



Wadia a315 and a340



About two or so decades ago, I wanted nothing more than a Wadia digital decoding computer. The Wadia gear was well ahead of the digital curve, offering standalone digital-to-analogue conversion that made the recordings of the time sound more real, more palpable, more downright enjoyable than most.

It was high-end kit, and while I got to spend lots of time with Wadia's DACs, courtesy of the then importers, Ambiosonics, they were always too expensive to actually own. But I do remember the many, many pleasurable hours spent listening to music in the Wadias' company.

Fast forward to 2015, and an altogether different musical landscape – a landscape crowded to the brim with digital products, including a burgeoning number of digital amplifiers. Interestingly, Wadia's own

PowerDAC digital amplifiers were among the first to seek a digital alternative to conventional and inefficient Class A and AB amplification, well before mainstream Class D designs emerged.

However, the adoption of digital, switch-mode amplification in the rather more critical high-end audio environment is a fairly recent development, mainly because of initial concerns around high-frequency glare and distortion.

It seems that the refinement and development of the technology is now attracting a growing number of top-end brands, all attracted by the efficiency and 'green' credentials of Class D designs.

With its history of pioneering digital technology, it should come as no surprise that the modern-day Wadia, now a part of the Fine Sounds group, has also chosen to follow the digital amplification route.

The Wadia product catalogue can be divided into the full-sized form factor 3-Series, and the compact form factor 1-Series. The 3-Series offers two new-generation digital power amplifiers: the stereo a315, and the a340 monoblock. We had examples of both for this review.

Wadia's iteration of what is nominally considered Class D switch-mode amplification is dubbed Frequency Switching Transmission (FST), which the company describes as an adaptive modulation design that assures full output power is delivered over the entire audio spectrum.

At the same time, speaker protection is provided by a proprietary signal monitoring system that continuously surveys the output signal and prevents amplification when unsafe levels of DC voltage are detected.

While both the a315 and a340 employ the same technology, the latter features a fully symmetrical design from input to



output, which Wadia calls IO Symmetry. The company claims this benefits noise rejection and overall sonic integrity.

Both the a315 and a340 offer a choice of XLR balanced and single-ended RCA inputs but the a340 gets matching outputs to allow for daisy-chaining. Binding posts are beautifully executed, solid metal five-way designs.

The enclosures are attractive and distinctive, with rounded corners and a thick, black glass top plate that create an almost organic impression. The lower edges feature integrated rubber-tipped 'feet' that contribute to the clean, contemporary look.

The front fascia is adorned with nothing more than a power button, status light and a large but subtly integrated Wadia logo, illuminated during operation. Overall execution is admirably solid and reassuringly robust.

I started off the review listening to the a315 driving Sonus Faber Venere 3.0 floor-standers on review at the time (a stint with our reference KEF R500s followed later for comparison), with much of the source material being supplied by Primare's excellent NP30 network player (reviewed elsewhere in this issue).

Listening to Mark Knopfler's 'Yon Two Crows' off the *Privateering* set (44,1/16 WAV) the Wadia sounded slightly darker, slightly warmer than expected. This thin tonal patina added an appealing glow to the music without veiling the music.

It certainly did nothing to prevent the Wadia from presenting a gloriously full harvest of detail, presented on a magnificent soundstage that provided a strong, believable sense of dimensionality.

The guitars sounded vibrant, thanks to a combination of close-focussed detail, tonal density and unequivocal positioning on the wide-open soundstage. Knopfler's almost nonchalant, slightly moribund vocals were afforded centre stage, with the Wadia allowing a close examination of every inflection and nuance, but never to the detriment of the overall performance.

I liked the way the Wadia made the most of the high-resolution signal it was presented with, not only paying close attention to the finer slivers of detail, but also contextualising them to the benefit of



the sound's overall credibility. It allowed the layers of sound to be peeled back, revealing elements and nuances that can so often go unnoticed by less diligent amplification.

The tonal spread was wide and generous, with plenty of bottom-end foundation to

underpin the performance, and a smooth midrange that steered a pleasing path between creamy texture and lean agility.

