



#### DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Electrocompaniet  
AW 300 M

**ORIGIN**  
Norway

**TYPE**  
Mono power  
amplifier

**WEIGHT**  
30kg each

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
212 x 292 x 488mm

**FEATURES**  
• Power rating:  
300W (8ohm);  
600W (4ohm);  
1,000W (2ohm)

**DISTRIBUTOR**  
Elite Audio

**WEBSITE**  
electrocompaniet.  
com  
eliteaudiouk.com

# Mono masters

As the Norwegian brand's heavyweight AW 800 M flagship is split in two to reveal the AW 300 M, we ask... are these 'manageable monoblocks' truly a chip off the, ahem, block?

**H**aving forked out over £19-grand on it, sawing Electrocompaniet's AW 800 M power amp in half is probably not advisable. However, doing so would admittedly bring some advantages. Not only would you get even better channel separation from dividing the amp right back to the mains socket – not that the stereo amp is exactly lacking in this respect – but the resulting monoblock amps would hopefully be more manageable than the stereo option. It may not be huge, but the 800's 55kg mass puts

unpacking and placing it firmly in 'phone a friend' territory.

Well, it's time to stop eyeing that Makita power tool and musing: "What if...", as the AW 300 M is, to all intents and purposes, a ready-sliced AW 800 M. The rated output is the same and the dimensions are roughly half that of the stereo amp, while the price per brace is only slightly more than that of the stereo model, given the extra casework and power supply provision involved.

But for those of us of a 'Billy no mates' persuasion, these mono amps

have another distinct advantage: at 30kg apiece, they're more convenient as a one-person installation project and you should be capable of levering each AW 300 M into position by the speaker alone. Ah yes, positioning... The long but narrow enclosure of the AW 300 M makes it a tempting prospect for 'next to the speaker' locations, where it will present a face to the world that's surprisingly compact, at just 210mm wide and 290mm tall.

Indeed, if you wanted to place the amp out of sight – though we can't

see why you would, given the fascia's combination of gloss black and golden detailing – it would be easy enough. Its largest dimension, front to back, is just 490mm, so it may slot in sideways behind some larger speakers. Just bear in mind that although the amp sits on a trio of feet of a non-marking SuperSpike design, you'll need support beneath it on carpeted floors, purely to allow sufficient airflow. On hard wooden floors, you'll be fine.

Having a pair of loudspeakers before the listener seemingly connected only using easy-to-conceal

## At heart, this is an amp with an eager desire to really get down and party

balanced cables – the AW 300 M is XLR-input only – has a definite appeal. Certainly, it makes for a tidier installation than having a large power amp on a floor-level rack between the speakers or running thick speaker cables around the room.

Effectively dividing the AW 800 M 'Reference Monoblock Power Amplifier' in two to create these smaller units looks to have been a relatively simple task, given it is actually a stereo design bridgeable into mono. This allows the user to start with a single amp, most probably fed from the company's £3,600 EC 4.8 MKII preamp and then add another to create a much more powerful system.

The AW 300 M offers its own upgrade route, this mono amp having



### HOW IT COMPARES

If you are sorely tempted to go 'dual mono' with separate power amps located close to left and right channel speakers, then you have a surprisingly wide choice. Powerful at 300W/8ohm, and very cost-effective at £1,300 apiece, Quad's Artera Mono provides a very cultured bang for your buck and will gamely grapple with difficult speakers well above its pay grade. Closer to Electro's price point, and with an industrial design to match, there's Chord Electronics' Ultima 3 monos – rated at a hefty 480W/8ohm and with subjective speed and slam to match. However, for 'ultimate' power and tolerance of the toughest speakers there's little to beat the £6,700 (each) Michi M8's from Rotel. Able to deliver in excess of 1kW/8ohm they are truly unflappable.

two sets of terminals for those wanting to bi-wire their speakers, together with a 'daisy-chain' XLR output to allow an additional monoblock to be added for full bi-amplification. The simplicity of the AW 300 M makes it as fine a visual match for the EC 4.8 MkII – Electrocompaniet's only preamp, with its minimal 'diamond' of buttons for volume and source selection – as it is an electrical one. The power amp has just an on/standby button, the main power switch being to the rear, the colour of this changing from red (for standby) to blue (on) after about 10 seconds, or blinking red if the amp's protection has been triggered.

Electrocompaniet's distinctive logo illuminates blue to show all is well, with a little button hidden under the front edge killing the light show if required. A second button located in the same area toggles a signal-sensing auto standby function, which operates after 30 minutes of no input and will override 12V trigger connections from the preamp if you choose to use them.

