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Based on 40 years of continuous research and unwavering commitment to UK manufacturing, everything Rega does is there for one reason alone.

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## REVIEW

### PS Audio's Stellar S300

#### A Wallet (and Back) Friendly Amplifier

*By Rob Johnson*

Over the course of 40 years, the team at Colorado-based PS Audio has been extremely busy. The number and type of PS Audio's component offerings constantly evolving over those four decades as new design ideas, approaches, and technologies led to an ever-increasing line of high value components. Today, PS Audio offers preamps, digital audio components, various accessories, and much more. Their latest addition to the stable, the Stellar S300 stereo amplifier, provides terrific audio performance that exceeds expectation of its \$1,499 bargain price.

#### Starting with innovation

The new amp offers a unique circuit design marrying class D and class A circuitry within a single chassis.

PS Audio's takes full advantage of class D circuitry's efficient, high current potential for the output stage, coupling that with the warmer musicality of a class A, MOSFET-based input stage. After significant research and development, PS Audio's Darren Myers engineered the all-new circuitry which the company dubs an "Analog Cell." The result of this challenge is an energy-efficient component without the immense heat and substantial heatsinks which most class A designs require.

As a dual-mono design, each channel of the Stellar S300 has its own amplification stage and power supply.





## REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

While this approach requires a more complex build with two very distinct signal paths, there are some benefits a listener can expect. First, left and right channels are isolated to avoid potential cross-talk. Secondly, neither side wrestles for its food from a single power supply. Ultimately, the extra effort and cost of a dual-mono design like this has potential to offer more distinct soundstaging and an overall improvement in sonics. The PS Audio amp provides 140 watts per channel into eight-ohm speaker loads, and 300 into four-ohm scenarios, so there's plenty of juice on tap. Those needing added power should consider PS Audio's M700 monoblocks that feature similar electronic topology, but with extra power for more demanding speaker loads.

Unlike many of today's pure class A amplifiers featuring back-straining weight and a multitude of pointy heat sinks, the Stellar and its specialized internals weigh in at a scant 16.5 pounds. The amplifier sports a simplistic and streamlined aluminum body, interrupted only by a few vent holes for cooling on the top and sides. Other than a black "feature stripe" on the front panel created by a carefully and purposefully engineered gap between top and bottom wrap-around panels, the smooth facade is interrupted only by a small, square button on the top left corner to power up the unit from standby. The S300 is modest in overall size, measuring 17" wide by 3" high by 13" deep including connectors protruding from the rear panel.

### Setup

On the back of the amp, users have the option to use either the RCA or XLR inputs for connection to an upstream preamplifier or a digital source with variable output. For speaker connection, a double set of five-way binding posts offers additional flexibility in setup. With the extra posts, you can potentially drive two sets of speakers or bi-wire the Stellar to a single set of speakers.

With speaker wires, interconnects, and a power cord attached snugly to the amp, just flip the power switch on the back and you are almost ready to rock. The last step is pushing the front panel's square, blue LED-illuminated button which brings the amp out of standby. From initial cold start the amp's sound improves a bit once it comes up to full operating temperature, but thanks to the standby mode capability, which keeps the circuitry warm and ready for action, Stellar is prepared to sing in a matter of seconds.

### Listening

At first listen, a few things stand out sonically. While the amp has a seemingly neutral sound, there is a touch of forgiving warmth, slightly taming edgy artifacts residing in music sources or upstream components. However, the S300 will never be accused of a syrupy, or slow presentation. Across the frequency spectrum, it lends the appropriate emphasis without adding to or detracting from the music.

Bass proves another strong point for the Stellar. Ample power reserves keep a firm grip on lower frequency information. While bass is ample, it is not accentuated to an unnatural degree. The S300 exhibits excellent balance of depth, tightness, and punchiness, without an aggravating sensation of the eardrums getting used like tiny punching bags.

## REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

Songs like "Bulls on Parade" by Rage Against the Machine render with the energy of the performance. The S300 is at its best when the music demands more aggressive sonics.

The S300 also handles vocal presentations with grace. Male singers like Lyle Lovett, Beck, Leonard Cohen and Robert Plant are heard with convincing presence and the nuances that define each of their musical styles. During powerful passages from female soprano vocalists, the S300 does never loses its composure. Each singer's voice exhibits with poise, whether the song demands an unbridled crescendo or delicate subtleties, without hard edges.

The S300 handles soundstaging exceptionally well. Its voice offers a sense of spaciousness helping to promote the illusion of your speakers dissapearing. Musical elements drift all around the room but do not bunch up around the speaker bodies, so the musical illusion of a live performance remains preserved.





# REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

As the music dictates it, the amp empowers sound to extend well into the room, and recede beyond the rear wall of the listening space. Even when playing songs with many instruments and vocals distributed across the sound-engineered stage, each element has a well-defined presence both left-to-right and forward-to-rear.

The result of all these strengths gives the S300 a beautiful voice which mates well with the variety of upstream gear we had on hand for testing. For those who plan to spend significantly more than \$1,500 on an amp, yes, considerably more money can buy a higher level of refinement and detail retrieval enabling a more revealing and realistic sound. Heck, some people spend more than \$1,500 on interconnects. Given all of its capability, I am hard-pressed to think of other amplifiers in the S300's price range that do so much, so well. It holds its own among components that exceed its price tag. This PS Audio component deserves a spot on a short list of bargain amps that perform beyond what one should expect for the money.

## Conclusions

After a few weeks with the S300 amplifier in my reference system, I must admit I am smitten with it. I applaud PS Audio's new approach to circuit design bringing together the benefits of both class A and class D technology.

My past frustrations with class D amplification, which never sounded quite natural to me, are diminishing with each passing year thanks to the brilliant engineers and designers who make our audio hobby possible. Companies like PS Audio keep improving ways to marry the lightweight, compact, energy-efficient and linear performance of class D topology with additional innovations that complement it for greater musical enjoyment.



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Home theater Review

“The Atom’s sound is reminiscent of Naim’s lineage---smooth and refined.”  
Audiophilia

“The Uniti Atom was worth the wait.”  
Tone Audio





REVIEW: PS Audio Stellar S300

At \$1,499 the PS Audio S300 stereo amplifier offers shockingly good price-performance, quickly earning it the recognition of a 2018 TONEAudio Exceptional Value Award. It is a bargain for all it provides. As with all PS Audio gear, the equipment is designed, built, and tested in their Colorado facility.

They also offer a trade-up program, accepting all kinds of gear. If an older piece of gear is eligible, owners can complete an online form on PSAudio.com, and the team in Colorado will determine a trade in value against a new piece of PS Audio gear. This is an exceptional opportunity which few manufacturers offer. Plus, with a 30-day in-home audition for new equipment from PS Audio, you have very little to lose, and many watts-per-channel to gain!

PS Audio Stellar S300 Amplifier

MSRP: \$1,499  
www.psaudio.com

PERIPHERALS

Analog Source	SME Model 10 with SME V and Model 10 tonearms. Dynavector 17D3 and Denon DL-103R cartridges
Digital Sources	Mac Mini, Roon Music Service, Simaudio MOON 780D DAC, Oppo BDP-103, Van Alstine AVA DAC Mk5
Amplification	Conrad-Johnson ART150
Preamplifier	Coffman Labs G1-B, Oppo HA-1
Speakers	GamuT RS3i, JL Audio Dominion Subwoofers
Cables	Jena Labs
Power	Torus AVR 15 Plus, RSA Mongoose power cords



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