

# Affordable\$\$Audio

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## From the Pulpit: Grant Fidelity A-88 Tube Amplifier and P307 Phono/linestage Preamplifier By Stew Nelles

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As promised last month with my quick and dirty review of the Grant Fidelity B-283 tube buffer, here's a couple of more items from Grant Fidelity.

### A88 amplifier MSRP- CAD\$1369

Output Power: 65W UL and 32W Triode

Output Impedance: 4 ohm and 8 ohm

Frequency Response: 20Hz - 100kHz(1dB 10W/8 ohms)

Distortion: 1% @ 30 W

Input Impedance: 20Kohm

Input Sensitivity: 300mV and 600mV Pro

S/N Ratio: 78dB

Vacuum Tubes: 6SN7GTB X 4, KT88 X 4, 12AX7 x 2

- 65 watt per channel dual mono power amp.
- Front panel inputs to bypass internal preamp
- Switchable from 65 watts UltraLinear to 32 watts Pure Triode mode.

### P-307 Phono/CD Pre-amp and Processor - MSRP- CAD\$529

Frequency Response: 15Hz-100kHz (-2B),

Signal To Noise Ratio: CD/DVD-Less Than 75dB(A)1kHz-RIAA: Less Than 65dB(A)1kHz (@10mV input),

Distortion: <0.2%,

Input Voltage: CD/DVD: <.25V,

Output Voltage to Power Amp: dual outputs of either .25V or .7V.

- Heavy-Duty All- Metal Chassis and Faceplate
- Stereo RIAA Phono inputs (5mV sensitivity) on front panel, CD/DVD Stereo Inputs on rear panel, Dual Stereo Outputs-either .7V or .25V.
- Controls include: Stereo Volume, Input Switches for DVD and Phono, on-off power switch.
- Vacuum Tube Compliment: 2pc 12AU7 and 2pc 12AX7- DC on Tube Filaments for ultra-low noise.

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

## The Sound

### Some listening notes from some listening sessions.

Most of the listening done for this portion was carried out in a new system that I put together using my previously reviewed and purchased Hemp Acoustics FR 8c full range drivers, but with a twist: they were installed in planet10hifi's Demetri enclosure, sized for this driver. Also my drivers are no longer in a stock configuration. They have had their dust caps removed, phase plugs installed, and baskets dampened using a commercial dampening "putty". Thusly configured they can be described as low 40Hz in output, large sounding, with good sound staging apparent. Perhaps more about these some other time. I can say this though; they seem to make a very nice combination with the A88 amplifier driving them. Also my Oracle Alex Mll/SME 309 magnesium arm/Grado Sig8 MCZ combination was used for analog duties. Interconnects have been various

The context of this review is using each in its primary intended role...with the A-88 being utilized as an integrated amplifier with line level inputs, and the P307 being used as a phonostage. Comparisons have been made using my existing equipment: McCormack DNA 0.5 deluxe, and Microline drive in both passive and active mode. Sources used were a Sony SCHP 1001 (non-modded), Sony cd505esD cd player and my Oracle Alex Mll/SME 309 mag arm/ Grado Sig 8 MCZ cartridge. Speakers were primarily the Planet 10 hifi Demetri loudspeakers with Hemp Acoustics FR8c drivers and my old Castle Acoustics Dutham 900s. Cabling is a mix of discount Monster cable interconnects, Audio



Artistry interconnects and speaker cables, and Audioquest interconnects and cables.

