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## **REVIEW: Accoustic Arts Amp I – Compact sound culture**

by **Volker Frech**

editor

Can't you go smaller? Accoustic Arts answers this question with the new Amp I: This stereo power amplifier leaves behind the bulky, cubic dimensions and maximum wattage – yet still offers an impressive appearance and imposing performance: A dual-mono design based on the current mirror principle delivers the 330 watts per channel, typical of Accoustic Arts, and all the features of its larger siblings are also included. Our test reveals how the Amp I sounds.



*The Accoustic Arts Amp I, like all components from the Lauffen-based manufacturer, is a dream in aluminum and chrome – but quite unusually, it's a power amplifier in a sideboard-compatible format.*

Until now, Accoustic Arts' power amplifiers have been massive, high-wattage cubes: Anyone who studies the manufacturer's portfolio, from which we've already tested the [Mono IV](#) , [Mono VI](#) , and [Amp V](#) , will find consistently knee-high cubic powerhouses with sometimes four-figure wattage output. Not

everyone needs something so bulky and powerful – and so fans and distributors asked if the high-end manufacturer could produce something like a half-size Amp IV. Of course they could – and with the Amp I, there's now, for the first time in a long while, a power amplifier in the lineup that allows for rack or board placement and is also significantly more budget-friendly. This power amplifier pairs perfectly with the soon-to-be-released Preamp I – and Accustic Arts will once again have a dedicated pre/power amplifier combination in its top-of-the-line series, which also includes the [Player III](#) CD player to complete the audio chain.



*The model name, perfectly milled into the top surface, is a real eye-catcher – and a prime example of the outstanding material and manufacturing quality. This is arguably the most attractive solution for venting an amplifier.*

## **Audiophile dream made of aluminum and chrome**

Back to the Amp I. Even though it's smaller than its more spacious siblings, the 21 x 48 x 42 cm power amplifier, weighing in at a hefty 27 kg, makes an impressive statement on our editorial desk. This isn't solely due to its substantial size, but also to its elegant design and superb build quality. Like its amplifier relatives, it's instantly recognizable as an Accustic Arts component: the Amp I is an audiophile dream crafted from aluminum and chrome. The high-gloss finish is

achieved by the centrally positioned front panel: this inlay, set flush like an inlay, is made of solid brass, flawlessly chrome-plated for a perfect reflection. The manufacturer's logo is inlaid as a medallion at the top of this panel. At the bottom, this inlay houses the only control on the entire front: the equally metal and chrome-plated on/off switch. Three LEDs below it indicate the amplifier's operating status.



*The Amp I's side panels are designed entirely as heat sinks. The solid, milled fin areas offer a large radiating surface, ensuring effective heat dissipation. The amplifier's power transistors have direct thermal contact with the heat sinks via a solid internal metal plate. The elegantly rounded fins enhance the amplifier's visual lightness and elegance, as does the fine chamfering of all edges. As always with Accoustic Arts, the front panel impresses with the brushed aluminum finish and the subtle sheen of the refined surface.*

### **Noble shimmer**

Aside from the inlay, the Amp I boasts a solid aluminum housing. The edges are perfectly chamfered, the surfaces finely brushed and anodized. This reveals the attractive brushed finish, and the metal possesses a refined, subtle sheen. Our model is finished in silver, but the anodizing is also available in black. The front

panel can be gold-plated instead of chrome-plated, as can the medallion and feet. With its 98% pure precious metal plating, the Amp I truly becomes a valuable investment. The amplifier's substantial weight is evident in its thick-walled cabinet panels: the top is eight millimeters thick, while the front is a full centimeter. The cooling fin areas on the sides, milled from solid metal, are also this thick, before the solid material transitions on both sides into a row of fine fins. These delicate, grooved, and attractively rounded rows of fins enhance the amplifier's elegant appearance.

