



Part of Emotiva's BasX range of affordable AV, the A5 amplifier gives **Mark Craven** five potent power channels to play with

Emotional rescue

Back in the day, a five-channel power amplifier might have been all you needed to hookup with an AV processor for home cinema separates heaven. These days, however, audio systems can reach eleven channels and beyond, so are they still needed? American company Emotiva certainly thinks so.

Its BasX A5 is a power pusher rated at a solid 95W per channel into 8ohms (20Hz-20kHz measurement, less than 0.1% THD), and 130W into 4ohms (1kHz, <0.1% THD). It sells for the bargain price of £749. Sure, its five-channel complement might appear to some to be outdated, but it



will equally likely appeal to others. This is partly because multichannel power amplifiers remain something of a niche device, despite their relative simplicity to manufacture compared to integrated amps/receivers. Anyone in need of a five-channel, three-channel or four-channel amplifier will find choices a bit limited, and many of those that are available, including models from the likes of Arcam and Marantz, come in a good way higher than the £1,000 mark.

That Emotiva's BasX A5 is more affordable shouldn't surprise, as the company is very much in the value-for-money business. Founded by Dan Laufman, who has a career background in OEM, it began life following a traditional manufacturer/retailer distribution model, but then switched to a direct sales platform, enabling it to slash price tickets (although its UK distribution is handled by North Yorkshire-based Karma AV).

Open range

Emotiva's full product stable includes a range of loudspeakers (the Airmotiv series, with folded ribbon tweeters), plus subwoofers, USB DACs, and multichannel and stereo hardware. All are designed in the US, where its

high-end models are also manufactured, but the company does use 'efficient manufacturing partners' around the world for production of its more affordable hardware, including the BasX range.

This series is its entry-level, below the higher-spec, more muscular-looking X series, and its mission is 'to provide the capabilities you need without the frills you'd rather not pay for.' It consists of no fewer than 13 models, including stereo integrated and preamp units, the MC1 Dolby Atmos/DTS:X processor, and a multitude of power amps from monoblock to seven-channel.

All BasX amplifiers are Class A/B, instead of the more advanced Class H tech (similar to the Class G power favoured by Arcam) of the X series. The A5 therefore packs a custom toroidal linear power supply that accounts for much of its 12kg weight.

Steel yourself

The amp's styling verges on 'industrial', but it's rather smart all the same. The black steel chassis, with ventilation cut into the top panel (there are cooling fans and an internal heat sink), is fronted by a milled aluminium plate given a slick brushed finish.

This frontage is uncluttered too, with only a central power button and slim black display. The former has an amber ring light for standby, the latter five LEDs that represent the operational status of the amp's five channels. If they're glowing blue, everything is hunky-dory; flashing red and a 'fault condition' has been detected.

These status LEDs can be switched off if you wish via a control on the rear panel, adjacent to the BasX A5's 12V trigger in/outputs.

Speaker connection is made via chunky, five-way binding posts, well-spaced and positioned beneath the corresponding line-level input. Here there's only an unbalanced RCA option, which matches the output of

the BasX MC1 processor. For balanced audio, you'll need to step up to the X series.

There are all sorts of ways you might employ this five-channel amplifier. With an AV processor/power amp system – be it all-Emotiva or a mix-and-match – you could use it to run the five main channels. Or you might be opting for powerful monoblock amps for the front L/R speakers and need five channels to fill out a 7.1 system. Perhaps you just require power for four Atmos heights (okay, in that instance the BasX A4 would perhaps make more sense).

For this audition, I used it with a line-level preamp source for some stereo music, and then bolted it onto both Arcam AVR850 and Marantz NR1711 receivers.

Mega with music

The two-channel music listening was to get a quick grip on the BasX A5's inherent sound. And connected to the pre-outs on a Bluesound Vault 2i, and running a pair of GoldenEar BRX bookshelf speakers, the performance was bang on the money.

The Vault 2i isn't the most 'hi-fi' of devices when it comes to its DAC talents, but with the BasX in tow a Tidal session with the new Megadeth album (*The Sick, The Dying, ...and The Dead!*) was a thrill. This amp has real driving ability, meaning the GoldenEar speakers were given licence to dig deep and hard into the destructive drumming of closing track *We'll Be Back*. It kept pace with the tempo too, and generally made the speakers sound much bigger than they are.

What was not on offer was the finger-snap responsiveness of some Class D designs (including the far-more-expensive NAD M23, reviewed p68), and nor did the BasX A5 sound *completely* transparent. There was a bit more warmth and thickness to the lower-frequencies than I've heard other times with the GoldenEar model. That's not necessarily a bad thing, >

