

# toneAudio.

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## The POWER Issue

### **MONSTER MONOBLOCKS!**

McIntosh MC 1.2KW  
Simaudio Moon W-7M

### **Power and Finesse:**

Burmester 911 MK.3  
darTZeel's CTH-8550

### **Massive Bass:**

JL Audio's Mighty Gotham

### **World's First Review!**

The Rega Osiris Amplifier

### **Factory Visits:**

Bang & Olufsen and Nagra

Jaan Uhelszki talks to  
Mark Mothersbaugh  
about the Swiffer and  
other stories.

Stanley Clarke  
charms  
Portland with Chick Corea  
and Lenny White



**M** McIntosh made a big splash a few years ago with its six-box, 2,000-watt MC2KW power amplifiers. They are very cool, play incredibly loud (if you have enough juice in your power line to let them wind out all the way) and command an impressive presence. Many lovers of the McIntosh brand see them as the Holy Grail. For those who don't have the space or the budget but still dig those gigantic level meters, there's a more reasonable alternative: the MC1.2KW.

the name is very appropriate.” — Jeff Dorgay TONEAudio Issue 22

If your hairs don't stand up, it's all for nothing. Transmission of encoded energy is key and deliverance rides on pure timing and h... The Essence nails both. While more 'modern' leaner designs focus on greater apparent detail retrieval, Zu sh... on rhyth... coherence and mass.” — Srajan Ebaen 6moons

The Zu Essence is not a hair-shirt product, in which... at least half the high-efficiency loudspeakers in the o... s it's among the more affordable choices—expor... surpassed many of the rest. The Essence is something... With its... al colorat... st loudspe... of audiop... pressed... that goo... — Art Dudley Stereophile October 2009

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More manageable thanks to their monoblock design, the MC1.2KW's tip the scale at *only* 147 pounds each. They're still not budget components, but the \$22k price tag will leave you with enough money left over from not buying the \$70,000 MC2KW's to assemble a formidable system. Consider the 1.2KW's the “thinking man's gigantic monoblocks.”

The MC1.2KW's have a faceplate that is about the same size as the meter module on the MC2KW's, but these amps are still attention getters. They will be the center of attention in your music system, no doubt. A direct descendent of the MC1201's, the MC1.2KW's have some significant electrical as well as cosmetic upgrades. According to Ron Cornelius, McIntosh product manager, the MC1.2KW “Actually puts out closer to 1,600 watts per channel on a test bench, so you have to be careful with this much power on tap!”

And those meters. While there are many audiophiles that love “deep-listening” sessions, I really like the gigantic meters on the front of the MC1.2KW's and feel that they are a big part of their charm. In low light, their blue glow floods the listening room like a couple of gigantic lava lamps. If you must, you can turn them off. But why?

### Setup

Unless you are a super hero, I suggest getting at least one person to help you unpack the MC1.2KW's, and be certain that your equipment rack can support at least 150 pounds per shelf. Thanks to the large lip on the back, they are surprisingly easy to move around. I wish more manufacturers would provide rear panel handles on amplifiers this heavy. *(continued)*



**These big beasts need a lot of juice to do their thing... if you really want the full 1,200-watt-per-channel experience, you'll need a pair of 15-amp dedicated lines.**



While not the latest word in aesthetics, I found that a pair of Home Depot piano dollies come in handy when I was comparing the MC1.2KW's to my reference amplifiers, as well as the other gigantic amplifiers we had in for review this issue. They've since taken up permanent residence on a pair of Finite Elemente amplifier platforms and look very stylish... Personally, I think these amplifiers deserve to be displayed proudly instead of tucked away in a rack somewhere.

Your next concern will be power. These big beasts need a lot of juice to do their thing. You can run a pair on a 15-amp line, but they won't reach full power. A dedicated 20-amp line is better, but if you really want the full 1,200-watt-per-channel experience, you'll need a pair of 15-amp dedicated lines, as McIntosh tech-support head Chuck Hinton recommends: "Each amp needs its own 15-amp line for maximum performance." While McIntosh lists the maximum current draw at 13 amps, no point in scrimping if you're getting dedicated power lines run. I say go for 20 amp lines and make sure to have it done by a qualified electrician.

