



# SOULUTION 330



**T**he 520 and 501 Soulution assembly graced our 200th edition in 2014, displaying the quality of its sound and exquisitely understated look for which the Swiss brand is famous, and the same applies to the integrated 330, which is much more affordable and unveiled here.

It is a precious and desirable object, especially for the exceptional musicality that it can offer, like a present of great value that nevertheless has its price. It is, however, significantly less than the price of the 5 and 7 Series at the very high end of the Soulution range – designed uncompromisingly by Cyrill Hammer at Dulliken in Switzerland, not far from Zurich. Series 3 comprises the 325 preamplifier, the 311 stereo amplifier with a 120W rating and the modular 330 integrated amplifier, bringing together the preamplifier and amplifier circuits in one single unit. The entry-level price is 17,500 euros and, in addition to this, a DAC board (4,200 euros) and an MC phono stage (2,900 euros). Expensive? But, don't forget: it is one of the best amplifiers ever tested and it is an integrated unit.

## CLEAR LINES

The restrained style is an article of faith, combined with a simple metallic finish and the traditional Swiss build quality. The curved front panel is striking and the large black screen with red LED figures forms the 330's control centre. An impressive feature is the display showing the percentage by which the capacitors have discharged until exhaustion, thus preventing any interference in the loudspeakers before they cease completely and, for information, the 330 does not have the active discharge circuit of the 5/7 Series. Only three touch buttons activate the on/off, the mute function cutting off the inputs and the programme mode. By pressing and holding down the volume button it is possible to navigate in the menus and also to select the four inputs, which are also accessible via the ergonomic remote control. The settings can be personalised in program mode: for example, the initial volume and the maximum volume, the setting for the attenuation range, the choice of lighting input, surround mode (ignoring



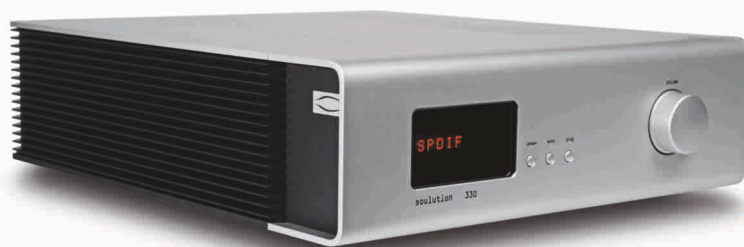
volume and balance), the three degrees of screen brightness, impedance settings of the MC phono and its high-pass filter, signal polarity and the firmware version (upgradable). The 330 also allows multiple combinations of stereo and mono bi-amplification by adding a second block, thanks to a source out output via a non-attenuated channel. The Link-Com interface on the USB then allows the units linked in this configuration to align their settings for volume, balance and the input selection. The desire for perfection extends to vibration-control feet in the guise of the Center Stage model manufactured by Critical Mass Systems.

### IT'S YOUR CHOICE

Our model was equipped with two very high-level options. An MC phono stage with a gain of 60 dB equipped with components that can be parametrised on three input resistors (20, 100, 1260 ohms) and modified remotely, and a DAC board including four inputs: USB, AES/EBU, S/PDIF and RJ45 network.

The 330 is recognised as a DLNA media distributor that is compatible with the UPnP protocol. An application such as M-Connect via a smartphone or a tablet then acts as an interface. The DAC is based on Burr-Brown PCM 1792 chips; as the sampling and digital filters have been bypassed, only the conversion section is used. These tasks are executed by a powerful DSP, which enhances the proprietary zerophase technology, ensuring that phase errors are kept to a minimum – a feature that is also present on Series 5 and 7. It is compatible with 16–24 bit files sampled at 32–192 kHz plus DSDs in DoP from 2.82 to 5.64 MHz (USB, AES and S/PDIF).

**No screws are visible on the 330 compact but it is deep enough at 49 cm and 43 cm wide and a weight of 30 kg. The switching volume of the resistors is assisted by a second PGA, not in active listening mode.**





soulution

Each large side  
dissipater is  
completely  
integrated in the  
line for greater  
discretion.

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In a network, the 330 reads the 16-24 bits in 44.1–192 kHz and the DSD (DFF, DSF) plus the DXD coded in 24 bits / 352.8 kHz. Just listen to be convinced of the magnificent quality of this DAC option.

