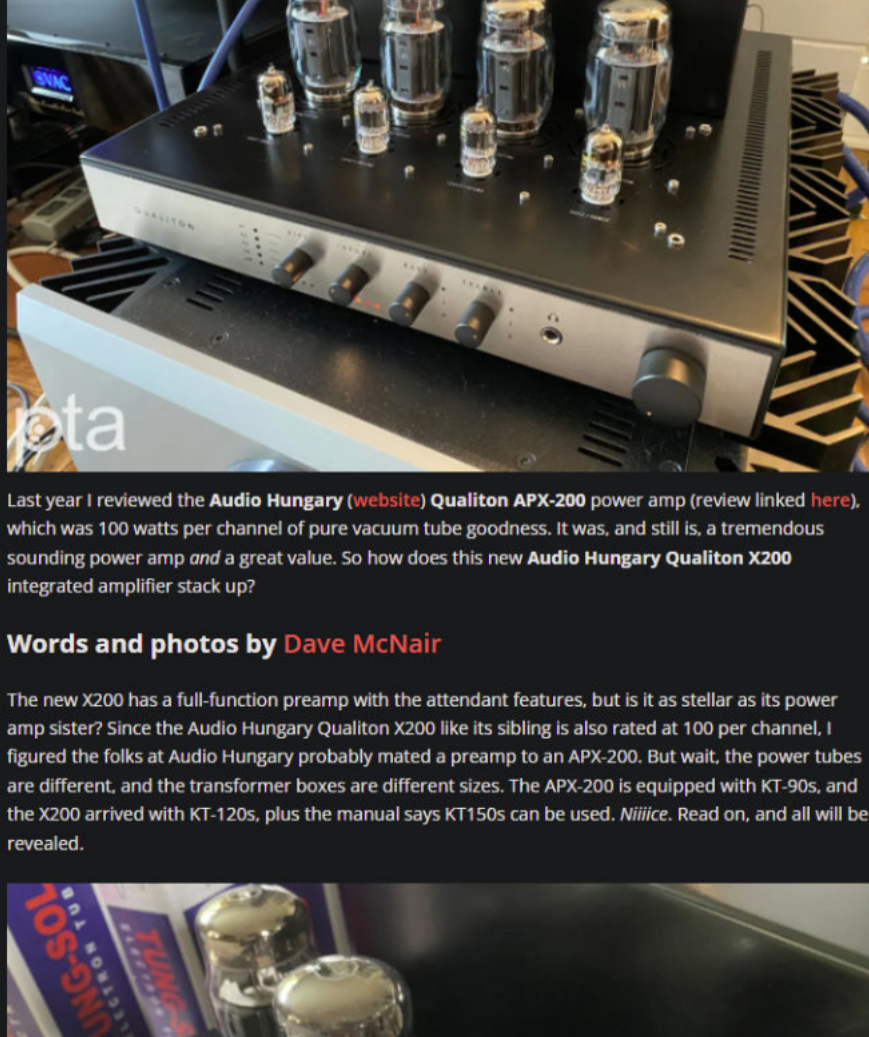
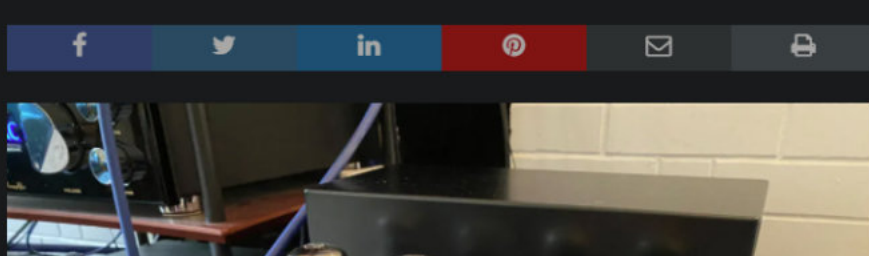


Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 Integrated | REVIEW

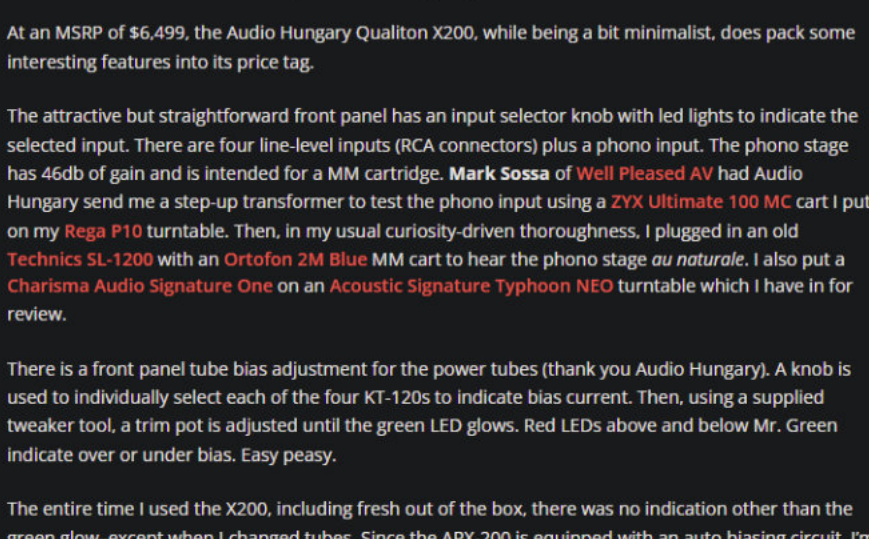
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Last year I reviewed the [Audio Hungary \(website\) Qualiton APX-200](#) power amp (review linked [here](#)), which was 100 watts per channel of pure vacuum tube goodness. It was, and still is, a tremendous sounding power amp and a great value. So how does this new **Audio Hungary Qualiton X200** integrated amplifier stack up?

Words and photos by [Dave McNair](#)

The new X200 has a full-function preamp with the attendant features, but is it as stellar as its power amp sister? Since the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 like its sibling is also rated at 100 per channel, I figured the folks at Audio Hungary probably mated a preamp to an APX-200. But wait, the power tubes are different, and the transformer boxes are different sizes. The APX-200 is equipped with KT-90s, and the X200 arrived with KT-120s, plus the manual says KT150s can be used. *Nililice*. Read on, and all will be revealed.



The Echoes Of The Amplifiers Ringing In Your Head

At an MSRP of \$6,499, the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200, while being a bit minimalist, does pack some interesting features into its price tag.

The attractive but straightforward front panel has an input selector knob with led lights to indicate the selected input. There are four line-level inputs (RCA connectors) plus a phono input. The phono stage has 46db of gain and is intended for a MM cartridge. [Mark Sossa of Well Pleased AV](#) had Audio Hungary send me a step up transformer to test the phono input using a [ZYX Ultimate 100 MC](#) cart I put on my [Rega P10](#) turntable. Then, in my usual curiosity-driven thoroughness, I plugged in an old [Technics SL-1200](#) with an [Ortofon 2M Blue](#) MM cart to hear the phono stage *ou naturelle*. I also put a [Charisma Audio Signature One](#) on an [Acoustic Signature Typhoon NEO](#) turntable which I have in for review.

There is a front panel tube bias adjustment for the power tubes (thank you Audio Hungary). A knob is used to individually select each of the four KT-120s to indicate bias current. Then, using a supplied tweaker tool, a trim pot is adjusted until the green LED glows. Red LEDs above and below Mr. Green indicate over or under bias. Easy peasy.

The entire time I used the X200, including fresh out of the box, there was no indication other than the green glow—except when I changed tubes. Since the APX-200 is equipped with an auto biasing circuit, I'm assuming Qualiton chose manual bias for changing from KT-120s to KT-150s should the user desire.

