



NORMA REVO IPA-140B Integrated Amplifier critique

August 19, 2020 by Marvin Bolden

Marvin Bolden is having a truly memorable experience with the Norma Revo IPA-140B Integrated Amplifier!

Norma Audio of Cremona, Italy, while not a common name in the United States is well known across Europe and has been in business since 1987. Cremona, a city of famous violin makers and some of the most magnificent and historical operatic composers, has a history that weighed quite heavily on the founding of *Norma Audio's* name.

“Norma” is a tragic lyric opera written by Vincenzo Bellini, based on the play of the same name. The opera is regarded as a leading prayer “Ca

Enrico Ros

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Audio. It is quite obvious that Enrico's design philosophy for the Norma audio line is derived from his love of music and quite particularly, the beauty of the singing voice. As such, he has focused his electronic designs aimed at reproducing the sound of the human voice at its best. Ironically, this is the ultimate design goal, (*or should be*) of the finest loudspeaker designers

The Norma Revo IPA-140B is a dual-mono class AB design that offers 140 watts into 8ohms and 280 watts into a 4-ohm speaker load. The beautiful chassis of this unassuming unit sizes up at 4.3 x 16.9 x 14.3in. (H x W x D). This integrated amplifier may not look it but its weight comes in at a cool 55 lbs.

Other key specs can be had at *Norma Audio's* website where you may find additional specifications for the IPA-140B. Most *average* audio enthusiast's never usually check out a product's detailed specification, though it could be of considerable interest to the more advanced user and/or engineer. As my role for our readers is to determine and advise on how the Revo IPA-140B sounds subjectively with various associated components, I'll just say: "use what God gave you — your EARS.!"

KEY FEATURES

The IPA-140B comes in two colors, silver and black, and you can get the LED's in blue or red which comes with a full-function aluminum remote. Here are some highlights of Norma's specifications that should be of interest:

1. High current MOS-FET power device (150 A output peak current).

2. 12 power devices for a total rated 1,500 W power handling capability

3. Separate

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4. High speed and low noise regulated power supply for gain and driver stage.

5. High filtering capacity (70.000 uF) with numerous (24) low impedance capacitors.

6. A toroidal power transformer is specially designed for audio applications, low dispersion flow, low mechanical noise, and a high permeability magnetic core with consequent low output impedance, 2 x 400 VA.

7. Input configurable as Direct Inputs, for Home Theater use.

8. Outputs configurable as Pre Out, Active or Passive, for use with Power Amp and/or with Active Subwoofer.

9. *XLR balanced input*

10. Optional mm/mc phono and DAC boards available.

It is worth noting that Norma does not find it imperative to use Balanced inputs. The XLR input is there for residual means. They are steadfast in their observations that balanced inputs are a bit more fiction than fact and are not optimized for

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Secondly, I

best sounding of the four RCA inputs. Why you might ask? It

has the most direct or shortest path to the circuit board. The differences may be minuscule, but noticeable.

Right out of the box you can tell the quality of the IPA-140B by its feel and heft; this is no run of the mill stamped metal stuff here. The IPA-140B does pass the eyeball test without looking like it's on steroids. The volume control is smooth when rotated, the blue LED's are not the ones that have that piercing ray gun look in the dark. My sample had the blue lights as I was interested in combining it with two other pieces of gear with blue LED's and no red, although I do have one with green.



Here is some of the program material used in this evaluation:

Blinding Lights – *The Weekend* Duende – *Bozzio Levin Stevens* In Heaven – *Michael Wollny Trio* Liberty – *Anette Askvik*

Lost Without You – *Freya Ridings* Nacht – *Michael Wollny Trio* *Nachtfahrten/release/7585125* Trampoline – *Shaed*

Unearthed – *E.S. Posthumus* *Unearthed/release/737769*

SOUND QUALITY

Although my original amp, the Mastersound compact 845

has a sound
amplifier pr
However, t
solid-state

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as a **tube amp** may distort at the same signal level as the tube amp, but the distortions are not subtle, and we hear them as distortion, not as a slightly louder sound pressure level.).

In any event, I had reached a point when the Mastersound sound just leveled off as it ran out of dynamics. Well, along comes 'Norma'. Immediately when I approached the volume levels where the Mastersound would run a bit out of steam, Norma just seems to be getting started. On transients alone, the Norma would go over the set level with quite impressive bursts of power while at the same time hold an iron grip on my *sealed woofers*. Although you may give up some of that liquid 845 tubed midrange sound of the Mastersound, the IPA-140B is just so smooth with an extended and extremely silky high-frequency response and mellow *tube-like mids*, I was more than happy with the tradeoff.

Imagine this, the lights dim, your equipment is warmed up for optimal sound, a nice cold beverage of your choice is at hand, and last but not least you start up your playlist. Although I am writing a review of the Norma, in the end, it's all about the music with the equipment coming in secondarily.

