

REVIEWS NAIM
NAIT 50 £2,850



Fifty something

As he pops the champagne, **Nick Tate** celebrates Naim's 50th anniversary with its new, limited edition, Nait 50 integrated amp

They used to say that you know you're getting old when policemen look young, but these days – for audiophiles at least – it's a case of being able to remember the original product that's just being relaunched as an anniversary model. We have seen umpteen tribute products over the past few years, now it's Naim's turn to get in on the act.

The original Nait integrated amplifier was launched 20 odd years after the company started in 1973, and caused a stir for several reasons. First, Naim had a reputation for mid-to-high end pre/power amps and integrations weren't taken very seriously back then. Second, the amp itself was quite quirky – with a very

low power output and a balance control that was simply a screw-adjusted trim pot to control the volume of one channel! Yet it sounded very good for the money, providing you matched it to the right speakers.

Rather than simply releasing a souped-up version of the first Nait 1, this is more of a modern clean-sheet design done in the style of the original. Steve Sells, Naim's Technical Director, tells *HFC* that Naim's founder and (then) Managing Director Julian Vereker designed the Nait 1: "to be a no-nonsense great-sounding product" – and that's the idea of the Nait 50 now. But there's a twist, because this is a limited edition anniversary model of which only 1,973 are being made.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Naim Nait 50
ORIGIN
UK
TYPE
Integrated amplifier
WEIGHT
4.5kg
DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
207 x 87 x 321mm
FEATURES
• Quoted power: 2x 25W RMS (8ohm)
• Inputs: 2x 5-pin DIN; RCA phono
• 6.3mm headphone socket
DISTRIBUTOR
Naim Audio Ltd.
WEBSITE
naimaudio.com

"The approach was to design a gem-like modern version of the Nait 1", Steve reveals. "We wanted it to be instantly recognisable and to reflect Julian's design. However, we did not want a facsimile of the original. Keeping it simple meant no remote and no software, which means interacting with the product and being immersed in the ceremony of listening to music. To walk up to a product, put a record on, sit back, and enjoy until the end of the record."

The Nait 50 combines new aspects together with sub-assemblies from

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existing Naim products. For example, its headphone amplifier is from the Atom HE and NAC 332, while the discrete transistor phono stage is new and bespoke. The power amp section is a re-engineered small version of the New Classic NAP 250 with Sanken power transistors instead of Naim's own NA009 types.

The result is a beautifully packed, retro-styled amp that's thoroughly modern on the inside, yet ties in closely with the original's design values. It offers a claimed 2x 25W RMS per channel into 8ohm (with

40W into 4ohm, 60 into 2). Yet that is still low when you can buy a 2x 150W RMS (8ohm) integrated amplifier for half that, these days.

The Nait 50 loses the silly 'trim pot' balance control and gains a 6.3mm headphone socket in its place. It has three switchable inputs for moving magnet phono, aux and streamer. It feels substantially better built than the original and has a white LED. Round the back you get a cleanly laid-out pane, with DIN sockets for aux and streamer inputs, plus RCAs for the phono in.

Sound quality

This amplifier has quite deliberately not been designed to have the mainstream appeal of the modern Nait range. It's not as good an all-rounder as amps such as the Nait XS 3 (*HFC* 454), for example, and its power is obviously limited. At the same time, it's a highly enjoyable-sounding amplifier if you match it to reasonably sensitive speakers that go usefully loud with a modest amount of power, such as Acoustic Energy's AE509 floorstanders (*HFC* 456).

Tonally it is a quintessential modern Naim, which is to say upfront and open but nowhere near as bright as the original Nait 1. It's more user friendly and will match a wider range of speakers and/or sources as a result. Via a Chord Hugo TT2 (*HFC* 468) DAC Supertramp's *Child Of Vision* never sounds strident despite being a pretty fierce recording. This lets you enjoy the superb musicianship, with its lightning attack transients off the drum kit, dramatic keyboard playing and brilliantly syncopated vocals.

It may not have the sheer wallop of most rivals, but it grips the music and articulates it in a vivid, dynamic and engrossing way. It really goes for the jugular of the song's emotion and dramatic tension in recordings such as this. This makes it just as entertaining on rhythm-driven techno music, such as Goldie's *Timeless*. There's so much happening in the mix, and despite its modest-on-paper power output, the Nait 50 really wants to tell you about it. The gut-churning bass isn't as fulsome as with some rivals, but little can match the speed of delivery. It has real *joie de vivre*, with a spirited midband and clear, incisive treble.

This is more than a little confusing, as you'd expect small, low-powered amps to sound weak and anaemic, wheezing under the strain. Yet it's pretty much the opposite, like a cheeky little terrier that wants to make its mark on the neighbourhood – and no one has told it it's smaller



The parallels with Musical Fidelity's new A1 are striking. Both the original Nait and the first A1 appeared around the same time in the mid-Eighties, and the anniversary models arrived close together. The A1 has similar rated power, but is pure Class A and rather than a clean-sheet redesign is closely based on the original, but with modern tweaks. The A1 isn't as animated sounding as the Nait 50, but is much more detailed and has far superior soundstaging – so it depends on your taste. Both are great amps, but the A1 appears better value at just £1,500.



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than all the other dogs! That's not to say it's unsubtle and loudish, though; listen to a well-recorded modern 'down tempo' track like *Zero 7's I Have Seen* and you're soon marvelling at the intricacies of the music. The Naim sets up a clear soundstage, inside which is a lot to listen for. Vocals come across strongly with an explicit centre image and beautifully counterpoint the synthesiser backing and percussion work behind.

The Nait 50 combines both new aspects and sub-assemblies from existing Naim kit

Although it can't serve up massive, gut-churning bass, the bottom end is crisp and propulsive, pushing the song along as if in a hurry. Above this, synths come across in a large and imposing way, gutsy and full bodied. Vocals are sultry, reflective and quite mesmeric, and the overall effect is of a moving musical event. Indeed, it has a kind of subtle magic to it; it's all about quality rather than quantity, and the result is that it evokes a dreamy, reflective mood that's just right for this track.

Soundstaging isn't the widest at this price, but is still in the style of the rest of the amplifier's character. It's upfront and engaging, not distant and disconnected. The original Nait is a good deal more vague in comparison, with instruments anchored less securely in the recorded acoustic. It's not especially great in terms of depth perspective, but its 'close and

personal' presentation seems more intimate. You find yourself following the vocal lines more often, and enjoying how really good singers can use their voices in a percussive as well as melodic way. Its rendition of *Siouxsie And The Banshees' Swimming Horses* is a case in point – dramatic, soaring and uplifting, you feel you're up-close-and-personal, basking in the drama of the occasion.

Conclusion

Best described as a specialist mini music maker, Naim's Nait 50 is a true thoroughbred. It gives a tantalising taste of what the company's high-end amplification can do, delivering a special sound that stands above the fray. Factor in the superb retro styling and excellent build, and it's hard to criticise – providing you understand why it exists in the first place. Whether you're a diehard Naim fan or simply want something that's a little bit out of the ordinary in your system, do consider this rare gem ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★
BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★
FEATURES
★★★★★
OVERALL
★★★★★

LIKE: Fun, musical sound; build quality; styling; rarity
DISLIKE: Low power; high cost
WESAY: Naim's 50th anniversary present to itself

