

# Ice test

THE USE OF ONE AMP IS CALLED A SINGLE-FOOTPRINT SOLUTION. RAYNER RAIDS THE WORLD OF MULTI-

For many buyers, the concept of needing something extra to go with their speakers and the bit that goes in the dashboard is a pain in the arse. Even if they realise that, for the sheer power and control that they really desire, an amplifier will be vital, they may well not want to turn their car into the likes of the Alpine X-type, with a whole boot dominated by amps and whatnots, and the accompanying mass of wiring.

That said, there is no reason why they shouldn't want just one amp... all be it a very powerful one.

Here we take a look at the whole range, from affordable, to highly desirable (but pricey). All are big and bad.

This is our search for the Big Foot. The single-footprint solution. The amp that can do both music and bass alike.

I hear that one of the amps in this group has just been ordered on behalf of a household-name pop star for fitting into their luxury ride... wonder if they choose well?

## HOW WE TESTED 'EM

Ideally, each should have been fitted to standard system and driven for a week to properly audition for set-up ease, sound and so forth. All I could do in the time was to hook up a pair of the reference Focal 6x9s across one pair of channels, cross out some 80-Hz and down for them, and then feed the bass channel into the sealed Icetriconic Wood dept 12-inch enclosure, housing the Kicker Comp VR subwoofer - cheap but well up to the task of helping tell these apart. Thus, full suck on the power supplies of each amplifier was not possible. However, sound quality could be thought about, as could the overall desirability or wow factor of the product. Features counted for their own score, as did the value represented by the package as a whole, before final totting-up.

## DLS A5 THE-BIG-THREE - £650 MILLENNIUM AUDIO - 020 8866 6486

The subwoofer crossover on here can be set between 40-Hz and 90-Hz, and the bass channel's power output can reach a massive 700-watts if loaded up right.

The high-pass filter goes between 50-Hz and 150-Hz.

The whole feel and flavour of this amp is classy. It looks lovely, is built like weapons and sounds as sweet as a nut.

Simple, elegant and gorgeous, but less cash than some high end products.

A superb piece of audio design.



**FATMAN FACTS:** 6/12-dB per octave crossovers; 25-Hz subsonic filter; >100-dB signal-to-noise ratio. 50-watts x2 + 300-watts @ 4-ohm; 90-A fuse; 410(w)x73(h)x240(d)mm; 5.9-Kg.

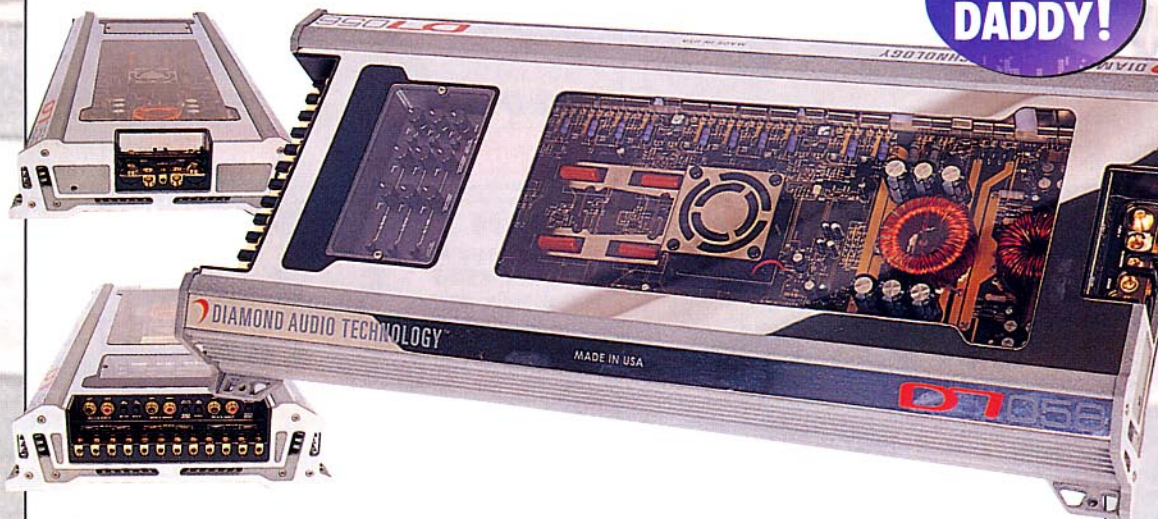
**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **10** Desirability: **9** Features: **7** Value: **9** Total: **35**

## DIAMOND AUDIO D7056 - £1,750 MILLENNIUM AUDIO - 020 8866 6486

A big power supply means the watts double into 2-ohms. There are three sets of fully independent crossovers on the top of what is possibly the most attractive amplifier I've seen, ever.

