

What's in a power supply? A user review of a Naim 555 PS DR with NDX 2 Streamer

Like most audiophiles, I understand the principle that every active audio device starts with a DC power supply. It's not much of a step to see that a better power supply might improve the sound quality; I guess the big question is by how much?

Naim have taken a particularly comprehensive approach to the 555 PS DR. As a literal answer to what's in it; Naim start with an outsize mains transformer, at a guess probably capable of delivering more than 25 or 30 times the power required by the NDX2! The 555 PS DR has multiple separate outputs each powered by a separate winding on the mains transformer. Rectification, large reservoir capacitors and voltage regulator circuits follow for each supply output. It is common in audio to use easy and convenient off the shelf regulator chips to deliver controlled voltages for DC supplies. Not Naim; they make their own "DR" discrete regulators using multiple individual transistors because, they explain, discrete transistors correct voltage variations much faster than any ready-made chip. This, almost extreme effort is all to maintain the tightest voltage control and ultimately smooth stable power source for each section of the streamer.

When you remove the 'pepper pot' plug from the rear panel of the NDX 2, 10 pins are revealed separating the internal sections of the streamer from the internal power supply. Information for the ND 555 suggests that with the 555 PS DR installed, the streamer logic, DSP, clock, DAC, analogue input stage and filter have separate supplies. Having the same core streaming architecture, it seems likely that NDX 2 is broadly similar. Completing the connection with the rather heavy duty (and costly) Burndy lead brings the highly regulated DC supplies to each of these sections in the NDX 2.

To my ears, it is remarkable is just how much effect the 555 PS DR has on the overall sound of the NDX 2 whilst still maintaining its essential character. Firstly, micro dynamics are markedly improved; the emphasis and decay at the beginning and end of an acoustic instrument or vocal sound stand out more vividly, creating greater definition around each note and enhancing the feeling of rhythm. Micro changes in level and timbre become more distinct giving life and energy to voices and acoustic sounds. Secondly, sound staging takes on another dimension gaining depth and a much more expansive musical space. This allows you to hear further into the music; solo sounds, especially voices, inhabit their own space which with improved dynamics greatly enhances the feeling of emotion in the performance. Finally, treble gets a bit more delicate and bass grows in stature gaining solidity, evenness and depth providing a more confident foundation to the performance.

Adding the 555 PS DR to the NDX2 has delivered a hugely more engaging performance. What was a greatly enjoyable musical image is now a more vital, emotional and lifelike multidimensional musical experience which draws you in and brings you closer to that illusive feeling of being there. And it's not just a few tracks; any well recorded music of whatever age seems to yield up the information to allow this magic to happen!

Of course, anything from Naim at this level comes at a significant cost. My friends at Signals HiFi as always allow you a generous home audition which is to be highly recommended. For anyone with an NDX 2 who is perhaps considering an ND 555 it just might be everything you want, or maybe just a very enjoyable step in the ND555 direction given that a 555 PS DR is a requirement for that streamer. KB 01/09/21