

HiFiReport



Review

Van Medevoort MA360 SE Integrated Amplifier

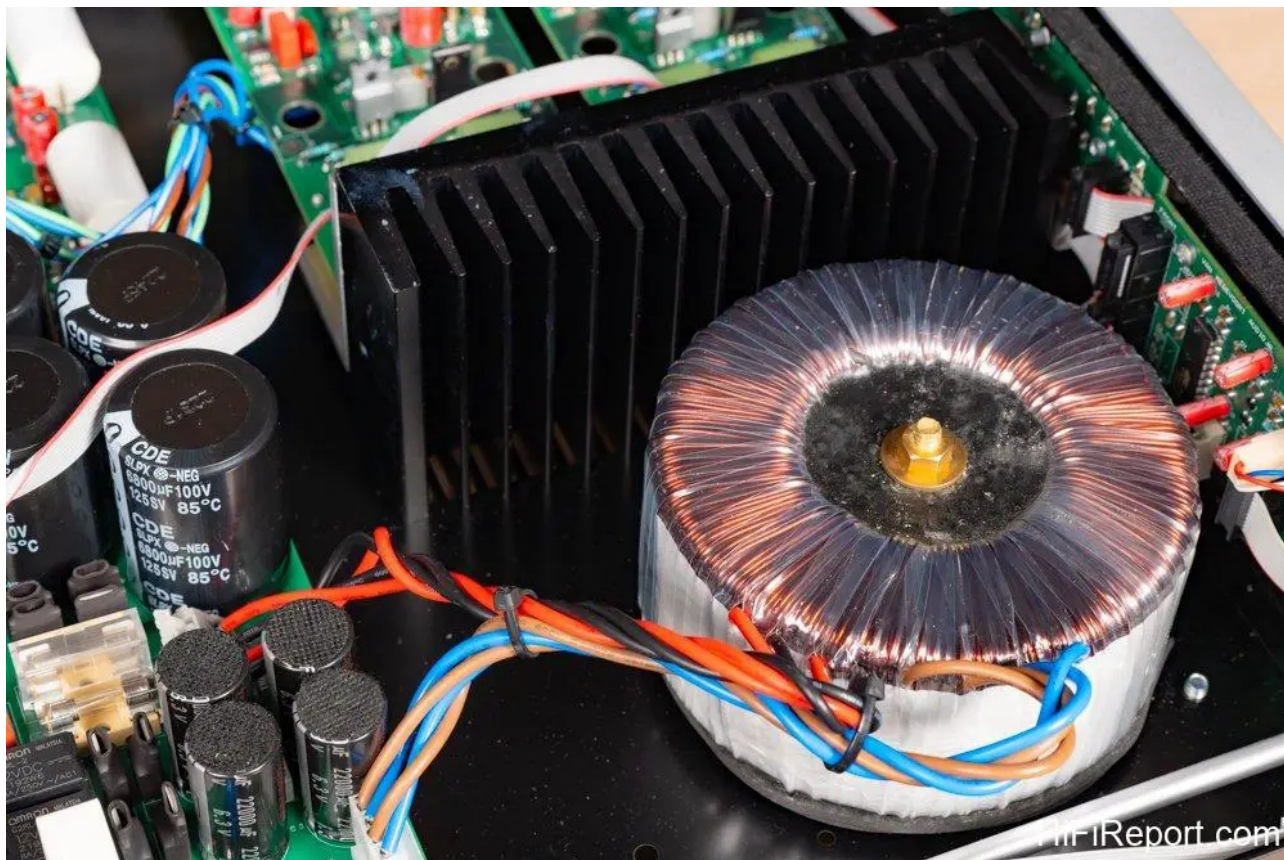
For me, the editor-in-chief, Van Medevoort from the Netherlands was a newly discovered brand. Yet, they are hardly a nascent player; founded in 1985, this audio company boasts a venerable forty-year history. Its recent introduction to our market is how I finally had the pleasure of experiencing it.

First Encounter at TAA 2024

My initial encounter with Van Medevoort occurred at the 2024 TAA Audio Show, where a joint new product launch with Vestylid was held. That's when I first became acquainted with Van Medevoort. However, given the somewhat challenging pronunciation of its full name, I'll refer to it simply as VM from now on for easier recall.

