

BILLBOARD



HIFI TEST

Test: Bryston 3B³ | Power amplifier

The bulwark

by JOCHEN REINECKE | 17TH OCTOBER 2019



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 [The bulwark](#)
- 2 [Bryston 7B³: Sound test & comparisons](#)
- 3 [Test conclusion: Bryston 3B³](#)



Do you know a hi-fi manufacturer who gives a 20-year guarantee on its power amplifiers and subjects each of its devices to a 100-hour stress test before delivery? Bryston from Canada does something like that (sales for Germany: www.avitech.at/de/). But in addition to longevity and operational reliability, the customer also

expects good sound. Because if the listener does not "like" the sound at home, the aforementioned efforts are in vain ...

Bryston has a finely graduated portfolio of power amplifiers in its program - from the small 2.5B³ with 2 x 135 watts into 8 ohms to the monoblock 28B³, which pulls out a real kilowatt into 8 ohms. Here and now I would like to deal with the "second smallest" power amplifier, the Bryston 3B³ (6,250 euros), which with 200 watts per channel should deliver more than enough power for most living room applications. But first, in the sense of avoiding redundancy: If you want to find out more about the manufacturer Bryston, I would like to recommend Jörg Dames' [review of the Bryston 7B³](#) and Martin Mertens' test of the [Bryston 4B³ in conjunction with the prepress BP17³](#). Let's go straight to the nitty-gritty and take a closer look at the test subjects.

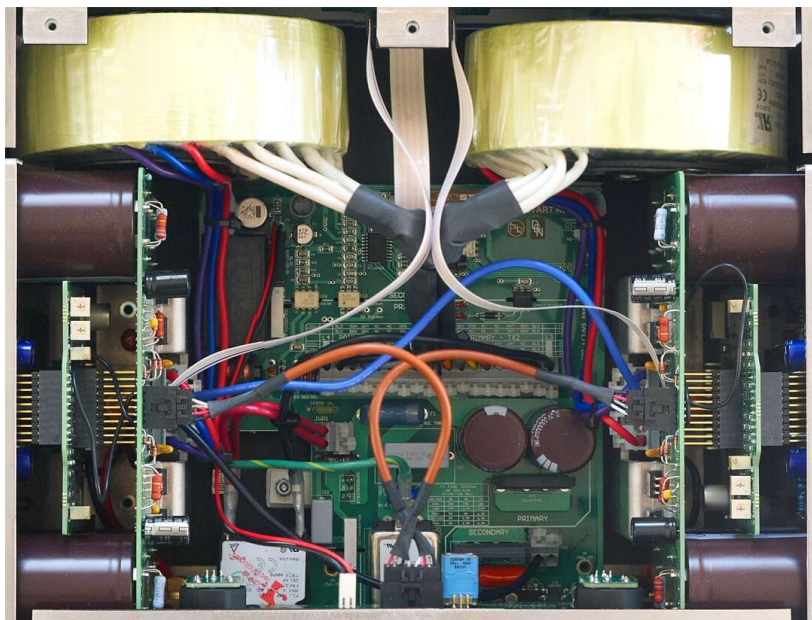


The Bryston 3B³ comes as a stereo power amplifier, which can be switched to monoblock operation using the toggle switch on the back. Access is optionally possible via [XLR](#) or [Cinch](#), the active input must also be selected via a toggle switch. A third switch allows the total gain to be adjusted, 23 or 29 [dB](#) are available. The professional quality of all Bryston power amplifiers is not only evident in the almost bulwark-like workmanship, but also in the fact that they are available in two versions: a "home and yard version" and a studio or PA version with fixings for 19-inch racks as well as practical handles for pulling out and pushing into them. But while this is still a matter of external appearance, there is also padding under the hood instead of spilling.



On the back of the Bryston 3B³ there are toggle switches for selecting the amplification factor, mono-bridged or stereo operation as well as the input selection

An essential part of the circuit design criteria for this and other representatives of the current "Bryston Cubed" series was an optimal performance curve "from the first to the last watt", says Avitech sales. While many other powerful amps only have a really good **signal-to-noise ratio** from about a third of the maximum output power upwards, Bryston wants to offer a completely untroubled sound experience even at single-digit watts. On the one hand, through the selection of selected, extra-fast driver transistors, crossover **distortions were** almost completely eliminated.

