

REVIEW

W-7M POWER AMPLIFIER

Monsters of Rock:

The Simaudio Moon W-7M Monoblocks

By Jeff Dorgay

We have always had excellent results with Simaudio's Moon components, and we've been using their I-7 integrated as a reference component for quite some time. I'm always on the lookout for fantastic solid-state sound, and the W-7M's fall into that very rare category of amplifier that possess the delicacy and tonal purity of the finest tube gear, with none of the drawbacks.





The W-7M's weigh 87 pounds each and you can see why the minute you pop the top. There is a pair of .5KW power transformers in each amplifier with 240,000 microfarads worth of capacitance for the power supply and 24 output transistors per channel. Overbuilt is an understatement with these amplifiers. The Simaudio website says that the "W-7M will drive virtually any loudspeaker to its maximum capabilities with incredible ease." As I was screwing the top plate back on, I felt pretty confident about this.

The W-7M's retail for \$24,000 per pair and are available in standard silver, as were our review samples, or a combination black and silver front panel. Custom options are available. Rated power for these amplifiers is 500 watts per channel at 8 ohms, doubling to 1000 watts at 4 ohms. No measurement is listed for 2 ohms.

All of Simaudio's components are

built in Quebec, Canada. "We're a vertically integrated company," said Marketing VP, Lionel Goodfield. "Though we purchase some raw materials worldwide, we build everything here in Canada." Goodfield was quick to point out that Simaudio is one of the few manufacturers in North America that owns a five-axis CNC milling machine to produce their own chassis and faceplates. If you've seen a piece of their gear up front, you know what I'm talking about. We are looking forward to a factory visit in early 2010 for a full report.

Setup

The only parameter to keep in mind with the W-7M's is that your rack's shelves will support an 80-pound amplifier. With this kind of power at your command, I would even suggest a dedicated 20 amp line if it's at your disposal, as I would with any high-powered amplifier. *(continued)*



The W-7M's have two pairs of speaker-output terminals, which use premium WBT's that are easy to twist. They were no problem at all with my Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cables, which feature some relatively large spade lugs. You can connect to the W-7M via the RCA input or the XLR input. As this amplifier is fully balanced, I'd suggest going the balanced route if your preamplifier is so equipped.

Thanks to a bi-directional RS-232 port and a 12-volt trigger port, you can make the W-7M's a part of a fully automated home audio/theater system. I had no problems patching it into my stack of McIntosh and Burmester components, so it will work just fine if you do not have an all-Simaudio system.

Both the instruction manual and marketing manager Goodfield will tell you that the W-7M's need to be left on for a couple of days before they reach their full potential. My review samples already had some burn-in time. If you have just purchased a fresh pair, expect a 300-500 hour break-in before their true tonality is expressed. Fortunately, these amplifiers draw only 40 watts each when idling,

so the power drain is not very high.

The W-7M's sounded excellent right out of the shipping cartons, but true to form, they opened up significantly by the second day. The main power switch is tough to get to on the back panel, buried underneath the speaker terminals next to the 15 amp IEC socket, but this switch is intended to be left on at all times. You can easily switch the amplifier between standby and operate from the front panel.

The Sound

These amplifiers definitely live up to the marketing verbiage. Even with the power-hungry Magnepans, these amplifiers never came close to running out of juice. Thanks to the dual-chassis, dual-power-supply design, the W-7M's redefine soundstage width. As I happened to have a number of other high-powered amplifiers at my disposal for comparison, the W-7M's were definitely the champion in this department. Listening to "Just Chillin'" from the Crash Test Dummies' *Give Yourself a Hand*, the W-7M's soundstage felt like it extended about six feet beyond the walls.

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This was a surreal experience and honestly quite addictive. At this point, I was using the MartinLogan CLX's and I was hearing things *behind* me, which only happens with the most resolving electronics. I had the same experience with "What's He Building?" from Tom Waits' *Mule Variation*, with the percussive sound effects floating all over the room. And when I spun "The Bunny" from Michell Froom's *Dopamine*, it was definitely a psychedelic experience. Which led me to an Electric Prunes superset, but I digress.

Unlike some class-A solid-state amplifiers that can fool you at times into thinking there might be some glass bottles under the hood, the W-7M's do not embellish the presentation. As with my favorite solid-state amplifiers (C-J Premier 350, Burmester 911 MK3 and the darTZeel CTH-8550) the W-7M's achieve the task of sounding like neither tubes nor transistors, and this is the highest compliment I can pay them.

You can get carried away with the natural tonality of these amplifiers, and the level of fine detail that these amplifiers resolve will keep you in the listening chair for hours on end without fatigue. That level of detail and the long natural decay of acoustic instruments is what can fool you from around the corner into believing you aren't listening to recorded music at all.

During the course of the review, I listened to all of the new Blue Note remasters from Music Matters and Acoustic Sounds a few times over on vinyl, CD and SACD. While I couldn't compare these records to the actual performers for obvious reasons, I did spend a fair amount of time with live acoustic music during the review period. I always came away impressed with what I heard through the W-7M's in terms of tonal correctness.

