

30.04.12 by Roberto Rocchi

Soulution 540 digital player



SPARK
in the dark
AWARD

The Swiss Soulution introduces itself as an interpreter of the radical hi-end philosophy, with the intent of scaling and reaching the top of the worldwide audio quality. In very few years this brand has succeeded in making a name for itself in the hi-fi world, gaining - I must say with full merit - the respect and consideration of the international critics thanks to its challenging devices: challenging for costs and dimensions, although with amazing performances. The Italian importer has provided us with a Soulution Audio complete chain. An absolute reference for the room that currently hosts our most valuable audio machines: the room of the friend Marcello.

The Soulution Audio mega system is composed of the 540 digital player, the 721 preamp and the 710 power amp. The loudspeakers are a pair of Acapella Campanile, interchanged with a pair of high rank prototypes.



I would like to start the series of reviews about the Soulution products with the 540 digital source. A device that pertains to the Series 5, the economic one, so to speak... The top series holds the "7" digit and differentiates itself not only for better performances (obviously) but also for a slightly wider chassis.

The Soulution 540 Digital Player is a CD/SACD that employs the prestigious VRDS Esoteric VOSP transport which has been laid down and firmly screwed upon two massive aluminium bricks. I basically agree on the choice of a rigid chassis for the transport, because I've always noticed some timbric inconsistencies in the



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sonic response of those transports that have been damped down elastically (exception made for a very elastic typology as it vibrates at frequencies in audio range). I know it could sound a bit strange, mostly if it is said by who, like me, strives to push down - out of the audible range - the resonances of the tonearm-cartridge system. Oh God! Now all the forum people go wild to slaughter me!

The 540 costs around twenty thousand euro and it is a 24bit/192KHz integrated CD player that employs Burr-Brown PCM 1792; 24bit/384KHz with DSP conversion. The available analog outputs are balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA. The digital outputs comprise AES/EBU (XLR), SPDIF (RCA),

Toslink (Optical). The inputs are USB, Toslink, AES/EBU and SPDIF.

The 540 has its own digital volume control and could be linked directly to the power amp without passing through the preamp.

Nevertheless the digital volume control has not been used during the listening test.

Its design is really hi-tech; its smooth and rounded silhouette has been obtained by using a thick and heavy satin aluminium folded sheet.

To the sober style of the machine contribute also the large display with red digits, the three small service buttons, the multifunction controller knob and the narrow tray of the transport.

It hasn't been easy to open the chassis and taking some pictures inside. For that reason,

I suggest to ask an expert in order to avoid scratching it irreparably.

We have connected the audio chain in a whole balanced way, a Hobson's choice to exploit the great sound qualities of the system. Actually, a test with the unbalanced link-up has made me feel some disappointment and I have preferred to move back to the balanced connection.

I couldn't resist. I'll tell you right now. This has been one of the most exciting, pleasant and satisfying listening test of the last years. A sound that reproduces an event with live connotations but that can be extended for hours without any fatigue or nuisance.

I have been struck with the 540: an amazing machine which I can easily define as the trait-d'union between the analog and the digital domain. Notwithstanding the digitalists do not welcome enthusiastically the DSP conversion - and so do I - the Soulution 540 has persuaded me a lot thanks to its sound features that are closer to the analog sound. Personally, I cannot say if this depends or not on the DSP conversion.

The 540 has been inserted in a top context starting from the listening room: a beautiful room (6mx8m), with a medium acoustic treatment utilized by ReMusic to test important and huge loudspeakers.

The listening test has started with classical music. The recordings leave no doubts although they do not take care of

the artistic quality. Here then the Carmen Habanera Fantasia by FIM records. With this track you can understand from the very beginning how much quality the Soulution can produce: the orchestra assumes a scenic composure of great balance. The soundstage is natural and three-dimensionally very wide, surely helped by the pair of Acapella Campanile loudspeakers which can offer a solid and homogenous image, so that by



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 response or dynamic without real measurements. Therefore, you have to add a quid to these outstanding performances. For example, the frequency spectrum, which is very wide with the range extremes at a big distance, can express itself with extreme confidence, as though the fact of reaching the deepest bass range were the simplest thing in the world. The dynamic has an impressive sound pressure, although the pleasure of listening remains very high considering the absence of any performing effort or tonal hardening. And now I am sure you want to know how the Soulution performs in the most important parameter for a digital source: timbric and transparency. No wonder if I have spoken of something very close to the analog sound. A liquid and bodied sound, no grain and thus a limpid and clean sound expressed with great plasticity and with round and precise musical articulations. The detail, also that barely audible, has a presence and a microdynamic that leave you appalled.

I have made a direct comparison with the Moon Andromeda RS which I consider one of the best digital sources on the market nowadays. A real battle royal! The winner is the Soulution 540 because it gets a more natural sound, with no grain. Unbelievable. Astonishing is the female voice of Jacintha in the CD The Girl From Bossanova. The 540 seconds the features of the loudspeakers and casts a sound image made of roundness and presence. Percussions and sax have a tactile identity and you believe you are assisting to a real event. The piano is grandiose. I have played a very performing high resolution recording by the German pianist Martin Vatter. Well, if you close your eyes you feel like having the Steinway & Sons Grand Piano of 1929 in your listening room. A unique experience that I wish you to have.

