

Outlaw 750 Five-Channel Amplifier

Wanted by anyone who loves an amazing deal.

by Brent Butterworth

How many times have you seen ads that say something like, “We cut out the middleman by selling direct to you!” Sentences like this usually omit one important piece of information, though. They



A. The 750's front panel is criminally simple—with just a power switch and an indicator light.

B. This backside is pretty standard for a five-channel amp, with five RCA inputs and five sets of five-way binding posts.

should read, “We cut out the middleman—and take his profits!” because the goods usually sell for just slightly less than you'd expect to pay at retail. Selling direct should give manufacturers the ability to cut prices by at least a third. After all, there's no dealer markup, no rep commission, no bad debt....

Recently, some veterans of the consumer electronics biz started a new company that offers its products only over a Website—and claims to offer you dramatically lower prices than what you'd pay for comparable products at your local home theater dealer. The new company's called Outlaw, and its first product is an amplifier, the 750.

The 750 sells direct for \$1,099 plus shipping (which Outlaw says shouldn't exceed \$55 in the continental U.S.). It's a five-channel amp with a power rating of 165 watts per channel into 8 ohms. That power rating certainly caught my interest, because no five-channel amp in this price range offers nearly as much power. The Carver AV-705x, for example, costs the same and offers 120 watts per channel; the AMC 2N100-5 reviewed in April costs \$1,350 and puts out 150 watts per channel.

Of course, as anyone who's read a few *Home Theater* amp Face Offs could tell you, low-cost, high-power amps often sound pretty lousy. So is the 750 the real, honest-to-god, direct-to-you bargain that Outlaw promises, or just another direct-sales scam that's pushing a \$1,100 amp for the unbelievably low price of...\$1,099?

When I popped off the 750's lid, I was reminded not of a low-priced five-channel amp like a Carver or a B&K. I was reminded more of mid-priced five-channels like the \$1,695 ATI AT1505 (reviewed December '97) and the \$1,750 Sherbourn 5/1500 (February '99). There's a large, toroidal transformer, with separate pairs of 10,000-microFarad storage capacitors for each amplifier channel (for a total of 100,000 μ F). Like the ATI and the Sherbourn, each channel has six output transistors; the AMC, in comparison, has only four. Each chan-

nel has its own heatsink; there's no fan to annoy you with extraneous, unnecessary noise. A protection circuit keeps the amp from frying if you short out its output terminals.

The front panel has only a power switch and an indicator light. The back has five sturdy RCA input jacks, with five sets of five-way binding posts. There's also a minijack that turns the amp on when it receives a 12-volt DC trigger signal (many preamp/processors send out such a signal when they're powered up). This is a completely ordinary feature package for a five-channel amp, but there's really no important feature missing.

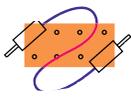
I had a chance to listen to the 750 extensively over the

TESTING SYSTEM

Krell Audio+Video Standard pre/pro, Sony DVP-S3000 DVD player, Aerial Acoustics Model 7, CC3, and SR3 speakers, NHT SuperTwo and SuperOne speakers

Aerial Acoustics speakers in our New York listening room, comparing it with a variety of amps including the AMC 2N100-5 and the \$2,500 Parasound HCA-2205A (reviewed in October '98). I used lots of CDs and DVDs, all played over a Sony DVD player through Krell's wonderful-sounding Audio+Video Standard pre/pro.

After only a few CDs, it became apparent to me that



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the 750 does not sound like a \$1,099 amp—it sounds like a \$1,700 amp. The 750 outclassed the 2N100-5 in almost every way. It produced much tighter, more robust bass, a smoother midrange, and a much more extended treble; the AMC, in comparison, sounded very midrange-heavy, with comparatively weak treble and bass. The 750 also out-imaged the 2N100-5. The soundstage on high-falutin audiophile recordings, like the 24-bit/96-kilohertz DVD release of Sara K.'s *Hobo*, was very broad and deep, equaling the ATI's excellent performance in this regard, while the

2N100-5 seemed to keep the sound caged in between the speakers.

