

Integrated hybrid amplifier. Rated at 330W/8ohm
Made by: Musical Fidelity (Audio Tuning Vertriebs GmbH), Austria
Supplied by: Henley Audio Ltd, UK
Telephone: 01235 511166
Web: www.musicalfidelity.com; www.henleyaudio.co.uk
Price: £10,999

AUDIO
FILE

INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER



Musical Fidelity Nu-Vista 800.2

This latest nuvisor/bipolar hybrid integrated marks a return of Musical Fidelity's traditional 'no-nonsense belter'. Difficult speakers? This amplifier will drive *anything!*
Review: **Mark Craven & Paul Miller** Lab: **Paul Miller**

The conclusion to our review of Musical Fidelity's original Nu-Vista 800 integrated amplifier [HFN Nov '14] announced: '16 years from now, we'll remember it!'. That was the gap between the manufacturer's first Nu-Vista product, the 1998 Nu-Vista Preamp, and its then-new integrated descendant. Yet while our reviewer was so enamoured of MF's tube/solid state powerhouse that he imagined it flying the hybrid amp flag for years to come, it turns out the Nu-Vista 800 was not to last quite that long.

The arrival of the £10,999 Nu-Vista 800.2 is not, however, evidence that Musical Fidelity feels its predecessor had ceased to impress. The explanation is more prosaic: the Nu-Vista 800's OEM-sourced front-panel display was discontinued 'at very short notice', forcing the Austrian-based manufacturer to choose between either discontinuing the amplifier itself or redesigning it. Hence why the 800.2 is remarkably like its forebear, both in terms of aesthetic design and specification [see PM's boxout, p51]. 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it', applies here, with the addition of 'but we will need a new display'.

DISPLAY RESOLUTION

Those familiar with the Nu-Vista 800 will notice the different, more modern-looking display here and its option of a VU meter presentation. This is the same display debuted on the company's recent Nu-Vista pre/power solution [HFN Mar '23]. That system, the four-box PRE/PAS, has separate PSUs for both amplifiers, sells for over £40,000 and claims a 300W/8ohm power output. This is a figure matched by the 800.2 [see PM's Lab Report, p53], should you be tallying up watts-per-pound...

The 800.2 also has a gently reimagined aluminium fascia, with both ends now disguising the amp's efficient side-mounted

heatsinks rather than showing them off. The layout is almost identical, however, with rotaries for source (left) and volume (right), a few control buttons, and an IR window for the alloy remote [see p53].

Like the PRE/PAS, the 800.2 has gained a button – 'Lighting Mode' lets you cycle through eight different combinations of illumination for the 800.2's display and the LEDs that light up both its base and its quartet of nuvisor valves. This isn't a new trick, but the functionality was previously under a 'Display' button, which is now dedicated to switching the display off, changing between dark and light themes, or removing the VU meters. Musical Fidelity suggests dimming everything, but I rather enjoyed the light show, particularly the way the valve illumination switches from orange to blue once they've warmed up.

Ramming home the fact this integrated isn't reinventing the wheel is a rear panel which, apart from the absence of the copper plate that once surrounded its inputs, is identical. Two sets of speaker binding posts handle bi-wired systems, while analogue sources can feed four single-end RCA inputs (one with a switch for HT bypass mode), or a balanced XLR. Line and pre-out RCAs complete the set.

TIME TO REWIND

Naturally, Musical Fidelity hasn't just introduced a new display for the 800.2 – it also features rewind transformers, which the company claims results in 'lower standing flux, so they are less sensitive to DC on the mains'. As for the technology that gives this amplifier its name, the story remains the same: the 800.2 uses nuvisor



RIGHT: Built as two mono amps, with two transformers and PSUs, into a single chassis, the 800.2 has one pair of 6551N nuvisors [right] and five complementary pairs of Sanken output transistors per channel [top and bottom]



valves, first developed by RCA in the 1950s, in its fully-balanced input and driver stage, and beefy Sanken transistors in its output stage, in what is effectively a dual-mono amplifier in a single box.

In practice, the 800.2 is the latest in what will be a full Nu-Vista range from Musical Fidelity. The existing Nu-Vista Vinyl phono preamp [HFN Mar '18] will be updated with balanced inputs and there will also be a fully balanced DAC plus a partnering CD transport. Also anticipated is a (slightly) lower-powered 600.2 integrated amplifier, not to mention very high-powered PAM monoblocks.

BIG SMOOTHY

Initially set up with a pair of KEF R3 Meta standmounts [full review next month], the 800.2 proved capable of that welcome

trick of making 'small' speakers appear big, such was the depth of its bass delivery. However, it was with Martin Logan's towering Motion XT F200 floorstanders [HFN Jul '23] that I was able to appreciate the full scope of its abilities. The amplifier has a latent power that feels prodigious, yet it's coupled with a smoothness that ensures listening to any flavour of music is a real pleasure. This silky and luxurious character is a constant, and while some listeners might trade a little less velvet for a more incisive edge, for me the 800.2 blows that notion away with the sheer poise and stature of its performance.

