

D'Agostino Momentum Z Monoblocs

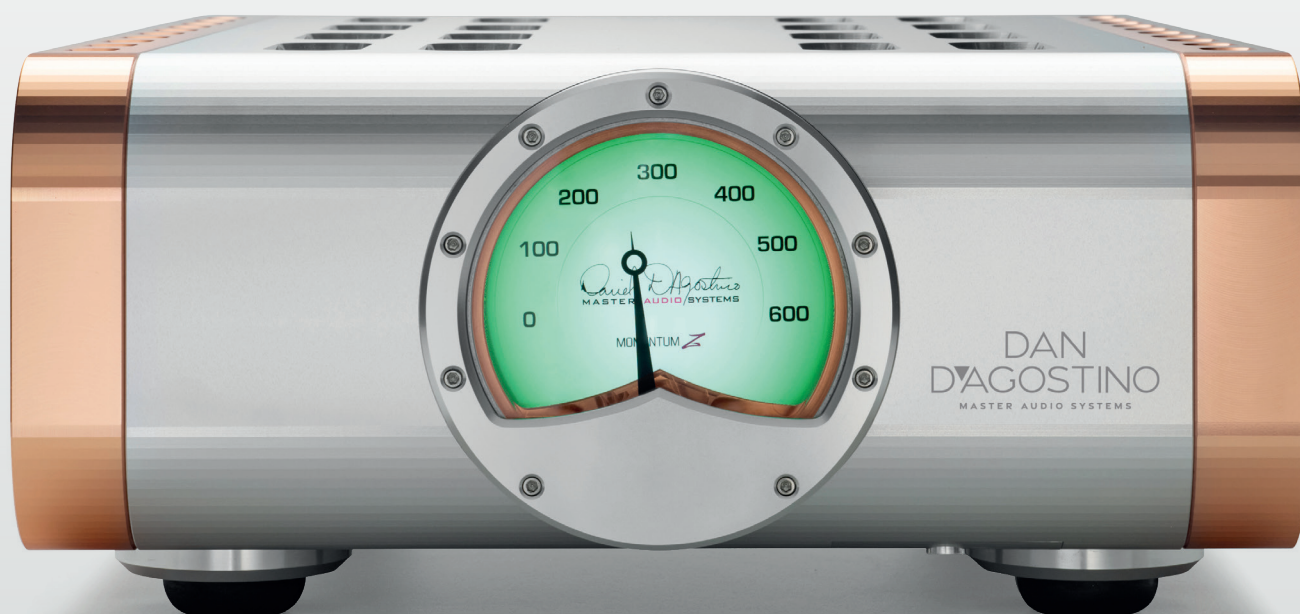
Rafael Todes

Dan D'Agostino left Krell (which he founded in 1980) in 2009, and this year he is celebrating the 15th anniversary of the new enterprise he founded with his wife, Dan D'Agostino Master Audio Systems. The Momentum Z monoblocs build on the previous model, the Momentum M400Mxv, and each monobloc features two linear 1.2kVA toroidal transformers, specified to deliver 500W into 8 ohms and 1,000W into 4 ohms, with a frequency response of 1Hz to 200 kHz, ± 1 dB. The Momentum series sits below the 'Relentless' series in the range and above 'Progression' and the entry-level 'Pendulum' series.

The Monoblocs develop the Swiss Watch styling theme seen in previous models, with beautifully engineered solid copper fins that double as heat sinks. Notably, these copper fins have twice the thermal conductivity of aluminium, which obviates the need for a fan, which is always noisy and an irritation to boot!

Breguet cool

The fascia has the distinctive styling of a Breguet watch, with a combination of a colourful 3.5-inch high-resolution LCD digital display and an analogue hand that shows output in watts. A striking and apt synthesis of digital and analogue, most appropriate for the greatest schism in audio today. »





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» Another innovation in the Z monoblocs is internet connectivity, allowing you to monitor operating voltages, temperature, bias, and DC offset. I guess this is not like a Bluetooth toothbrush, which seems to be technology for technology's sake, because it could be useful as a diagnostic aid in the unlikely event of something going wrong.

