

Two years on...

Vitus Audio SS-010 V2 amplifier & Andromeda cable set

by Chris Thomas

It has been more than two years since the Vitus amp first stunned me with its musical abilities. Since then it has undergone several internal modifications. Now, with the introduction of the new mains lead, the company's own Andromeda cable concept is complete, too. When I reviewed the amp, I asked Hans Ole Vitus, the designer and manufacturer, whether he regarded it as a power amplifier with a volume control and two inputs or as an integrated amplifier. He liked the former description, but I have mainly used it as the latter and have yet to hear a single-box solution that I have

enjoyed as much.

At the time of the first review, I did have the Andromeda speaker cables and the RCA terminated interconnect leads but, as these were completely new and the amplifier was a well-used example, I chose not to include them at the time for fear of muddying the waters. Who knew then how long the cables would have taken to run-in? So I employed Nordost Valhalla throughout, including mains cables, as these were the best I had to hand. The results were superb so, when I heard from Vitus that he had decided to make some internal changes

to the SS-010, I was intrigued. The only real criticism I had was that there was not enough gain available when the amplifier was used with a separate preamplifier so he decided to address that and several other issues to produce a Version 2 model.

Where the original employed a 24-step volume control, the new model has 48 steps, which has enabled it to achieve full gain at the input stage and therefore full sensitivity. It also makes setting the volume level notably more accurate. There was a rearrangement of circuit design, which saw the power supply capacitors moved across to the amplifier PCB and that, Vitus claims, gives the SS-010 V2 better impulse handling. Apart from these, the amplifier remains as before. Extremely sturdily built around a massive 1,400KVA UI transformer (UI being the shape) that physically dominates the internals, the amplifier still weighs in at a mighty 35kg and for its size and weight produces what seems like a fairly conservative power output of 25 watts in either Class A or A/B. It still provides only two inputs, one single-ended and



▶ one balanced. All adjustments are made via a neat menu system that controls input and class switching, volume adjustment, display illumination and of course the procedure that removes the preamp section from line and configures the unit to be employed as a power amplifier. There is now also an untested Vitus remote, which will take the place of the originally supplied Phillips Pronto.

The Andromeda cabling is manufactured by Vitus and is the result of the sort of painstaking research that is so much a part of Hans Ole's singular approach to audio. He started by working with different suppliers of raw copper. Each type was provided in equal purity before being made into cables and subjected to extensive listening tests. Then, with the materials selected, the cabling was manufactured with typical Vitus attention to detail.

Each consists of 20 different gauge, individually isolated conductors, spun in a unique way. No less than four isolation zones are incorporated into a new Dielectric structure they call DSE (short for 'Dielectric Skin Eliminator', which sounds like disturbingly like some sort of instrument of torture). Quite obviously this is a complex procedure but essentially

comprises of two, highly insulated inner zones, totally anti-static and employed to create the right atmosphere around each conductor. A third procedure installs an isolation zone while the fourth is then added to provide a minimum surface contact between the different poles in the final wire. All Andromeda cabling is essentially of this construction and the result is a thick black wire that – while not the most aesthetically elegant – is soft and extremely compliant.

This makes dressing the speaker cabling around corners surprisingly easy. The speaker cables themselves comprise of three individual wires per pole, gently plaited together, giving six for each speaker.

The whole essence of what this amplifier is about is expressed when listening in Class A. When idle it can be flipped into A/B (where it still sounds very good) and this halves the power consumption, or it can be put into stand-by. But for serious and intense listening sessions nothing comes close to its delicious tonality and flow that emerges



about an hour after the Class A setting has been selected and the amplifier is fully warmed. From then it just gets better and better, the more work you ask it to do.

When the V2 first arrived it had a literally months of running in ahead of it and I have lived with it for a year now. Even after a few hundred hours of initial use I was disappointed with the bass. It just wasn't right. I was still using a Nordost mains lead as the Andromeda was a late summer arrival and the low-end performance seemed to lack extension. It was also compressed and I was certainly missing that freedom and elastic feeling of movement that I had so enjoyed with the V1.

However, soon after the Vitus mains lead arrived and was installed, the amplifier changed character completely and as this spent more and more time in use I really started to hear what



▶ the V2 was capable of. Over the intervening period I have had a chance to use it with a variety of equipment in a number of different situations and I have to say that, with the complete cable system in place the new SS-010 has shown a quite different side to its character. Sonically the Andromeda is a darker cable than the Nordost. With the Vitus amp, it is perhaps a little less agile with a touch less high frequency delicacy, but is more intense and deeply shaded. Tonally it shifts the spectrum down a notch and adds more weight and sheer width to the musical balance. The focus it brings is more about the amplifier's special ability to show you the colour and timbral character of instruments without ever shredding the musical picture or interfering with its natural sense of dynamic precision.

The advantage that the best integrated amplifiers, with shared power supplies, have over many separate pre/power combinations lie in the word. They can seem simply more musically integrated and the SS-010 V2 is a classic case in point. It actually sounds

less like most people's idea of a piece of high-end audio than just about any other amp. There is no sense of extended top to bottom bandwidth. The instruments are imbedded within the pictures it paints and its control over them and the rhythmic conditions is entirely natural and unforced. I can guarantee that it will sound unusual at first to many people as there is nothing immediately attention-grabbing about it's performance. But there is a deep body of muscular strength that lies at the heart of the amplifiers performance that no doubt stems from that huge transformer and this brings a sense of unflustered calm to everything you ask it to do. Control is superb but with no feeling that the electronics are exerting superfluous grip and as a result instrumental articulation, although not the very best I have heard, it still extremely impressive.

One of my favourite systems for the SS-010 V2 is the Burmester CD 001 CD player and the Focal JM Labs Diablo speakers with Andromeda cabling throughout, including the mains lead for the CD player. This is one of the most musically satisfying systems, built around an integrated amplifier, I have heard.

The Diablo is certainly a demanding speaker but even though it is only 25 watts per channel, this set-up is musically powerful, with layers and layers of instrumental texture and subtlety that just flow (that word again) from the speakers with a stability and concise resolution of the great and small that I really enjoy. But, are those 25 watts enough I hear

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Vitus Audio SS-010 v2

Type: Power amplifier
with volume control

Power Output: 25 W Class A
25W Class AB

Inputs: 1 x RCA, 1x XLR

Input Impedance: RCA-10 K ohms,
XLR -600ohms

Frequency Response: DC to 800kHz

THD: Better than 0.01%

Dimensions (HxWxD):
130x435x430 mm

Weight: 35 Kg

Price: £13,500

Vitus Audio Andromeda cable

Prices:

1m interconnect£2,160

1.5m power cord£1,650

2x2.5m speaker cable£5,130

Manufacturer: Vitus Audio A/S
Denmark

Net: www.vitusaudio.com

Distributor: Metropolis Music

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you ask? This Vitus majors on quality rather than paper power and those Class A watts will be enough for most, although those with very inefficient speakers and/or very large rooms may find it marginal but then there is always the SM-010 which is a mono version of this model. The big problem at the moment is that, like most equipment built abroad, the Vitus is an unwitting victim of the crippling current exchange rates and its price has rocketed since I first heard the V1. That's a judgement call for any prospective buyers, but all I can say is that this remains a remarkable amplifier and I can only give it and the cabling a huge thumbs-up. ▶+