### **Excellence in quality and manufacturing**

They also lend the Amp I a certain lightness. This is further enhanced by the four metal feet on which the amplifier rests: acoustically, their rubberized pads absorb vibrations, while visually they make the Amp I appear to float. Overall, this amplifier boasts excellent material quality and perfect workmanship. The Lauffen-based manufacturer, which meticulously and accurately handcrafts each of its high-end components, is renowned for this reference-level quality. We have experienced this top-tier quality not only in their power amplifiers, but also in products such as the [Player VI](#) , the [Tube Preamp V](#) , the [Preamp V Phono](#) , and the [Power III Phono](#) . The Amp I seamlessly continues this tradition. A highlight of all Accustic Arts components is always the design of the top panel: the Amp I impresses with a perfectly milled cutout of its model name. These cutouts are backed with a perforated grille. This is an exceptionally elegant and sophisticated way to ventilate the amplifier housing.



*Elegant design: The high-gloss, mirror-smooth chrome trim is perfectly flush with the front panel as a sophisticated inlay. The medallion bearing the seal-like Accoustic Arts logo is set into this inlay*

## **Dual-mono design**

This ventilation system, in conjunction with the cooling fins, ensures the necessary heat dissipation. This can generate a significant temperature increase, as the Amp I has a power consumption of a substantial 75 watts at idle, and delivers a hefty 330 watts per channel into four ohms when in operation. The Amp I achieves this power, typical of Accoustic Arts, with a dual-mono amplifier design. The left and right channels of the stereo signal are amplified by completely separate and strictly isolated high-performance amplifiers. This dual-mono configuration allows for optimal channel separation. The circuit boards for these two amplifiers are mounted along the sides of the chassis, extending almost the entire length of the interior on both sides. The actual amplifiers, i.e., the transistors of the output stage, are mounted on external metal plates, which in turn have direct, full contact with the side-mounted heat sinks. A generously sized toroidal transformer sits at the center of the chassis, which also explains the Amp I's considerable weight.

## Powerful supply, short signaling pathways

This magnetically shielded and potted high-quality transformer provides up to 600 volt-amperes to the two amplifiers via separate windings. This power output ensures high current delivery and ample reserves. This is crucial for the power, dynamics, and composure of any amplifier's sound reproduction. The subsequent smoothing and filtering also contribute to this: it is performed by equally expensive premium capacitors with a power supply capacitance exceeding 80,000 microfarads. The entire circuit design utilizes the shortest possible conductor and signal paths, which benefits the signal-to-noise ratio. The meticulously designed internal layout, with its clean lines and attractive black circuit boards with gold-plated traces, is also a visual delight. In realizing the amplifier, Accustic Arts simplified and concentrated the circuit design – and therefore dispensed with the bridge circuit, as is used, for example, in the [Mono IV](#), where, although it is a mono amp, two power stages essentially provide the amplification.



*The back of the Amp I offers a clear and tidy layout of connection options for the input preamplifier and the sound-transmitting loudspeakers.*

## **Current mirror principle as an amplifier trademark**

The current mirror principle, however, is non-negotiable: Accustic Arts relies on this circuit concept in all its power amplifiers. Here, another current signal is derived from an existing reference current signal – essentially mirroring it. In the current-controlled Amp I, eight meticulously selected, high-quality MOSFET transistors in each of the two amplifier stages provide the actual signal amplification. Their large number ensures high current delivery and prevents the MOSFETs from reaching their power limits. This contributes to the amplifier's low distortion. Due to this circuit design and the resulting high current delivery, the Amp I can effortlessly drive even low-impedance and demanding loudspeakers. The Amp I also features comprehensive protection circuitry. This safeguards the amplifier and the loudspeakers from high-frequency vibrations and also disconnects the speaker outputs in case of clipping or excessive DC offset. These are unwanted DC components in the music signal: They raise the signal curve to a different reference potential and are therefore also unsuitable or even harmful for loudspeaker drivers.

