

REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Naim ND5 XS 2

The entry-level model in Naim's new network player range is a simplified design, with no display and control via an app. The performance however is a different matter ...

Having more or less invented the all-in-one network music system with the launch of its Naim Uniti in 2009 – yes, it really was almost a decade ago – Naim extended the concept into a range of derivative systems, refreshed with an all-new line-up a couple of years back. As well as new services and features, the current Unitis are built on what Naim calls its 'platform for the future', which is designed to accommodate any changes in formats or services occurring down the line. Now this technology has come to the new Naim network player range, launched midway through last year, the new models having all the facilities of the Unitis and being designed to match the three levels of the Naim hierarchy: the si/XS series, the Classic products and the Reference range.

At the Reference end, the new network player is the ND555, which will set you back £19,998 complete with the 555PS power supply from which it is powered, while the Classic model is the NDX2, selling for £4999, and upgradable using the £3999 XPS DR power supply, or the £6599 555PS used by the ND555.

The ND5 XS 2 we have here is the entry-level model: selling for £2299, it's designed to match the slimline NAIT XS2 integrated amplifier, as well as the less expensive NAIT 5si amp and the CD5si. But getting the new-style Naim streamer technology into the slim casework created its own problems, as the ND555 and NDX2 both use the same large, full-colour



NAIM ND 5 XS 2

Type Network music player

Price £2299

Sources UPnP streaming, Spotify Connect, Tidal, vTuner Internet radio, Roon, other streaming services via Chromecast Audio

File formats played PCM-base files to 384kHz/32bit, DSD64/128

Inputs Two optical and two coaxial digital, two USB-A ports for storage devices, Bluetooth with aptX, AirPlay

Networking Ethernet, dual-band Wi-Fi

Output Coax digital, analogue on RCA phonos and DIN

Remote control via Naim app on tablet/smartphone

Accessories included DIN-to-DIN interconnect, BNC-to-RCA adapter, Power-Line Lite mains cable, Bluetooth antenna, two Wi-Fi antennae

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.2x6.7x30.3cm
naimaudio.com

displays used in the 'new Uniti' models, replacing the small green on black displays of the original Naim streamers.

The solution? Simple, really: the ND5 XS 2 doesn't have a display. Or indeed any controls beyond a power

button on the front panel, along with a tiny LED to indicate network connection and a slot into which one can put a USB stick full of music, or to which your iPhone can be connected.

Instead, the new player is controlled completely by Naim's excellent app, available as a free download for iOS or Android smartphones and tablets. Refined over many years since the first Naim Uniti appeared, this can now control ND-players both old and new, all the Uniti models from the first to the latest, and of course Naim's hugely popular Muso and Muso Qb all-in-one network speaker systems. What's more, it's possible to set up a complete multiroom audio package using any mix of the products, so one could have a main room system fronted by an ND555 or the previous NDS, a study set-up of a Uniti and a pair of speakers, and a Muso in the kitchen or wherever.

So what does the ND 5 XS 2 offer? Well, like all of the new players, it will play music from USB memory, network storage or online services including Spotify Connect and Tidal, as well as internet radio using the vTuner platform, while onboard Chromecast audio allows it to stream from hundreds of smartphone/tablet apps. Music streaming extends all the way up to 384kHz/32bit and DSD128/5.6MHz, while there are also digital inputs – two optical, coaxial and BNC – enabling conventional digital sources to be connected at up to 192kHz/24bit.

There's also both Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay wireless connectivity for portable

HI-FI | HOME CINEMA | AUTOMATED SOLUTIONS



Based conveniently in central Guildford P.J. Hi-Fi has specialised in the demonstration, provision and installation of quality hi-fi and home cinema for over 20 years. Our dedicated demonstration rooms allow you to listen in comfort to a range of exceptional products, whilst our friendly and knowledgeable staff are always on hand to answer any questions you may have. Whether you are looking for your first genuine hi-fi system, want to create a bespoke home cinema or wish to distribute music and movie throughout your house, P.J. Hi-Fi can provide a solution to suit all budgets and criteria. As a truly independent retailer we are proud to say that we hand select, test and scrutinise all the products that we supply, ensuring a consistent standard of quality and reliability over our entire range of equipment. Drop in today to discuss your requirements or phone / email us to book a demonstration.

Tel: 01483 504801 | www.pjhifi.co.uk | Email: info@pjhifi.co.uk
3 Bridge Street | Guildford | Surrey GU1 4RY



SUGGESTED PARTNERS

Given the performance of the ND5 XS 2, a high-quality partnering system is required. Try these ...

