

Lite Fantastic!



Naim's UnitiLite has added Bluetooth and Spotify to its list of talents – making it even more of a bargain, says Jon Myles.

It's fair to say that Naim's original Uniti was a groundbreaking product for them – introducing a whole new set of customers to the company's distinctive products. The one-box system featured high-resolution UPnP streaming, a CD player, internet, FM and DAB radio plus USB input, a 50 Watts per channel amplifier, headphone socket and connections for an iPod – all for less than £2000 at the time of launch.



Little wonder it proved a runaway success and was soon copied by rival hi-fi manufacturers with their own versions of the all-in-one system.

Since then, there have been a number of revisions and software upgrades and – inevitably – price increases, which mean the current Uniti 2 model now costs nearer to £3000 and boasts a beefier 70 Watts per channel amplifier.

But if that price is too steep for you, fear not – for Naim has an entry level model called UnitiLite with

much of the same functionality as its bigger brother, but costing a more wallet-friendly £1995.

And, as part of a recent upgrade, the UnitiLite now comes with built-in support for Spotify's streaming music service, as well as Bluetooth for sending music from portable devices or computers.

Unbox the Lite and it's noticeably slimmer than the original Uniti or the Uniti 2 but still comes in Naim's trademark black powder-coated metallic casework.

The space saving comes from Naim abandoning the use of its famous swing-out CD drawer for a more traditional slide-loading tray.

Much of the front panel is taken up by the large display panel, alongside nine control buttons that give access to the unit's basic functions. Beneath the CD draw sits the USB input, together with headphone and combined line-in/optical digital input sockets.

The rear panel is also tightly-packed, featuring a wired network input and a connection for the supplied wi-fi antenna, two optical and two electrical digital inputs, two analogue ins, and an F-type screw connection for an FM/DAB aerial.

There's also one of Naim's

favourite four-pin DIN sockets for preamp-level output should you want to connect an external power amplifier, alongside 4mm loudspeaker terminals.

Inside the box is a 50 Watts per channel amplifier with a sturdy linear power supply – and as well as CD playback, radio and the new Bluetooth and Spotify capability, the UnitiLite will stream music files of up to 32bit/192kHz.

Naim recommends a wired Ethernet connection for best performance – but I had no trouble streaming high-resolution files from a WD NAS drive situated in the same room.

A remote control is also provided, but I'd recommend downloading Naim's free dedicated control app for Apple iOS or Android devices. The app has been gradually polished and improved since it launched and is now one of the best out there. It selects inputs – allowing the creation and saving of playlists, storing radio presets and other features, such as the display of album artwork – and it also gives access to the on-line Rovi music database for album reviews, information on artists and suggestions for other music you may be interested in, based on what



Two aerials, no less, for Wi-fi and Bluetooth, attest to the UnitiLite's comms. skills. There is a network RJ45 socket, S/PDIF inputs, loudspeaker outputs and more, underscoring just how capable this Naim is.

you are playing at the time.

It makes operating the UnitiLite extremely easy and intuitive, despite the range of features on offer.

SOUND QUALITY

It may be dubbed 'Lite' but there's nothing inconsequential about the Naim's sound.

In typical Naim fashion it has a solidity and pace that brings music alive, with powerful bass and a smooth, cluttered midband.

Playing The Pixies 'Wave Of Mutilation' best of CD collection, there was real snap and crackle to the music. Joey Santiago's guitar lines have a crisp leading edge, while Kim Deal's bass is firm and distinct. There's good separation between the instruments too – but the Naim never sounds clinical, instead staying

true to the rough spirit of the music.

The UnitiLite, though, really shines when streaming hi-res music – the extra detail on the likes of The Clash's 'Jimmy Jazz' 24/96 shining through with terrific air and atmosphere to the track.

There's perhaps not quite the overall detail of the more expensive Uniti 2 – a slight feeling the UnitiLite isn't exploring both ends of the frequency spectrum to the fullest extent, but it doesn't alter the verve it brings to the music.

