



[**Read the 2015 Pass Laboratories XA200.8 Review**](#)

The first quarter of 2025 has proven to be most interesting thus far. Class D amplification has finally come of age with the release of a \$2,499 analog class D monoblock amplifier, the Orchard Audio Starkrimson Mono Ultra Premium, which I reviewed last month. There are uber expensive class D amplifiers out there but the whole class D premise and promise is low-cost high-efficiency high-performance. If I were to spend tens of thousands of dollars on amplifiers instead, I'd sample the matured technologies of solid-state, and few bear the accolade of the vanguard in this arena than Pass Laboratories in sheer performance.

Northern California-based Pass Laboratories launched the XA200.8 pure class A solid-state monoblock amplifier in 2014, and it has been in continuous production ever since. It is a record of sorts not just on the stunning longevity of this company's products, but the sheer will power of the management to resist an exterior redressing and redesign of componentry for marketing purposes. This is a company that will launch new designs only if it can assure its customers of

tangible, repeatable performance improvements. I have been using my pair since its launch; this is a 10th anniversary review of the amplifier to my [first review in 2015](#). Many of the quality and grade of components used in the pair of \$44,000 monoblocks is audio specific and manufactured exclusively for the company, far superior to the ones used by others. The build and component quality of the Pass Laboratories XA series flagship amplification that is the XA200.8 is such that it will outlast each and everyone of us.

The XA200.8 stands out among competition not just for the high-resolution midrange, or the definitive, nuanced bottom-end, or the silky smooth top-end; its claim to fame is an arrestingly engaging spectral composition from top to bottom and one that is also easy on the ear. It is this beautifully engineered sounding board of an amp that is also brimming with very meticulously assembled innards; it is a design with such seemingly living energy that you can feel it in every note.

Specification:

Class: A
 Type: Mono
 Gain: 26 dB
 Full power: 2V @ 26 dB gain
 Low frequency response: 1.5 Hz
 High frequency response: 100 kHz
 Power output /ch: 200 (8 ohm), 400 (4 ohm)
 Distortion: 1% at 1 kHz, full power
 Maximum output: 62 Volts, 50 Amps
 Input impedance: 50 Ohms (RCA), 100 Kohms (XLR)
 Damping factor: 200
 Slew rate: 50 V/uS
 Output noise: 200 uV
 Input CMRR: -60 dB
 DC offset: 0.05 V
 Leaves Class A at pk Watts: 430
 Current draw: 6.1 Amps at Idle
 Power consumption: 750 Watts
 Temperature: 53 degree C
 Dimensions: 19 W x 27.5 D x 11 H (inch)
 Shipping Weight: 177 lbs

 MSRP: \$44,000/pair

Responding to my unrelenting curiosity about the design ad nauseum, Pass Labs Technical Support Kent English has this to say: “Nelson [Pass] is a topologist, where the fine details of how the part is used is every bit as important as the genesis of the part. Not surprisingly the output stage on the XA-200.8 is the same International Rectifier N/P Channel MOSFETS that we use in all but the XA25 and INT-25. The various amps differ only in the number of output devices and their carefully chosen operational points.

Likewise, the power supply is simply a more authoritative version of our ubiquitous ‘linear power supply’. How the parts are used is not trivial, but the basic design certainly is: A bridge rectifier converts AC line voltage from a robust step-down transformer to pulsating DC at a lower voltage. A bank of smoothing capacitors effectively integrates that high ripple waveform to a relatively stable, low noise DC reservoir of power. That same capacitor bank array assures an ample low impedance flow of current to the source pins of the MOSFETS at the desired voltage.

It really is that simple. The sophistication is tailoring each stage and element to the desired final effect.”

Good’ole Kent was saying that everyone can build a solid-state amplifier using the most expensive parts; but few can put them together in a better way and perform at a higher level than Nelson Pass. It’s not the meats and potatoes, it’s the chef. And it’s not just ingenuity and smarts, it’s lots of painstaking procedures and hard work. In this case, those that are smart and work the hardest produce the best results.

In the last ten years, I put a monstrosity of equipment up-stream of the XA200.8 and not only has it been utterly rugged in engineering and indestructible in use, its gentleness towards speakers is unsurpassed. I put it through the 100dB sensitive Destination Vista horn and later on the Pureaudioproject Quintet 15 with Voxativ AC-X during their respective auditions and the amp was gentle and judicious, never brutal or brittle; the first watt or so required for live performance level playback through these speakers was pristine and rich, never mind it probably never needed to produce the second watt, much less the two hundredth watt for that matter. Of course, for such efficient speakers the \$7,650 XA30.8 would’ve sufficed, but the XA 200.8 was so well-engineered it was arguably the most trustworthy and ideal solid-state amplifier to pair to those speakers.

