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Air Tight ATM-1E

Sonic Model Athlete

A model athlete is generally understood to be someone who can be considered a model or ideal athlete due to their strong and harmonious physique or their overall appearance. The following report will make it clear why the new Air Tight ATM-1E fits this characterization perfectly.



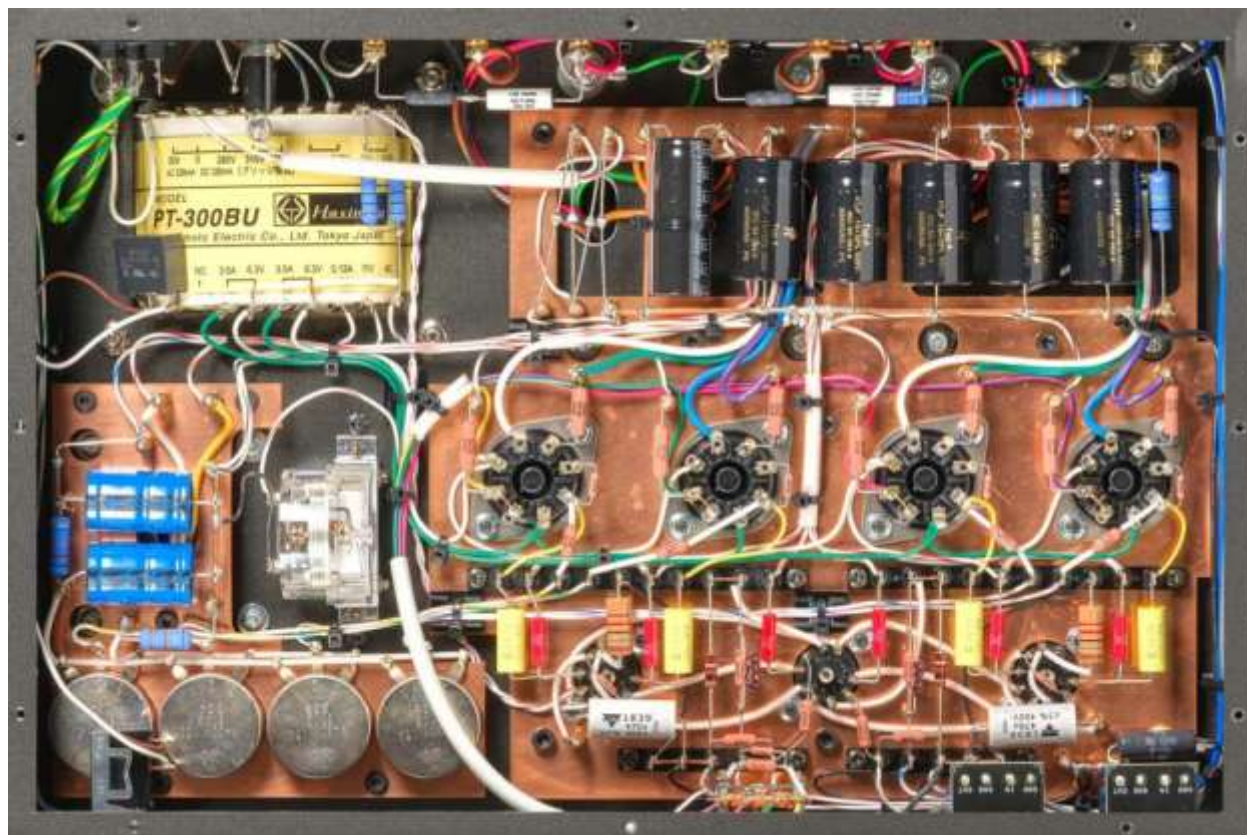
For a good 40 years, a handful of quality-obsessed technicians in Takatsuki (near Osaka) have been producing hi-fi equipment in the purest manufacturing process, which has by now achieved legendary status. They build to order, and when selecting components, they do so solely based on their sonic capabilities. Product cycles of several decades are therefore typical for this high-end manufacturer. The first amplifier in the ATM-1 series appeared on the market 38 years ago, and its hallmark has always been the push-pull configuration in which EL34 tubes bear the main load.

