



NuForce STA120

power amplifier

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Space has been more expensive than stuff in this part of the world for some time now and that has had quite a severe effect on the world of stereo systems, hi-fi, call it what you will. The popularity of headphones is not merely linked to the the quantity of music you can keep on a smart phone, it's related to the difficulty of having a decent pair of loudspeakers in the modern home (and being able to use them). As a result people are listening on smaller systems; Bluetooth speakers, soundbars, headphones etc. So what is the music lover who wants great sound to do? Find smaller audio components is one answer and companies like NuForce appear to understand this. Its small and minimally styled range of electronics is all housed in casework that is half the size of most other serious brands.

The STA120 is a good case in point, it's an 85 watt per channel stereo power amplifier that stands 50mm high on its little rubber feet, that's two inches in North American money, and even that sounds bigger than it looks. The width of 215mm is exactly half the size of standard separates, which gives you a better idea of how it might look on the shelf. You can't build a conventional 85 watt power amplifier into a box this small because the power supply is usually too big but NuForce has always been a class D company, it uses this relatively efficient technology in all its components because it's better for polar bears and makes for smaller and literally cooler electronics. It has a toroidal mains transformer but the output is a switching type, a 400kHz PWM design. Class D used to be a dirty word but thanks to the efforts of Linn and Chord Electronics that has changed and most will accept that the technology has the potential for good, even great sound.



There is a matching DAC/preamplifier called DAC 80 (£650) that I had hoped to use with the STA120 but it needs proprietary driver software and wouldn't play ball with the USB output of the Melco N1A digital transport I use so it had to be put back in its box. I used the STA120 with another compact component, the Townshend Allegri controller and hooked up my usual PMC Fact.8 speakers. This amplifier is said to prefer a fast, clean and tight loudspeaker so the PMCs should be perfect, in practice it was a remarkably successful combination given the £650 price of the amplifier. There were occasions when it could have had a bit more power, dynamics were a little restrained, but the speed of the NuForce cannot be denied. It starts and stops with alacrity.

It has a neutral balance with no real sense of extra warmth and this made me wonder about the aforementioned speaker criteria, just to make sure I pulled in a pair of Bowers & Wilkins CM10 S2 floorstanders. These have a fuller sound than the PMCs with quite prodigious low end in the right hands, but as suggested this amp wasn't well suited to the job. It doesn't have the grip that the CM10 S2 needs to keep bass lines on track. A better alternative proved to be Triangle Comete Ez standmounts, these have horn loaded tweeters for maximum dynamics and this combined with a tight bottom end worked a treat. Now the likes of Boris Blank, The Civil Wars and Tr ntm ller could be enjoyed to the max, with plenty of scale and energy.



My time with this NuForce was brief but very enjoyable and I would repeat it given the chance. In value terms you pay a percentage for the compact size and, it has to be said, superb finish of this discreet amplifier but there is not much competition if you want a small and beautiful power amp so value ratings are tricky. If you want to build a decent system that won't take over the living room or even the desk top this is one of the better places to start.

SPECIFICATIONS:

Product type Stereo Power Amplifier
 Output impedance 300m Ohm
 Power output 85W x 2 @ 8Ohm, 125Wx2 @ 4 Ohm
 Peak output power 300W
 Input Impedance 22K Ohm
 Output impedance 300m Ohm
 Nominal impute level 1Vrms

Gain 25.5dB
Frequency response 10Hz-40kHz
Sensitivity 1Vrms
Signal to noise ratio (SNR) 115dB
Total harmonic distortion + noise (THD + N) 0.01%
Power supply 115V/230V
Power consumption 12W

PRICE: £650 MANUFACTURER DETAILS:

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