

# Totally set free

In launching its V 40 SE, has Octave merely improved the legendary V 40 from our December issue, or is the company from Baden-Baden heading here for totally new spheres of sound?

Test: Dina Dervisevic, Johannes Maier Photos: Julian Bauer

Octave boss Andreas Hofmann normally tends to be serious and reserved. But when handing over the V 40 SE a proud smile nevertheless flitted across his face. And he admits: "I was even surprised myself by what I was still able to tease out of the V 40's actually minimalist concept."

Concept here means that, as previously, the input signals

first encounter the volume potentiometer and then ICs, which both take on a degree of early amplification and also guarantee constant working conditions for the following three-pole valves (ECC 83s with two systems inside a glass bulb). After further accentuation the music flows straight on to an ECC 82 double triode (somewhat more powerful than



the 83). It creates even now the fitting push-pull input signal for the appropriately set final valves, by discharging equal voltages with reverse deflection over both its minus and plus electrodes (cathode and anode).

While Octave ships the V 40 SE for €4,100 with, like our test model, four fine 6550s from Svetlana, for €300 less there is also a budget version with the not quite so powerful EL 34s. The manufacturer also explicitly allows experiments with other power valves that use the same socket, such as the 6L6, KT 88, KT 90, KT100 and others. As extras, the V 40 SE thus provides more than just the option of adjusting the quiescent currents

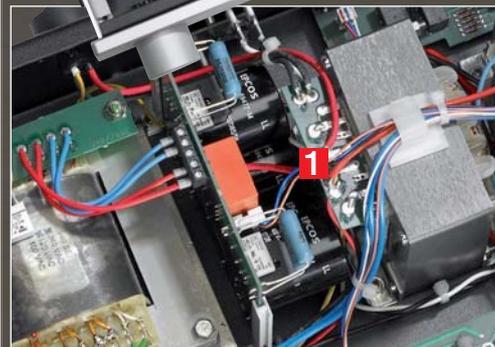
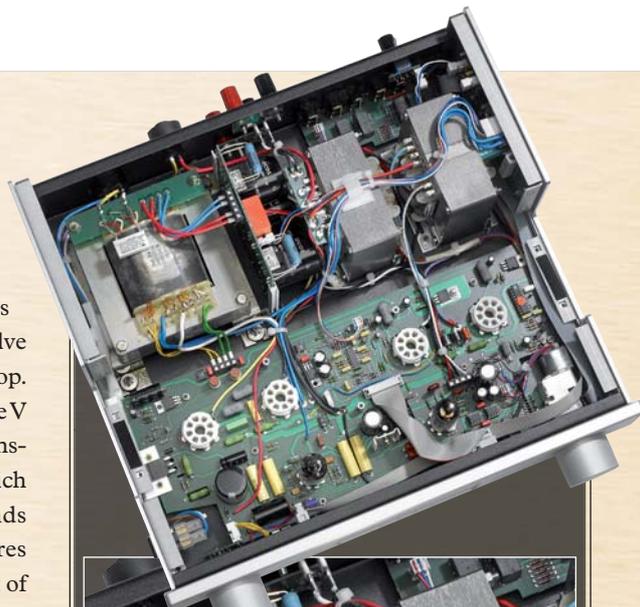
cing less amplification. There is, on the other hand, the assurance that after the amp is plugged in one or other valve will not suddenly flash and pop. As is already the case with the V 40, the SE also has regal transformers with PMZ core, which almost completely surrounds the coil (10/07), and features particularly secure treatment of the anode high voltage in two halves. The products Hoffman has now used to clean these up are not Far East products, but Siemens / Epcos-Elkos, some of the very best. In the case, too, of the capacitors operating right next to the valves he fitted ones with clearly higher capacity and lower loss, including (in the case



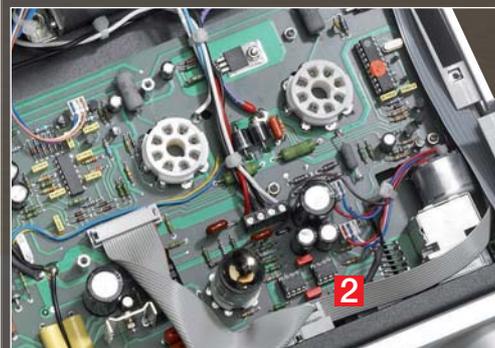
The left input selector button has six positions: 1 to 4 for high-level inputs, 5 provides access to the bias adjustment and 6 creates fixed levels for one input.

to this or that colour change via red, yellow or green LEDs. Aiding the option of change, the output stages also run with relatively a low, stabilised screen-grid voltage of 250 volts. With this relatively low potential (other manufacturers go up to 400 volts) this additional electrode does not accelerate all that much the turnover of negatively charged electrons, thus produ-