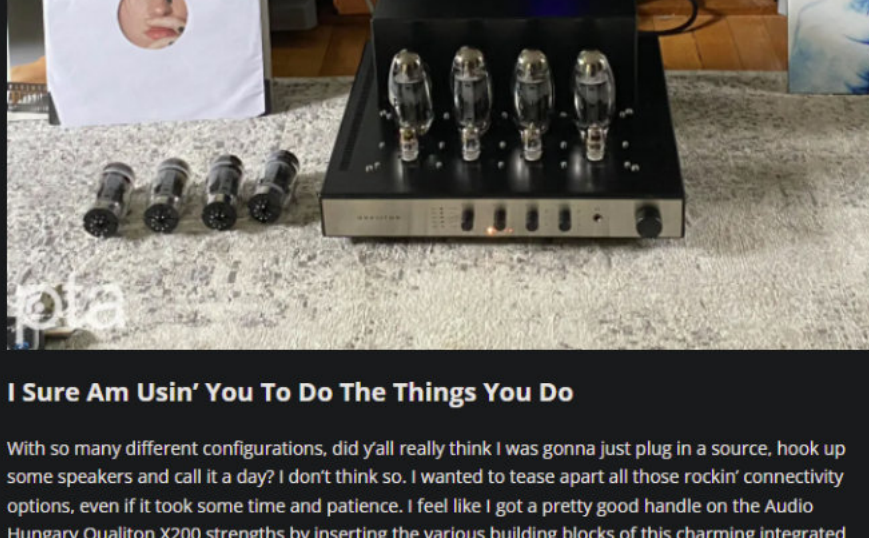


An excellent-feeling volume knob rounds out the front panel controls. The included remote, featuring volume and mute, was heavy and seemed of good build quality. Around the back are the identical custom-made-locking binding posts used on the APX-200 for speaker hookup. However, instead of choosing 8-ohm or 4-ohm taps as featured on the APX-200, the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 has a single set per channel. In practice, I found that regardless of a speaker's quoted impedance the 8-ohm tap on the APX-200 always sounded best, so I never missed that option using the chosen single output transformer tap on the X200.

RCA inputs are for the phono and four line-level inputs plus a preamp output, eq output, and dedicated subwoofer output. Another pair of RCAs for headphones with an auto biasing circuit, which is also available as a balanced XLR input. That's a lot of connectivity to cover potential usage options.

The row of two 12AX7 and two 6922 input tubes are flanked by four KT120 power tubes, with the transformer covers in the last row. As I talked about in my APX-200 review, Audio Hungary builds transformers in-house. I don't have scientific evidence, but I feel the high quality of sound I hear from these amps must have something to do with the Audio Hungary transformer mojo. In addition, I found the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 vintage/modern hybrid look to be very attractive. A solid feeling metal case remote is included with volume and mute controls.

Audio Hungary designed the Qualiton to handle KT-150 power tubes additionally. I happened to have had a quad set of new [Tung-Sol KT-150s](#) on hand to use for testing. After swapping out the KT-120s supplied with the X200 (also Tung-Sol) for the KT-150s, warming them up, and re-biasing them a couple of times, I put on some tunes to check things out. I'll talk more about sonics in a bit, but as a teaser, I found very audible differences between KT-120 versus KT-150s. Both were excellent in clearly different ways.



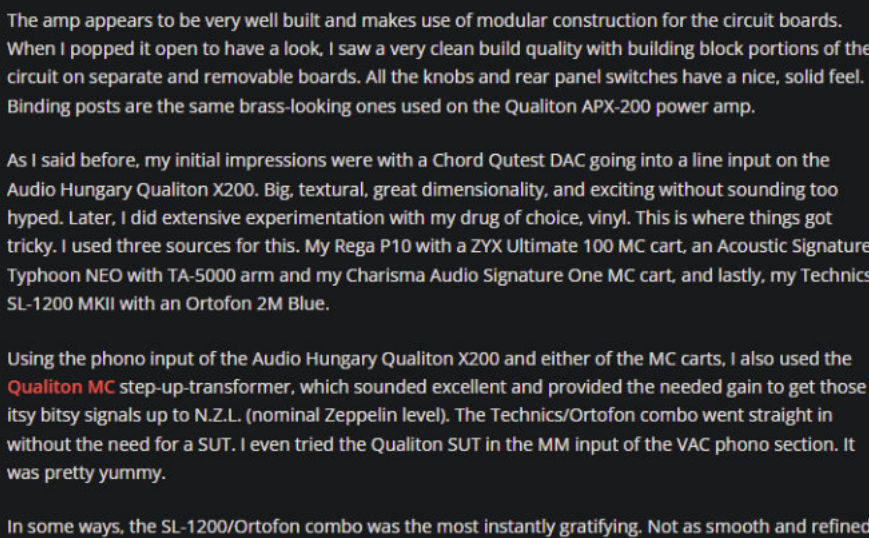
I Sure Am Usin' You To Do The Things You Do

With so many different configurations, did y'all really think I was gonna just plug in a source, hook up some speakers and call it a day? I don't think so. I wanted to tease apart all those rockin' connectivity options, even if it took some time and patience. I feel like I got a pretty good handle on the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 strengths by inserting the various building blocks of this charming integrated amp into my reference system. I even used it as an integrated amp. Imagine that.

