

# Flattery gets you Nowhere

*Rafael Todes plugs into the Musical Fidelity AMS100, a huge and reassuringly expensive Class A amplifier which tells it like it is, without interfering with the original detail of its source.*

AS I WAS STARING OUT of the window this morning, I saw an unmarked blue van appear and park on the opposite side of the road. Two burly men got out and opened the back door of the van. Gesticulations followed, a team of six Polish builders, (a regular feature of the street) offered some help, which was politely declined. The men came to the door dragging a wooden crate weighing 150kg, like pallbearers at a funeral with a solid state amplifier for me to review. The dimensions are impressive: nearly a metre deep, and half a metre wide.

This is not an amplifier for the faint-hearted (price: £14,000) and will inevitably occupy a trophy-like position in a room. The front panel is machined from solid milspec aluminium billet. Its badges are made from medical grade stainless steel. The top and sides are machined from solid metal and finished to the highest standard. (Warning: with a Wife

Acceptance Factor well into the negative, it is good grounds for divorce.)

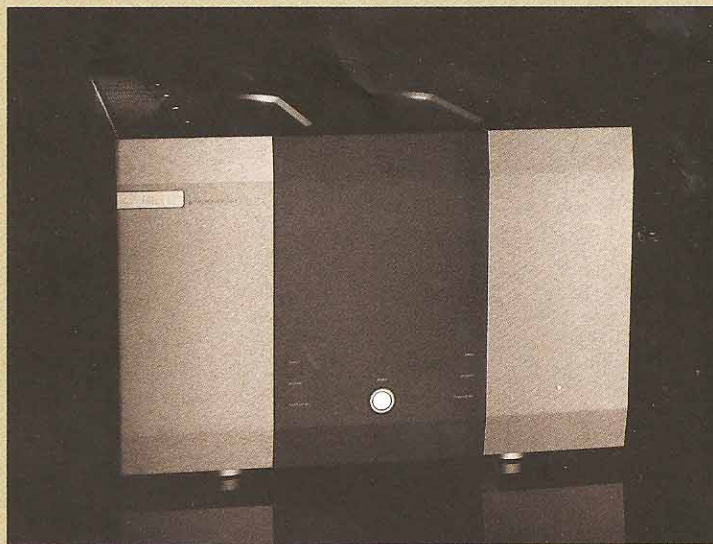
The amplifier is the brainchild of Antony Michaelson, founder and director of Musical Fidelity, one of Britain's leading HiFi companies. He started life as a professional clarinetist, and has that rare combination of the scientific rigour required to design cutting edge audio products, as well as the deep knowledge of the way instruments actually sound.

His philosophy is rather simple. An amplifier should be 'right', ie virtually zero distortion, and should interfere as little as possible with the signal coming in. The amplifier is rated at 100 watts per channel and is pure Class A. With energy consumption at around 1kW, it radiates enough heat to keep a polar expedition alive. It was therefore with great trepidation that I hooked

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this behemoth up.

Starting with a Mahler Symphony, the last movement of number six, which begins with an orchestral flourish with harp, we are transported into a fantastic world. My first observation about the amplifier was the extraordinary degree of control it exhibits. It takes rapid changes of dynamics completely in its stride, making



The AMS100 from Musical Fidelity: a sonic chameleon

the most complex of passages sound free and easy. It also demonstrates exactly how the recording has been made, the spot microphones for the various instruments making you feel that you are actually in the brass section, or the violin section, or on stage. The level of detail I experienced is unlike anything that I have heard before.

LISTENING TO THE AMADEUS Quartet with Cecil Aronowitz playing the opening of the Mozart E-flat Quintet, I penetrated further into the quintet's mechanics than ever before – I could hear the second viola's bow crossing the string as if he was in the room.

It is always interesting to see how an amplifier copes with different sources. Live analogue radio is one of the highest forms of fidelity, soon sadly to be abolished for the inadequate and inferior DAB. I happened upon Plácido Domingo's *Simon Boccanegra* Prom on BBC Radio 3, live from the Albert Hall, and conducted by Tony Pappano. The sound stage of the Albert was stunningly

realistic. Actually, that isn't true – it was far better than sound you can hear anywhere in that bizarre hall! Domingo's presence and voice was massive, pure and very lifelike. The orchestra was defined and punchy. The AMS100 seemed to do its job perfectly, sorting out the different textures with effortless benevolent muscle.

So what does this amplifier actually sound like? This is a hard one. In itself, it sounds of very little: it merely does what it is told. A sonic chameleon, it ruthlessly shows up any component that doesn't meet its standards. My poor valve phono stage, which used to sound so good with a valve power amplifier, has been laid bare! The Musical Fidelity AMS100 highlights its tubby bottom-end repeatedly and mercilessly.

This beast is not for everyone; it is massive, expensive, very hard to move, and it doesn't know how to flatter. But given the right partnering it is capable of the very best. ●

[www.musicfidelity.com](http://www.musicfidelity.com)

## HOT STUFF

Heat is the main drawback with Class A amplifiers, as the output transistors are always switched on. In Class AB amplifiers they only come into effect at higher volume levels. The advantage, however, is that since the transistors are on all the time, you eliminate switching distortion. Thus the sound tends to be clearer and purer throughout its spectrum.