## **A nice feature: the damping factor linearization.**

Among the refinements of every Accustic Arts power amplifier is the switchable damping factor linearization. A high damping factor is desirable in a modern negative feedback power amplifier. This means the amplifier's internal resistance is significantly lower than the resistance of the connected loudspeaker. This ensures good distortion characteristics and high control over the speaker drivers' movement. However, Accustic Arts introduces a caveat: Loudspeaker drivers don't exhibit their optimal transient response at the maximum damping factor, but rather at a slightly lower value. This factor should also remain constant over a wide frequency range. In reality, however, there is a fundamental drop-off starting at around five kilohertz. This is where damping factor linearization comes into play: When activated, the damping factor no longer reaches the upper limit of its optimal range, but remains slightly below it. As a result, the damping factor now exhibits a much smoother roll-off across the frequency response: It remains within the optimal zone up to around twenty kilohertz.



*The switchable "Damping Control" is a circuit delicacy typical of Accoustic Arts: The damping factor linearization is intended to create the best possible balance between high amplifier control over the speaker drivers, optimal vibration behavior of the speaker diaphragms and at the same time a high and constant resistance ratio from the amplifier output resistance to the speaker impedance.*

## **Mute function and variety of connections**

The "Damping Control" is activated or deactivated via a push-button switch. It is located on the rear panel of the Amp I, to the left of the input section. To the right, a second push button mutes the speaker outputs. This, as well as the activation of the signal paths after switching on the power amplifier, is accomplished via audibly clicking relays. This reassuring sound confirms that the signal paths are mechanically and electrically isolated or connected with absolute precision. Thanks to the "Mute" circuit, other preamplifiers or speakers can be connected quickly and easily. For inputs, the Amp I offers both a balanced XLR input and an unbalanced RCA input. The input is also selected via a push-button switch. Both inputs allow for DC coupling in addition to the standard AC coupling: This means a preamplifier can be connected whose output signal does not pass through a coupling capacitor that blocks DC components. Now to the outputs: Here, the Amp I offers four excellent pairs of WBT nextgen terminals, enabling bi-wiring.



*On the input side, the Amp I features an unbalanced RCA input and a balanced XLR input. The desired input is selected and activated using the "Input Selection" switch..*

## The Accoustic Arts Amp I in practice

For the listening test, we used the standard single-wiring connection because our [Audio Physic Midex](#) loudspeaker is equipped with a single pair of terminals. We connected the [Lumin P1 mini](#) to the Amp I as both a music source and a preamplifier. We initially connected it to the Amp I using unbalanced cables and started with "Three Shades Of A House" by the Bobo Stenson Trio. The very first bars of the song had us glued to the sofa, captivated and eager to hear. This was partly due to bassist Anders Jormin and drummer Jon Fält, who opened the song with their unconventional, soloistic interplay. It was also due to the playback through the amplifying Amp I: we'd never heard the intro sound this good before! Jormin began with a brisk series of harmonics – and even those overtones, created by lightly placing a finger of the fretting hand on the correct string position while simultaneously plucking that string with the picking hand...



*The Amp I offers two pairs of speaker terminals for connection. These outputs are identical, allowing for bi-wiring of loudspeakers. The terminals are excellent models from WBT's nextgen series. They feature minimal metal for maximum sonic neutrality and are equipped with a torque indicator. This prevents damage to the fine strands when tightening bare wire. If the speaker cable has a separate shield, the Amp I even provides dedicated grounding contacts for this purpose.*

## **Breathtaking authenticity**

...has a breathtaking authenticity: The tones possess precisely that wiry, bell-like quality that a thick, metal-wound bass string exudes when played with this technique. Added to this are the phenomenal promptness and accuracy of the notes, which we experience as a wonderful sense of presence: It's as if Jormin were standing right in front of us with his bass. This perception is further enhanced by the fact that each of his string plucks generates a light but noticeable pressure, allowing us to physically experience the bass – even though these harmonics are very fine, delicate, and quiet. Wow! With the very first of these notes, we are transported to another space, because the resolution of the reproduction is so high that even the first pluck delivers the sound reflections of the studio space, captured by the microphones there. This conveyance of the ambience is so perfectly achieved in the reproduction that the imagined space instantly becomes the new reality – and the actual walls of our room are simply magically erased.

