



# PATHWAY TO HAPPPINESS

Accustic Arts from southern Germany has followed up the AMP VI super power amplifier with the PREAMP V, a suitable preamplifier. How does this dream combo sound?

**Text: Tom Frantzen**

**H**ere it stands before us now, the latest flagship preamplifier from Accustic Arts. The South German high end manufacturer produces small-series gems for listening to music with a high level of material quality as well as effort and has enjoyed great success with that, particularly in the export market. The new model is a thoroughbred transistor preamplifier, looking as if it was milled from a solid block of aluminum, and in fully balanced Class A circuit technology, matching the AMP VI from STEREO 6/2024.

The 14-kilogram unit costs from 25,500 euros and is also available in black-silver or black-gold in addition to the silver version we tested for this review.

### Sound evolution

Compared to the already excellent predecessor models of the Series III, which have served us in the STEREO team as uncompromising "top references" for several years, the new V introduced at the beginning of 2023 has evolved noticeably.

It has not only been given a new, high-quality and large display, where previously there was none. The circuit layout

### TEST DEVICES

**Preamplifier:** Audio Research REF 6 SE

**Power Amplifier:** Accustic Arts AMP VI

**Loudspeakers:** B&W 801 D4, DALI Epikore 9

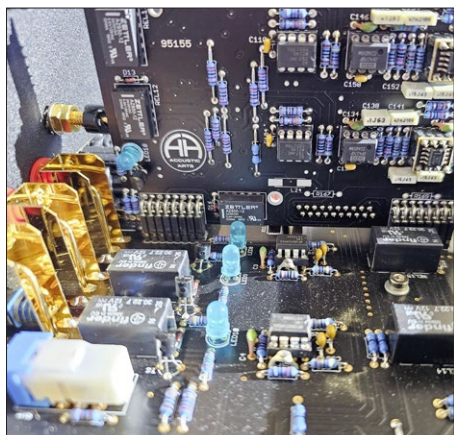
**Cables:** In-Akustik, HMS, Supra Cables



For detailed information on the test devices, scan the QR code.

## TEST PREAMPLIFIER

Photos: STEREO, Manufacturer



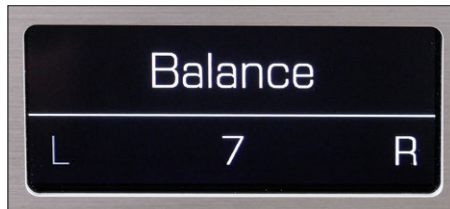
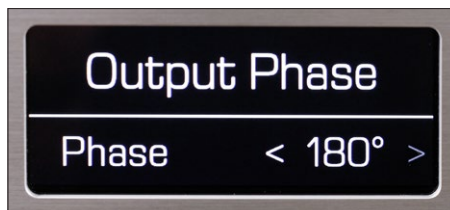
The optional upgrade to V-Phono is achieved using the plug-in circuit board shown.

has also been continuously optimized with a sonic purpose in the direction of interference immunity and short signal paths. In detail, the 50VA toroidal transformer with particularly low stray field has also been positioned directly on the main board of the current preamplifier. This simplifies the design without making any compromises, i.e. improves the manufacturing process and allows for fewer sources of error during assembly.

A fundamental revision of the input section may, however, have been even more important for the final result. This change improved the signal-to-noise ratio by a few decibels and thus achieved a more than academically measurable increase in sound dynamics.

### Symmetry and Class A

Under the hood, which is very massive in case of the Preamp V, everything looks high-class: The “who’s who” of the best parts manufacturers can be found here. There are many capacitors from WIMA, but also tightly toleranced resistors and relays for input switching as well as very elaborate contacts that have been designed for long-term reliability to the highest, sometimes even military standards.



Thanks to the new display, menu settings such as tone control are now also possible.



Of course, we also took a look under the hood of the Accustic Arts preamplifier.

Even the headphone output has enormous power reserves, delivering 1.2 volts at 32 ohms impedance and even 3.7 volts at 100 ohms according to the STEREO measurement lab. Signs of de-

This means twice as many components in the main sections of the device, as two phase-inverted signals have to be transported. This ensures greater operational reliability and low interference, thus also in use in professional studio technology. Class A is the “de facto standard” for preamplifiers, because unlike the current/power amplification of a power amplifier, with pure voltage amplification such as here there is no need to worry about waste heat and energy efficiency.



**Tom Frantzen**  
Editor

**»THE SOUND OF THIS  
PREAMP IS ALMOST  
OUT OF THIS WORLD.  
ABSOLUTELY FASCINATING.«**

liberate “over-motorization”. It goes without saying that we are looking at a preamplifier that is completely balanced from input to output, as might perhaps be expected in the absolute top class.

