

Test: Network player, DAC pre-amplifier and power amplifier SotM sMS-200 Ultra, Manunta Young Mk III and Manunta Crosby

Two to one

Compact systems are nice, but usually it is rather difficult to find matching devices. Manunta gets stronger thanks to SotM.

Manunta has always focused on rather small devices that complement each other very well. Most recently, the ultra-tiny EVO series systems put a whole lot of sophisticated technology into extremely small cases. The Rockstar series is a bit bigger, although the different systems are still a long way from bending the shelves of a shelf. In an area of 20 by 20 centimeters, at only 5 centimeters high, the devices of Manunta are expected to provide full-blown functions and of course the right sound. It's a plan that works out, as shown by our two testers.

The combination of the Manunta Young Mk III DAC/preamplifier and the Crosby power amplifier actually offered some surprises, which are rarely seen in the compact class.

So let's start with the power amp.

Although Crosby does not have front panel controls, it has four bright Status LEDs embedded in a dark glass plate on top of each other. Framed by a comparatively thick aluminum housing by a screwless design, it communicates clearly even without many design features.

But it gets really interesting on the back. The Crosby offers, despite the limited space available, both an XLR connector and a pair of RCA jacks for the acceptance of analog signals from the preamplifier. That alone is worthy of all honors, but here you find another surprise. In addition to the small selector switch for the input selection, there is a second lever, which switches the power amp from stereo to mono mode. Therefore the Crosby can be bridged and each drive a single bi-wiring speaker with his full power.

Of these, the class-D power amp develops a lot. In stereo, at hard clipping, nearly 120 watts were available per channel, while at eight Ohm impedance still just under 65 watts were reached. Both values are over the manufacturer specs. In mono mode, you will see even 180 watts of power available.

Enough power to get big speakers moving which one could hardly trust the little Crosby at first sight.

Also the distortion values remained consistently at a very low level, so that the power amp showed good linear operation at all times.

While sharing his appearance with Crosby, Young has one entirely other function. The slim DAC takes care of the transformation of the digital input signals, while the integrated pre-stage accomplishes the power amplifier drive. Accordingly, the front panel of the Young differs, its front plexiglass is equipped with a monochrome display and the matching multi-function knob. However, one looks in vain for what one has actually expected here, because the typical headphone output that DACs of this format often offer is missing here. Instead, Manunta concentrates with the Young entirely on the work with active speakers, the Crosby power amplifier or even an external headphone amplifier.

The DAC pre-stage offers everything you need for a full-format situation would find. Inputs for S/PDIF signals in the form of coaxial plug and Toslink socket are to be expected. There is even one more AES/EBU connection, which is so rare even in larger devices. For real HiRes ambitions, however, is a USB port necessary, of course, the Young also offers it. For fast and uncomplicated streaming from the smartphone, a Bluetooth interface is also integrated, the antenna is pleasantly small and only protrudes a few millimeters from the metal housing. Quite quality-conscious, this works with the lossless AptX standard, which also allows for the transmission of albums in CD quality without cable. Manunta even thought about an analogue input, too, so that a phono preamp or a CD player with the preamp can be used. Thankfully, the connections here are even designed so that even with multiple connections used no dislocations must be made or bend the cable.

Exemplary. On the output side, there is less versatility, because although the Crosby makes both analog connection types possible, the Young is the only balanced XLR connector method to output the variable signal.

For the conversion, Manunta relies on a Burr-Brown platform. The PCM1795 DAC chip is used in the Young, supported by two different clocks, of which each covers its own frequency range, so that a conversion between can be bypassed the two multiples. That leads to a more accurate result in the actual D/A conversion and suppresses the undesired jitter.

The DAC works quite modern with a 32-bit architecture that does not cause word depths of this or lower value. For this purpose, the processing of PCM signals with up to 384 kHz is possible with the Young. Furthermore, the DAC provides DSD compatibility, which allows the decryption of bitstreams up to 11.2MHz, which is equivalent to DSD256. Full HiRes support is therefore no longer a dream in the compact class. Even a filter setting is possible here, in order to adapt the sound of the Young a little to the own hearing taste.