Any fears that the trebles would suffer glare or aggression were soon allayed – the upper frequencies showed off a slight sheen of warmth which added just the

VITAL STATS

a315

Power output	150/250 watts (per channel, 8/4 ohms)
Frequency response	20 Hz – 20 kHz (+0,-0,5 dB)
Signal-to-noise ratio	90 dB (A-weighted, balanced)
Inputs	1x stereo XLR, 1x stereo RCA
Outputs	Five-way binding posts
Dimensions (WxHxD)	454 x 86 x 508 mm
Weight	12,2 kg

a340

Power output	400/500 watts (mono, 8/4 ohms)
Frequency response	20 Hz – 20 kHz
Signal-to-noise ratio	90 dB (A-weighted, balanced)
Inputs	1x XLR, 1x RCA
Outputs	1x XLR, 1x RCA Five-way binding posts
Dimensions (WxHxD)	454 x 86 x 508 mm
Weight	12,2 kg

Price

Wadia a315:	R62 000
Wadia a340:	R71 000

Verdict

Clean, uncluttered aesthetics provide no clue to the big, spacious, and generous delivery of these power amps. Loads of muscle ensure ample authority and pace, but never to the detriment of musical empathy.

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OUR RATING: 84 / 100





right level approachability without blurring or attenuating any detail.

As for speed and dynamics, the Wadia always sounded more athletic and emphatic than its 150 watts a side might suggest. Admittedly, neither the Veneres nor the KEFs present a particularly difficult load, but the a315 wasn't intimidated when I opened the taps, and it remained resolute in its composure and timing, even at uncomfortable listening levels.

Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut* (44,1/16 WAV), ripped from the remastered CD) is arguably more Roger Waters than vintage Floyd, but no less appealing for it. The cinematic production, panoramic soundstage and detail-rich arrangement not only makes for immersive listening, but is also a stern test of any system's resolution, pace and punch.

The a315 was well up to the task, easily creating the space and dimension need to do believable justice to the band's carefully crafted, holographic sound picture. It also faithfully tracked the music's dynamic swings.

Time then to compare the confident,

musical and thoroughly enjoyable performance of the stereo power amp with the extra power and control promised by a pair of a340 monoblocks. As mentioned, these share the same aesthetics, casework and execution as the a315, but with closer attention to the differential signal path.

The a340s were run as monoblocks, looking after a channel each, and like the a315, received their signal via balanced XLR.

The difference was immediately apparent: a pacier, more agile delivery, with faster transients and a more succinct, authoritative approach. Tonally, there was more substance, albeit while retaining a similar tonal balance, but presented with more impetus.

The bottom end was perhaps the biggest beneficiary, given both more slam and precision, but also greater reach and depth. On Sting's marvellous, bittersweet *Mercury Falling* (44,1/16 WAV) the monoblocks created a sound that was more tactile, more immediate, underpinned by a bolder but better controlled low-frequency performance, and a greater sense of air and separation.

The tonal spread was wide and generous, with plenty of bottom-end foundation to underpin the performance, and a smooth midrange that steered a pleasing path between creamy texture and lean agility.

The midrange didn't necessarily become richer in tonal terms, but the A340 seemed to make more of the incoming signal, and there was a greater sense of lucidity and separation, allowing a clearer view of the music. This extended into the upper frequency band, where the a340 allowed improved access to fine detail, albeit without resorting to bite or brittleness.

The Wadia a315 and a350 are further proof that digital switch-mode amplifier technology has come of age. These amps hardly raise a sweat, even when driven with gusto, and deliver a sound that links clarity and insight to a smooth tonality that encourages extended listening.

The a350 monoblocks were the superior performers here, and so they should, considering the additional investment required. But the a315 is no slouch in sonic terms, and unless you have wildly inefficient loudspeakers or a hall-sized listening room, its approachability, momentum and composure makes for hugely entertaining listening.

The a350s ramp up everything a notch or two, with the major benefit of greater insight and improved control, achieved by the extra authority and clarity on offer. They're certainly worth the extra spend.

Most of all, these amplifiers prove that Wadia hasn't lost its magical touch when it comes to all things digital. After 20 years, I shouldn't be surprised!

Deon Schoeman

Associated Equipment

Electrocompaniet EC 4.7 pre-amp
Primare NP30 network player
Aesthetix Romulus Signature CD player
Oppo BDP-95EU universal deck
KEF R500 loudspeakers
Sonus Faber Venere 3.0 loudspeakers

Software

Mark Knopfler – *Privateering* (Universal)
Pink Floyd – *The Final Cut* (Columbia)
Sting – *Mercury Falling* (A&M)
Toto – *Tambu* (Columbia)