The preamplifier, which originates not far from the Neckar river, has obviously been bred for the best possible signal purity and yet at the same time high broadband capabilities. This aims to achieve a „fast“ and purely analog signal transmission and processing.

The reproduced frequency range was also extended downwards to (almost) 0 Hertz. For the AC voltages of different frequencies used for signal transmission, this means nothing other than DC voltage. We hi-fi fans have always been warned that this is unsuitable for other devices in the chain, especially tube amplifiers and loudspeakers, haven’t we? The answer can be found in the box on the next double page.



Six high-level inputs, one of which is phono MM/MC if required, and two pairs of RCA/XLR outputs, each with different configurations (see box) are available.



The black color variant with golden buttons is particularly popular in Asia.



The AMP VI, the company's largest stereo power amplifier, impressed us in STEREO 6/2024.



The PREAMP V's remote control, made entirely of metal, is impressive and of high quality.

The preamp from the town of Lauffen also has a lot to offer on the connection side. A further three high-level connections are available as XLR and three as RCA inputs, whereby one of these can also be specially configured as a level fixed input for home cinema purposes if desired. The most interesting option is, of course, the „PHONO“ turntable connection, which can be fitted as standard or retrofitted and for which Input 4 must be sacrificed. With the phono board installed for 1,800 euros, the weight increases by another pound, and the price for the full configuration ends up at 27,300 euros. For the extra charge, the customer gets an MM/MC phono branch right away or as a later upgrade, which is in little or no way inferior to very high-class separate phono preamps. This stems from the fact that the electronics can be meticulously adapted to the requirements of the existing pickup system via the menu of the PREAMP V. MC impedances from 47 to 470 ohms and MM capacities between 50 and 425 picofarads can be selected. The signal paths may even have an advantage over separate phono preamps thanks to the integration into one housing and the elimination of unnecessary cables. And you save money, because even if you avoid absurdly expensive cables, good cables are never really cheap.

### Many Materials, High Quality

All control elements, as well as the sockets, make an extremely sturdy and solid impression, as if they were built to last forever. What's more, no cable, no matter how oversized, will pull this heavy preamp out of the shelf easily.

Generally, the Accoustic Arts is a purely analog preamplifier. No DAC, no USB, no HDMI, not even Bluetooth and certainly no streaming is supposed to stand in the way of the "analog purity" and impair the "delicate" music signals here. Of course, this applies all the more to the unamplified phono voltages of the phono version, which are 40 or even 60 decibels weaker. At this point, we would also like to mention the sister

model TUBE PREAMP V, which employs two additional tubes in the signal path. It is a tradition at Accoustic Arts to offer independently developed and optimized preamplifiers for both semiconductor and tube fans.

The massive remote control weighs just under half a pound. And in itself it already is a feast for the eyes. It's not delicate, certainly not, but it's not bulky either. Even the small metal buttons look high-quality and trustworthy. Only those who drop this sceptre are fulfilling a cliché, because in that case it should be even more solid than most wood flooring. You should avoid that at all costs.

### Working Together

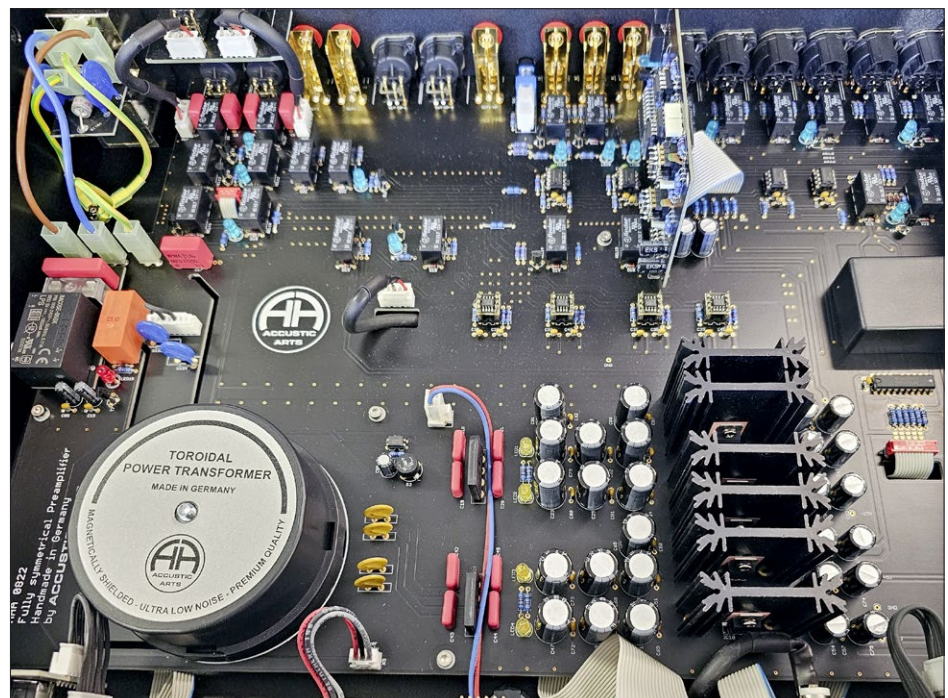
In terms of sound, the Accoustic Arts PREAMP V – as one might expect, but of course should definitely be experienced – can be classified in the "Olympus" after just a few moments. We are certainly looking at one of the best preamps on