EL34 – the good old pentode, whose development began before the Second World War. The tube evolved from the EL60, which in turn evolved from the Philips/Valvo 443 series. The first EL34 types appeared in 1949, and their use in Marshall guitar amplifiers ensured that this pentode became widely known from the end of the 1960s at the latest. Thanks to its sonic qualities – as well as its ruggedness – the tube type quickly found its way into the world of hi-fi amplifiers. In the ATM-1E, an ECC81 (12AT7) serves as a splitter alongside the EL34, and one 6CG7 (6FQ7) per channel ensures the best signal processing due to its very linear behavior combined with its extremely low noise floor. This type of tube was originally developed for use in TV sets; the extremely long service life is another advantage of this dual triode. It fits in perfectly with Air Tight's philosophy.



The changes in the current Air Tight ATM-1E tube power amplifier (the “E” stands for “Edition 2024”) are quite far-reaching. The amplifier appears quite compact in its dimensions, but a solid 21.5 kilograms is a dead giveaway that the unit sports a hefty “iron core” – one of the hallmarks of excellent tube power amplifiers. The difference to its predecessor is immediately apparent on the front due to the now missing (second) RCA/cinch input. Another difference to its

predecessor (ATM-1S) is the new, extremely precise bias setting on the top of the device. The main distinguishing features can be found on the inside: The output transformers come from Tamura (the Japanese specialist of all for such electrical components), the hand-wound and oiled paper-wrapped choke coil is manufactured in-house, as is the equally hand-wound and likewise oiled paper-wrapped mains transformer. The point-to-point connection of all components is just as first-class, i.e. all components are wired by hand to ensure the best sound characteristics. The components are selected exclusively for their sonic aspects and, depending on the section/area of application, the technically purest copper cables are used so that no negative effects occur in the energy flow. All in all, it has become a completely new circuit.



Like other Air-Tight amplifiers, the ATM-1E is basically an adjustable power amplifier in which all components and wiring are hand-soldered in the best Air-Tight tradition and without printed circuit boards. By the way: there are no NOS components for good reason! Instead, all individual parts are meticulously measured and matched. Need I mention that the tubes are matched to extremely tight standards? In the test case, I didn't have to change anything in the bias setting! In the event of readjustment, the amp should be in operation for at least a good quarter of an hour beforehand. I really like this kind of uncompromising approach. The use of the two level controls on the front may seem unusual at first glance, but it makes sense. Just think of the sometimes unfavorable conditions when it comes to setting up the speakers (e.g. because the listening room does not allow the classic positioning) – this form of “integrated balance adjustment” is most welcome. There is no remote control, and there is exactly one (!) RCA/cinch input on the rear panel as well as the corresponding speaker outputs in eight and four ohms and, if required, also in 16 ohms. The four EL34s deliver a solid two times 35 watts to the terminals. Efficient loudspeakers (for me this is the kind from 90 dB upwards, preferably

significantly more) are therefore suitable partners. Some people will grumble about the fact that there is only one RCA/cinch input. Air Tight is also very specific on this point and says: “Focus on the essentials!” I really like this philosophy, because it brings us back to the roots and thus to the music with a source that is ultimately (in my case) analog. No matter, you can use any other source just as well – yes, even one of those wondrous thingies with “music from the air” in them. Nevertheless, Air Tight also offers an alternative for hi-fi enthusiasts who want to connect multiple sources with its own preamplifiers.



Typical of all exceptional amplifiers is the naturalness with which they present music. The good ones do it “quite nicely”, the really good ones take a back seat and present the music in the given quality. This amplifier is without doubt one of the latter. Of course, the ATM-1E also demonstrates the typical Air-Tight liveliness and musical understanding. Let me state this quite soberly in advance: It is just the kind of amplifier as the Air Tight ATM-1E in question – which in truth are anything but sober, but rather exceptionally musical – that automatically come to be legends all on their own.

I give the amp a good half hour to suitably temper itself, then I start my music program immediately with Miles Davis, certainly the most successful of all jazz legends. Even if his recordings occasionally caused an uproar, there was always one thing that everyone agreed on: the trumpeter literally reinvented jazz several times over the decades of his career. *Kind Of Blue*, with which Miles Davis underpinned his undisputed claim to the throne of the jazz Olympus in 1959, bears witness to the virtuosity of this exceptional musician. Pieces such as “So What”, “Flamenco Sketches” and “Blue In Green” still move listeners today. Pressed in 200 gram high-quality vinyl, the Columbia Records reissue from 2010 (MOVL 019) is the vinyl

