

# NAD C165/C275BEE

This NAD combo could be accused of looking utilitarian in the company of the others in our group. It would have you believe that the design of separate components has changed little during 30 years. However it's the cheapest here by miles, nonetheless feeling solidly built with a good quality of finish. The 'feel' of the controls on the C165BEE preamp belies its low price, as does the power of the C275BEE power amp [see lab report] – a mighty, meaty pre/power set for the money.

Facilities for custom installers and system builders are comprehensive too, while the already powerful amplifier can be bridged to mono. The preamp includes defeatable tone controls, MM/MC phono stage with adjustable input loading, the whole kaboodle.

**BOLDLY CONFIDENT**  
 NAD claims many improvements in the preamp over its previous C162 model and its audio performance certainly appears to confirm this. 'By the Rivers Dark' was delivered with tremendous gusto, the power amp's four pairs of 220W output transistors per channel providing this NAD combo with exceptional grip and authority. Cohen's voice was textured with tortured emotion, while the ethereal backing vocals occupied distinct

places in the vivid, open soundstage. As the mix became increasingly dense there was no sign of the muddying confusion exhibited by the others, the fast articulation of the track's fulsome bass helping to keep the tempo punchy and upbeat.

The dynamic swings in the Hugh Masekela recording were more realistic than demonstrated by all but the Primare combo [facing page], recreating the energy and zest of the band's emotive performance with aplomb. The trumpet really rasped where appropriate, while percussion shimmered delicately in the background. It's not only in detail resolution that the NAD excelled, but also in bass control, weight and extension. It sounded boldly confident on all musical selections.

**DON'T JUDGE BY LOOKS**  
 As with all the combos in the group, the NAD's full function remote control was obviously made to a budget price. And I would argue that the NAD's conventional styling looks old-fashioned in today's modern audio arena; that this relatively affordable combination comes with the smallest pride-of-ownership badge in the test. Yet given its price it clearly represents classic 'budget esoterica': first-class high fidelity for only a second-class ticket price.

Sound Quality: 75%  
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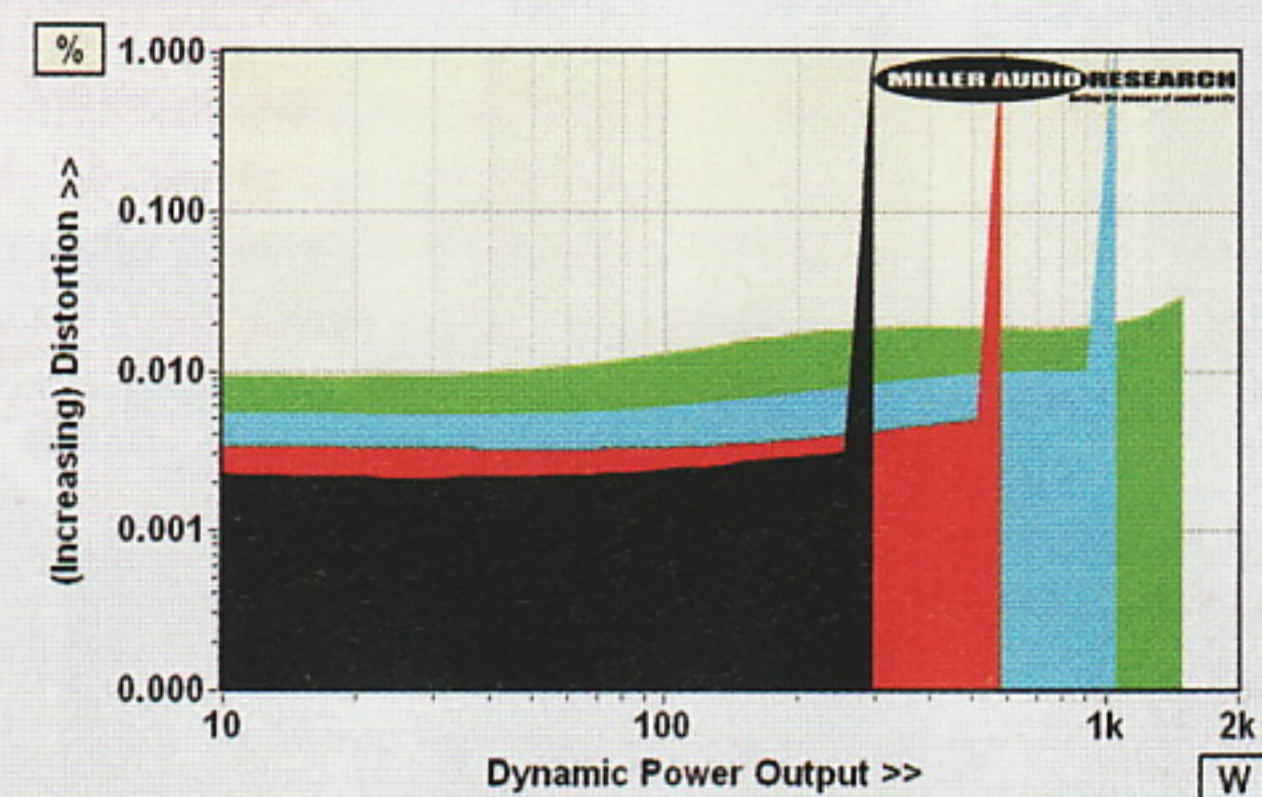


