

ST and SST

Complicated? The emergence of the ST versions of Bryston's long established models was more than just the addition of a couple of letters after the model number. Extensive research that was initiated with the multi-channel 9B to reduce noise and distortion due to the close proximity of the mains transformers found its way into other models, starting with the 14B. With the addition of new, higher spec output transistors this effectively became a new design, ST being the initials of Stuart Taylor, the man responsible for the work. The 7B ST however, continued to use the original metal can output transistors, until the introduction of an SST version updated these to bring it into line with the 14B ST. Across the board, power supplies have been slightly beefed up with a marginal increase in rail voltage (hence the 14B SST now falls into line) but (and I quote from the designer) with an amplifier of this power output the differences are marginal.

▶ while the ability to pitch extremely low notes is awesome. The Bryston does not waste time with the exaggeration of 'mid-bass' waffle, but when there is something genuinely there, it is reproduced with breathtaking results.

And the darkness?

It's not so much what you play as what you don't play...

I remember this as advice given to me by one of the elder statesmen of the art in my early days of doing session guitar work; it is often more productive to be economical. In common with amps like the Naim NAP 300, there is a finely etched quality, a cleanliness to sounds that serves to highlight the space in between them, which together with the ability to stop and start with no overhang results in a 'black canvas' from which music emerges, effectively giving a higher contrast and more impact to music. But where the power

reserves really come into their own is with the way in which the amplifier exerts its influence over the loudspeakers. Rather like the teacher you had at school that never had to raise his voice to instil discipline, but had the whole class totally and utterly under control through respect, the 7B's are about grip and control. Kick drum had quite incredible impact, while it was possible to play certain highly dynamic recordings at higher than normal levels, as the bass cone was on such a tight leash that the danger of mechanical overload was actually diminished. Talking of such things, I never had the opportunity to try the Bryston's with something like the Revel Salons, which I think would have sounded sublime, or the JMLabs Nova Utopia, where the general level of tightness at the bottom end would have tidied up a slightly unruly performance in my room. During the time that I lived with the 7B's, I cannot deny that there were occasions on which I explored the excitement of playing suitable music at pretty high levels, and there was always the temptation to show off to friends, but more often than not it was playing music quietly that was most rewarding. Possibly the Bryston lacked some of the romance of a good valve amplifier, and one acquaintance argued that it lacked a certain ability to involve you with the music quite as effectively, but I was always drawn back by the cleanliness and lack of smearing that gave everything great articulation and speed, with real detail to string instruments and voices. It seems mildly crazy to describe the 7B as delicate, but that is often how it came across... an iron fist, but with a velvet glove on.

There are differences between the 7 and the 14B. The 7 has an ever so slightly tighter bass response, which in itself might go unnoticed under a lot of conditions, were it not for the fact that it slightly alters your perception of what is going on elsewhere. I suspect

the differences are subtle enough to make a decision between the two system led, i.e. you will opt for mono blocks over a stereo chassis for practical rather than sonic reasons, the ability to site the amps near the loudspeakers, for example. But, it is just possible that the 14 gives the impression of having a little more flow with music, seeming a little bit warmer in the midrange; as I have said, a result I suspect that has more to do with a different perception generated by the slight difference in bass performance rather than anything else.

The 7B SST is a terrifically good amplifier. Its generous power abilities allow almost universal application, but forget about that, it is far more to do with the fact that you really wouldn't know that it was a big amp. It suffers none of the flaws that often afflict the breed, and if it lacks some of the organic warmth of a low powered valve amp, it makes up for it by having a sense of purpose and authority that is rarely achieved elsewhere.

Just think of it as a little amp with unlimited headroom... 

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Solid-state bi-polar mono-block power amp
Power output:	600 Watts / 8 Ohms 900 Watts / 4 Ohms
Input sensitivity:	1 or 2 Volt switchable
Input impedance:	50 K Ohms single ended 20 K Ohms balanced
Distortion:	<0.005% at rated output
Damping factor:	Over 300 at 20 Hz
Dimensions (WxHxD):	483 x 133 x 320
Weight:	22 Kg ea.
Finishes:	Black or silver, with or without handles
Price:	£3000 ea.

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