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Bryston 14B Cubed Review - HTR.com



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Bryston 14B³ Stereo Amplifier

Bryston is a Canadian AV company based in Ontario. The company was originally an electronic medical device manufacturer before becoming an audio component manufacturer. As such, Bryston understands the importance of implementing exceptionally high-quality parts in life-saving medical equipment, and the company now applies that philosophy to creating cost-no-object audio components. Bryston products are hand made in the Canadian facility, with no outsourcing and no shortcuts. New products are not introduced annually to artificially improve the lineup and drive sales; rather, Bryston

introduces new models when they contain real advancements--which is what Bryston promises with its new Cubed amplifier line, consisting of the 28B , 14B , 7B , 4B , 3B , and 2.5B .

Reviewed here is the 14B³, the top-of-the-line stereo amplifier. The 14B is essentially two 7B mono amplifiers built into one chassis in a dual mono design (Bryston says that the two 7B amps have slightly higher combined power supply capacitance). At 600 watts per channel at eight ohms and 900 watts per channel at four ohms, the 14B is a true heavyweight. And I mean literally: weighing in at 91 pounds, with 19 inches of width and 18.4 inches of depth, the 14B feels like Thor's Hammer. Total harmonic distortion is less than or equal to 0.005 percent from 20 Hz to 20 kHz at full power.

Bryston Quad-Complimentary Circuitry

All voltage gain stages have regulated power supplies, while each channel has its own independent power supply. Power transformers for each channel store energy for maximum dynamic range.

Bryston's guiding principle in amplifier design is faithful reproduction of the recorded music by having the lowest distortion with minimal noise to achieve the best performance. In comparison with the previous SST2 product range, Bryston was able to significantly lower distortion at the input stage to 1/1000th of one percent, improve common mode noise rejection to reduce electro-magnetic interference, and boost the noise-rejection capabilities of radio-frequency interference while decreasing standby power consumption. Lastly, Bryston refined the line's faceplate, made of hefty aluminum that exudes quality and elevates the product's appearance.

All Bryston amplifier designs are based on Class AB output stage architecture, as opposed to Class A. Bryston is quick to point out the inherent benefits of this design--namely, improved linearity and lower distortion, without the massive heat and power

consumption. Bryston carries over its Quad-Complimentary topology from the previous SST2 product line, effectively eliminating upper-end harmonic distortion, which resembles Class A amplifier performance without the drawbacks.

Another benefit of the new circuit design is the ease of preamplifier matching with selectable 6 dB of gain from 23 dB to 29 dB, to accommodate different preamplifier output levels.

Bryston takes pride in using the highest-grade components sourced locally while retaining long-term employees, many of which have been with the company for over 20 years. Before leaving the factory, all products receive a certificate signed by a technician, indicating a perfect score during 100 hours of burn-in and stress testing. To back up its quality claims, Bryston provides an unprecedented 20-year warranty on all analog products.

The 14B includes balanced and single-ended audio inputs. You won't find noisy mechanical fans on this beast, as it uses convection cooling with massive heat sinks, which are immediately visible upon opening the box. The amp



It Was Time To Give The Bryston Middle T's A Turn

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is available in either black or silver (natural) anodized aluminum, with or without front handles. Rear handles are standard on all versions, which helps maneuver the unit in and out of your cabinet and acts as a safeguard to the amplifier's input and output connections.



The Hookup

I installed the 14B in my living room surround sound system, replacing my NAD M27 amplifier's right and left channels. Bryston also sent the Middle T floor-standing speakers to give the 14B³ something to play with. And I was lucky to have two additional visiting speaker products during my time with the Bryston 14B : the Ohm 5000, and the Sonus faber II Cremonese. My daily speaker system in this room consists of a 5.1 speaker system from Vienna Acoustics, from its now discontinued Schonberg line. Needless to say, I got a good idea how the Bryston amp works with a variety of speaker systems.

Other relevant components include an NAD M17 surround sound processor, the aforementioned NAD M27 multichannel amplifier for the center and rear channels, an Oppo BDP-105 Blu-ray player, and a MacBook Pro streaming TIDAL's HiFi CD-quality service over Chrome.