The brand name VM derives from its founder, Ad van Medevoort. He embarked on his journey in the audio industry in 1965, though it wasn't until 1985 that he established VM.

Entering the audio industry for two decades before striking out on his own speaks volumes about Ad van Medevoort's solid foundation. With such extensive experience, Ad van Medevoort must surely be over seventy, a seasoned veteran in the field.



Introducing Van Medevoort in Hong Kong and Taiwan

During the VM launch event, the brand presentation was handled by Carver Lai from Hong Kong. As a distributor of Martin Logan electrostatic loudspeakers in Hong Kong, Carver sought out VM to optimize the performance of these demanding speakers. This fortuitous connection led to VM's introduction in Hong Kong and subsequently to Martin Logan distributors and enthusiasts in Taiwan, recommending VM as the ideal solution for driving electrostatic loudspeakers.

That VM presentation gave me quite a fright, as I, someone not entirely proficient in Cantonese, was tasked with interpreting. Fortunately, I managed to keep pace with the technical jargon, narrowly making it through. This experience, however, left a profound impression of VM.

From Pro to Home: A Comprehensive Range

VM's product portfolio spans both professional studio equipment and home audio systems. Within their home amplifier lineup, products are categorized into entry-level, mid-range, and high-end series. The VM Audio Art 300 series marks the entry point, comprising seven amplifier models. Starting with the MA360 integrated amplifier, this series also includes the CA360 preamplifier, PA362 power amplifier, DA360 DAC, CT360 CD transport, CD360T CD player, and the PH360 MM/MC phono stage.



Moving up, the VM Audio Art 400 series features four components: the CA470 preamplifier, PA472 stereo power amplifier, PA471 monoblock power amplifier, and DA470 DAC.

At the very pinnacle resides the VM State of the Art series. The official website lists five products: a preamplifier, stereo power amplifier, monoblock power amplifier, DAC, and an MM/MC phono stage. However, as the top-tier State of the Art series is built to order, specific model numbers are not detailed.

The Exclusive SE Edition

The MA360 SE sent to HiFiReport for review bears the “SE” suffix, denoting a Special Edition. This particular variant was developed because Carver Lai, the Hong Kong distributor, has specific sonic requirements. Consequently, the filter capacitors and internal wiring were upgraded by the factory to specified components, and internal damping was enhanced. Thus, the MA360 units sold in Hong Kong and Taiwan are designated as the MA360 SE.

However, specific details regarding the SE modifications have not been extensively disclosed by the manufacturer. They prefer audiophiles to evaluate the sonic performance with their own ears, emphasizing that a pleasing sound is paramount.

Despite VM's impressive four-decade history, the manufacturer maintains a remarkably low profile. While searching for information on their official website, I found only two reviews for the MA360: one from VuMeter and another from Diapson, both French audio publications. Surprisingly, there were no reviews from VM's home country, the Netherlands. The VuMeter review specifically noted VM's minimal advertising, contributing to its somewhat mysterious reputation.



A Glimpse Inside

Given the scarcity of brand background information, I decided to go straight to the source and open up the unit. The MA360 SE boasts standard dimensions, roughly 1U in width and about 10 cm in height, yet it tips the scales at a substantial 12 kg. The front panel is crafted from thick aluminum, while the chassis is steel, conveying an immediate sense of robust rigidity and solid build quality upon handling.

Upon disassembly, the MA360 SE's internal layout clearly reveals three main sections. A sizable toroidal transformer occupies roughly half of the front portion of the chassis. For a stereo integrated amplifier rated at 150W, its power supply capacity of 350 watts signifies ample headroom, ensuring no dynamic compression even during high-power output.



In the rear half of the MA360 SE's chassis lies a large circuit board. The left section houses the power filtering, where damping enhancements are visible on top of the capacitors. The right section contains

the preamplifier circuitry, which is fully discrete and independently built for left and right channels. These connect to the power amplification stage located in the front-right of the chassis, with the left and right channels intentionally separated onto two distinct PCB boards to maximize channel separation through a dual-mono design.

