

GREAT ENTRY LEVEL MCINTOSH!

The MA6300 Integrated

— Jeff Dorgay

While many people like to compare McIntosh products to Harley Davidson because of the obvious American Icon status, I would compare them to Mercedes Benz instead. I see McIntosh as more of a luxury brand, like Mercedes and I see their customers as wanting a high quality product with a lot of retained value, but not necessarily willing to sacrifice that last bit of luxury for performance (like a Porsche or BMW owner might).





That being said, like Mercedes many potential McIntosh customers think they can't afford to buy in, feeling the McIntosh brand is out of reach for the common man. They offer a few entry level products that are quite good and are very reasonably priced, offering a level of fit and finish that is very close to the flagship models. The MA6300 integrated amplifier is a perfect example of this philosophy.

For \$3000, you have a full function solid-state amplifier that is all McIntosh, from the black glass front panel with backlit type to those famous blue meters. With one hundred watts per channel into an 8-ohm load (160 wpc/4 ohms), you have a lot of speaker choices available. It's a pretty good sized amplifier too, with the front panel being very substantial and weighing in just under 40 pounds.

Thanks to six single-ended RCA inputs, a balanced XLR input and a tape output, you should be able to build a very versatile system around the MA6300 as well. It also features a headphone jack, a MM phono input and a great remote! The phono stage has a 2.5mv sensitivity and an input loading of 47k.

Initial Set Up

The MA6300 spent all of it's time in my living room, powering a number of different speakers that I have been reviewing, but most of the time it was driving my DeVore Gibbon Super 8s with excellent results. Thanks to the 90db efficiency rating of the Gibbons, those big power meters hovered right around the middle of their range at about one watt.

The rest of my system was comprised of the McIntosh MS300 music server (which also doubles as a CD player) and my Squeezebox 3/Benchmark DAC-1 combination. I even brought a Music Hall MMF-9 into the living room with the supplied high output cartridge, just to give the phono section a whirl.

All cabling was from Audio Art and a Running Springs Haley was used for power conditioning along with DH Labs Power Plus power cords. I ran everything through the RCA inputs except for the DAC-1, using the balanced input. *(continued)*



This is an amplifier that you can just take out of the box, plug in and go. The big black front panel has a balance control and a volume control, that's it. Along the bottom of the panel there are switches (featuring McIntosh's Silent Electromagnetic Switching that is all microprocessor controlled) for all of the inputs in addition to a mono switch and the ability to turn the speakers off when you are listening to headphones.

There are also a pair of amber LEDs for the patented McIntosh Power Guard system. This is their version of a soft clipping circuit that protects your tweeters from extreme distortion, should you push things too far. Only when listening to *Romance Bloody Romance* by Death From Above 1976, which is one of the most compressed popular recordings I own, was I able to get these indicators to produce more than a brief blink.

At that volume level everyone but Mr. O'Brien was running for cover, so most of you will probably never engage the Power Guard circuit in action.

The Sound

This one is as easy as it gets. Whether you have always aspired to McIntosh ownership, or are just looking for a great 100wpc integrated amplifier, you should be able to find happiness with the MA6300. Because it does not have the output transformers of the higher priced MA6900, the sound is a little bit brighter on the extreme top end. Often, McIntosh solid-state amplifiers are criticized for being too warm and tubey sounding, the MA6300 was very neutral to my ears, but would not be mistaken for a tube amplifier.

And I mean that in a good way. The high end is not harsh and bass is well defined with plenty of weight. When I switched to the less efficient B&W 805s, I spent a couple of hours with those meters jumping up all the way to the top of their range. The sound was never harsh or fatiguing and the amplifier never got more than a slight bit warm to the touch.

One of the first things you notice (or perhaps don't notice at all) is how very quiet the MA6300 is. *(continued)*

With solid-state circuitry throughout, it is dead quiet, even on the phono input. While on the subject, the phono input was quite good for a basic MM on board design. I used the MA6300 to check out a few budget turntables that we have in for review and it is just right for that purpose. If you have a limited vinyl collection, or would like to dabble in LPs without shelling out another \$500 for an outboard phono stage, I think you could be very content with the on board phono stage.

Should you be a little bit more obsessed with vinyl, an outboard phono stage will be in order, but don't forget about the one inside the MA6300 to use with a second table (mono cartridge, 78s, etc.).

I spent quite a few hours listening to the MA6300 and the matchup with the DeVore speakers was excellent. Unless you have extremely inefficient speakers or need to listen at jet engine levels, the 100 watts that the M6300 offers up should be more than enough. Whether I was listening to Miles Davis or The Clash, I was always able to relax and just enjoy the presentation. Bass was very well controlled and powerful. While I was in a totally '70s mode writing about the Skiing Ninja modified x-ls speakers (which are also a fantastic match for the MA6300) I listened to a bunch of old Pink Floyd and Genesis records all having very extended bass. The MA6300 always did a great job.

Moving along to jazz standards and female vocals were a good match as well. The MA6300 had enough midrange palpability to keep all but the most hardcore tube fans happy. However, if you are thinking of the vintage sound of the old MC 30s, this is not going to be for you!

More Than The Sum Of Its Parts

Granted, there are a couple of other integrated amplifiers in this price category that offer up a bit more

musical resolution than the MA6300, but what this amplifier offers in spades is a very high level of musicality combined with tremendous flexibility. Considering that you get a great remote, a built in phono stage AND a headphone amplifier for \$3000 from a company that you know will be around in twenty five years, that's a tremendous value. I had a similar experience last year with the C220 preamplifier; I felt that it provided a more than adequate helping of sound along with an excellent combination of features, absent on other gear at this price point.

So that's the question that you have to ask yourself before pulling the trigger on the MA6300. Are you willing to sacrifice functionality for a bit more performance or do you want it all in one package, yet still have great sound?

The classic good looks of the McIntosh gear will either beckon or beguile you. If you are in the love it camp, this is equipment that should work well in just about any décor situation. About 80% of the people that visited my house while the MA6300 was here really enjoyed it and a few told me that the styling was 'very retro'. I had to explain that McIntosh has been going down this path for many years, so that's just the way they do it.

Other audio lovers were pleasantly surprised when I told them the price. Quite a few were expecting the tag to be about double the asking price; again that misconception that you have to take a home equity loan to purchase a McIntosh product. (Those MC1201 power amplifiers with the GIANT meters are another story...)

So if you have thought about McIntosh for a while, here is a very easy way to buy into the brand. There's a high probability that you will like the way they do things at McIntosh enough to become a customer for life. ●

MANUFACTURER

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ASSOCIATED COMPONENTS

Analog Sources Rega P25 w/ Groovetracer mods, Sumiko Blackbird cartridge, Teac 4300SX

Digital Sources McIntosh MS300 music server, Squeezebox 3 w/ Benchmark DAC-1

Speakers DeVore Fidelity Gibbon Super 8s, B&W 805S, Skiing Ninja modified ONIX x-ls

Speaker and Interconnect Cables Audio Art IC-1 (RCA and XLR) and Audio Art speaker cable

Power Cords DH Labs Power Plus

Power Conditioning Running Springs Haley