ABOVE: Seen here in its black livery, the 800.2's two huge rotaries govern source selection and volume with buttons for the various display and 'lighting' modes. Build and finish is superb

'Your Star Will Shine', from The Stone Roses' *Second Coming* album [Geffen 424 503-2], is a woolly, acoustic jam with plenty of textural contrasts, and Musical Fidelity's integrated makes it sound both delicate and large, with castanet percussion an insistent presence behind swirling, multitracked guitars. On 'Wonderwall' by Oasis, from their 1995 album (*What's the Story*) *Morning Glory?*

[Creation Records CRE CD189], the amp pushes vocalist Liam Gallagher into the room, forward of his brother's background guitar strumming.

On the surface this is another gentle piece, but when the drums, low strings and bass guitar entered on

the second verse, the depth and control was remarkable. The same can be said of the 800.2's evocation of the recording environment. The Rolling Stones' 'Start Me Up' [*Tattoo You*; Virgin 7243-8-39521-2-0], a track left over from the band's *Some Girls* sessions, paints a picture of Mick, Keef and co rampaging in the live room, with reverb to the hand claps and guitar flourishes. I almost felt I was there with them.

ALL CLEAR

This track boogied along in a foot-tapping blur, aided by the amp's quick reactions to the stop/start production – the 800.2 might be a real heavyweight, but it can groove along with ease, throwing fast punches. There's less of an upbeat feel to The Police's 'Every Breath You Take' [...*The* ↗

NU-VISTA 800 REVISITED

The original Nu-Vista 800 [inset] caused something of a storm when it launched some nine years ago. It was also rated at 330W/8ohm although I suggested at the time [HFN Nov '14] that Musical Fidelity revise this to 300W/8ohm to better reflect the 2x325W/8ohm and 2x580W/4ohm achieved in practice. I'd say the same for the 800.2 although both amplifiers had/have exactly the same reserve to accommodate peaks of 370W, 700W, 1.30kW and 2.2kW into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads at <1% THD. Distortion was a low 0.001-0.004% from 20Hz-20kHz/10W, though our sample of the 800 showed a higher THD level through bass frequencies via the right channel.

Power aside, the new 800.2 is clearly a more refined implementation of the 800 blueprint. Distortion is better matched between the L/R channels of the 800.2 and lower too, falling to 0.0005-0.002% over the same range [see Graph 2, p53] and holding to 0.0008W/1W, 0.0005%/10W, 0.00065W/100W and 0.004%/300W. By contrast the older 800 achieved 0.001%/1W to 0.002%/100W and 0.005%/300W. Gain, via the balanced XLR inputs, is reduced from +42.3dB to a more 'sensible' +30.8dB in the 800.2 but the 86dB A-wtd S/N (re. 0dBW) is unchanged. The digitally-governed volume control is also retained, operating in 0.5dB steps over a 114.5dB range with an error of just +0.3dB over the top 90dB, +0.5dB over 100dB and +1.3dB over a full 110dB of its range – impossible to achieve with a conventional analogue potentiometer! PM

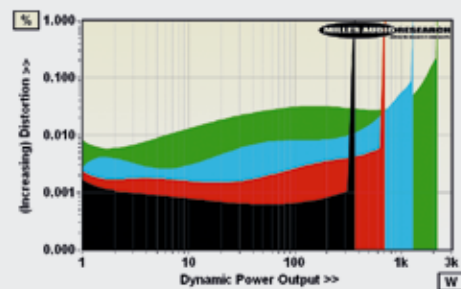


LAB REPORT

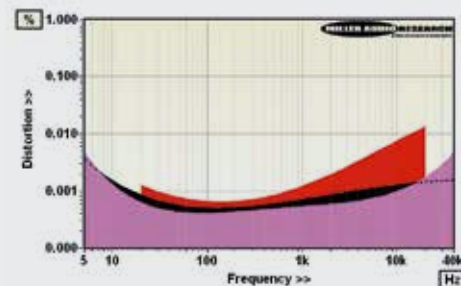
MUSICAL FIDELITY NU-VISTA 800.2

The core design of the 800.2 is taken straight out of the multi-box Nu-Vista PRE/PAS [HFN Mar '23] although the latter's over-cautious electronic protection – limiting its low impedance output to just 575W/2ohm (17A) and 198W/1ohm – is lifted here. I am quite sure this has been addressed by MF following our exclusive review and Lab Report! So, while the Nu-Vista 800.2 delivers the same 2x330W/8ohm and 2x580W/4ohm we saw from the PAS, it boosts this to 369W, 707W, 1.30kW and 2.20kW (47A) into 8, 4, 2 and 1ohm loads under dynamic conditions [re. 1kHz/10msec at <1% THD, see Graph 1]. Overall gain is +30.8dB which is exactly the combined gain of the PRE/PAS combination, although the A-wtd S/N ratio of 86.3dB (re. 0dBW) is still short of the 94.1dB achieved by the PAS even with the split in gain taken into account. The PAS's external PSU, and enhanced filtering, clearly exercises some advantage.