EARTH-SHATTERING BASS

The frequency response on my Rosso Fiorentino Volterra II speakers is stated as 38hz to 100khz. The eight-inch woofers are housed in sealed enclosures with a quoted 88db into a 6-ohm load. The Norma just cruised along as if it was a normal day at the shop. I was not in the least disappointed. Right out the gate listening to *Blinding Lights* provided me some room-shaking bass that was tight and articulate. In "*Lost Without You*" and "*Unearthed*", the Norma provided full foundational support for the music with power of that "one-n quality amp

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This amp has a great attack on bass notes and wonderful

control of the bass drivers; there was no overhang when the notes stopped. For some reason, Norma does not publish any damping factor specs but other European designed amplifiers with this type of extended response range usually have very high damping factors in the 1- 2khz range.

My listening room is on the second floor above the master bedroom which has resulted in more than one night of my door being opened with a head poking in to tell me to *turn the music down!* This happened on one said night when I was listening to "*Nara*" (*Theme to Cold Case*). I will presume that such bass was emanating from the Volterra's sealed eight-inch enclosure. Such floor shaking and heart-thumping bass made me sit back and take quick notice of a tight, powerful, full, and tuneful bass response!

Overall, the bass from the Norma was a delight to listen to and blended right along with the lower mid-range without infringing on or causing any muddying effects as it blended seamlessly with the other drivers.

MID-HIGH FREQUENCIES

Some words I would use to describe the sound of the high end of the Norma would be airy, extended and superbly natural, while it was quite gratifyingly able to maintain *pin-point stereo imaging!* The upper registers of the piano on "*Liberty*" and "*Lost Without You*" were clear and percussive with the harmonics of each note being heard.

Female vocals on these two songs were also just as impressive as they were lustrous, extended, and with nary a hint of harshness or brightness; just oh so sweet!

The cymbal work on "*Nacht*" was so good that you hear each tick, tick, tick... and precise... tweeters a... refined, airy... response that was never fatiguing or strident. A true

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pleasure to listen to.

ICING ON THE CAKE- MIDRANGE

This is where I think the IPA-140B really shines and that might just be the effect of the MOS-FET transistors being used. They inevitably can give an immaculate, fundamental quality to the music's **harmonic structure** (*an overtone accompanying a fundamental tone at a fixed interval, produced by the vibration of a string, column of air, etc. in an exact fraction of its length.*)

Mosfets have long been taunted as having a “tube-like” sound quality. This has not always been the case. In the early days of MOS-FETS, they encompassed a somewhat ‘unique’ sound or should I say sound distortion that was called the MOS-FET haze or veil that made the midrange appear as if there was a mistiness or “fog” surrounding the resultant audio reproduction.

Thankfully, this has changed tremendously with the newest Metal Oxide Semiconductor Field Effect Transistor, (MOSFET) and currently, is *an excellent* choice for small signal linear amplifiers as their input impedance is extremely high—making them easy to bias. The key for MOSFETs to produce *linear amplification* is to keep it operating in its saturation region, unlike the Bipolar Junction Transistor. But just like the BJT, it too needs to be biased around a centrally fixed Q-point. Quite happily, I can report that the Norma IPA-140B shone through quite breathtakingly with a superb virtuous quality that was as clear as a whistle.

“*Trampoline*” sounded natural with both female and male vocals. The vocals had fine depth and *proper* width to them with perfect locational effects. This song was the icing on the cake, a

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For lower mid-range male vocals (baritones) I listened to *“You Want It Darker”* which had Leonard’s deep chesty voice come through as sounding tonally rich and full. The chant vocals were reproduced allowing you to imagine monks in the background with a heavenly air to the sound. The upright bass in *“In Heaven”* was fully woody sounding and brought a smile to my face as it covered the entire mid-bass region and beyond; extending into much of the lower midrange; oh so rich;y. *“Castle”*s had a tight polished drive that brought about some nice toe-tapping moments.

“Strong” was eerily haunting with all the three-dimensional effects and echoes that the producer intended. If you want to hear how a saxophone should sound just listen to *“Liberty”*.

CAVEATS and SUMMARY

I did have one minor qualm with the Norma IPA-140b integrated amp. That would be the size and shape of the buttons on the remote which seems as if they would be easy to catch on your clothing and break. Otherwise, I COULD NOT FIND

If you hadr
manufactur

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Italy having a steep tradition in music and the arts or that there are just a lot of good engineers being turned out there. What I do know is that they are cranking out some great stereo equipment with great musicality and industrial arts design. If you ever have a chance to sample some of this great Italian wine (*oops, I mean HiFi*), by all means, you will not be disappointed. (*Ed. Note ~ try Tuscany and Piedmont!*)

Let's end this critique quite plain and simply: The Norma IPA-140B integrated amplifier is one of the most musical and satisfying pieces of stereo gear that I have ever owned.!

Norma Revo IPA-140B Integrated Amplifier, base MSRP \$7000

Associated equipment used: L.K.S. MH – DA0004 DAC • Lumin U1 Mini digital transport with *Black Cat Silverstar! 75 mk1 BNC coaxial*, using Tidal. • Rosso Fiorentino Volterra II speakers • Argento Audio Organic interconnects and speaker cables • Cullen Cables power cords.

Comparison amp: Mastersound compact 845 integrated amplifier

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