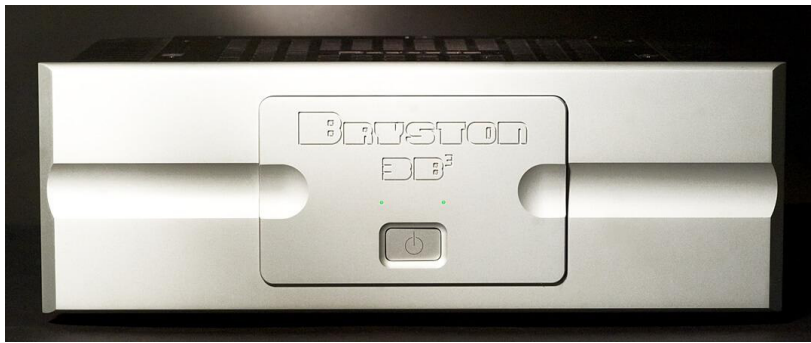


The circuitry of the Bryston 3B³, including two toroidal transformers, is in double mono

The output stage design, in turn, was chosen in such a way that the capacitance "seen" by the driver transistors is as low as possible. In this way, "reloading delays" in the end section, which contribute to non-linearities in the zero crossing area, can be virtually eliminated. The next central starting point is the suppression of RF distortion. This applies not only to the driver and output stage, but also and in particular to the power supply - here, too, highly effective suppression measures have been taken at the source to ensure that no harmful HF components can enter the circuit via the mains current. Speaking of mains power: Instead of - as is often the case - one transformer with two taps, the Bryston 3B³ has two separate **toroidal transformers**, one for each channel, donated.

Well-engineered, solid technology will of course always please the tester's heart - but what does it all bring in the listening room?

Bryston 7B³: Sound test & comparisons



The current Bryston power amplifiers are also available with blue LEDs

Oh boy, it's pretty good! It's really hard not to get into raptures about what this power amplifier delivers. The author of these lines began his career as a hi-fi reviewer almost exactly ten years ago and has since dragged a three-digit number of components and speakers through his listening room. Seldom enough is a device so impressive that the test will be remembered for years afterwards - the Bryston 3B³ power amplifier is definitely such a candidate. But now a little less emotion and all over again!

The main talents of this power amplifier are its broadband and linearity. That makes it wonderfully easy to describe the tonality of this power amplifier: It doesn't have any! We HiFi editors are always struggling with the small details, accentuation, and shading in the middle, low and high frequencies: Does it sparkle or darken around the top, does it grumble or spring in the low frequency? In all honesty, you can simply skip these criteria with the Bryston 3B³, because it only does one thing, and it is spot on: It is the much-cited "reinforcing wire" that really passes through everything unfiltered and unbent in tonal terms that the players deliver.

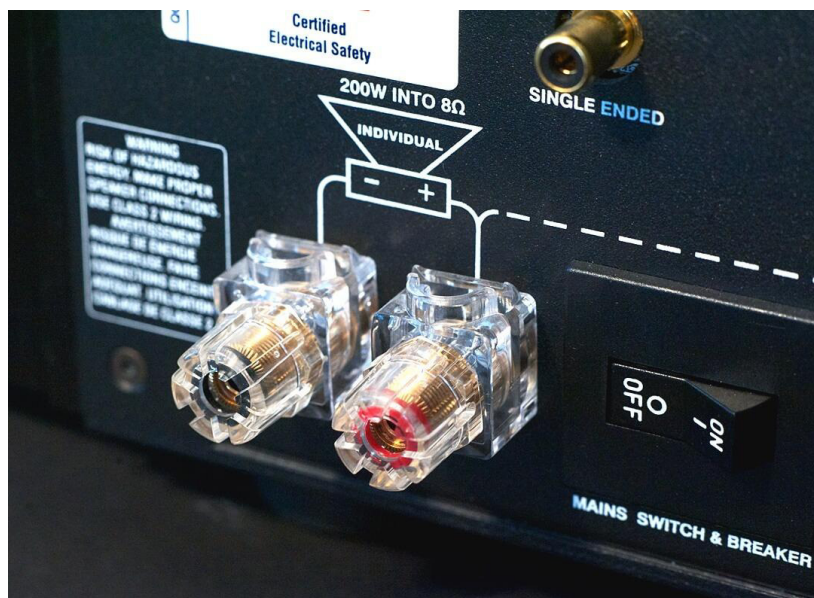


Take, for example, a track that gives full throttle across the entire frequency band: *Lana del Rey's "The Next Best American Record"* (album: *Norman Fucking Roswell*; [listen on Amazon](#)). In the first 32 bars a quiet acoustic guitar, a synthesizer surface and Lana del Rey's voice.

