

MEET THE BLOCKS.

review by AUDIODROM

BLOCK AUDIO: Mono Block, Line & Power Block

"The Blocks behaved very neutrally, like two boulders on the sides of the speakers. And what does such a good boulder do? You can kick it, you can be angry with it, you can beg or cry, and it won't budge. A Block cannot be persuaded to play something that isn't on the player - and to be honest, I couldn't trick him with anything..."

MJ

100% REFERENCE

MONO BLOCK is a monoblock that is competent to send up 500 W to the 4 ohms speakers (250 W into 8 ohms), of which 200 Watts are in pure Class A. An aesthetically pleasing aluminium monolith is an exercise in simplicity - narrow status-LED strips and finned heatsinks are the only extravagant features to be found here. It is a hungry amplifier, pulling 500 Watts out of a socket in its idle mode. If you're thrifty, you can try to tame its gluttony by switching to ECO mode, so consumption will fall to that of a 100-Watt bulb. A massive 2.5 kVA toroid



contributes significantly to the total weight of 90 kg. Other parameters are not less impressive: 500 000 μF of filtering capacity, 120 dB of signal / noise ratio and damping factor exceeding 5000 (which is twenty times more than that of the Musical Fidelity Titan "power station" that we have reviewed earlier). I cannot imagine a pair of speakers that this beast would not be able to drive. If you want to enjoy music you will - in addition to a pair of MONO BLOCKs - need a combo of the preamp and its power supply: the LINE & POWER BLOCK. Combining BLOCKs with other brands is forbidden - and I really mean it - because all BLOCK devices are equipped with sophisticated built-in protection so that one without the other just does not work. The preamp switches the power amp on and off and even monitors its internal temperature via a communication cable. Similarly, monoblock can detect if there is a load on speaker terminals. If not, they won't even power up. The preamplifier is strictly separated dual mono - two completely separated cases, one for each channel, are joint together at the front by a display unit. Viewed from rear - as a small bonus - there is a class A headphone preamp that accommodates both XLR and 6.3 mm jack. A built-in phono preamp is another welcome feature - its RC values can be set even via the BLOCK's remote. The LINE BLOCK provides 4 pairs of symmetrical (balanced) and five pairs of unbalanced inputs, and two pairs of RCA and XLR on output.

Form and Function:

98%

ERGONOMICS

95%

SOUND

100%

MANUFACTURE

The preamplifier is powered by rechargeable cells - each channel has its own bank - which give enough juice for approximately 15 to 20 hours of music listening pleasure before they begin to be automatically recharged. What's good is that even in charging mode (during which of course music playback continues) the preamplifier isn't directly connected to the mains voltage. However, if you prefer to run the amp without batteries it is easily configurable for standard direct-from-the-wall operation.



... continual purity of the external design moreover neither broken by only one visible ugly screw-head.

Low frequencies

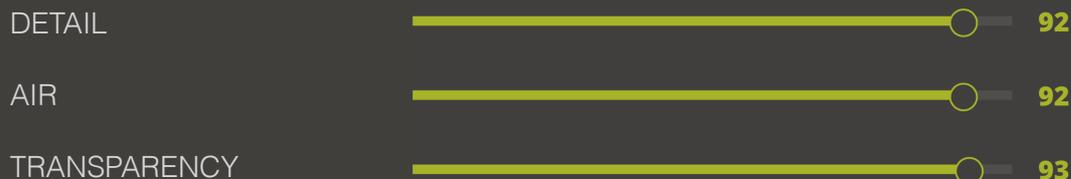
WEIGHT		92
EFFERVESCENCE		94
ARTICULATION		92

The set-up of the devices through a three-level menu is thoughtful - via the control interface you can configure virtually anything. The user can choose between Class A, ECO or A-ECO mode (which after 15 minutes without amplifier signal automatically switches itself into ECO to save your pocket). The brightness of the DOT display can be controlled manually, automatically, or the display can be completely disabled. It's possible to switch the phase by 180 degrees, set up after how much time without audio signal the amps switch themselves off, or what the default volume should be when the amps are turned on (convenient when you have a naughty kids at home or when listening late and are running the risk of blowing out the windows). And one more handy feature - when switching on or off, a so-called "fader" is activated and the volume goes smoothly up from silence or back down again to zero. Individual inputs can be deactivated and it is possible to set up an individual gain (dB) for each. The user can also bypass the input, so he can control the volume only by connected device, such as a home theatre processor. If necessary the remote control can be completely disabled or the amps reset to factory settings.



