

toneAudio

Pass Labs INT-60 Amplifier

Main Course or Desert?

By Jeff Dorgay



There used to be a restaurant nearby that offered small portions fantastic deserts. You could have a large shot glass full of whatever deserts were on the main menu for a couple of bucks. It wasn't about saving on the bill; there are times you really crave desert but don't need a giant helping of chocolate mousse. The INT-60 from Pass Labs is kind of like that.

Their XS level components are some of the world's finest. Ask nearly anyone that's owned or reviewed them. Many of us with that level of appreciation for musical excellence don't necessarily have the budget, or perhaps have a smaller room, or very sensitive speakers. At that point, a full XS system isn't a fit. Introducing the INT-60.

Many readers have asked about the difference between their new XA25, which we reviewed here, and the new INT-60. On one level, they are different beasts, because the XA25 is only a power amplifier – yet the XA25 offers some nuances that even the mighty XS300s or my current reference, the XA200.8s don't, due to a simpler circuit topology. Mr. Pass often praises the simple approach and the XA25 is incredible in that respect. But you still need a preamplifier, so by the time you find a worthy preamplifier and purchase the necessary cables, you'll still most likely exceed the \$9,500 price tag of the INT-60.

For those that need it, the INT-60 does allow separate inputs and outputs, that will let you use the power or preamplifier sections by themselves. Just in case you decide to bi-amp, or who knows?

Heavy metal

Don't let the lower power figure fool you. Though the INT-60 is only rated at 60 watts per channel, where the larger INT-250 is rated 250 per, this amplifier stays biased in class-A mode longer, all the way to 30 watts per channel. At 93 pounds, it's only about 15 pounds lighter than the INT-250 as well. The INT-60 is still fairly dense for a single chassis box.

Utilizing a smaller, yet stylistically similar blue meter to the one in the big Pass amps, the INT-60 features a similar visual architecture to all of the other Pass products. While this may seem like a minor point, it's very thoughtful of the creative braintrust at Pass to allow the INT-60 to work with the same remote as their other preamplifiers. A small, but helpful feature. The rest of the INT-60s physical layout is also identical to the rest of the lineup, so if you are building a second system around your INT-60, or trading up from something else in the family, you will feel right at home.

The INT-60 is highly versatile, offering four line-level inputs, with one of them a balanced XLR input, while the other three are single ended RCA inputs. A pair of big Furutech speaker output terminals, much like the ones on all the other Pass amplifiers make it easy to connect any type of speaker cable. Bonus points here for being able to use the INT-60 as a preamplifier or power amplifier separately, so in case you decide to upgrade to a bigger amplifier, use a multiple amp setup, or just want to try something else for a while, balanced XLR and single ended RCA inputs and outputs are available, making the INT-60 incredibly flexible.

An equal measure of sound and simplicity

Like every other Pass amplifier I've used, the INT-60 needs a few solid days of play to break in, but not really any more – 100 hours will do the trick. Equally so for warmup, if you turn it off at the end of the day – expect about 1 full hour for the slight fog to clear when you power it up. Considering the INT-60 isn't a full – blown class-A amplifier and it draws about 375 watts, it's up to you whether you'll just be leaving it on all the time.

Using the INT-60 with a handful of fairly efficient loudspeakers from Focal and Pure Audio Project, I doubt it ever ran hard enough to escape from class-A mode. Only when I connected the vintage Magnepan Tympani IVs, was I able to budge the meter from its center position, revealing that the amplifier is moving out of class A operation. It's worth mentioning what a splendid job this amplifier did driving these speakers, that are normally thought of as needing tons of power to drive.

Bouncing between the XSPre/XA200.8 combination and the INT-60 at modest volume levels, it is clear just how much of the top range Pass performance is captured here. Of course, the flagship models resolve more information at all volume levels, but the core sonic picture that all Pass amplifiers portray is present in the INT-60. This amplifier is voiced a few small clicks to the warmer, more tonally saturated

side of neutral. That's how Mr. Pass likes his amplifiers to sound, and I agree. As he's fond of saying, "it's the tube sound without the hassle."

If you've ever been a tube lover that is tired of the tube game, the INT-60 is your ticket to paradise. Leave it on all day, and never worry about scrounging for NOS tubes again. Sure the best tube gear might reveal a few more molecules of music here or there, but most won't. And most won't offer the level of quiet, dynamics and bass grip that the INT-60 does.

A high level of tonal and timbral accuracy also makes the INT-60 tough to ignore. Pianos, violins, and other acoustic instruments sound incredibly right, and with a pair of speakers in the 87-90db/1-watt sensitivity range, you will have to push the INT-60 very hard to get it to clip.

Rounding out the picture, the INT-60 paints a very engaging, three-dimensional musical landscape, with rock-solid pace. Listening to the Stones' "Low Down" (from Bridges to Babylon), the INT-60 keeps Charlie Watts drumming solidly anchored through the melody, while Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood sneak up behind Jagger's lead vocals, going "woo, woo" during the chorus, as if they were up on stage together. Pure acoustic performances delight, and the level that this amplifier unfolds densely packed music is truly world class.

100% fun, zero fatigue

A bottom end that will put you back in the listening chair when the music warrants it, and smooth, yet defined and delicate rendition of the mids and highs, makes for an amplifier you can listen to all day long. As many music lovers gravitate more towards simpler setups in the home, a high quality integrated amplifier makes perfect sense. If your sensibilities call for this approach, we suggest the Pass Labs INT-60 very highly. This is a fantastic amplifier.

