

TONEAudio.

The e-journal of analog
and digital sound.

no.5

2006

What Are You Listening On?

**CANADIAN
IMPORTS**
THE TETRA 506s

**FUN FUN WITH
MANLEY'S
MAHI MAHI**

**CROSS
POLLINATION**
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REVIEWS, MUSIC &
SO MUCH MORE

The Channel Islands D-100 Amplifiers

— JEFF DORGAY





At first glance to the unknowing, the D-100s from Channel Islands might easily be mistaken for a power conditioner. They are pretty small at 6.25" x 5.5" x 8", however they weigh about 15 pounds each, so they are substantial. Quick he-man test: can you palm a pair of D-100s? I can! A quick look inside reveals a pretty space efficient package, with a giant torodial power transformer and a small circuit board for the amplifier along with a slightly larger one for the power supply. Everything looks very neat and tidy, with good parts quality throughout.

You can order your D-100s with a balanced XLR input or a single-ended RCA input as well as ordering a high gain (32db) or standard gain (26db). My test samples were the RCA/26db gain models, but I felt this offers great flexibility for a wide range of users.

Ok, let's get serious and get down to business. The CI D-100s are Class-D monoblock amplifiers that produce 100 watts into 8 ohms and 175 watts into 4 ohms. They are \$1599 a pair and can be purchased directly from CI or Music Direct.

Initial Set Up and Listening

These came right out of the box and got plugged right into my third system to get cooking. Because there aren't a ton of parts inside these little boxes (it's mostly power supply inside) I did not anticipate a terribly long break in period. My suspicions were confirmed and after about three days with the CD player on repeat, the D-100s were settling in rather nicely.

I did almost all of my listening in my third system, consisting of the Emotive Audio Poeta lineage, the Acoustic Zen Adagios and the ModWright Denon 3910 universal disc player. DH Labs Revelation interconnects and Q-14 speaker cables were used along with DH Labs Power Plus power cords. Power conditioning was supplied by a Running Springs Haley.

I did experiment a bit with other lineages, including the ModWright 9.0 SWL SE, which Dusty Vawter, owner of Channel Islands said "A lot of our customers have found a good match between our amps and the ModWright preamp in their system." I also had excellent results with this combination.

Vawter claims 20 amps per channel worth of current capability, so this led me to try my Apogee Calipers as well as the Daedalus Audio D-2s which are very current hungry. Lou Hinkley, owner of Daedalus told me he was pretty sure a Class D amplifier would be a "bad choice" for his speakers, but the little D-100s did a great job here as well. Bottom line, you should be able to use these amps with any speaker you have or might be considering, they will drive anything. *(continued)*

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The Sound

I can't stress enough that you ignore these amplifiers for the first 50 hours of operation, or you will get grumpy. However, once they have some hours on them, they open up considerably and settle into a very enjoyable character. When not in use, the amber LED in the right corner lights up to keep the amplifier in a standby mode. A quick poke at the power switch and they power up, indicated by the blue LED. I felt these amplifiers only needed about 10 minutes to really get going.

Most amplifiers seem to have one or two things that really define their sound. For me, the D-100s had a lot of dynamic capability and very powerful, controlled bass. The Adagios have a very taut, extended bass response and the D-100s did a fantastic job with records having a lot of information in the lower octaves. This issue I was investigating the 30th anniversary pressing (LP) of **Dark Side of the Moon**, so I was comparing all five of my pressings with this system (I know, I know...). Thanks to a lot of punch, these amplifiers did a great job revealing the differences between all five of them. *(continued)*



If your taste in sound is more on the neutral side, I think you will really enjoy these amplifiers. There was no mistaking these for a slightly warm, tube-like sound, as my Pass Aleph 3 exhibits, however, there was no mistaking the D-100s for an etched solid-state feel, as I have heard from certain amplifiers from Krell, Levinson and a few others.

Just Pretty Darn Neutral

Personally, liking things just a touch on the warmer side, I really enjoyed the sound with my Poeta, which also is just a touch warm. My Prima Luna Prologue 5 is very warm and that too, was just fine with me. The nice thing about an amplifier this neutral is that you can go either way with it without any issues.

The D-100 also did a good job with anything requiring midrange accuracy and the usual female vocal tracks were reproduced very well. I had to go the extra mile away from the normal female tracks and put on a great old copy of Peggy Lee's **Is That All There Is?** on the turntable. This led me down the Dusty Springfield and Nancy Sinatra path (no boots related puns here) with equal enjoyment.

Thanks to the monoblock design, there was great separation, but if I had to find one fault with these amplifiers, they didn't have as much of a three dimensional feel to them as I would like if I were shopping. However, to be fair to CI, I haven't heard anything else in this price range that does either. The recently tested Manley Mahis and the Prima Luna Prologue monoblocks have a bit more of this, but they will set you back another \$1000-1200 and they don't have anywhere near the weight that the D-100s possess. And they both will need a pile of tubes every couple of years. Even with cheapie tubes, that adds up. Remember the price you pay for the glowing bottles, two re-tube operations and you could have a free pair of D-100s!

Another bonus is that the D-100s barely generate any heat. You can play these at brain damage levels and they never really even get warm! For those of you with space at a premium, this is something to consider, especially if you are building a home theater system.

THE VERDICT

Living with the Channel Islands D-100s for a while was a very good experience. These amplifiers are solidly built and offer better sound than their modest price would suggest. The D-100s are also very versatile, they were able to drive any speaker I threw at them with ease. Thanks to the small footprint, low power consumption and low heat output, this is as easy as high-end sound gets.

Like me, Dusty Vawter is a car guy and we both drive BMWs. However, if I were going to compare his amps to a car, it would be a Mini Cooper S with the works kit: big performance, quality and value in a compact package. That's exactly how I feel about these amplifiers. ●

MANUFACTURER:

Channel Islands Audio

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PERIPHERALS:

Preamplifier Emotive Audio Poeta

Phono Preamplifier Hagerman Trumpet

Analog Source Modded Rega P25 with Sumiko Blackbird, Sota Comet with Shelter 501 mk.II

Digital Source ModWright Denon 3910

Speakers Penaudio Serenade, Tetra 506, ACI Sapphire XL

Interconnect DH Labs Revelation



Speaker Cable DH Labs Q-14

Power Cords DH Labs Power Plus

Power Conditioner Running Springs Haley

Vibration Control Symposium Ultra Platforms, Rollerblock Jr.s

FAVORITE TEST TUNES:

Pink Floyd Dark Side of the Moon (CD/LP)

Peggy Lee Is That All There Is? (LP)

Brian Eno Music For Films, Music For Airports (LP)

Charles Mingus Passions of a Man: Complete Atlantic Recordings 1956-1961 (CD)

The Doors LA Woman (CD) DCC

Matthew Sweet Girlfriend (CD)