### **A88/linestage integrated amplifier/PSIII Phono stage:**

The Police, *Zenyatta Mondatta*: “Don’t Stand so Close to Me” was a little hard sounding using the A88 and PS Audio III phono stage. It had good impact, good bass lines, and good attack. Voices are a little softened, pulled back with good detail: on the verge of annoying. “Driven to tears” is improved. I attribute these results to overly hot production

Los Lobos et al, *La Bamba*: “La Bamba” was live sounding but not irritating. Almost the complete soundtrack has been produced with “juke box” sound—highs exaggerated, bass slightly “bloated”, as though being played through an old Wurlitzer. “c’mon” moves, with a produced false ambience, but really enjoyable. Natural bass. On “Oh, Donna” there is a slight sibilance. Marshall Crenshaw’s “Summertime Blues” was immediate. But when Bo Diddley’s performance of “who do you Love?” started-- it was pretty startling. Just as it is easy to forget how startling and character filled the

voice of the late John Lee Hooker was, so too is it for Mr. Diddley’s voice. In many ways “Who do You Love” sounded like it was recorded at a music festival, and Mr. Diddley’s voice sounded course enough to believe he had been up all night partying with folks at this imaginary music festival.

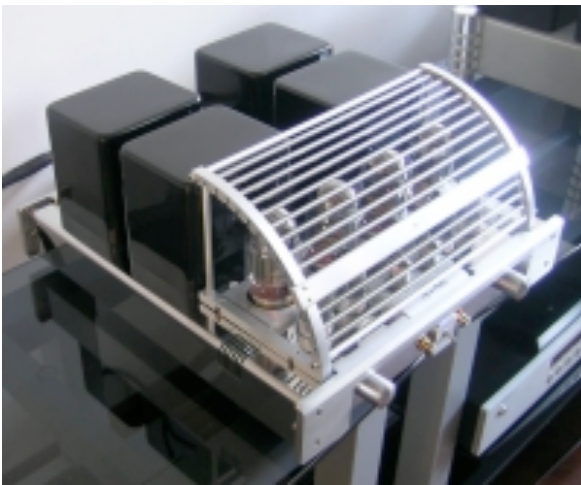
Van Halen, *The Best of VanHalen*. Not a group known for great music, but Eddie and the crew are great musicians. If they could only have a great lead with some talent—oops they tried that with Sammy Hagar. “Dance the night away” is a great song for remembering one’s “youth” (ala Joe Pesci form “My Cousin Vinnie”), but boy does the recording suck—glam rock gone bad. When will Eddie Van Halen allow himself to become the incredible artist he really is? Reinvent yourself Eddie! Can Ms. Bertonelli sing? If not get hold of a great singer, kill off the David Lee Roth front man, and start making great music. (You can do it).

Elton John: *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*: “Candle in the Wind” was as natural and beautiful as I have ever heard it (the 1973 rendition). The live version of “Benny and the Jets” sounded like it was---LIVE!

So tonally the A88/Demetri system was good. It is easily transparent enough to highlight and showcase the system in front of it. Sometimes maybe a little too revealing—bad recordings sound bad, while good ones sound great. I will say that the drums and some Bass notes seem a little pulled back, not threadbare but *slightly* pulled back. PRAT is quite excellent

### **And now the P307**

Rather than do a blow by blow of the P307, I default to my quick and dirty style, and offer up a couple of standouts.



Bruce Hornsby and the Range, *The Way it Is*: “That’s Just the Way it is” is about as good as I’ve heard. Detailed without being overly “etchy”. Piano is excellent, bass line is distinct and well produced. There is no false sense of “bloating” as I thought there might be. No thickening of “body” in the voice and instruments. Overall I think an improvement over the PSIII. Upper keys on the piano is absolutely beautiful, and reduced apparent sibilance when compared directly to the PSIII.

Dire Straits *Brothers in Arms*; “Ride Across the River” and others had a reduced apparent depth when compared to the PSIII. The soundstage became shallower, but the width increased. There was more body, good impact, Horn sounded more realistic with just enough “bite” to be somewhat believable, and the pan flute was excellent.

### **The Complaints:**

Without mincing any words, let it be known that all of Grant Fidelity’s products are made in China to Grant’s specifications. Also, please note that these are the introductory pieces in the “Affordable” series (but they don’t look like it or sound like it in any way). And they are not without fault (although mainly faults of omissions and what I might call “common sense aesthetics”). So here are my complaints first.

- 🔊🔌 The P307 needs to have its controls moved from (what I feel is an unsuitable location) the top of the unit to one of the long sides, beside the power switch.