The design here is, unsurprisingly, closely related to the AW 800 M, using the company's direct-coupled high open-loop bandwidth topology, here enhanced with an output stage engineered to isolate the input and driver stages from the load, in the quest for the lowest-possible distortion. The power supply uses both DC and RF filtering at its input, while the 800VA transformer is magnetically and electrostatically shielded, its output smoothed by a 100,000µF bank of 100V reservoir capacitors.

The main amplifier section, rated at 300W/8ohm and doubling into

4ohm loads, is mounted in its own enclosure, with heatsinks on either side, and the matt black casework is braced with a pair of external bars – running front to back – for even greater rigidity.

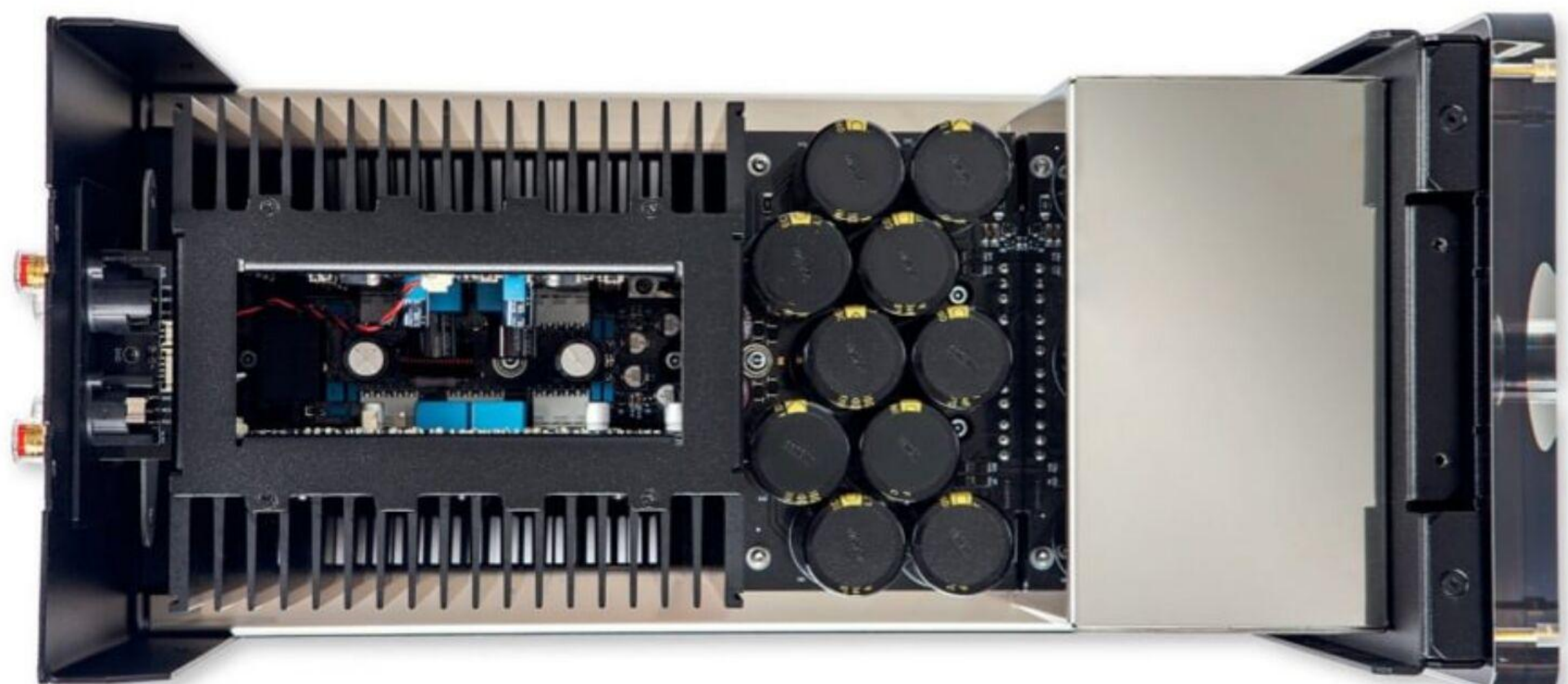
As with all of Electrocompaniet's products, the AW 300 M is built in-house in South-West Norway, in the highly automated facility of parent company Westcontrol, with quality assured by keeping everything from populating and flow-soldering circuitboards to those all-important final checks located under one roof.

## Sound quality

If this 'compact' monoblock wasn't so heavy, it would be tempting to trot out the old cliché about it punching well above its weight. So perhaps it's better to say that, despite its classic, understated styling, at heart this is definitely an amp with a penchant for partying. Yes, it sounds wonderfully sweet, clean and crisp when playing meticulously recorded jazz –

Norwegian jazz, perhaps? Take a bow the Espen Eriksen Trio – but it's just as persuasive when you loosen the reins and let it drive hard, its tight control perfect for even the densest of mixes.