The simple equal six-channel array may seem dated versus the DLS, but this is wickedly high-end and fabulously versatile due to this classic design.

See-through to show the pricey parts and fatty-gutted toroid... it's the Daddy.



**FATMAN FACTS:** 18-dB per octave crossovers; 102-dB signal-to-noise ratio; Fan cooled. 50-watts x6 @ 4-ohm; 100-A fuse; 569(w)x75(h)x312(d)mm; 10-Kg.

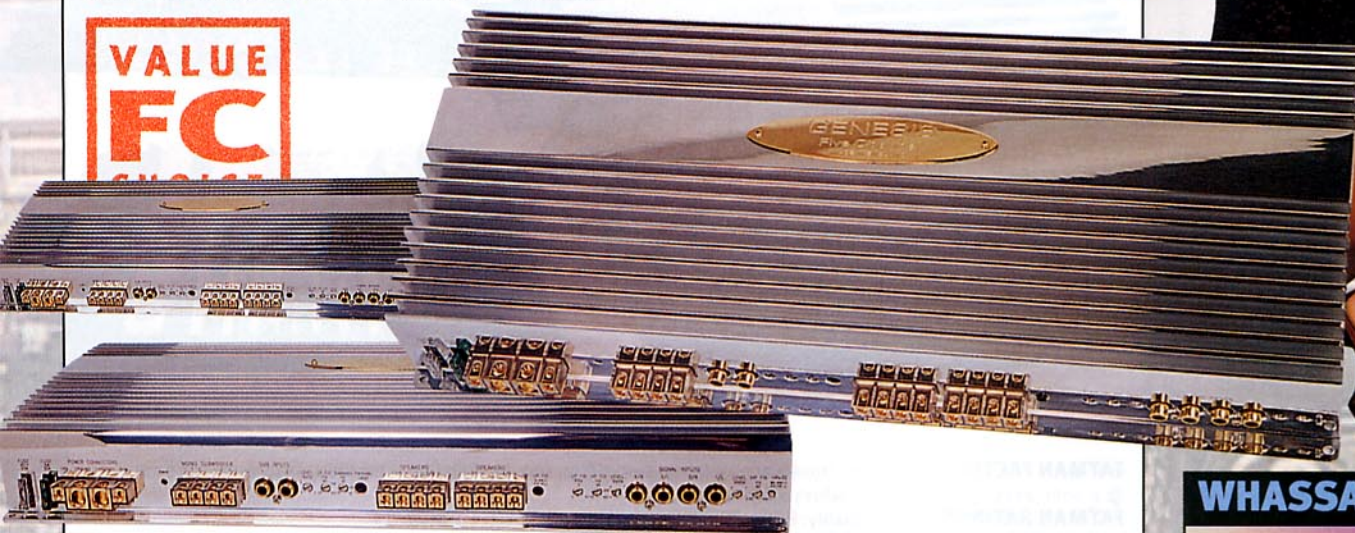
**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **10** Desirability: **10** Features: **9** Value: **7** Total: **36**

## CHANNEL AMPS IN SEARCH OF THE ELUSIVE SASQUATCH

### GENESIS FIVE CHANNEL - £800 GENESIS 01702 611 180

With two power supplies and a remote subwoofer level-control knob facility, this is a multi-award-winning amp. It's very pretty indeed, although, on one side the control holes had scooped out sides on one edge, showing the direction the polisher ran and some of the controls were sunk a bit deep. The crossovers are fixed at 80-Hz, and the sound is known to be as good as the best. A handsome superstar performer and worthy single system.