### HIGH SPEED

Soulution designed its original plans, often going against the presumptions of "audiophiles". Based on the architecture of Series 5, the structure of the 330 is dual-mono. The current amplification involves three stages, each in a precise operating range that is practically linear. It has a wide bandwidth (DC at 800 kHz), rapid switching transistors and ultra-short signal paths. Local feedback loops applied to each stage operate at very high speed, following the signal very closely. Preamplification circuits use very high-performing operational amplifiers from Texas Instruments. The volume is unique thanks to an attenuator switching precision resistors via relays but assisted by a second PGA (programmable gain amplifier) type, which is only active when the volume

### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

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Price: 17,500 euros

DAC board + network input: 4,200 euros

MC phono board: 2,900 euros

Power: 120W 8 ohms, 240W 4 ohms

Bandwidth: 0 - 800 kHz (-3 dB)

Signal-to-noise ratio: > 120 dB

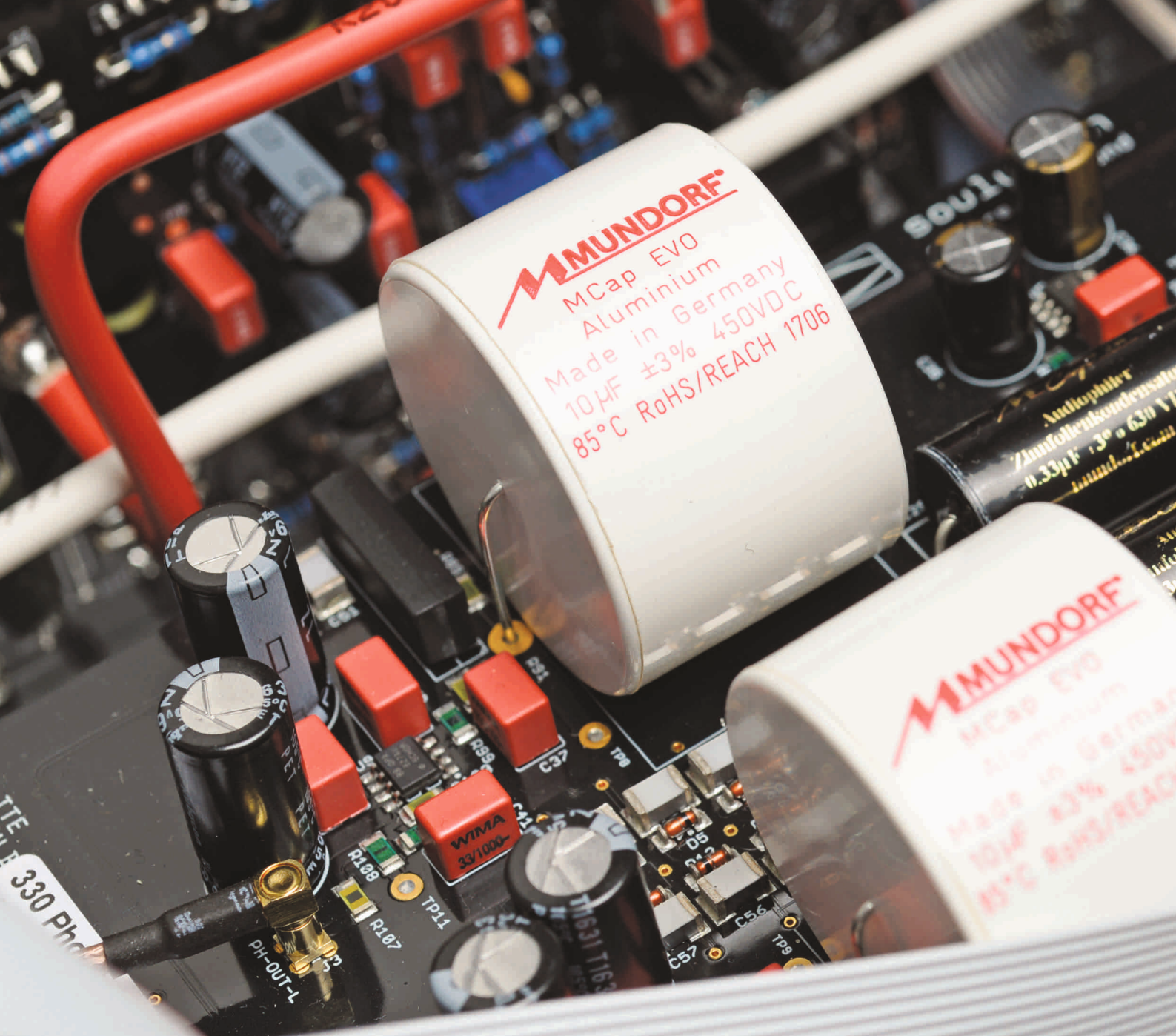
THD + N: < 0.001%

Dimensions (L x H x D): 430 x 490 x 142 mm

Weight: 30 kg

origin: Switzerland





The MC phono board is equipped with German capacitors manufactured by Mundorf et Wima, both quality brands familiar to audiophiles. The 330's audio section is physically separated from the isolated power supply for minimum interference.