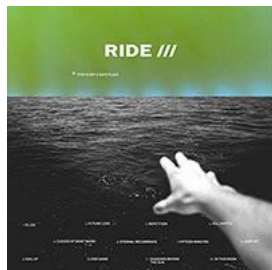
This is followed by a bridge with a restrained orchestral line-up and quiet marching drums in the background.

And it really starts in the chorus: puckering drums, all

kinds of synthesizers, high-frequency synthetic drum sounds and a sub-bass that is not loud / cheeky, but still abysmal, that really takes your shoes off. All of this is completely transparent via the Bryston output stage. Clear, bright, unconcealed, the highs of the e-drums, bulbous and intense, but completely authentic, the acoustic guitar - and the sub-bass drives into the pit of the stomach with incredible power, but: not by means of tonal / volume-wise overemphasis, but through sheer emphasis Depth down to the very lowest octave. The sound image does not sink into any lowlands, but remains completely transparent up to the very highest heights. This is important because the main role in this track is of course played by the lascivious voice of Lana del Rey. A less well-tuned but sub-bass capable amp would now have "brought this sub-bass forward". This does not happen with the Bryston power amplifier: Lana del Rey can continue to play the Sun Queen and *Nevertheless*, the sub-bass tingles comfortably on the inside of the stomach.

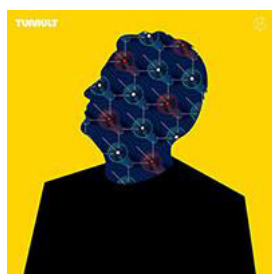


Next talent: speed. I don't know when I last had such a lightning-fast power amplifier in front of the shotgun. And that applies in every position and at the lowest and highest volume levels. I like to feel components with *Friedemann's* piece "Sourdós" (album: *Rendez-Vous / Best of Biber Records*). This instrumental track impresses with a wonderfully clear, precise guitar playing in combination with a marimba and a rhythmic clap of hands as well as a continuous change of virtuoso sequences and quiet, reverberant passages to rest. When Friedemann's fingers rush over the strings and call up the entire sound palette of the acoustic guitar, from the gentle cat-paw to the extra sharp, metallic tearing, then the Bryston 3B³ power amplifier reaches through with fantastic, almost flamenco-like timing.



This works without any compromises even with music that is clearly rocky and raw - for example with "Fifteen Minutes" from the new album *This is not a safe place* by Shoegazer *Ride* ([listen to it on Amazon](#)). This track sounds so much like Sonic Youth that as a listener you don't really know whether it's plagiarism or deference. Mulchy mixed drums, torn minor 7/9 chords with rage, a deep rumbling electric bass and in the last third of

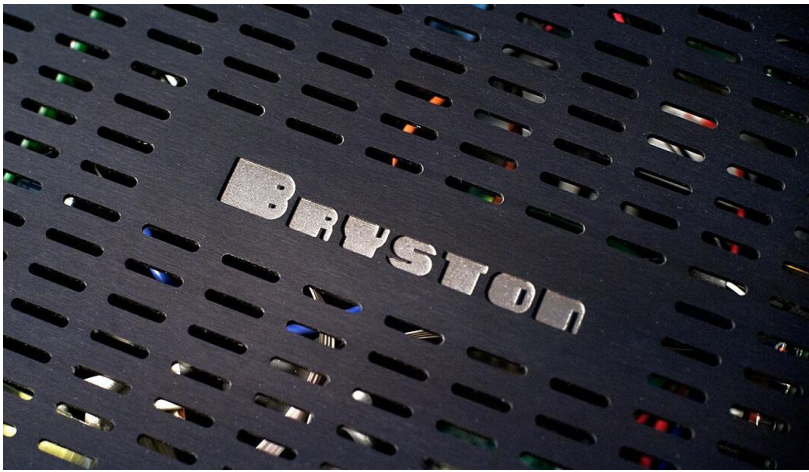
the song a short, massive outburst of rage with chirping feedback and dragging guitar tracks. The Bryston 3B³ gives the simple, but effective drumming something immensely impulsive and compelling, the load change in the last third is not dragged off a nanosecond and blows off with a vehemence that makes your hair stand on end. Interestingly, this also works at a low listening volume, which is basically much more difficult to achieve than at a high one. Because in order to be able to reproduce these differences and load changes even at room volume,