**VALUE  
FC**



**FATMAN FACTS:** 12-dB/oct crossovers; 12-40-Hz adj. subsonic filter; 105-dB signal-to-noise ratio. 55x4 + 155-watts @ 4-ohm; 25-A+30-A fuse; 450(w)x62(h)x210(d)mm; 5-Kg.

**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **10** Desirability: **10** Features: **7** Value: **8** Total: **35**

### ALPINE MRV-F409 - £600 ALPINE - 01908 611556

The lovely top-plate housing crossover sweeps from 50-Hz to 8-kHz on this special edition V12 amplifier - made to drive the very posh F#1 Status speakers.

You get clear silicone rubber bands to insulate the terminals with once installed. The copper base hides a quality set of innards - this may be the best amp Alpine has ever made.

Not quite as covetable as the mad-end products, but you will get respect for your choice if you buy one. Sheer class.



**FATMAN FACTS:** 12-dB per octave crossovers; 100-dB signal-to-noise ratio; RAC preout. 40-watts x4 @ 4-ohm; 40-A fuse; 330(w)x60(h)x280(d)mm; 5.3-Kg.

**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **10** Desirability: **8** Features: **6** Value: **9** Total: **33**



## WHASSAT?

### RMS POWER:

Real, or continuous wattage. Either handling or output. In this case it's amps, so it's output.

### PEAK POWER:

Power at a brief instant, with the wind behind it. Always a massive number and reads well.

### ACTIVE CROSSOVER:

A device in the amp to split the tones up - highs to the tweeter channel, bass to the big one.

### SIGNAL TO NOISE RATIO:

How Hi the Fi? For an amp 90-dB is a minimum, any less will sound hissy. 110-dB is class.

### NZ & KHZ OR HERTZ AND KILOHERTZ:

Cycles per second is Hertz. A speaker wobbling up and down 40x a second is doing 40-Hz. A kilo of anything (is twenty years - all) is about a thousand. 1-kHz is a 'peeeeeeee' sound.

### TOROID:

Literally 'doughnut shaped' this is the ferrite core that wire is wound around as part of the power supply. A fat one is best.

### BUTTERWORTH:

A way of designing a crossover slope, named after the geezer wot dun it first.

