

Audience aR1p Passive Power Conditioner

Doug Blackburn



In a previous review, I called Audience's aR12 "king of the passive [power conditioners]" because it provided more improvement in audio quality than any passive power conditioner auditioned to that point. Audience has expanded their adeptResponse power conditioning family with two new products: the six-outlet aR6, and, the subject of this review, the aR1p. On the outside, the aR1p is about as basic a product as you'll find. There are no lights, no switches, no fuses, no feet, no meter, no circuit breaker, no transformer, and no power cord, and it's about the size of a brick. On the back is a three-prong plug that goes into a wall outlet, and the bottom is home to a single AC outlet for one component. If you wish to use an aR1p in a ceiling-mounted plug, Audience provides a drywall anchor and screw that will support most of the weight of the aR1p. If a wall outlet is used, the drywall anchor is not likely to be needed.

Because of the plug orientation, only one aR1p will fit in a duplex wall outlet. Your component's power cord has to be long enough to reach the aR1p since it won't be in the rack with your components. You could use a power strip plugged into an aR1p so several lower-power components could be connected to a single unit, but you would lose the inter-component isolation you get from using an aR1p for each component. That may not be an issue if you connect two or three components that would not normally be in use at the same time.

The aR1p brings the high-quality Auricap capacitor filter components and heavy-duty, high-current construction of the aR12 to a much lower price point. Of course, with the aR1p there's just one outlet in the solid-feeling brick, so you're not paying for an elegant enclosure or power cord. The aR1p design gives you a single filter with a very short current path, making it especially suited for use with amplifiers. The non-degrading surge suppression will provide long-term protection for the connected component.

The Best

The aR1ps were first used with the Belles 28A preamp (\$4,500), Belles 350A Reference stereo amplifier (\$4,000) for the main loudspeakers, and a modestly priced Parasound mono amplifier for the center channel loudspeaker. These components sounded perfectly fine connected to wall outlet power. In fact, there was nothing I could have complained about, sound-wise. But connecting them to an aR1p, one component at a time, was a revelation. The sound became wonderfully crystal clear with

terrific detail in all frequency ranges. On the amplifiers especially, bass tightness, impact, and detail were remarkably improved compared to wall outlet power. It seemed impossible for a mere power conditioner to make this much of a difference. I've heard nothing like it since Audience's big-buck aR12 passive power conditioner. The sound became so compelling to listen to, I didn't want to stop. Music and movies both had a new lively character and emotional connection that made the sound, when using wall outlet power, seem dull, listless, veiled, and uninteresting by comparison. I've been very careful in power conditioner reviews to not overstate any improvements I hear or see, but this is the real deal—the aR1p makes clear and obvious improvements in sound quality that anybody should be able to hear.

Audience provided a total of three aR1ps for the review. Connecting these to the stereo preamp, stereo amplifier, and stereo digital-to-analog converter, all at the same time, provided a sublime stereo-listening experience. The system was very dynamic sounding, even more so than when using balanced power for those same components. Highly complex mixes like Mickey Hart/Rhythm Devils *The Apocalypse Now Sessions* had all the presence of a live performance with loads of detail, depth, and width to convince you that the musicians and instruments were right there in the room.

I could hear a quieter noise floor when using balanced power with the same components, but it hardly mattered because the sound was so darn likeable when using the aR1p that I really didn't care to go back to balanced power. The aR1p excelled at revealing dynamic details in the myriad of plucked instruments in Regina Spektor's CD, *Begin To Hope*. The remarkable performances soared and dove all over the room showing off remarkable dynamics and great attention to sonic details. While listening to the CD remaster of the classic Reiner/Chicago Symphony/Dvorák *New World Symphony*, layering of depth created a solid audio image of the orchestra being laid out in front of you, as though you were seated in the front row of a low balcony. David Gilmour's often dreamlike *On An Island* became an aural bonbon floating in the room with remarkable presence. The aR1p was as good as or better than any other power conditioner used with these analog audio components. I still marvel at what I was hearing.

