

Review of Grandinote SUPREMO, by Wojciech Pacula (translation Marek Dyba), 05/2022, on :



I WORLD PREMIERE I

「 The Italian company GRANDINOTE was established in 2005. Its founder and chief designer is MASSIMILIANO "MAX" MAGRI. Their first product was the A Solo amplifier, and the most important technology they use is called MAGNETOSOLID. We are premiere testing their largest integrated amplifier, SUPREMO. 」



IF YOU TAKE A LOOK AT the Grandinote's lineup, you will find loudspeakers, integrated amplifiers and power amplifiers - preamplifiers, a files player, cables, stands, and even a control application. Because it is a company offering complete systems, a kind of micro-cosmos of cooperating elements. However, when you get to know its history, you will surely not miss the fact that at the center of this constellation are amplifiers, and more precisely - integrated amplifiers. Moreover, amplifiers based on the Magnetosolid technology.



The first design of this type was ready in 1996, when Max was still an electronics student. Tubes were the basis of this design, but over time they were replaced with transistors. The unique idea, however, was that the semiconductors should be operated in circuits similar to ones used for tubes, and with output transformers. Although the most famous brand that uses output transformers in solid-state devices is the American McIntosh, they use a classic circuit with transformers „added”, and the one in Grandinote amplifiers, as the manufacturer assures, is a completely different one.

In the early 2000s, Max switched to transistor technology, and in 2003, the first amplifier of a new type was developed, still in the form of a prototype. It required further work, mainly due to not fully mastered problems with the bass performance. The first ready-made device was the A SOLO model, introduced for sale in 2005. The Grandinote company was also registered at that time.

But it was still not, according to the designer, perfect. The PRESTIGIO model from 2007 was supposed to solve its problems. A year later, the production of the A Solo model, replaced by the SHINAI, was ended. As I wrote in its 2017 test, the boss of Grandinote did something absolutely unique in the business: he promised all his customers who had previously bought A Solo that if they decided to buy Shinai he would buy back old amplifiers at a good price (review [HERE](#)).

■ SUPREMO

THE SUPREMO IS THE LATEST product of this Italian manufacture. This is what is often called a super-integrated. This name indicates the type of device - an integrated amplifier - and its assumed class of performance and price - both set at high levels. In audio, we come across such products from time to time. Let's recall the [SOULUTION 530](#), costing 49,000 Euro a few years ago, and Dan D'Agostino [PROGRESSION INTEGRATED](#), which could set you back almost PLN 100,000 a year ago, darTZeel CTH-8550 MK II for 38,000 USD, or - the cheapest in this group - Accuphase E-5000 for almost 70,000 PLN.

Supremo is the top integrated amplifier from Grandinote, based - like all its other amplifiers - on the Magnetosolid technology. What is Magnetosolid? As we read in the company materials, it is the name of a technology patented by Max, which is a combination of two elements: ferroMAGNET and "SOLID state". It is a development of a technology known almost from the moment audio transistors were introduced - following the current output stage there are audio transformers, which is a solution similar to the one used in tube amplifiers. Here these are toroidal transformers, so the same type as used in their products by the Polish company [FEZZ AUDIO](#).

Massimiliano says about it:

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In the past, a very famous American company designed a solid-state amplifier with output transformers. But it was just that: a semiconductor amplifier with output transformers. My Magnetosolid amplifiers are different: they are actually tube amplifiers with semiconductor components used instead of tubes. There are transformers in the output stage, because tube amplifiers must have those in the output.

The transformers in Grandinote devices feature a design different from the classic components of this type, developed by the company's founder; He was already involved in research during his studies. However, they are very, very expensive to produce. That is why all Grandinote amplifiers are available in two versions: basic and with more expensive transformers. The latter are called Magnetosolid-VHP, where VHP stands for "Very High Performances".

Due to the presence of such an amount of iron and copper in a relatively small housing, the Supremo, measuring 318 x 196 x 473 mm, weighs as much as 40 kg. It is the most expensive amplifier of this company - below there are also monoblocks, which are, however, a device equipped with a preamplifier - i.e. from the taxological point of view, an integrated amplifier - and classic integrated amplifiers, the Essenza and Shinai models.