I am aware that what I am listening to right now is not the best system in the world, partly because the best system in the world doesn't exist, and partly because there are many systems that can perform well also with different typologies and philosophies, and furthermore all perfectible.

But guys, what a great sound! I like very much all of that.

The Soulution 540 digital player is, with good reason, on the podium of the best digital musical machines. The price is obviously very

changing the listening spot the stability of the sound framework does not change. Carry out this experiment: stand on your ideal listening spot and then walk parallel to the loudspeakers. If while walking you can hear more the loudspeaker which is closer to you, then the image reproduced by the system you are testing has not a great quality. If instead the image stays stable and firm although you are out of axis in respect to the loudspeakers, then the reproduced image has a great quality proportionally to the grade of stability of the image itself.

The performances here are on top levels so it seems quite reductive speaking of frequency



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high, together with the economic range of the complete system: around 150,000.00 euro. Unquestionably few are the lucky people who could enjoy the good sound of the Soulution 540. We have been lucky to do it. The Soulution 540 has deserved five sparks in all the parameters I have considered. For me it is a Spark in the Dark!

SCHEME SUMMARY

top score	*****	ReMusic Sparks
Timbric:	*****	Absolutely balanced and neutral. Both instruments and voices have been given back with amazing naturalness.
Dynamic:	*****	Excellent. Without any vacillation or hesitation. Microdynamic at the top.
Detail:	*****	Extraordinary. Hardly to get something better. The whole signal is reproduced with high spontaneity and without any effort.
Clearness:	*****	Transparency and clearness, a liquid and clear sound, with a presence effect that gets very close to the live event.
Image:	*****	Three-dimensional. Excellent scanning of the horizontal and vertical plans. The sensation of roundness both of voices and instruments is very strong.
Tonality:	*****	No coloration.

Official technical specifications:

Type: integrated CD/SACD

Converter: Burr-Brown PCM1792 24 bit/192KHz, 24 bit/384 KHz with DSP conversion

Analog outputs: 1 x balanced output (XLR), 1 x unbalanced output (RCA)

Digital outputs: SPDIF (RCA), AES/EBU (XLR), Optical (Toslink)

Digital inputs: SPDIF (RCA), AES/EBU (XLR), Optical (Toslink), USB

Nominal voltage: Model 220-240 V / 50-60 Hz, 220-240V - Model 100-120 V / 50 - 60 Hz, 100-120V

Power consumption: OFF (standby) <0.5 W-ON 50 W

Main-Out

Output voltage: 4Vrms (XLR), 2Vrms (RCA)

Peak Output Current: 0.2 A

Output impedance: 100ohms

Frequency response (depending on data format): DC-100 KHz

Distortion: <0,002% (THD+N)

