

# The Warm Solid State, the V200

Courtesy Zombie\_X <http://www.head-fi.org/products/vioelectric-hpa-v200/reviews/6436>

**Pros:** Warm, lush, inviting sound

**Cons:** some detail smearing, soundstage compression, and treble roll off



Written by Zombie\_X  
March 9th, 2012

## PRE-REVIEW STATEMENT:

Hi all, Zombie-X here again with another review for the good boys and girls of Head-Fi.org. Up today I have the Vioelectric HPA V200, which is developed and manufactured by Lake-People for their subdivision named "Vioelectric". I have had ample time to listen and compare this amp with my other amps and it's quite a nice amp, but how does it compare to other amps in the price range?

I would love to give a big thanks to both Robert at Aphrodite Cu29 for supplying me with the Vioelectric V200 as well as information and guidance. Robert is quite a nice guy and was ready to send the amps for review, what a guy!

During this review I will be comparing to my other amps: Audio-GD ROC and SPL Auditor. Each amp will be compared quite extensively and will be tested with a wide variety of headphones. The Audio-GD ROC and SPL Auditor will utilize the XLR output from my Vioelectric DAC V800.

## ABOUT VIOELECTRIC:

Who is Vioelectric? Vioelectric is a subdivision of Lake People GmbH from Germany. The parent company, Lake People, manufactures a wide variety of electronics such as other DAC's and headphone amps for studio use or for sound engineers. They aim to produce very accurate equipment and everything is built very sturdy, just like all German engineering. All their gear is incredibly rugged and sturdy.

Even though the Vioelectric line is aimed at consumers, the performance and behavior of the gear is still very studio quality. Clearly their studio roots couldn't be lost but is that good or bad? From what I have heard in this DAC this is still very much a studio unit and is not far off from their professional offerings. Well you're going to find out soon enough on how it actually sounds and compares. Brace yourself!!

The following text is quoted directly from their website:

Quote:

Established in 1986, we have since become your partner for professional audio electronics. Following our motto %ools - not toys+, we achieved highest reputation during the past years amongst our customers. These are private studios, broadcasters and TV companies. Also airports, congress and exhibition centres count on the reliability of our products made in Germany. This all began under the roof of Rosgartenstrasse 13 in the city of Konstanz. Here, three young guys started with the development and manufacture of limiters and noise gates but not too success-fully ð The commercial survival on a very low level was made possible by the production of headphone amplifiers. From 1989 on, the production range was extended to level matching and balancing amplifiers such successfully, that it came essential to move to larger premises.

Since 1991, the new address read: Haidelmoosweg 52. Due to the developement of the first german 20-bit A/D and D/A converters in the beginning nineties, the name Lake People re-sounded throughout the land. Suddenly, the company was regarded as a high-tech brand, with a highly positive effect on its public reputation. The growing know-how led to many new products in the analog and digital domain during the following years. Although some pro-jects turned out to be flops, most devices met the customers' re-quirements, with the effect of continuous growth of the company. By the end of the nineties, the number of employees had in-creased to ten, and the 140 m² of Haidelmoosweg 52 went cramping. Again, a move to new premises came necessary. As it was obvious that rental facilities would not meet the demands, we decided to put up our own building. The company site was constructed in 2000 in a new industrial park in Konstanz, Turmstrasse 7a, just a hundred metres from the lake. Also in 2000, Lake People was transformed into a Ltd. company.

During 2004, nearly the entire production range underwent re-engineering. This concerned both circuitry as well as mechanical design. At the same time, new digital converters were - now being the 4th generation. Another ambitious unit is our innovative digital peak meter, with its new and sophisticated detail solutions. A very speciality of Lake People is the development and modification of audio processing units according to customer specifications.

## GEAR USED:

### AMPS:

- SPL Auditor
- Audio-GD Roc
- Woo Audio WA3+ (Not Used)
- Musical Fidelity X-CANV8P (Not Used)
- Vioelectric HPA V200
- Vioelectric HPA V181 (Not Used)

### DAC:

- Vioelectric DAC V800

### HEADPHONES:

- Beyerdynamic T1
- Sennheiser HD600
- AKG K400
- AKG K501
- Shure SRH-440
- KRK KNS-8400

