

Powerhouse!

GAMUT DI 150 INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER

Jonathan Valin



It seems a long time ago that that irascible Dane, Ole Lund Christensen, came to see me in Cincy with his first product—the GamuT D200 stereo power amplifier. Our Man in Sea Cliff had already heard the amp, extolled it, and commended it to me. Thus, the visit.

A lot of things have changed since then. Ole is no longer with GamuT, which is now owned by another Dane, Lars Goller. And GamuT is no longer a one-trick pony: In addition to stereo and monoblock power amps, it now makes loudspeakers, preamps,

CD players, accessories, and the integrated amp—the DI 150—that I'm reviewing. The old-line products have also evolved; the D200 is now in its Mk III version. (It wasn't even a Mk I, back then.)

However, some things have remained the same.

For instance, Christensen's brilliant idea—to use only *one* power MOSFET (capable of 300A peaks!) per channel in his output stage¹—is still the core technology of all GamuT amplifiers. (Conventional solid-state power amps use a plethora of discrete

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power transistors in their output stages, all of which have to be perfectly matched electrically to “sing with one voice.” It was Ole’s contention that these transistors could *never* be perfectly matched, so you inevitably ended up listening to a slightly out-of-tune choir rather than the one pure voice of his single MOSFET design.) The name has stayed the same, too—“gamut,” which, as Ole used to delight in pointing out, means the whole series of musical notes, from the lowest to the highest. Design and build-quality have also remained distinctive and high.

Danish-Modern-looking and extremely well made, the DI 150, for example, sports a sixty-pound aluminum-and-steel chassis, with a massive faceplate into which is set a backlit screen and a big volume control knob. When lit up (the back-lighting can be shut off, which dramatically changes the sound), the display lists in two columns the names of the inputs that can be selected via a supplied remote or by pressing the round pushbuttons that run along either side of the screen. (An LED lights up beside the selected input.) The volume control also has an LED associated with it, which revolves with the knob, indicating where in the roughly 300 degrees of rotation (and volume level) you are. It, too, is remote controllable. (Among other things, you can also mute the DI 150 with the remote.)

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With its remote control, home-theater-bypass toggle switch, six inputs (two balanced), and four outputs, the DI 150 looks like a sexy latter-day integrated. But looks, here, are deceiving. This is not a typical integrated amp, in that none of its circuitry (save for its remote-controlled display) has been designed and built specifically for this integrated application. No, GamuT has taken a far more ambitious route. Inside that single aluminum-and-stainless-steel chassis is nothing less than a D200 Mk III stereo amp and a D3i linestage preamp. Oh, the dual-mono power supplies have to be tailored to accommodate the chassis (and power output is, thereby, reduced by about 10%), but the circuits are identical to GamuT’s standalone power amp and preamp. If you bought the pair as stand-alones, they would cost you \$4k more (not

including the interconnect you’d have to buy to hook them up). GamuT isn’t offering you an integrated; it’s offering two well-established separates in a single box, at a relative bargain price.

You could probably tell that this isn’t a typical integrated by looking at its power output numbers. Conservatively rated at 180Wpc (the factory says it typically outputs 210Wpc) into 8 ohms, 360Wpc into 4 ohms, and 720Wpc into 2 ohms, this is not your grandson’s integrated. You could also tell by looking at its price tag. At \$10,500, this is definitely not a Creek. That’s *serious* money, and to earn it the DI 150 had better be seriously good. Happily, it is. Maybe as good as integrations get. *But* you’re going to have to love the GamuT sound to go for it.

What is the GamuT sound? Well, that’s changed a bit over the years. Ole’s first D200 was an astonishingly (and I mean record-breakingly) fast, powerful, detailed, dead-neutral amplifier, with the hardest-hitting bass I’d heard up to then. The thing had tremendous clout, microscopic resolution, and not a trace of human warmth in its aluminum-and-steel body. It was a lab instrument, essentially—kind of a Halcro before there was a Halcro. An amplifier for recording engineers, it was not, I thought, ideal for home stereo, although what it did well it did jaw-droppingly well.

Several years later, the Mk II version of the D200 showed up in my listening room. By then I had long since written a review of the Mk I, detailing most of what I just said. To my surprise, GamuT must’ve taken my critique (or somebody’s critique) seriously, for the Mk II was a substantially different animal.

