

180 POUNDS OF POWER

The AMP VI from Accoustic Arts makes our long-standing reference power amplifier AMP II - MK4 seem almost small. 84 kilograms, three kilowatts of sine wave power, around 48,000 euros. But nothing but music and muscle. Incredible!

Text: Tom Frantzen



The manufacturer Accoustic Arts from Lauffen am Neckar in southern Germany is certainly thriving, though somewhat in the background. Despite some very good reviews in STEREO – the author had the pleasure of meeting an AMP for the first time in 2009 – Joachim Voss' audio electronics are more of an insider tip than a trend in Germany.

Still, it will be difficult to find anything superior, no matter the brand or price. A few details about the AMP VI stereo power amplifier reviewed here: 2x 950/1500/1600 watts continuous power (at 0.1% THD+N) into 8/4/2 ohms, 84 kilograms/185 lbs of weight and a price tag of around 48,000 euros. That is yet another dramatic increase in performance data compared to our long-standing STEREO top reference AMP II – MK4. Extremely ambitious customers are said to have asked for an amplifier with even more output power than the predecessor. Alright ... That also awakens our eagerness for this review.

The housing of the AMP VI, which can be fed both balanced and unbalanced, actually „hides“ two mono blocks. That is made unmistakably clear by the two channel-separated, magnetically shielded toroidal transformers, for example.

40 selected MOSFET transistors aim to provide plenty of amplification power. The stability and almost vault-like precision is palpable, there is also plenty of preservative gold found on all contacts. The housing is made entirely of aluminum, the finger-thick inlay is milled from solid brass, polished and chrome-plated. The entire structure of the amplifier appears to be designed for extreme mechanical stability and therefore low resonance. This is intended to prevent distortion caused by vibrations.

High Quality Components

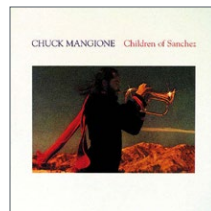
The German-made capacitor banks for the mains filter alone add up to 220,000 microfarads of capacitance. That is almost three times the capacity of the Luxman amp also reviewed in this magazine, which is anything but weak. All components are selected and of a quality that meets even the most critical (military) requirements.

In our opinion, the start-up current limitation with DC mains filter as well as the extensive protective circuits against clipping, excessive DC offset or high-frequency oscillations, are very practical and sensible. The components read like the crème de la crème of suppliers. WIMA capacitors, Vishay Beyschlag resistors, Exicon MOSFETs, Würth noise suppression capacitors, all sockets are also of high quality.



The AMP VI is also available in black and gold (photo) and black and silver for the same price.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD



C. MANGIONE: CHILDREN OF SANCHEZ

This is perhaps the most dynamic soundtrack of all time.



AL JARREAU: JARREAU

„Mornin“ or „Boogie Down“ definitely awaken the spirits. Fantastic music!



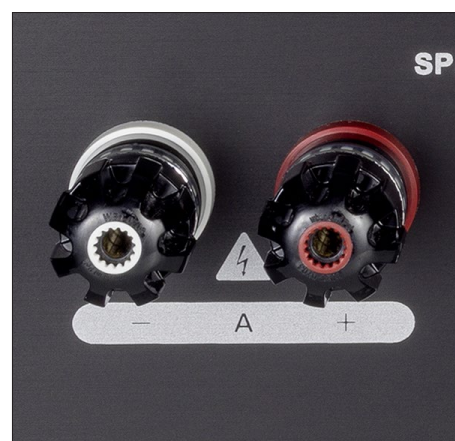
For more information and our STEREO playlists, scan the QR code.

Anyone paying attention will perhaps be looking for the 16A high-current mains input, as the AMP VI would more than exhaust the capacity of a normal German household socket (3,600 VA/watts). The clever engineers have therefore given each of the already completely separate channels and transformers inside the housing its own 10A power input, which added up amounts to 20A or up to 7,200 VA/watts. You can't get more double mono than this.

As a bonus, the largest stereo power amplifier from the German company also features a linearization of the very high damping factor of (stated) 500. This aims to ensure that the conditions should remain identical over the entire frequency range. Well, the measured damping factor is lower when linearized, where it also sounds a little less tight in the listening test. Fortunately, this whole aspect is switchable. It is therefore possible to achieve a slight tonal variation, but – with all due respect – we consider this linearization feature to not be essential.



Damping control as well as mute can be switched on the power amp itself.



High-quality WBT bi-wiring speaker terminals accept connection cables.



The similarly high-quality RCA and XLR input sockets are switchable.

TEST POWER AMPLIFIER

We didn't take the easy way out when it came to testing this beast, which is hardly possible at weight of 84 kg anyway. With this enormous weight and its width and depth of over 50 centimeters each, the AMP VI is not suitable for a normal shelf, which means that you have to react logistically. We employed special power amplifier bases for the Accoustic Arts amp and the comparable sparring partner Krell KSA-i400. When the AMP is delivered in its flight case, it is best to invite friends to help you unpack and set up the device. Experience has shown that – unlike with a piano – they will be happy to help.