## PRODUCT FEATURES:

|                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Unbalanced Inputs               | 2                   |
| Balanced Inputs                 | (2)                 |
| Impedance                       | 10 kOhms            |
| Unbalanced Outputs              | (2)                 |
| Balanced Outputs                | 0                   |
| Number of Channels              | 2                   |
| Nominal Input Level             | +8 dBu              |
| Amplifier Gain                  | 8 dB                |
| ... with Pre-Gain               | -4/+2/+8/+14/+20 dB |
| Frequency Range (-0,5 dB)       | 5 Hz - 60 kHz       |
| Damping Factor (in 50 Ohm Load) | 800                 |
| Dynamic Range (A-wtd)           | 128 dB              |
| Noise (A-wtd)                   | -100 dB             |
| THD+N @ 10V / 100 Ohms (1W)     | -110 dB             |
| THD+N @ 4V / 32 Ohms (0,5W)     | -103 dB             |
| Crosstalk @ 1 kHz               | -110 dB             |
| Crosstalk @ 15 kHz              | -95 dB              |
| Output Voltage in 600 Ohms      | 18,5 V              |
| Output Power in 600 Ohms        | 570 mW              |
| Output Voltage in 100 Ohms      | 14,8 V              |
| Output Power in 100 Ohms        | 2200 mW             |
| Output Voltage in 50 Ohms       | 11,6 V              |
| Output Power in 50 Ohms         | 2700 mW             |
| Output Voltage in 32 Ohms       | 8,0 Veff            |
| Output Power in 32 Ohms         | 2000 mW             |
| Output Voltage in 16 Ohms       | 4 Veff              |
| Output Power in 16 Ohms         | 1000 mW             |
| Number of Outputs               | 2                   |
| Power Supply                    | 230 / 115 V         |
| Power Consumption               | 10 VA               |
| Dimensions (WxHxD) mm           | 170x49x225          |

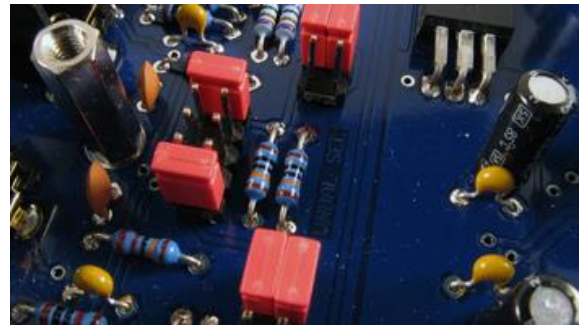
## OBSERVATIONS:

This amp, like the DAC V800, is built like a tank! The housing is made from machined aluminum is coated with a material called Nextel. The inside of the amp has machined ridges on the underside of the top part of the case. The amp is small, compact, but quite hefty for it's size. All the jacks as high quality parts from Neutrik. The headphone jacks are nice and snug which means you get good contact. The RCA I/O sockets are a tad bigger than normal RCA's and they in turn give you a tighter fit. This can be god or bad, and in my case I find the RCA I/O sockets somewhat iffy. With certain cables you will get distorted sound, like there is a short in the cable.

This is the newest revision of the amp, which now includes a stepped potentiometer. This type of POT give the most accurate channel balance next to digital, but it does have drawbacks. The main drawback is that when using IEM's, one click may be too quite and the next click will be too loud. That's where the pre-gain setting comes in and I recommend lowering the gain by -6db or -12db for IEM's and lower sensitivity headphones. The gain dip switches are located on the back of the unit and adjust the volume by: -12db, -6db, +6db, +12db. The RCA cinch socket can be configured as input or output via internal jumpers located towards where the USB DAC board would connect to the main board.

The insides of the amp are quite nice and the amp has a hearty build indeed. You will find capacitors, resistors, OP amps, dip switches, jumpers all throughout the inside of this little guy! From the inside of the amp you can adjust various settings such as the RCA I/O, cut-off, and ground lift. The dip switches on the back of the amp are nice as they adjust the internal gain of the amp. Be sure the power is off before touching them though, as gear generally does not like sudden changes in voltage.





## PERFORMANCE:

The V200 is a high powered headphone amplifier and its sonic signature is warm, smooth, and powerful. Maybe I should elaborate more. What I mean is the sound is very tube like with the warmth and smoothness to it, but has more pronounced bass that makes it sound "more in charge" or powerful. I have yet to experience this type of signature in a solid state headphone amp. The amp is still quite detailed but more forgiving of lower quality sources. I think it's quite a achievement in that respect, but because of this smoothness and warmth, some details are smeared over and the soundstage is smaller than it should be. When I used my T1 with the amp, initially with the first unit I had, the sound was distorted and there was a lot of clipping. So the review was shelved. Now I have a properly working unit and here's the low down.