Core Design Philosophy

The Alps potentiometer for volume control is mounted directly on the rear PCB, minimizing the distance to the preamplifier circuitry to ensure the shortest possible signal path. This is why the front volume knob employs a mechanical metal rod linkage to the Alps potentiometer.



In terms of circuit characteristics, the MA360 SE can be broadly summarized by three principles: differential amplification, dual-mono design, and shortest music signal path. As for the amplification topology itself, VM describes it as “Dynamic Class A.” This approach aims to deliver the rich, sonic qualities of Class A amplification without the excessive heat typically associated with pure Class A designs.

Unflappable Thermal Stability

The manufacturer recommends an optimal operating temperature of 35-40 degrees Celsius. The MA360 SE typically reaches this temperature within approximately 60 minutes of power-on, at which point it delivers its best sound.

Observing the MA360 SE's heatsink, located at the center-front of the chassis, it's evident that heat dissipates from this area, gradually spreading throughout the unit. During my listening sessions, the MA360 SE indeed performed optimally after about an hour of warm-up. At this point, the entire chassis exhibited a uniform, slight warmth—noticeable to the touch but never uncomfortably hot. This is when the MA360 SE sounded its absolute best.

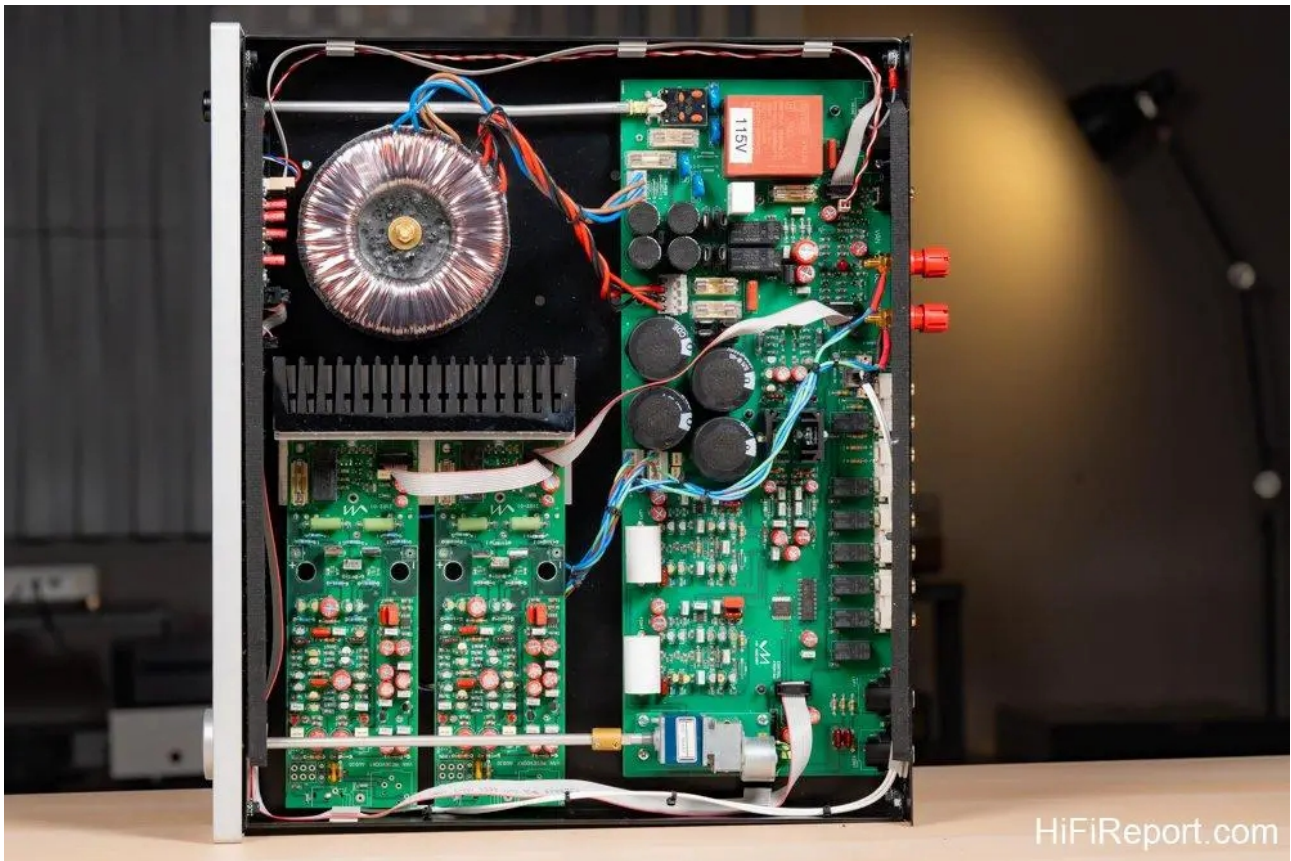


Moreover, while the power transistors appear to be the only components directly mounted to the central heatsink, the entire chassis, including the thick aluminum front panel and metal enclosure, effectively acts as a heatsink. Consequently, even when left playing all day, the MA360 SE consistently maintains its stable optimal operating temperature without overheating. Throughout my testing, even after a full day of operation, the MA360 SE remained only mildly warm to the touch.

Pure Analog Control

As integrated amplifiers go, the MA360 SE's design can be described as remarkably conventional, perhaps even a bit old-fashioned. The function buttons on the front panel are straightforward: a power switch on the left, input selectors (1-6) on the right, and a circular volume knob at the far right. The design is exceptionally clean and uncluttered.

I refer to the MA360 SE's front panel and controls as somewhat "old-fashioned" because they are entirely analog buttons and knobs, devoid of modern touchscreens or digital displays. However, for seasoned audiophiles, an all-analog control scheme typically means greater long-term reliability and fewer concerns about potential failures. Furthermore, finding replacement parts for simple mechanical switches is rarely an issue.

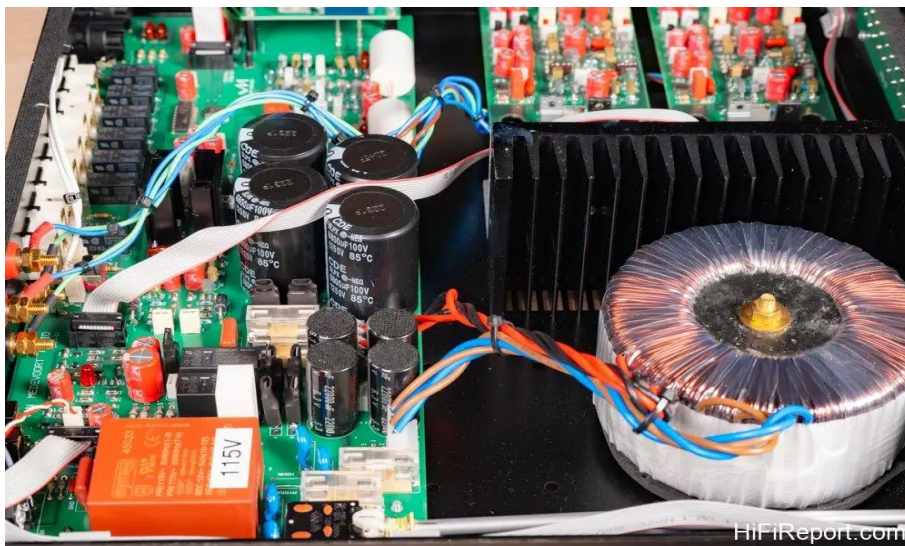
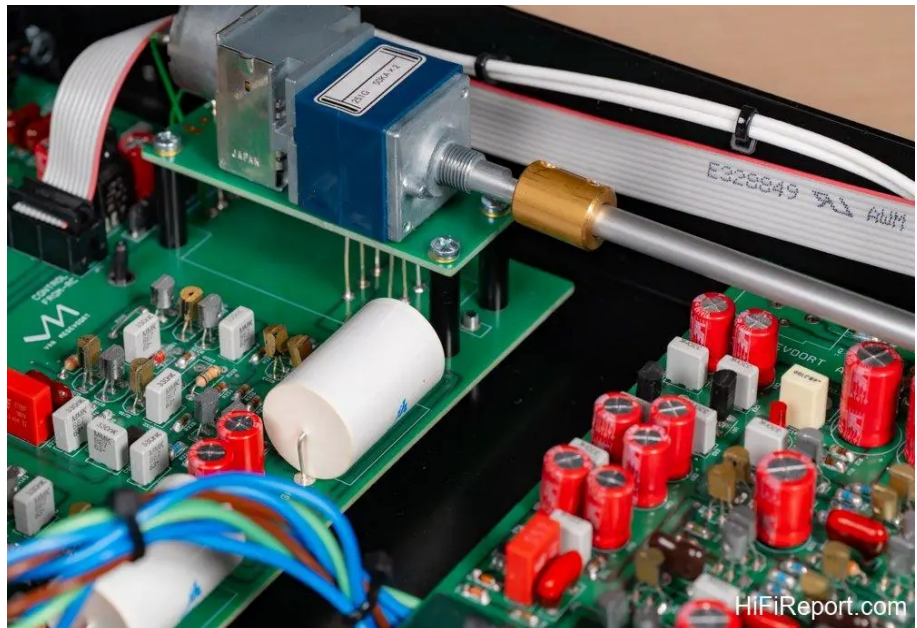


