

AMP INSPIRATION FROM CONSTELLATION AUDIO

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NAIM AUDIO'S  
£155,000 STATEMENT



# Naim Audio Statement amplifiers

by Alan Sircom

**N**aim Audio's Statement is the easiest amplifier I've ever had to review. The clue is in the name. It's every inch a statement piece from the brand, and making that statement demands a hell of a lot of inches.

Of course, the Statement isn't a single statement; it's a preamplifier and mono power amplifier combination, with elements designed to match one another. The pairing is the NAC S1 preamplifier and the NAP S1 mono power amplifier which have been sold separately. But in the main, those who can afford £57,000 on a preamp can also afford £49,000 on each of the power amps.

No matter how you sidle up to those numbers, they are substantial amounts to spend on audio electronics. One might be tempted to suggest they are 'Statement' amounts of money. Visually, it's a bold statement, too: we have seen a few tower power amplifiers, but the S1 is a skyscraper in comparison, and its 20mm thick aluminium front and side panels only accentuate this powerful appeal. And the matching preamplifier sandwiched between the two powers is unique. The control surfaces are minimalist and elegant: the large illuminated volume dial invites touch that rewards with a tactile sense that defies description. The 'cylon' volume indicator (a white light that moves from the left to right side of the top panel to indicate relative volume) is subtle and understated, but easily understandable. And then there are the heatsinks – elegantly curved in an opposing but matched pattern that might be a far cry from the aluminium sleeves of yore, but look excellent in the flesh. Finished in a choice of black as standard (custom finishes are available, just not commonly discussed), and standing waist height and as wide as a

kitchen range, this is not the kind of product you hide away. In fact, it's a bit of an audiophile statement in the room. But for all that, it's not the imposing giant slab of audio blackness you might expect.

The black of the Statement is broken up with an illuminated acrylic section on each of the amplifier modules. This also separates the power supplies and toroidal transformers that feed the amplifiers from their more delicate amplifier circuits. These power supply modules also house the amplifier input and output connectors, which are in their own screened 'Faraday cage'. The preamp features six single-ended inputs (although three are DIN connections, as used by Naim and no other company these days) and two balanced inputs, and the amplifiers are connected using XLRs (although single-ended DIN outputs are also supplied). These power supply chassis are also a statement on their own. For example, there's the 4kVA toroidal transformer, which is about the size of a wheel for a classic Mini, and weighs almost as much as the rest of the Mini. This sits bolted to the base plate of the amp using brass plates. Above this is a collection of some of the largest capacitors you'll see this side of a 1950s sci-fi movie. As a result, this not only sinks any potential EMF forces and vibration from the power supplies into the ground, it also keeps its centre of gravity so low that even Sonny Bill Williams at full charge couldn't tip the amps over.

At 101kg per channel (and 61.5kg for the preamp) all sitting on armour-piercing spikes, tipping over is not an issue. Installation, on the other hand, is a big issue, and requires a team of four piano movers to extract the devices from their flight cases and manoeuvre them into place (Naim installers are currently sharing horror stories among themselves, of no parking zones, trying to carry these monsters up narrow and twisting flights of staircases, and old and saggy floorboards.)

Inside each chassis is something more like a military mainframe computer than an audio amplifier. Individual sub-sections of both preamp and power amp sit in their own PC-motherboard sized circuit boards, each one bolted to its own brass plate, then held in a frame by a series of springs, and the plates then slot together using a series of standoffs. This is amplifier construction on a grand scale, leaving absolutely nothing to chance. So, that smooth volume control isn't a potentiometer; it controls a microprocessor that connects to a daughter board with 100 separate resistor pairs in a stepped attenuator. Normally, such stepped attenuator networks end up being crowded round a rotary device to save space, but here they are laid out precisely on their own large board for absolute signal integrity. It also means the best possible resistors can be used for the task, not simply ones small enough to fit.