Noise floor: 140 dB

Volume range: 0-80 dB

Balance range: +/-9dB

Digital-Out

Output voltage: SPDIF 500mV p-p, AES/EBU 5Vp-p

Output impedance: SPDIF 75ohms, AES/EBU 110ohms

Digital-In

Sensitivity: 0,3-5V p-p

Input impedance: SPDIF 75ohms, AES/EBU 110ohms

PLL-range: +/-100 ppm

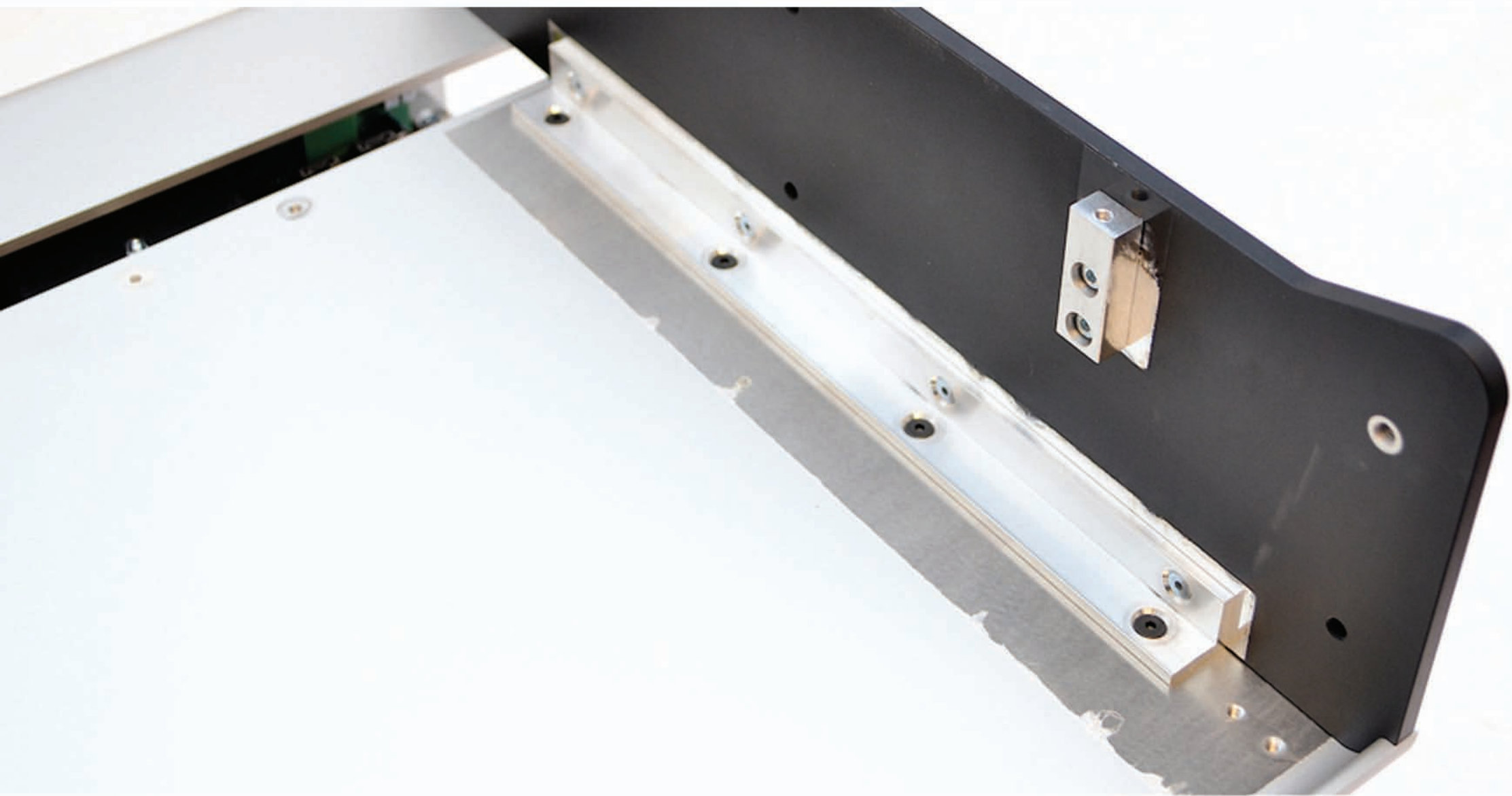
LINK-System: +12V

Dimensions: 442x143x448 mm (WxHxD)