While some might feel that the reliance on analog switches without a modern LCD or touch interface seems behind the times, for those who prioritize machine stability and longevity, the MA360 SE's classic design philosophy signifies the manufacturer's intent for the unit to provide years of worry-free enjoyment without common electronic ailments.

Understated Powerhouse?

An integrated amplifier delivering 150 watts into 8 ohms, combined with the MA360 SE's unadorned exterior, might lead many to wonder: "It's just another new brand from the Netherlands, what's so special about it?" In truth, the MA360 SE possesses three attributes that make it a standout in its price category: First, the MA360 SE's amplification circuit boasts an exceptionally high damping factor, enhancing the amplifier's ability to control speaker low-frequency drivers. According to the factory specifications, the MA360 SE's damping factor ranges from 1,200 to 1,500. While not entirely unique in integrated amplifiers under approximately \$9,000 USD, such high figures are certainly uncommon.

Second, VM emphasizes ultra-low distortion in its amplification circuitry. The MA360 SE's Total Harmonic Distortion (THD) is specified by the manufacturer at 0.003%. While competitors at this price point might offer similar figures, they are certainly not abundant. Third is the MA360 SE's input level, which VM specifies as "unlimited." I genuinely cannot recall



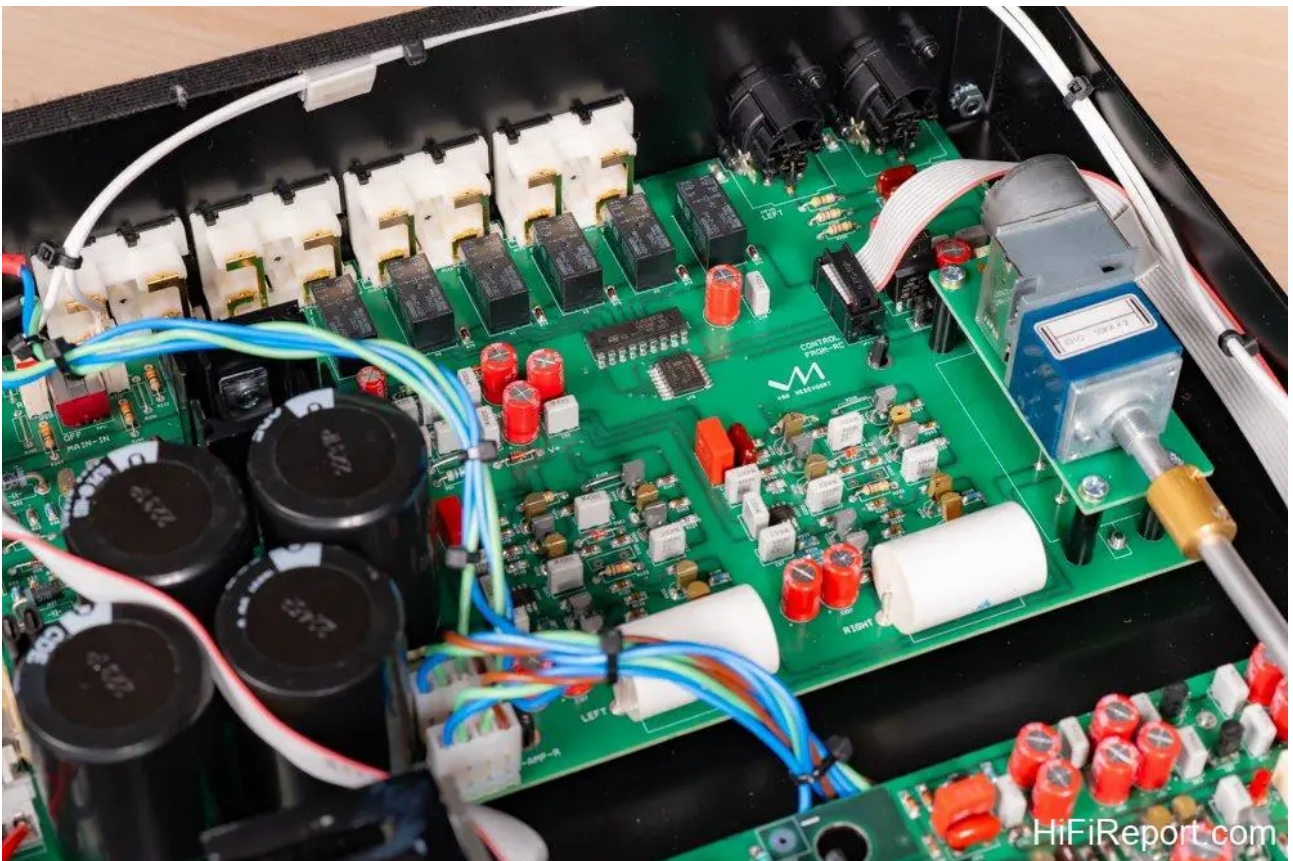
ever seeing "Unlimited" listed for an input level specification. This implies that you can pair the MA360 SE with high-gain sources without any fear of the amplifier being overloaded or generating distortion from the front end. While the MA360 SE's high damping factor and ultra-low THD might have

some rivals, when combined with its "unlimited" input level, the MA360 SE stands in a class of its own. Due to its high damping factor, the MA360 SE also exhibits exceptional resilience to varying speaker impedances. According to VM's factory specifications, the MA360 SE can handle speaker impedances as low as 2 ohms, meaning it can effortlessly drive even the most demanding, low-impedance loudspeakers.

Driving the Alexia V with Panache

It was time to put the MA360 SE to the test. For the listening session, I paired it with a YBA CDT-450 CD transport and a Merging NADAC, with the MA360 SE solely responsible for driving the Wilson Audio Alexia V loudspeakers.

I also brought in the Dynaudio Contour 60 for comparison, but when it came to low-frequency performance, the Alexia V's larger bass drivers, combined with the MA360 SE's high damping factor, demonstrated truly exceptional control. So, I opted to push the boundaries and pair the MA360 SE with the higher-tier Alexia V.



