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Audes: Powerconditioner ST-1500



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Enjoy the Silence



by Knut Barnsdorf

Audes ST-1500

A few weeks ago, Eckhard Derks from the German Audes distribution approached me to ask if I would like to review the brand-new power conditioner ST-1500. Of course I endorsed his proposal. Due to the premature praises for the models ST-3000 and ST-900, I was curious about the new device, as the enemy that endangers the sonic performance of our hi-fi systems is lurking around in our electricity grid. What could be better than a manufacturer's promise to really clean up this mess? I also hoped that the review sample would be the device with the two neat instruments adorning its front panel. During my preliminary research, I stumbled upon it while browsing the internet. And what can I say, when I opened the exceptionally heavy package, exactly this latest version came to light. My first statement was: This machine looks fantastic, what a good starting point.

Audes – The company

The history of Audes dates back to 1935 in Tallinn, Estonia, where it all started. There the company manufactured radio receivers under the name RET. In 1960, the company established a subsidiary plant to manufacture its own transformers. The company thus has decades of experience in transformer

design. In 1992, the company changed their name to Audes. Today, their portfolio includes loudspeakers, tube amplifiers, loudspeaker drivers and transformers. Audes also operates as supplier of output transformers as well as inductors and power supplies for other companies. Based on their superb toroidal transformers, Audes also manufactures so-called power conditioners. In this round I will focus on the medium model of the current power conditioner line-up.

The trade press has given the Audes ST-900 and ST-3000 models a lot of praise, while hi-fi blogs have been discussing the functionality of the Audes power conditioner based on pictures of the internal structure. However, I did not find a conclusive answer to this anywhere. Audes hold their cards very close, when it comes to technical detail. That is understandable.

My professional background is a non-technical one, so I will limit myself focusing on the following three topics: How can the Audes ST-1500 be described? What is its task? How does the power conditioner affect music listening in your audio system?

Audes ST-1500 – The description

The ST-1500 forms the middle model in Audes' line of power conditioners. The 25.5 kilo heavy unit retails for 3,500 euros. Taking into consideration what some companies charge today for a mains cable or speaker cables, this price is absolutely acceptable. You will get a hi-fi accessory device for your expenditure, that is built like an armored

cabinet. At just under 48 cm wide, 35 cm deep and 16 cm high, the ST-1500 represents a hi-fi device of stately size. If you plan to change its position in your equipment support quite frequently, you surely will save the money on your gym.

Audes meanwhile is visually livening up the front panels of their power conditioners.

Moving away from the plain black appearance of previous models, which made them look beefy and a bit dull, now two white displays with a Bakelite-look frame adorn the front panel. One of them shows the mains voltage, the other the flowing current, while an orange LED on the left front indicates the operating status. On the back you'll find the connection for the included EU power cord. Next to it, the power button is to be found. On the back, the ST-1500 provides five connections for your various components. The Audes conditioner is excellently manufactured and its connector panel on the back is of high quality as well. All of the power cords I used sat tight in the sockets of the power conditioner...

The Audes ST-1500 is based on the principle of an isolating transformer, which separates the hi-fi equipment from the household power circuit. Accordingly, the inside consists mainly of a toroidal transformer that takes over this function. It forms the core of the

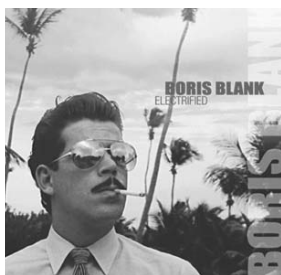
device and makes up the main part of the weight. Its core impresses with a considerable size. In addition, the DC output impedance is kept extremely low. This helps to keep the power drain stable under large current requirements. The shielding of the toroidal transformer itself is designed to high standards.

The ST-1500 power conditioner features a soft start function that protects your components when the unit is being switched on. A timed relay takes care of this task. The power consumption of the ST-1500 is low, so you can leave the unit in operational mode all the time without troubling your mind. Temperature issues are handled by a built-in thermal protection, which switches off the transformer at a temperature of 90 degrees Celsius. If the temperature level drops below 75 degrees, the unit will restart. The ST-1500 does not need an internal fan and copes well with normal room temperatures...

Power conditioner – What is it for?

Let's move on to the aforementioned second point, namely the tasks a power conditioner has to fulfill. The ST-1500 galvanically isolates your devices from the inhouse mains power. This eliminates interferences, which are mainly caused by dimmers, switching power supplies and other devices in the

Boris Blank Electrified, Carla Bruni Enjoy the Silence, Inge Marie Gunderson Feel, Shinedown Stratosphere.





The ST-1500 has a very low output DC impedance, so it can easily deliver high current surges without experiencing voltage sags. This is achieved by using a transformer with a very large core and operating with minimal inductance.

house and which sneak their way into your hi-fi equipment. In my case, for example, this is the external electric blinds of the kitchen. The shut-off switch always makes itself heard with a click deriving from the speakers. However, as I don't have the blinds moving up and down all day, it still is annoying. And this is precisely one of the problems that an Audes ST-1500 addresses with the galvanic separation concept. I would like to mention another example here: My XTZ Edge A2-300, which I purchased at a later time, hummed minimally when it was idling to full scale. With the ST-1500 it resembles a

stone: it's absolutely silent.