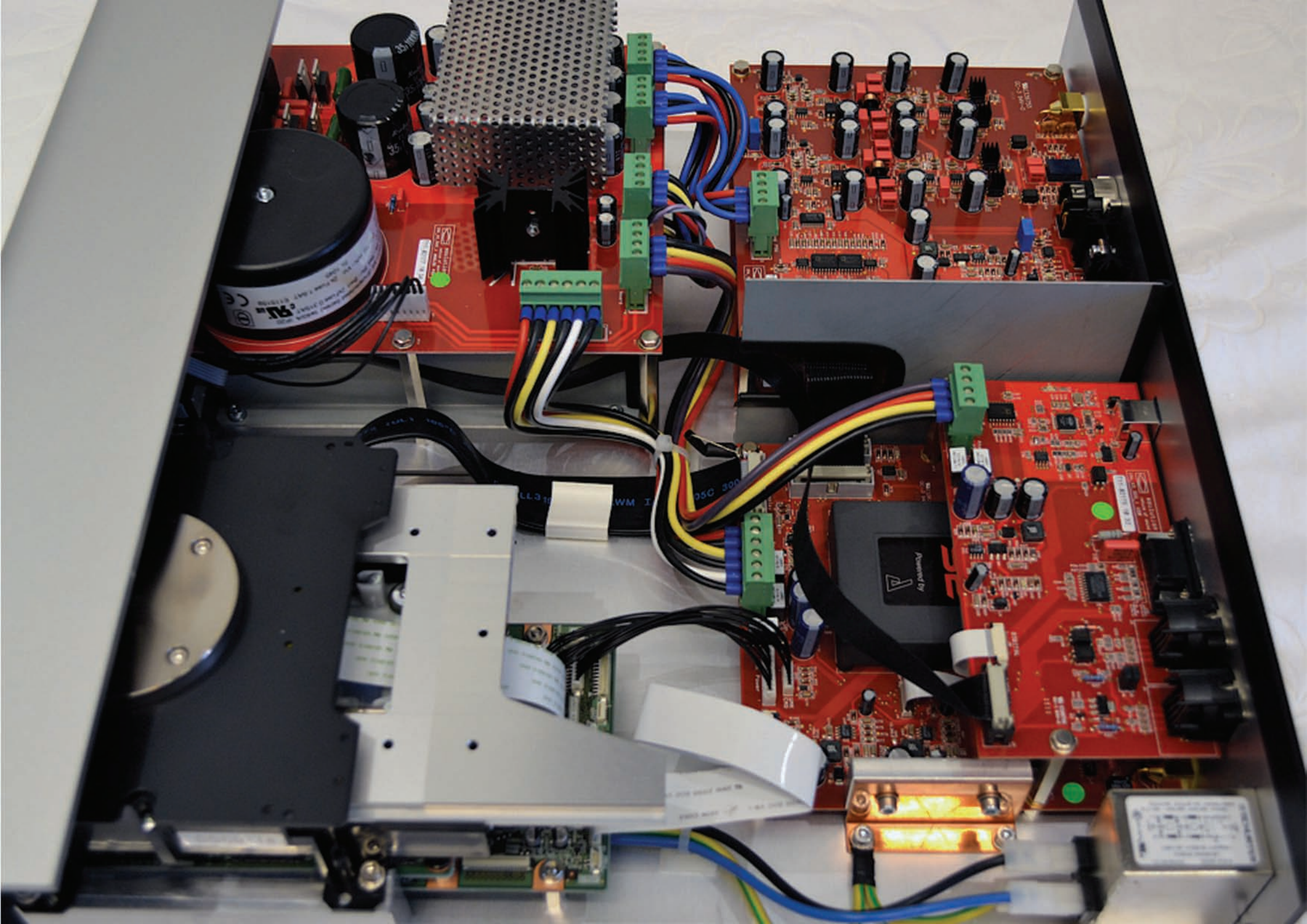
Official Italian dealer: Audioplus