How was that with the "first to the last watt"? This is not an empty marketing promise. On his new album "Tumult" *Herbert Grönemeyer* ([listen on Amazon](#)) In addition to the usual barking, caressing and rumbling, there is also a lyrically and musically exceptionally successful ballad hidden, it is called "Waiting Room of the World". A very simple and all the more effective piano leitmotif, counteracted by dull e-piano chords

that are strongly mixed into the background, plus a brutally intimate voice by Grönemeyer with a long low-pass reverb tail, mixed brutally close to the ear. Even at the 9 o'clock position of the volume control, all of this has an intensity that is difficult to grasp. And if you tear open further: pure, clear, unconcealed music, no noise, no matter how delicate, no noise, no accentuation, but "the pure material" in front of an abysmal black background. And so one also notices here that "Herbie", who works in almost all of his songs at the latest in the chorus with a doubled vocal track as a technical production trick, for once takes a guest singer as a double. Via my integrated amplifier I didn't notice *Hegel H90* when I listened to it for the first time, for example. Ever since I noticed it on the Bryston 3B³ amp (in conjunction with my *Abacus Preamp 14*), I've also heard it with the Hegel - but the Bryston power amplifier *struck* me. It's cool.

At the risk of getting bored: the stereo stage also uncompromisingly continues the principle of the "reinforcing wire". What is present on the recording is passed on unmoved. If you have a first-class recording like *Pink Floyd's "Time"* (album: *The Dark Side of the Moon*), then with the ticking and tinkling of the clocks, which fan out wide in the stereo panorama, you sink completely into a psychedelic dream. If you want to find your way back to reality, you first have to go jogging outside, what is offered here in (sorry!) Holography is spectacular. However, if you have a recording in which the microphones and panorama settings on the mixer were set on or off at random (early stuff by *Dinosaur Jr.* for example), then it sounds that way about the Bryston 3B³, so it is not an "interior decorator" who straightens the interior design a bit if necessary, but rather a real studio tool here too. Nothing is glossed over here by creating an artificial space around the actors or a "pulsation", as one can already experience with tube power amplifiers: The representation is more unmistakably precise than euphonic.



Bryston 3B³: Compare

Usually at fairaudio we always look a bit to the left and right and compare with other components. It's pretty difficult for me with the Bryston 3B³ because it overperforms in all relevant disciplines. In their clarity, broadband and transparency, they remind me most of the A4e amplifiers from Valvet (around 6,900 euros); In terms of sound, the Bryston and the Valvets can compete with each other - but the Bryston delivers three times as much sine wave power and should therefore probably represent the superior investment in terms of the undistorted overall level and the compatibility with various speakers despite its lower price. The Bryston 3B³ also reminds me a bit of the Moon power amplifier 330 A (4,000 euros), especially in terms of its transparency and fine resolution, *at the same time* comes down to the lowest octave, even if this is only very low in the source material. But also in terms of speed and timing, the Bryston 3B³ is ahead of the Moon-Amp - although the latter is far from "sedate", it is not as fast as the Canadian.

Last but not least, a very exciting insight: Whether it's the high **damping** factor or the broadband - the Bryston power amplifier harmonized perfectly with all of my speakers and literally got the best out of them. Even the Harbeth 30.1, which is rather good-natured in the treble range, was stimulated by it to sparkle and shine - but not by a treble boost: In the combination with the Audes Maestro 116, which is more alert at the top, an especially tonally just as balanced sound was evident. I don't know how that works - but it works.



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- 1 [The bulwark](#)
- 2 [Bryston 7B³: Sound test & comparisons](#)
- 3 [Test conclusion: Bryston 3B³](#)

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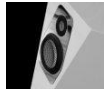
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