- 🔔📁The tube covers need to be removed. Maybe OK for shipping, but they colour the sound in an obvious way—simply removing them from the P307 helped things a completely disproportionate amount.
- 🔔📁The A-88 integrated amp is mainly without too much wrong in either a layout or aesthetics. But a couple of items need to be added to make sense of it as a complete integrated solution (less phono stage). For one, a preamp out-amp in pair of RCAs on the back of the unit would be welcome. The preamp bypass is there, but on the front of the unit. A preamp out might be a nice option if one was wanting to bi-amp using the A-88's internal amp and say a solid-state power amp for a subwoofer.
- 🔔📁The A-88 has a tape input, but no tape loop. This is kind of annoying, a proper tape loop might allow one to use a processor or actual tape unit with it to facilitate recording on whatever media of choice.
- 🔔📁Both of these pieces have one other annoyance: the manufacturer has insisted on silk screening “power transformer” and “output transformer “ on the covers of the appropriate transformers. I for one don't need the reminder and find the effort to label them a waste of time, energy, and money.

Ok. That's those are the extent of what I consider to be drawbacks to these units. And price. If one does a search for Chinese built tube amplifiers and associated products these are a little on the pricey side. I understand what Ian Grant is doing, and why he is pricing these items appropriately. But most will wander around and look at various Internet offerings, and see no difference. Well there is one particularly glaring one to me. You see, Ian is dedicated to developing a real dealer network, not Internet sales. He believes (and I agree) for one to properly sell his products, folks need to hear them. So he's been developing retail dealers *and home demonstrators*. And he is offering a proper warranty program to boot. I think this a rather bold approach to selling his wares—real dealers with real in home demonstrations as a matter of policy. This presents a real risk to himself and his dealer/ demonstrators. If his products are the same as others, will “customers” go for an in home demonstration and then just buy something else off of the Internet? Ian is gambling on the answer to that question as being “no”. A pretty big gamble but one that suggests confidence in his products and approach.

So now some build and fit and finish comments, common to both. First of all, both units have a very good fit and finish. Near the best that I have ever seen on any equipment, period. They have incredible tactile feel, switches switch with a “clunk” and volume controls step with positive steps. I don't know whether or not the attenuators/ volume controls are in fact stepped such as the very famous TacT products, but they feel like it (I didn't lift the hood on either unit). Regardless, the volume controls on each of the units sounded very good, very “transparent” with no real character of their own. The connections used on both units are good quality RCA connectors. I've seen worse on much more expensive units. Blue LEDs are a nice touch on the P307 as well. The only real complaint I have in any of this area is that on the A-88, it is difficult to read the labels of the inputs, perhaps Ian can get them engraved and then back painted to make them easier to read.

### Comments regarding the PSIII and P307

Rather than trying to compare the two and come up with an absolute winner between these two products, I offer this thumbnail comparison. The PSIII sound bigger in terms of sound staging, the bass is slightly pulled back in level, and pinpoint location of instruments within the sound field seems easier. Pretty good for an item coming on to 30 years old—a testament to the original design and intent. The Grant Fidelity P307 on the other hand has more body, more “weight” and seems to be tonally more accurate.

This is a testament to what I believe is a fundamentally well designed and implemented phonostage / preamp. It performed better than I expected.

### Final comments on the A88

This little line stage/amplifier is again what I would consider to be quite good. With enough blast to drive multi-way loudspeakers and enough finesse to play along full rangers I think it's a no brainer. It's not particularly expensive, is well built, has an in-home demonstration opportunity, and well gives the room a nice warm glow (snow's fallen in the last week here and it's hovering around 0 degrees F).

### Some comments concerning myself

I have been so impressed by Grant Fidelity's products; I've decided to negotiate a dealer agreement between them and myself. I cannot make a stronger statement.

Thankfully our publisher has agreed to allow me to stay on with Affordable Audio in a writing capacity, however as in the past, I'll limit myself to reviews of used items that do not compete with any of Grant Fidelity's products.

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