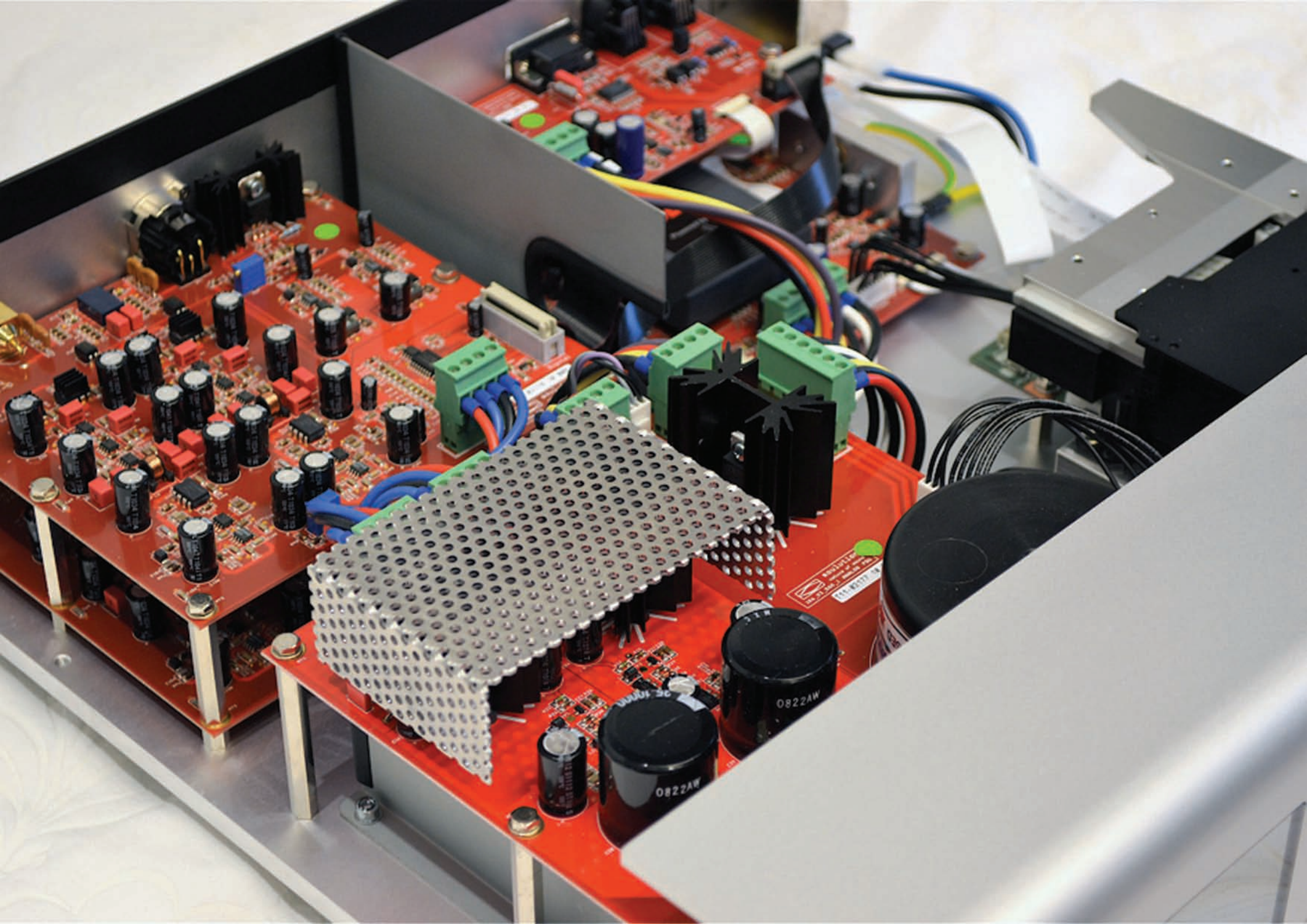
Official current price in Italy: 19,900.00 EUR

