Gold Note system

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There has always been a reluctance on the part of your average audio enthusiast to source their entire system from a single manufacturer. The reasons are historic and founded in the kind of knowledge and truths that perhaps tend to linger long after any real relevance. Few manufacturers are as good at making electronics as they are loudspeakers and to break that down still further, there are many examples of electronic manufacturers being better at designing and producing preamplifiers than power amplifiers, or vice versa. The resultant thinking has been to mix 'n match what each company does best and this, in my experience, can have mixed success.

Things have moved along though and for every rule, there have always been exceptions. Then there is always the thorny issue of component compatibility and system synergy to consider. I once hooked the best preamplifier I have ever heard into a pair of the best mono amplifiers that had crossed my path and the results were disappointing. Balancing the musical strengths of one component against another is tricky, but can also be an ultimately rewarding business. Getting them both to sing the same song, especially when the rather thorny issue of cabling is thrown into the mix, can be dicey. Then again, it can be glorious.

Fuss-free

A few issues ago I had the great pleasure of spending some time with the Gold Note DS-10 EVO, a single box network streamer DAC that also offered a really fine output level section that enabled it to be deployed as a preamplifier. Nothing especially new there you might think, except the performance was so musically involving and the function in tandem with its dedicated app so fuss-free that I could see that this machine had real system potential. I wrote as much and then discovered that there was an optional dedicated power supply available so, before it went back the distributor dropped one off and it did exactly what it

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» should have and moved the performance onto an entirely new level. Things were becoming more serious and my curiosity was piqued.

A glance through the Gold Note catalogue was revealing in its depth of products. Alongside a £62,000 turntable there was an entire 10-series range including a neat power amplifier that could be used as a stereo chassis or a pair of them could be employed as mono amplifiers, with a quite surprising lift in quoted available power. I am sure you can see where this is going as the idea of a full Gold Note system began to look more and more appealing if the DS-10 EVO experience was anything to go by. What about a pair of speakers? Lo and behold, Gold Note produce a range of five models, the smallest and immediately the most appealing to me were the A3 EVO II, a conveniently sized and quite beautiful little design which, I figured, would allow me to enjoy *Il Suono Italiano*, Gold-Note's motto, to the full. The course was set with only a few details to sort before I could embark on the journey.

As the system arrived without speaker stands or cabling that was the first issue that needed sorting. Running through my stash of speaker stands yielded some very variable results. No surprise in itself but the end solution was as unexpected as it was impractical. I still had a pair of the now defunct Quadraspire acrylic stands that slot neatly together from two pieces. If memory serves, these were the shorter versions and I had superb results when I used them a lot, several years ago, especially with lighter weight speaker designs. I would normally hesitate to recommend equipment that is no longer made but perhaps the low-mass construction of the Quadraspire designs gives a clue as to wringing the best from the A3 EVO IIs. Whatever the case, these stands set the speakers musically free. Primarily dynamically, but also in their whole sense of lightness of touch and speed. This was to remain the very best I could wring for them. Often these small designs are claimed to be suitable for shelf mounting. Personally I couldn't imagine a worse location for these speakers and this is a real compliment to their potential. They like and need free air to breathe, especially through that rear facing port. Correctly mounted, they will surprise and delight you and perhaps the bolt-together stands that Gold Note have designed for them are the answer. I don't know. Not having a pair means that I can't speak to that but my advice is to get your dealer to loan you several pairs of stands and try them in your listening room. The differences you will hear will guide you.

Stand out

The cabinets of the review pair were a real stand-out. A gloss walnut-veneered side panel has been shaped into a kind of diamond profile where the broadest point is alongside the 153 mm treated paper bass/mid driver and supplemented by a tasteful metallic inlay that runs the full depth of the cabinet. Atop that is a 28 mm silk-domed tweeter where the side panels taper down to give a truly elegant and classy cabinet dynamic. The front baffle that seems almost like a sub-structure in appearance is small and most people would be able to span the centres of the drivers with one hand. The cabinet is very stiff, thanks to those side panels but it has a bit of depth to it too at around »

» 300mm and the bass is loaded through a rear facing port. It's a compact design but its performance is anything but. In many ways it was the surprise package of the whole system, then again, no part of any system operates entirely independently.

I soon discovered that, like many Italian systems, this one majored on a smooth dynamic performance, full of colour and tonal light and shade. Cabling ended up as Nordost Blue Heaven. The reason I decided to go this way was because I like the linearity and speed of the Nordost cables which have an extremely delicate dynamic touch too without any excess baggage in the low end. I found that it balanced very nicely with the system's qualities. You might choose another option but the slight tonal lift that the Blue Heaven bought through midband worked well for me.

The PA-10 amplifier is the same size as each of the boxes in this system which means that the overall system aesthetics are great. This is a fully-balanced design that can be simply switched from a stereo chassis to a mono-block. Like all the 10-series electronics it is substantially constructed from a solid steel chassis and thick aluminium panelling for appropriate shielding. As a single stereo design it sounds sweet and very smooth with notable resolution and the sort of tonality and grip that the Gold Note speakers thrive on. Driven from the pre-out of the DS-10 EVO it has power levels that most smaller rooms are going to find entirely adequate. If you have a PA-10 operating in this configuration my advice is to double up with another unit bridged for mono as soon as you can because the improvements are exponential. Once you've heard the sheer musical authority that this configuration brings, you won't want to go back I promise you.

