

Vioelectric V200: The German Solid State

Courtesy Headfonia <http://www.headfonia.com/vioelectric-v200-the-german-solid-state>



Time sure does flyō I reviewed the V100 in November of last year and I absolutely loved it. The V200's little brother turned out to be an awesome amp and that made lots of readers wonder how Vioelectric's top of the line product would perform and so I promised to add a comparison between both amps. In the meantime 7 months and a couple seasons have passed before we got a hold of the V200. Don't forget to go read [the V100 review](#) first to get the general picture of Vioelectric.

All the Vioelectric amps are still made by hand in Germany and with a typical German quality control. Combined with the fact that Vioelectric (being a smaller company) amongst other reasons can't afford to buy huge stocks of components makes it tough for them to keep up with the increasing demand of V200s from all over the world. Orthodynamic headphones have been getting more popular lately and with the release of the

Hifiman HE-400 at \$399, the orthodynamic technology suddenly was available for a much bigger crowd. The HE-400 doesn't really need amp like the Vioelectric to shine but my point is it seems the popularity of the Vioelectric lineup follows the same increasing popularity of the orthodynamics (and of course quality products make a name for themselves).

Anyway, I didn't want to insist too much so I just waited till when Vioelectric had a unit available for us, in return I could keep the V100 till the V200 would arrive and in that time the V100 has been the amp I have been using most for my listening sessions. So anyway, apologies if it took a long time to get this review online (especially to Spencer who has been dying to read it!)

Differences between the V100 and the V200

Like the V100, the Vioelectric V200 also is an A/B Class amplifier with the exact same build quality and looks. (V100 weighs 1.7kg & V200 weighs 1.8kg, both measure W 170 x H 49 x D226 mm). It has the same classy feet and identical double Neutrik plugs in front. If it wasn't for the difference in the volume pot, which I will explain right below this paragraph, and the V100/V200 logo I wouldn't be able to tell them apart. On the back, again the same balanced- and unbalanced inputs and pre gain jumpers.

A difference to the older units is the use of a new volume control since November 2011. The older versions used a normal ALPS RK27 volume pot while the new amplifiers come with a special made ALPS pot, slightly bigger and with a less slick grip, which shows best in the pictures (see bottom of article). This is what Vioelectric said about the volume control: *The volume control was changed to a 41 detent from Alps which is only made on demand. We like the detent feeling whilst turning because it has something to do with precision and eases repositioning to a specific level. Also the 41 detent*

matches the layout on the frontpanel. Every two steps a mark is hit. Please note that this is NOT a stepped volume control but still analog with infinite resolution. The new knob is an original Vioelectric design and manufactured only for us. It is solid aluminium as before but slightly bigger (25 to 23,5 mm) and higher (20 to 16 mm) thus using more material. It is glas blasted and the anodising quality is much better as it was before+

In the beginning I preferred the ~~non-stepped~~ version of the V100 in my possession, because the dial was so smooth and easy to turn but now that I've been using the updated, ~~stepped~~ volume control for several weeks I have to say I find it even easier to use, I guess I've just become a fan of this special made pot. Don't get me wrong because the popular volume pot Vioelectric used before, the ALPS RK27, is excellent too. (Vioelectric also confirmed other parts might change during time, to improve quality or because of stock related & availability reasons)

On the inside you get ~~better~~ components and 8 transistors per channel instead of 4 like with the V100. Two small signal BC546/BC556 and the power transistors 2SA1606/2SC4159, all driven by a non-inverting NE5534 op-amp. Like in our version of the V100 we did not ask for the supplementary USB DAC. As the overview in the picture gallery shows, the V200 has more power as the V100 except at 16 and 600Ohm. At 32 and 500Ohm, the V200 delivers respectively 0.3 and 0.5W more as the V100 does. The V100 was already quite powerful but the V200 has all the power you need (I didn't try with a HE-6 but from what I read they can do the job).

The increase in power really is audible with the LCD-2, the HE-500 and even the easy to drive HE-400 (which I like more and more with the V200!). The amp lifts them all up to an even higher level as with the V100. In contradiction to the V100 I never used the first +6db gain setting on the V200, meaning you get 8db gain (2.5 factor) standard and a very big range on the volume control. (Personally I never went past 12 o'clock).

Sound Impressions

When I first connected the V200 straight out of the box I did not like it as much as the V100, it just didn't sound as good and the bass was rather weak. I then stopped listening and let the amp burn in for 15-20 hours and in that time it changed quite a lot (or did my mind?). When I came back to the V200 the amp had opened up and the sound was simply awesome. While the sound signature is comparable to the V100 there are some significant differences. The V100 is the more neutral sounding amplifier of the two, that's the biggest difference for me between the two. Detail retrieval on the V100 is already very good but the V200 does it even better. It is more precise and very dynamic, powerful sounding with good body and with great tonal balance. It is even more balanced and its positioning is incredible. On top of that the sound is never harsh and is always smooth and musical.

The V200 has deeper bass extension and the bass overall is a bit tighter and punchier as with the V100, adding a little bit more detail too. The lower tones are great: the black background is awesome. When listening to Leonard Cohen you can hear the timbre and the tremble in his voice when he begins to talk/sing. I have had a lot of goose bump moments with the V200 listening to a whole lot of artists.

The mid section is smooth, warm and laid back but not overly warm, it's a very balanced amp but it isn't as neutral sounding as the V100 and does make you think of the tube sound even more, of course that depends on your definition of neutral. The treble on the V200 like everything else is smooth too, it's never harsh and at the same time it is slightly rolled off. Its bass is further extended as the treble, something I can appreciate.

Overall, in conclusion, the amplifier to my ears isn't the most neutral sounding one on the planet, it is more on the warmer side of the spectrum and it really does sound tube like, more so as the V100

does. Soundstage wise the V200, like its little brother, isn't the widest and it is clear that the focus wasn't on this during development. Don't get me wrong, soundstage really is good enough and the depth of it does make up for it. In exchange you get this wonderful package that will make you enjoy your music like never before.

Headphone Pairings

The Hifiman HE-500, which I said to be good but not great with the V100 is simply awesome with the V200. As we know they are a little bit more difficult to drive as the Audez® ortho and I think it's the first time I really got the full potential out of them, thanks to the extra power. The LCD-2 which already was incredible with the V100 is even better with the V200, the bass is very present, mids are the best and like the HE-500 I have never heard them this good before. It's no wonder that everyone on the World Wide Web is raving about this combination. As I mentioned in the first Vioelectric review, the amplifier had no problem at all with any of the headphones used. The Sennheiser HD650 sounds very good with this amp although I still prefer it with a real tube amp like the Crack or the LaFigaro 339.

The V200 is the better version of the V100, and that one already was excellent. This one adds power, bass and overall detail and smoothness, but at the same time making it a little less neutral as the V100. I love the Vioelectric sound and they're both very good amps and I could perfectly live with any of these two as my solid state amp. If I could choose and wasn't on a budget I would go for the V200 for sure, it just is the best of both. If you want to get the best out of your hard to drive headphones, the Vioelectric models should definitely be on your short list, they are worth every single bit. The V200 is available from Vioelectric.de directly or from one of their distributors. Official price is " 850 for Europeans and " 714.29 worldwide (no VAT). Vioelectric is also working on a balanced headphone out unit

Gear used for review:

V100, V200, 339, HE-400, HE-500, LCD-2, HD650, T70, NFB-3, E10, Norse cables