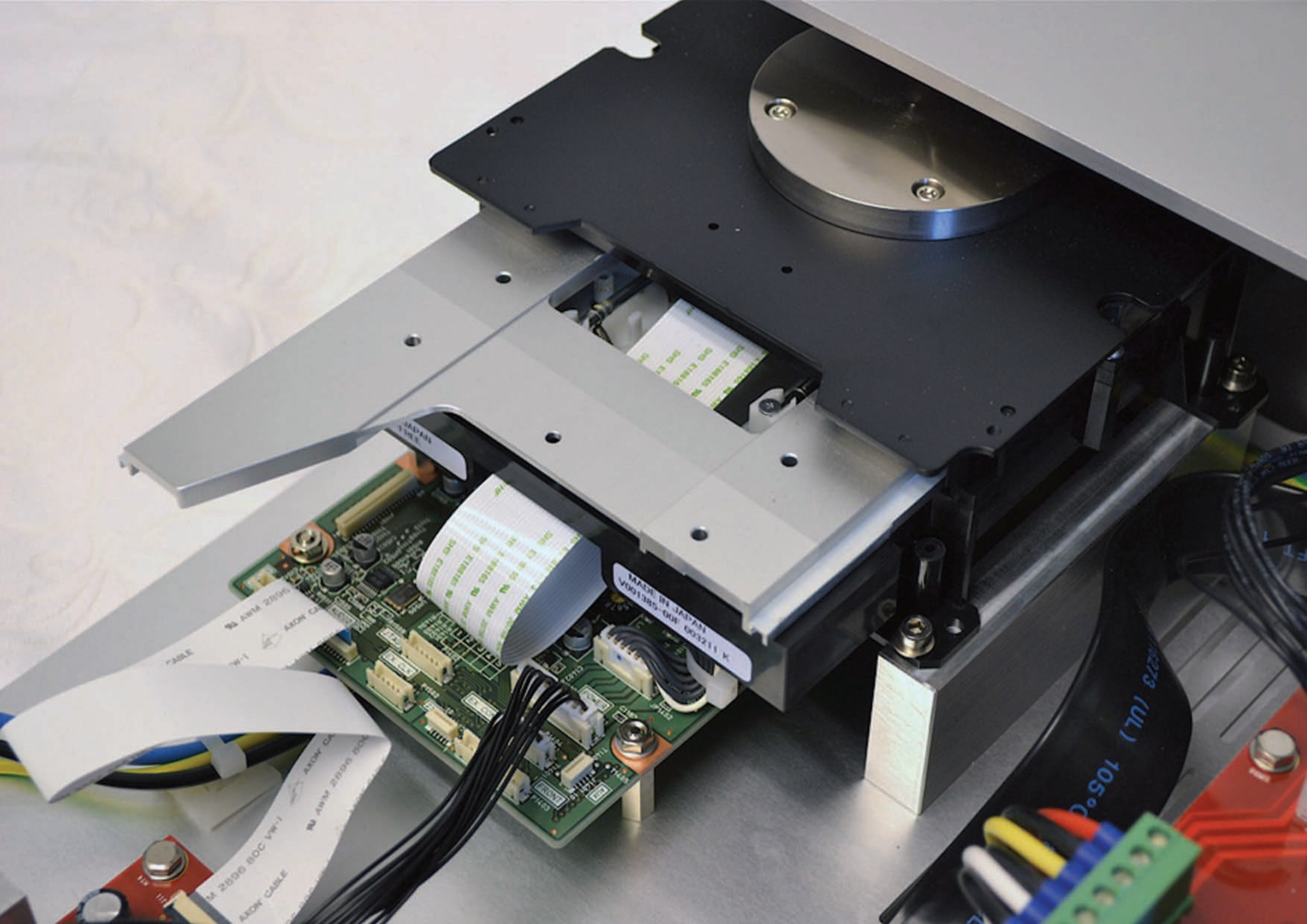




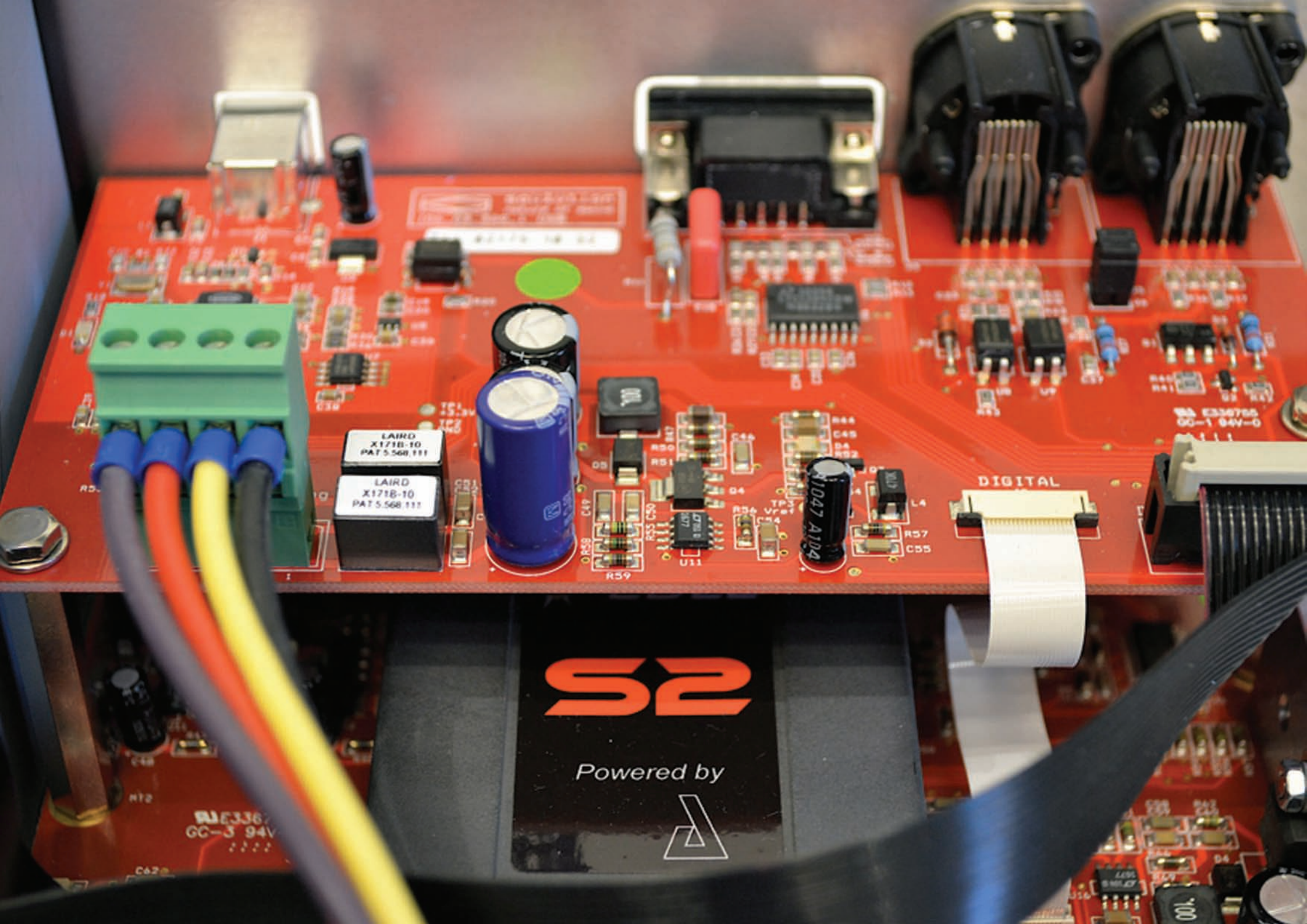












