

The Electrocompaniet Nemo Power Amplifier

Audio Viagra

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Specifications

Class A Solid State Mono Amplifier
Rated Output Power: 600 W @8 ohms;
1200 W @ 4 ohms
Power consumption: 230 watts
Current: 150 A peak
Input impedance: 55 K Ohm balanced
Output impedance: 0.009, 20 Hz - 20 KHz
Damping factor: 900, 20 Hz - 20 KHz
Sensitivity:
1.6V (175W/37V); 60 mV (1 watt)
Shipping weight: 90.2 pounds per amp
Dimensions: 11.3" H x 18.5" D x 20.2" W
Price: \$14,995 (plus applicable taxes & shipping)



US Distributor: Jason Scott Distributing
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Website: www.electrocompaniet.no

There's an interesting little commercial that shows a man walking through his office while one after another, his coworkers begin asking him why it is that he looks so different. "Have you been working out?" "Did you get a haircut?" "Is that a new suit?" were just some of the questions that his officemates were firing at him trying to understand just why it was that he seemed so ... improved. The commercial then reveals that the man had started taking Viagra and what his coworkers were noticing was simply the increased confidence with which he was carrying himself. Taking a little blue pill that can turn an average man into a human tripod will do that.

A similar occurrence happened to me a few of months ago when I added the awesome 600 W Electrocompaniet "Nemo" mono amps to my system. The Nemo earned its moniker from its initial design goal, which was to develop an ideal match for the enigmatic B&W "Nautilus" loudspeaker. I was visiting some friends and began inviting people over to a new house that I had just moved into. I honestly felt energized as my guest list began to grow. Back in my early audiophile days, I would've thought twice about inviting a few friends and a bunch of near strangers into my one bedroom apartment just to sit around and watch videotapes, play Bid Whist and of course listen to music. At that time, my system consisted of a Jeff Rowland Consonance preamp, Model One power amp, Wadia 6 CD player and the wonderful Meadowlark Kestrels. A nice sounding, attractive and well built system to be sure, but never did it give me the confidence to go out and engage people with only a passing interest in music, let alone audiophile gear. I knew what their reactions would be. "Your CD player looks cool but where do you stick in the cartridge?" "Where's the bass and treble?" And my favorite, "What do you think about Bose?" Oh, how things have changed. Here I was bursting with the confidence to tell my friends to invite their friends to come over and enjoy my new house and sounds. Slapping a pair of 600 Wpc monsters into a stereo system will do that.

Before the Nemos arrived, my system had gone through more changes than my girlfriend's mind during a visit to Discount Shoe Warehouse. The splendid Talon Audio Peregrine X speakers with their claw shaped, Museum of Contemporary Art quality looks had become the main attraction in my nearly 24' x 20' listening room, replacing the Kestrels. The Wadia and Rowland gear had long since taken up residence at my brother (and fellow audio-Jedi) Mike's house, and an Electrocompaniet EMC-1 CD player and ECI-3 integrated amp had come to rest on

my stereo rack. I truly loved the overachieving, 70 Wpc ECI-3, but I had bought it while still living in a small apartment. I knew that with the spaciousness of my new listening room that I was simply going to want more out of my system. There was always a sense with the integrated that the performance was "nice" but didn't quite possess the "balls" to really dig into my recordings and amplify every morsel of high-end performance that I really needed it to. In other words, I was lacking confidence in my system's ultimate performance. Even still, it gave me a taste of the high-end that I had sought for so long. So after only a few months with the ECI-3, I decided that my new room and system needed something like that little blue pill, it needed the Nemos.

Initially I thought about taking another stab at tube amplification. Through the years, a plethora of Golden Tube, Audio Research, CJ and MFA amps had been part of my system. Unfortunately, those relationships more or less resembled some of those abusive, co-dependant Hollywood marriages. It seemed like we should be good together, but it just never worked out. Having been a long time fan of the creations of Per Abrahamsen (dating back to the "Ampliwire" designs), I figured that the Nemos might just provide the shot of potency that my system needed.

The Looks of Love

Few amplifiers carry an aura of power and finesse the way the Nemos do. It all starts with a look that I would characterize as masculine elegance. A 13/16" thick acrylic faceplate with the word "ELECTROCOMPANIET" neatly engraved in gold is fastened to the amp's black anodized chassis with four gold plated screws. In the middle of the faceplate is the company logo that glows a cobalt blue when the amp is powered on. Beneath the logo is the word "NEMO," and beneath that the words "Monaural Class A Reference Amplifier" are also engraved in gold. Soon EC will be offering optional brushed silver aluminum faceplates for the entire EC line. The heavily vented chassis helps the four massive internal heat sinks keep the amps at a comfortable temperature. The rear panel is thoughtfully laid out with two sets of gold-plated binding posts for biwiring on one side and two sets of XLR connectors on the other. One of the XLR connectors is labeled "link." This allows the user to connect a second set of amps for biamping. They can easily be used in bridged mode, delivering up to four times the power. Centered on the back of each amp is a power switch, detachable power cord connection and fuse holder.

