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# Norma HS-IPA1 Integrated Amplifier- Analysis!



August 13, 2021 by Howard Milstein

***The Norma HS-IPA1 Integrated Amplifier is a smaller sibling to their IPA-140B. Howard Milstein discerns how it measures up!***

Last year writer Marvin Bolden gave us an in-depth evaluation of his personal experiences with the [Norma IPA-140B integrated amplifier](#). He has since made it his “go-to” amplifier for future component evaluations.

Distributor Derek Skipworth of Audio Thesis has subsequently offered me the opportunity to evaluate Norma Audio’s lower-powered unit, the [HS-IPA1](#) which is the subject of this review. Cremona, the City in Italy where these beautiful amplifiers are designed is a city of famous violin makers and some of the most magnificent and historical operatic composers, and as mentioned in Marvin’s review, has a history that weighed quite heavily on the founding of [Norma Audio’s](#) name.

Whereas the [Norma IPA-140 B](#) delivered an average power output of 150 watts per channel, the diminutive yet essentially enticing looking HS-IPA1 is a 75 watt per channel (8 ohms) Class AB MOSFET designed amplifier while being able to deliver 150 watts into 4

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The HS-IPA1 has a few different options available for the user (*the DAC was not included with my sample*) at very reasonable prices. With the optional headphone, phono, and DAC boards, one can get a fully integrated solution for any use they require by just adding your preferred sources!

The optional DAC is stated to offer you five inputs which include a USB and are DSD ready. The headphone output stage is Class A with a variable output sensitivity that can match numerous impedance loads. I ended up experiencing some outstanding results using my [Prism Sound "Callia" DAC](#) as well as my usual reference digital sources....*Audio Note CD3.1x/2* and *Wyred4Sound's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary DAC*. (I also had a chance to **start** using the [Border Patrol R2R DAC](#), which will be reviewed very shortly!)

The Norma phono stage is a delightful welcome and is good for both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges while having variable loading and gain. Changing the settings for the phono stage and headphone amp can be somewhat of a pain for some end-users as it requires you to remove the screws that hold the casing together to get to the dip switches inside. Once this is done, you should not have to worry about anything further on. I changed settings once for my Dynavector high output cartridge with splendid results. There are three moving coil settings on the phono-stage; 100, 510, and 1,000 ohms plus 47 ohms for MM cartridges. However, I must admit that the majority of my listening to the HS-IPA1 was done with *digital* sources.

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The input selection process of the Norma is a bit unconventional. Instead of simply hitting a button for the three inputs etc., the IPA1 requires that you first hit one of two buttons marked INPUT or DAC to choose the section of the internal pre-amp you wish to be utilized. You have to cycle the inputs of your choice (one-through-four) to your desired source via a second set of pushbuttons. For someone using its optional DAC as well as the analog inputs, this is very good design practice. Used as a basic integrated amplifier with external source components (as I did) it was a bigger step; not overtly inconvenient, but something that robbed me of some extra listening time. The small, metal-cased remote control is of decent quality and can be used to adjust all the settings the amplifier provides.

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to update in the future.!

## SONIC IMPRESSIONS

After a few hours or so of warm-up, the Norma IPH-1 's initial sound quality gave me a somewhat unexpected, yet quite enticing experience, most memorable when I later mated it to the Stirling LS3/6, Spendor SP1, and Quad ESL 63's (*the latter quite surprisingly, indeed!*) It was undeniably expressing an overall top to bottom audio presentation of a sublime, musically enticing sound quality with a **fleshy**, accurate and beguiling midrange response that contained layers of soundstage instrumental tonality—the audible presentation was fiercely satisfying and overtly neutral to my ears.

One could easily state that The *Norma*'s initial claim to fame here was its expressively conducive musical *tonality*, which aided the above loudspeakers to come to their ultimate fruition quite easily.... again- serving up a *richly textured, creamy*, and supremely elegant sound quality.

Depth and soundstage width was excellent while the amp contributed nothing truly of its own nature to the sound being dispensed. While the mid-treble balance was as silky as any amplifier I have heard in this price range, it was that informatively excellent midrange that became embellished in my auditory senses. Dynamics and instrumental transients were finely exploited but without any of that sense of anxiety whereas "*tidbits*" of brightness can creep up on you when playing a formidable amount of discreet program material.

This beautiful sound perspective was fully chewed and overtly inclined to offer a delicate

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in its reproduction of recorded music. Stereophonic Image localization was finely placed within the full soundstage and the Norma sounded like an “*operatic*” work in progress.

The HS IPA-1 was able to seize all of the most well-recorded sources and their dynamic capabilities while its *nimble* sound presentation still captured the inherent detail and sheer, minute intricacies of well-recorded music from basically all types of genres.