Instead of a simple selection, even separate algorithms for DSD and PCM are used here. Access to these and other functions can be obtained either with the buttons on the front or the included remote control, which has proven to be significantly more comfortable in comparison, to navigate through the options menu of the DAC.

In addition to the digital playback, which have earned quite a praise, you also take advantage of the analog competence of Manunta. Note: Instead of simply regulating the output signal through the DAC chip to let it, as is usually the case with compact systems, here we find a separate analog volume control.

As good as Young and Crosby are attuned to one another, they make one DAC pre-amp and a power amp unfortunately not a complete hi-fi system. And even if the grasp to the smartphone is always a possibility, the Bluetooth transmission will probably not adequately meet the capabilities of the station wagon. That's why we complemented Manunta's duo with the right source device in the form of the SOTM SMS-200 Ultra.

The Korean manufacturer is one of the secrets in the field of music computers, because in addition to the finished systems of the company are also here individual components that users use in their own computers can turn. A little bit of this pioneering spirit from the beginning time of high quality digital audio playback has become SOTM until today receive. Focused hardware combines with an individual software solution.

In contrast to most other modern source devices, which offer a special control app, SOTM lets users decide how they want to control the SMS-200 Ultra. Necessary is either a mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet, or a computer that is in the same network as the slim streamers. Using the IP address or a special shortcut, the operating system called Eunhasu can then be accessed via a browser and the desired controller can be configured.

Long-time computer audio enthusiasts are excited about integrating Logitech's SqueezeLite and MPD to access attached servers or storage. For classic DLNA-based apps, which are offered in countless ways either for free or for a few euros in the Play and App Store, the SMS-200 Ultra can also be made accessible.

With the Shairport integration, a direct streaming content of various apps such as Qobuz or Tidal is also possible if the DNLA app used does not offer its own integration. Ultimately, then, control via room would be possible in order to be able to address SOTM's network players via the popular music software.

So the SMS-200 Ultra offers a lot of possibilities, and as flexible as it is in the operation, it is also in the choice of the music played. Thus, the streamer supports both the playback of DSD at up to eight times the data rate as well as all popular PCM formats. 768 kHz sampling rate and 32 bit word depth are no problem for the device, so that virtually no music can be found, the use of which would be prevented here.

The real peculiarity of the SMS-200 in the new Ultra version, in addition to the slightly modified exterior, however, is the new clock section of the System. With the clock called sCLK-EX the streamer is now supposed to offer a further enhanced

sound experience, which surpasses the standard version. In addition, our test device was already equipped with the optional Word Clock input with BNC connection, with which the SMS-200 Ultra can be synchronized with another oscillator.

SOTMs player became so via USB, the only output of the streamer connected to the Manunta combo, and although the slightly longer case of the Ultra may make an optical combination less perfect, the three systems compliment each other perfectly. The clock upgrade of the Ultra actually brings out a lot more from the already good SMS-200. Thus, the game of Streamer now presented against a darker background and seemed altogether more plastic.

Supported by the precise transformation of the Young and powered by the remarkable achievement of the Crosby developed here a wonderful lively sound. Punch in the bass provided a good foundation for rock, while classical orchestral pieces profited from the dynamics of the setup. With increasing quality of the source material, a finer and finer game turned up again and again. More details came out and the tweeter got a little finer. It always maintained a nice flow, which simply gave the station wagon a great musicality. Compact systems have become a real alternative in the era of hi-res audio and cleverly designed analog technology, enabling them to realize good sound even in a smaller space.

Philipp Schneckenburger

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"SOTM upgrades its SMS-200 in the Ultra version once again. The Good new neutral game of the player gets through the new clock section again a boost and acts more plastic, while the individual operating solution their fans will surely find.

Manunta delivers with the Rockstar series just the right combination, to a great compact system.

The Young Mk III offers possibilities and technology that are otherwise reserved for large systems.

With the Crosby power amp, Manunta delivers just the right amount of power to put a full-fledged system in its place. "

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