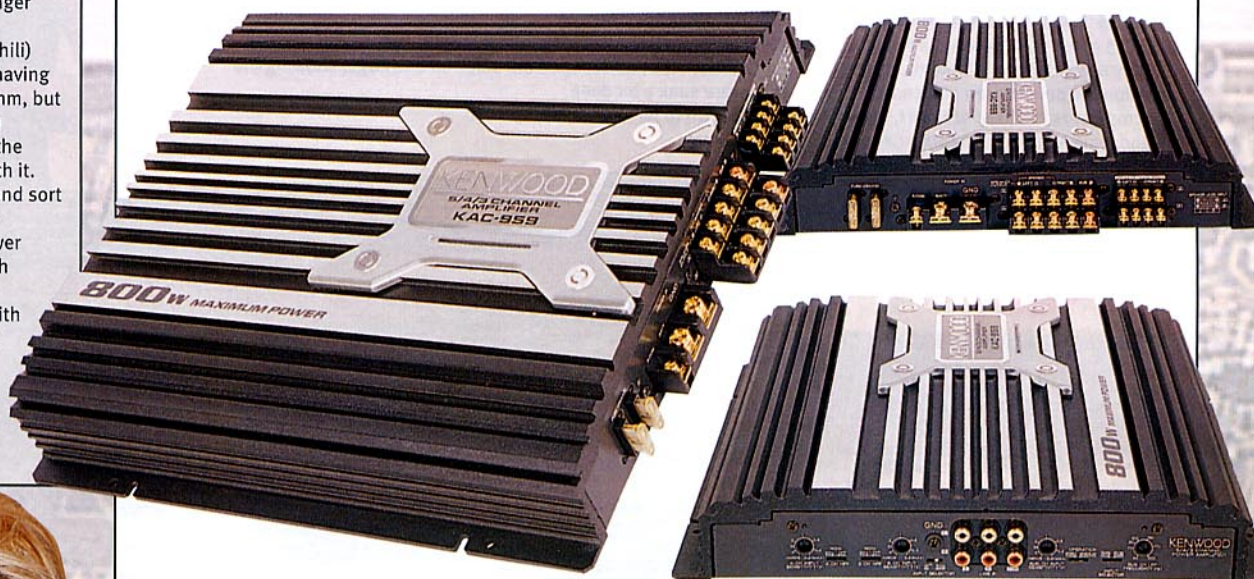


**SOME WORDS ON IMPEDANCE AND POWER SUPPLIES**

Amplifiers, like cars, have engines. This is their power supply or that bit of the innards that turns the battery volts into stuff the amp's watt-whanger thingies (that is power transistors in Electro-Swahili) can use. It's all very well having an amplifier that'll do 1-ohm, but unless the thing has been designed to do this from the ground up, it's rarely worth it. The sound gets strained and sort of nose-against-the-glass snubbed-off. Look for power ratings that really rise with impedance drop and generally use your amp with some headroom left over, rather than balls it out. It'll sound better and impress you far more on peaky boom-booms.

**KENWOOD KAC-959 - £400 KENWOOD - 01923 816444**

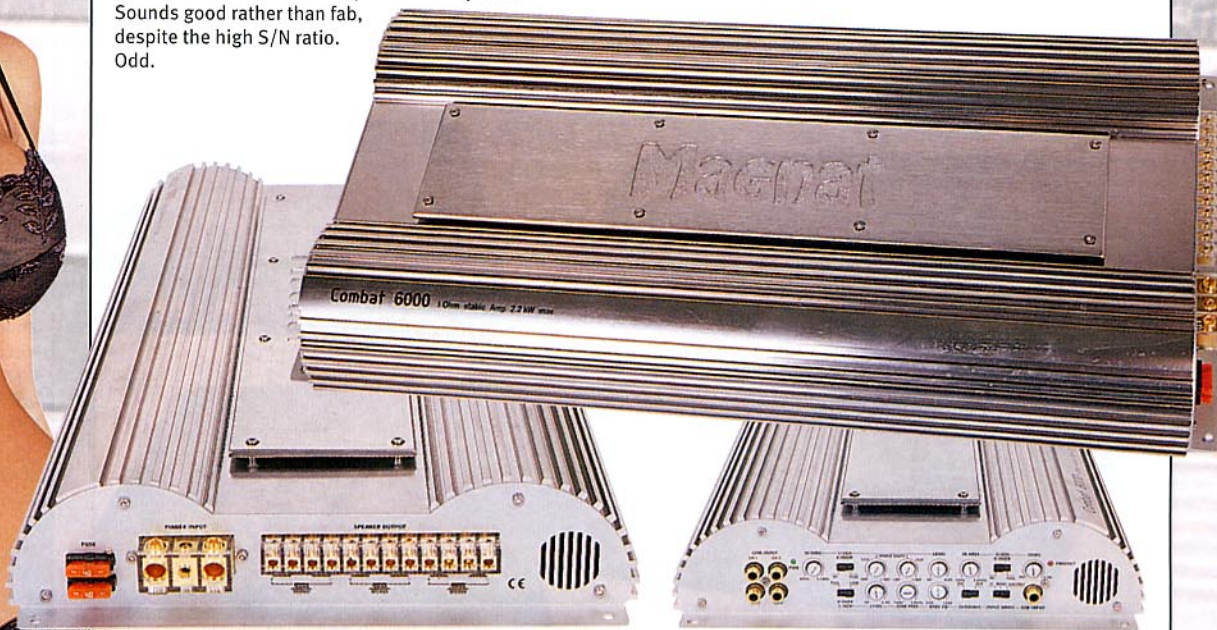
This MOSFET driven puppy has connectors for speaker level inputs, ideal for those wanting to graft into a regular car system, yet it is no toy amp. It has a separate power supply for the 4-ch section and the single 120-watt bass channel. The crossovers are primitive, in that they are simple 80-Hz/150-Hz switches on the four channels, albeit with a knob for 50-200-Hz on the bass end. A bit plain vanilla next to some here, but the best value in the group.