The massive size and weight of the Nemo leaves no doubt that their only purpose is to amplify an audio signal exactly the way that the performer who recorded the music intended it to be. There are no artifacts of solid-state sound. They do not sound tube-like, they sound lifelike. Look, there are a lot of wonderful new designers out like Jud Barber of Joule Electra and Richard Marsh of Marsh Sound Design who are delivering some wonderful and innovative new products to the marketplace, but the fact is that there is still only one way for a musical signal being amplified by an amplifier to sound, and that, my friends, is accurate. Accurate and powerful music reproduction is all that the Nemos do.

One quick look under the hood and you'll know why. Those of you who are familiar with the EC line will immediately realize that the Nemo is based on the splendid AW180 monoblocks. In fact, you'll swear that the Nemo is simply comprised of a pair of bridged AW180s. Almost, accept that the Nemos run in what EC calls a "balanced/bridged configuration." This means that both halves of the bridge are fully balanced thus decreasing the amp's harmonic distortion to an absolute minimum. Also, each half of the bridge has a completely separated "Floating Transformer Technology" (FTT) power supply, which is common in all EC designs. This technology gives the amps the ability to deliver twice the current that comes from a conventional power supply.

Cliché Me Baby!

So how do these puppies sound? Oh, I could wear out every last cliché in that Merriam Webster novella, but I'll start with the most obvious, powerful. The Nemos render a soundstage that is wide and deep, with plenty of headroom, particularly on live recordings. If you ever want to hear what a muscle amp like the Nemos can do with a dynamic speaker that can go down below 20 Hz effortlessly, look no further than French jazz vocalist Michel Jonasz' "La Temps Passe" from *la fabuleuse histoire de Mister Swing* [WEA 2292-42338-2 II]. This track from a live double CD features misseur Jonasz' fabulous vocals and some of the deepest bass ever produced from a synthesizer. The great Bobby Palkovic, of Merlin Audio, turned me on to this disc at the '95 SCES here in Chicago. He played it on an early version of his famed VSM loudspeakers via the Sim Audio Celeste 4150 amp. Anyone familiar with VSM will tell you that they are not the last word in bass reproduction, but the 150 Wpc Celeste sure coaxed a credible amount of bass out of them. Now consider what 600 watts of rompin', stompin' Nordic beast did through the Talons. To this day, my girlfriend will not allow me to play this disc in her presence.

Want another apt cliché? Okay, how about transparent. The Ray Brown Trio's "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," from *Summer Wind* [Concord CCD-4426], is a splendid live performance that fill's my listening room with so much realistic presence that I'm often tempted to raise my hand to order an Absolut and tonic. Instruments are believably imaged against a pitch-black backdrop, making it easy to enjoy Gene Harris' crowd pleasing piano work. And, when I listen to "Monkery's the Blues" from the CD *Carmen Sings Monk* [Novus 3086-2-N], the Nemos portray Carmen McCrae's voice with the wide range of colors, tones and inflections that she is known for. The same can be said for Johnny Hartman's ultra-cool style on "Don't You Know I Care" from

I Just dropped by to Say Hello [Impulse IMPD-176]. Hartman's voice is full and warm. Percussions sound detailed and dimensional. Admittedly, I haven't been a big fan of Classical music, but hearing "*Exotic Dances*" [Reference Recordings XXX] through the Nemos is quickly making me a convert. There are some other clichés that I could babble on about, but I'll spare you the drool.

I'm not trying to say that the residents of Valhalla crafted the Nemos. They are certainly not without their flaws. For one, the stock power cords that come with the units are an embarrassment and not worthy of the build quality of amps costing nearly \$15K. Second, amps of this bulk and weight need to have some sort of handle built in to the rear of them. And third, Electrocompaniet should do more to stress just how much better these amps sound after at least 100 hours of use. Believe me the difference is HUGE! Out of the box, the Nemos sounded a bit unsure of themselves. It took some time for them to realize the power they possessed in my system before they started kickin' ass and taking names.

Conclusion

The Nemos have put me in a position where considering shelling out big bucks to buy another amp would be just silly. That's not to say that there is no better sounding amp out there. The virtues of the Bel Canto eVo 2 and the Halcro dm58 have been thoroughly expressed throughout the audiophile press. But it would be hard to imagine a system that would not be improved by the Nemo's performance, though I have yet to hear how they would sound on a pair of some of the better full-range electrostatics like say, the Quad 989 or Sound Lab Ultimate. Maybe I'll be able to answer that question at another time. Suffice it to say that I have given my system that little blue pill and it has given me a confidence that's gotten my coworkers asking, "Have you been working out?" "Did you get a haircut?" "Are you taking Viagra?"

