

## Simaudio Moon Neo ACE

29. November 2016 ·

**The £2800 Simaudio Moon Neo ACE is a versatile, all-in-one solution that you need only add speakers to...there's even an on-board moving magnet phonostage. John Scott finds out just how ACE it really is.**

Having reviewed Naim's Superuniti all-in-one streamer/DAC/amp/tuner last summer, when I was offered the opportunity to spend some time with Simaudio's own single box offering I naturally grasped it with both hands. Like the Naim Superuniti, the Moon Neo ACE combines a streamer, DAC and amplifier in one box so that all the user has to do is connect it to a network, either via Ethernet or wirelessly and add speakers. The ACE will then stream music stored on the user's home network, eg on a PC or NAS. Internet streaming from services such as Tidal and Internet radio is also available. In addition, the ACE also has a moving magnet phono stage, something missing from the Superuniti.

Canadian manufacturer Simaudio have been producing audio equipment since 1980, originally as Sima Acoustics . The company became known as Simaudio in 1990, first launching the Celeste range and then, in 1997, the Moon series of products. Over the years the company have developed and released a range of products under the Moon banner for both 2-channel audio and multi-channel home theatre use. The ACE (which stands for A Complete Experience) falls into the Moon Neo "affordable luxury" range and provides a one box option from that range's amplification and streaming DAC products; a true "just add speakers" solution to anyone short of space or not looking to build a system out of individual components.



### **Unboxing, Setup and Appearance**

The ACE arrived in a standard cardboard shipping box, albeit Moon branded, and was internally well protected. A user manual and set of quick start guides provide all the help you need to get the ACE up and running. If you have previously used a streamer connected by Ethernet then this really involves nothing more than connecting the Ethernet cable, attaching your speakers and plugging it in. If you also want to connect a turntable, then a moving magnet phono stage is also provided. Wireless setup is achieved via the display screen, a couple of buttons and a rotary dial on the front of the unit, which also doubles as a volume control. The process of entering your network password with the dial and buttons is very intuitive compared to some other streamers I have tried and I had the unit up and running in a matter of minutes.



The ACE's compact dimensions meant that it was equally at home on my television unit as it was on my hifi rack. The ACE comes in either all black or black and silver options. The ACE II was supplied with was all black and I think this would be my choice. The aluminium case has an attractively curved front plate. The black front plate is accented by seven silver buttons, a silver logo and a monochrome OLED display panel. The whole thing whispers understated elegance (it would scream understated elegance but it is far too refined to do anything so vulgar). The five buttons on the left hand of the display control power stand by, volume mute, display brightness – with an option to turn the display off completely and the final two buttons toggle backwards or forwards through the inputs. The two buttons on the right side of the display provide navigation through the set up options. The front panel also has a headphone output and an input for a mobile media player. The rear panel contains a wealth of inputs and outputs of a variety and sufficiency to put the ACE at the heart of your audio setup. Round the back we have the moving magnet phono input plus an USB input, 2 SPDIF inputs, an Ethernet port and 2 optical inputs. The ACE also accepts Bluetooth

connection along with wifi. So, whether you want to play vinyl, stream from a NAS or a USB drive, connect to your phone or tablet by Bluetooth or hook up the audio from your TV, sat alive box or blue ray player you are covered.



Control of the ACE is either by the front panel buttons – apart from using these for the initial setup I had no need to use them again but I guess they are a handy option to have; by the attractive supplied remote or by MIND, Simaudio’s control app for android and iOS devices.

The remote provides comprehensive control of the ACE and its slimline styling complements the unit well. My only criticism would be that I found the flat-profiled buttons a little difficult to read but it wasn’t a major issue. I have said in previous reviews that a streamer is only as good as its app and I still firmly believe that to be the case. MIND is one of the best apps I have so far encountered. It is intuitive to use and offers full control of the ACE including volume control and selection of inputs. Access to Internet radio stations and Tidal (if you have a subscription) is also included. Every app has its own way of doing things and some can take a while to get used to but with MIND I was quickly using my tablet to browse the files on my NAS, create playlists on the fly and explore new releases on Tidal. Compared to Naim’s app for the Superuniti, the display is perhaps a little cramped but in terms of functionality, the MIND app did everything I wanted it to do in an intuitive fashion and, being generally highly critical of these types of app, I was very pleased with how it operated. Like the Superuniti, the ACE uses the UPnP streaming protocol and how the app displays your music library depends on the UPnP server that you have installed on your PC or NAS. I have Minim Server, Logitech’s LMS server (in UPnP mode) and Synology’s Audio Station server installed on my NAS and each presented the contents of my library slightly differently. My preference was LMS but all were acceptable, with the caveat that Synology’s server does not support gapless playback.

