

Ideal Innovations

Panel Instruments

It's difficult to remember a time when there weren't iPods, but despite the increasing popularity of portable media players, there are music lovers still dedicated to the sound produced by a standalone amplifier. Like those in the ubiquitous iPod, today most amps are built directly into the music player. Although built-in units are certainly more economic on space, there are many purists who believe the quality of the sound produced by free-standing amplifiers is superior.

"There used to be no transistors, no solid state equipment. Anyone who bought audio equipment had only one option - vacuum tube. This was the only way to listen to music or hear the TV," says Syd Beaumont of Ideal Innovations, a company that designs high end retro-styled vacuum tube or valve amplifiers.

"There are many weaknesses to an amplifier that is already built into a system, like low power, distorted output, not being very flexible – just to name a few."

Noticing these weaknesses, Syd started building his own amps to produce better sound. His background as an electrician prompted his interest, but his enjoyment of music helped him turn it into a business.



EM32-1B-LED

"It started out as a longtime hobby of mine," he says. "I spent almost 30 years building these things. In 2002, I finally quit my job at a local automotive plant and went full time into building audio equipment."

Syd claims that the sound produced from Ideal Innovations' amplifiers is cleaner, and his many customers agree.

"I've been told that people like our amps because the music is more open, full bodied, and clear," he says. "Everyone hears something different and has a different way to describe it, but the consensus seems to be that music from tube equipment is more natural sounding, and that's what people like."

The growing popularity of Ideal Innovations' products shows that there is a strong, renewed interest in the sound quality that vacuum tube amplifiers produce.



"I find it amusing when younger people think this is something new. They have no idea that it all started with tube equipment – right back to the early 1900s. That's what makes my work retrospective."

When ordering from Ideal Innovations, customers have a lot of say in how their amps are designed. One recent customer ordered an amplifier that required voltage adjustments to be made periodically, which can be very complicated.



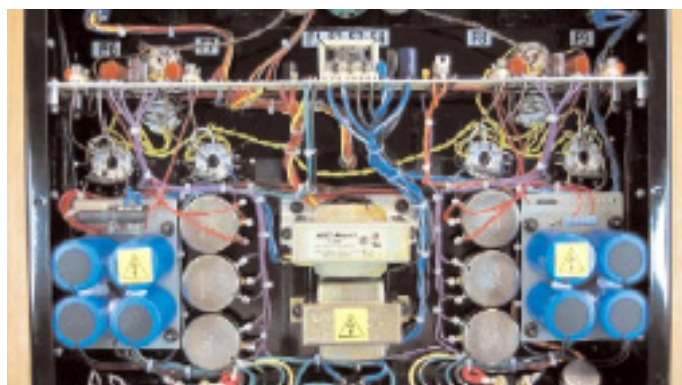
Ideal Innovations uses Lascar's EM32-1B-LED voltmeter. More information on the product can be found by visiting Lascar's website at www.lascarelectronics.com and downloading the products datasheet.

"You need to connect an accurate meter to the amplifier," explains Syd, "because if things aren't adjusted properly, you can damage the tubes or make the amplifier overheat."

Most companies offer test points and jacks where you can connect a meter, but true to his company's name, Syd innovatively decided to build a panel meter into his own unit. "Dozens or even hundreds of other companies make vacuum tube amplifiers," he says. "I've never seen a digital voltmeter incorporated into another design."

Syd knew that there are several companies who make small meters, but he chose Lascar Electronics' round EM32-1B-LED above any other digital panel meter. "None of the others had the appearance or the ease of use," says Syd. "I was quite pleased to find it, actually. Everything else required a square panel cutout, and that's not easy to do unless you have it done when you manufacture the chassis."

The EM32-1B-LED is part of Lascar's Easy Mount series, a range designed to mount easily on any panel by simply drilling or punching a hole. This particular part is a 3 1/2 digit LED voltmeter intended to be mounted into a 32.5mm (1.28") diameter cutout and includes screw terminals so that no soldering is required.



"You basically punch one round hole and then put the meter in place," Syd explains. "It's very easy to mount if you have the right punch; in fact, the way it mounts was one of the reasons I chose this meter, the way that it fit onto my product. It was extremely easy to use from an assembly point of view."

Even with the growing interest in tube equipment, it continues to be a niche market for Ideal Innovations. Mainstream media does not sell vacuum tube amplifiers, and neither does anyone else at the price Syd is asking. He says, "We want to keep the equipment affordable – we want to make something the average person can enjoy." The low cost of Lascar's meter allows Ideal Innovations to continue to sell even custom work at a reasonable price.

Incorporating the meter into the amplifier itself will allow Syd's customers to make the necessary adjustments to the amp with ease. "Now they won't have to connect external equipment to set it up," Syd explains. "Of course it is safer, but it also ensures that fewer mistakes will be made when making adjustments. It's so easy to make a mistake, and it can be very costly if your equipment is ruined."

Lascar's meter has allowed Ideal Innovations to develop a new and innovative custom unit. Syd concludes, "I enjoy the sound quality of tube amplifiers more than solid state amplifiers, and just being able to share that music listening experience with others is something I like doing. Incorporating Lascar's meter into my design has allowed my customers to enjoy the experience more safely and with less hassle."

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