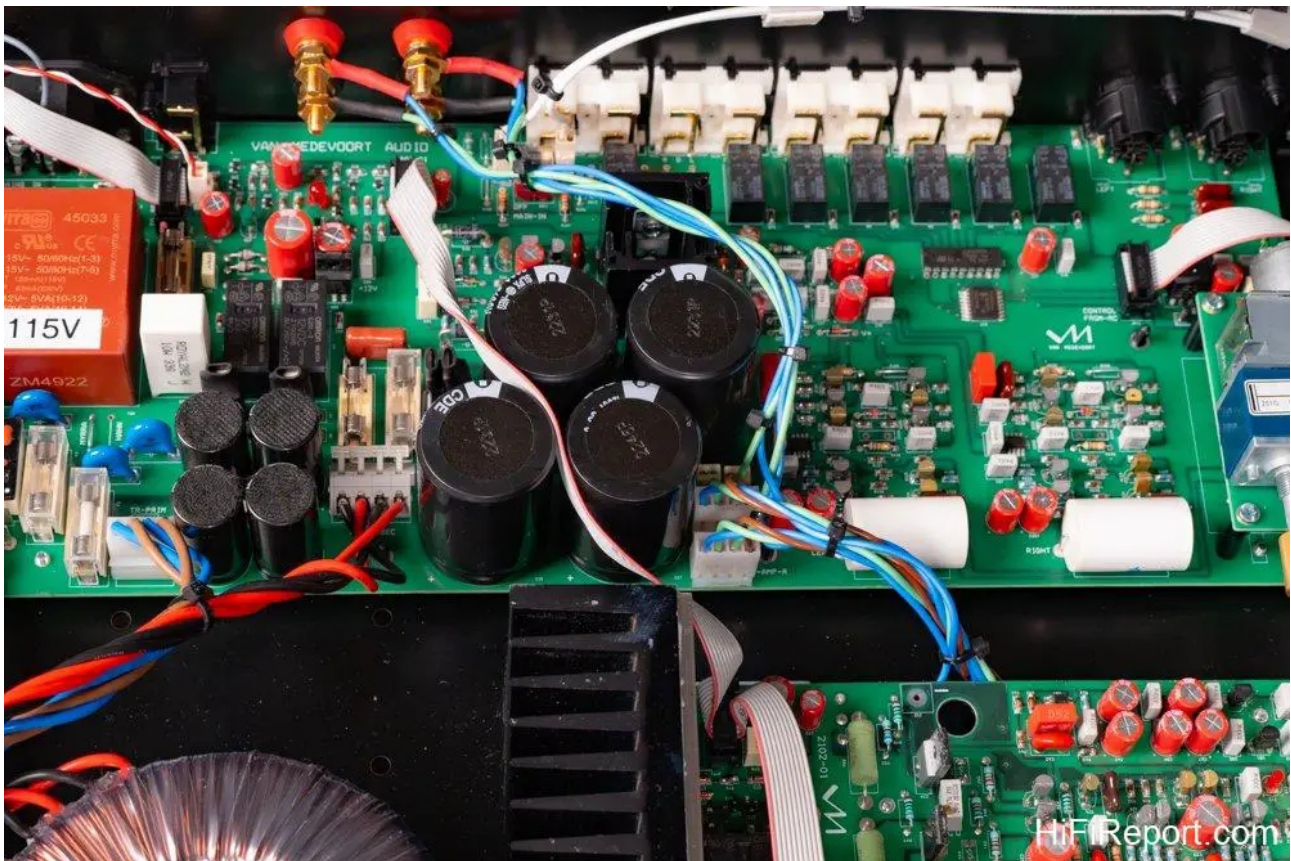
Warmth Meets Vibrancy

The manufacturer emphasizes that the MA360 SE's Dynamic Class A amplification delivers high damping factor, high slew rate, and low distortion—technical specifications that sound impressive. Yet, in musical reproduction, these translate into a warm and vibrant sound, coupled with remarkable tonal density. Taking Bach's Cello Suites as an example, listening to Mstislav Rostropovich's EMI recording of the Prelude, the MA360 SE conjured a thick yet elastic cello line precisely centered between the Alexia V speakers. The sense of space from the church recording, contrasted with the focused and substantial cello image, made the MA360 SE's rendition of the cello not just realistic, but also imbued with a smooth, flowing musicality.

Visceral Bass Performance

Of course, a solo cello piece doesn't fully challenge the MA360 SE's drive and control. Switching to blues rock, I played John Mayer's "I'm Gonna Find Another You." The opening electric guitar riff immediately conveyed the warmth of a vintage amplifier through the MA360 SE. John Mayer's vocals were intimately placed in the center of the soundstage.

As the drums and electric bass joined in, the MA360 SE expanded the width of the rock band's soundstage. The electric bass, with its compressed, punchy feel, intertwined with the decorative flourishes of the electric guitar. The electric guitar's trailing reverb and numerous other recording details were all rendered with precision by the MA360 SE, missing absolutely nothing.



