



# The charm of the North

Moonriver Audio is a new manufacturer of sound equipment from Sweden. I wanted to examine, since I find it quite appealing. Perhaps we'll find some substance beneath the pleasing exterior?

There are several things that provide the Moonriver 404 with its good looks. The stylish black front plate, the vintage look font of the written indications on that same front plate, and the control knob's tasteful design. There is also the whole front layout with its four hefty knobs, and of course the stylish wooden cheek on each side. It looks good and I would not hesitate to have it in my living room. Furthermore a separate external phono stage of some substance is planned, which of course we find to be a strong argument in favour. The Moonriver 404 is essentially a classic analogue integrated amplifier priced at 3000 euros. It

can be equipped with a Phono module at 480 euros, and a D/A-converter module for 580 euros which would make it a complete centerpiece of an elegant hifi system.

The designer behind the amp resides in Malmö and seems to be a man of good taste, both calm and down to earth. And this is also how he would like his products to present themselves. For the name he is indebted to Henry Mancini, Johnny Mercer and Audrey Hepburn who's interpretation of Moon river in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* gave her a (deserved) Oscar.

To look for cutting edge, hi-tech invention or show off at the limit of what's possible won't be the case here. On the other hand instead, you get proven components carefully combined and handcraft made in Europe. Another interesting detail are the orange colored LEDs indicating the operational status, which furthermore can be dimmed or switched off via a toggle switch placed on the front plate, very smart. That's the kind of detail that gets me every time.

The first control knob from the left, switches between the four inputs using relays. Two of those inputs can be used for the optional phono- and D/A-modules. The second knob is used, as in bygone days, to switch between normal operation and tape monitoring. Not in order to, in any way, promote the return of the tape deck, but rather to simplify the use of active room correction. A LED placed in the center of the front plate indicates when the amplifier is operational, and the first knob to the right is the balance control. The possibility to lock this control in the center position would have been helpful, but the lack thereof is not a deal breaker. Further to the right you'll find the volume control, and between these knobs there is a toggle switch for mono or stereo operation. Thus it has everything you need, in fact there's more than what you'd normally get with a high end minimalist integrated amplifier these days.

Around the back you'll find the corresponding connections. Besides the four pairs of inputs there is a USB-input

to feed the D/A-converter, a complete tape loop, and two pre-outputs. Is there a matching power amp underway? You bet there will be. The speaker terminals are OK, the power socket standard, excellent and appropriate.

With the amplifier comes a remote control. It's an ordinary, plastic, standard piece of kit with six buttons which cover the basics like volume adjustment, input selection, mute and tape monitor. The phono module can handle both MM and MC cartridges. Inside the amp it is shielded by a sheet-metal cover. The available options for different settings are limited: Two DIP-switches inside allow switching between MM and MC, and selecting either 47 Kohm or 100 Ohm as input impedance. Those are the basics which in many cases will work well. Since we are already looking at the phono module: It consists of an op-amp based standard concept, which I'm happy to see that has separate voltage regulators on the circuit board. The resistors are surprisingly, not completely updated, carbon film type, but the foil capacitors are high grade.

On the other hand there is really something happening under the top cover of the Swedish amp. Even if the output isn't all that high, the power supply contains a rather sturdy toroidal transformer. In order to connect the transformer to the mains the manufacturer has provided a starting current limitation/soft start circuit that works well, which protects not only your fuses, but also the power switch from the

## Playmates

### Cartridge:

- Audio-Technica AT-5V
- Excalibur Gold

### Turntable:

- Technics SL-1000 MK2

### Phono stage:

- PS Audio Stellar Phono

### Speakers:

- KLANG+TON Nada
- KLANG+TON Prototyp
- Audio Physic Avantero III

## The competition

### Amplifiers:

- Cambridge Audio Edge A
- Taga HT-2500B

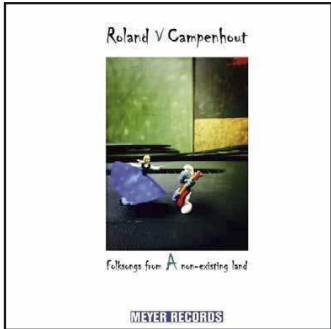


*Tasteful design knobs, discrete orange LEDs: Successful layout and design, the Moonriver 404*



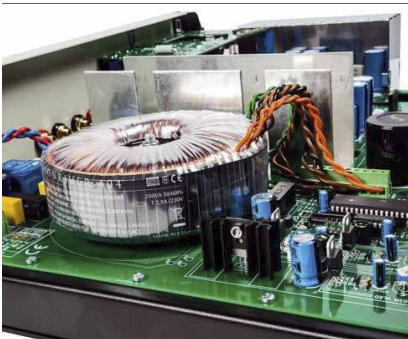
*A small but aesthetically effective detail, the side cheeks are made of real wood*

Roland Van Campenhout –  
Folksongs from a Non-Existing Land



Playlist

- Roland Van Campenhout  
Folksongs from a Non-Existing Land
- Kadavar  
For the Dead Travel Fast
- Pink Floyd  
Wish You Were Here
- Rickie Lee Jones  
Pirates (MFSL 45)



The 250-VA-transformer has double the capacity needed to provide the rated output

The 404 is well equipped with functions and has optional Phono and DAC modules

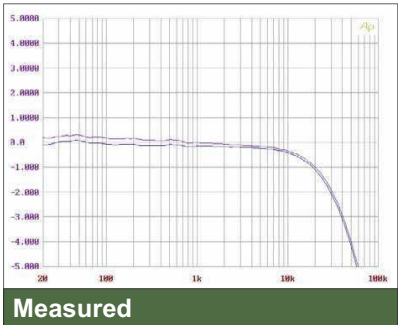


substantial starting current of the transformer. Most of the 404 amplification is handled by two integrated power amp components. It was impossible to find any kind of designation of type or maker on the fifteen-leg ICs mounted on an angled cooling element. It seems safe enough to assume that they are examples of one of several standard types developed by the semiconductor industry for this purpose, and which have proven their worth in the meantime. No need to be concerned about quality in this regard as there have been real cult amplifiers from Japan built with such components: Anyone remember the Gaincard from 47 Labs?

