

ADVANCE PARIS

GROUP OF THREE – INTEGRATED / PRE-POWER AMPLIFIERS & 'ALL-IN-ONE'

Advance Paris is quite likely a new name to most of our readers; it is indeed a fresh face here in Australia. But it's far from a newcomer. With a 25-year history in its domestic market and Europe as Advance Acoustics, the company was making loudspeakers as far back in 1995, before expanding into electronics with its first amplifier in 2003. It went global via IFA 2005 in Berlin and now distributes in over 40 countries, from its headquarters in Brie-Comte-Robert, outside Paris.

Recent changes include its name — now Advance Paris — and its leadership, with a new team led by CEO Dimitri Peucelle, formerly of Citroen, and of Dyson in France, Italy, and Spain.

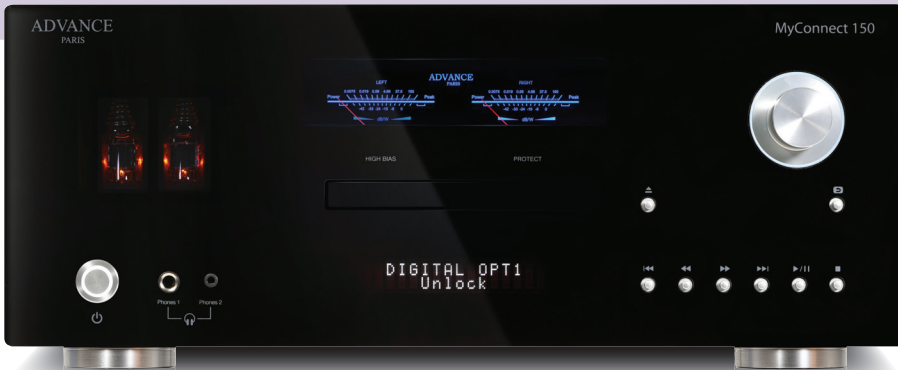
The Advance Paris product catalogue is comprehensive, with a greater emphasis now on electronics than speakers. We've so far played with three separate Advance

Paris products: an amplifier, a pre-power amplifier combination, and a remarkable all-in-one which does pretty much everything bar the speakers. Together they reveal much of the philosophy behind Advance Paris, while also revealing the quality and value on offer from this new arrival to hi-fi stores Down Under.

Solid stereo A12 Classic amplifier

Let's start with the A12 Classic (below), a straightforward stereo hi-fi amplifier pitched at an upper-midrange price of \$4499. Straight away we enjoy key Advance Paris characteristics, the front fascia in full black, dominated by two large and lovely





blue VU meters, calibrated to show power output into eight ohms, and also dB. These are traditional analogue needles on a panel, and look great centred in the 43cm width of the A12, though it rises a high 19.5cm and stretches back 445mm. It weighs an impressive near-18kg.

Between the two VU meters, behind the glass, sit a couple of smallish vacuum tubes. These are employed in the pre-amplifier section in order to provide, says Advance Paris, “a musical sounding amplifier without aggressiveness.” We’d lean to the view that ‘valve sound’ has more to do with power amplifiers — the differences in distortion characteristics compared to solid-state output stages, rather than their use in what is here a hybrid amplifier with valves in the preamp, but then a solid-state power stage delivering 190W per channel into eight ohms, 280W into four ohms.

In an email exchange with Mssr. Peucelle, he noted that Advance Paris is using ECC-81 tubes, “renowned since the 1950s... These are very high quality

so-called ‘low noise’ tubes, ideal for the perfect signal processing, they make it possible to attack the transistor power stage with the best precision.”

Whatever their effect, their gentle reddish glow was wonderfully attractive.

While the power amps are solid-state, they have an unusual option to switch to a ‘high bias’ mode, which heavily biases their push-pull transistors away from the ‘zero’ point, where crossover distortion occurs.

This ‘high bias’ feature is available across all of the amplifier sections in the three products we tested. It means that except when you’re playing very loud, the majority of the music will be in pure Class-A mode, with no crossover distortion at all.

The cost of this mode is higher energy consumption and greater heat production.

The other delight common across Advance Paris products is their rear panels, which are exceedingly well-stocked, as well as loaded with various intriguing switches that can adapt the various inputs and outputs to your needs. On the A12 you get five traditional stereo RCA inputs, a phono input switchable between moving magnet and moving coil cartridges (and with selectable load and impedances). There are two sets of balanced XLR inputs, an ‘amp in’ input that goes through at full level (mercifully off by default), and then a preamp out, two configurable subwoofer outs, and two headphone outs with various adjustments for different headphone types.

"their rear panels exceedingly well-stocked, as well as loaded with various intriguing switches to tweak the various inputs and outputs..."

The Advance Paris MyConnect 150, with a CD player, streamer and amplifier all in one box.

The digital section has three optical inputs, three coaxial inputs, an AES/EBU XLR, USB-A, USB-B for computer, and two HDMI sockets, one labelled as HDMI audio (e.g. if your Blu-ray player as a separate audio output), the other for HDMI ARC from your TV. Amazingly the HDMI input even allows video forwarding to the output, though only up to 1080p.

All in all, there are very few better-equipped amplifiers around.

And we loved the sound of the A12. Playing files and Tidal digitally from PC, everything sounded great — well, except for the music which didn’t. With the kind of transparency on offer from this Advance Paris amplifier, there’s no hiding the limitations of bad recordings. But stuff we know to be of high quality, and a surprising amount of regular music, simply sounded great. Especially at higher volume levels. And really, regardless of the bias setting.