AV INFO

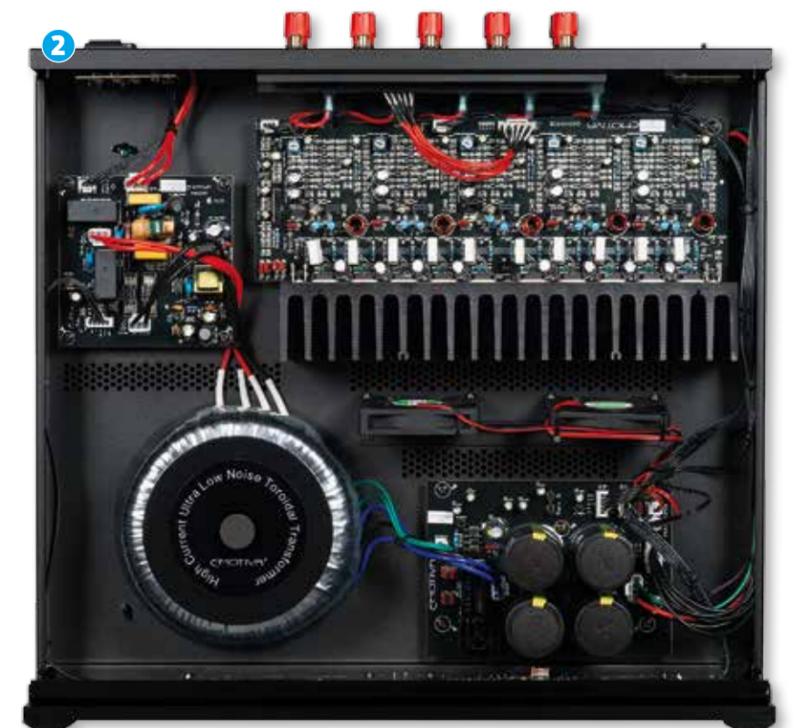
PRODUCT:
Five-channel Class A/B power amplifier

POSITION:
One of a bevy of BasX models, below Emotiva's X series

PEERS:
IOTAVX AVXPI;
Marantz MM7055

1. The front panel features five (dimnable) LED lights to signify channel status

2. Emotiva's custom toroidal power supply (bottom, left) feeds into the amp's Class A/B output stage



3



of course, and any criticism of the sound here needs to take the amplifier's bargain price into account.

With multichannel audio, all five of the A5's outputs are put to work, and the good vibes continue. The soundmix of *Ford vs Ferrari* (4K Blu-ray), with the amplifier fed by the pre-outs of an Arcam AVR850, was presented as large and epic when necessary, but also subtle and refined when the sound design demands it. Emotiva's amp isn't just about grunt, quietly going about its business to give Foley effects during the film's interior scenes plenty of clarity and bite.

That said, the reason you might want to swap in a new power amplifier is to experience more of a sense of energy and speaker grip, and that's what you get when Matt

'There was a far greater feel of physicality to the action, as trucks and cars careened through the Rio streets'

Damon (as Carroll Shelby) takes the Ford CEO (Tracy Letts) for a rather aggressive spin in the new motor.

'Are you ready?' quips Damon before he dumps the throttle and the GT40 races onto the track. The sound of its engine was simply divine, a meaty yet almost smooth roar that sprang from my speakers with alacrity. The BasX A5 then leaned into the spot sounds of the sequence, ensuring gear changes had a delicious clunk and squealing tires rang long and true. The chatter in the hangar/office, or Letts' panicked wails, was equally well served, as dialogue enjoyed a rich tonality.

A/B comparisons between the A5 and my Arcam's own Class G grunt were interesting. There were differences to the sound, the costlier receiver sounding softer with top-end detail, for example, but Emotiva's amp matched it beat for beat in terms of soundstage scale and output. From this evidence, I'd have no qualms about adding the well-priced A5 to any high-end AVR.

SPECIFICATIONS

POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 5 x 95W (8ohm, all channels driven, 20Hz-20kHz, 0.1% THD); 120W/8ohm (two channels driven) **CONNECTIONS:** 5 x phono inputs; 5 x speaker terminals; 12V i/o **DIMENSIONS:** 432(w) x 102(h) x 394(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 12kg

FEATURES: Class A/B power amplifier technology; custom toroidal linear power supply; dimmable status LEDs; fault protection; steel chassis with milled aluminium faceplate

TESTED WITH



FORD VS FERRARI: The appeal of this based-on-real-life drama (AKA *Le Mans '66*) might depend on how much of a petrolhead you are, but its Dolby Atmos soundmix should delight all. There's steering skill (geddit) and dynamics during set-piece moments, and all other times its fidelity shines through. Rev it up on Fox's 4K BD.

Used to beef up the Marantz NR1711, it quickly showed off its far greater potency. This slim-line receiver is a personal favourite of mine, rich in features, super-smart, and musical sounding – but brute force isn't a strong point. *Fast and Furious 5*'s bank vault robbery/chase sequence (another personal fave), played out in 2.1, was fizzy, fun and eminently watchable through the NR1711, but became more dynamic, more cinematic, through the BasX A5. There was a far greater feel of physicality to the action, as trucks, cars and vault careened through the streets of Rio de Janeiro, and as our heroes Dom and Brian drive down the dead-end bridge, the tense score had more body, and it punched harder through the mix.

X marks the spot

The price of the BasX A5 will be enough to catch the eye of system builders operating on tight budgets, but in no way should it be seen as a compromise product. The styling is smart, build quality is superb, and even the manual is better than many (not that there's much here to confuse anyone). It is, of course, the performance that really sells this amp. The vast reserves of power here will suit all likely partnering loudspeakers, and it's used well, bringing slam, grip and presence to music and movies alike. However you choose to use it, the BasX hits the spot ■

3. Emotiva claims the amp's internal design is optimised for clean signal delivery

4. Binding posts and RCA inputs are arranged to correspond to each channel

HCC VERDICT



Emotiva BasX A5

→ £749 → www.emotiva.com

WE SAY: This amp is a bang-for-your-buck superstar, offering copious, performance-enhancing power from a neat, tidy design. Don't need five channels? There are other BasX options.

4