ABOVE: Despite its modest price, the NAD includes MM/MC inputs with adjustable loading, variable gain pre-out and power-in controls, and a proper tape monitor

## HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

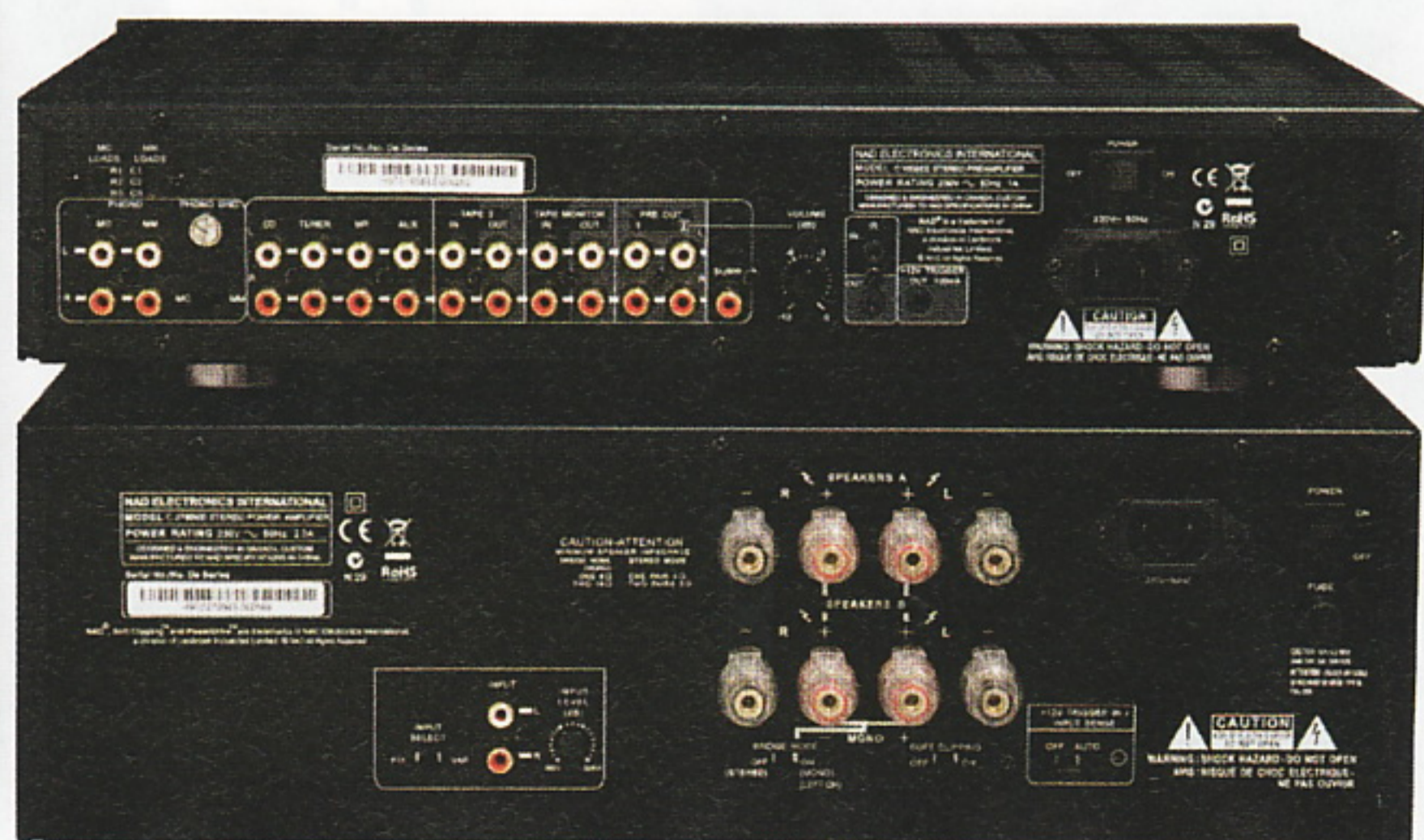
If you are looking for the big beast in our five-way jungle, then NAD's C275BEE is it! Rated somewhat ambiguously at '>150W into 8 and 4ohm' the amp does indeed offer ~190W into these loads (soft clipping on) but extends this mightily with sufficient headroom to deliver 300/8ohm and 585W/4ohm under dynamic – music-like – conditions [see graph, below]. Its maximum 39.4A current (10msec, <1% THD) is sufficient for the toughest, least sensitive speakers likely to cross its path.