When we take a look at their power output, we will probably be surprised, even if there is little that can surprise us. Apart from monoblocks, all these models offer an output of 37 W per channel, which is not that much. It results, however, from the applied solutions and the designer's philosophy, for whom less is more. This means that it is easier to achieve top performance with lower outputs than with higher ones. And that the multiplication of transistors at the output introduces additional distortions.

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| A few simple words...MASSIMILIANO MAGRI Owner, designer

\ MASSIMILIANO MAGRI with his MACH 2P speakers • photo Grandinote

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL MODELS? The Essenza amplifier is identical to the Shinai, the only difference are the output transformers: in the Essenza model we rely on very expensive and unique transformers, although the electrical circuit is the same. Thanks to the output transformers, the sound improves in every way.

In the Supremo model we used the same output transformers as in the Essenza, but with a completely different preamplifier circuit. Also the output stage is the same as in the Essenza (and Shinai, except for the output transformers), but - as I say - the preamplifier is completely different.

When it comes to performance a difference between Supremo and Essenza is more significant than between Essenza and Shinai. ♦

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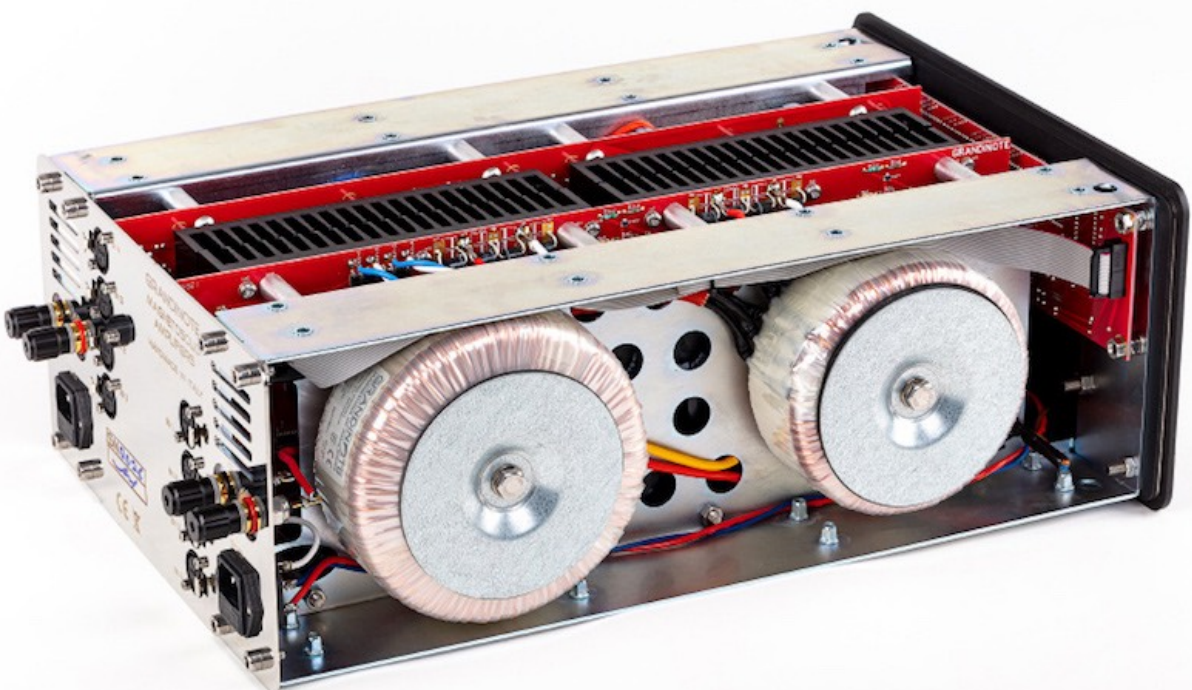
The SUPREMO AMPLIFIER HAS A CLASSIC LOOK for this manufacturer. So it is deep and narrow. On the front, aluminum panel there is a red display based on LED modules, on which we can read the volume level and the selected source. On the sides there are buttons which we use to control the amplifier, and below there is a large power switch. The top, made of polished steel sheet, features slots to facilitate cooling of the interior.



The amplifier works in class A, without feedback and with direct coupling of stages, without the use of capacitors. Yet, it was possible to obtain very high damping factor of more than 230, which translates to a very good control over the speakers, as well as a wide frequency response: from 1.5 Hz to 350 kHz. It is a dual mono amplifier and fully balanced one; inside there are four identical amplifiers, two per channel, one for each half of the balanced signal.