The amp alone is very beefy and can drive everything I threw at it without a hitch. Even the difficult K400 was no problem for it at all. I don't have any orthodynamic models on hand to try out but the specs alone say it should be able to drive most of the HiFiMan ortho's without and fuss. It can put out nearly 3W into a 50Ohm load!

**Thanks to Fried, Lake-People CEO, I have been informed that the output impedance is actually 0,0625Ohms. It seems I misread the technical data and gave some wrong info. I'd like to apologize for any confusion this may have caused. As such I will give impressions of some of my low impedance headphones from this amp. Hopefully this may sway people away from my initial findings.**

- With the Beyerdynamic T1's I find this amp to mate extremely well with them. It's has the power to drive them with complete authority and ease. So don't worry about pairing the T1 with the amp. The warm and smooth sound complements the T1's warmish/neutral tone quite well. The T1's become more intimate and intoxicating. Treble is slightly rolled and smoothed out thus giving the T1's a more mid-centric sound. The added bass is really nice as well and gives the T1 more "oomph". The bass is very well controlled and tight. The soundstage however sounds more confined.
- The Sennheiser HD600's (300Ohms) are already quite warm and forgiving. The amp intensifies this. The HD600's treble is further smoothed out and the mids gain a nice full body feel to them. The bass is more powerful, and as with the T1, is very well controlled. The treble detail is a bit masked by the warmth of the amp, though it's not that bad. The amp is able to drive the HD600 perfectly and it sound superb. The soundstage issues are not as noticeable as with the T1 but they are still there.
- The AKG K501 (120Ohms) on this bad boy sounds glorious! If you thought the K501's mids were lifelike before, then you will bet a nice surprise from this amp. The mids take on an ethereal quality to them. They are fuller and even more realistic sounding. The treble does not to be subdued or rolled off like what I heard with the previous headphones, it's smoother sounding for sure. The bass fills in nicely and makes this headphone sound even more

balanced and I do appreciate the extra bass, and it's not distorted or bloated. You can notice that the soundstage is more constricted as it's like going from a concert hall to a movie theater.

- The AKG K400 (120Ohms) benefits nicely from the amp. It already had a sound signature that I would call "right" but the amp intensifies it. More bass, smoother treble, more liquid mids. Also the V200 has no trouble driving the K400 at all. The midrange is more liquid and smooth and even more engaging. The treble is slightly rolled but gives way to a more analog type presentation. The bass is still tight and controlled, just there is more of it now. I have not heard one bit of clipping or distortion from the amp at all. The soundstage suffers bit and sounds more congested but nothing that is too bad.
- The KRK KNS-8400 (38Ohms) benefited the most of the other headphones. They are quite lean sounding to begin with and this amps makes them sound a lot fuller. The mids on the stock model were somewhat thin sounding with elevated treble and somewhat distant bass. I'm glad to say that the bass is upfront, the mids are filled in, and the treble is toned down a notch. Really nice! These 8400's seemed harder to drive than the SRH-440. I had to turn the volume up to double of the SRH-440 so that their levels matched. But the amp still drives them fine. I should note that the bass improved a lot. It become much tighter and gained more punch... oh wait a sec..
- Lets see, the Shure SRH-440 (38Ohms) sounded pretty nice from the amp but it wasn't as big of a change as with the others. I could definitely hear more bass and smoother highs and more mids, but it was not a huge improvement. The bass was more prominent but not bloated or mushy. The midrange was the best improvement as they a bit thin in the mids before and now they are warm. The 440's are already very easy to amp so they did not need much power. They just didn't improve as much with amping as I expected. I suspect that they are far to easy to drive and don't scale that well.
- Next up is the Sennheiser CX500 (16Ohms) does not require that much power. The sound by itself is a bit muddy with too much bass and rolled highs with a somewhat iffy sounding midrange. The V200 adds an unnecessary amount of bass and the highs can be overly smoothed out a bit. The bass becomes quite bloated and the highs are muffled sounding, like you are listening to a HD650. The midrange is quite better than what it was when unamped. Their soundstage is further narrowed . This pairing is not good at all IMO. I don't know what the headphone could sound good on it's own but worse with the amp. I'd say it's just not synergizing with it.
- I have the Shure SE215-K here. This headphone has improved quite a bit with my other amps, especially on my ROC and X-CANV8P. It seems they need s a lot of current to have their potential unlocked. With the V200 they become a lot more intimate and resolving, but also have a more gripping and powerful sound. I always thought they were bassy, but the V200 brings them into the realm of bass heavy. The bass gets more body but remains tight and punchy with good extension and texture. I have yet to hear it loose control and get bloated. The headphones didn't have much soundstage and the amp further narrows it. I think it's similar to a Grado's soundstage now, but a tad larger.