## Exciting radio play

This impression intensifies with Jon Fält's entrance: Even before his first musical contribution, the drummer flips the lever on his snare drum, tensioning the snare wires, which give the snare its distinctive rattle, beneath the resonant head – and even this sound is audible in this recording, just as Jormin's playing sounds from touching and plucking the bass strings were earlier. It is precisely these sounds that provide the sonic spice to the music: Only through them does a recording sound authentic, only through them do we have the feeling that real musicians are playing in front of us. The Amp I conveys this brilliantly! Now, during the pauses between the bass harmonics, Fält places delicate taps on his splash cymbal, the bell of his ride cymbal, and the rim of his tom. This dialogue between bass and drums is like a captivating radio play – and we recognize all the components involved!



*The stereo power amplifier appears to float slightly due to its four decoupling feet. This makes the amplifier, which weighs a considerable 32 kilograms, feel significantly lighter.*

## Clarity, purity and peace

We hear the acoustic signature of the wood of the drumsticks, the metal of the cymbals and drum shells, the steel of the strings – and know, because of the dullness of the attack, that human fingers are plucking the strings. All of this is so sensationally good and precisely perceptible because the reproduction possesses extraordinary clarity and purity – and operates with an almost

astonishingly low level of noise and distortion. Even when we turn the Lumin preamplifier up high in idle mode, the Amp I performs its amplification task with maximum silence. It brilliantly delivers that "deep black background" against which the music can unfold free from any distraction, and even the smallest details remain audible because they are not lost in any background noise. The outstanding purity enables a wonderful sense of calm and transparency. These merits, which we have already appreciated in Accoustic Arts' larger power amplifiers, are also present in the Amp I.



*The "Mute" button mutes the power amplifier. This is a useful feature because it allows for quick and silent cable changes – and also enables silent switching between inputs and damping control.*

## **Immersive spatial perception**

Finally, pianist Bobo Stenson joins in, playing his grand piano positioned to the right of the double bass. Now we have a complete representation of the trio on stage – and a perfect impression of the RSI's Auditorio Stelio Molo, where the recording took place. With its transparency, accuracy, and wealth of detail, the Amp I impressively recreates the generous space – allowing us to immerse ourselves in the ambiance of this broadcast concert hall. Stenson's piano playing also possesses a stunning realism: we hear every strike of the felt-covered

hammers on the strings, as if we were sitting right next to the open case of his grand piano. We can even hear the vibrations of the approximately 230 strings, because even the taut wires of the unplayed notes are also excited, their resonance creating a strengthening or cancellation of various frequencies, a process that constantly changes as the chord decays. This shifting of the tonal spectrum creates the magical sound of a piano.



*The robustness of the case is particularly evident in the 10 millimeter thick front, but also in the thick-walled, heavy top and the massive heatsink cheeks.*

### **Grandiose dynamism, genuine vibrancy**

From the moment the piano enters, bassist Jormin frequently plays the lowest register of his four-stringed instrument – and this is where the Amp I demonstrates its power: The double bass possesses precisely the depth, the pressure, and the carrying power that this acoustic instrument can deliver through its wooden body – provided the playback is powerful enough. The power amplifier also scores points with its immense impulse response: This precision, combined with its power output, enables magnificent dynamics. The drumming, of course, benefits particularly from this, because Fält uses his drums like a solo instrument, utilizing the entire volume range from pianissimo to fortissimo, from

the faintest touches of any rod parts to the loudest, most powerful blows. Besides reproducing the most subtle sounds, it is the dynamics that lend a truly vibrant quality to a performance – and the Amp I delivers this vitality and freshness with excellence. Its performance remains completely relaxed. We realize the misjudgment this can lead to when we leave our listening room...