this planet. STEREO has never had a better one in our large listening room, in any case.

In a brilliant combination with the AMP VI power amplifier from the same company, which remained here as a reference after our review, the PREAMP V at least stands up to its competition in most disciplines and even overtakes them in one or two of them.

This preamplifier thus gave the excellent B&W 801 D4 speakers even more "grip" and bite, without losing a single trace of timbre, breathtaking temperament or flow. At the same time, the performance became even more transparent, yet remained full-bodied and bursting with juice and power.

Opulence and transparency do not often go together so harmoniously and thus holistically. The preamp quite clearly has no need to feign speed by draining the lower registers. The Accoustic Arts didn't have the slightest weakness in any area,



The inside of the Accoustic-Arts preamp V is extremely clean and "architecturally" optimized; the toroidal transformer can be seen on the left.

## TEST PREAMPLIFIER

not even where the tube faction sometimes scores points, for example the midrange. Here too, the preamp pulls out all the stops, remains extremely precise, flexible “in the hips” and almost empathetic. It drives the musical action forward with verve and rhythm, but still remains the master of the proceedings despite all the resolution and dynamics.

This also applies to absurdly high levels, where it has to – and can – rely on the power provided by the AMP VI. Bass hits such as those at the beginning of Eric Clapton’s live performance, followed by AC/DC’s title track “Highway To Hell” or even the dynamic soundscape of Stevie Wonder’s “Superstition” are clearly defined, almost chiseled, and land accurately in the pit of your stomach with emphatic vehemence. It almost seems like a miracle when delicate singer Cara Dillon steps up to the microphone in our large STEREO listening room immediately afterwards and vividly as well as in life-size sings her emotionally moving “There Were Roses”, with the background of senseless victims of the Northern Irish civil war. What a spectrum! The Accoustic Arts handles all of this in a decidedly multi-faceted, incorruptible way – and yet with charm and a great deal of stirring emotionality.

### Mating rituals

No matter whether you pair the Accoustic Arts preamp with one – or even se-

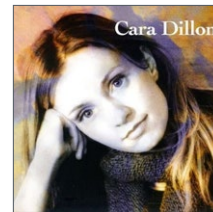
veral – adequate power amplifier(s) or place it together with similarly good active loudspeakers, you can hardly treat yourself to anything better. And in the case of a five-figure price tag, that’s probably exactly the right word. You have to be able to do it, want to do it – and like yourself to do it. The first point is often the most difficult.

We know from experience that the aforementioned tube version TUBE PREAMP V – which is actually a hybrid version of the largest Accoustic Arts preamp – sounds slightly different. That doesn’t necessarily mean better or worse, and it certainly shouldn’t stop you from trying it out for yourself.

The tube in version III may have sounded a bit fuller and softer, but we are not yet familiar with generation V as a tube, at least in the STEREO listening room, and can only speculate at this point. Here you should try out for yourself which of the siblings you like better, as personal preferences or individual musical taste can also be the deciding factor.

It is by the way not technically possible to convert one preamp to the other, i.e. semiconductor to tube or vice versa, as the two models are independent designs that are not based on each other. Nevertheless, they come at practically the same price and can also be retrofitted with the same equipment upgrades (phono). So once again: be sure to listen to both!

## DAMIT HABEN WIR GEHÖRT



### CARA DILLON: CARA DILLON

Successful Irish singer-songwriter with an angelic folk voice.



### AC/DC: HIGHWAY TO HELL

Undoubtedly a masterpiece of hard rock music.



For more information and our STEREO playlists, scan the QR code.

The only conclusion we can draw from this extremely impressive preamplifier is that the music enjoyment with this device is simply out of this world – you just don’t want to stop. An unmistakable sign of the highest sound quality: CDs and records of several editors are piling up.

Musical happiness can sometimes be so simple. Unfortunately, there was no mention of it being cheap in this case – top class, after all. ■

## TOUGH CHOICE

The different outputs of the V might be confusing at first.