On the subject of individual components, an undisclosed maker of custom semiconductors makes the output transistors specifically for Naim. These NA009N (for N-type) and NA009P (for P-type) are used in complementary push-pull pairs, run in Class AB in a new dual bridged architecture. Each transistor

is potted for mechanical damping and the amps deliver a mighty 746W per channel into eight ohms. Put another way, one horsepower per channel. And that load doesn't quit when the going gets tough: the amplifiers deliver 1.45kW into a four ohm load and can burst power up to 9kW at one ohm. Naim is suitably silent about all other specifications, in the manner of Rolls Royce's 'sufficient' understatement.

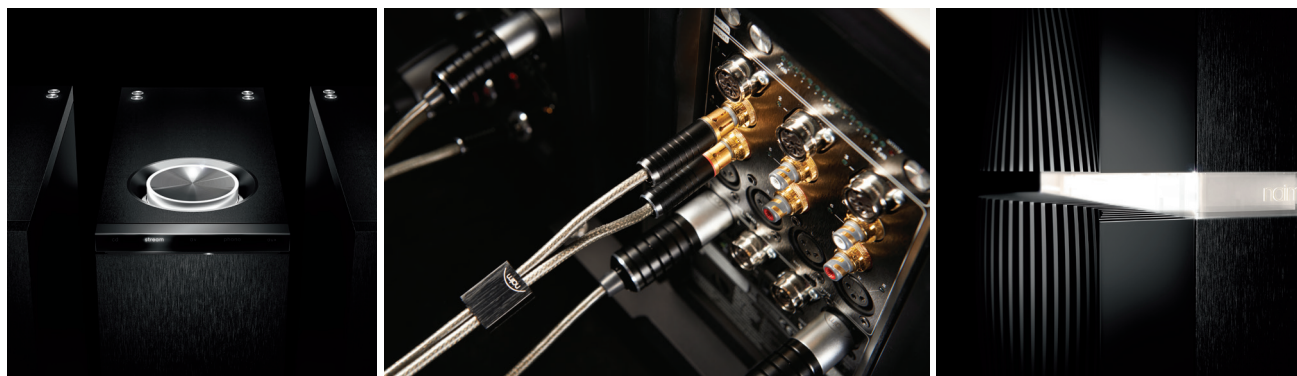
Naim has traditionally been somewhat dismissive of the whole high-end cable world. Naim didn't so much think such cables didn't do things to the sound quality as maintain that most high-end cables did wrong things to the sound. This posed a potential problem for Naim with the Statement, because the company recognised that no self-respecting super-high-ender will be content with £30 per metre copper stranded NAC A5 cables, and the resultant sound could be compromised by exotic designs making one aspect of the performance better at the expense of the whole. So Naim introduced Super Lumina cables, both as a high-end upgrade for existing Naim users and more importantly to offer a 'first, do no harm' solution for Statement owners. While Super Lumina is not in Nordost's Odin 2 league in this context (or price), it does seem to tie into the Naim ethos. Some later, extra-Statement listening is required.

Similarly, the use of DIN implies connection to Naim's own sources, but I feel Naim is selling itself short here. Not because Naim's source components are weak links (the reverse is true), but because someone with something truly spectacular without a Naim badge might think this ►





*“I felt more than a little bit scared. I thought I’d rupture something. Those bass notes on ‘Chameleon’ were a physical assault on the person.”*



► is just another amp in Naim’s ever-expanding range. In fact, it’s using Statement with non-Naim source components that you begin to get an idea of just how flexible this amplifier can be. Its character does not impose itself on the sound of the player, and it doesn’t limit the source options. If you like the sound of a particular player, Statement will respect that sound. Naim’s own sources are a logical match, but not a necessary one.

The final piece in the Statement jigsaw is the sound, and once again it lives up to the name. This time, however, it proclaims its statement to both the high-end audio world, and Naim’s loyal following. To the former, it shows not only that the company can ‘do’ high-end audio, but that it can bring Naim’s sensitivities to the table. To Naim’s party faithful, it shows the company’s sonic values can sit in a high-end context.