On the rear panel, the speaker terminals are spade-type rather than banana plug, presumably because spades offer better electrical connectivity, but this is a tad inconvenient for those of us with banana plugs. D'Agostino supply converters for such eventualities.

JFET voltage gain

The major new technological innovation in the Z monoblocs is the use of a JFET voltage-gain stage, with a circuit engineered for ultra-low impedance. The blocks are designed to partner with the Momentum C2Z preamp, which has exactly this impedance. The benefit is lower noise, and the amps are said to be less fussy about the choice of interconnect cable.

In the event of a non-D'Agostino preamp being used, there is a switch that can be flipped, but this requires removing the top panel to access the internal switch on the main board behind the XLR input. I suppose this is something a dealer would do if a customer wants to use their own non-D'Agostino preamp. There are only XLR

inputs, with a plug-in RCA/XLR connector available. When the power switch is on, the unit enters standby mode, and a button under the front fascia puts the unit into operation mode.

I was supplied with the matching preamp, the C2Z, for the review. It is styled and handled similarly to the D'Agostino Pendulum, which I reviewed a few editions ago, though it is an integrated amplifier. I used the amplifier and preamp to drive my B&W 802d4s, together with a Naim Nat01 Tuner, but primarily a dCS Bartók APEX with a Lina clock. Cabling was a combination of Townshend F1 Fractal Speaker cable and Inakustic cables reviewed in Issue 257. I also used a PS Audio PS10 Power Regenerator.

Listening

A recent release on Tidal, Haydn's 84th Symphony, with the Danish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Adam Fischer on Naxos, shows just how well the pre/power combination is performing. Obviously well-recorded, the orchestra is rendered with incredible accuracy in 3D space. The sound is powerful, detailed, sweet, textured and highly dynamic. There is no harshness from the violins in the loud passages, just a solid, massive sense of weight that you hear in the first few rows of a concert hall with a fine orchestra.

The cellos and basses sound taut, without the rubberiness you can sometimes hear from a lesser solid-state amplifier. There is a lovely airiness to the presentation »



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» - everything breathes. There is air and space between the players, and the chords ring and sound substantial. Haydn's ever-present wit is there in spades. The performance pulls my attention in.

In my experience, it is easy to deconstruct audio when there are glaring faults, but it's much harder when there are none and the music and performance speak so clearly. Haydn's grammar is very clear; the phrasing and micro-phrasing make perfect sense. This is a rare audio treat for me. An amplifier serving up an electrically charged performance with utter conviction.

Good vs great

If I may be permitted to digress, as a violinist, I have been fortunate to play and own some very fine instruments. The biggest difference between a good violin and a great one is the complexity of sound it can produce and the way it encourages you to find new colours and sounds within it. There are more complexities and timbres I'm hearing from this D'Agostino amp than I'm normally served up, and that's thrilling. It's like discovering new rooms in your house - a common dream, I'm told. Same music, just far more colours and textures, and a wider palette of emotions being presented.

On to my trusted favourite test recording, Shostakovich's First Symphony, with Andris Nelsons and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The first movement is an odd mixture of chamber music and large orchestral sounds. The level of delicacy and detail is great, and there is real finesse to the proceedings. All the woodwind solos have real character and charm, and when a slam is needed, i.e., the whole orchestra on fire, the D'Agostino provide the fireworks! The bass drum packs quite a punch, and the timing overall is immaculate.

There is outstanding rhythmic control. Transients are very fast, and the whole performance has an edge to it, really exciting and drawing you into Shostakovich's world by the scruff of the neck. I find myself concentrating on the musical dialogue rather than the audio performance. This is the sign of a great amplifier. Its skill and competence disappear behind the composer's intentions. It hides its knowledge well.

Light work

Next up, some choral music, the Brahms Requiem, with Raphaël Pichon on the Harmonia Mundi label. I often have a major problem with big choral recordings. This may be to do with the fact that so many singers in the choir end up being off-axis to the microphones, and the resultant sound can be harsh. There is also a massive amount of detail

to resolve, and the end product can sound both muddy and harsh. The D'Agostino pair make light work of this, or perhaps I should say heavy, gravitas-imbued work of it.