So it's not surprising that the rear panel looks the way it does, and there are only balanced inputs - four of them. It may surprise you to see TWO IEC power inlets, one per channel. There are, in fact, two monophonic amplifiers in one chassis. I would like to add that there are only single speaker outputs and that the amplifier is controlled by an aluminum remote control with five buttons, among which there is no menu button. And one more thing - Supremo comes to us in a solid transport box with wheels.



Although you can't see it at first glance, thanks to the microprocessor control, we can set a few things in the Supremo's menu. We can, for example, set the "gain" of the inputs to equalize the gain for individual sources. Thanks to this solution, you can avoid some of them playing much louder than others, with the same volume setting. We can also convert input 1 to a line output. You can also set the balance between channels and even turn off the receiver system of the remote control. The latter is to improve the sound. And finally, there is a "sleep" function for the display, which turns off after a certain time without a command.

∨ **STAND** From the very beginning, Grandinote amplifiers attracted attention due to the fact that they stood on neat, proprietary stands, which also hosted a second device from this company. The stands are small, solid, although you won't find any anti-vibration "patents" in them, except for one. It is about connecting the solid pins of the stand with the amplifier's feet. And they are available for various combinations - with the Volta file player below, Celio phonostage, etc.



The stand consists of a steel platform, which the aforementioned pins are screwed onto, which act as supports for the amplifier, and low feet. In the pins, semicircular recesses are milled, into which also semicircular, feet fit. It is a simpler version of the bearing, an anti-vibration element that is found in the products of **FINITE ELEMENTE**, **FRANZ AUDIO ACCESSORIES** (PL), **STACORE** or **AVATAR AUDIO** (PL).

SOUND

HOW WE LISTENED The Grandinote Supremo amplifier was tested in the "High Fidelity" reference system, in which it was compared to a system consisting of the Ayon Audio Spheris III tube preamplifier and the Soullution 710 solid-state power amplifier. The device was placed on a dedicated stand next to the right Harbeth M.40.1 speaker, with which it was connected using Siltech Triple Crown cables or - alternately - Western Electric WE16GA (NOS).



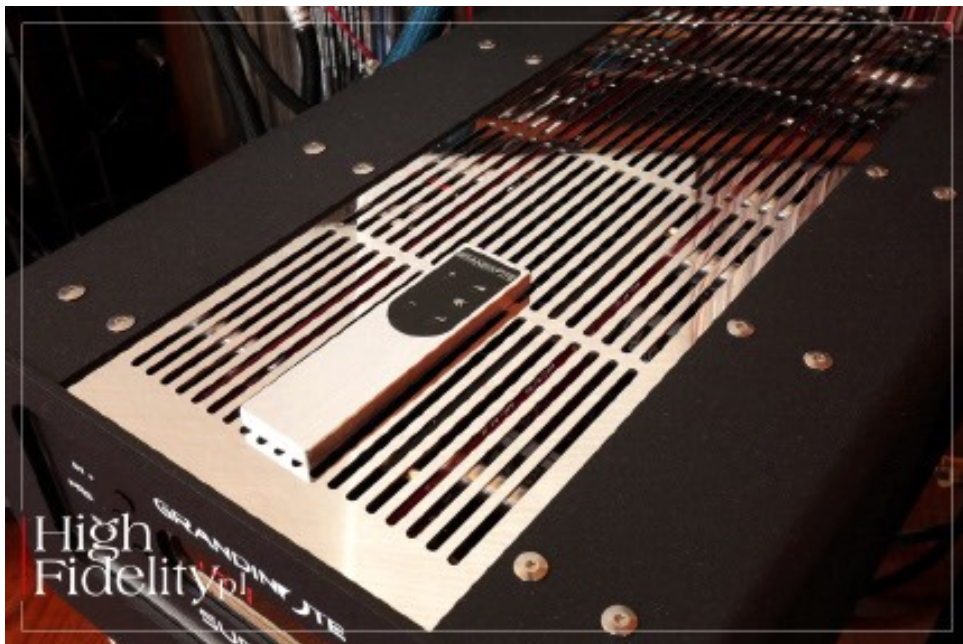
The signal source was the Ayon Audio CD-35 HF Edition SACD player, which was connected to the amplifier with a balanced interconnect, the Acoustic Revive XLR 1.0 Triple-C FM (1.8 x 1.4 mm). In the HF system, the player is usually connected to the preamplifier using an unbalanced cable. The amplifier was powered by two WestminsterLab Standard Series cables.

