

New kid on the block!

A new small amplifier, developed and manufactured entirely in Sweden, has us literally gasping.

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3 quick facts

- Extra RIAA and DAC cards
- Developed and built in Sweden
- Thrifty circuit solution

It was love and desire already at first glance! Everything felt so right! From the matter-of-fact retro shape and the firmly grip-friendly knobs to the solid quality of the build. When the amplifier also turned out to have a minimalist build with discrete components, upgradable with both vinyl input and D/A converters, it was apparent that someone had put in a real effort with the insides as well.

That someone is called **George Polychronidis** and lives in Malmö, where the amplifier is also being built. The amplifier called **Moonriver Model 404**, with the middle name **Fågelsång**, is a robust, no-nonsense build with modest 50 watts and 8 ohms, but plays with an authority as if it had significantly more under the hood.

We could tell already at the High End fair in Stockholm at the beginning of 2019, when we heard it briefly for the first time. There, the amplifier grabbed a pair of large Focal speakers and made them play and power on enough to drop our jaws! The shock was not mitigated when we heard the price, so we just had to try out this amplifier.

Now we have, and after using it for a month, we've started to doubt that we will ever be able to return it. This amplifier seemed completely unbothered by the challenges we presented it with, and it surprised us by being able to bring out new unexpected qualities from every kind of speaker we connected.

It may sound like an exaggeration, but Moonriver could really raise your pulse and turn your usual stereo system into something intensely vibrant and impactful, having the music swallow you up. Immersed and wrapped in a large and colorful soundscape. Think tubes or Class A Amplifiers and you might guess what's coming, and Moonriver had the same lightning speed and delicate detail resolution as single-ended triodes.

This is not so strange after all, since its creator has also designed tube amplifiers. So, what's the secret? Well, just like with just low-power triode amplifiers, it's obviously about simplicity. At Moonriver, features and inflated power specifications have been skipped to focus entirely on the sound. Therefore, the amplifier has an absolute minimum of components in the signal path.

Only a few, but handpicked and with listening tests. The vital preamplifier stage thus consists of only five transistors per channel. But not only that – somewhat unexpectedly, the output stage is even more minimalist and consists of a single power component per channel. Of course, that is not entirely true, since it is a complete amplifier component with several transistors embedded in the same housing.

The advantages of this type of component are many, such as the minimal signal path and ideal heat stability with negligible operation between the amplifier halves. Even though the build quality certainly hasn't been scrimped, smart solutions keep the price down, for example by not using a regular cooling element for the output stage, but instead a large, angled aluminum plate that is fixed to the bottom so that the chassis also provides cooling. We could continue to lavish this amplifier with praise – the sound is of the kind that really must be experienced.

Yes, our thoughts went to amplifiers with ardent followers, such as the exotic French Lavardin or the minimalist English LFD, because Moonriver provides the same hard-to-describe acoustic magic.



Great sound quality
Lovely retro look
Good features



Cube measurement not so good

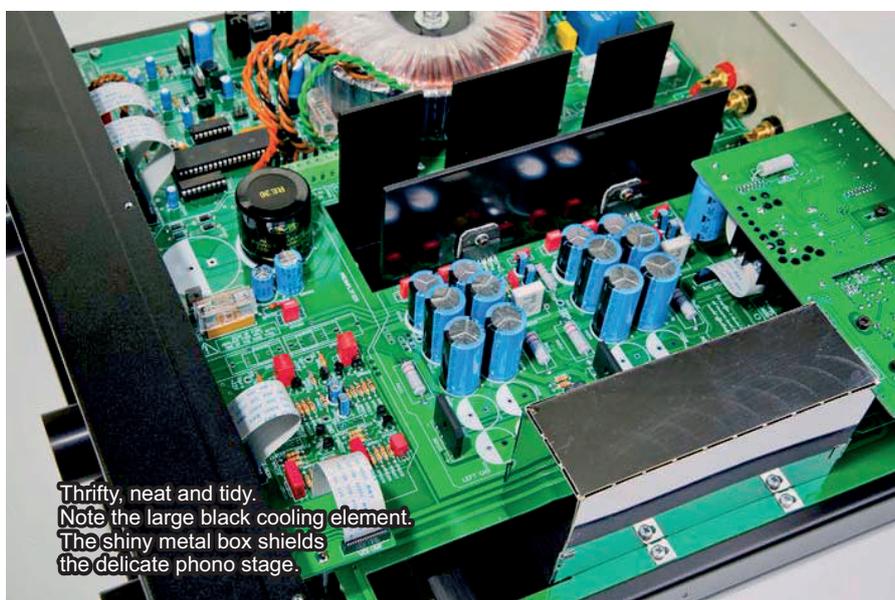


A rather amazing amplifier that really floored us and handled all the speakers we hooked up, despite the modest wattage.

Our test model was equipped with USB-DAC and MM-RIAA. Only RCA inputs, no XLR. The remote is as simple and easy to manage as a remote control can be!



“the kind of sound that really must be experienced”

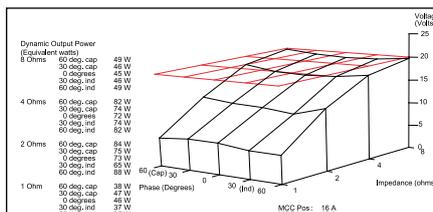


Thrifty, neat and tidy.
Note the large black cooling element.
The shiny metal box shields the delicate phono stage.

At the same time, the Swedish amplifier has a vital energy and a push that is more reminiscent of what we always appreciated at Naim, so the characteristics combination could hardly be any better. Another thing that could hardly be any better at this price is the juicy phono stage included in our model. Although it is an MM stage, it provided a refined, fully dynamic space for an MC cartridge like Lyra Delos, and didn't obstruct the cartridge's breathtaking detail resolution.

We almost forgot the well-made USB-D/A converter that we also tried, since we were so completely engrossed in the pure analog sound. We're also assuming that someone interested in this type of distinct audiophile amplifier prioritizes one of the two phono stages over the USB DAC card. But the digital card is there and sounds surprisingly analog for a built-in card.

As you understand, we are completely sold on Moonriver and this time have no remarks whatsoever. We are instead surprised that such an enchanting amplifier doesn't cost more and is actually built in Sweden.



Despite its modest specs of 50 W, the Moonriver 404 is in fact over-spec'ed and doesn't reach the cube roof even at 8 Ω load. The result is still pretty good at 8 and 4 ohms, but after that the measurement drops off. Low but fairly symmetrical current on 16/18 amps.

Moonriver Audio Model 404 Fågelsång

Price: 30.000 kr (excl. RIAA, DAC)

Type: Integrated amplifier

Upgrades: MM-card 2.900 kr, MM/MC-card 4.800 kr, USB-DAC 5.800 kr, MM/DAC 8.700 kr, MM/MC/DAC 10.600

Output Power: 2x50W/8 ohm

Inputs: 5 pair RCA (1 and 4 for RIAA and DAC)

Outputs: 2 pairs pre Out + tape Out

Headphone Output: No

Remote Control: Yes

Size: (HxBxD) 14x43x39 cm

Weight: 13 kg

Info: plaudio.com, moonriveraudio.com

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