

# BEE Stings

NAD C315BEE (£180)

Its design may have passed away decades ago, but the spirit of the legendary 3020 integrated amp lives on

hi-finews  
OUTSTANDING  
PRODUCT



Every time NAD launches a budget integrated amplifier, it bills it as 'the new NAD 3020'. The 3020 was, probably, the most successful entry-level integrated amp of all-time. Thus it's no surprise NAD wants the world to regard the C315BEE as the heir to that particular throne.

Bjorn Eric Edvardsen couldn't avoid having the 3020 in the back of his mind when faced with the challenge of designing a new super-budget-amp. NAD claims: 'While we had to make some compromises compared to the C325BEE – CMOS input switching instead of reed relay, simplified PowerDrive circuit, etc – the basic performance under most conditions is equal.'

The C315BEE features bass, treble and balance controls, with tone defeat. Motorised volume is remotely operable. (The handset also controls the NAD CD player.) At the rear are five line inputs and tape loop. Two pairs of 4mm speaker terminals are provided.

The C315BEE's performance continually surprised and enchanted me, especially the way it caressed the LS3/5As. Two characteristics marked this stand-out performance, the most obvious being its real-world power. It could make the LS3/5As crack, but best of all, it could genuinely access the full range of the Guarneri. This is no mean feat: I've heard far costlier, more powerful amplifiers fail to drive the Italian masterwork.

I am not saying that NAD has defied all reason and come up with a dreadnought of an amplifier for under £200, able to massacre £6000-plus

powerhouses. Close scrutiny reveals a slight restraint in the absolute dynamic swings, the lowest reaches of the bass will not cause the room to quake and massive drums will reveal its absolute limits.

## THE RIGHT STUFF

When fed Keb' Mo's 'For What It's Worth', the richness and attack of the bass had the same substance I expect of and experienced not long before with massive Krells. While there's no substitute for wattage, the NAD certainly has the right stuff for normal rooms, through probably any speaker in its price class.

Far more important are the other characteristics that turned me into a champion of this amplifier: a mid-band so lifelike in the textures of vocals; its intimations of warmth; a sort of realistic sibilance presented in the correct context so authentic that even the LS3/5As could not embarrass it. Gravel-throated Johnny Cash at San Quentin, singing with his crystal-clear-voiced wife June Carter Cash, benefited from the amplifier's ability to retain their tonal characteristics even in tandem, as tricky a situation to resolve as any in music playback. The '315 fears no genre and is rarely less than commanding. It can seem continuously euphonic, but does not obscure textures, dynamics, tonal hues. It does not homogenise.

Witness Mountain's *Masters Of War*, a US import by Leslie West's still-active powerhouse band, almost 40 years on. West has delivered the weirdest Bob Dylan homage yet, everything from acoustic blues to HM interpretations of Dylan's early

protest classics. The set's varying textures, including fuzz-tone guitar and the sort of electro-acoustic picking used by Jimmy Page during Led Zep's quieter moments, serve up stunning contrasts that attest to the '315's speed, clarity, coherence and attack – four qualities missing from its over-rated antecedent. The new NAD took his axe-wielding in its stride, sliding from cool-to-hot, mellow-to-acidic, with utter grace.

Best of all, it captured the rasp of West's anguished vocals, which I first heard live when he was with the Vagrants. It bears a rawness possessed by the most tormented of bluesmen, powerful enough to rival an amplified instrument. The NAD dared not contain it.

## VERDICT

The C315BEE allows the listener to 'get inside the music', involved

'It allows the listener to "get inside the music", with an intimacy denied to most sub-£200 components'

with an intimacy denied to most components of sub-£200 price tags. A mind-boggling bargain, in real terms it costs as little as one-third the price of its ancestor. So do what I'm doing: buy one! ☺

## AUDIO FILE

Stereo integrated amplifier with five line-level inputs, one tape loop and remote control. Rated at 40W/8ohm

Made by: NAD Electronics International

Distributed by: Armour Home Electronics

Telephone: 01279 501111

Web: www.nadelectronics.com

## HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	50W/75W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2ohm)	120W/215W/260W
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	0.038–0.067ohm
Frequency resp. (20Hz–100kHz, 8ohm)	–0.09dB to +0.04dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/40W)	31mV/197mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (for 0dBW/full output)	94.2dB/110.5dB
Distortion (10W/8ohm, 20Hz–20kHz)	0.003–0.009%