

World Design KT88 kit Sound Quality

Adam Smith and Noel Keywood listen to World Design's new WD88VA kit amplifier.



nearly always start a testing session with some female vocals, and this is a particular area in which a good valve amplifier shows its worth. The WD88VA served up Norah Jones with real emotion, in a rock solid layout between the speakers, her backing band being superbly laid out around her. No instrument details were missing and the amplifier picked out the finest of nuances with no problem at all, offering them up with a delicacy and intimacy that was a pleasure to behold.

At the top end of the frequency range, the treble proved itself well matched to the midrange, and cymbals and came across as clear and sharp with no sense of blurring or distortion - it was found in the measurement of the unit last month that distortion was very low across the complete frequency band, and it is at the extremes that valve amplifiers can often be found wanting, but this is not the case with the WD88VA. A spin of Wagner's Overture from Reinzi showed that the amplifier acquitted itself equally well with classical material, and presented the transition from quiet to crescendo with aplomb.

The other property that struck me was the inky black silence that greeted me during gaps - all too often valve amplifiers have a slight hum or a soft hiss that some view (or tolerate!) as part of their 'charm' but the WD88VA was silent. Even with an ear pressed up against the speaker, no strange noises were apparent.

The relative lack of bass control

compared

to a good transistor design is the reason that I have never personally succumbed to a valve amplifier in my own system, but it was here that the WD88VA really played the ace up its sleeve. I had been aware during the audition that my attention had not been unduly drawn to the low frequency end of things. Now concentrating my listening "low down" I found that the WD88VA is a more than capable bass machine! With the thumping beat of Celine Dion's "I'm alive" the WD88VA hung on to the rhythm superbly, never losing control or making a muddle of anything. I next spun a Jazzanova dub track featuring a complex electronic bass line and, believe me, this amplifier can boogie! All too often this particular track can suffer from a blurring of transients and a complete loss of timing on a 'slow' sounding amplifier, but the WD88VA pumped it out with great gusto.

I swapped speakers to a pair of Spendor S8es, a favourite here at World Towers, but prone to rather enthusiastic bass. They were more than happy on the end of the WD88VA, not sounding wallowy. In absolute terms low frequencies were not held in a grip of iron like they would be on the end of a Naim amplifier, for example, and a very slight overhang could be detected, but this is only something that would be noticeable during a careful audition and, to my ears, the

WD88VA acquitted itself superbly.

As you may have gathered, I thoroughly enjoyed my afternoon auditioning the World Designs WD88VA - it proved itself to be an engaging valve amplifier that measured well and sounded superb to boot. Quite simply, it plays music, and plays it extremely well.

Noel says: We've done KT88s before, but I make no apologies for doing them again. This time there is 16dB of feedback and a measured performance that is almost transistor like in those areas where the little blighters work well. Lower output impedance due to higher feedback gives better bass control, useful with loudspeakers that are, in themselves, not so well damped, such as Spendor's S8es. The S8es can sound loose and plummy with valve amps, but far less so with this one. If you have loudspeakers that are well damped, then this does not matter so much, but big bass jobbies are usually loose and designed for solid-state control (meaning a low output impedance). The WD88VA bridges the gap here. You get a generally tighter, cleaner and more controlled sound, as you might expect, and this Adam heard as less of the bass looseness that characterises so many valve amps.