

Amplifiers



EAM Lab Classic 102i

By Fr@ntz

It would seem that the domestic audio market is so saturated, if not crammed, with all sorts of brands from the farthest corners of our globe that there is simply no room left for another player. On the other hand, some recipients are so bored with the "faces" migrating between distributors' catalogs that they crave fresh blood and projects that are far from being labeled. And it is precisely with the representative of this fresh blood and a new face among the brands available on the Vistula that we will meet in this test thanks to High End Alliance . Without unnecessarily prolonging the introduction, I invite you to a few, as is my custom, extremely subjective comments and reflections on the integrated amplifier EAM Lab Classic 102i.







As a casual introduction to the brand that is officially debuting on our pages, I will only allow myself to mention that the beginnings of its activity date back to 1997, when Emanuele Pizzi founded the TCE company, offering its amplifiers for the pro-audio market. So what does this entity have to do with our guest today? Well, in 2010 it was renamed ... EAM Lab and its portfolio now includes electronics also aimed at "civilian" recipients from the Hi-Fi / High-End segment. Currently, the 800 m² headquarters of EAM lab is located in the picturesque town of Busto Arsizio (Lombardy / Italy) and it is here that the complete production process takes place - from the design phase, prototype implementation, to production and preparation for shipping of the final versions. The premises also include an exhibition and display area and three listening rooms. In short, everything possible is done on site – under one roof.

And how does the titular 102 look? I dare say that looking at it from the perspective of "Italian stereotypes" it is surprisingly ... raw, or even industrial. You will not find the expected rustic accents, rounded shapes or wooden, probably walnut, inserts in it. We are dealing with a rather small, aluminum body with menacingly bristling radiator combs on the sides, blackened ventilation perforations neatly integrated into the top plate and a minimalist front made of a massive sheet of brushed aluminum. Let us add that the front is minimalistically sparse, with a centrally placed, legible display available in white, yellow, green and blue visible in the above photos and two turned knobs - the left one, responsible for source selection and the right one - acting as a gain control.

A glance at the rear panel does not disappoint, both flanks are occupied by single, solid speaker terminals and between them there is space for a pair of XLR inputs, an output/input from the pre/power amplifier, 3 RCA line inputs enriched with a built-in MM phono preamplifier, an output for an external recorder and an optional digital section with coaxial, USB and optical inputs. The list ends with a main switch and an IEC power socket. The set also includes an elegant and handy aluminum remote control.

Despite its rather inconspicuous posture, the 102 inspires confidence with its quite substantial, 15 kg weight, which is largely due to the surprisingly solid power supply based on two large toroids, providing life-giving energy to the systems designed in dual mono topology mounted on four-layer PCBs, one layer of which acts as a screen against RFI interference. What is surprising is the fact that despite the balanced design, there is only a single pair of XLRs on the back, and four RCA inputs. Fortunately, the signals supplied to them are symmetrical, but if you have a choice in this case, it is worth taking care of a balanced source as well. Going further, the converter section is placed on a separate board. It boasts the presence of a 32-bit Sabre ESS - ES9038Q2M chip. The volume control is provided by a pair of digital circuits controlling the output stages based on MOSFET transistors. The manufacturer's declared power of the title integrated is 100W at 8Ω, 180 at 4Ω and ... 290W at 2Ω per channel, which clearly indicates that this inconspicuous little guy should successfully cope even with large and not very easy to drive speakers.

Moving on to the description of the 102's sound qualities, I will be careful to point out that I had no idea what to expect from it, because if memory serves me right, not only had I never listened to anything from the Italian company in my well over a quarter-century of adventure with Hi-Fi, but until the proposal made by High End Alliance I was completely unaware of the existence of the titular entity. That is why, without unnecessary and confusing the reception of the baggage of expectations, I plugged the EAM Lab Classic 102i into my regular system and... my jaw dropped. The reason? Quite obvious - extremely energetic, full of verve, drive and great control playing, reminiscent of the engine of a thoroughbred sports car. However, I will allow myself to skip a specific brand at this point, because the range of automotive analogies among Italian two-wheelers is so wide and has such a large group of obsessively loyal fans that in order to avoid potential and completely unnecessary animosities, it is best for each of you, of course after listening, to decide whether the EAM Lab Integra is closer to the Ferrari Testarossa, Lamborghini Aventador or maybe Lancia Delta Integrale. Nevertheless, one thing is obvious and indisputable - we are dealing with a real volcano of energy that loves repertoire, where the proverbial ride without holding the handles blows the slippers off your feet and the beret off your bald head. It is therefore not surprising that during almost two weeks of tests, the title amplifier was very often fed with all kinds of metal extremes, great symphonies and uncompromising electronics, which cannot be heard during official, exhibition listening sessions for fear of obvious compromise of the presented systems. Meanwhile, regardless of whether the Alien Weaponry gang was screaming from the speakers ("Tangaroa"), the French horns were heralding a real apocalypse ("Gladiator"), or the infrasonic bass of 潘PAN ("Ghosts") was shaking the foundations of Hades, EAM held my Dynaudio amplifiers, not very friendly to weak ones, in an iron grip and led them on an extremely short leash. Control over the entire reproduced band deserved only superlatives, but instead of taking shortcuts and a certain thinning of the sound, the 102 focused on not exaggerated sinewiness, but at the same time it maintained the proper juiciness, mass and volume of the generated sound. She also avoided excessive nervousness, so if after the cacophonous build-ups there came a moment of lyrical chords, she automatically switched from apocalyptic destruction to soothing the shattered nerves. It is also worth emphasizing that during the guest performances, 102-ka, despite her, I assume, innate uncompromising nature, never once let herself be caught emphasizing sibilants or the graininess of the highest components, so both the rustling Carla Bruni ("Quelqu'un M'a Dit" <https://tidal.com/browse/album/4873453>), as well as the hissy Anna Maria Jopek ("Farat" <https://tidal.com/browse/album/13189205>) graciously let themselves be listened to without feeling tired from the first to the last sounds recorded on their albums. Of course, the vocal mannerisms of both of the above-mentioned divas were perfectly audible, but they did not dominate the whole message.