First of all, there is a sense of complete clarity coming from my speakers. The choir is present and correct, but the amplifiers resolve the inner detail beautifully. The skilfully scored woodwind and brass come across perfectly balanced. This is a very polished performance, and when the climax "Denn Alles Fleisch..." happens, there are no gear changes, just a smooth transition to greater power and presence. I am literally pinned back in my chair, sucked into the glorious sounds I'm hearing. Truly impressive!

Trying some Jazz, Art Farmer with *Farmer's Market* (1958), and the track 'With Prestige' (Van Gelder Remaster) sounds really terrific. There is that dry accuracy you hear in a jazz club, a sort of dusty, cigarette-impregnated sound. The percussion is punchy; the hi-hat, which runs throughout, is metallic and tightly cast, and Farmer on flugelhorn sounds masterful. There can't be that many records made in the late fifties that sound this good. The D'Agostinos capture the intensity and swagger of this group with immaculate timing and rhythm, punchy, fast transients, and a sense of scale. I would find it hard to characterise the sound I'm hearing; I don't hear any particular tendencies apart from an overriding sense of clarity and precision, a large sound space, and a magnetic pull on my concentration to appreciate the music at a deeper level.

Listening to *Tears of Joy*, by Antonio Forcione, on the Naim label, a recording that seems to sound good on any system, as it has few instruments that don't compete with each other and are in very different registers, does sound significantly better than I have heard before. The guitar has a tighter, more taut sound, and the percussion comes over as less bloated, but still bristling with power and energy. The placement of the instruments in space is chiselled, both left-to-right and front-to-back. I have the feeling, listening to the Momentum Z Monoblocs, that I can literally reach out and touch the instruments. There is also a fabulous rhythmic propulsion that exceeds what I have heard before.

I am also hearing many more tiny details than I have experienced up to now. That's a really exciting thing about great Hi-End audio. You think you know every detail of a track, and then something comes along and transforms it for you. A revelation! Finally, Ionisation by Edgar Varèse, a purely percussive piece that stretches the limits of percussion instruments, making melody, texture and rhythmic virtuosity!





The D'Agostino Momentum Z monoblocs have been among the greatest pleasures to review in my recent memory.



» Greater depth

This recording on the Decca label with the Los Angeles Percussion Ensemble has much greater depth and attack than I have previously heard. It's a jungle of percussion sounds, brought closer to life by the lightning-fast transients of the Momentum Z's. Everything sounds a bit more sonorous, more detailed and more dynamic. The 'blobs do struck percussion so well, and the snare drum is beautifully located in space, so believable that the reality of the piece is all-encompassing. It's big and powerful when power is needed, but it also has a command and grip on the quieter passages, a feat that few amplifiers can match. It's surprising how hard it is for an amplifier to maintain control and detail when the music drops to a whisper, and this does that amazingly well. Another revelation!

The D'Agostino Momentum Z monoblocs have been among the greatest pleasures to review in my recent memory. They have an accuracy, a scale and a beauty to what they produce that make me want to listen deeper, longer and more fully. They are visually striking objects, alpha-male jewellery with more than a hint of bling, but don't be fooled by their banker's-bonus allure. They are a fabulously designed and engineered product worthy only of the finest of systems and the greatest musical appreciation. +

Technical specifications

Inputs 1 balanced XLR Outputs 1 pair binding posts
Power Output 500 W @ 8 Ω / 1,000 W @ 4 Ω / 2,000 W @ 2 Ω
Frequency Response 1 Hz to 200 kHz, -1 dB / 20 Hz to 20 kHz, +0.1 dB
Signal-to-Noise Ratio >75 dB, A-weighted / >115 dB, unweighted
Gain 27dB Distortion 0.02% @ 1 kHz, 500 watts @ 8 Ω Input Impedance 1 M Ω (Standard input setting) / 300 Ω (Z input setting)
Output Impedance <0.05 Ω, 20 Hz to 20 kHz
Output Voltage 190 V peak-to-peak
Output Current 60A peak-to-peak
Power Consumption Standby 17W / Idle 35W / Maximum 3,200W
Finish Silver or black
Dimensions (WxHxD) 32 x 13 x 54 cm
Weight 45 kg
Price: £63,998 each

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