Among class A solid-state amplifiers, the XA200.8 demonstrates one of the most consistent sophistication in driving high-efficiency and power hungry speakers alike. Most amplifiers are designed to drive either type of speakers but not both, pit one of the more exclusive high-power amplifiers against horn speakers and it is an instant no-no. The top-end will either sound too hot or lack life, the woofer either lacking control or sustaining overpowering, threatening assaults and the Alnico midrange colored.

So, as I reviewed the Sound Lab model with the largest stretch of the mylar membrane, I knew I would be able to hear more and deeper into what the XA was made of. This is a speaker of such tremendous performance potential that it reflects the complexity of amplifiers feeding it. And as the 90 dB, 8 Ohms electrostatic panels induced the monoblocks to produce more of those potent watts, the result was far reaching and definitive. The XA’s level of sophistication and robustness of its power supply system empowers it to funnel all the wattage necessary to satiate the panels.

The XA200.8 is the ultimate candidate for readers considering tube amplifications seeking the last word in tonal definition. For if the target is to attain the most exquisite tonality and the highest resolution and yet still have the tube warmth in your system, then one can’t do much better than partnering the XA with a reference grade tube preamplifier. Conversely, pairing a good tube preamplifier with anything other than the pure class A powerhouse is just suboptimal.

The XA200.8 is the model with which comparison against its tube counterparts becomes truly meaningful, for no other solid-state amplifier possesses the same power with its level of finesse and sheer resolution, and no tube amplifiers that I auditioned could deliver the XA extensions and transients. There are costlier solid-state designs with furniture grade enclosures and dancing meters, some even come with precious metals for sheer exclusivity, but no design offers more performance for less. The XA200.8 is a blindingly brilliant engineering specimen to encompass the best of both worlds.

\$44,000 is astronomical even among its competition and there are other, very fine solid-state monoblocks out there and then there is the one solid-state amplification design that bears the Pass name, and it is the genuine article in the audio industry. There is the maxim that “You get what you paid for.” What did you pay for, and what did you get for it? Put another \$50,000 amplifier next to the XA, and you’ll know what you will get if the other amplifier has more functionality and sports a luxurious chassis. You’ll know when something else is competing not on sound but something else. You’ll also see what one company achieves and the other keeps going in the other direction.

I have different amplifiers for varying auditioning requirements, but if I had no choice, the XA200.8 would be the only one I will never part with.

Few system decouplings make more sense than the case of the preamplifier and power amplifier, although a good number of us at one time or another also owned the high-valued, well-engineered one-box solution that is the Japanese integrated amplifier of the seventies through the nineties. For those of us investing heavily into separates, the preamplification has always been the foundation of the system, for a good preamplifier preserves the signal handed down from the upstream analog and digital systems, thus effectuating the overall system performance. And then there is the value proposition that is the XA200.8.

Predominantly, the high-end audio industry is led by engineers with varying business acumen aptitudes, with a few companies led by salespersons sans E.E. degrees, and the business focuses between the two categories of business owners are vastly different. Nelson Pass belongs to the first category. As such, his designs convey copious industrial strength and invoke deep understanding of the audio technology. Founding Threshold Corporation in the seventies and Pass Laboratories in the nineties, Nelson’s companies have had financier-managers at the helm of operations but the product focus has always been performance informed by bleeding edge technological advancements. He has had proven industrial designers such as former Pass Labs president Desmond Harrington who helmed the creation of the Krell digital systems of the nineties, but the company policy has been one of never indulging in and charging customers for superfluous concerns and blings alike.

The crown jewel of the Pass Laboratories series of amplifiers to these eyes is the XA200.8 monoblock; I haven't found a higher performing design for less, and I haven't found more expensive propositions of other makes more compelling performance-wise. The caliber of the XA is such that no other component in a system has a stronger case of being the anchor of the system. Its ability to deliver the most potent and pristine power from the first to the hundredth watt to the speaker is absolute and consistent, so much so that in my system, the Sound Lab Majestic 945PX performs at such level, and of such tonality, extension, dimensionality and spatiality that none has equaled.

An asset is considered a sound investment when its value/performance curve is continuously upward. Pass Laboratories does not behave like the rest of the high-end audio industry; it had not increased the price of its existing product range since the 2014 launch of the current XA series in real terms. And as competitors rise and fall the XA stands unscathed in its particular performance/value proposition. We will see many more expensive concoctions from others in the coming years but if we are to forecast the future based on track records, none will perform higher for less. If one had begun saving money at some point in time to buy the XA and has now become an owner, the pair of monoblocks will still be an uncontested best buy not only to this day but for many years to come. The XA200.8. A very sound investment indeed.