**FATMAN FACTS:** 12/18-dB/Oct crossovers; 15-Hz subsonic filter; 100-dB signal-to-noise ratio. 4x40-watts +120-watts @ 4-ohm; 2x25-A fuse; 290(w)x56(h)x320(d)mm; 5.2-Kg.  
**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **8** Desirability: **7** Features: **6** Value: **10** Total: **31**

**MAGNAT COMBAT 6000 - £500 FSM - 023 9269 0999**

A 2-ohm load doubles the output power and the bass channels will double again into 1-ohm. It has high-pass filters and a 0-12-dB bass boost (@40-Hz) as well as phase control on channels 1-4 for fine-tuning. This could be hard to set-up and looks a bit cheap and brushed, but represents great value for the dude needing some real control over all the different parts of the system. Sounds good rather than fab, despite the high S/N ratio. Odd.



**FATMAN FACTS:** 18/24-dB per octave crossovers; 0-12-dB boost @ 42-Hz; >106-dB signal-to-noise ratio. 2x80-watts + 4x60-watts @ 4-ohm; 2x40A fuse; 570(w)x65(h)x288(d)mm; 8.35-Kg.  
**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **8** Desirability: **8** Features: **9** Value: **9** Total: **34**



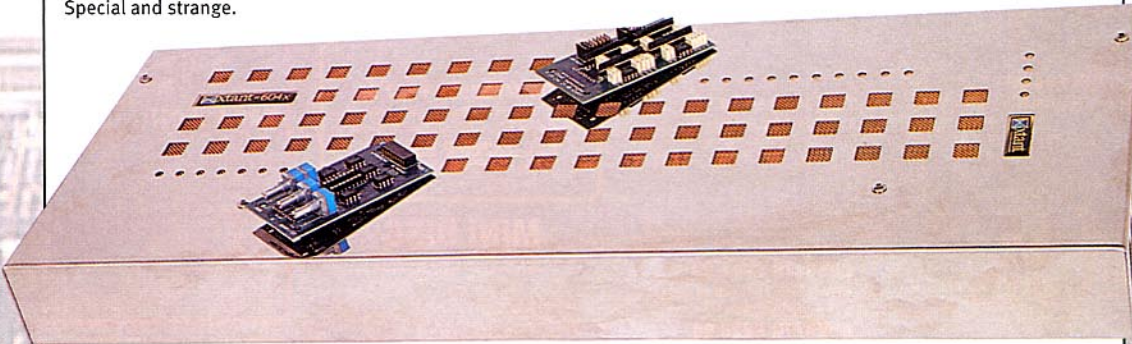
**XTANT 604X (WITH PQM-1/£130 & CM-24X/£120) - £1,100 PATH GROUP - 01844 219000**

The power per channel doubles into 2-ohms, but it doesn't want to see any lesser loads.

This is a new concept in amplifiers. It has a world of accessory ports and system adjustable circuitry – these should be set prior to putting the lid on... and the protective plastic should come off last.

Ours came with an extra £250 worth of 1-band parametric equaliser and a card to raise the crossover slope from 12-dB (built-in) to 24-dB.

Special and strange.



**FATMAN FACTS:** 12/24-dB per octave crossovers; 100-dB signal-to-noise ratio, line out/passive out. 75-watts x4 @ 4-ohm; 120-A fuse; 215(w)x54(h)x594(d)mm; 7-Kg.

**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **10** Desirability: **8** Features: **9** Value: **7** Total: **34**