Of course, a lot of this gets diluted slightly because Naim now so often gets played with Focal loudspeakers, for obvious ‘family ties’ reasons. While this is great, and a good match, it has led to a mindset that points Naim away from other high-end components. So, we put aside the Focals and went with a more standard high-end benchmark speaker brand – Wilson Audio. This proved an awesome match: the Naim Statements really love being

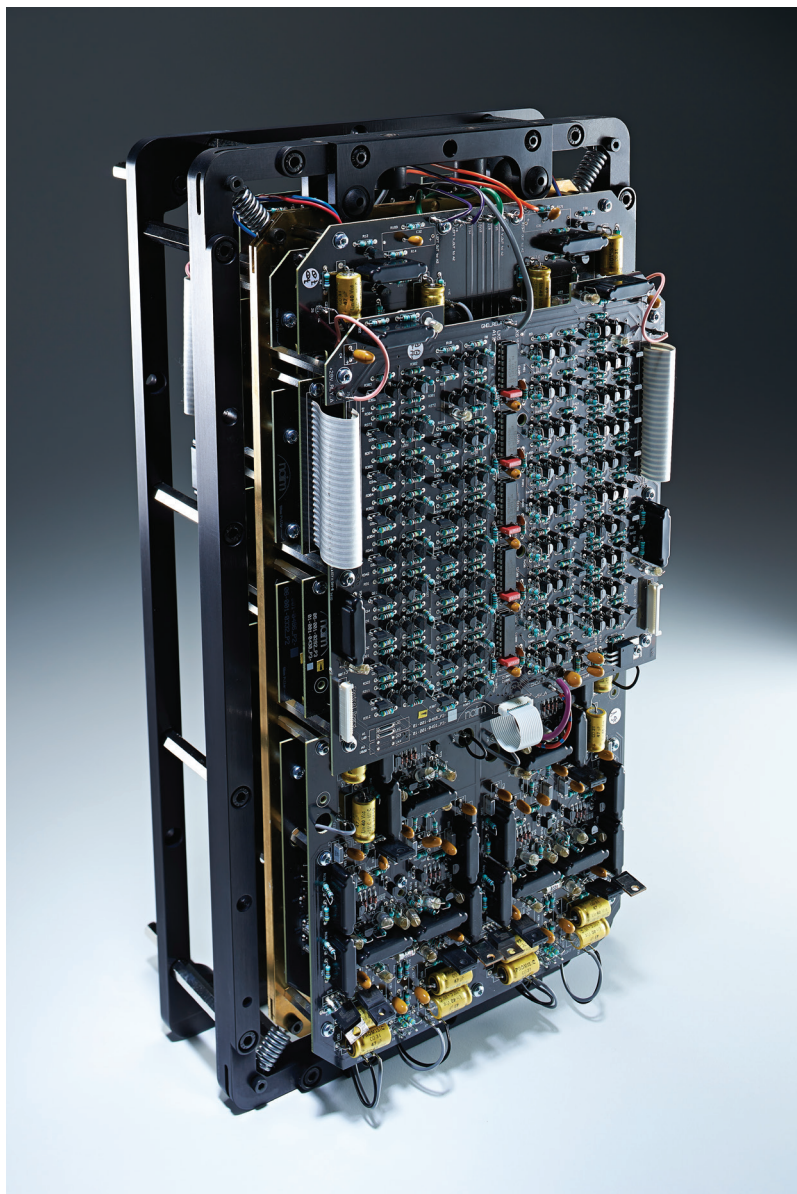
driven hard, and Wilson loudspeakers are more than capable of taking that kind of punishment. So there was a standoff: me, the amp, the speakers, and Trentemøller. Who would back down first?