The completely handcrafted amplifier is available in silver, black-silver and – perhaps popular in Asia – black-gold. In our listening test, the Accoustic Arts proved to be an amplifier of enormous expressiveness, confident and yet amazingly light-footed as well as highly musical, bordering on magical. It has always been difficult for engineers – and various developers have confirmed this to us several times – to realize extreme performance in combination with very high sound quality when constructing an amplifier.

Developing small audiophile amplifiers with a few power transistors in, let's



At Accoustic Arts, big focus is put on craftsmanship. Components are also assembled on site.

say, the low to mid double-digit watt range is significantly less complicated. That alone is one reason for the fact that there are relatively many remarkably „coherent“ sounding integrated amplifiers in the affordable range. Similarly, we all know that compact, monitor-like 2-way loudspeakers are much easier to get „good“ sound out of than more elaborate multi-way floorstanding loudspeakers.



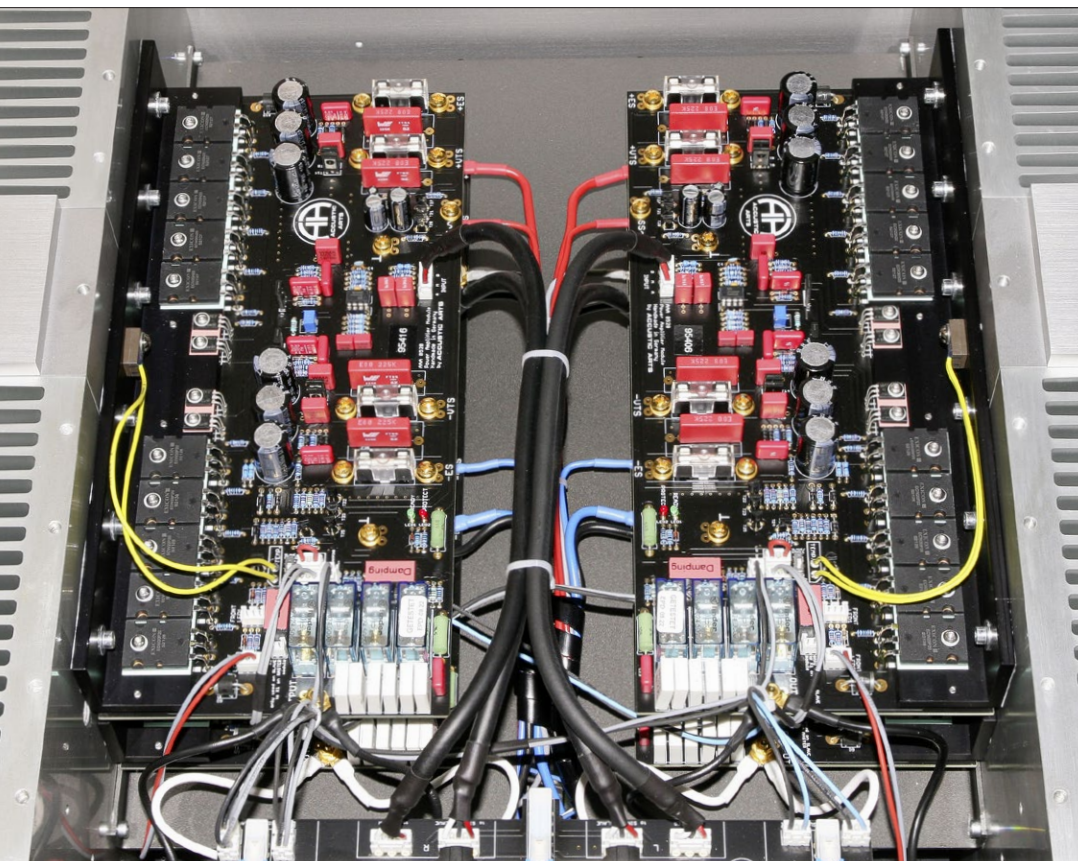
The cover plate alone, milled from solid brass, is basically as thick as a finger.

Big Caliber in the Listening Test

This dilemma is perhaps even more complex with huge power amplifiers, whose spec sheets naturally have completely different requirements and fewer financial and technical limitations than even the largest integrated amplifiers. Ultimately, the spatial dimensions with unavoidably longer signal paths also play a role here – simply accommodating the 40 MOSFET power transistors and getting them to play as synchronized as possible must have been a particular challenge.

Nevertheless, the Accoustic Arts amp, which relies uncompromisingly on two transformers – each with its own channel-specific mains input – sounds particularly impressive in the mid-range, which is eminently important for the musicality. This is where the unmistakable character of natural instruments and the human voice in particular is revealed in all its glory. The large, uncompressed sound image has a very pronounced agility and radiance, which sets it apart from comparable monster-amps. It's easy to get the impression that the company has managed the balancing act of hijacking the sometimes-heralded superiority of tube technology, particularly in the smooth, clearly articulated mid-range, using semiconductor technology and combining it with ridiculous MOSFET performance.

