



The Moon Neo 430HA headphone amplifier creates a happy zone around your ears



The Moon Neo 430HA didn't make a strong, immediate first impression. It certainly looked and felt like a solid high-end component, but the sound didn't bowl me over, so I left a radio playing through it for about a week. That did the trick, the transparency and purity of the sound jumped ahead of any amp I've auditioned at home, almost every headphone sounded better than ever!

The Neo 430HA was designed for headphone connoisseurs, folks who own at least one high-end headphone, probably two or three. That's why the Neo 430HA's front panel has a selection of headphone jacks, including two 3-pin XLRs, and one 4-pin XLR, for use with headphones that sport XLR connectors. There's also a standard 6.3mm headphone jack, plus a 3.5mm analog input so you can play your smart phone through the Neo 430HA. The rear panel hosts two RCA and one XLR stereo inputs; plus fixed & variable line-level RCA stereo outputs.

Order the optional digital converter and your Neo 430HA will also have two coaxial, one optical, and one USB digital input. The converter goes beyond the usual 192kHz/24-bit PCM digital, the Neo 430HA can handle up to 384 kHz/32 bit ultra high-resolution PCM, and Direct Stream Digital DSD64, DSD128 and DSD256 formats over the USB input. The Neo 430HA measures 16.9 by 3.5 by 13.8 inches (42.9 by 8.9 by 35.1 cm); it's available in silver, black, or the snazzy silver & black "two-tone" finish. A remote control is included as well.

The Neo 430HA isn't just a headphone amp, it can also be used as a preamp in a home audio system, so I hooked it up to my First Watt J2 power amp and Zu Audio Druid V speakers. Judged as a high-end preamp the Neo 430HA sounded great and it's an excellent value.

High-resolution files, like the recently remastered "Led Zeppelin II" album produced superior clarity and immediacy than CDs or LPs. The Apex Teton all-tube headphone amp is no slouch, but it lagged behind the Neo 430HA with my Beyerdynamic T-1 headphones for detail resolution. The Teton bettered the Neo 430HA with its ability to flesh out the sound of voices and instruments. The tube amp is finicky about headphones, some sound great, others lackluster, the Neo 430HA can handle any full-size headphone.

My favorite Audeze headphone, the newest version of the LCD-3, was revelatory with this amp, upping the headphone's power delivery and low-end gravitas. Still, the best headphone sound at home this year happened when I paired the Neo 430HA with my Abyss AB-1266 'phones! It's a seriously expensive amp/headphone combination, but sound quality is absolutely state of the art, and those two are a tiny fraction of the cost of an equivalent speaker-based system.

The Neo 430HA, more than any other amp I've tried at home, unleashed more of the AB-1266's uninhibited dynamic range, out-of-the head soundstage, extraordinarily deep bass, and clearer highs than any headphone I own. That's testament to the Neo 430HA's abilities, so no matter how far you go with headphones in the future the Neo 430HA won't be the limiting factor. It also scored well with my Sennheiser HD 700, AKG K812, Grado RS 1, and Hifiman HE 6 full-size headphones.

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