### **Astonishing performance boost**

...because the externally perceptible level of the playback is astonishingly high. Yet we don't perceive the music as being that loud in the room. This is always a good sign of clean, low-distortion, and coherent amplification – and the Amp I achieves this brilliantly. Up until now, we've used the unbalanced input; now we switch to the balanced input – and at the same volume, we experience the playback as even more direct, the musicians and their instruments as even more present. The resolution is even finer, and the spatiality is therefore even more perceptible. The bass sounds a bit more powerful, and the drums gain in impact. Clearly, this is our favorite input! Now we're eager to see what the Damping Control does – and its effect is even more astonishing than the input switch. The piano, in particular, is even clearer; the notes are crisper, more sparkling, and the chords are more finely detailed, which makes the iridescent tonal spectrum as they decay even more captivating.



*The chrome front panel features only one control: the on/off push button. Below it, three LEDs indicate the current status of the stereo power amplifier: the blue LED signals readiness for operation, while the two outer red LEDs illuminate during the warm-up phase. These LEDs go out as soon as the signal paths are activated with an audible and reassuring relay click. If they remain lit during operation, they indicate a fault or distortion.*

### **Power, control, sound culture**

Moreover, the dynamics are even more responsive. We notice this particularly with the drums: the drumbeats have even more verve and freshness, sounding even more impulsive. Even the faintest cymbal touches now possess an almost astonishing presence. This is thanks to the equally increased transparency and clarity: the reproduction sounds even more organized, spacious, and open. The 3D imaging now has a breathtakingly intense breadth and depth. All acoustic events – piano sounds, bass notes, or drum hits, but also the musicians' playing sounds – unfold even more freely. This is also due to an even more contoured bass: the low end retains its power and carrying power, but gains in definition. As a result, the overall reproduction becomes even more organized. Thus, this chamber music performance delivered by the Bobo Svenson Trio completely captivates us. With this stupendous performance, the Amp I now continues the

outstanding sonic character that has already impressed us with Accoustic Arts' larger power amplifiers.

## **Image magic**

We experience this with other pieces of music as well. In "Godzilla's Birthday," which drummer Charly Antolini, percussionist Nippy Noya, and bassist Wolfgang Schmid celebrate with a furious percussion display and thunderous, deep bass, the Amp I truly shines in terms of dynamics, power, and control. This transforms the song into a rousing monster birthday celebration. We celebrate the clarity, transparency, and spaciousness of the soundstage once again in the opera: Nadine Sierra sings "Ah, fors'è lui" from Verdi's "La Traviata" at the RAI di Torino Auditorium, accompanied by the RAI Radio Orchestra. The performance is phenomenal: we can pinpoint the location of the entire ensemble, right down to the back of the orchestra, where the vocal sections are seated and the individual instruments are playing. In the foreground, Nadine Sierra captivates us with the beauty of her voice and flawless technique. During her artistic solo passages, we hold our breath – because thanks to the imaging magic of the Amp I, we enjoy the magic of her voice from the best seat in the concert hall, right down to Sierra's softest breaths.



*The Accoustic Arts Amp I in the listening room. Here, the stereo power amplifier is playing with the Lumin P1 mini and a pair of Peak Consult Sonora speakers.*

## Conclusion

The Accoustic Arts Amp I proves that excellent power amplifier amplification is possible even on a more compact scale. To achieve this, the Lauffen-based high-end manufacturer streamlined the amplifier's design while retaining its key hallmarks: Powered by a high-capacity, high-reserve power supply, selected MOSFET transistors amplify the signal in a current mirror circuit implemented in a strict dual-mono design. This 330-watt stereo power amplifier thus delivers a sound reproduction that rivals the outstanding sonic character of Accoustic Arts' flagship models – especially with damping factor linearization activated. The performance is characterized by exceptionally low noise and distortion, as well as immense purity and transparency. The combination of power and control ensures an absolutely pristine sound reproduction with astounding clarity, extending all the way down to the punchy, well-defined bass. Thanks to its exceptional level of detail and outstanding resolution, the Amp I achieves an immersive, three-dimensional soundstage and a phenomenally vivid and present rendering of the musicians and their instruments. Its superb dynamic range also contributes to an impressively lifelike reproduction – in true audiophile excellence.