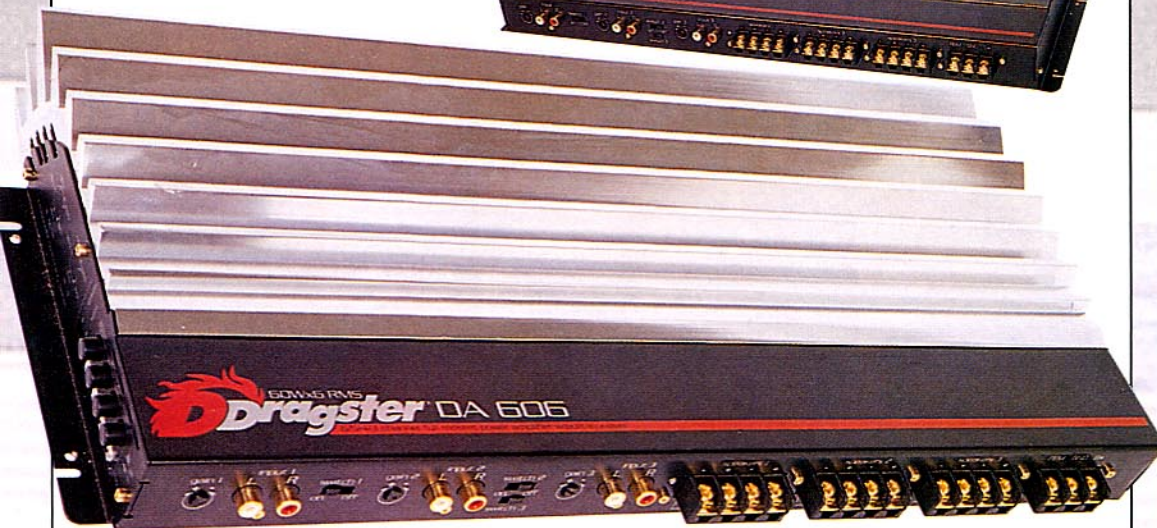
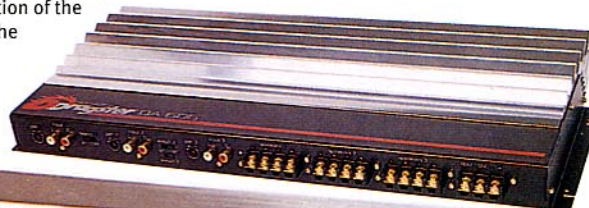
**DRAGSTER DA606 - £380 PATH GROUP - 01844 219000**

Giving a phat 105-watts x6 at 2-ohms, it does look like the way to use this amp.

A slabby item wearing a rakish heatsink like a frozen quiff, this had the lowest signal-to-noise ratio of any amp here... by at least 10-dB – so you'll hear a hiss at loud volumes in quiet parts.

All the controls are down one side with the exception of the crossovers, which are bloody hard to fathom for the average Joe. They perplexed me for a bit.

Very easy to buy.



**FATMAN FACTS:** 12/24-dB per octave crossovers; >90-dB signal-to-noise ratio. 60-watts x6 @ 4-ohm; 50-A fuse; 352(w)x55(h)x230(d)mm; 3.6-Kg.

**FATMAN RATINGS:** Sound Quality: **7** Desirability: **7** Features: **7** Value: **10** Total: **31**



**CONCLUSION**

In the old days, a four-channel amp was just an excuse to sell a bloke a bigger lump. Some six-channelers came with lots of stuff about how you could hook the thing up a bit clever, but very few had specialised bass end built electronics. Now, we can see that more amps than not in this group have specialised features, crossovers and, in some cases, even separate power supplies just to run the power-hungry bass end of the amplifier. Things have gotten way more serious and in no way is the single-footprint solution a poor-sod's option, as some here were animal bass makers – especially the Magnat and the DLS.

However, at the rear of the group, we find the Kenwood on 31 points, mostly because it lacks the complex sweepable crossovers of better-equipped amplifiers. It still sounded way better than the Dragster, also on 31, whose ballsy presentation had some hiss in the back of the box. That the Alpine came next on 33 is about some of the mad end competition. It remains the best amp Alpine have ever made. It's gorgeous. The Magnat and the Xtant did well at 34 points each as the Magnat is cheap, sounds good and bristles with stuff, while the Xtant is a real slice of audiophile out-there-nutter kit, with clever bits inside. The 35-point Genesis is a peach, albeit a slightly flawed example. The equal 35 point (and equal Fastcar Choice) DLS Big Three is surprisingly well priced for what's inside. I loved the components list you get with it, and it's as well built as anything I've seen. The Diamond Audio amplifier is fit for a rock star. Gorgeous and clever with purity of tone and largesse of power. A single footprint amp for the true cognoscenti.