The 2N100-5 did, however, sound better than the 750 on edgy-sounding rock CDs like the remastered version of Led Zeppelin's *Presence* (sadly, even the remastered version sounds pretty rough

compared with '80s and '90s rock recordings). On recordings like this, the 750 (and most other good amps) can be *too* revealing. The 2N100-5, on the other hand, lends a warm, rolled-off quality that takes the edge off the sound just like a tube amp would. I guess there are a few

people who would prefer this sound on everything, just as there are people who like A.1. sauce on everything. But it's not reality—you're getting the flavor of the A.1. (or the 2N100-5), not the actual flavor of what you're eating (or listening to).

The Parasound HCA-2205A, in my opinion, is a very viable step-up from an under-\$2,000 multichannel amp, thanks to its tremendous power (220 watts per channel) and surprisingly lush, refined sound. The HCA-2205A's definitely a step-up from the 750, too—especially in the treble, where the 750 sounds very clean and uncolored, but not as detailed, lush, or airy as the 2205A, which I feel can make a legitimate claim of being a true high-end amplifier. The 750 really doesn't give up anything in dynamics, though, compared with the 2205A; it sounds just about as powerful. (Of course, when you consider that the difference between 165 watts and 220 watts boils down to 1.25 dB, that shouldn't be too surprising.) All things considered, I feel the 750 offers sound quality as good as that of any under-\$2,000 multichannel amp I've heard.

Sure, there are good reasons not to buy some products direct. Speakers, for example, are such a matter of personal taste that you really do have to go listen for yourself. The sound of the

speaker has to work for you, the looks have to work for you, and they have to be set up properly, a process in which a knowledgeable,

HIGHLIGHTS

- For real: a \$1,700 amp for \$1,099
- Excellent sound quality and all the features you really need

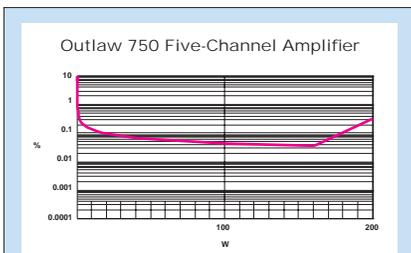
experienced dealer can make the difference between good sound and bad. But I'm not sure that the generally subtle differences in midpriced five-channel amps are worth fretting about, and how many dealers are going to take the trouble to set up a meaningful, level-matched comparison of five-channel amps for you, anyway?

This review is going to anger a lot of people—namely, the companies who make amplifiers in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 price range, and the

750 Five-Channel Amplifier **\$1,099**

Outlaw Electronics
www.outlawaudio.com
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dealers who sell them. A lot of them will come up with bogus reasons why this amp's no good. But *Home Theater* magazine can't pretend that the Web doesn't exist, we can't pretend that there's some reason why you shouldn't buy an amp direct, and we can't pretend that this isn't a \$1,700 amp for \$1,099. Because that's just what it is. 📡



HT Labs measures: Outlaw 750

The above measurement shows the total harmonic distortion plus noise versus power output of the Outlaw 750's left amplifier channel. With two channels driving an 8-ohm load, the amp begins clipping at 0.036% distortion and 161 watts. The amp reaches 1% THD+N at 179.5 watts, as shown above. Into 4 ohms, the amp begins clipping at 317 watts and reaches 1% THD+N at 378.5 watts. The amplifier's frequency response was ± 0.17 dB from 20 Hz to 20 kHz. The response only dropped to -0.2 dB at 10 Hz and to -0.73 at 50 kHz. Crosstalk at 1 kHz was -50.8 dB from left to right and -51.2 from right to left. THD+N from the amplifier was less than .028% at 1 kHz. The crosstalk is slightly high, but the amp makes its rated power with room to spare.—AJ

