

# Manley Neo-Classic 500 mono power amps

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The **Manley Neo-Classic 500** monoblocks embody the top production of the Manley Laboratories Inc. The well-known Californian Company of Chino, founded by David Manley, is today firmly run by **EveAnna Manley** who has put lot of passion and has shown a strong entrepreneurial character so to lead her company in the Olympus of the major worldwide brands.

The Manley Neo-Classic 500 are balanced/unbalanced monoblocks. They utilize ten KT90 output tubes to get 500 watts in tetrode, with the possibility of having “just” 250 in triode mode.

The two Manley are very huge and their weigh of 82 lbs depends mostly by two big transformers dedicated to power supply and signal output.

In effect, the great power they generate needs a huge energy reservation and a great care in the power supply. Looking at them you feel respect and fear, actually also some apprehension in turning them on. Plus there are some cautions to take.

First of all, once you have unpacked them, have you remembered to take off the foam rubber that protects the tubes?

No?

Well, then take off the metallic grid and pull out the grey foam rubber if you don't want to light a fire. Once you have hooked up the interconnects, thanks to the angled-back chassis, you can turn on the Manley monoblocks in this way: firstly you have to insert the "mute", the last tumbler switch on the left of the front panel, and control that the "soft start" mode has been inserted, penultimate tumbler switch on the right. Then turn on the device with the "start" tumbler switch, last on the right. At this point, you can experience a lowering in the electrical supply. No problem: go ahead. Now you can turn off the "soft-start" mode and the machine will be completely operational.

To switch from tetrode to triode operation mode, and vice versa, I suggest you switching off the power amps or, at least, activating the mute and the "soft start". The tetrode mode guarantees 500 watts of maximum power while the triode mode halves the power to 250 watts.

I suggest the triode mode with very efficient loudspeakers because the 500 watts of the tetrode could press too strongly on the drivers magnets, generating a too sharp sound. Furthermore the triode can avoid the dangerous excursions of the cones and damages of the suspensions. With my **Heresy I** I have preferred the tetrode mode since I've found it capable of giving control and refinement, and of course it does!

Let's get things in the right order. I have inserted the two American monoblocks in my tube system, replacing the two 30 watts **Audiosophia** power amps with the EL84 tubes.

What I see is amazing. My eyes are gratified by the Classic 500 monoblocks and by the magnificent blue colour of the satin-finished aluminium of the front panels. In general the appearance is "rétro" – speaking of which the name is Neo-Classic Design – with a white-illuminated writing and a metallic grid that dresses the splits of the front panel. To the design contribute the big handles, the tumbler switches, the stainless steel screws in sight and the holes for the improbable rack set-up of the Manley 500, just to follow the "pro" nature of the Manley Labs. Always on the front side there is a black satin plate that hides the trimmers useful to adjust the bias of each KT90 output tube. In the package is included a tester and a screwdriver to operate on the bias.

The operation is made simple by the holes of the tester tips and by the position of the tube trimmers.

I personally have adjusted the bias of the anodic power supply to 28 mA so to perfectly balance all the KT90. If we calculate also the consumption of the 12AT7A and 12BH7A, the power supply could reach 300 mA for each output tube. To avoid any harmful overheating the designer of the main transformer would have dimensioned the secondary winding for the anodic ones in order get a maximum power of 450 mA, that is one and a half time more than necessary. Instead, for the secondary of the filaments, since a minimum of 1,5 A is required for the output tube, he would have dimensioned the wires to conduce a current of at least twenty amperes. I would like to stress the fact that for a couple of years, the Manley reworked the output transformers to operate the output stage in Ultra-Linear mode

Speaking of tubes. Every Manley Neo-Classic 500 monoblock has a 12AT7A by **General Electrics** as double input triode, a pair of excellent 12BH7A double triodes as drivers and ten KT90 as output drivers, all by **Electro Harmonix**. The KT90 are tubes usually employed in pro amplifications for guitars and sum up the power of the KT88 with the refinement of the EL34. In all we have twenty-six tubes for an amplification of 500 watts with a gain of 32dB in tetrode

mode and about 250 watts with a gain of 30 dB in triode mode. To complete the technical specifications, we have to add the two big reservoir capacitors with 3800 microfarads each and the two transformers, one for the power supply and the other for the output.

The Manley 500 can also be used as balanced. To select the input you have to operate on a tumbler switch on the rear panel. Be careful because you can touch and select it accidentally. I have personally preferred the sound in unbalanced mode.

