth amps—Bakoon's AMP-11R, Job's 225—had already suggested particular sonics I'd grown very fond of, I spotted a perfect opportunity to learn more about this school of circuit design; and an excellent chance that Norma's €4.950 integrated with a solid 140/280wpc into 8/4Ω would fall into the Bakoon/Job class with more useful power and more useful features (remote control, MM/MC phono, configurable outputs). That'd surely be a story worth telling.

