

**NAD M25 POWER AMPLIFIER** | \$4499 | ★★★★★ | [www.audioproducts.com.au](http://www.audioproducts.com.au)

**For:** Awesome power and dynamics range.

**Against:** We don't own one. Yet.

**Conclusion:** Amazing Precision and control.

NAD has been famed in the past for its big power amplifiers – but none have come quite as huge or as mighty as the unfortunately titled M25. Weighing in at 44kg and nearly half a metre deep, not only is this behemoth the size and weight of most Krell power amps, it is just as solidly built and just as well finished too. Thankfully the price tag is far more NAD than Krell, and at \$4499 for 160W to all seven channels the M25 offers superb material value and power per pound.

Internal design centering on a huge Holmgren toroidal transformer, power rails made from chunky copper bus bars and seven completely discrete mono power amplifiers. The spec sheet quotes a near flat response from 3Hz to 70kHz and 118dB signal to noise ratio at full power. With 160W on tap the design is certainly going to create spectacular dynamics.

Of course this is a NAD design too – a company want to add nitrous-like power boosts to its amplifiers. Evolving from the Power Envelope feature of many moons ago the M25 now sports Powerdrive. This circuit engages a second high-voltage rail that nearly doubles the continuous power on a short term dynamic basis. Mama!

The external design shares the material mix and cosmetics of the matching disc player and processor. The intense blue LEDs show all channels in operation and the back panel offers seven phono inputs and seven pairs of binding posts that clearly wouldn't balk at zero-gauge cable. There is a 12V trigger to complete the Blofeld scenario and a switch to engage NADs old faithful 'soft clipping' feature.

Soft clipping ensures that if you are barking mad and/or stone deaf and want to drive the M25 to its limits, it will fall into gentle 'peak' clipping rather than full-scale distortion. Given the M25's power and current reserves, you would probably be sonically crushed and picking bits of molten speaker driver out of the sofa first. The manual should warn anyone who sees the soft clipping light on the M25 illuminate to seek urgent medical attention.

#### Quote, unquote.

It takes about a nano-second of listening to the M25 to realise it is something special in terms of dynamic headroom, bass extension and sheer control over speaker drivers. The soundstage is immense, bursting from an inky silent background with frightening realism and tautness. It is as if every note, every sound and every effect is chiselled into the air with laser like precision.

Hooked up to a big set of floorstanders with decent bass extension, the M25 renders a subwoofer all but an optional extra, such is its low down drive and power. We would go so far to say that no amplifier yet to grace the testing room has ever driven our system quite so hard nor kept them under such tight control.

Bass and snare drum attack is awesome, underpinning soundtracks with incredible low-frequency definition. The effects extends through the entire frequency spectrum keepin g a flat-neutral balance with tight control all the way from explosive LFEs up to shrill effects like shattering glass.

LAB REPORT	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Manufacturer's Output 160W per ch into 8				
Measured Power @ 1kHz				
2ch driven: 260W into 8Ω	✓			
5ch driven: 160W into 8Ω		✓		
8ch driven: 110W into 8Ω			✓	
8ch driven: 250W into 4Ω		✓		
Fidelity Firewall @ 1kHz				
170W into 8Ω (0.02%THD)		✓		
Distortion @ 1kHz				
0.01%THD @ 50W (8Ω)		✓		
Frequency response				
20Hz-20kHz +/-0.3dB		✓		

Dialogue is projected superbly and the M25's rendition of vocal scale gives actors with serious presence a tangible reality in your living room. This extends to music too, turning decent recordings into a full emotional experience complete with foot tapping, duck-walking or air-guitaring depending on your genre penchant.

Switching back to our reference power amplifier set up, the NAD can suddenly seem a little boisterous and heavy-handed with more delicate material. Genteel female vocals lack a little of the sparkle and minutiae tonal inflections of the very best esoterica, and it is not totally character-less... but let's get real. The M25 is a sub \$4500 power amp and comprehensively eclipses every other multichannel power amp in its class for sheer jaw-dropping performance and pretence-free home cinema enjoyment.

#### Versatile

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For us, the M25 is the star of the Masters Series and is the most versatile, weaving its potent magic with just about any processor or source you throw at it. If you like your home entertainment big and dramatic in every conceivable sense the M25 is an absolute bargain. It both ices the cake of a Masters Series system and offers itself as a first-class upgrade to just about any AV amplifier or receiver out there

#### CONCLUSION

The Masters Series not only represents a design departure for NAD – it could also spell the beginning of a new world order in the serious home theatre market. For a little less than \$11,000 you get AV performance that fights well above its price point and three gorgeously crafted boxes with design flair.

Compare and contrast to a typical Japanese AV combo at the same price: A slab-sided integrated AV amplifier festooned with features unlikely to ever see use in anger and over a grand's worth of DVD player that, to the untrained eye, looks just like a Chinese special. If you like features aplenty and a high gadget-count then the NAD Masters Series is not for you, but consider [carefully](#) just what you want an AV system for. If you come up with answers like performance, simplicity and pride of ownership – then look no further than your local NAD dealer

The M55 universal player is close to Arcam's DV-137 in design philosophy, performance and price – and gets a 5-star accolade in just the same way. In isolation the differences are miniscule. The Arcam nudges microscopically ahead of the darker sounding M15 with music while the NAD has marginally better picture contrast and so on. They both annoy by their lack of OSD to the HDMI output too, which is an amusing twist. Cosmetically, our vote goes to the NAD...

The M15 processor is a rare beast these days in that it eschews gadgetry – almost to a fault. There is no hint of auto-set-up or room EQ, no video scaling or up-conversion to HDMI and a distinct shortage of picture tweakery. But it matters little because the M15's fundamental sound processing and picture handling is fabulous from the outset. It is also joyously simple to use and its robust and detailed sound simply immerses you into movies – whatever the genre.

The M25 power amplifier is the brightest shining star of the Masters Series, causing a stir in the testing room the like of which has not been seen since the original *Star Wars* trilogy was launched on Laserdisc with AC-3 soundtrack. It is one of the most potent, dynamic and well-controlled multi-channel power amplifiers on the market and, frankly, a 24-carat bargain at less than \$4500. While each individual component has much merit in its own right, the Masters Series' ultimate strength lies in its holistic design and system synergy – the system as a whole being even greater than the sum of the parts.

This is both impressive and a potential flaw in the NAD plot. You can certainly purchase the M55 disc player for its excellent audio and visual performance, the M15 processor for its smooth sound and simplicity, or the M25 power amplifier for its awesome dynamics – but unless you have all three links in the chain you will never truly capture the full magic of the NAD Masters Series at its very best. Oh, go on then, We'll have all three...