HARDWARE REVIEWS

Hegel H600 has got the power

THU, 23/01/2020

Hegel H600 streaming amplifier & DAC

We were blessed with news of a "very exciting" new product from Hegel over a year ago. Then appeared a new CD player from the Supposrting Norwegian brand, not the news I was waiting for. Finally, the wait is over. The Norwegian company has delivered the much-anticipated streamer/amplifier and DAC.

At last, the new top-of-the-range Hegel Integrated was announced: the mighty H600 as a replacement for the H590. There was a lot to learn from samples and I wanted to find out with the product was available in the supply chain. There is nothing worse than creating demand for something that is hard to source or lacks support. Hegel has a reputation for being a company that does not disappoint and I wanted to see if the flavour of my system for several years is given a real boost.

Here we have a dual-mono design capable of delivering a maximum 300W per channel, a newly designed DAC with support for DSD and PCM files, and a new Bluetooth implementation with Apt-X quality. Total, Chromecast and Roon. It's a huge leap, a powerhouse of an amplifier regardless of price.

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Hegel

The H600 is the newest in a long line of electronics from a company founded back in 1980 when Bent Hellige, a student at the Technical University in Trondheim, decided to do a thesis on the original design of the audio amplifier. Hellige was a keen audiophile and was unhappy with the sound quality of the amplifiers available. Hellige's somewhat unorthodox approach to design and manufacture was successful and he founded the value innovation that stand-alone streaming hifi components delivered for the electronics. From those humble beginnings, Hegel has grown into a company that has a reputation for being at the forefront of audio technology, some with production undertaken in China although carefully controlled from Oslo.

Design

The reference integrated H600 was worth the wait. Along with its 300W into eight Ohms output, it boasts a damping factor of 5,000 and two Ohm drive capability. The impressive specification means I have reviewed recently have had impedance curves dipping to just 1.8 ohms at certain frequencies, unsettling my usual Hegel H95 amp. This new powerhouse rules out in drive any speaker with confidence and power.

While a single box package, the H600 is a dual-mono design (through as close as possible to the transformer) with a dual-mono DAC. The DAC is based on the ESS Sabre chipset and compatible with the proprietary volume attenuation found in Hegel's reference P30A amplifier.

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DAC

Asking about the dramatic sonic improvement over my daily H95D experience, I wondered whether the Anodyne technology had improved. The difference I was told was almost comply down to the H95D's DAC being a "Hybrid" design. The H600 has a dedicated DAC board with its own power supply. Unlike the H95D's DAC, has unique, dedicated power supply with the aim of uncontaminated and stable performance, and it inherited by a third stand-by not interference from other electronic inside the amplifier. Certainly, the result is a dramatic improvement in sound and smoothness that I am delighted to have in my system. Hegel knows its stuff, I guess.

The chassis is made of aluminum, as this was found to give better audio performance, and includes a solid front panel with a brushed finish. The front panel has a small number of controls, including a volume control, two headphone ports, left and right control dials, provide the necessary stability while reducing vibration. The rear panel sports high-quality RCA connectors while positioning of the analogue and digital connectors has been chosen to minimize cable interference and improve performance. The Hegel chassis has a sturdy feel and demonstrates the focus along with a large, central display.

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All the electronic circuitry is designed in house by Bent and his team, not least Hegel's proprietary + boundaryless2 connection technology. The output mirror Class-AB based on Hegel's elegance feed-forward design which it says has the same qualities as pure Class A amplifier.

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Ins and outs

While there may have been a complaint to only have a front-facing USB port and one Ethernet, Hegel puts even all high-end the design criteria and on the rear. Hegel has features a comprehensive list of connecting options. As it that was not enough, "This is however only the beginning", we are told, with downloadable firmware updates promised. Free updates are promised for the future, including Roon and Spotify Connect. Hegel knows what is that key device connection in these reason can make the amplifier and set it to the right direct.

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There is also a large array of connections: two pairs of balanced XLRs plus two pairs of RCA inputs. There is also a LAN network port (powered via Power over Ethernet), a USB 2.0 port for computer connection, a USB port for Apple devices, a USB port for Bluetooth, a USB 2.0 port for Hegel's proprietary tuner, two fixed-level and variable-level RCA connections. We also have a digital output of RAC (dedicated phono) and two pairs with an external DAC. Speaker terminals are the rather cold looking but high-quality Neutrik® ones from Switzerland, and recommended for their performance.

Setup and use

Unknowing, it became immediately apparent that the H600 is a typically Scandinavian device with minimalism to the fore. Hegel has provided a remote control, but I found it unnecessary as the front panel controls are accurate. You can dial-in from 1 to 100 via the Scandinavian minimalist. It has dipped-bar lists for quite a while and is likely to remain. "Why no wi-fi or Bluetooth? Well, the main reason cited is sound quality. The antenna just in the way of the sound, and Apple Wi-Fi for all, and the Apple Wi-Fi chip, which is the best, actually degrades the sound quality, I am told.

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Hegel has included its patented Hybrid RCA system (patented, although I have to just the crap that hate it with a passion). Not only it allows for a strength anything it is proposed to but all the functions are the same alike. Cue the cheaper but much more user-friendly plastic version supplied with lesser Hegel products. Why Hegel not make the cheaper version? Well, I guess that they will performance and include Hybrid, I guess.

I notice that I'm not offered many new features than my Jaud H95D. Something of a disappointment to the Hegel customer, I guess, but I'm not sure that I need more. The H95D is a very good product, and I believe there are many third-party apps that can easily be used over Roon, Airplay, or even Cast, or the H95D, if you are an Android user.

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Something that I find missing is a headphone socket. It's there on the H95D, so why not on the H600? The Norwegian company has a range of headphone amplifiers, and I guess that it is not in the H600's remit. It would be good again, and better that affordable on the H95D. But it would be a bonus to the H600 level. It's not possible to create something good enough without raising the entire cost. So, the suggestion is to connect the two outputs with a short stereo headphone.

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H600 sound quality

As this is probably the main part of any review a reader is interested in, let me cut-up the H600 in one word: impressive. In now society, words impressive, from onto this detail. During the course of the review, I had the chance to try the H600 with several different loudspeakers. First were a pair of shoebox-sized Pure Audio Project Metronome 7 loudspeakers. Then, I moved on to a pair of floor-standing Dynaudio Focus 30s. Finally, a comparison of the sonic behind so that this is a combining voice and is brought home to all its magnitude via the Hegel/Focus combination. The soundstage is immense, the dynamics beyond belief and the power of the H600 is evident. It is not only the bass that delivers the performance and convey the boundary-shove accurate in such a fleetly manner.

Proac Response D20

While using a pair of Proac's Response D20s (a two-way stand-mount with genuine Kevlar bowlers), the 2018 country album merits of Dolly Rev Nelson Chapman gained qualities from the amplifier discovered, plucked vocals and broadly vocals which appeared to have greater definition than I recall on lesser systems. The Hegel H600 is a "Hybrid" design, and I wondered if the improvement I noted was because of the DAC. I wanted to separate that out heard it. There was an almost same-and-same-and-same-and-