Performance

First, I let the 14B³ go a few rounds with the already installed Ohm 5000 floor-standers. Streaming a variety of music from TIDAL immediately demonstrated

the improved dynamic range I got from top to bottom. My perception was that the 14B³ was gripping the Ohms with fierce control. I had always suspected that the Ohms would benefit from more power than I had in my reference system, and they certainly did. (You can read the Ohm review [here](#).) The NAD M27 amplifier has fantastic detail with a silent background; however, with Bryston's 600 watts per channel and emphasis on low noise, it took the Ohms to another level of transparency while retaining the low noise character of the NAD amplifier. Bass had detail, revealing nuances of pitch and faithfulness previously not heard. The midrange became more projected and weighted, while the upper frequencies floated.

On the acoustic guitar version of Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" by Rodrigo y Gabriela, the 14B³ elevated the Ohms' performance with more control over the CLS driver, which improved detail and provided astonishingly broad imaging. I could sense heightened upper-end frequencies, along with additional midrange bass characterized by enhanced presence. Deep bass detail and mass improved, as well.

Since Bryston's 600 watts per channel was not quite a fair comparison with the M27's 180 watts per channel, I brought the Rotel RB 1590, a 350-watt stereo amplifier, to the contest. While listening to the same tracks noted above, it was apparent that the Rotel got closer to the performance of the 14B, yet it was not enough to take the title. The Bryston outperformed the Rotel in overall dynamic range, clarity, and authority when connected to the Ohm 5000 speakers.

It was time to give the Bryston Middle Ts a turn with the 14B³. These proved to be amazing speakers that sound so much larger than one would expect, given their slender footprint. I played all the previous tracks again, as well as others, and I

I Could Clearly Hear The Elevated Clarity In The 14B Cubed

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heard just how well the 14B³ controlled the Middle T, displaying deep articulate bass with just the right amount of mid-bass. The experience was similar to what I noted with the Ohm speakers: improved overall dynamics from top to bottom, especially noticeable in the midrange.

warmth, along with a natural throaty character where appropriate. I could hear the subtlest fluctuations in pitch and tone, demonstrating the nuance of the 14B³ in comparison with the Rotel.

Peter Gabriel - Don't Give Up (Kate Bush)

Peter Gabriel - Don't Give Up (ft. Kate Bush)



As the Ohms speakers headed back to the manufacturer, they probably crossed paths with the Sonus faber II Cremonese speakers, which arrived a few days later. The II Cremonese is by far the most sophisticated speaker I had for this review, and it did not disappoint. When mated with the Rotel, the Sonus fabers created a huge soundstage with realism and an organic sound that I have yet to experience in my home. Yet when I switched to the Bryston 14B, I noticed even more depth, clarity, and control. Like the Ohm 5000, the II Cremonese clearly benefitted from the massive power of the 14B³. I heard subtle improvements in detail and realism, creating a more emotional experience.

On the song "Don't Give Up," performed by Peter Gabriel and Kate Bush on the album *So* (Geffen Records), I was able to experience both male and female voices at the same time. Their vocals had texture and

Another area of improvement was in the 80-Hz and below region. The II Cremonese has a substantial bass setup consisting of two bass drivers in their own enclosure within the tower's cabinet. Craving for power, these drivers really demonstrated their capability with the massive power of the Bryston behind them. The combo had authority and detail, revealing subtle changes of frequencies.

When it was time for the Sonus faber II Cremonese speakers to go home, I connected the 14B³ to my stock speaker system: the Vienna Acoustic Schonberg speakers in a 5.1 setup. Being so accustomed to this setup in my room, I could clearly hear the elevated clarity, dynamic range, and imaging I got with the 14B³ connected to the system. While not as impressive as the II Cremonese, my Vienna Acoustics speakers displayed improved detail and weight in the midrange that I never thought possible with this speaker sys-

14B Cubed - Brought Noticeable Improvements

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tem. The Schonberg always possessed a smoothness and balanced

center, the 14B³ expanded the reach of the right and left channels with more



character, and the Bryston did not take that away, but rather improved upon it with additional subtle sonic details.