As always, it comes down to how you use such components and Moonriver audio has definitely put some considerable effort into this, and thus provided for an extravagant power supply. The transformer has capacity in abundance and we find banks of capacitors directly next to the chips connected in parallel, providing current without restraint. Another good idea was not to try to squeeze the last bit of power out of the chips. Almost 40 watts at eight, and over 50 watts at four ohms results in a solid compromise that works really well in practice.

The assembly of the different boards is done by hand as practiced by the manufacturer, using almost exclusively classic discrete components which can be assembled by hand unlike modern SMD components. It is all exactly as the Swedes had told us, something I'm content to take note of.

In use, the amplifier does what it should without putting on any airs. Feels like a good integrated amp of, lets say, the early



**Measured**

Measurements comment

The frequency response measurement of the Moonriver via the phono MM input shows extensive linearity and channel equality. The transmission range extends to about 40 kilohertz. The device delivers around 38 watts into eight and 52 watts into four ohms. The signal-to-noise ratio across the high-level inputs at 5 watts at the output is a good -85 decibels, the channel separation is -68 decibels. The distortion also looks neat: 0.06 percent at 5 watts at eight and 0.08 percent at four ohms. The device consumes 73 watts of power when idling.

eighties. Grown-ups among us will be comfortable, everything works just as it should. Also we got along fine with the D/A-converter. The USB-input handles a sampling rate up to 384Khz, no DSD

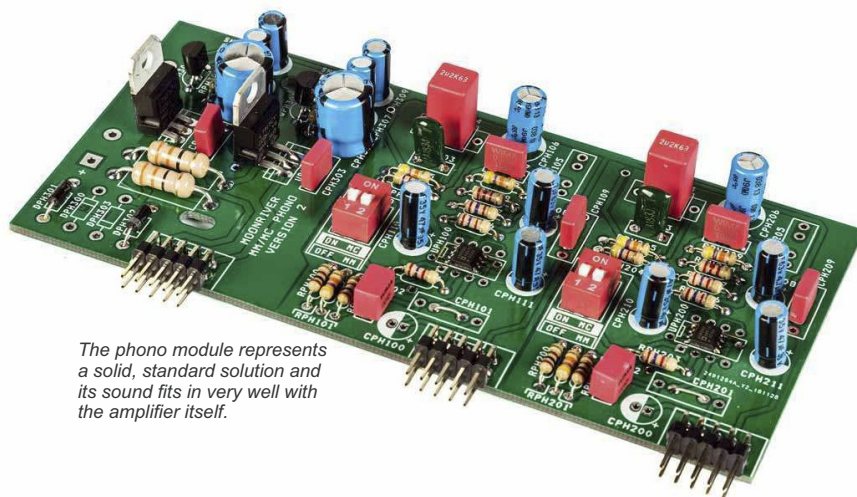


- Moonriver 404**
- Price 3.000 Euro
  - Distributor Len HiFi, Duisburg
  - Telephone 02065 544139
  - Internet lenhifi.de
  - Warranty 3 Years
  - Weight ca. 12 kg

**Bottom line ...**

The Moonriver is a beautiful old school integrated amplifier with an amazing sonic potential: It sounds fresh, has a clear edge and is clearly one of the most dynamic representatives of its class.





*The phono module represents a solid, standard solution and its sound fits in very well with the amplifier itself.*



*The delicate signal from the cartridge is treated under the cover of a metal shield.*



*The output stage of the 404 uses tried and tested amps on a chip/power amp components*

compatibility. The driver installation for PC went without any hiccups.

But we are more interested in the performance and capability of the built in phono module. Let's have a quick look: Fed by an old and well known overachiever, a MM Audio Technica AT-5V, the amplifier delivers a minor dynamic miracle: It plays music with great agility, goes round every musical corner with joy, and breathes fresh air through your speaker cables. Prerequisite for this level of performance are speakers of some efficiency able to provide the necessary means to make this happen.

The distributor suggests speakers from the Polish manufacturer Horns, of which we also have referred on more than one occasion, and which surely should work out well. I used several DIY concepts, among these one with a horn for the medium-high frequencies, which was held under control of the Swedish amp and given ample exercise. Let's listen to the old blues man Roland Van Campenhout and behold, his "Folk songs from a non-existing land" suddenly don't sound as bad tempered anymore. The Moonriver gives to the music sparkle, gloss and drive. The percussion has shine and glitter, and everything is fanned out wide, with up-front soundstage. The gents of the band Kadavar let the music from their latest album "For the dead can travel fast" rip through the atmosphere with rhythm and grip, and I find no reason to replace the Moonriver with any amplifier with larger caliber. Switching to an MC-cartridge changes tonal balance in the direction of more brilliance, which draws me back towards the MM. With the MM however the Swede fights like a champ. Sincere compliments.

Original - [https://www.hifitest.de/test/vollverstaerker/moonriver-404\\_18727](https://www.hifitest.de/test/vollverstaerker/moonriver-404_18727)

*Holger Barske*



The Revelation.



Revelation 1 LP



Revelation 2 LP



Revelation 3 LP



Revelation 1  
Poweramplifier

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