Furthermore, it is able to push power for a short time in case of high current requirements imposed by power amplifiers. Such current demands can be caused by pieces of music with extreme lows or dynamic peaks: The ST-1500 will simply deliver what amplifiers need. In turn, this leads to better transients as well. By design, the ST-1500 effectively eliminates interference above 800 Hertz, where most of the interferences in the mains are to be found, while interference below 50 Hertz is also blocked by the isolation transformer. Hum problems caused by external sources affecting the transformers from your hi-fi equipment can also be eliminated by the Audes conditioner. Especially the sensitive phono stages benefit from this conception..

Within the ST-1500, the mains voltage is balanced. This has the advantage that no matter how you turn the plugs of your devices' mains cables when inserted into the conditioner, the phase is always correct. Let's conclude now with the third and last aspect. What is the effect of a power conditioner when listening to music?

Listening experience

The Audes ST-1500 behaves quiet in operational mode. Only when heavy DC voltage components inflate the mains, it acknowledges this with a slight hum (a hot air dryer in the immediate vicinity would be an example). There is no malfunction, but it indicates the disturbing influences. In normal operation it shows off with complete silence.

The first track is "As Long As I Can See The Light" by Inger Marie Gundersen. It originates from the album *Feels Like Home* (24/96

FLAC/Quobuz). Inger Marie's voice sounds brittle, she almost breathes the song into the microphone. The calmness virtually causes the tension here. The sparse instrumentation clearly separates from the voice. I can focus on a new instrument with each entry. The voice sounds extremely clean even at high volume. No distortion to be heard, the music emerges from a deep black background.

The second track, "Electrified" by Boris Blank from 2014 (24/88 FLAC/Quobuz) is pure contradiction. It's fast and pulsating. For me, the question arises whether the dynamics of the track suffer from the influence of the ST-1500, or not. And, the opposite is the case here. I love my 15" woofers and they are now really getting a lot of work to do. They fullfledgedly pump the energy into the listening room, as the song comes up with a bone-crushing bassline. After 2.15 minutes all fun ends. Due to streaming, I luckily can restart right from the beginning.

Let's then switch to a completely different genre. "Devour" from the *Shinedown* album *Somewhere in the Stratosphere*, recorded live in Kansas City in 2011, is performed in an unplugged version (16/44.1 CD quality/Quobuz). The track is originally a fast hard rock piece written for electric instruments. Now singer Brent Smith has to create the pressure with his raspy voice alone. Drums, acoustic guitars and piano have to underline his powerful performance and set the tempo. It's really crazy, how the drums set clearly more accents, pushing Smith ahead at will. But he's not impressed at all, bellowing like a deer. The piano performs with good substance, while the guitars sound strained, but still brilliant. My power amps are begging for more food, which they get

Specifications

Nominal power: 1500 VA

Input: 10 A / IEC C14 socket

Output: 5x 16 A / 250 VAC socket

CEE 7/3

Mains cable: 10 A / 250 VAC connector IEC C13

Dimensions (mm): 155 H x 477 W x 348 D

Dimensions (inch): 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ H x 18 $\frac{7}{8}$ W x 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ D

Weight: 25,5 kg

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High-quality CEE 7/3 sockets are galvanically isolated from the external power grid.

once hooked up to the Audes ST-1500. Here, pure wine is poured instead of natural, unfiltered apple juice. The overall performance has more punch, is more three-dimensional, and offers more order than I've ever heard before. The insights into the musical action are now deeper. The downside to it all is that the unrestrained rendering of detail also reveals weaknesses. By the end of the concert, Smith has lost any grit in his hard rock voice, and he yelps his way through the encores. He is obviously really pushed to the limit by the concert. The sonic performance here is relentlessly honest.

Let's now move on to the closing act. It gets quieter with Carla Bruni's successfully in 2017 pre-sented album French Touch. She dares to venture into Depeche Mode's classic "Enjoy the Silence" (24/48FLAC/Quobuz). She reduces her version to strings, acoustic guitar and piano. The sparingly used notes of the piano surge from the back right, giving the impression of having travelled a huge distance. Thus, for me, I can clearly assign these to their place of origin.

Carla Bruni sobs and wheezes her way through the song. In the past, Bruni's voice used to distort minimally. Now she sounds smoky and raspy, but she's no longer annoying.

The Audes power conditioner comes up with some advantages: There is less electrical noise in your audio system, it enhances the musical performance with a fine polish and you experience more of what your components are capable of. The details in music recordings become clearer and step out more perceptibly into the foreground. Complex bass lines are rendered with more contour. The bass seems to reach deeper, while the low tones get more grip. The performance becomes more transparent due to an increased blackness of the background. The high frequencies sound free of distortion and more relaxed. The midrange gets enriched with more colour and expression, sounding seemingly clearer.

It's getting late while listening. The electric Asus blinds are automatically lowering, making me wait for the "click" from the speakers, but nothing happens. I enjoy the silence.

KBA