With movies, the Schonbergs always provide a great experience when connected to the NAD M27 and M17 combo. With the Bryston 14B³ connected to the right and left speakers, it brought a noticeable improvement in musical passages within movie soundtracks. The improved imaging in width and depth helped me feel more involved in the movie. For example, in the recent movie Wonder Women streamed over VUDU in the HDX format, there's a nice combination of action, dialog, and music in the soundtrack.

With orchestral music in the right and left channels, there was an obvious heightened quality and dimension that would make me sit straight and take notice. Actions scenes improved, too--with the juiced-up right and left channels supporting the center and reaching out farther to the rear channels.

With the movie Avatar, even though most of the audio was coming from

pronounced dynamic range and projection of sound effects.

Many home theater enthusiasts believe that all amplifier channels must match to obtain optimum results, but I could not disagree more. I enjoyed having the 14B³ power my right and left channels, as I felt it improved the system as a whole. Plus I would have the benefit of a high-end two-channel rig for music listening.

These days, home theater enthusiasts are looking for more amplification channels to implement the Atmos and DTS:X formats. Instead of purchasing new amplifiers for these immersive surround channels, why not use your existing amplifier for that and step up the right and left channels with something that can elevate your system to a new realm?

The Downside

I did not find a downside in the performance of the 14B³. One area to be concerned with is the Bryston's huge proportions and weight, causing chal-

Bryston 14B Cubed - Not Flashy - Understated

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Challenges when installing it in your existing cabinet. While the updated faceplate is handsome with an understated industrial look, it is not flashy. Some manufacturers have gone to extreme measures to create jewel-like case-work, making them eye candy for their owners.

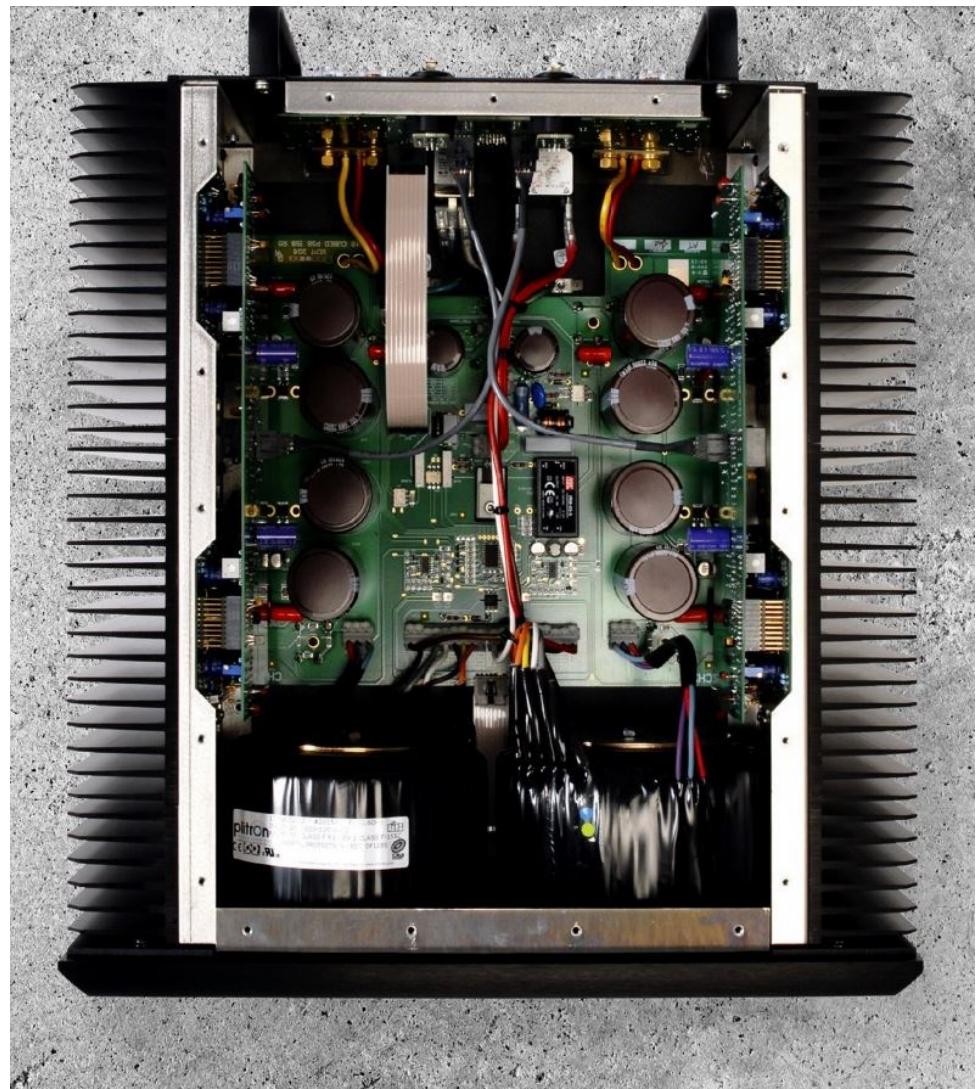
However, these qualities often come in at a higher price point than what the Bryston sells for.