NAIT XS 2

The obvious complement is the NAIT XS 2 integrated amplifier, offering a similarly slimline design and a sound with plenty of punch and refinement



BOWERS & WILKINS 603

A wide range of speakers will work well with the Naim pairing, but the new Bowers & Wilkins 603 floorstanders would be a particularly good choice



devices and computers, along with both Wi-Fi and Ethernet networking. Although Naim has worked hard on maximising the product's Wi-Fi capability, Ethernet remains the optimal choice for stability and reliability, especially if you want to stream high-res music.

In addition the ND5 XS 2 is Roon-ready, meaning it can act as an endpoint for a system running Roon on a connected computer or NAS, offering an alternative means of control complete with Roon's excellent tagging, content information and more.

Analogue outputs are provided using a choice of Naim's preferred five-pin DIN or conventional RCA phons, with a signal ground switch able to 'float' the ground in case of hum problems – while there's also a remote control output allowing a suitable Naim amp to be controlled via the app. There's an extra USB socket to the rear, to which a hard drive could be attached for local storage of music, for example, and there are no fewer than three antenna mounts – two for Wi-Fi and one for Bluetooth – for which stub antennae are provided.

Like all the new Naim network products, the ND5 XS 2 supports 'over the air' updating for firmware and code to enhance performance – the original products had a slightly laborious process involving a computer connected via both a serial cable and Ethernet – meaning it will be simple to keep the product up-to-date with the latest formats and so on.

PERFORMANCE

The Naim was slotted into my system in place of my usual NDS/555PS player, which was last sold at something approaching six times its price, so I was justifiably expecting a major fall in sound quality; in addition I was sure this 'entry-level' model would be a long way off the NDX2 I have been trying of late, especially when the pricier player is used with one of Naim's offboard power supplies.

However, while the ND5 XS 2 does give something away to them in terms of bass extension and conviction, not to mention the finer nuances of detail and soundstage imaging, you'd never guess it

when listening to the player in isolation, so convincing is the manner in which it plays music. Used with my SuperNAIT 2/HiCap DR amplifier and PMC OB1 speakers, it delivered a presentation of music both powerful and with excellent vitality, creating a broad, deep soundstage and a realistic impression of the position of performers within it.

The sound is typical of the current crop of Naim products, being both fast and generous

The sound is typical of the current crop of Naim products, being both fast and generous, with nothing of the old 'forward and only for rock music' stereotype, erroneous though it was, in evidence here. Instead it proves itself fast and rhythmically adept, for example with Dana Zemtsov's Channel Classics recording of Bartók's Viola Concerto in DSD127, where the crisp delivery of the solo instrument is set against the orchestra with impressive clarity. The recording also illustrates well the expansive dynamics the Naim can muster, as does Víkingur Ólafsson's Johann Sebastian Bach set on DG: the Naim works well with the 192kHz/24bit recording to bring out the speed, precision and drama of the performances.

Yes, the ND5 XS 2 might lack a little of the sheer scale and insight the top-end Naim network players can bring to bear, but it still impresses with large-scale orchestral music, as is clear with the final movement of Mahler's First Symphony in the Fischer/Budapest Festival Orchestra recording in DSD64. The rhythmic dexterity, dynamic range and power of the sound are all much in evidence, and the result is as thrilling as it is involving.

In fact, anyone expecting the entry-level Naim streamer to come in poverty specification is going to be sorely disappointed. This minimalist little component punches way above its weight, and is superbly musical – maybe removing the display plays a significant part in the quite remarkable performance on offer here. 🎧

Or you could try...

Some Naim fanatics have suggested that a rival for the ND5 XS 2 would be a used Naim NDS, as a few of this last-generation player have appeared for sale in the £3000-£4000 range. However, this overlooks the NDS's requirement for an offboard power supply.

Marantz ND8006

A more sensible rival would be the excellent Marantz



ND8006, which combines CD playback with a full suite of streaming functionality, including all the popular services and file playback well into the realms of ultra-high resolution. It also has HEOS multiroom to match the Naim's abilities in this area, and happens to sell for around half the price of the ND5 XS 2. For more information see marantz.co.uk

Pioneer N-70AE

Pioneer's N-70AE lacks the CD playback and multiroom capability of the Marantz, but is otherwise similarly equipped when it comes to the range of streaming services and file formats it supports, all the way up into very high resolution formats including DSD256/11.2MHz. It also sells for around the same price as the Marantz, undercutting the Naim by a healthy margin. See more at pioneer-audiovisual.eu



Naim Uniti Nova

Of course, if you were considering the Naim and its matching



NAIT XS 2 amplifier, which sells for just under £2000, the company's flagship all-in-one unit, the Uniti Nova, may divert your attention for around the same price as the two units together. It remains to be seen how the sound would compare in a direct comparison, but the Nova is very good indeed, and offers that one-box convenience. naimaudio.com