Both Spotify and Bluetooth also worked seamlessly. Yes, the former's lower bit-rate is noticeable but not to the extent that the music becomes mere background noise. On the contrary, the UnitiLite is adept at grabbing hold of a song and bringing the best out of it. I had great fun

rifling through the service's millions of tracks – unearthing some long-forgotten gems while also discovering new favourites.

Bluetooth via an Apple iPhone 6 Plus was also crisp and clear. Yes, you'll notice some reduction in quality compared to high-resolution, but it's a convenient and useful addition for when you just want to turn on some music instantly.

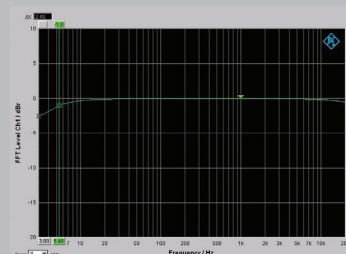
CONCLUSION

The UnitiLite is a talented box of tricks that gets on with the task of playing music with a refreshing verve and assurance – whether it be CD, high-resolution streaming or radio. Add in new Bluetooth and Spotify capability and it looks even more of a bargain. Connect up a decent pair of loudspeakers and away you go.

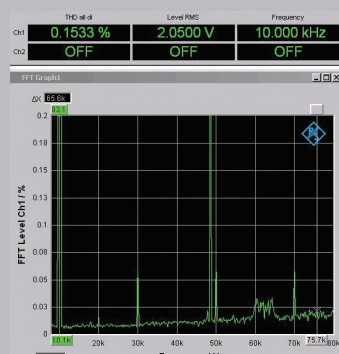
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The UnitiLite amplifier produced a healthy 50 Watts into 8 Ohms under measurement, and 90 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it will go loud enough for most

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



listeners.

Frequency response was wide, with an upper -1dB limit of 30kHz. There was a small amount of crossover distortion, measuring 0.15%, with distortion rising at powers lower than 1 Watt – not ideal.

Analogue input sensitivity was extremely high at 140mV, so just about any input can be handled.

The S/PDIF digital audio electrical input (phono socket) accepted up to 24/192 PCM code, giving a flat audio response out to 20kHz – good.

The S/PDIF optical input worked up to 192kHz sample rate too – useful because it avoids a no-sound scenario with hi-res – very good.

Playback from memory stick exhibited the same mediocre dynamic range of 106dB as S/PDIF and also the same frequency response, as expected, reading up to 192kHz sample rate files. The UnitiLite's digital dynamic range isn't impressive.

The VHF/FM tuner measured flat to 10kHz and rolled away smoothly to a pilot tone notch at 19kHz. Noise was that of a typical budget VHF/FM tuner, measuring

-60dB at full quieting, achieved at 0.7mV or more from the aerial, a good result. The IHF stereo sensitivity value measured 60μV, another normal value. It's a good VHF/FM section.

The UnitiLite measured well. It doesn't excel: digital dynamic range was limited at 106dB from 24bit, little better than CD's 102dB – a disappointment. Otherwise, the figures are very respectable and in keeping with the price point of a product with so much packed in. **NK**

Power 55 Watts
Frequency response (-1dB) 5Hz-30kHz
Separation 95dB
Noise -92dB
Distortion (1W, 10kHz) 0.15%
Input sensitivity 140mV

Digital S/PDIF
Frequency response (-1dB) 24/192
 5Hz-20kHz

Distortion (16/24bit)
 0dB 0.001/0.001
 -60dB 0.29/0.17
Separation (1kHz) 110dB
Noise (IEC A) -119dB
Dynamic range (24bit) 106dB

NAIM UNITILITE £1995



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT

CD, streaming and radio together with a great amplifier, Bluetooth and Spotify make the UnitiLite an ideal one-box music solution. Highly recommended.

FOR

- high-resolution streaming
- Bluetooth and Spotify
- good amplifier section
- slim design

Against

- nothing at the price

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