During more discussion with Ron Cornelius, he again stressed having a pro take care of the wiring and also to make sure that the wiring is in tip-top shape. "While you've got that electrician out there, have him double-check your grounding and tighten up all the connections at the breaker box and your outlets. It's the nature of solid-core copper wire to wiggle loose with time. If you don't have solid power going to your system, your line level components will suffer as well."

To confirm this, I tried the MC1.2KW's together on a 15-amp line, then a 20 and finally, giving each their own dedicated 20A line. When hooked up to the single 15-amp line, I blew the circuit breaker repeatedly when rocking out. With one 20 amp line, I was not wearing a path in the floor to the breaker box, but the two dedicated lines was really the way to roll. No question, power is your friend. *(continued)*

## 170iTransport



The 170iTransport is the first component specifically designed to transform your iPod into a high-resolution audio/video media server.

The 170iTransport combines the convenience of personal audio with the performance and connectivity of your home audio/video system, delivering bit-perfect digital audio signal via a coaxial S/PDIF output, DVD quality video via component outputs, and built on a sleek stackable cast aluminum chassis.

When the iPod docks with 170iTransport, the iPod transforms into an audiophile-grade media server that rivals some of the top performing digital source components available.

The rest is easy. MC1.2KW's have balanced XLR inputs on the back panel along with RCA inputs and a 12-volt trigger, so it should fit into any system handily. Due to the use of the legendary McIntosh Autotransformers in the output stage, there are 2-ohm, 4-ohm and 8-ohm taps to connect your speakers. So while I would suggest starting with the nominal impedance on your speaker's spec sheet, a little experimenting will yield the best results.


However, I must add that these multiple taps are not my only minor complaint with the MC1.2KW. I do not like the binding posts used in *any* of the solid-state McIntosh amplifiers. The opening is too small to use any major audiophile speaker cables with spade lugs easily, and I have to believe anyone dropping \$22k on a pair of power amplifiers is going to buy good cable to go with. The three sets of terminals are way too close together for anyone but ET to make use of them handily. And while you're retrofitting the chassis, I'd love to see the IEC socket moved to the rear panel to make it easier to use a big, beefy power cord. Other than that, the amp is perfect!

### The Sound

The MC1.2KW's grabbed me immediately. After giving the amplifiers a few hours to warm up with nondescript background music, I dropped Joe Harley's recording of Sam McClain's, *Give it up to Love* on the turntable and played "Too Proud." This record was recorded live to two-track analog tape and has a massive soundstage. When you crank this one up and dim the lights, it sounds like mighty Sam is right there in your listening room (singing in front of a pair of gigantic McIntosh amplifiers in this case...). *(continued)*

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Product of the Year  
Award



With this kind of dynamic range at your disposal, big power is essential to get that live feel and the Mac's never disappointed me whether I was listening to a fully symphony orchestra or Rammstein. You don't realize just how wimpy your 100-watt per channel amplifier is until you have 1,200 per channel at your disposal. Trust me, you won't want to go back.

Friends listening to my system with the MC1.2KW's almost always made the same comment: "Wow, I can't believe how often those meters jump up around 300-600 watts and we're not listening that loud." All the arguments about "tube watts" vs. "transistor watts" vs. "whatever other watts you got" go away, and quickly. It's big power vs. little power, baby, and if there was ever an argument for size mattering, the MC 1.2's settle the score handily.

People often forget that the need for power goes up exponentially as sound-pressure level doubles; so that 100-watt-per-channel amp sounds great when you are listening in the one-to-10 watt range because you still have 100 watts or so in reserve. But when you get fast and furious with the volume control, compression sets in quickly and, if you're not careful, clipping. Still, you do have to proceed with care when really rocking out because even though it's tougher to burn out a tweeter with all that clean power, you can run the risk of toasting a crossover when you are pushing the MC1.2KW's near their limits. And that's when bad things happen to good people.

