

# Accoustic Arts Power III integrated amplifier

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**A**ccoustic Arts was founded in 1996 by a father and his sons, 20 years later, it was sold to Jochen Voss, who employs a part-time roadie as head of engineering and builds a broad range of electronics in southwest Germany near Stuttgart. Most are pure solid-state, but some combine transistors with tubes in hybrid designs. The company aims to make equipment as close to the original as possible, and if this integration is anything to go by, they are having some success.

The Power III is the biggest integrated in the Accoustic Arts range. It's also physically quite big, albeit the 23-kilo mass is just about manageable as is the larger-than-average 48.2cm width; just don't expect to slide it into a shelf on a regular equipment rack. Build quality is superb, the casework is as good as it gets if you like the machined-from-solid billet aesthetic, and it would be a pity to place this amp on a shelf where you couldn't appreciate the machining on the top and enjoy the red glow of the LEDs within.

The simple array of twin chromium knobs on the front alongside a relatively straightforward display disguise the fact that the Power III offers processor-based features to those prepared to read the manual. There is the option to adjust input gain by plus or minus 12dB and thus match the level of a turntable and a streamer, which might otherwise be distinctly different. You can make an input operate in unity gain, which bypasses the volume control and effectively turns the Power III into a power amplifier, which is useful when used in a multichannel set-up. Balance can be adjusted as can start-up volume, and the pre/rec output can be defined as variable or fixed according to requirements.

## Stream on

On the input front, the Power III is exceptionally well-equipped. It has balanced and single-ended line connections and the option to add a phono stage to one of the three RCA inputs. The presence of a ground terminal above input three indicates which this is. Alongside the analogue connections are digital inputs in coaxial, optical >>



EQUIPMENT REVIEW  
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» and USB forms; the only thing missing is an ethernet connection. There is no streaming engine inside this amplifier, but the USB means you can connect virtually any separate streamer with minimal compromise. The speaker terminals are high-quality WBT types made with a minimum of metal for the best sound quality.

The Power III's phono stage is billed as ready for both moving coil and moving magnet cartridges. However, changing this via the front or rear panels is impossible. Instead, you must remove the lid to reveal the phono module within. This allows MM or MC to be selected and offers three levels of capacitance for the former and four impedance settings for MC, ranging from 10 Ohms to 1 kOhm. Usefully, this amplifier is shipped with the phono stage set for MC cartridges that prefer a 100 Ohm input impedance, which suits most models, including my Rega Aphelion 2.

The onboard DAC chip is not specified but clearly up to date with a respectable 32-bit/384kHz rate for PCM and 512 for DSD. These are the sort of figures you will find with the majority of well-regarded DACs; they aren't trying to push the envelope but are more than up to the job of easily converting bits into sinewaves. On the amplification front, the Power III lives up to its name, with a rating of 230 Watts into eight Ohms and rising to over 500W into two Ohms. Not many amplifiers are rated into such a low impedance, and this inspires confidence that this one will drive most loudspeakers without difficulty.

### Go down easy

In my system, driving Oephi Immanence 2.5 loudspeakers, the Power III is a big, cuddly amplifier by solid-state standards. It makes many alternatives sound hard and thin, and has a relaxed delivery that welcomes you into its presence and lets you go down easy. And this is a good thing; its why people love Quad amps of yore, not just the valve ones. It makes listening less of a challenge and more of a joy; it focuses on the music and gets out of the way. On the one hand, this means that you don't get edge-of-the-seat excitement unless there's plenty of it in the recording, but on the other, it's a welcome change from more eager and excitable alternatives. At least that's how it sounded with Atlas Ultra Arran RCA interconnects. Switching to something slightly leaner produced a similarly tauter, more pacey sound. The Power III is a pretty revealing amplifier.

The phono stage is very lovely too and encourages high-level playback because no edginess or glare is being added by the amplifier. Julian Lage's jazz guitar playing grooved beautifully, the track 'Omission' (*Speak to Me*) has plenty going on, but the Accustic Arts delivered it in a relaxed, coherent fashion while making clear that vinyl still does things that digital cannot. Including very strong image depth and plenty of space where that is on the recording. The bass is controlled but not gripped. It flows naturally and extends as far as the loudspeakers can take it.