With the aforementioned trio's cover of *We Don't Need Another Hero* from the *What Took You So Long* album, the AW 300 M is gentle and languid with Eriksen's piano, Lars Tormod Jensen's bass and Andreas Bye's drum, giving the whole track a decidedly dreamy feel. But slipping into another gear with the more percussive playing of Neil Cowley on his trio's *Rooster Was A Witness* from *The Face Of Mount Molehill* album; the relentless driving





- 1 XLR daisy-chain input/output
- 2 Two sets of 4mm speaker binding posts per channel
- 3 Ground post
- 4 On/off switch
- 5 AC mains input
- 6 Trigger in/outputs

### READY, WILLING AND CABLED

Let's talk about cables or, more specifically, given the groans usually greeting debates on this subject, let's talk about cable lengths. Different markets around the world have their own tastes when it comes to installing pre/power amplifier combinations, with UK audiophiles typically racking all electronics together, with short interconnect runs between the components and longer speaker cables. Elsewhere the preference is for localised amp/speaker setups fed with long runs from the preamplifier. In practice, the AW 300 M monoblocks make the 'long interconnects/short speaker cables' route even more feasible: placed right next to the speakers, they require extremely short speaker wiring. Knock yourself out with that dream speaker cable as you'll not be needing much of it! Of course, the enabling technology here is

the use of balanced cabling from the preamp to the power amp(s), with improved interference rejection than is possible with single-ended connections. Not for nothing do studio and stage installations favour balanced working, although many of these installations use transformer-coupled interconnects rather than the purely electronically balanced output/input of Electrocompaniet's pre and power amps. Here the promise of reduced common-mode noise and suppressed even-order distortions must be weighed against the complexity of the doubled-up circuitry. However, we have obtained good results from 'cooking quality' pro-use balanced cables for hi-fi setups. Think less than £50 for a decent pair of balanced interconnects, and suddenly the short speaker cable approach gets very tempting.

rhythm perfectly illustrates the speed and deftness of these amplifiers.

And they absolutely do scale and heft, too, thanks to that healthy – to say the least – power output allied to speed and snap. Warm they may be when required, but there's nothing lush or lazy about the way that they play music, as is clear with the recent Pentatone release of Haydn's *The Creation*. From the opening evocation of chaos and the exuberant cry of: "And there was light!" the power of the Dresdner Philharmonie and the MDR Leipzig Radio Choir is marshalled to dramatic effect by conductor Marek Janowski, aided

here by the wide-open dynamics the Electrocompaniet amps are so deftly capable of delivering.

The amplifier's balance is just as striking with the contributions of the vocal soloists – the timbres of their voices laid bare for inspection without any sense of enforced 'hi-finess'.

Instead, the entire story unfolds before the listener in thoroughly riveting style and remains enjoyable whether or not you subscribe to Haydn's religious theme.

On the subject of big and bold, Electrocompaniet's monoblocks sound magnificent blasting out the (probably deeply unfashionable)

Emerson, Lake & Palmer *Welcome Back My Friends...* live set. The band's version of *Toccata*, based on Ginastera's *Toccata Concertata*, amazingly sounds even more frenetic than it does on the *Brain Salad Surgery* album, and the epic *Karn Evil 9* – all 36-plus minutes of it – slams hard, underpinned by Carl Palmer's massive drumkit alongside Greg Lake's understated bass. Moreover, this amp pair fully conveys the ability of Keith Emerson's extravagant keyboard work to effortlessly carry the melody while simultaneously delivering what are seemingly the kind of deep notes more usually associated with those massive gothic church organs.

This set is about as 'clean' a live recording of the period as you'll ever

### Electrocompaniet's distinctive logo illuminates blue to show that all is well

encounter – the trio always toured many tons of equipment to achieve the crispest and most powerful sound around – and the nimble, extended sound of the Electrocompaniet AW 300 Ms driving full-range speakers brings it all back to life in utterly sensational style.

### Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, these new mono amps deliver all the performance of the AW 800 M used in stereo mode, but in a much more convenient form factor. Simplicity and solid engineering pay off in a sound that's packed with detail, and seemingly limitless power and dynamics, ensuring all genres of music are delivered with conviction and involvement. Add in the robust elegance and build, and this is a fine buy if you've got the reddiees ●

### Hi-Fi Choice

#### OUR VERDICT

<b>SOUND QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>LIKE:</b> Detailed sound; more manageable than the AW 800 M
<b>VALUE FOR MONEY</b> ★★★★★	<b>DISLIKE:</b> Nothing of note, except maybe the price tag...
<b>BUILD QUALITY</b> ★★★★★	<b>WE SAY:</b> A fine buy for high-end aficionados
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	

#### OVERALL