As I secretly hope, the above text clearly shows that the appearance of the EAM Lab Classic 102i in your systems can be a real wake-up call for the speakers that have been somewhat sluggish and not very willing to cooperate. Moreover, when considering the choice of version, I will immediately suggest that there is no need to hesitate, because the optional DAC module is simply great and is not just an addition forced by the market, but can easily compete with stand-alone designs from the level of at least 5k PLN. So if you are looking for something unusual, unprepared and at the same time characterized by a high-quality, energy-boiling sound, then the titular Italian integrated amp should suit your taste.

Marcin Olszewski

System used during the test

- CD/DAC: Vitus Audio SCD-025 Mk.II
- File player: Lumin U2 Mini + Farad Super3 + Farad DC Level 2 copper cable + Omicron Magic Dream Classic; IO Data Soundgenic HDL-RA4TB
- Turntable: Denon DP-3000NE + Denon DL-103R
- Phono preamplifier: Tellurium Q Iridium MM/MC Phono Pre Amp
- Digital source selector: Audio Authority 1177
- Integrated amplifier: Vitus Audio RI-101 MkII + Quantum Science Audio (QSA) Violet
- Speakers: Dynaudio Contour 30 + Acoustic Revive SPU-8 pads + Base Audio quartz platforms
- RCA IC: Furutech FA-13S; phono NEO d+ RCA Class B Stereo + Ground (1m)
- XLR IC: Vermöuth Audio Reference; Furutech DAS-4.1
- Digital IC: Fadel art DigiLitz; Harmonic Technology Cyberlink Copper; Apogee Wyde Eye; Monster Cable Interlink LightSpeed 200
- USB Cables: Wireworld Starlight; Vermöuth Audio Reference USB; ZenSati Zorro
- Speaker cables: Signal Projects Hydra + SHUBI Custom Acoustic Stands MMS-1
- Power cables: Esprit Audio Alpha; Furutech FP-3TS762 / FI-28R / FI-E38R; Organic Audio Power + Furutech CF-080 Damping Ring; Acoustic Zen Gargantua II; Furutech Nanoflux Power NCF
- Power strip: Furutech e-TP60ER + Furutech FP-3TS762 / Fi-50 NCF(R) /FI-50M NCF(R)
- Wall socket: Furutech FT-SWS-D (R) NCF
- Switch: Silent Angel Bonn N8 + Silent Angel S28 feet + Farad Super3 power supply + Farad DC Level 2 copper cable
- Ethernet cables: In-akustik CAT6 Premium II; Audiomica Laboratory Anort Consequence, Artoc Ultra Reference, Arago Excellence; Furutech LAN-8 NCF; Next Level Tech NxLT Lan Flame
- Anti-vibration platform: Franc Audio Accessories Wood Block Slim Platform
- Table: Solid Tech Radius Duo 3
- Acoustic panels: Vicoustic Flat Panel VMT

Distribution: High End Alliance

Manufacturer: EAM Lab

Prices

EAM lab classic 102i + Mhono MM: 3,200€

Optional DAC module: 400€

Technical Data

Output power: 2 x 100W / 8Ω; 2 x 180 / 4Ω; 2 x 290 / 2Ω

Frequency response: 20Hz-20kHz +/- 0.2dB

THD+N distortion: 0.003%

Channel separation: >77dB

Signal to noise ratio: >102dB

Analog inputs: 1 pair XLR, 3 pairs RCA, phono MM, AMP-IN RCA

Analog outputs: Pre-out RCA, Rec Out. RCA

Digital inputs (after installation of optional DAC module): Optical, Coaxial, USB (PCM max 24bit/384kHz; DSD 512)

Input impedance: 47 kΩ (XLR); 22 kΩ (RCA), 47 kΩ (Phono)

Gain (Phono MM): 41dB

Dimensions (W x D x H): 42 x 38 x 11 cm

Weight: 15 kg