### **Power and Control**

Next up, some Prince from the *Diamonds and Pearls* album. The beginning of the track, "Insatiable," features deep synth bass that has some grunt but usually comes across loose and sloppy. The extra power and control of the MC1.2KW's grabs that note, holds the sustain and then stops cleanly. I usually need the help of the JL Audio Gotham in my system to achieve that experience. *(continued)*

The other aspect of a high-powered amplifier that becomes instantly apparent is the ability to play complex music at relatively high volume levels without the soundstage collapsing. Try this with your favorite piece of densely packed music, whether it is a full symphony or driving rock. This is where you really hear the difference between 100 watts per channel and 1,200. Though both play fairly loud, when you start to crank the 100-watt amp, everything gets muddy and you lose focus. If you become the happy owner of a pair of MC1.2KW's, this will be a thing of the past and you might even discover that some of those discs that you thought were compressed just had their peaks rounded off.

During the course of the review, I had the opportunity to use the MC1.2KW's with about a dozen different loudspeakers, from the Martin-Logan CLX electrostatics to the YG Acoustics Anat II Studios, both of which have low impedance dips and can be problematic to drive. But nothing in my speaker arsenal requires more power than my Magnepan 1.6's, now updated with new crossovers from the Skiing Ninja.

Should you be a Magnepan owner looking for the Holy Grail, nothing lights up a pair of Maggies like the MC1.2KW's. Where the 1.6's had always felt somewhat bass shy in my 16 x 24 foot room, with the Mac amps they sounded like I had added a subwoofer to the system. The dynamics were amazing and again, all who listened were surprised how easy it was to use up 1,000 watts per channel. It's worth mentioning that no matter how hard I pushed these amplifiers, even when driving the Magnepan *very loud*, the MC1.2KW's never got more than slightly warm to the touch.

Having just spent time with the MC252 amplifier that we reviewed very favorably, I must comment that the MC1.2KW's are in a completely different league. The MC252 is an excellent amplifier and a great value, but it does not have the delicacy and clarity that the MC1.2KW has.



No matter what the listening level, these are some pretty special amplifiers with just the slightest bit of warmth and body to the overall presentation. I doubt that anyone will ever refer to these amplifiers as "sterile solid-state."

### Big Power, Big Meters, Big Fun

At \$22,000 a pair, this is not an idle purchase, even for the well-heeled. But if you want a pair of amplifiers that will never run out of juice or require you to buy a futures contract on output tubes, the MC1.2KW could be your version of the Holy Grail. So dim the lights, put your favorite disc on and let em' rip. ●

**No matter what the listening level, these are some pretty special amplifiers with just the slightest bit of warmth and body to the overall presentation.**



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- Robert Harley,  
The Absolute Sound,  
Issue 193



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- Jeff Dorgay,  
TONEAudio  
Magazine,  
Issue 18



running springs audio

The McIntosh MC1.2KW  
monoblock amplifiers  
MSRP: \$22,000/pr.

## MANUFACTURER

### McIntosh Laboratories

2 Chambers Street  
Binghamton, NY 13903  
607-723-3512  
www.mcintoshlabs.com

## PERIPHERALS

**Digital Sources** Naim  
CD555, Wadia 781i, Sooloos  
Music Server, McIntosh  
MCD 500

**Analog Sources** Spiral  
Groove SG-2 w/ Triplanar  
VIII and Lyra Skala cartridge,  
TW-Acoustic Raven Two with  
SME i.Vi (Clearaudio DaVinci)  
and SME 309 (Soundsmith  
"the voice"), Rega P9 w/  
RB1000 and Dynavector  
XV-1s cartridge

**Phono Preamp** Nagra  
VPS with VFS base and Red  
Wine Audio Black Lightning  
Power supply, Naim Superline  
with HiCap 2 power supply.

**Preamp** Burmester 011

**Speakers** MartinLogan CLX  
w/JL Audio F110 subwoofers,  
Gamut S-7's, YG Acoustics  
Anat II Studio, Harbeth  
Monitor 40.1, Magnepan 1.6.

**Cable** Shunyata Aurora  
interconnects, Shunyata  
Stratos SP speaker cable

**Power** Running Springs  
Dmitri, Jaco (2) and Maxim  
power conditioners with RSA  
Mongoose and HZ power  
cords