Jazz Dynamics: Potent Lows, Luminous Highs

For an even more impactful bass experience, I turned to Jacques Loussier's "Jazz Plays Bach: The Four Seasons." The opening of the first movement of "Spring" features powerful jazz drum kicks, complemented by the rich, articulate pluck of the acoustic bass. The MA360 SE unleashed thick, weighty bass while maintaining a lively, bouncing speed, demonstrating superb control over the lower registers. Above the drums and double bass, the delightful piano melody unfolded. The MA360 SE rendered the layers of piano chords and single-note melodies with clarity, and the shimmering overtones of the piano were simply beautiful. As the music gradually descended, the double bass offered a low, humming pizzicato, extending the depth of the soundstage. The MA360 SE skillfully captured the contrasts in spatial cues within the recording, creating a profound 3D soundstage.

The music then tightened, the jazz drums pounding powerfully, returning to a normal tempo, once again presenting the joyful jazz "Spring." The MA360 SE reproduced the piano with a beautiful, sparkling sheen. Increasingly complex chords built up a rich tapestry of musical layers. Every time I listen to this jazz trio album, I'm amazed by the musicians' incredible talent—just three instruments, yet they create such a vibrant jazz swing atmosphere.

Brahms: Gravitas and Richness

Next up was classical music, with the first movement of Brahms' Piano Trio No. 1, performed by Maria João Pires, Augustin Dumay, and Jian Wang. The music begins with the piano's tender, romantic melody, followed by the cello joining in with complementary phrases. After these two instruments

establish the theme, the violin enters, immediately taking center stage as the piano and cello respond in kind, building the characteristic weight and richness of Brahms' music. The MA360 SE skillfully presented the relative positions of these three instruments, bringing out a vibrant quality in the mid-high frequencies. This allowed me to truly appreciate the distinct personalities of the three musicians: Pires's romantic yet never overly dense piano, Wang's relatively restrained cello, and Dumay's assertive violin. Thus, as Dumay's penetrating violin emerged, the piano and cello responded with equally fervent playing. The three instruments engaged in a dynamic interplay of cooperation and competition. Listening to Brahms with the MA360 SE, one experiences not just the musical texture, but also the profound emotional intent conveyed by the musicians, creating a deeply moving musical experience.

Mozart: Exquisite Soundstage

Finally, I listened to Radu Lupu and Murray Perahia's collaboration on Mozart's Concerto for Two Pianos, K. 365, choosing the delightful third movement, Allegro. The orchestral tutti introduces the rondo theme. Although Mozart's concertos typically feature smaller orchestrations, the MA360 SE delivered sufficiently full mid-low frequencies, presenting a tangible soundstage.

As the piano themes entered, the two pianos were distinctly placed on the left and right sides of the stage, responding to each other and to the accompanying orchestra. The MA360 SE rendered a fluid, natural stage depiction, clearly delineating the two pianos and the orchestra positioned centrally. Following Mozart's joyous Allegro tempo, the piano's leading tone was transparent and articulate, while the orchestra's responses provided depth and power in the low end.

I must say, even though VM discusses Dynamic Class A, high damping factor, high slew rate, and low distortion—all technical terms—in actual musical listening, one can simply forget these technicalities. The amplifier's fluid, warm, and vibrant tonality simply makes for an utterly captivating listening experience.

Beyond Appearances: A Must-Hear Amplifier

Honestly, when I first received the MA360 SE, I couldn't help but feel a bit apprehensive. This seemingly unassuming integrated amplifier carries a price tag of approximately ---- USD, and many other amplifiers boast a more outwardly appealing aesthetic. However, after actually listening to it, I can confidently say that VM sells pure sound quality and musicality. The MA360 SE's relatively simple and unpretentious design is built for enduring reliability. If you're seeking an integrated amplifier that is straightforward, sounds superb, and features entirely analog operation, it's absolutely worth making a dedicated trip to a distributor or dealer for an audition. The MA360 SE, though outwardly modest, harbors a purely analog musical soul within its core. After a listen, it might just become your cherished musical companion for years to come.

Specifications

Van Medevoort MA360 SE

- Type: Stereo Integrated Amplifier
- Power Output: 150 Watts (per channel)
- Damping Factor: 1200 – 1500
- Channel Separation: > 100 dB / 1.5 -100,000 Hz
- Distortion: < 0.003 % / 1.5 -100 kHz * S/N Ratio: > 100 dB
- Inputs: XLR × 1, RCA × 5
- Dimensions: 434 × 102 × 390 mm (W × H × D)
- Weight: 12 kg