

Audioengine's nifty \$199 desktop amplifier | The Audiophile

http://news.cnet.com/8301-13645_3-20022940-47.html?tag=cnetRiver

November 29, 2010

The Audioengine N22

(Credit: Audioengine)

Audioengine's spectacularly good [A2](#) has been my powered speaker reference for years. I recently enthused about Audioengine's slightly larger passive [P4 speaker](#) (\$249/pair) that need to be powered by a separate amp. I was surprised that Audioengine didn't introduce an amp when they brought out the P4, but now with the [N22](#) (\$199), the time has come.

It's an unobtrusive, vertically oriented design--7 inches high, 2.75 inches wide, and 5.5 inches deep--and it weighs 3.5 pounds. The clean front panel has just a volume control and a 3.5mm headphone jack; the rear end has stereo RCA inputs and subwoofer outputs; metal speaker wire binding posts; and a USB port for charging portable devices. The N22 accepts analog signals only. The medium-density fiberboard wood cabinet is finished in satin black, and the amp has a separate power supply.



The digital amp puts out 22 watts per channel; that's about right for the P4 speakers. The sound was nowhere as warm and sweet as the A2, but it was considerably more detailed and lively. At first I missed the A2's easygoing nature, but I quickly came to appreciate the N22/P4's superior resolution, dynamic drive, and improved bass definition.

The P4's bass is fine, but its 4-inch Kevlar cone woofers aren't exactly the last word in punch or power. So I hooked up my PSB Alpha B speakers, and its 5.25-inch woofers uncorked a more satisfying low-end experience. But the 11-inch-high PSBs are a little too big for my desktop, so I brought the P4s back. I thought I'd never retire the A2s, but now that I've grown accustomed to the N22/P4's detail and clarity, there's no going back. It's a winning combination, but I'm sure most small speakers would be fine with the N22.

I plugged a pair of Sennheiser HD-598 headphones (review to come) into the N22, and came away pretty impressed by what I heard. The sound was extremely open and pure, so the N22's headphone sound is another reason to consider this little amp. The N22's

headphone amp is decent enough, but the [Schiit Audio Asgard](#) dedicated headphone amp (\$249) was noticeably more transparent-sounding.

You can purchase the N22 direct from Audioengine's online store, and the \$199 price includes FedEx delivery. The amp is sold with a 30-day return guarantee.