



Classe Audio CA-5200 Reviewed



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Receivers are for bedrooms. In a true high-performance, audiophile-grade theater, you need real power to move some air with your speakers, meaning that even if you have a pair of your favorite monoblock amps perched on a slab of granite, you still have five more channels of audio to power. That brings me to the \$8,000 Classe' CA-5200, one of the most refined, powerful and graceful multi-channel amps to ever grace my equipment rack.



Listed conservatively at 200 watts per channel times five channels, the Classe Audio CA-5200 is what we could call a beast of an amplifier. It mainly operates as a traditional class AB amp but, at lower outputs, the Classe' engineers have figured out a way to make the amps run as a class-A amp (no pun intended), which reportedly reduces some of the noise associated with class AB switching, not that you can hear any audible noise when auditioning the Classe' CA-5200, as this power amp runs very, very quietly. The Toroidal transformer (the heart and soul of any good class AB amp) is custom-made and extra-beefy, yet the Classe' CA-5200 runs cool as a cucumber.

The build quality and industrial design for the entire Classe' line, especially the CA-5200, is as good as it gets at any price in the world of specialty audio. For music, expect to hear an amplifier that doesn't really impose its sound on your recordings. What the Classe' CA-5200 does is provide a reserve of power that is always sitting there waiting to produce. You don't always need all 200 watts across five channels, but when you are playing a demanding SACD in surround, there are times you are glad you have the sonic reinforcement that the CA-5200 delivers. For movies, the need for discrete power is arguably even more important, as a CA-5200 likely would power your front three speakers, as well as your surrounds. With HD audio coming from today's best Blu-ray sources, never before has having a high-resolution surround sound system been more relevant. The resolution of the effects you can hear in your side and rear channels are better than ever, necessitating a more significant amplifier like the Classe' CA-5200.

High Points

- The Classe' Audio CA-5200 delivers real power via proven amplifier technology. The 200 watts you get from each channel are conservatively rated and have pound after pound of technology to back them up. Don't fall for the hype of a digital amp unless cost is the most pressing issue. Yes, they are quiet and have one hell of a spec sheet, but listen to a real amp like the Classe' CA-5200 first before you plunk down your Black Card.
- The fit and finish of the Classe' Audio CA-5200 is breathtaking. One look in person (or even at the photos) will reassure you as to why this is one of the best options in the world of audiophile amplifiers. This is an amp you buy and keep for the rest of your life; you may even put a provision in your will for it. It's that good and will last that long.
- No multi-channel amp looks better in a custom rack than Classe'. Arguably, no large-scale class-AB amp runs cooler in a rack, either.
- Classe says they design their amps to not be very interconnect-dependent, meaning you don't have to geek out with 10 pairs of three-meter interconnects from your AV preamp to your amp. It's nice that they said this, as I needed to test it for myself and you know what? You can hear a difference between, say, UltraLink and Transparent cables with the Classe' CA-5200, so I stuck with my Transparent Reference cables, which have served me well over the years, as I believe each incremental audio improvement adds up to a system that sounds significantly better. I agree with Classe, however, that cables are not a huge issue with the CA-5200, as they sometimes are with tweakier audiophile amps.

Low Points

- I could pick on the Classe CA-5200's weight, but it's more of a planning issue than a ding. You wouldn't want to drop a CA-5200 in a flimsy rack, as this amp is worthy of being placed on granite in a more audiophile-oriented system. The coolest way of presenting the CA-5200 is in a custom rack, such as a Middle Atlantic rack with a custom faceplate. An entire rack of Classe' electronics looks nothing short of stunning when installed professionally.

Conclusion

The Classe' Audio CA-5200 is as powerful, nimble and robust as you will find in the world of audiophilia. Its build quality makes a reasonable argument that this amp will function longer than you will. The Classe CA-5200 has enough real power to light up the highest-end speakers in a 5.1 or 7.1 system, ranging from B&Ws to Wilsons to MartinLogans to Cantons to Magnepans to Revels. You never need to worry about having enough power if you own a Classe CA-5200. If you were to make a list of the best multi-channel amps money could buy for ultimate performance, value and overall sound, I am confident the Classe' Audio CA-5200 would be right at the top.

Keywords

Classe Audio, Classe Audio CA-5200, Classe CA-5200 amp reviewed, 5 channel amp, audiophile amp reviews, Equity, Bowers and Wilkins, Abby Road Studios

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