



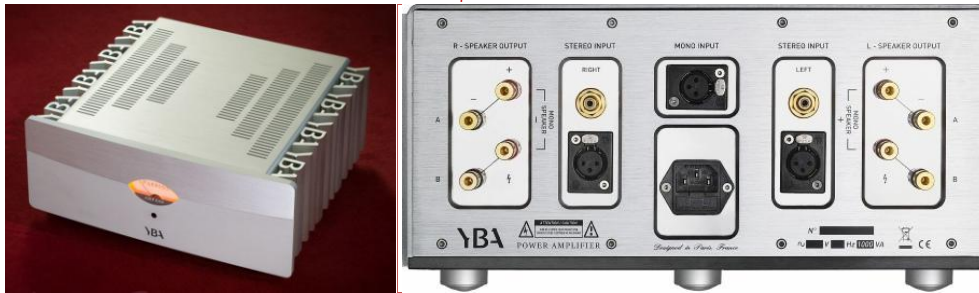
Passion A650 Amplifier
Passion Pre550A Preamp+Dual-Mono DAC

Owner Review

Loudspeakers: Wilson Benesch "ACT"
The reviewer also owns Dartzeel (18+108) separates

YBA Passion 650 amplifier

\$6700



Tech Specs

- YBA patented "alpha Class-A" circuit
- Internal bandwidth: 40Mhz
- Output (stereo): 200w/ch
- Output (mono): 600w/ch (XLR only)
- 2 prs binding posts: High or Low Damping
- 9mm Aluminum bottom plate with mechanical ground path

Build quality & styling: simply superb. The 650 looks pleasantly compact yet also very substantial and luxurious, with a beautiful metal casing, cool looking YBA shaped cooling fins and really nice amber colored display. Binding posts and connectors are of high quality. It runs warm but not hot enough to warm a room as most tube and even some brute solid state amps do, and it will fit in and even complement most living rooms, even ones with stylish decors. it also runs very quiet. This amplifier feels and looks like a truly high end machine, designed with unmistakable French modern flair.

Sound: with my speakers (Wilson Benesch ACT) and in my room (moderate size, shoe box shape), the Passion 650 walked an almost ideal line between musicality/naturalness and detail retrieval/transparency.

It exercises excellent control on drivers (notably with the "A" binding posts options) and always felt powerful and in control (never had the impression it was struggling or running out of steam, even on high modulation sections played at fairly high volume).

Its sound was very even keeled across frequencies, with impressive naturalness of timbres on human voices and acoustic instruments. Then again, it could rock just fine when required, thank you!

A lot of "transparent" components can - beyond the initial wow factor, make you cringe or develop listening fatigue. The 650 is not one of these, whilst providing excellent detail and transparency. Musicians are here, but not thrown on to the listener or artificially detoured like a picture which sharpness was boosted on Photoshop.

The choice of two pair of binding posts with different voicing/damping factor is a bonus: option B provides a suaver, more "tube-like" voicing, at the cost with my speakers of slightly looser bass and more subjective warmth. Both options are nice and can accommodate different preferences and equipment configurations. If it was a car, the 650 would be a high end version of BMW series 5 or Audi A5 ... or a luxurious Citroen sedan!

Criticisms: none. My 650 has to be rebiased, but that's a minor thing. Otherwise it functioned and delivered sonic goods flawlessly.

Overall: this is a LOT of amplifier for the money. I have heard a lot of amps over the last 10 years, and few solid state designs that I could enjoy. Not only the 650 is one of them but it is among my favorite! It just plays music with a competent, confident and supremely natural manner, packaged in a luxury design.

I could live with it and not look back - and probably would have, if I was not lucky enough to already own one of the most expensive (*six times the price of the 650*) and best amplifiers in the market.

The 650 almost convinced me to sell it: enough said? I don't see how anyone could go wrong purchasing a Passion 650. Now this makes me wonder how much better the YBA Signature amp can be ...

YBA 550A preamplifier & DAC

\$8000



Tech Specs

- 3 Analog Inputs: 2 RCA + 1 XLR
- 6 Digital Inputs: USB, I2S, Coax (RCA), Coax (BNC), AES/EBU, Optical
- Dual-Mono DAC
- 180° Phase Control
- 2 Linear Power Supplies: 1 Analog + 1 Digital
- Volume Attenuator: Burr-Brown 2320 resistor ladder
- 9mm Aluminum bottom plate with mechanical ground path

Build quality & styling

The 550 looks like a high end Swiss (think Nagra) machine, with an added touch of French flair. It is compact, very handsomely presented, with an attractive and very easily readable amber colored

display and a luxurious metal remote control. All controls and functions are easy, intuitive and pleasurable to use. YBA designed feet make the choice of support/stand less critical, which is nice. Binding posts and connectors are of high quality. Build quality is outstanding.

The versatility is remarkable: I defy anyone to find any type of input missing (even AirPlay, I2S and Ethernet are there, beyond the usual suspects!), and the combination of a DAC with a preamplifier makes a ton of sense (one less box, one less pair of IC cables). Too bad the designer couldn't also fit a phono stage, but that would have probably resulted in damaging compromises.

This machine looks and feels - and actually competes with, \$15,000 components.

Sound

In three words, the 550 sounds like it looks: refined, elegant and musical. This is a very revealing, subtle but also highly enjoyable pre/DAC, that delivers a remarkable combination of detail and musicality.

Compared to its 650 amplifier cousin, I would say it leans just ever so slightly towards air, nimbleness and transparency than towards "flesh and muscle", but don't that as an indication it's one of these artificially transparent components that make you restrict your musical diet to only the most pleasing sounding recordings, for fear of ending up grinding your teeth.

The 550 sounds unfailingly natural and musical. Both USB and coaxial inputs sound very close to my ears. I did not evaluate the AES/EBU or Ethernet. Like all high end electronics, it vastly benefits from a high quality power cord.

Criticisms

I was not sure how to connect the 550 directly to a network, and the manual is not very helpful in that regard. The DAC cannot play DSD files, which personally does not bother me as my experience with high resolution files so far has been more than mixed.

Overall

This is an innovative, modern and very assured component, that should grace any well designed system and living room. Compared to dedicated preamplifier and DAC and interconnects, the value for money is remarkable, and makes the 550 compete with much higher priced components. Unless you insist on a very fleshy, meaty, muscle bound sound, it's hard to see how anyone could go wrong with buying this French army knife.