... except flexible wires to the huge suspended toroid, there is not even one signal or supply cable.

Cleanliness of resolution



A mandolin is a demanding instrument - when reproduced it should not be the size of a wardrobe, should not have wiry or tinny sound and definitely should not sound dry or lifeless. Via the Block Audio combo there was no doubt that the mandolin was a perfect royal court instrument which is perfect not only when played, but also when recorded, and that it can deliver even in complex instrumental arrangements. The amplifiers don't favour one frequency over another, neither had I feeling that they add or subtract anything. Metallica's self-titled black album, which is not so great recording sonically, played through the Block combo like a recording, which is not so great sonically. If you're expecting mercy from Blocks, you won't get any.



... the Line & Power construction is divided into seven physically separated, shielded and electrically isolated cases.

Tonal fidelity



Suzanne Vega's *Tom's Dinner* was just amazing. Pure, natural and perfectly articulate, the vocal was the perfect example of how properly managed midrange should sound: with beautiful and understated studio reverb, perfect timing and excellent phrasing. And what if we throw more instruments into the mix? Another beautiful voice, this time *Goaskinviellja* of Mari Boine, backed by a flute, a shamanic drum, a bass and a cow bell, all instruments building to a maelstrom of sounds, extending far beyond the front wall.

Yet it was not just the music that nailed me to my listening chair: there was also brutal dynamics of the amplifiers, which took the Confidence C4 speakers to their limit. A warning is needed - if you playback a piece of really dynamic music through Blocks it is easy to overload the speakers (and Dynaudio's aren't the most sensitive ones). The amplifiers seem to be never out of their breath, it is just about what speakers or neighbours allow, the power reservoir is seemingly endless.

Spatiality

THE 3-DIMENSIONALITY		95
STAGE WIDTH		95
STAGE DEPTH		96

It was very refreshing to hear, how the voice of Bob Anders on the test record Chesky move with a strongly defined certainty from left to right and back again and how precisely the space outside the two speakers was reproduced, when such an extreme position is such an impossible task for so many setups. If you closed your eyes, in front of you, you had a living person, walking effortlessly in front of the listener, perfectly articulated, with no mischievous hissing and devoid of any coloration, save for the refinement brought into the system by the Esotars' silk domes.



... volume control and inputs switching are provided by precision (Mu-Metal shielded) reed relays from Pickering. Toroidal transformer in the Power Block is actually hanging on a single silent-block!

The amplifiers do not compromise spatial depth. A strike of a tambourine near a microphone is a delight and the same holds true for following its decay in the depth of a studio. I tried similar thing in many rooms - after all the tambourine is a small instrument and can be taken anywhere - and this seemingly simple test happened to be a fiasco for many audio set-ups. The trinity of the BLOCKs handled it with aplomb.

Retail Price incl. VAT

MONO BLOCK: € 40 000,- /pair

LINE & POWER BLOCK: € 30 000,-

Associated Equipment:

- ▶ **Source signal:** Yamaha CDS3000
- ▶ **Amplifier:** Plinius SA-Reference
- ▶ **Cables:** Furutech Lineflux a Speakerflux, Kimber Kable Silver Streak
- ▶ **Speakers:** Dynaudio Confidence C4 MkII Signature
- ▶ **Filters and network:** Block Audio Dog Block, Furutech Powerflux

Recommended retailers:



Blockaudio s.r.o., Olomouc, tel. +420 604 514 282