

## Simaudio Moon Neo ACE All-in-One Music Player Review

*Can Simaudio deliver a winning hand with the ACE?*

by [Ed Selley](#) Aug 4, 2016



What is the Simaudio Moon Neo ACE?

The Moon NEO Ace is Simaudio's first attempt at an all in one streaming system and one that ticks almost every spec box that you might reasonably expect a product of this nature to feature. The market for high quality all-in-one systems has expanded dramatically over the last 5-6 years and some companies have proved to be extremely adept at creating them.

Simaudio manages to be both an obvious and peculiar choice for a company to make such a thing. On the one hand, they are adept at software and make all the components and sources that might be expected to fit into such a system. On the other, they have a fairly consistent history of building components that perform one- possibly two- functions as well as can be expected and not cramming functionality in for the sake of it.

As such, the Moon Neo Ace has the option to go either way. In what is a very competitive market segment though, there is no shortage of extremely capable rivals. Not only are there one box systems lining up to have a piece of the ACE, there is no escaping from the fact that £2,800 buys a great deal of separate system too. Can the ACE deliver on the promise of its impressive spec and the brand's generally strong showings and become the must have product of its type?

## Specifications



The Simaudio ACE is a single chassis all-in-one system to which you simply add speakers for a complete system. Simaudio doesn't make speakers which means that the ACE can't necessarily be seen as a one stop shop but equally it does tend to mean that Simaudio builds with a view to their equipment being used with a variety of different speakers and you should have a fairly wide variety to choose from.

Put simply, the ACE does a huge amount. Streaming? Yes Sir, both over Ethernet and wifi and at sample rates up to 32/384kHz? Want to use USB or another digital input instead? No problem, the ACE has two optical and two coaxial inputs partnered with a single USB-B connection that supports high res PCM and DSD up to 256. Do you want to use it with analogue sources? No problem. Three RCA line inputs are fitted alongside a moving magnet compatible phono stage. In short, the Simaudio has clearly taken into account what rivals offer and made sure that it is not going to be outgunned at any stage.

Neither are these features randomly plucked out of thin air. Simaudio makes an extensive range of products that cover all of these functionality points and do so with a considerable degree of ability. In short, the ACE has a deeply impressive parts bin to raid for components and very little of it shows any signs of being anything other than entirely bespoke to Simaudio. Systems of this nature live or die on the way they hang together and the ACE has a great start in this regard.

Amplification takes the form of a 50 watt Class A/B type amplifier. This appears to have at least a passing resemblance to the one used in the entry level Moon integrated amplifier. In a category where some models feature Class D amps with power outputs that are well into three figures, 50 watts might not sound too enormous but the figure is given into 8 ohms and the ACE doesn't feel in any way lacking in power. If you do find yourself needing more urge, there is a stereo preout that enables the ACE to be used with the range of Simaudio external power amps- although these are fairly pricey bits of kit.



If you can muddle through with 50 watts (and trust me on this, you can), the ACE has to be seen as quite good value. Sure £2,800 is not exactly small change but when you consider the ACE is effectively, the functionality of the entry level integrated amp, the 230HAD we tested recently, a MiND interface for streaming and a cut down version of one of the company's phono stages, and that little lot comes to north of £4,000, the ACE starts to make a lot of sense.

There are some omissions to the ACE spec, considerable as it is. The first is logical enough, in that the ACE can't play CD directly. Simaudio actually halted CD player production altogether for a period of time, although new models have appeared again in the meantime. We've noted that CD is on the wane somewhat and that its best days are behind it. This being the case, the decision to omit a mechanism does make a fair bit of sense. Given that the ACE is pretty busy internally, it is hard to see how Simaudio could have fitted one in even if they'd wanted to.