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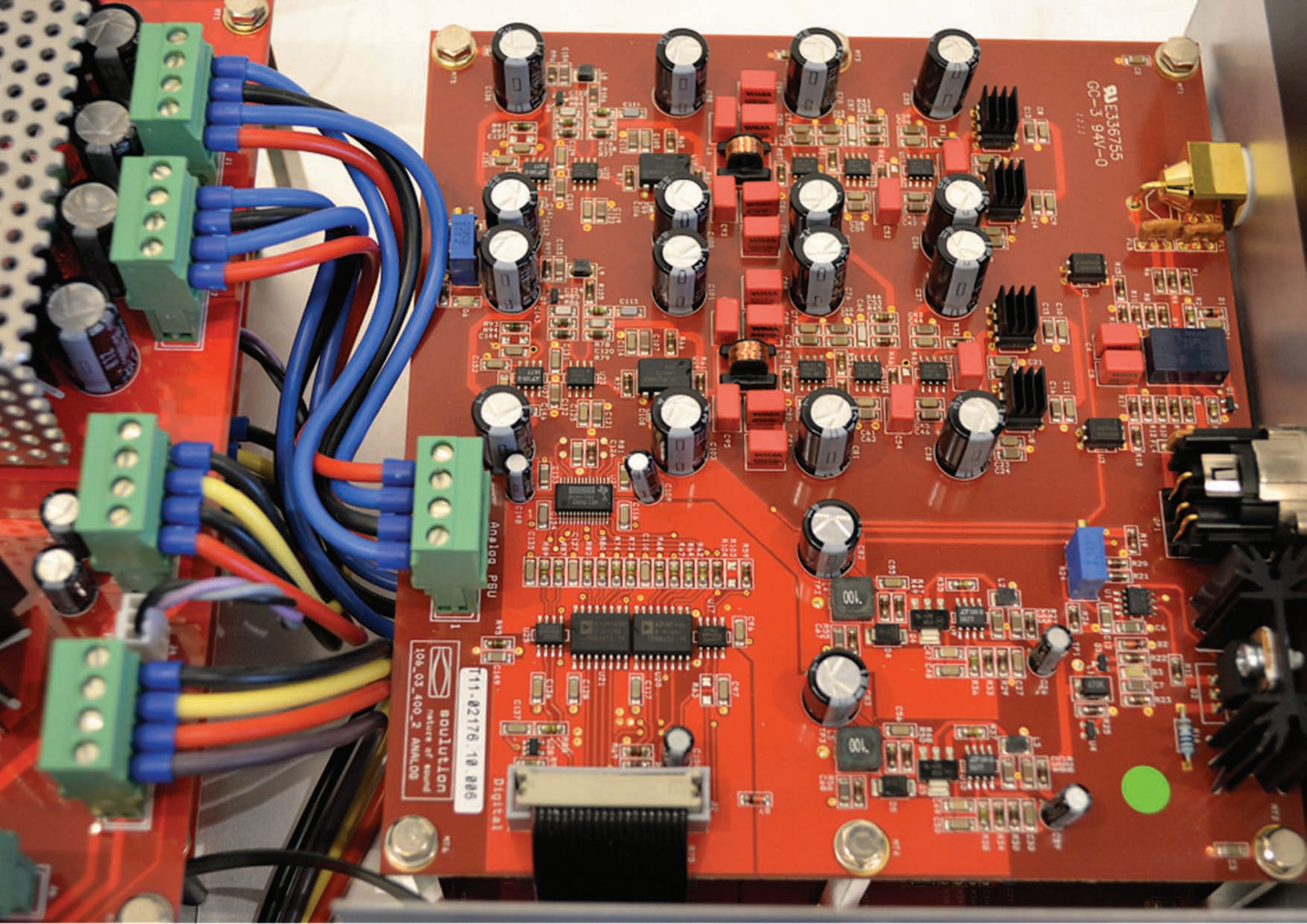
DIGITAL