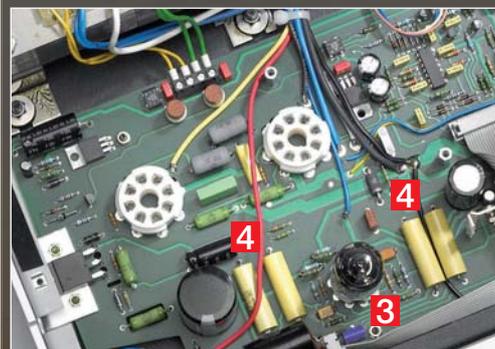
of the drivers' cathodes) wickedly expensive professional tantalum capacitors. For all of this he conjured up a new circuit board layout. All in all, in comparison to the V 40 this led to less harmonic distortion, which now allowed Hofmann on the SE to use even less overall negative feedback. In his opinion (see interview) this leads to even more favourable acoustic >>



Octave has positioned the Epcos storage capacitors (1) advantageously between mains and output transformer.



IC buffers (2) separate the initial valve stage from the volume potentiometer.



The twin valve phase splitter (3) controls the end valves via four capacitors (4).



The special socket to the right of centre enables connection of optional extra Elko storage capacity. The switch on the left activates various standby modes.

qualities. In the listening room the Octave did indeed sound clearer. Sandra Wollasch's voice, for instance, on the 'So Together' CD (Herzog Records) seemed much more finely nuanced, spirited and vibrant above the surging bass tones. The fear that with such merciless openness some sharpness could occur soon proved unfounded.

Quite the contrary! Especially when singing 'Let Me Out', Sandra formed the 's' sounds even more gently, the English 'th' more smoothly and 'd' with a yet softer and more genuine stroke of the tongue. With the older model there was by comparison always a haze over all of these nuances – a very slight one admittedly, but a haze all the same. durften.

The V 40 SE not only seemed more refined with voices, it also tackled the individual electric piano tones more sensitively, as if with velvet gloves – so that



Adjusting quiescent current: Octave recommends the green/red LED setting for the more powerful 6550 and green/yellow for the smaller EL 34.

they were allowed to sparkle like little shining stars even more beautifully and intensely.

With classical music, such as Brahms' Second Piano Concerto (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Telarc CD), the SE positioned the delicate violins cautiously and not too far into background, while the veteran model pushed them almost for-

cibly to the back. No matter what the style of music, the V 40 and the more powerful V 70 (tested in Jan 2004) tried to serve the listener a pleasant overall package, while the new model attended more to the individual audio components. The V 40 SE has therefore clearly achieved a leap forward of a full two points.



**Octave V 40 SE**  
**€4,100 (as per the manufacturer)**

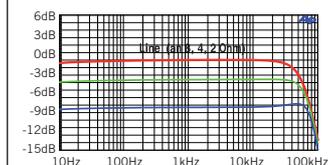
Sold by: Octave, Karlsbad  
 Tel.: 07248/3278  
 www.octave.de

See website for international agents

Size: W: 45.1 x H: 15 x D: 41.5cm  
 Weight: 18 kg

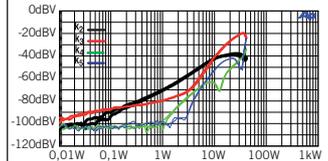
**Measurements**

**Frequency response levels:**



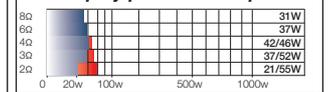
Very balanced; low level, but very broad band at 2-Ohm loading

**Harmonics analysis (k2 to k5 vs. output)**



Evenly running harmonic components with perfect alternating performance

**stereoplay performance profile**

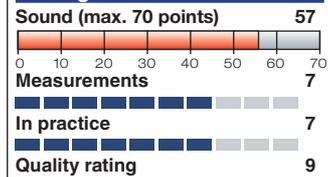


Good performance level up to 55 watts at 2 Ohms, less so at inductive loads

Sine wave performance at 8/4Ω  
 k=1%: 20/42W      k=3%: 30/46W

Signal to noise ratio  
 Line 97 dB  
 Consumption in 'Eco' mode 22/124 W

**Rating**



Completely redeveloped, highly interesting successor to the legendary V 40 from October 2002. Sounds somewhat brighter and at the same time finer, more sensitive and with more high end.

**Stereoplay test verdict**

Sound	Absolutely top-class	57 points
Overall verdict	Very good	80 points
Value for money		Excellent

**stereoplay** Interview



Andreas Hofmann  
 Octave boss and developer

**stp:** Andreas Hofmann, can we deduce any trend from the development of the V 40 into the V 40 SE?

**AH:** Yes, towards higher resolution with a very natural sound.

**stp:** And how do you achieve that?

**AH:** I keep optimising the layout until the amp can manage with just minimal negative feedback. I can thus make the harmonic distortion more independent

of the complex burden on the loudspeakers.

**stp:** What sort of mechanisms do you see there?

**AH:** Well, negative feedback is based on forming a difference between the output and input signals, but due to phase displacement this does not work perfectly. In the worst case scenario you get transient interfering impulses.