## TREBLE:

The treble on this amp is very similar tot hat of tube amps. It's smooth, non fatiguing, and slightly rolled off. The treble on this amp is quite extended but does roll off a tad. Because of the roll off and smoothness, some details of the treble are obscured or blurred. It's still really good treble, but of a

different flavor. It's also not as airy as the Auditor or ROC. The highs aren't blurred at all and are still present, but slightly softer.

### **MIDRANGE:**

The mids are this amps specialty. They are lush and engaging without being shouty or congested. Yet again they remind me of tubes and are rich and detailed. Some details are more subdued in the mids, perhaps from the treble being slightly soft? In any case they do add new life to certain music. Guitars and vocals are more life like than ever before. Vocals sound more natural and pleasing while guitars are smoother and less grating on ones ears. Take a listen to *Alice in Chains: MTV Unplugged* and you'll get where I'm coming from ;)

### **BASS:**

Bass is presented in a way that it's fuller and has more impact but not bloated or mushy. It's tight, controlled, and fast. It reaches deep and grips you. It's almost visceral in nature and adds more life to the mix. Bass details aren't covered by the rest of the sound not does the bass "bleed" into the midrange at all. It's separated and exclaims 'Here I am!'. Bass guitar's have more heft and weight to them. The whole sound gains this weight to it that can be intoxicating, to me it is at least.

### **SOUNDSTAGE:**

Here's is the amps weakness. It sounds compressed on some material or headphones. On the T1's it did sound compressed and was more intimate. Imaging was slightly off because of this and picking spots in the music can be hard on some headphones. I was initially disappointed by this, but grew to enjoy the smaller stage. It brought everything into focus and more upfront

## **COMPARISONS:**

### **VS. SPL AUDITOR:**

These amps sound vastly different from one another. The SPL being dead neutral with perhaps a tiny touch of warmth, and the Vioelectric being very warm and smooth. The V200 can sound a little smeared when you do a direct comparison between the two amps. The V200 has rolled treble which makes it sound softer or even ill defined in comparison, but it's not downright dull. The V200 has plenty of treble, just that the upper registers are rolled off.

The mids of both amps are very different as well. The V200 being lush and the Auditor being neutral. The V200 has a more pleasing coloration in the midband than it's neutral brother that can make some music sound boring. I find the Auditor to have more natural mids as they are not boosted. Both are equally detailed and engaging when it comes to guitars.

The bass on both of them are similar in regards to how far it extends and the only major difference is that the V200 has more bass body and impact. This does not negatively effect the bass at all though as it's not bloated or distorted. Still in line with the Auditor I would say. The Auditor also has more control over the bass and is tighter.

## **VS. AUDIO-GD ROC:**

Yet again they sound different, this time the ROC is warmer. The ROC is warmer than the SPL Auditor and is smoother in its presentation. The treble is not rolled at all though. It's still extends high up there and is very detailed. It just sounds more fluid or liquid than you would expect. The V200's treble is fluid as well and just seems to flow out without being harsh or strident. As stated earlier it is slightly rolled off and the treble can suffer from this. The highest details in the treble are present on the ROC, but not the V200.

The midrange of the ROC is not as detailed but also can sound more organic. The V200 in comparison has a very warm midrange that is organic, but not in the way the ROC portrays it. The ROC has more texture to the midrange, but not more detailed. The V200 is still a lot more detailed in its midrange than the ROC is and is more pleasing. There is just something about the ROC's midrange...

The bass on the is quite tight and I'd have to give the nudge to the V200. It reaches deeper and has more control over the bass. The bass is also more textured on the V200. The ROC's bass is still very good but lacks some texture and control. I guess you can say it sounds a tad loose in direct comparison.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Having this amp for some time and using it with a large variety of headphones, I have to tip my hat to Vioelectric. They packed a lot of power and finesse in this amp. It can drive everything I throw at it easily. The sonics are nice and warm, great for any tube lover, especially if one does not want to deal with tubes but loves their sound. Probably the warmest solid state amp I have ever heard and I think you'd be hard pressed to find another solid state amp with this signature again. The main reason the review is 4 stars is due to how the treble is presented and how it kills some details, and how the soundstage is presented. If those issues were not there then the amp would easily get a 5 star rating from me.

This amp can drive absolutely anything short of the K1000 and some orthos.