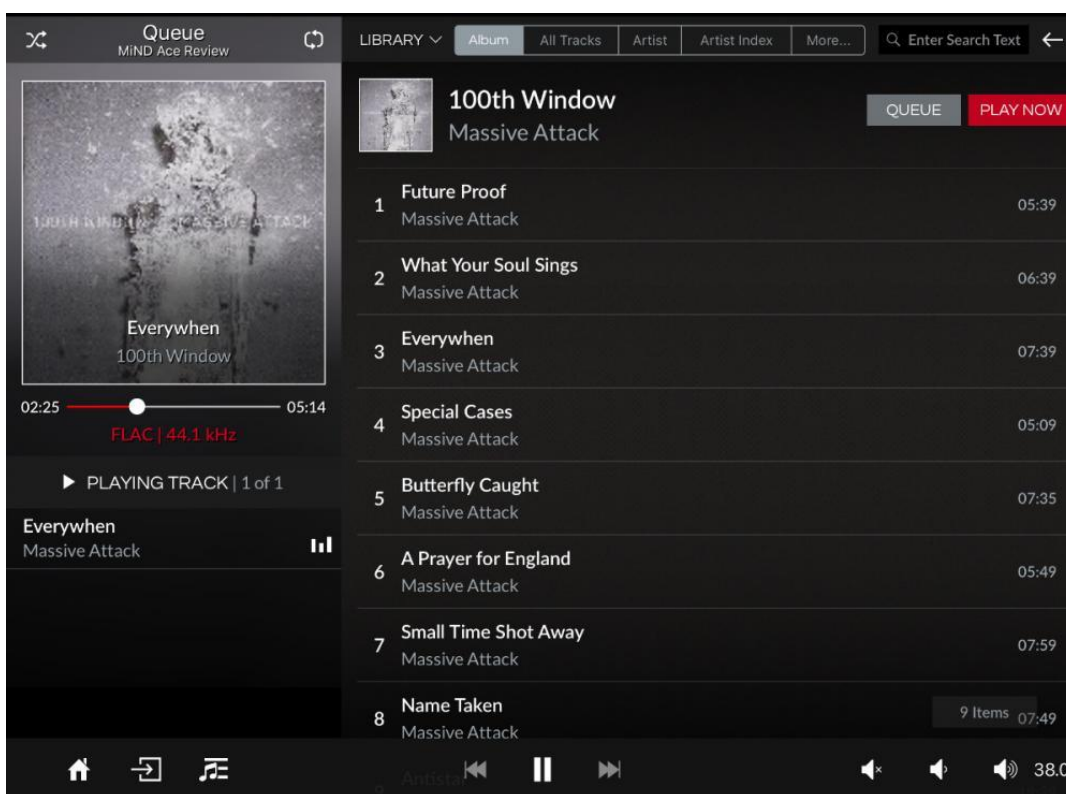
The other missing item is a bit more unusual. The ACE is the only product I've ever reviewed that can natively stream Tidal but can't do the same via Spotify Connect. There are undoubtedly solid enough reasons for this to be the case as far as Simaudio is concerned- Tidal has a qualitative advantage and for a number of years, Spotify was unavailable in Simaudio's native Canada but it is still a bit of an oddity. Of course, you do have plenty of inputs to get Spotify into the ACE if you want it.

## Design



If there was one thing I was able to criticise the 230HAD for, it was that it doesn't look terribly spectacular. While the ACE is still unlikely to find itself in a museum of modern art, it is a handsome looking piece of equipment. The curved 'cheeks' give it a presence that its little brother lacks and the result is a smart looking piece of equipment. The review sample also demonstrates my preferred option for all of the Moon equipment which is the mixed silver and black option- it's something of a calling card for the brand and it looks excellent.

The rest of the ACE is pretty impressive too. The build doesn't have the 'hewn from a single giant piece of metal' feel of the most expensive Simaudio equipment but it is assembled in a very confidence inspiring way. The controls move with a solid feel and everything on the ACE has a precision to it that inspires confidence. The white on black OLED display is clear and easy to read although it is sufficiently small that most information does need to scroll to appear in its entirety.



The ACE comes with two points of control beyond the front panel. The first is an IR remote handset that seems to have been borrowed from another member of the range. It is a nice enough piece of design but as every button is the same size and laid out in a grid, it is the sort of thing you have to physically look at to use- hardly the end of the world but in comparison to the default Naim handset for example, it is a little less intuitive.

More likely to see regular use is the MiND app. This is available for iOS and Android devices and as well as controlling the streaming side of the ACE, also handles volume, input selection and internet radio options. The app itself is stable, well laid out and easy to use but it isn't perfect. Like all products that support Tidal, the app has to access the service within its own software and this is slightly clunky compared to some other systems I've tested. There is also no visible volume slider- just volume up/down buttons and a mute button that's a little too close for comfort.

The other aspect of the app I don't like is a more personal one in that it has a queue function and you

can't simply press a track and hear it- you need to select the 'Play now' or 'Queue' function. Personally, I find this bloody annoying. I effectively like my streamers to run like steroidal CD players and run from the selected track to the end of the album. I don't want them to compile a polygot collection of tracks in an arbitrary queue that needs to be emptied to prevent the device from returning to something you stopped listening to three hours previously. Simaudio is not the only offender and far from the worst but I find it takes the speed and slickness out of what is otherwise a very good piece of software.



*«Put simply, the ACE does a huge amount»*

How was the Moon Neo ACE tested?

The ACE was placed on a Quadraspire QAVX rack and given power via an IsoTek Evo 3 Sigmas mains conditioner. It has been connected to my wireless network for control, internet radio and streaming services testing. It was tested taking files over Ethernet from a Western Digital MyBook type NAS and over USB from a Melco N1A. A Naim ND5XS was used for testing the digital inputs and RCA connections as was a Cyrus Phono signature. A Rega Planar 2 was used to test the phono stage directly.

Initially, the ACE was tested with a pair of Boenicke W8 floorstanders but my own Neat Momentum 4is were also used. Test material has been streamed files in FLAC, WAV, AIFF and DSD at a variety of sample rates, Tidal, internet radio and vinyl have also been used.

What does the Moon Neo ACE Sound like? The sample supplied by the UK distributor had clearly done some running before it arrived with me so it was directly installed from the beginning although I held off from critical listening for a day or so. With me paying more attention though, the ACE manages to make a compelling case for itself. Like other components from the brand that I have tried over the years, the ACE has been carefully designed and very deliberately voiced to not be the story. If you buy the Simaudio, the 'character' of the system is going to largely be the result of the speakers you use rather than the device itself.