S2

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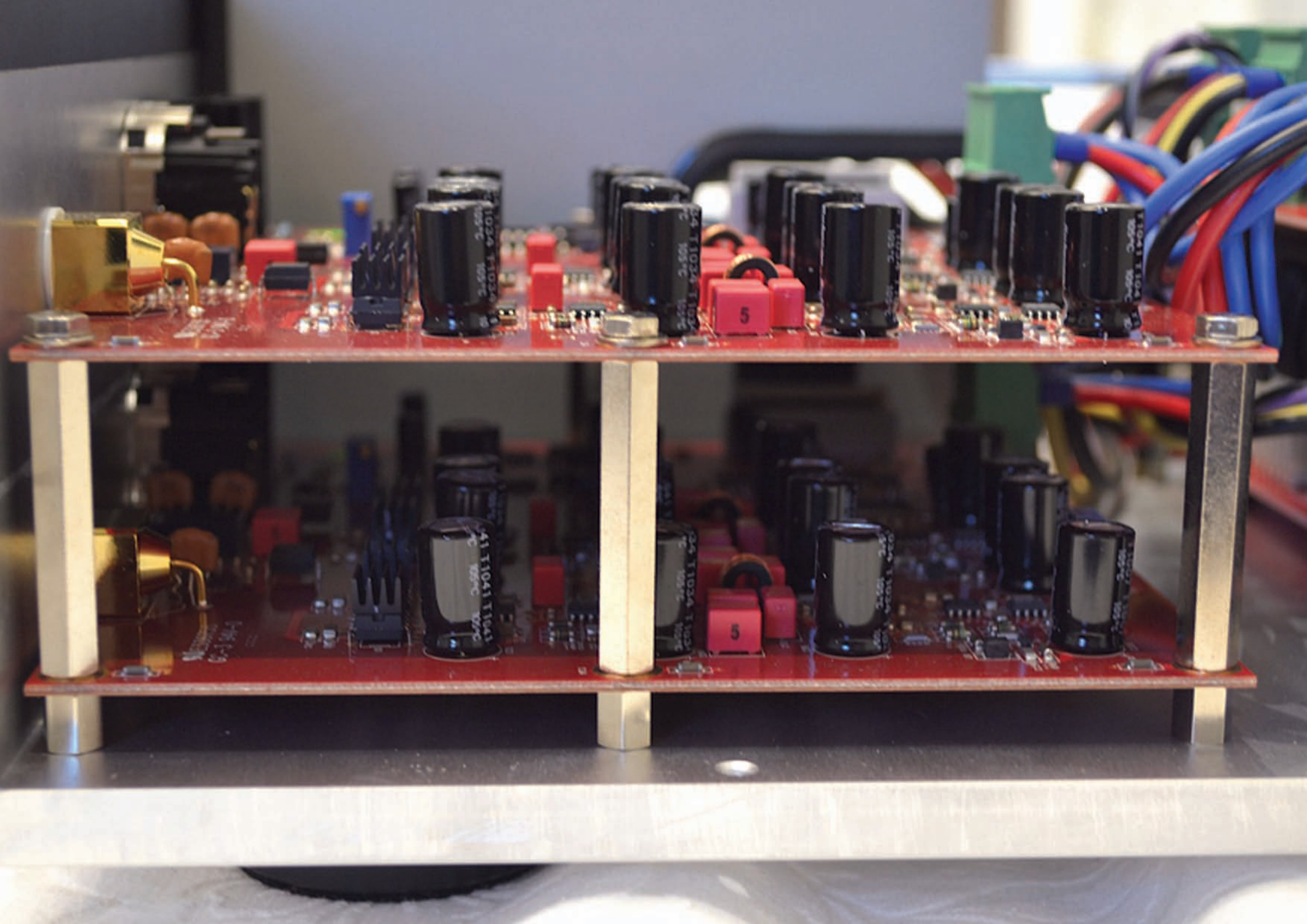
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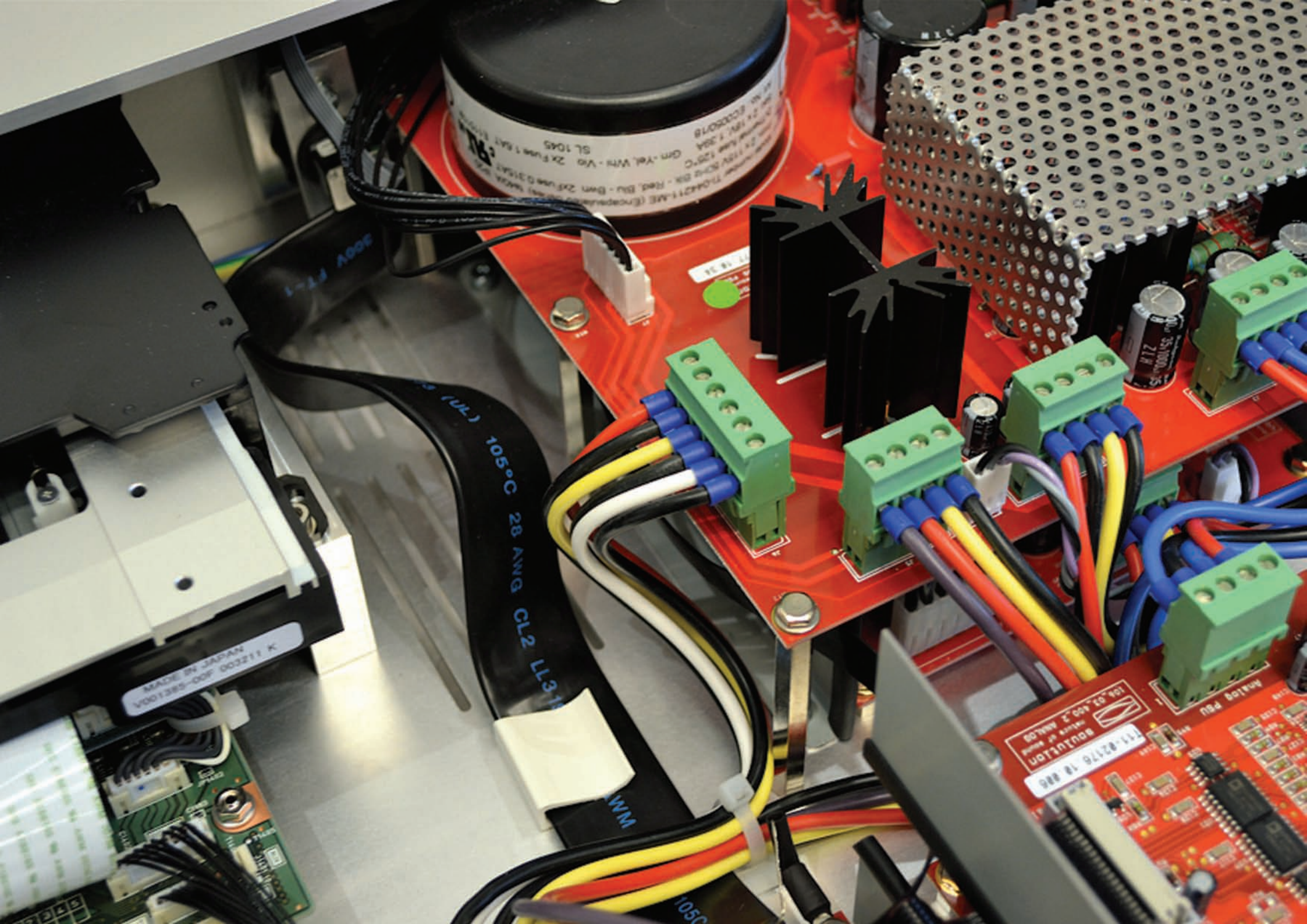
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solution
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Digital

Analog PSU







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