Power, Power, Power, Yeah!

There's just nothing like a pair of gigantic power amplifiers, and once you hear a pair of full-range speakers driven effortlessly,

I guarantee that you'll be hooked. Like any other HiFi component, every amplifier has its own sound and its own strengths. When comparing the W-7M's with the big McIntosh MC1.2KW's, I found that even though the McIntosh amps had more power, the Moon amps had more contrast and snappier transient response. Think of the McIntosh amps as a Z06 Corvette and the W-7M's as an Audi R8. They both have more performance than you can handle, but the Audi is a little snappier off the line and around the corners.

That extra transient snap will be apparent, no matter what kind of music you enjoy, but I suspect that this will be appreciated most by classical-music lovers that prefer large-scale orchestral pieces. Mahler, Shostakovich and Bax never sounded bigger, and this too was a ton of fun. Many audiophiles predisposed towards small amplifiers lose sight of the importance of dynamics as a major component of accurate sound reproduction. You just can't get it without a power amplifier like the W-7M that has huge reserves.

These three were primarily what I listened to during the audition period because it really played to the strength of the amplifiers. One of my biggest complaints with well-recorded classical music is that when you turn it up far enough to experience the quiet bits along with the crescendos, the amplifier runs out of power. This power always makes itself known most clearly when listening to complex music with huge dynamic swings. Whether you are listening to the alarm clocks in *Dark Side of the Moon* or the cannon shots at the end of the *1812 Overture* (or the cannon shots in AC/CD's *For Those About to Rock...*), the W-7M's never lost the ability to hang onto the most faint details in the music while being pushed to its limit dynamically. That's what gives you the extra feeling of realism.

I was unable to find the limits of the W-7M's in terms of getting them to clip or compress. I even knocked a few small chunks off my ceiling down as I tried! The comment about "driving any speaker" is true. *(continued)*

The GamuT S-7's and Verity Audio Sarastro II's are both fairly efficient and easy to drive as well as my Harbeth Monitor 40.1's, but the Martin Logan CLX, Magnepan 1.6 and the YG Acoustics Anat II's are no picnic to drive. They all have fairly low impedance and have proven moderately to very torturous to other amplifiers lacking adequate current drive. The W-7M's glided through with ease, no matter what music or volume level I chose, and it did so without getting terribly warm.

Consistent In Its Resolve

One of the things that impressed me most about the W-7M's was that while possessing a neutral character, the amplifiers' character came shining through no matter what speakers I paired them with. The amplifiers possessed a stunning level of resolution, yet I always heard the essence of whatever speaker I was hearing.

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This is definitely a pair of amplifiers around which you can build a very high-end system. And should your taste in speakers change in a few years, you won't be shopping for amplifiers as well.

If you must have a smidge of tube warmth, these are not the amplifiers for you, although perhaps you could add a tube preamplifier to the mix. But once you spend a little time with solid-state at this level, you just might lose some of that romantic feeling towards tubes. I know I have. Remember, once you get a few hundred hours of listening under your belt, you never have to turn the W-7M's off and you never have to hunt for power tubes again. Walk the five blocks to get your latte every day to balance out your carbon footprint if you feel that guilty about using 40 watts of power all day long. It's a small sacrifice to make!

Award Winning Performance

In Issue 25, we awarded the Simaudio W-7M's our Product of the Year award in the amplifier category. While \$24,000 is a lot of money to spend on a pair of power amplifiers, you could easily spend a lot more and not get the combination of sound and build quality that Simaudio offers. Most importantly, this is a product built by a company with a 30-year history of manufacturing with a solid worldwide dealer network, which is not something to be taken lightly in our current economy. ●

The Simaudio W-7M monoblock power amplifiers

MSRP: \$24,000/pr.

MANUFACTURER

www.simaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Sources Spiral Groove SG-2 w/Triplanar VIII and Lyra Skala, TW-Acoustic Raven Two with SME iV.Vi and Dynavector XV-1s

Digital Sources Naim CD555/PS555, Naim HDX, PS Audio Perfect Wave, Simaudio 750, Wadia 781SE, Sooloos Music server

Preamplifiers Burmester 011, Conrad-Johnson ACT2/Series 2, Audio Research SP-17

Phono Preamplifiers Nagra VPS/VFS with Red Wine Audio Black Lightning power supply, Manley Steelhead RC, Naim Superline w/HiCap2

Speakers GamuT S7, Harbeth Monitor 40.1, MartinLogan CLX, Magnepan 1.6, Verity Audio Sarastro II, YG Acoustics Anat II Studio

Cable Shunyata Aurora interconnects, Shunyata Stratos SP speaker cable

Power Running Springs Dmitri and Maxim power conditioners, RSA HZ power cords and Shunyata Python CX power cords

Accessories Burmester V1 and V3 racks, Furutech DeMag, Finite Elemente Cerapucks and Ceraballs, Shunyata Dark Field Cable Elevators