The 800.2's response is also slightly more 'rolled off' than that of the PAS, its -3dB limits of 3Hz-80kHz being inside the <1Hz to >100kHz -3dB bandwidth of the partnering power amp. Its output impedance is almost identical, however, at 0.019-0.068ohm (20Hz-20kHz), increasing to 0.58ohm/100kHz, so any modification of the 800.2's system response with different loudspeaker loads will be the same as that experienced with the PAS. The layout is necessarily more cramped inside the 800.2 so there's ~5dBV of extra residual noise plus a little extra capacitive coupling, all contributing to a slightly poorer (but not 'poor') 94-59dB stereo separation compared to the 113-93dB achieved by the PAS. How does the 800.2 compare with the original 800? See my boxout on p51. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 46.9A



ABOVE: Distortion versus frequency versus power output (1W/8ohm, black; 10W, pink; 100W, red)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	330W / 580W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	369W/707W/1.30kW/2.20kW
Output imp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	0.019-0.068ohm / 0.575ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	-0.13dB to -0.28dB/-4.45dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/330W)	81mV / 1505mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/330W)	86.3dB / 111.5dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, 10W/8ohm)	0.00049-0.0019%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	114W / 935W (1W standby)
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	483x187x510mm / 41kg



ABOVE: The Nu-Vista 800.2 has five line ins (four on RCAs, inc. an HT bypass option and one set on XLRs), plus fixed and variable outs (on RCAs). Pairs of very substantial loudspeaker cable/4mm binding posts support bi-wiring

Singles A&M Records; EVECD 1], but the amplifier effortlessly switched gear to craft a fulsome, bass-rich wave of sound, deep enough to dive into. The piano accompaniment was clear and lifelike, with the weight of each press of the keys easy to appreciate, as was the occasional cheeky stutter in Sting's otherwise uniform bassline. Such fine details aren't hidden away, but neither are they spotlighted: Musical Fidelity's new model gets the balance right between its big picture presentation and the incisive retrieval of minutiae.

THUMPING TIMPANI

As for the 800.2's vast vat of power, it held Martin Logan's three 200mm bass drivers in a strong grip and pushed out music at a volume that's easily described as 'room-filling'. Using the somewhat oversized remote handset, it's then easy to find the level to suit, such is the granular nature of the volume control. Enya's 'Even In The Shadows' [Dark Sky Island, Warner Bros Records; 96kHz/24-bit] demanded to be listened to loud, and the amplifier responded with aplomb, ensuring the layered vocals and weighty transients didn't lose an ounce of their rich, smooth quality as the VU meters on the fascia crept to the right.

Indeed, largescale productions might well be the 800.2's bread and butter as James Horner's score for the film *Titanic* [Sony Classical

LEFT: Solid alloy remote offers control over source, volume, mute and display modes



SK 63213] came across as big as the doomed vessel itself. In 'Take Her To Sea, Mr Murdoch', optimistic melodies from across the orchestra pit dovetailed with resonant strings, thumping timpani and crashing cymbals, and again there was the sense the 800.2 wasn't missing out on any elements, high or low, as the sound flooded the listening seat. Moreover, Horner's love of dynamic stabs of brass and strings, such as on 'Hard To Starboard', require an amp with plenty in reserve, and these arrived with a dynamic swagger.

In a nutshell, the appeal of the Nu-Vista 800.2 doesn't simply boil down to its obvious output. This all-analogue integrated has the kind of performance that leaves you lost in the music, and focuses you on what you're listening to, rather than the amp powering it all. I won't say it goes about its business quietly, because it plays loud and weighs over 40kg, but it is utterly unflappable with whatever you throw at it. As my listening segued from the delicate compositions of Philip Glass's *Glassworks* [Sony Classical; 96kHz/24-bit] to the pounding hip-hop of Dr Dre's 'Still D.R.E.' [2001; Interscope Records 490 4862], I loved every second. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

In an ideal world, the Nu-Vista 800.2 wouldn't exist. Still, the forced retirement of its predecessor has birthed a worthy successor, with some aesthetic refinements and a whole lot of power under the hood. This amp has the smoothness you might expect from its nuvistor tubes, allied to a feeling of glorious, controlled aggression. And next to the brand's PRE/PAS system, it looks like an absolute bargain!

Sound Quality: 89%

