



# The best-ever SAM

Audionet celebrates the birthday of its long-running amplifier hit with a strictly limited special edition that takes the potential of the design to a new level.

**A**udionet's SAM is one of a very select group of amplifiers that have become established in the STEREO editorial staff's collective consciousness. Of course, familiarity plays its part: we have encountered the SAM several times over the past two decades. In our article archive at [www.stereo.de](http://www.stereo.de) you will find the test of the early V2-version from issue 12/99, and the most recent review, of the second-generation SAM G2 (currently at 4490 Euro), was in issue 2/11. In between, both versions spent several years as faithful test references in our listening rooms.

In the meantime the manufacturer has migrated from Bochum to Berlin, but the SAM has maintained its extraordinary

external appearance: not many amplifiers dare to do without a conventional volume control knob on the front panel. Yet Audionet has sacrificed this most distinctive amplifier control element of any amp for simple, and logical, reasons.

## Direct signal flow

If you want to keep an amp's signal paths as direct and uncomplicated as possible, the detour via a front-panel potentiometer is at best a compromise: after all, the inputs are located at the opposite end of the housing, making that the ideal location for the preamplifier section. So yes, the SAM of course has a volume control – in fact an extremely high quality one – but it's placed in the middle of the

preamplifier circuit, which is its optimal position.

The buttons on the front panel control this volume adjustment, but this is no digital system, although you push your way through its steps using excellent ball-headed buttons, but rather a remote-controlled ALPs motorised potentiometer, its regulation of level carried out purely in the analog domain. Other selections, including switching between inputs and making menu adjustments, are also made using this pair of up/down buttons is made via a slim device menu, although our extensive experience suggests that 99.9% of the time users will control the amplifier using the full aluminium remote control supplied.



The shortened signal paths here play a major part in the directness of the sound of SAM: it has delivered stunning performance in all its incarnations and has always been able to hold its own against all its direct competitors – sometimes even those in higher price-class boundaries. Its incredible sound-tagging, pithy dynamics spiced with lightning-fast attack, and analytical resolution without ever becoming dull or ‘mechanical’ – all make Good Ol’ SAM the epitome of a thoroughly audiophile amplifier. What’s more, this combination of virtues makes it incredible fun – pardon me, Audionet – when you really let rip.

For the twentieth anniversary of their super-amp, Audionet decided to launch

an exclusive special edition, the SAM 20 SE, strictly limited to 200 units: externally, the solid aluminium block looks unchanged, with little more than a small copper plaque on the back to set it apart. This shows our sample to be just the tenth in the production run.

The basic circuit logic has also been retained inside, but during the development of the SE, however, all assemblies and individual parts were reassessed, and replaced in groups with higher quality alternatives. The basis for these upgrades

**Front-panel engraving – and an edition number plaque to the rear – set this special edition apart. ▶**



has been the work involved in Audionet’s newer models, such as the stunning „WATT“ (around 12,500 Euro, and tested in STEREO 1/17), from which the low-resistance power transistors were borrowed. In addition, the internal wiring has been replaced with pure gold and silver cables, while high-quality mica capacitors are also used at all sound-relevant points.

### **Phono included**

The phono board here is much more than just fine-tuning: on the SAM G2 this is a

chargeable option (at around 500 euros), but installed as standard on the SE is a completely revised version of the board, equipped with an armada of mica capacitors and improved operational amplifiers. Out of the box our test sample was set up for moving magnet cartridges, but it can easily be set up for moving coil models: a total of four jumper banks allow fine-tuning of impedance and gain factor.

**Etched into history**

To underline the exclusivity of the Anniversary model, its front panel and remote control legends aren't printed, but engraved. However, the rest of the design is familiar: there are six gold-plated analog inputs, one of which is balanced, another one reserved for phono, while speaker connections are via high-quality Furutech combination terminals.

Line out and preout terminals are provided for a recorder as well as a subwoofer or power amplifier, but don't be surprised if there is initially no signal from these: the outputs are deactivated as default – all part of that idea of simplifying signal-flow – and must be switched on if required in the SAM 20 SE's menu system.

For users in regions where two-pin mains plugs rule, it's worth noting that there's clear marking of the preferred mains phase, which is good, and that the display will indicate if the mains is connected in reverse phase. However, the headphone output is more likely to raise eyebrows: it's hidden directly underneath the loudspeaker terminals on the

rear panel. We can see why it's been done – those signal-flow considerations again – but it's hardly the most accessible position.