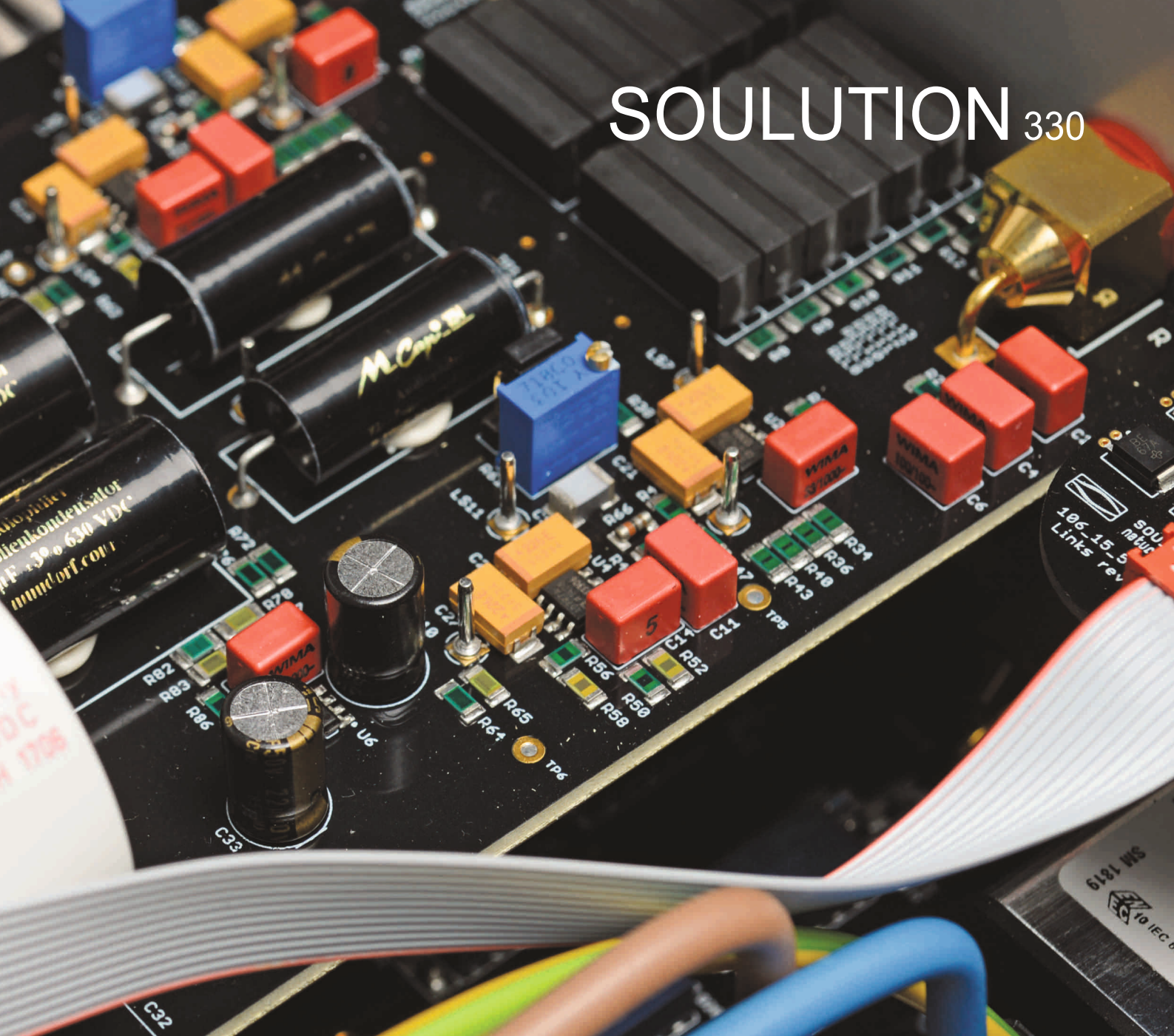
is modified, ensuring that levels are changed without a clicking noise. Essentially, only the outgoing and incoming clicks are noticed. The amplification at class A polarisation on the 15 first watts completed for 160,000 uf of Mundorf storage capacitance authorises an almost infinite impulse response, with the power of 120 W on 8 ohms being doubled on 4 ohms. High-precision management of the quiescent current ensures optimum operation in class A under all conditions. However, most of all, Soultion masters perfectly the six power supplies, four of which are switched-mode power supplies supplying power of 1,200 VA. High-performance filtering and high-speed voltage regulators ensure greater stability than any transformer-based conventional techno-

logy. Induced noise is suppressed by physical separation of amplification boards and effective shielding. Finally, sophisticated methods protect the 330 against RFs, direct current at the input and short-circuits at the output. Each device is supplied with its own laminated sheet of measures, all first class, while the build is of impeccable quality and the system is equipped with the best available components.