I DON'T KNOW IF YOU HAVE NOTICED THIS, yourself, or observing your friends, but when you listen to a new device that catches your attention, the music pieces you listen to seem longer, and your focus on the music you listen to is almost perfect. The more interesting the sound, the clearer these two listening features. I guarantee you that while listening to the Supremo you will push both of them to the limit.

The thing is, it's an incredibly transparent device. The Shinai is fast, punctual, but also a bit romantic, more saturated than precise. It's a fantastic device to be clear, a device that is always highly recommended. From its more expensive version, one could expect the development of these features, set in similar proportions, but presented in an even better, fuller way. It is not so. If I am not mistaken, it offers is a completely different type of performance and it was developed to achieve different goals.

The Supremo is primarily an amplifier that adds very little to the sound from itself - that's why I started this part of the test by stating that it is "transparent". Although I had only one vocal album prepared at the beginning, the monophonic FRANK SINATRA's Songs For Swingin 'Lovers!, realizing how incredibly this amplifier "disappeared" from the signal's track, I first took off the shelf the CHRIS CONNOR's Sings Lullabys Of Birdland, released in 2007 by Victor Entertainment (JVC) on K2HD, then JULIE LONDON's Julie is her name. Vol. 1, this time on HiQualityCD and finally, the beautiful duo MYRCZEK & TOMASZEWSKI from Love Revisited, on the Master CD-R.

The first three albums were recorded between 1954 and 1957, the fourth was released in 2014. Each of them is different and shows different aspects of the sound. Supremo did not warm them up, did not weigh them in. It did not try to "remaster" them. So it showed both a rather airy realization of the first three discs, as well as an incredibly heavy and large vocal from the last one. Each of them had its own "flavor", ultimately they were prepared in different studios and by various producers, but all of them showed a slightly raised upper midrange and a lack of lower bass filling. The latter was not even about the lowest sounds, because these were not there, but about the size of the sound stage.



A stronger upper midrange was there, the microphones from that period had clear "peaks" at a few kHz, but the vast majority of devices correct this element - either warming the sound up, or just „cruising around" the issue. Warming up means slightly withdrawing and rounding of the attack. This is what tube amplifiers and transistor amplifiers featuring FET transistors usually do. In turn, "cruising around" results from insufficient resolution, masked using smoothness. This, in turn, is the domain of many, even very good, semiconductor devices.

The Italian amplifier doesn't do that. I'm almost sure that Max, when designing it with his largest loudspeakers, aimed at the highest possible dynamics and speed, and not at covering the problems of the recordings. Most of the musicians I know have a similar opinion - the basic aspect of sound for them is timing. So a combination of what I wrote above with not blurring the sound. Listening to the more albums, I saw in my mind the Grandinote designer leading his project in this direction.

The point is that I heard a sound without ornaments - the one I remembered from listening to other expensive amplifiers. It was not as "tangible" presentation and not as resolving as from the reference system. But I did not expect it either, the price difference between them was too big. But it was so "invisible" that the music took on unique colors, shapes, shades. It was alive. There was a vitality to it, which most electronic devices lack, and which we only find when listening to the music played live, without amplification.

SO WITH SUPREMO WE GET AN EXTREMELY FAST, clean and exceptionally resolving sound. The amplifier extends really deep into the bass range and it is a well-controlled bass. I haven't heard such a good sounding bass guitar as from the promotional copy of the DOMINIC MILLER's album entitled November, apart from the reference amplifier, in a long time. It was not a massive or saturated bass - this is not the "type". It was presented with precise edges, with very good filling, while playing rather fast than deep.

So it will not be a device that would correct anything in the system. I will say more - everything has to be well-ordered and refined in it, because only then we can bring out from Supremo everything that Max, as it seems to me, wanted it to offer. And then any disc listened to with it will be something new for us, something refreshing. Even if it was released on a CCD, i.e. with an anti-piracy system that ruins the sound, it will be played in an extremely competent way - in my case it was exactly the same with the PET SHOP BOYS' PopArt: Pet Shop Boys - The Hits .