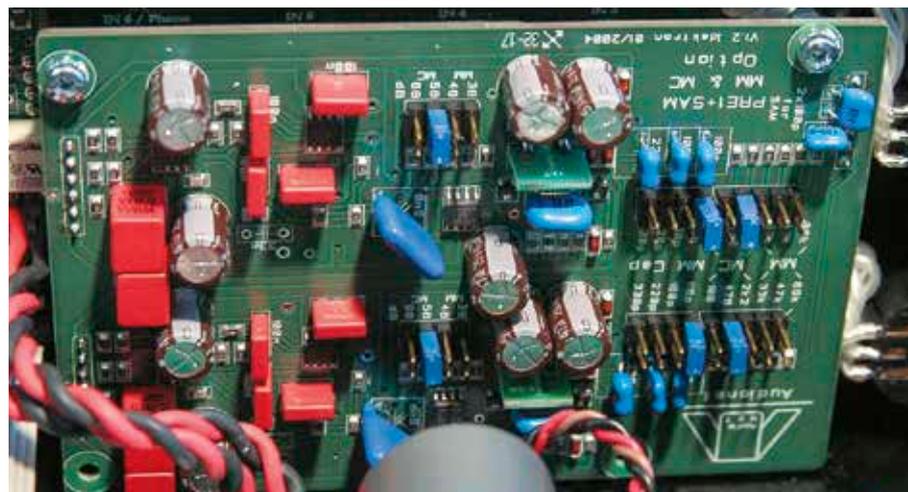
As expected, the sound of the 20 SE is in a class of its own: transparent, crisp and with extreme spatial resolution, it does an excellent job of making loudspeakers and listening room walls “disappear”, and reproduces voices and instruments with sharp, almost chiselled contours on a huge soundstage. This makes Black Sabbath's „Warning“, from the band's debut album, a breathtaking experience: the guitar solos are distributed dramatically over the panorama and, with their attack and reverberation, form a contrast to the otherwise dryly mixed song. The SAM brings the instruments to the Bowers & Wilkins 800 D3 speakers in so three-dimensional and vivid a way that you'd think you could reach into the strings.

In the meantime, the amplifier powers even the most staggering bass impulses into the listening room cleanly, and with superbly-drawn detail. An output of nearly 180 watts into four ohms, with instantaneous peak power of up to 232 watts, ensures it never runs out of breath, enabling it to drive unstoppable momentum and flow, but do so with exemplary order, clarity and balance.

The 20 SE enhances the strengths of the “standard” SAM model to perfection, demonstrating the potential of the SAM G2 circuitry – but only for a limited time: when all 200 of these special amps are sold, they're gone, so this is one well worth seeking out, and soon. *Carsten Barnbeck*

**KEYWORD**

**Mica capacitor:** „mica“ is the term used to describe mineral layer crystals, which have been used as dielectric in capacitors since the 1920s.



▲ The factory-fit phono section has been reworked for the 20 SE, differing in many details from the 500 Euro optional board retrofittable to the SAM.

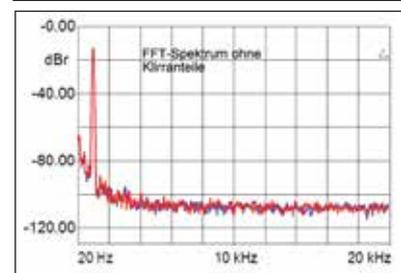
**AUDIONET SAM 20 SE**



Price: 6990 €  
 Dimensions: 43 x 11 x 39 cm (WxHxD)  
 Warranty: 2 years  
 Contact: idetron  
 Phone: +49 30 2332421 0,  
 www.audionet.de

The limited-edition Anniversary model enhances the proven strengths of the SAM design: it combines audiophile virtues with joyful musicality, and does so in a spatial, orderly and incredibly dynamic manner. Limited to just 200 examples, this is a superb amplifier

**MEASUREMENTS**



Continuous power (8 Ohm / 40hm)	103 W/179 W
Pulse power 4 Ohm (1kHz)	232 W
Distortion at 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.003 %/0.001 %/0.002 %
Intermod. 50mW/5W/1dB Pmax	0.005 %/0.002 %/0.04 %
Signal-to-noise ratio at 50mW/ 5W	86.8 dB/106.5 dB
Signal-to-noise ratio Phono MM (5 mV for 5 Watt)	79.4 dB (A)
Attenuation at 4 Ohm (63Hz/1kHz/14kHz)	142/149/200
Upper cut-off frequency (-3dB/40hm)	>80 kHz
Crosstalk Line 1 > Line	2 93.4 dB
Stereo channel separation at 10kHz	75.3 dB



**LAB COMMENTARY:** Perfect measurement values throughout. By the way, the SAM resists the wrong power supply. If the mains phase is incorrectly connected to the cable, the amp in the display indicates this.

**FEATURES**

One balanced XLR input, one phono-in (MM/MC), four RCA inputs; record out and pre-outs each; one pair of Furutech loudspeaker terminals; headphone output; remote control; manual

**STEREO - TEST**

SOUND QUALITY 94%

PRICE/PERFORMANCE



**EXZELLENT**