## LISTEN

Tones : Soultion 330 is equipped at the outset with all that is needed for superlative amplification and it is the leading device of what is currently on the market. The tones are reproduced accurately and with exceptional purity and transparency. It redefines what one

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considers to be neutral or transparent but this is often accompanied by dryness or excessive definition, which is absolutely not the case here. Quite the contrary, as the materials and textures are both embodied and natural, the voices are expressive in their precision but without any affectation, perfectly positioned and with fantastic presence; the high pitch is splendidly true, evident on the brushes caressing the cymbals with unheard-of realism or even in the delicate notes of a harpsichord. The bass and especially the deep bass are phenomenal in their movements and impact; something is happening with these well-implemented switch-mode power supplies, with an instantaneous response and without any hesitation and slowness. What a way of projecting with realism



The MCaps are damped to stop all vibrations. Opposite, the four shielded SMPS power supplies; foam also insulates the four Mundorf chemical capacitors for the power supply from vibration.

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all the power of a symphonic orchestra, its sound and layer in the initial octaves and therefore to believe in it 100%. The 330's tonal integrity is definitely the best ever seen for amplification.

**Dynamic :** Another striking quality of the 330 is its dazzling speed of attack with no hanging back. The power supply responds immediately to the slightest stimulus, producing an unleashing of terrestrial forces such as for the percussion in War Dance by Respighi played by the Minnesota Orchestra (Reference Recording), without any slowing or modification to the stability of the layers of sound at the peaks. Power of 120W seems fairly modest but there is no need to rely on it: 30 amps are also available when demand for power arises and this makes its presence felt every time during tumultuous passages. The vivacity of action on the micro-details works wonders, never drowned in the background noise or misrepresented by unwelcome distortions; the music appears to be driven by its own energy, without any braking or slowness, developing over time in complete freedom. The vigour unleashed at every moment is phenomenal, right down deep into the bass: the loudspeaker appears to be transfigured by the 330's enormous damping factor, which is above 5,000. Many transducers with complex filters and with weak sensitivity benefit from this by having an easy outlet for expression with Soulution.

**Sound stage :** To plot the square of the circle, the raised silence of the 330 enhanced by great definition is capable of a sound stage that is almost holographic, not only in the staging of rigorous layers of sound but in the weight and the presence that it is capable of giving each group of musicians or a soloist. Naturally, this brings a change in terms of the sources and the quality of these; Soulution will not conceal any defects there may be in the sound recording. However, on the best recordings, such as the Fackeltanz (Reference Recording) by the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra interpreting Moritz Moszkowski, the precision and arrangement of the consoles are brought into sharp focus but seamlessly enhanced by this incredible layer, the beats of the bass drum evoking all the dynamism that it is capable of. The sound landscape is revealed in its complexity, its precise contours and its richness, where the electronics are forgotten. Yet the Soulution 330 is definitely the conductor reigning over the sources and loudspeakers, pushing them to give their best, engendering immense satisfaction with the music.

## VERDICT

The notion of a relationship between quality and price is difficult to ascertain in a unit of this class. In the Soulution range, it is the most "affordable" and in that it has tremendous merit. When considering the best amplifiers sampled to compile the review, assuming the power supplied is sufficient, it becomes very competitive, because certain units that are much more expensive deliver nowhere near such a good performance. The extreme purity of the line verging on the ascetic symbolises Soulution's willingness to focus on what is essential, at the heart of the music in its entirety and without omitting or adding anything, just exploring its true nature. Liberated from any electronic impurity and alert as ever, the musical flow is expressed in its genuine dimension, free in its energy and respecting the musicians' intention. The speakers are powered by free-flowing current and the digital sources are served by the DAC's exceptional fluidity. With the integrated 330, Soulution is providing an excellent addition to the exclusive group of the best electronics systems.

Bruno Castelluzzo

**By pressing and holding down the volume it is possible to change the input; pressing briefly activates the volume reduction or navigates in the activated prog mode on the front panel. At the back, the excellent Mundorf MConnect copper terminals for free tightening. Note the XLR source OUT for a non-attenuated output, allowing multiple options for bi- or multi-amplification connected to another 330.**