Comparison and Competition

Finding a competitively priced stereo amplifier with the same power as the Bryston 14B³ was futile. If there is something out there, I was not able to find it.

One alternative is Bryston's own 7B³ mono block (remember, the 14B³ is essentially two 7B³ amps). At \$11,400 for the pair (\$600 more than the 14B³), the 7B³ represents a compelling alternative if you have the space, offering the benefit of two separate chassis.

Since it was difficult to find stereo amplifiers with the same power, I looked toward price to guide me, but even that was difficult. Pass Labs' most powerful stereo amplifier is the Point 8 model X350.8 (\$14,200) at 350 watts per channel at eight ohms. My limited experience with the X350.8 reminds me that this amplifier had a very emotional



The Bryston 14B Proves To Be An Astounding Value

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sound and is capable of driving difficult loads. However, it is approximately \$3,400 more than the Bryston.

The Krell Duo 300 has 300 watts per channel and features Krell's iBias technology, which--like Bryston's Quad Complementary technology--is intended to have the characteristics of a Class A amplifier.

The D'Agostino Classic Stereo (more expensive, with 300 watts per channel at eight ohms, 600 watts per channel at four ohms, and 1,200 at two ohms. While I have not auditioned this amplifier yet, it carries a pedigree worth exploring.

Lastly, the McIntosh MC452 stereo amplifier, rated at 450 watts per channel at eight, four, and two ohms, gets closer to the 14B³ power specification. I have not auditioned the MC452, but I have had the opportunity to demonstrate some of the company's other excellent amplifiers, which is why I am suggesting you give it some consideration.

Conclusion

The Bryston 14B³ gave an amazing performance with four different speakers: some benefited from its 600 watts of power, while all displayed improved clarity, detail, and control, with a wide and deep soundstage. Incidentally, the Bryston 14B³ proved to be the most powerful two-channel amplifier I could identify.

Clearly, power is not the most important criteria when speaking about amplifiers, but in this case the amp demonstrated its ability to drive a variety of speakers, with extremely low noise and a quiet backdrop. Additionally, the 14B³ has impeccable hand-crafted build quality and an understated yet eye-catching

appearance, backed up by an industry leading 20-year warranty.

If chosen carefully, an amplifier can remain a relevant part of your audio system for many years, unlike other component categories. So it makes sense to consider the most sophisticated and high-quality amplifier you can afford. Over the years of purchasing audio equipment at various price points, I have discovered one truth: It is better to spend more than I had planned than to spend less than I should. It is with this philosophy in mind that I say, even though it's expensive, the Bryston 14B³ proves to be an astounding value.

BY AUTHOR:
JERRY DEL COLLIANO

HTR Product Rating for Bryston 14B³ Stereo Amplifier

Criteria	Rating
Performance	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

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