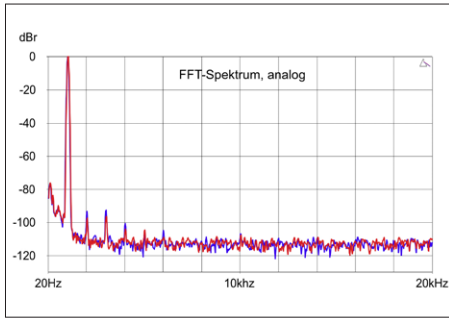
The Accoustic Arts PREAMP V has two pairs of balanced and unbalanced sockets each for the outputs to be connected to the respective power amplifier or active loudspeakers. One of these is always labeled „AC” and the other „DC”, which stands for „Alternating Current” and „Direct Current”, respectively. This is undoubtedly somewhat confusing at first, as there of course is not a direct current signal on one and an alternating current signal on the other per se. The music signal, which consists of a complex mixture of frequencies, is always transmitted as alternating voltage.

This means that the AC output „filters out” the lowest frequencies below the usable bass range, including direct current signal, by means of a so-called RC element

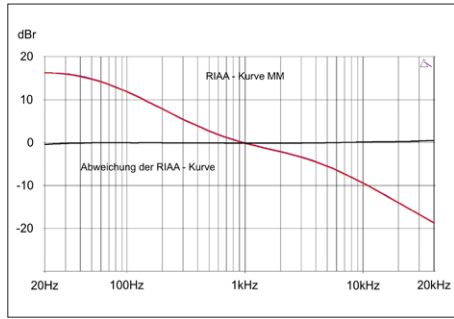
(for „resistor-capacitor”) consisting of a resistor and a capacitor. The DC output, on the other hand, does not use this RC element and thus also transmits the lowest frequency signals almost down to 0 Hertz – i.e. direct current. This in turn means that there is no component-related interference with the signal in the audible range when using DC. Don’t worry, appropriate circuitry still prevents harmful direct current from being present at the DC output, which could theoretically endanger sensitive tube amplifiers or loudspeakers in particular. STEREO has already gained experience with this feature because Accoustic Arts preamps have been in use as work equipment for some time now.



The outputs of the PREAMP V are designated as AC and DC versions.



The FFT spectrum is practically free of impairments such as distortion or noise.



The measured RIAA equalization for MM pickup systems is perfectly precise.

ACCUSTIC ARTS PREAMP V PHONO		
<b>Product type / price range</b>		preamplifier / above 10,000 euros
<b>Website</b>		www.accusticarts.de
<b>Price in euros</b>		from 25,500 (base version), extra phono 1,800
<b>Dimensions (W x H x D) in cm</b>		48.2 x 12.8 x 39.3
<b>Weight in kg</b>		from 14
<b>German distributor / phone</b>		Accustic Arts / +49 7133 97477 0
<b>Type of amplifier (transistor, tube)</b>		transistor
<b>SOUND</b>	<b>55 %</b>	<b>very good 1.2</b>
<b>Sound quality</b>		extremely fine, precise, open, 3D and yet powerful and voluminous
<b>MEASUREMENTS</b>	<b>15 %</b>	<b>good 1.8</b>
<b>Output resistance (in ohms)</b>		good (92)
<b>Intermodulation: 300 mV (in percent)</b>		very good (0.00066)
<b>Maximum output power (in volt)</b>		good (11.6)
<b>Channel separation (30 mV at 10 kHz; in decibels)</b>		good (75)
<b>Synchronization volume control at -60 dB (in decibels)</b>		very good (0.13)
<b>Upper cut-off frequency (in kHz)</b>		very good (>80)
<b>Distortion at 1 kHz: 300 mV (in percent)</b>		good (0.015)
<b>Signal-to-noise-ratio : 300 mV / MM / MC (in decibels)</b>		satisfactory (86)
<b>FFT spectrum</b>		very good
<b>Power consumption idling (in watts)</b>		very good (11)
<b>FEATURES</b>	<b>15 %</b>	<b>good 2.2</b>
<b>Haptics / workmanship</b>		very good
<b>Number of analog inputs (RCA / XLR)</b>		very good (7)
<b>Special interfaces</b>		only phono / headphones
<b>Tone control or room calibration</b>		yes (balance)
<b>Finishes</b>		3
<b>Hard mains switch</b>		yes
<b>Features upgradeable</b>		no
<b>HANDLING &amp; OPERATING</b>	<b>15 %</b>	<b>good 1.9</b>
<b>Quality of the remote / manual</b>		good / good
<b>Controls on the device / display</b>		good
<b>Warranty in years</b>		good (3)
<b>STEREO TEST RESULT</b>		<b>very good 1.5</b>