The amplifier showed that these are recordings with a limited tonal scale and not very dynamic. But also that they are extremely melodic, that there is a subcutaneous melancholy in them. And at the same time it did not sharpen the treble and did not brighten it up. If you want to have more lower midrange, it will have to be corrected with loudspeakers, the amplifier does not make it deeper. It is expressive, fast and resolving, and yet it retains the musicality of the recordings, does not cut them into separate events. I will say more - thanks to the excellent dynamics, it extracts from the recordings the creative ideas behind them. My point is, by stepping back behind the music, it allows us to hear what the producers in the recording studio heard. No coloration or correction of any kind.

The purity of this presentation does not mean sterility. It's not that kind of presentation at all. There is true purity, that is, being open to a musical signal in its unchanged form. Therefore, the best recordings on the best releases, whether it's THE OSCAR PETERSON TRIO's We Get Request in the "24 Gold Direct-from-Master Edition UDM" version, or MAHAVISHNU ORCHESTRA's Birds Of Fire on the SACD from 2021, and finally the MAYO NAKANO PIANO TRIO on the MIWAKU disc in the Extreme Hard Glass CD-R version, they all sounded great.

This awesomeness consisted in the perfect presentation of the weight of the cymbals and their attack, the dynamics of the drums and the sonority of the piano, the precision of the double bass and its richness. I really rarely get to hear so many details shown in such a well-organized fashion as with the Supremo.

■ SUMMARY

IF YOU LISTEN TO ANJA GARBAREK from Smiling & Waving, especially to the Sleep track, you'll see what I mean. I am talking about excellent bass control, which goes very low, with a great treble, which is not too 'skinny', but has exceptional sonority and a precise, accurate midrange.

The amplifier does not offer a "tangible" sound, but rather a distanced one, showing the events behind the line connecting the speakers. It presents impeccable dynamics and a perfect attack - this is absolutely unique, regardless of the price level. It is extremely "compact" internally, that is, focused on the sound matter. While listening to music with it, we have to focus more than usual, because we receive so much information that it forms a completely new whole, giving us a new quality, i.e. real, high-end at its best. Hence our RED Fingerprint award.

■ DESIGN

SUPREMO IS AN INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER. It measures 318 x 196 x 473 mm (W x H x D) and weighs 40 kg. The sides are made of bent, thick aluminum sheets, and the back, top and bottom are made of polished stainless steel. The device rests on metal, hemispherical feet. The front is an aluminum plate anodized in black. In its cut-out there is a space for a large-size red LED display and buttons.

The rear is a classic for minimalist amplifiers, except for two details. The classic term here is based on a small number of inputs, four pairs of XLRs, with an option to switch input 1 to function as an output (it can be done in amp's menu), and a pair of gold-plated speaker terminals. The latter look very nice, although there is no name on them, so I don't know who prepared them; XLR sockets come from Neutrik.

The power sockets look ordinary, although they could be sourced from Furutech. But importantly there are two of them, so a separate power cord is required for each channel. While this may seem like excess madness, it is not. In this way, the power circuits are to a certain extent separated from each other and the mutual noise modulation is reduced. This is the first detail. The second one is related to the input sockets - they are set from top to bottom in one channel (numbers 1-4), and in the other channel the other way around (numbers 4-1). This is because the amplifier boards are identical and for the connection to the output transistors to be on the same side, they must be turned by 180°.



And there are two output transistors per channel, one for each half of the balanced signal, and are bolted to the four large heat sinks in the center. The amplifier gets very hot, so it is worth leaving a lot of free space above and below it. The device works in class A, in a balanced, i.e. push-pull, circuit. The PCBs show separate power circuits, including rectifiers, for each branch of the circuit - so we have here, as I said, four identical amplifiers.

On the sides, separated from the electronics by screens, and from the rest of the system by side panels, there are transformers. There are power and output transformers there.

The remote control is made of a flat aluminum element, and the buttons are of a membrane type. It is quite handy as the buttons have a clear actuation point.

The device does not look as impressive as some other super integrated. Its design, however, is very solid and well-thought-out, and the performance is excellent. ■