Test & Text: [Volker Frech](#)

Photos: Simone Maier

## EVALUATION

Summary

**Overall rating: 100+**

**Class: Luxury class**

**Price/performance ratio: reasonable**



## Technical data

<b>Product category:</b>	<b>Power amplifier (stereo)</b>
Prices:	- with chrome inlay: €17,900.00 - with gold inlay: €19,200.00
Guarantee:	3 years
Details:	- Case: Silver, Black - Applications (inlay, medal, feet): Chrome-plated, gold-plated
Distribution:	Accustic Arts, Lauffen Tel.: +49 7133 97477-0 www.accusticarts.de
Principle:	Transistor amplifier, dual-mono design, current mirror principle
Dimensions (H x W x D):	206 x 482 x 420 mm
Weight:	32,1 kg
Inputs (analog):	1 x balanced (XLR) 1 x unbalanced (RCA)
Input impedance:	Symmetrical (XLR): 16 k $\Omega$ (manufacturer's specification) Unbalanced (RCA): 15 k $\Omega$ (manufacturer's specification)
Outputs (analog):	2 x speakers
Minimum connection impedance:	4 $\Omega$ (manufacturer's specification)
Performance:	Sine wave output power (@ 1 kHz, THD+N = 0.1%): - max. 2 x 330 W at 4 $\Omega$ (manufacturer's specification) - max. 2 x 210 W at 8 $\Omega$ (manufacturer's specification)
Voltage amplification	25 dB (manufacturer's specification)
Signal-to-noise ratio:	-96 dB at 4 $\Omega$ at 1 kHz and 10 W (manufacturer's specification)
Total harmonic distortion (THD+N):	< 0.01% at 4 $\Omega$ at 1 kHz and 10 W (manufacturer's specification)
Crosstalk attenuation:	> 86 dB at 1 kHz (manufacturer's specification)
Power consumption at idle:	approx. 75 W (manufacturer's specification)

**Product category:** Power amplifier (stereo)

Quiescent current: Approximately 160 mA (manufacturer's specification)

Scope of delivery:

- Accoustic Arts AMP I
- Power cable (1.8 m)
- 1 pair of gloves
- Cleaning cloth
- 2 spare fuses
- Quality and testing certificate
- User manual (German)
- Wooden accessory box

Optional accessories: Flight case for transport (€480.00)

Pros and cons:

- + Superb workmanship
- + Elegant design, high-quality feel
- + Outstanding noise and low noise levels
- + Immense purity and transparency
- + High level of detail
- + Excellent spatial representation
- + Stunning three-dimensionality
- + Superb dynamics
- + Rich power and outstanding control
- + Wonderful relaxation and tranquility in playback
- + Damping factor linearization (can be deactivated)
- + Protection circuitry against clipping, high-frequency vibrations, and excessive DC offset
- + Inrush current limiting with DC mains filter
- + Balanced input (XLR) and unbalanced input (RCA), switchable
- + Mute switch enables noiseless cable changes
- + 4 binding posts allow bi-wiring
- + Grounding terminals for shielded speaker cables
- High power consumption at idle

**Grading:**

**Overall grade:** 100+

Class: Luxury Class

Price-performance: appropriate

Tested with: Tested with:  
- Streaming preamp: Lumin P1 mini

**Product category:**

**Power amplifier (stereo)**

- Speakers: Audio Physic Midex
- Signal cables: Audioquest Black Beauty XLR, Black Beauty RCA
- Speaker cables: Audioquest Rocket 88
- Power cable: Audioquest Monsoon