The bass stomping into the room with tremendous physical force proves them right. As we all know, only few tube amplifiers can do that. In any case, there is no longer any question that such a strong power amplifier could possibly „have too much power to walk“. The timbres are richly faceted, the timing exemplary, details are cleanly resolved and yet carefully embedded in the context, bordering on holography. Impulses come out of nowhere across the entire frequency range, and



The two power amps are built strictly mirrored and double-layered as well as designed as separate monoblocks in the housing, with the two shielded toroidal transformers sitting underneath.

the AMP VI, with appropriate transducers such as the B&W 800 D3, enables undistorted levels that are reminiscent of primordial forces. Surprisingly, the nimble and agile Accoustic Arts requires virtually no warm-up phase – in practical use, it is „fully up to speed“ within minutes. Audiophiles often experience that differently. The author himself sometimes calls his wife before planned music or movie sessions to ask her to switch on one or two devices – usually the amplifiers – so that the electronics' operating points are reached „just in time“ to play at their best.

Indeed, it goes even further than that: the AMP VI doesn't even get really warm later on, even after hours of intensive music listening. That is unusual, and the huge housing, which acts as a heat sink, has a positive effect here. However, this also eliminates the use of the amp as a heat source for the music room in winter – which is probably the most expensive way of generating heat anyway.

Speaking of which, the front-mounted main switch – earlier AMP models had the hard power switch at the back and required corresponding squats to be reached – helps to save energy with the latest Accoustic-Arts power amplifiers, as the blue LEDs indicate operation.

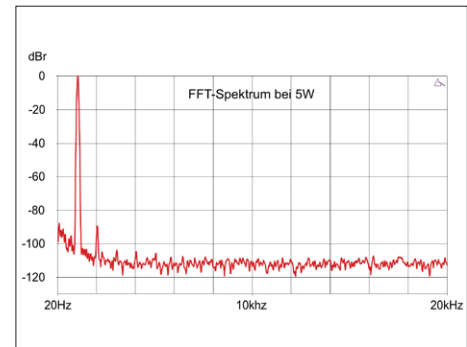
A practical tip: The AMP VI can be fed signals both unbalanced via RCA and balanced via XLR cable with excellent results. However, the superior way to achieve the best sound is and remains the symmetrical connection, which is less prone to interferences – at least if the corresponding preamplifier is also fully balanced. Much more is not possible.

Sound Quality that is Hard to Beat

No surprise really, as we are dealing with two large-caliber monoblocks in one housing, so to speak. If desired, Accoustic Arts

also supplies mono blocks called Mono VI separately and technically almost identically on request, although the price tag then climbs to 74,100 euros and the scales reach 150 kg. The monos may then have an even higher channel separation than the „only“ good 74 dB measured in our lab test. Almost academic.

But either way, we can hardly imagine superior amplifiers. Perhaps in terms of power consumption, carrying comfort or price tag, which still won't really be an easy task. The Accoustic Arts power amplifier is undoubtedly a dream amplifier, almost surreal. In short: world class. ■



The FFT spectrum shows practically no trace of distortion or noise.

ACCUSTIC ARTS AMP VI

Product type / price range	Power Amplifier / above 10,000 euros	
Website	www.accousticarts.de	
Price in euros	48,300	
Dimensions (W x H x D) in cm	53 x 32.8 x 54.5	
Weight in kg	around 84	
German distributor	Accoustic Arts Audio GmbH	
Phone	+49 7133 97477 0	
SOUND	55 %	very good 1.1
Sound quality	outstandingly sovereign, strong, transparent, tangible, extremely impulse-resistant	
MEASUREMENTS	25 %	very good 1.2
Continuous power per channel 4/8 ohms at 3% distortion (in watts)	very good (1450)	
Pulse power at 4 ohms (1 kHz; in watts)	very good (>1560)	
Intermodulation at 5 watts (in percent)	very good (0.0024)	
Damping factor at 4 ohms (63 Hz / 1 kHz / 14 kHz)	very good (95)	
Channel separation (in decibels)	good (74)	
Upper cut-off frequency (in kHz)	very good (>80)	
Distortion at 5 watts (in percent)	very good (0.005)	
Signal-to-noise-ratio at 5 watts (in decibels)	good (91)	
FFT spectrum	very good	
FEATURES	5 %	very good 1.0
Haptics / workmanship	very good	
Number of inputs (RCA / XLR)	RCA / XLR (2)	
Finishes	silver, black-silver, black-gold (3)	
HANDLING & OPERATING	10 %	very good 1.4
Controls on the device / display	very good	
Quality of the manual	very good	
SERVICE & ENVIRONMENT	5 %	good 1.8
Warranty in years	good (3)	
Packaging	flight case	
Power consumption standby / idling (in watts)	good (~120)	
Hard mains switch	yes	
STEREO TEST RESULT	very good 1.2	

TEST DEVICES

CD Player: T+A MP 3100 HV

Preamp: Audio Research Reference 6SE

Power Amps: Accoustic Arts AMP VI, Krell KSA-i400

Loudspeakers: B&W 800 D3, DALI Epicon 6, Gauder Akustik Capello 80

Cables: Cardas, HMS, In-Akustik, Silent Wire, Supra



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