To get the best possible result for surround sound, I placed aR1s on the two amplifiers for the three front channels and on the stereo amplifier for the side surrounds, and left the center surrounds off. Movie soundtracks opened up to make the soundfield more spacious and dimensional. The dynamics were noticeably improved with more delineation of individual sounds during chaotic scenes. *Casino*

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SPECIFICATIONS

Features

One AC outlet
 No power cord; plugs directly into wall outlet
 Power Factor Correction
 Transient surge suppression
 RF/noise filtering
 Low DC resistance
 Hubble receptacle
 Marincio AC plug
 Audience Auricap high-performance capacitors used exclusively in filter networks
 No circuit board, 10-gauge internal wiring
 Ceiling-mount hardware included for use with projectors
 Full mechanical damping
 Cryogenically treated

Specifications

Surge suppression up to 20,000 amps, non-deteriorating devices
 120 VAC, 15 amps, 50-60 Hz, 3300 watts also available for 220 VAC - 240 VAC, 15 amps, 3300 watts
 Warranty: 10 years parts and labor for defects

Dimensions (WHD In Inches): 6 x 3 x 2

Weight (In Pounds): 1.5

Price: \$495

Manufactured In The United States By:

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 120 N. Pacific Street #K-9
 San Marcos, CA 92069
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 www.audience-av.com

Royale (Blu-ray Disc) is a good example of a complex mix when Bond is trying to stop the destruction of a new super-jumbo passenger jet at the Miami Airport. The level of excitement and visceral envelopment was very special. The several crashes the fuel truck makes, as well as the near miss by the 747, were simply phenomenal. Quieter moments, such as the scene on Lake Como where Bond and Vesper, er, bond, demand your full attention because of the compelling feeling of intimacy within the soundfield.

The Middle

There were significant, but smaller improvements when using the aR1p with a new Onkyo TX-SR875 AVR, and the stereo digital-to-analog conversion setup (Perpetual Technologies P-1A/P-3A with out-board power supply). Audio wise, the stereo digital front-end and the Onkyo AVR perked up nicely when using an aR1p, compared to power from a wall outlet. I was hearing the typical improvements you get from very good passive power conditioners—removal of the dull, thick, boring sound that seems characteristic of wall outlet sound, even if the audio comes from a digital source. The improvement in transparency, detail, and the more fun “feel” of the music or movie sound made listening to everything more enjoyable. The degree of improvement was clearly not as great as with the preamp and amplifiers, but it was still a very easy-to-hear incremental with worthwhile improvements.

What?

Where I struck out was with the video display (Sony KDS-R60XBR2, 60-inch SXRD™ rear projector), the two high-definition disc players (Sony BDP-S1 and Toshiba HD-A2), and the DISH Network HD/DVR (ViP622). No matter what I tried, all of these digital components with digital audio and video connections via HDMI just didn't provide any detectable degree of improvement in image quality. I was beginning to think it was something I was doing wrong. So I tried an older single-outlet VansEvers power conditioner that was optimized for video components. Surprise! Absolutely nothing in the way of improvements from the VansEvers passive power conditioner either. I have had significant improvements from the VansEvers video power conditioner in the past when using analog CRT and hybrid analog/digital CRT video displays with analog inputs.

The only power conditioning that seems to make any difference in an all-digital video system is balanced power—at least that's what I'm experiencing right now. And balanced power has, so far, not been what I'd call a huge improvement. It's noticeable, but you really have to look for it and be very familiar with the image quality without balanced power. So, on one hand, I was surprised I couldn't get a rise out of the video side of the system with up to three aR1ps being used, but on the other hand you can't argue much when other passive power conditioners also get shut out of the improvement game.

Where Does That Leave Us?

I did a lot of head scratching over this review. As always, with power conditioner reviews, you have to keep in mind that your experiences could be significantly different than mine. Differences in your

local AC power and differences in the components you use can conspire to produce very different results. While I didn't find the aR1p provided any video image quality benefits in my system, you could have very different results. One thing I can be confident about is the performance of the aR1p with analog audio components. The degree of improvement compared to wall outlet power is as significant as a major upgrade to an analog amplifier or preamplifier. Not even many thousands of dollars of high-end power conditioning, including balanced power, could provide better or more desirable sound from analog components than the aR1p. Used with the right components, the aR1p provides a heck of a kick in the pants—equaled only by the aR12, so far.

Balanced power may provide a quieter noise floor, but no balanced power conditioner I have produces the same level of sheer music or soundtrack excitement and pleasure. The aR1p may not be for everybody, but if you're on a quest for the best possible sound quality from your system, the aR1p should be evaluated. You may find it to be as worthwhile an addition to your system as I did. **WSR**



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