I really enjoyed some of the quieter, less obvious tracks on one album (*Ville Blomster* by the Andrea Hauge Trio), »



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» pieces where your attention is not necessarily as strong as it might be on the meatier tunes. The Power III reveals dynamics at low levels, which brings out the magic in the performance; the music draws you in and lets the artist communicate to a rare degree. The track 'Asta' was particularly beautiful with the Accustic Arts/Oepphi combo. It's also rare to get this quality of sound from vinyl in an integrated amplifier; separate phono stages don't have to cope with a nearby power supply of this scale, so they usually have an advantage, but in this instance, you would have to spend a decent amount to better the onboard module.

### More upbeat

The USB input is a little more upbeat than the analogue inputs; with a Lumin A2 mini streamer connected via Network Acoustics muon2 USB cable, this input was as revealing as the RCAs. Put on something splashy from a streaming service, and that's how it sounds; put on something well-cut from your local library, and it's a far more polished situation. I compared the Lumin with AURALiC's VEGA S1 (also covered this month) and found some prototype Network Acoustics RCA cables. This revealed that both USB and analogue inputs have a very similar sound. There was a slight difference, but not one that would warrant purchasing one streaming source rather than the other. Both sounded harmonically rich with good 'kick' to bass lines and easy but controlled dynamics, the vocal on Ike White's 'Changin' Times' being particularly well rendered.

I tried a tester in the form of 'The Battle' from the *Gladiator* soundtrack, a very dense, large-scale orchestral piece with plenty of processing that can sound hard and flat through many DAC/amplifier combinations. I was pleasantly surprised to hear the Power III deliver the power and drama of the piece without the sense of compression that so often accompanies it. By this point, I had moved onto PMC twenty5.26i loudspeakers which proved to be a very good match to the Accustic Arts, their bass can be on the lean side with a lot of amps, but the power on tap here made for low-end that was fully extended whilst remaining highly articulate.

I also enjoyed how they delivered the easy tension of Michael Franks' *The Art of Tea* (Speakers Corner) on vinyl. In the wrong hands, this album can become soporifically smooth, and I was concerned that the Power III's relaxed demeanour might have that effect. I was wrong. It tracked

the transients and brought out the brilliance of composition and playing on this fabulous recording. I've heard it sounding pacier, but this system delivered both plushness and definition efficiently, making it easy to hear what each musician contributed to the mix.

You get a beefy aluminium remote handset with the Power III, albeit its functionality is not immediately apparent. This is high-end audio, after all. The high-quality finish on this Accustic Arts amplifier might give the impression that it's all about looks, but the proof is in the listening, which is even more attractive. It would seem that in Accustic Arts, we have another German electronics brand to keep an eye on. +

### Technical specifications

**Type:** Solid-state, two-channel integrated amplifier with built-in DAC, phono stage, and headphone amplifier.

**Analogue inputs:** One MM/MC phono input (via RCA jacks), three single-ended line-level inputs (via RCA jacks), two balanced inputs (via XLR connectors).

**Digital inputs:** Four S/PDIF (two coaxial, two optical), one USB port.

**Analogue outputs:** One pre-/rec (via RCA jacks).

**Supported sample rates:**

- Coaxial and optical S/PDIF: up to 24-bit — 192kHz
- USB: up to 32-bit — 384kHz, DSD512

**Input impedance:**

- High-level: 50kOhms
- Phono: variable

**Output impedance (preamp):** 47 Ohms

**Headphone Loads:** > 25 Ohms

**Power Output:** 230Wpc @ 8 Ohms, 370W pc @ 4 Ohms, 510W pc @ 2 Ohms

**Bandwidth:** Not specified

**Distortion:** THD+N < 0.01%

**Signal to Noise Ratio:** -97 dBA (ref. 6.325 V) – A weighted

**Dimensions (HxWxD):** 145 x 482 x 430mm

**Weight:** 23kg

**Price:** £16,200 as tested (£14,400 without phono module), \$18,500, €16,500

**Manufacturer** Accustic Arts Audio GmbH

🌐 [www.accusticarts.de](http://www.accusticarts.de)

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