Distortion is low too, keeping to a steady 0.002-0.003% from 20Hz-20kHz and from 1W-150W while the partnering C165BEE preamp drops further to 0.0002%. Noise is very low from both, the preamp offering a wide 102dB A-wd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV) and the power amp close to 128dB (re. 150W). Responses are wide and flat and output impedances usefully low (pre/68ohm and power/0.04ohm). Power consumption is a little high. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm loads (green)

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	195W / 180W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	300W / 585W / 1.06kW / 1.55kW
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	0.036-0.050ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz-100kHz, pre/power)	-0.1 to -0.5dB/+0.0 to -0.3dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/150W)	98mV / 1240mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (pre/power)	101.8dB (0dBV) / 97.8dB (0dBW)
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, pre/power)	0.0002-0.0006%/0.002-0.002%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	67W/630W
Dimensions (WHD, pre/power)	435x80x286/435x133x352mm



ABOVE: Phono inputs are complemented by four line-level inputs, two tape loops, two output pairs and a mono line out for a subwoofer. Power amp can be bridged

# Group Test Verdict

Each of this month's pre/power combinations offers something different, proving that there are many things to consider when choosing the ideal setup. They were auditioned using a Wadia 381i CD player and fabulous monitoring speakers alternatively from Townshend Audio (line source) and Focal (point source). Interconnects were Townshend DCT300.

The Myriad's seductively smooth and sophisticated sound would doubtless marry well with forward-sounding speakers possessing zingy, 'hot' high frequencies. Thanks to its modular construction with the facility to slot in additional amplifier modules it is without doubt a fine choice for those who aspire to distributing high quality sound throughout the home. Each module is a complete amplifier with its own toroidal transformer and power supply integrated on the 'card', so adding extra channels does not reduce their individual power outputs as if one single supply were used. Deploying this combo to drive ceiling-mounted speakers in kitchens and/or bathrooms, for example, would frankly be overkill – it sounds that good. But as a straightforward 'pure audio' stereo amp it was outclassed by the others in this test.

There was little to choose between the sound of the Arcam and Cyrus combos, but much for prospective

owners to consider nonetheless. While both provide a cost-effective upgrade path for enthusiasts' growing systems, and the Arcam is a joy to live with thanks to its clear, vivid display and logical layout, the Cyrus is a unique proposition offering the performance of full-sized separate components in compact, space-saving packages. As we are living in increasingly confined spaces these days it's no wonder that Cyrus products are so popular among hi-fi buyers today. As a reviewer I couldn't use them, the cramped space at the rear of the amplifiers necessitating the use of adaptors for speaker cables with banana plugs or spade terminations. This would

*'It's the NAD that offers the biggest bang for the buck'*

drive me bananas! If I didn't have to change my system almost every other day I would likely choose the Cyrus over the Arcam due to its versatility. The inclusion of a DAC built into the preamp is a boon, allowing digital hookup of a Sky/Freeview/Freesat box; the USB input for connection of a computer is the icing on the cake.

## STAR TURNS

The two stars of the group in terms of sheer audio performance turn out to be the cheapest and most expensive combinations respectively. The Primare



Pre30/A33.2 sounds simply divine, commensurate with its £3300 price, delivering effortless music-making full of drama, subtlety and scale. Pride of ownership is an important factor when spending so much, of course, and its chic, minimalist styling won't be to everyone's taste. I like it a lot, but concede that it's the polar opposite of much American high-end esoterica that is popular with many audiophiles. Its plastic remote controller is a let down; however, Primare manufactures a classy brushed aluminium optional handset (the C32) priced at £170.

It's the NAD C165BEE/C275BEE that offers the biggest bang for the buck. Like the Primare it sounds explicit, focused and never strained, tracking dynamic swings in music recordings with aplomb. Yes, it looks a little old-fashioned but there's nothing utilitarian about its sound which is highly polished. It's not quite the equal of the Primare, but given its £1600 price it can be deemed an audiophile bargain. ☺