### Sound

So far then, the ACE is a winner on looks and functionality but how does it fare on sound? It handles PCM up to 384khz and DSD up to DSD256 (should you be able to find files at either of these highest resolutions). Not all resolutions are supported on all inputs. As I didn’t have access to a turntable with a MM cartridge during the period of the review, the phono input was not tested.

Perhaps influenced by the ACE’s elegant looks, I started off my listening with nothing too raucous. Shelby Lynne’s Just A Little Lovin’ is a first rate recording – a tribute to Dusty Springfield in a soulful and sophisticated style. The ACE allowed all the dynamics and subtleties of the recording to shine. The drums on the title track are understated in quantity but not in quality, each cymbal stroke gangs in the air with a realistic decay and every snare thwack resonates with the shell of the drum, not just the skin. During the song, Lynne pauses between lines and the print through on the recording tape results in a pre-echo of the line she is about to sing. The ACE picks this detail up effortlessly.



This gets me in the mood for a bit of Dusty herself so it's time for a spot of the classic Dusty In Memphis album. On Son Of A Preacher Man, the ACE has no problem conveying the live feel of the performance. In particular, the intricacies of Tommy Cogbill's bass line which maintains a kind of inverted dialogue with Dusty's vocal are handled deftly.



Moving on to something completely different, solo piano can be tricky to realistically reproduce. Streaming Khatia Buniatishvili's version of Mussorgsky's Pictures At An Exhibition via Tidal, the ACE conveys a realistic sense of the performance space and keeps the piano locked down solidly within it. And proving that this is not a one off, the ACE also comes up trumps with Alice Sara Ott's live recording of Pictures At An Exhibition from St Petersburg's White Nights Festival.

One of the qualities I really liked about the ACE was its volume control. I occasionally find that some amplifiers lack subtlety in volume control – 12 may be just too loud for some situations but 11 not loud enough, for example. Whether operated manually by the volume knob on the unit, by infra red through the remote control or via wifi by the MIND app, increase or decrease in volume is handled in smooth half steps and I never had a problem finding a volume level that suited my requirements.

### **Conclusion**

The ACE is a stylish, compact, well built single-box design that provides everything you need to deliver a high quality streaming solution. The inclusion of a moving magnet phono stage and a variety of inputs provides added flexibility, giving it the opportunity to become an all-singing, all-dancing entertainment centre, handling, vinyl, an external CD player and audio from TV, satellite or Blue ray. Just add the speakers of your choice.

If I'm forced to make comparisons with the Naim Superuniti, and I suppose I am, then in terms of absolute sound quality the Naim wins out. But, and it's an important but, there is around £1000 price difference between the Superuniti and the ACE, and that could buy you a nice turntable or pair of speakers. You need to hear both and decide where you need your money to go. If you do go for the ACE though, I doubt you'll end up feeling short changed sound wise. The ACE matches sophisticated looks with an equally sophisticated sound and comes highly recommended.



### **AT A GLANCE**

**Build Quality:** Attractive and well put together unit that is complimented by a well thought out app.

**Sound Quality:** Dynamic and detailed, yet subtle when needed. A sophisticated sound.

**Value For Money:** If there is a single box solution out there that offers better value for money than the ACE then I really need to hear it. I get the feeling I may be wailing a while though.

**Pros:**

**Good looks**  
**Compact size**  
**Competent control app**  
**Detailed, involving sound**  
**Cons:**  
**I honestly can't think of any**

**Price: £2800**

**John Scott**

### **Specifications**

**Output Power at 8Ω: 50 Watts per channel**  
**Input Sensitivity: 370mV – 3.0V RMS**  
**Input Impedance: 22,100Ω**  
**Gain: 37dB**  
**Frequency response (full range): 10Hz – 80kHz +0/-3dB**  
**Crosstalk: -100dB THD (20Hz – 20kHz @ 1 watt / 50 watts) 0.02% / 0.02%**  
**Intermodulation distortion: 0.005%**  
**PCM Bit-depth range / sampling rates: 16 – 32 bits / 44.1 – 384kHz**  
**DSD sample rates: DSD64, DSD128 & DSD256**  
**Shipping weight: 24 lbs / 11 Kgs**  
**Dimensions (width x height x depth): 16.9 x 3.5 x 14.4 in. 42.9 x 8.9 x 36.6 cm**