

## The McIntosh MA7000

### A Boost For Your System

By Jerold O'Brien

I love McIntosh equipment for the same reason I love vintage BMW's, they are built well, perform well and have a rabid following of obsessed fans of the marque like me to keep the resale values high. (and spare parts available) The MA7000 is a serious piece of gear and, unlike the recent Bangle styled BMW's, is a proper addition to a long evolving heritage at McIntosh Labs.

The MA7000 is the top dog in McIntosh's line of powerful and versatile integrated amplifiers, with 250 watts per channel on tap at 2, 4, or 8 ohms. Speaking of taps, the MA7000 uses McIntosh's famous Autoformers in the output stage, just like their massive power amplifiers.

As the staff recluse, I spend a lot of time tinkering with tube amplifiers. I mod and rebuild old Dynacos, Eicos, you name it. A recent acquisition of a McIntosh MA230 integrated amplifier rekindled my interest in the brand and being a hybrid design it eased my final step to transistors with the MA7000. Many of you know that Mac gear isn't cheap and the MA7000 will set you back 7500 dollars. Just shy of a hundred pounds, this one is a beast and features the giant rack handles from the big McIntosh power amplifiers. It certainly looks worth this kind of dough.

### **Stop by for the equalizer, stay for the power**

I've been enjoying my Strata Minis from AV123 with the MA230, which offers up a very warm, musical sound indeed. But I live in somewhat of a ski chalet, hence bizarre acoustics. The recent girlfriend will not go for tube traps and such, so I was initially intrigued with the five-band equalizer on the front panel of the MA7000.

That's right, equalizer. Every one of you guys that grumps about an equalizer usually has a grand total of four records that sound good on your system, so shut up. A little boost at 50hz, a little push at 1500 hz and Foghat never sounded better. The other controls are at 150hz, 500hz and 10k. That 10k control really comes in handy for CD's that are too harsh or 78's that are really noisy. Once you get used to it, you will never go back.

All this control is cool, but what really won me over was the power. I love my 2002tii and will always wax poetic about how my little 2-liter engine with it's basic Kugelfischer injection is all I need to get by until I get behind the wheel of my brother's new M3 with a 414 hp V-8. Absolute power does corrupt absolutely, especially if you like to rock.

Just as I've always been a 4 cylinder BMW guy, I've always been a 30-50 watt tube amplifier guy. What a difference! Our publisher likes to tease me when he says power is your friend, so I guess it's my turn to shut up.

My Strata's have never sounded this good, exhibiting a new level of finesse with all of that power on tap. They have a powered subwoofer built in, so to see how well the MA7000 did with control in the lower registers, I carted up my old JBL L-166's up from the living room. These are notoriously power hungry, but listening to my favorite rock records was very exciting indeed; I wish I had this amplifier back in the 70's!

Where I always thought these speakers had a somewhat loose, uncontrolled bass response they now sounded tight and extended with much more detail than I ever thought this vintage speaker capable of.

### **No Longer a McCurmudge**

This is McIntosh's biggest integrated to date - 250 watts per channel delivered into 8, 4 or even 2 ohms with no more than 0.005% total harmonic distortion to rated power. With 2.0 db of headroom, you have more than enough juice to power most any speaker system on the market. But of course it features a gigantic pair of blue meters, so the MC7000 takes command of your system visually as well as dynamically.

I'm definitely a convert to the current McIntosh way of doing things. I've always enjoyed the way McIntosh gear of days past has that wonderful, romantic quality that seems to make everything sound great. The MA7000 builds on that strength and adds major dynamics and some resolution to the mix without sacrificing the musicality. Transient attack is faster than any Mac I remember and the noise floor is super quiet. It's amusing to crank up "Dance Me In" from The Repulsion Box CD and show someone the SPL meter hit peaks over 100db during your conversation. The MA7000 plays loud but it's clean.

McIntosh's Power Guard circuit is a very intuitive soft clipping circuit that steps in should your enthusiasm with the volume control get out of control. A 250-watt per channel power amplifier can sizzle tweeters if not treated with respect. I had to push the MA7000 way beyond reasonable levels listening to UFO's *Lights Out* LP, but sure enough those I did make the PG lights come on. Interestingly enough, when I turned around, the room had cleared out.

Even after a few marathon brain damage listening sessions, the MA7000 remained fairly cool to the touch, a testament to the stout build quality of this amplifier. Paying homage to the many McIntosh power amplifiers that performed their duties admirably in the PA systems of the Grateful Dead and other rock amplifiers, this one can work hard without breaking a sweat.

### **More Features Baby!**

The EQ is great, but only the tip of the iceberg. The MA7000 has an outstanding headphone amplifier for when you can't crank the tunes. Precious few components have an onboard headphone amplifier these days and considering the rebirth of the headphone industry over the last five years, this is an awesome bonus feature. Add that equalizer and you can get just about any set of phones to sound to your liking.

A great moving magnet phono stage is also included with the MA7000, so those of you in the audience that have a decent table and vinyl collection will be pleasantly surprised. Adding my Rega P3-24 table (with TT-PSU power supply) and Rega's best MM cart made a very pleasant analog front end indeed. While I have a huge vinyl collection, I've

never really bothered to invest in a killer turntable. With the Rega, I have just enough analog to keep me happy, yet not enough to stress me out towards the next upgrade. If you are this kind of vinyl lover, you will be thrilled with the onboard phono stage in the MA7000.

There is plenty of flexibility on the back panel too. A set of pre-out, main-in jacks are there in case you feel the need to bi-amp your speakers and add another giant McIntosh power amplifier to the mix, or drive a line level subwoofer. In addition to the five RCA inputs, there is a pair of balanced inputs, so you should be able to accommodate whatever combination of sources you have. There is also a fixed level output marked “server” which can easily work with your favorite tape recorder. Remember, us vintage McIntosh guys still have them!

I must admit though after borrowing our publishers MS750 music server for a while, my reel-to-reel tape deck may just be going up on EBay! Thanks to the data ports on the back, everything connects together and you can use the MS 750’s remote to power up and control the whole system. While my inner caveman bristles at the thought of only *one* remote, it is very handy. I should also mention that my inner nerd really appreciated the well thought out and illustrated manual. Just don’t tell my buddies I used it.

### **98% Perfect**

The MA7000 should keep its owners very happy, but it’s my job to criticize. My complaints are minimal and few, but for the price of a nice used BMW motorcycle, I want it all. On the next round of this amplifier, I’d love to see a second set of speaker outputs. With this much power on tap, I’d love to run another pair of speaker cables downstairs to my living room. The occasionally fussy audiophile in me would love to see that equalizer to have the ability to be switched out of the circuit altogether. Last but not least, I wouldn’t mind that phono section to have a moving coil option too. This is an expensive enough amplifier that I don’t want to get another outboard phono preamp should I get the urge to upgrade my turntable.

### **A Mac For Most of Us**

Considering that you get a great MM phono stage, a very good headphone amplifier along with a preamp and power amplifier all on one chassis, I think the MA7000 is a tremendous value. That eliminates a few extra boxes to buy as well as a couple sets of expensive interconnects and power cords, making for much less clutter in the mancave.

The MA7000 is built like a tank, sounds great and is easy to live with. I know that if I add one of these to my McIntosh collection, when my grandkids finish fighting over who gets it, McIntosh will still have spare parts on the shelf. Just like my trusty 2002tii and that’s a comforting feeling.