version on which the master tape finally ran at the correct speed (previously, the tracking error in the right channel had been overlooked for a long time). Basically, this is the definitive jazz record ever! Why? Because it is quite simply perfect, right from the opening chords of “So What”. You can’t describe it or rationalize it in any way – it just is. The incredible band of Davis, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Bill Evans, Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb played the five tracks straight through without any prior rehearsal. Miles just briefly showed the band the theme and with no further delay, the tape was running for recording. Something must have happened in the studio at the time, because even by the dizzyingly high standards of those involved, *Kind Of Blue* is something special. Without any breakneck soloist performances – it’s the music itself. The essence of jazz – at least as far as this era is concerned. Incidentally, conveying the essence of the music is the main characteristic of every Air-Tight product, and the ATM-1E is in no way inferior.



John Mayall and his Bluesbreakers created what is probably their best album with *Stories*. The soul-searching songs on this 180-gram double LP (such as “Dirty Water”) are performed by the ATM-1E with such verve that the listener is left with goosebumps. Carried by this mood, Joe Bonamassa’s *Live At The Hollywood Bowl* comes next on the analog feeder. This is where blues rock meets classical music, and it must have been an unforgettable evening in Hollywood’s legendary amphitheater – forty orchestral musicians accompanied the maestro of blues rock, who created a monument to himself with this album with this extremely virtuosic musical blend of blues/rock and classical music, without leaving out the typical orchestral arrangements. “Fulminant” is probably the most appropriate description of this vinyl production – the overture of the LP is just that, and it continues in a correspondingly heavy-metal vein. The two level controls of the ATM-1E are set to “1 o’clock”, it is atmospheric and entertaining in my listening

room. The small black fixing screws on the control knobs are a double-sided detail, as their color makes it easier to make the correct stereo setting.

Unleashing its 35 watts on the 15-inch drivers of my large loudspeakers – the amplifier doesn't even begin to care. Of course, with the solid 98 decibel efficiency of these transducers, it only needs a fraction of its power – and this is exactly how a tube power amplifier should be operated. It shouldn't have to take any "load" from the connected loudspeakers. Of course, the Air Tight can also drive speakers with lower efficiency figures, its powerful transformer cores provide the necessary power. The unfazed power delivery that the ATM-1E makes available here is striking; you can really feel it.

At this point, I would like to conclude my extensive listening impressions, which have been consolidated over the course of several weeks (for reasons of space, only a short list can be included here), with *September Night* by the Tomasz Stanko Quartet – and I am sure that I will remember this exceptional amplifier for a long time to come. Time and again, it demonstrates to me that with such subtle music, its ability to transmit a pure and transparent sound comes to the fore. It is not only the nuances of the trumpet that captivate me when I listen to it, it is also the perfection with which the Air Tight ATM-1E transfers the wonderful atmosphere (which I was able to experience live at the time) of this extremely emotional live recording from September 9, 2004 from the Muffathalle in Munich, into my listening room.



Accompanying Equipment

CD player: C.E.C CD-5 with Horwege modification | **Turntable:** Transrotor Dark Star Reference with Konstant Reference M1 power supply | **Tonearm:** Transrotor TR 9S | **Cartridges:** Audio-

Technica VM760SLC, Phasemation PP-200 | **Phono preamplifier:** Phasemation EA-220 with T-320 step-up transformer | **Tube integrated amplifier:** Thivan Labs 572/811 Anniversary | **Loudspeakers:** Klipsch Heresy III with balanced crossovers from Elixir-Loudspeakers, Thivan Labs Eros 9 Ultra

Tube power amplifier Air Tight ATM-1E

Concept: stereo tube power amplifier with channel-separated volume control | **Tube configuration:** 4 x EL34, 1 x 12AT7 (ECC81), 2 x 6CG7 (6FQ7) | **Quiescent current/bias:** manual bias setting, control via display | **Output power (1 kHz/THD < 5 %):** 35 W per channel | **Inputs:** 1 x RCA | **Outputs:** 1 x speaker output (4 / 8 Ω) | **Frequency response (-1 dB/30 W):** 20 Hz to 30 kHz | **Input impedance:** 100 k Ω | **Input sensitivity:** 700 mV (35 W) | **Damping factor (1 kHz/1 W):** 6.7 | **Power consumption:** 250 VA | **Dimensions (W/H/D):** 37/31/25 cm | **Weight:** 22 kg | **Warranty period:** 2 years | **Price:** around € 12 000

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