

FULLY EQUIPPED AMP:

A tube preamplifier. A transistor power amplifier.
A digital/analogue converter. Plus a phono pre-amp.
And a Bluetooth module.

Magnat
MA 600



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Test result: very good 04-16

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Price tip 04-16



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A tube preamplifier. A transistor power amplifier. A digital/analogue converter. Plus a phono pre-amp. And a Bluetooth module. All of this in one device for just € 600? What may sound like an unrealistic pipe dream of a particularly frugal music lover goes by the name Magnat MA 600. We had to suss out this feature-laden wonder for ourselves.

Conceptually, the Magnat MA 600 represents a fusion of classic features and modern configuration requirements. Visually, however, it is bound solely by tradition: A factual presence in a 43 cm, solid metal housing and an 8 kg fighting weight. The five-millimeter-thick brushed aluminum front panel looks tidy with its large display, an input for mobile devices, a headphone jack, source select buttons, a power button and a combined menu/volume knob. It doesn't need anything else. The supplied remote control provides access to additional functions such as the equalizer and mute settings.

A real eye-catching element of the amp is its tube, which conveys a warm orange glow via the front porthole. Magnat has opted to enhance the sensual aura here slightly with a small LED. This is a pre-selected ECC 88 tube that has an envisaged service life of up to 50,000 hours. According to Magnat, when the amp is delivered the tube has already been burned in for 60 hours to ensure it can operate at a high level from the very outset. During development Magnat's engineers placed special emphasis on the low-noise performance of the preamplifier. This much can be said: A trace of noise was only audible when the volume knob was cranked up to its stop and only then when we were up close, with our ear directly on the speaker. Everything is quiet at normal listening distances.

The "pre-ignited" audio material from the tube ultimately lands in the semiconductor output stage, which, according to our measurements of 2 x 65 watts RMS (4 ohms @ 1% THD), has been well-equipped from a technical point of view. A look under the hood reveals that Magnat has generally not scrimped on the use of materials: An elaborate power supply unit with separately stabilized voltages, a generously dimensioned toroidal transformer and large capacity filter electrolytic capacitors.

Practical advantage: Hybrid

A combination of tube preamplifier and transistor output stage makes sense in this price class. This is because tube-based amplifiers place certain demands on a speaker. Conditions such as linearized impedance or a high degree of efficiency, however, can hardly be guaranteed in the "bread and butter" category, whereby an amplifier must interact well with all inexpensive or existing speakers. The performance of the MA 600 must be free of airs and graces – and this is where the rock-solid transistor technology in the power amp section proves to be a very wise and sensible decision. The hybrid MA 600 represents an anomaly in the € 600 league by its technical construction alone – and

this unique selling point would ensure a compelling position in the market by itself. But apparently that wasn't enough for Magnat. Because, in addition to the phono to tape inputs that are customary in this class, the MA 600 also boasts a complete digital section that is based on a tried and tested TI/Burr Brown chip. This is capable of handling high-resolution data of up to 24 bit/192 kHz – at each of the three inputs (coaxial, optical and USB). But that's not all from this equipment-laden giant from Pulheim. The rear-mounted antenna alludes to a more contemporary feature: Bluetooth. In accordance with the superior apt-X standard, audio signals from appropriately equipped mobile devices can be played wirelessly via the MA 600. And the quality is very close to that of a CD.

From 0 to 100 in 15 seconds

During operation the first thing we notice is that the amplifier, which, incidentally, is supplied via a separate power supply unit, takes 15 seconds to boot up from its standby status. The display counts down accordingly. Even the impatient ones among us can endure this time frame to ensure the device reaches its optimum operating conditions. To get acquainted with the amp I start down the analogue road and play the current LP "Karica-Tar" by Karl Hector & The Malcouns. This 100 percent hand-played, simmering Neo-Afro-Jazz-Fusion naturally plays into the hands of the MA 600 with its harmonious, heart-fulfilling sound. And it's exactly that: The sound from the tube/transistor hybrid is emitted in an extremely coherent, warm and natural manner. Its reproduction is of the collective whole and not the separation of individual elements. The MA 600 reproduces the groove, the heat and the atmosphere of the music in a very compelling way. As the recording quality of the Karl Hector album exhibits more of a rustic than elaborate character, we place Gregory Porter's album on the turntable next. The productions by the exceptional vocalist sound like they are in a much higher league. In "Painted On Canvas" Magnat's amp reproduces Porter's sonorous vocals in a wonderfully rounded style. Which was expected. The fact that it's also capable of distinguishing the accompanying intricate work on the snare drum doesn't need to be said. Magnat's amp can do more than just "nice".

Even though it may give you the impression at first glance, the hybrid tube amp is not only gifted when it comes to organic music. When playing the extremely deep digital techno/dub track "303/303/303/303/808" by TM 404, which is supplied via USB directly from our MacBook, it is evident that it's not overwhelmed by the underground, low-frequency bursts – as long as things are kept within socially acceptable limits. In addition, the Magnat amp generates a nice degree of spatiality within the comprehensive sound pattern and, in doing so, it represents the crunching effects of the Roland rhythm machines in a moderately crisp manner.

Now it's back to the world of pure musical handiwork. The bass power that is demanded of the amplifier by the bass drum and bass synthesizer during the intro to "Desire" by the blue-eyed soul singer, Boz Scaggs, is simply astounding. Playback is profoundly rich and substantial. Compared to the excellent Marantz HD-AMP1 that I recently tested, Magnat's amp is lacking somewhat when it comes to the last vestiges of control and dynamic agility. It isn't a fully-fledged, dynamic sports car. But that's perfectly in order. Especially since the MA 600 hybrid, with its extensive configuration, is around half the price of the HD-AMP1 and freely delivers its special melodious qualities. And, as soon as we hear the disarming timbre of Bozz Scaggs, there is an immediate feeling of perpetual joy again thanks to the sumptuous vocal presentation of the Magnat unit.

It cannot get on your nerves

This amplifier not only tends to reproduce most styles of music from their best side, but it also allows hours of relaxed listening pleasure thanks to its thoroughly amiable representation. An ideal blend of yesterday and today ensures the Magnat MA 600 amp is extremely well suited for satisfying all of the audio requirements of everyday life in a high class manner. It reproduces music with an audiophile quality and is, so to speak, notoriously practical. Even if you want to play music wirelessly via a tablet, enhance the sound of your flatscreen TV via the digital input or play a record that you have just bought from a flea market – Magnat's amp will do it all. And it will do it well. An MA 600 may be the ideal device for all of those music lovers who, after years of frustration with their AV receiver, want to return to the stereo world, yet stay within their budget when doing so.

Sound quality	very good
Labor	good
Equipment	outstanding
Workmanship	very good
Result	very good