If this sounds in some way underwhelming, it shouldn't because the ACE does a finer job of producing a tonally accurate, unembellished and fundamentally 'right' presentation than pretty much anything else with this level of functionality at the same price. Listening to Radiohead's *A Moon Shaped Pool* via Tidal gives an inkling of what the ACE is about from the outset. This dense and tonally dark recording is relayed with its grim intensity very much intact but with enough fine detail and space to let you hear into the mix and appreciate everything that is going on.

Neither is it some worthy but dull studio refugee. Listening to the fundamentally joyous 24/96kHz download of Paul Simon's *So Beautiful or So What?* the ACE is there to find the fun in the recording and relay it without losing anything from the original. The timing is pinpoint accurate and Simon's vocals are packed full of detail in a way that really good digital finds very easy to do.

The absence of behavioural traits that are easily ascribed to the ACE also mean that when you want to change tack completely, the Simaudio is more than up to the task. The monstrous *III Pt 1* by K-X-P is a sort of deranged prog/krautrock hybrid that defies easy description but the ACE manages to slow down and deliver the crunching bass and heavy riffs with ease. Compared to some roughly price equivalent amps and systems that have been connected to the Neats, the Simaudio trades a last smidge of bass depth for detail and control but it still manages to hit pretty hard.



Testing the same files via digital inputs from the Melco and Naim suggests that the digital side of the ACE is pretty much source agnostic. This means that the Simaudio is well set up to handle a good slice of equipment being connected to it and although I didn't try it with a Sky HD Box my gut feeling is that the ACE would be an excellent piece of equipment to build a system around if you needed to. When you

start to compress files- internet radio, Spotify etc, the ACE stays relatively forgiving but there is no avoiding the loss of bandwidth completely in a piece of equipment this transparent.

The analogue inputs also manage to be conduits to the music rather than the story itself. This means that if you have pretty accurate source equipment as the SME arm side of the Avid Ingenium Twin I use going into a Cyrus Phono Signature undoubtedly is, you will get a very honest appraisal of what the device is up to. Connected to the slightly more forceful and dynamic presentation of the Naim ND5XS, the ACE has that slightly punchier presentation as a result. This is an admirably open and honest piece of equipment.

If there is a smidge of idiosyncrasy to the ACE, it can be found in the phono stage. Compared to the astonishingly accurate Cyrus, the ACE, comes across as lively and quite energetic. This is in part down to it not having the bass response of the standalone unit but it does a great job of obviating any sense of warmth and bloom that a turntable at the sort of price that might be used with the Simaudio might suffer from. As a final welcome trait, noise levels are usefully low whether the turntable grounds via a dedicated ground connection or via the phono plugs themselves.



*«This is an admirably open and honest piece of equipment»*

#### Conclusion

The £2,800 question for the Simaudio is whether it manages to sound like a device that costs, well, £2,800? The short answer is yes. When I test a system of this nature, one of the abstract but necessary challenges is to think if there is a selection of equipment I would happily choose to take it on for the same price. In the case of the ACE, there are collections of separate bits that could keep it honest but this ignores the convenience, integration and flexibility that the Simaudio brings with it.

Most importantly, this is a great sounding piece of equipment. The ACE is able to handle pretty much

anything you choose to throw at it because it puts so little of itself into the presentation. If you are the sort of person who's music collection is all over the place, this is one of the most effective ways of doing justice to all of it. For some people the, flexibility of separate units will win out but it is hard to ignore just how much the ACE does and how well it does it. This is a seriously accomplished all-in-one system and one that comes Highly Recommended.

#### The Rundown

*Build Quality* - 9

*Connectivity* - 9

*Ease of Use* - 8

*Sound Quality* - 9

*Features* - 9

*Value for Money* - 8

*Verdict* - 9

Simaudio Moon Neo ACE : Simaudio launches an all-in-one player that could well be good enough to put you off separates

Released: July 2016

Simaudio Moon Neo ACE Type

<b>Channels</b>	2.0
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Simaudio Moon Neo ACE Features

<b>Radio</b>	Internet Radio
<b>DLNA</b>	Yes
<b>Wi-Fi</b>	Yes

Simaudio Moon Neo ACE Sound

<b>Amplifier Type</b>	Class A/B
<b>Amplifier Power</b>	50

Simaudio Moon Neo ACE Product Properties

<b>Warranty</b>	2 years
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<b>Release Year</b>	2016
<b>Colour</b>	Black, silver, black and silver
<b>Width</b>	429mm
<b>Depth</b>	366mm
<b>Height</b>	89mm
<b>Weight</b>	11kg

Simaudio Moon Neo ACE Connections

<b>USB Ports</b>	1
<b>Digital Audio Inputs Coaxial</b>	2
<b>Digital Audio Outputs Coaxial</b>	1
<b>Digital Audio Inputs Optical</b>	2
<b>Analogue Audio Inputs RCA</b>	3
<b>LAN Ports</b>	1
<b>RS232 Connector</b>	1
<b>Triggers</b>	1
<b>Speaker Terminals</b>	Bare Wire Banana Spade