## COMPARISONS

Some recently reviewed integrated amplifiers available for subjective comparisons to the

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quality versus the HS IPA-1. The Supernait 3 is *almost* similarly priced, (when adding the Norma optional DAC and Phono Stage) but as the darTZeel CTH-8550 II is priced way above any of these units, an appropriate comparison seemed baseless.

As such, the **best comparison** would be the *Naim Supernait 3*. As far as overall sound quality perceptions are concerned, the Norma exhibits a somewhat *smoother, fuller midrange and high-frequency response* than the Naim. While one would consider the Naim to be a touch leaner in its mid/treble sound presentation, both amplifiers do ample justice to the full mid-lower bass frequencies as heard in their sonic impact and wonderfully defined bass response.

Though the Naim has a moving magnet input included without a DAC (thankfully), the Norma DAC, headphone, and phono boards are optional but can be obtained at fairly reasonable prices. The Naim is virtually at the same price point as the HS-IPA-1 when the latter's options are included, but is an amplifier that must be addressed and pertinently auditioned as it contains a *“signature”* sound of its own above and beyond its formal sound attributes.

As for the *Levinson 5805*, you will be offered a much more complete class A/B amp with its own built-in DAC and phono stage as well as a plethora of unsurpassed DAC filters, inputs, and outputs, and a huge 125-watt power reserve. The amplifier is built like a brick sh~~t house and exhibits a clean, detailed, reserved and overtly neutral subjective sound quality—but at almost double the price of the Norma!

## ANY SECOND THOUGHTS?

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mentioning. Once in a while, with some highly dynamic program sources (classical) the Norma exhibited a bit of “strain” on full-scale orchestral crescendos where SPL’s were a bit higher than normal.

The sensitivity of your preferred loudspeakers and their naturally varying impedance will have a relevant impact on the overall “loudness” levels perceived when listening to this amplifier and your favorite music.

Although the Norma had a good amount of power reserve, it will always be advisable to check your loudspeakers’ average load impedance and sensitivity when auditioning. (Remember, the Norma Revo IPA-140B offers double the power output!)

In the real world, assuming the amp is muscular enough to drive low impedance loudspeakers, if a particular loudspeaker has a lower impedance, it will play louder for the same voltage input from the amp— and this is information the consumer should always be aware of when evaluating the IPA1 or any amplifier you may be considering.

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Any Audiophile worth his salt will notice after a few days of listening to the Norma HS IPA-1 that this is an extremely beautiful integrated amplifier that is embodied with many formidable attributes and can reproduce *the essence* of music from its soul. Enrico Rosso, chief designer and engineer of Norma Audio has an ear for music that is beyond reproach. I emphasize this because of the magnificent overall *sonic timbre* that the Norma HS IPA-1 exhibits throughout the full audio spectrum with all types of music.

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mount with a sensitivity level at least in the 89db range or higher, you will be extraordinarily satisfied with the musicality of this wonderful sounding integrated amplifier...it is an eminently fine unit!

Price: Norma HS-IPA1 *basic amplifier* ~ \$3,000 USD

**The NORMA HS-IPA1 is available with 3 optional features:**

**DIGITAL > ANALOGUE CONVERTER**, which offers all the features of its DAC and is equipped with 5 full-bandwidth digital inputs, (24-bit, 192KHz PCM, DSD, asynchronous USB, and SPDIF).

**PHONO STAGE**, with user-selectable impedance and gain values, to feed the HS-IPA1 signal from both MM and MC cartridges.

**HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER**, A high-quality headphone amplifying section, able to drive just about all of the headphones available on market.

**Review system: Loudspeakers:** Sendor SP1 ~ Quad ESL-63 ~ Sterling LS3/6 **Digital:**Border Patrol DAC SE-I ~ Prism Sound "Callia" DAC ~ Innuos Zenith Mk.3 server/streamer ~ Wyred4Sound 10th Anniversary DAC ~ Audio Note (UK) CD3.1x/2 ~ **Amplification:** PS Audio M1200 monoblocks ~ Naim Supernait 3~ Levinson 5805 ~ darTZeel CTH-8550 MKII integrated Amplifier **Cables/ Conditioners:** Inakustik AC-3500p power station & LS-4004 speaker cables, AC-2404 reference Air Power Cord ~ Silversmith Audio 'Fidelium' loudspeaker cables ~ Wireworld Silver Eclipse 8 speaker cables ~ Wireworld Silver Eclipse 8 interconnects & Electra 7 digital SPDIF/ Audio Art 1 e" AC Power Cord.

### SPECIFICATIONS:

- **Type:** Integrated stereo amplifier

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- **Optional headphone amp:** selectable sensitivity, high current, 6.3mm jack
- **Optional DAC:** 5 input, 24/192 & DSD
- **Optional phono stage:** MM/MC, variable gain & impedance
- **Rated output power:** 75W into 8 Ohms, 150W into 4 Ohms
- **Supplied accessories:** IR remote control
- **Dimensions:** H x W x D: 118 x 214 x 370mm

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