The listening test

Don't be in hurry in judging the Manley 500 monoblocks. They need a long and patient run-in of about one hundred hours, during which you will have all the time to appreciate the gradual sound improvement and learn how to live with them happily. In my opinion, the Manley 500 risk to become definitive in the amplification chain of every audiophile. Their peculiarity is to make understand since the very beginning that they are "in charge". For better or for worse the Manley 500 lay down the law. How I know that? With my DIY loudspeakers with 86 dB of efficiency I have obtained a well-defined and controlled sound outcome. Then I have connected the **Klipsch Heresy I** with 96 dB. Well, the volume knob in the preamplifier hasn't moved and the Heresy, notwithstanding the higher efficiency, didn't play any louder!

I can't explain. It's like the Manley 500 would say: "Hey, pal, you have changed the loudspeakers, but this is the way I perform regardless of what you connect to my binding posts". The sound of the Manley Neo-Classic 500 is strongly characterized, a sound that shows openly its valve-like nature capable of generating mid and high frequencies of an amazing beauty, of drawing a detail that is strongly carved along a circular musical window which is powerful, determined and very natural. For the low frequencies some care has to be taken. First of all, although the Manley monoblocks have a huge energy reservation, I suggest using loudspeakers with a good efficiency. In this case the low frequencies will be more controlled as the efficiency raises. Besides, where it's possible, I suggest using the bi-wiring as I did with the **Orgue Archon Elite**, two-way loudspeakers with horn-loaded compression tweeter. With these loudspeakers the outcome was remarkable.

But there is something else. The Manley 500 have been tested also in bi-amp mode. They have been connected in Marcello's system with **Acapella Campanile** loudspeakers and **Soulution** amplification.

The Swiss devices have driven the woofers while the Manley the horn midrange and the ionic tweeter. To balance the volumes between the preamp and the final amp a transformer passive preamp has been placed. Well, guys what a sound! Great listening experience. After years of passion and professionalism on the field I still get involved in trying to find the best configuration so to have the best outcome. This is High-End! For me it's a *Spark in the dark*.

## SCHEME SUMMARY

*top score \*\*\*\* ReMusic Sparks*

**Frequency response:** \*\*\*\* | Very extended with a slight decrease in the very low notes. Probably that depends by the valve-state nature which smooths out and amplifies the low pitches.

**Dynamics:** \*\*\*\*1/2 | How much do you need? The Manley monoblocks have a lot. Don't pump up the volume, you can regret.

**Timbric:** \*\*\*1/2 | Typically American. Mid low range very present. It reminds the American radio broadcasters with their low voices and in counterphase. Mid high and high very natural. Amazing with the classical music.

**Image:** \*\*\*\*1/2 | Wide and deep. Great ability in recreating the soundstage. Great detail. A soundstage of great representation.

**Price quality ratio:** \*\*\*1/2 | Like all the top quality devices the price is high. Also the second-hand machines, considering the brand, are quite expensive.

**Manufacture:** \*\*\*\*\* | How questioning the quality and solidity of the Manley's products? Heavy and solid manufacture. Safe packaging in carton box .

### **Official technical specifications:**

ALL-TUBE monoblock design 10 x KT90EH Electro-Harmonix Russian output tubes

High current double 6414W GE driver stage

12AT7A large plate Electro-Harmonix Russian input tube

BALANCED & UNBALANCED inputs\MUTE switch

TRIODE / Ultra-Linear switching

SOFT-START/ EVER-WARM standby mode

MANLEY Precision output transformer

Factory set for 5 Ohms nominal

Front panel bias measurement and adjust (hiding under the black insert)

Large filter / reservoir capacitors 3800uF x 2

Angled rear of chassis provides for easy connections

WBT binding posts

Input sensitivity: 1V

Gain: 32dB tetrode; 30dB in triode

Input Impedance RCA: 116 kOhm @ 1KHz

Input Impedance XLR: 270 kOhm @ 1KHz; 20 kOhms @ 20KHz; 38 kOhm @ 20Hz

Noise Floor: Tetrode: -67dB; Triode -65dB typical

S/N Ratio: -80 dB

Dynamic Range: 96dB

FLAT frequency response: 10 Hz - 30 KHz continuous

Power Consumption: 30 Watts in "EVER-WARM"

Full power (tetrode): 500W

Full power (triode): 275W

Factory set for 100V, 120V or 220-240VAC operation for original destination country's mains voltage.

Operating Mains Voltage changeable with power transformer re-wiring and fuse value change.

Mains Voltage Frequency:

Dims: W=19", D=13", H=9"

Shipping weight: 82 lbs. each

Specifications subject to change because they just might.

**Official Italian dealer:** to Il Tempio Esoterico website

**Official current price in Italy:** 17,100.00 EUR

**Associated equipment:** to Roberto "The Rock" Rocchi's system

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