And with vinyl, real thrills. The 1981 CBS Master Sound Half-Speed Mastered release of Billy Joel’s 1978 album ‘52nd Street’ on a Technics turntable with an Audio-Technica Shibata stylus, sounded simply wonderful. Great timing, with everything in complete order, excellent presentation of percussion.

The works MyConnect 150 all-in-one

Take the stereo amplifier with its glowing front and massively-loaded rear, then keep loading in more abilities. The ECC81 valves are still there, the VU meters are still bouncing, but this all-in-one MyConnect 150 (pictured above left) also has a CD player built-in to the front panel, there are FM/DAB+ radio tuners inside and antenna connections on the rear. And there’s a full streaming section included, under the control of Advance Playstream, an app available for Apple and iOS phones.

The app is purely for streaming (you can’t select inputs or change amp settings), with access to Spotify, Tidal, Amazon Music and others, as well as playing files from NAS drives. There’s also AirPlay; Bluetooth requires an external dongle (which is included with the A12 amp, but not here).

The rear panel is again fully loaded — three sets of speaker outputs; yes three! We can’t recall ever seeing this on a consumer product. Seven RCA analogue inputs here!

< Well stocked! The A12 Classic’s back panel.





Plus the switchable loadable phono input, three optical, two coaxials, USB-B, USB-A (which proved a little limited in formats), the two subwoofer and headphone outputs, though no HDMI here, and no XLR outputs.

Those omissions are not a surprise, as the price here is \$3799, lower than the stereo amp, but with streaming, CD and radio added. Something has to go, clearly, and so we also find lower amplification levels (though still 2 x 130W into 8 ohms, 2 x 190W into 4 ohms) and a different DAC — TI's TI PCM1796 (accurate and neutral when implemented well) instead of the AKM AK4490 (musical and forgiving) in the A12 Classic stereo amp.

So did it sound like a lesser amplifier? Hardly. With its bias switch engaged the MC150 absolutely pounded out the Dandy Warhols' *We Used To Be Friends* from CD, with a thumping bass line and whizzing fizzy bits located with pinpoint accuracy in a soundstage both wide and spacious.

It has pace as well as power, keeping the percussive piano of Tori Amos' *Winter*

sharply focused and foregrounded for the solo bars, but then with the vocal looming crisply over the top, yet still leaving perfect clarity in the rest of the mix. We had some issues with the app and streaming, but for everything else, this was an extraordinary all-in-one offering; just add speakers.

Three-box amp X-P700 & X-A220 Evo

If it's full-on power you're after, you might go for Advance Audio's X-P700 preamplifier and a pair of X-A220 Evo power amplifiers. You can't tell from the pics here but each of the power amps is bigger than the whole MyConnect 150, while the pre-amplifier is lower in height — and here lacks the valves. Its size also limits the inputs, though there are still seven analogue RCA inputs and the switchable phono input, no HDMI, only two opticals and one coaxial, one USB-A and USB-B, one XLR input and XLR preouts to the power amps. There's one subwoofer output, and again the choice between two optional Bluetooth modules.

The VU meters move one to each power amp, each of which, as the name might suggest, rated with a power output of 220W into 8 ohms, or 350W into four ohms. Again there's sliding bias available — as with the other amps this is on the rear of each unit, which might be considered a little inconvenient, at least until you learn its position.

And there's not much more to tell, other than the wonderful music it made for us.

"We're just scratching the surface here: Advanced Paris has four integrated amps, four more networked amps, three all-in-ones, six power amps..."

The X-P700 preamplifier, which pairs with two of the X-A220 Evo power amps (below).

Listening to Gracie Abrams' album 'Good Riddance', we were impressed by the way the Advance Paris pre/power trio delivered the emotional content of the confessional nature of the lyrics, while simultaneously delivering the purity of the finger-picked acoustic guitar sound, the depth of the bass and the overall atmospheric. *Full Machine* may not be the album's best track, but sonically it's a masterpiece that the Advance Paris partnership was able to reproduce in our listening room to perfection.

So each of our first three visitors from Advance Paris managed to impress us with their sound, their wide raft of inputs and in the MC150 the breadth of abilities in a single product. Anything we didn't like? The streaming app for the MC150 was fairly bare bones and had a number of glitches on different services, though all things which can be fixed. One other thing on the valve models: each time you power them up, you have to wait for an onscreen countdown from 30 to 0. This is to allow time for the tubes to warm up but half a minute is a lot in some circumstances — notably turning on your TV when there's something you really want to see and you miss nearly 30 seconds of news or a favourite show.

All together now

Overall though, these three Advance Paris products each sounded fabulous, and each was loaded with extraordinary input provision; we can recommend each of them to people whose needs they meet.

And we're just scratching the surface here: Advanced Paris has four integrated amps, four more networked amps, three all-in-one models, six power amps, CD players and streamers, each waiting to sit glowing on an equipment rack near you. 📺



ADVANCE PARIS AMPLIFIERS & ALL-IN ONE

- Great sound across range
- High bias mode for 'Class A'
- Great looks
- Some app issues on all-in-one

Prices: A12 Classic **\$4499**
MyConnect 150 **\$3799**
X-P700: **\$2299**
X-A220 Evo **\$2900** each

Contact: Synergy Audio Visual
Telephone: 03 9459 7474
Web: www.synergyaudio.com