“Be careful of what you wish for” isn’t just a slogan. The “new” D200 wasn’t quite all kisses and cuddles, but there was *a lot* more timbral flesh on the old rhythmic bones. Indeed, the amp was now positively warm and a bit dark in balance. It was also a bit soft—or softer than the D200.

Everything considered the Mk II was an improvement. Its newfound tonal colors were closer to those of the real thing. But secretly I longed for more of a taste of the old D200, with its lightning transients and thunder dynamics and dead-neutral

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palette. It was a beast, but you couldn't help loving it.

Comes now, in the sheepy form of an integrated amp, the D200 Mk III (and its companion GamuT lineage preamp, the D3i, which I've never reviewed or auditioned). What does it sound like? Well, I am pleased to report that it sounds like a D200 Mk I with improved tone color. In other words, it's got its mojo back. This is the amp I'd hoped for in the Mk II version. Fast, hard-hitting, detailed as hell, neutral in balance, more lifelike (but not overly rich) in timbre, it's a killer.

But... it definitely sounds solid-state, and in kind of an old-fashioned way.

Ole never made any apologies for solid-state. He thought it was the tubes that ought to make apologies (and that did, turning bad records into good ones). If you're used to the lovely things that tubes can do, you won't find a one of them here. The bloom, the roundedness, the lifelike size, the liquidity, the gentleness, the forgiveness.

Instead, you'll hear every single violinist, violist, cellist, and bassist in the Berlin Philharmonic's string sections

Specs & Pricing

Type: Balanced dual-mono integrated amp
Power: 180Wpc @ 8 ohms; 360Wpc @ 4 ohms; 720Wpc @ 2 ohms
Inputs: Six (four unbalanced, two balanced)
Outputs: Four pair (one XLR line-level, one RCA line-level, one tape, one speaker)
Dimensions: 155mm x 431mm x 410mm
Weight: 30 kg.
Price: \$10,500

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ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Walker Proscenium Black Diamond record player; Clearaudio Goldfinger v2, Air Tight PC-1 mc cartridges; ARC Reference 3, Audio Space Reference 2 preamps; ARC PH7, Lamm LP2 phonostages; ARC CD7 CD player; ARC 610T, MBL 9008, Pass Labs 350.5, Parasound A21 amps; MAGICO Mini II, MBL 101 E, Ascendo M-S II, Focal 1007Be, Magneplanar MG12 speakers; Tara Labs "The One" and Omega cables

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roughing up the lorn flute and oboe in the Andante of the Prokofiev Fifth [DG]; you'll hear every marvelous nuance of *Mr. John Cage's Prepared Piano* [Decca Head], which, through the DI 150, can sound like a small ensemble (a drum—where'd that come from? A cymbal—how's that possible?); you'll hear every little warble and tremolo in Aaron Neville's watery falsetto on "Save the Last Dance for Me" [Rhino] like you're looking down his throat. You will also hear poor recordings sound more themselves. Though not no-prisoners unforgiving, like the D200 Mk I was, the DI 150 doesn't prettify bad records or CDs. On the other hand, it doesn't make them sound awful, either.

Soundstaging? Not the widest, deepest, tallest I've heard, but very good. Imaging? Also very good. This is not a miniaturizing solid-state amp. Nor does it throw things toward the back of the 'stage, as solid-

state tends to do. It's certainly not big and forward in the manner of a tube amp, but it isn't overly recessed, either.

Yes, the DI 150 has a sound of its own. All amps do. Single MOSFET GamuT amps are generally strong, fast, clear, and aggressively neutral in balance (if that makes any sense). They're anything but dark and liquid—sort of the anti-MBL sound. But this is not the cold, clinical amp the D200 used to be. In fact, the DI 150 can sound quite beautiful with good source material—and realistic with great ones. (You can make the DI 150 sound more like an MBL, BTW. Just turn on that front panel light, and everything will get darker and sweeter, without any apparent loss in dynamics.)

So where does the DI 150 stand? It's the best integrated amp I've heard, but, then I haven't heard many—and none that costs this much. So let me put this differently: It's fully competitive with some of the best solid-state separates I've heard. No, it's not a \$76k MBL 9011—in fact, it's nothing like an MBL 9011—but to the kind of listener who prizes detail, speed, power, and neutrality above all else it will be *well* worth seeking out. **TAS**

¹Actually, because the D200 is balanced, it worked out to two power MOSFETS per channel—one for each electrical leg (positive and negative) of the circuit.

