

AMPLIFIERS

Watts, the mini-system salesman's mantra, are a controversial area. Two things to learn: one, more watts does not necessarily mean better sound; two, mini system power figures are, erm, massaged to make them look better. Maybe, just maybe, your average stack system

can deliver something approaching the output it claims to have – but only for about a second. Yet on paper, proper hi-fi amplifiers can often appear less powerful than their mini system cousins. The moral? Paper specifications mean nothing. Sound counts. So listen up.



NAD S300 £1500 ▲
01908 319 360 | www.lenbrook.co.uk

What's so good about this one?

Let's start with looks. NAD often produces dull, grey boxes, but the S300 is a stunning departure; it's the best-made, best-looking amp in its class. Then there's the sound, which is refined, smooth and thoroughly potent, with strong bass punch, plenty of detail, and utter composure even when you crank that all-metal volume knob.

Why does it cost so much?

It's built from bits of battleships. Try picking it up – carefully, mind – and you'll rapidly understand just how much attention to detail has gone into this amp. It's laid out

with entirely separated audio channels inside and has two separate mains power transformers, one for each channel. Class.

NAD S300

○ Power	100W per channel
○ Inputs	Four
○ Remote	Yes, system controller
○ Headphone socket	No

Stuff says

Massively powerful and very sophisticated, this beautiful brute is a fine all-rounder

**PRIMARE A30.1 £1500**

If anything, the Primare sounds even better than the NAD – it just looks a bit less 'oh-wow'. Very dynamic, beautifully made and thoroughly musical, it's a fine buy; it doesn't win here only because we like the balance of the Meridian/NAD combo a little more

**QUAD 99 SERIES PRE/POWER £1300**

The hi-fi brand your dad used to have is still alive and kicking, and on the evidence of the 99-series, well up to techno-scratch, too. This preamp/power amp combo works best in an all-Quad set-up, but for brand-name kudos in the dark underworld of the hi-fi fraternity, not much beats it

**JARGON BUSTER** What to say about brands – and mystifying amp lingo explained**YOUR NEW FAVOURITE BRANDS**

Arcam 'Everyone's first proper hi-fi brand. Not too pricey, all the money's spent on the sound'

NAD 'You buy a hi-fi to listen to, not to look at, don't you?'

Naim 'It's real hairshirt purist stuff, but all the reviewers love 'em'

Primare 'I love the build on these

things: everything seems to have been machined from solid. Stunning living-room presence'

Quad 'Yeah, my dad used to have a Quad system. It's classic British hi-fi'

WHAT TO ASK FOR 'I'd like a quality integrated amplifier with a clean signal path and plenty of punch'

THE LINGO

Channel Two channels: stereo sound

Gain Or volume, as it's now known

Inputs The sockets on the back that you connect your sources to

Preamplifier Volume control with sockets on the back for your sources

Power amplifier The grunt part of the occasion; makes things go loud

Integrated amplifier A preamp and a power amp in one box

Sources Generic term for anything that makes a noise – like a CD player

Signal path Sound comes in. Sound comes out. That's the signal path

Punch Midrange drive, especially noticeable when things get dynamic

Watts A way to measure power