I did. I felt more than a little bit scared. I thought I’d rupture something. Those bass notes on ‘Chameleon’ [*The Last Resort*, *Poker Flat*] were a physical assault on the person – fast, full, and threatening. I could feel those bass notes pushing at the back of my eyes, but the Naim was barely out of first gear and the Wilsons were taking it all in their stride. I backed off the volume control when the really deep bass notes began to hit and I felt like a synthesiser was probing me. This was home PA levels, but with all the subtlety fully intact.

Of course, this is fairly typical behaviour, both for an amplifier with this much power delivery on tap, and someone sitting down to the Statement for the first time. The temptation to ‘open her up’ for a quick blast is almost irresistible. But the Statement is more than just brute force. A lot more, in fact.

The curious thing about the Statement’s sound is just how effortless it is. Effortless in the way a three-watt single-ended triode amp can be, but with all that power in reserve. It’s extraordinarily dynamic, possessing cavernous, powerful bass, and yet also extremely fast, despite these attributes seeming to be mutually exclusive in most amplifiers. This all combines to make a sound that is just... effortless. And here’s the thing: it’s a Class AB design that doesn’t sound at all like a Class AB design – it sounds like a very large, very cool running Class A design, with none of the crossover distortion that can be perceived as harshness. It’s not a warm sound either, but it’s the antithesis of a sharp-sounding Class AB design.

You’d think any review of a Naim amplifier would include discussion of its rhythmic properties, but that’s almost unnecessary here. The amplifier has such a colossal control over the loudspeakers the beat is effectively pinned down and mastered. It’s so adept that there’s nothing to see here. It just keeps a beat in a way other amps, frankly, don’t. More importantly, Naim is not known for its strong stereophonic performance. In fact, the equipment can ‘do’ imaging, but that ►



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### NAC S1 line preamplifier

**Audio inputs:** 3x DIN single-ended ,  
3x RCA single-ended stereo pair,  
2x XLR balanced stereo pair

**Audio outputs:** 1x XLR balanced stereo  
pair, 2x four-pin DIN single-ended

**Dimensions (HxWxD):** 94x27x41.2cm

**Weight:** 61.5kg

**Price:** £57,000

### NAP S1 mono power amplifier

**Audio Inputs:** 1x XLR

**Audio Outputs:** Binding posts for spade  
and 4mm banana plug

**Power Output:** 746W into 8Ω, 1450W  
into 4Ω, 9kW burst power into 1Ω

**Dimensions (HxWxD):** 94x25.6x38.3cm  
(per channel)

**Weight:** 101kg (per channel)

**Price:** £49,000 per channel

**Manufactured by:** Naim Audio

**URL:** [www.naim-audio.com](http://www.naim-audio.com)

**Tel:** +44(0) 1722 426 600

▶ property is simply not on the brand's radar. The Statement amps sort of change that. They throw out a surprisingly wide soundstage with fair image depth. The really big hitters in the soundstaging world probably get a little deeper into the spatial properties of a mix, but this would come with deep trade-offs.

The interesting part of this is swapping out bits of Statement for other statement-grade electronics. For example, replacing the preamplifier with an Audio Research Reference 10 line preamplifier. This unbalances the Statement sound and is not something I'd recommend as an option. However, it also shows up the big difference between the two options. The ARC preamp is the more 'beauteous' with greater image depth and possibly greater coherence across the frequency range, but the Statement preamplifier is a very obvious step in another direction. It shows what Naim is trying to achieve, in making an amplifier that

does all the filigree stuff high-end amps are so good at, but adds in its own musical mastery. It's as if the people who made Spectral amps suddenly developed a taste for Funkadelic, while still staying true to their Reference Recordings roots.

Above all of this though, the one thing the Naim Statement amps do so well is they make music fun. That doesn't mean it makes light of the music played, but it simply helps you enjoy music more. That's usually a function of smaller amps: bigger amps bring more detail, space, and majesty to the sound, but can often be authoritarian as well as stentorian in their sound. The Statement, for all its endless power, never does that. Statement doesn't push all its high-end rivals out, but it buys Naim a seat at the top table. Hugely expensive, yes... but that's the price you pay for the best! +