A small panel on the upper right of the rear panel carries the BTL (Bridge Tied Load) switch that turns the amplifier into a bit of a beast as well as releasing copious amounts of power. I used the balanced inputs from the DS-10 EVO. Don't think that this is all about pure output levels though. The extra control and levels of articulate resolution change much more than that and the system is notably better at low levels too. Suddenly the speaker becomes a wider window into the stereo soundstage and this now expands way beyond the physical boundaries of the cabinets.

Balance and presence

The depth of the sound and the way the speaker can now layer instruments and voices tier upon tier with a sense of balance and presence that often evades much more costly designs is a really attractive feature of this system. For anybody thinking that the style has been placed before sound quality then I have to tell you that you couldn't be more wrong. It is all those things but this is a really serious music system too. That extra power is actually quite startling but it has been deployed entirely to bring the music closer to you by allowing for greater dynamic freedom and the EVO II speakers really come to life when they are supplied with that extra level of musical energy that the upgrade brings.

At the front end of course the DS-10 EVO streaming DAC that I previously had a lot of fun with received its own boost in just about everything from the PSU-10 external power supply. The system felt the changes from back to front. »





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That's the level of the improvements on offer here. The DS-10 EVO is a great little Streamer/DAC and Line Stage in its own right but turbo boost it with the PSU-10 and you're again talking about a whole new level of performance. It connects via a single umbilical lead to a much stiffer and more robust transformer set-up. This is a dual-choke hybrid design comprising of a four transformer layout where three are dedicated to supplying the power and one for the inductive filter. It also has ultra-low noise voltage regulators and you can hear that the DS-10 EVO operates in a quieter musical domain as a result.

So, we are looking at a very configurable system here. I could use it as a simple, very compact two-box source and amplifier or a four-box set-up where the Streamer/DAC /Pre has its own dedicated power supply and the amplification is effectively doubled up. The result is a system that doesn't take up too much more room but is much more focussed musically and sounds a lot more intense and involving.

The Gold Note speakers are particularly 'stiff' when straight out of the box; this pair had seen action but would still need a period of use before they started to perform. After initial installation, I selected a playlist and just let the music energise the system for a while, but I just wasn't expecting the depth and width that flowed out of those little boxes. Running Tidal through the GN Control app the random music playlist that I heard began with tracks from an old David Crosby album from about 40 years ago. It caught me cold. The recording was so solid and the vocal so intimate that I ended up sitting and listening for a straight hour as the playlist unfolded.

Exceeded expectations

One of the lovely things about this system is that it reserves the ability to surprise you every time you spend time with it. I like small speakers and while I acknowledge their size limitations, I have seldom heard any with this much sense of tone and pure colour. Couple that with a real feeling of dynamic drive from the amplifiers and I soon understood that this system constantly exceeded my expectations. The other notable thing about it is how adaptable it is to just about any style or flavour of music. It has the sort of body, weight and depth that makes sweeping classical pieces come alive and it never grows thin or compressed like so many small cabinet designs. Yet, when you ask it to do intimate music of extreme subtlety with tiny micro-shifts of emphasis then the electronics are enormously capable. I will long remember listening to one of my favourite musicians Masaaki Kishibe, a wonderful Japanese composer/guitarist seduce me with beautiful tones, subtle phrases and melodies very soon after the system had arrived. That will live long in my memory because it paints musical pictures.

This is a very nice system that just does its thing bringing music from its streamer to your ears without fuss. It is so very easy and unchallenging to listen to and I really like that. It takes up very little room and I can imagine it looking great in many homes where system aesthetics are important. +

Technical specifications

DS-10 EVO Streaming DAC

Type Streaming DAC / Pre

Streaming from Roon, Airplay, MQA, Qobuz, Deezer, Spotify Connect, Tidal Connect, V-Tuner

Price £2,900

GOLD NOTE PA-10 Stereo power amplifier

Type Stereo power amplifier with bridging option

Power Output 75 watts at 8 ohms, 150 watts into 4 ohms

Power Output in BTL 600 watts per channel into 4 ohms

Audio Inputs 1 × RCA unbalanced, 1 × XLR balanced

Price £1,700

Gold Note PSU-10 EVO external power supply

Type external power supply for DS-10

Price £1,200

Dimensions of all electronics 80 × 200 × 260 mm (H×W×D)

Gold Note A3 EVO II speakers

Type 2-way stand-mounted loudspeaker

Drivers 1 × 153mm Mid/Bass driver, 28mm Silk-Domed tweeter

Port Rear facing

Sensitivity 87dB

Nominal impedance 6 Ohms

Dimensions 350 × 240 × 295mm (H×W×D)

Weight 20Kg pair (net)

Finishes available Black cabinet with matt or gloss walnut side panels

Price £4,000

Manufacturer Gold Note

www.goldnote.it

UK distributor Airt Audio

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