On that first date ("Did you grow up around here?" or "How long have you been single?") I simply plugged in my turntable and hooked up some speakers. Wait, that's REALLY quiet. Oh...it's a MM phono stage. Ooops. Okay, let's try the output of a DAC. That's better. Wow. That sounds amazing. So far, so good. But I gotta get my jam on with some rekkids.

Mark Sossa to the rescue! In a few short days, I had a Qualiton step-up transformer. Until then, I was more than happy to listen to digital sources, which at the time was via a [Chord Qutes](#) that I had borrowed because I had loaned out my [Border Patrol SE-L](#). Clearly, I'm not a big digital guy. The Chord was plenty good enough for me to hear the sonic charms of the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200.

In many ways, that simple setup was all I needed to hear to know the X200 was my cup of espresso. Colossal soundstage, glorious midrange, clean highs, and pounding bass. But wait, as I was to find out later, that was just the tip of the iceberg.



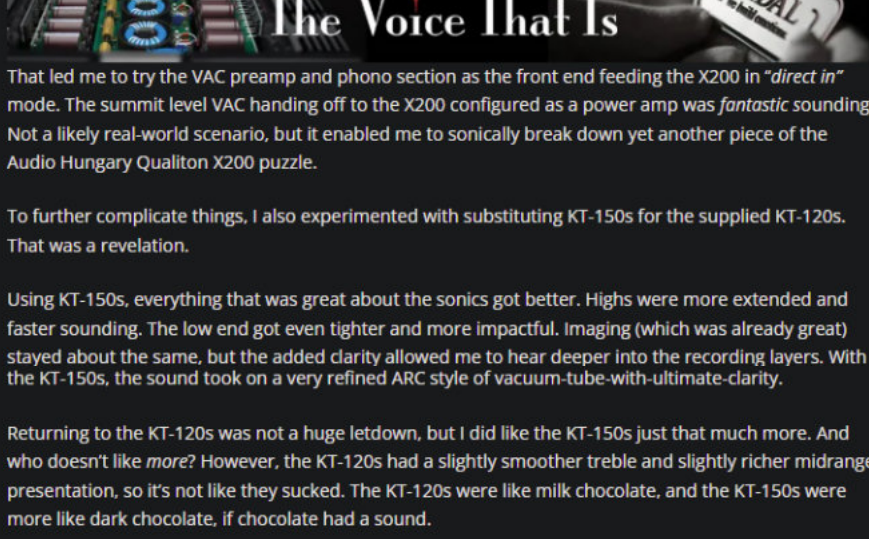
Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 In Use

The amp appears to be very well built and makes use of modular construction for the circuit boards. When I popped it open to have a look, I saw a very clean build quality with building block portions of the circuit on separate and removable boards. All the knobs and rear panel switches have a nice, solid feel. Binding posts are the same brass-looking ones used on the Qualiton APX-200 power amp.

As I said before, my initial impressions were with a Chord Qutes DAC going into a line input on the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200. Big, textural, great dimensionality, and exciting without sounding too hyped. Later, I did extensive experimentation with my drug of choice, vinyl. This is where things got tricky. I used three sources for this. My Rega P10 with a ZYX Ultimate 100 MC cart, an Acoustic Signature Typhoon NEO with TA-5000 arm and my Charisma Audio Signature One MC cart, and lastly, my Technics SL-1200 MKII with an Ortofon 2M Blue.

Using the phono input of the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 and either of the MC carts, I also used the [Qualiton MC](#) step-up-transformer, which sounded excellent and provided the needed gain to get those itsy bitsy signals up to N.Z.L. (nominal Zeppelin level). The Technics/Ortofon combo went straight in without the need for a SUT. I even tried the Qualiton SUT in the MM input of the VAC phono section. It was pretty yummy.

In some ways, the SL-1200/Ortofon combo was the most instantly gratifying. Not as smooth and refined sounding as the MC carts but a lot more fun! When using either table with MC carts, I got the feeling that while good sounding, the higher performance of those setups didn't quite translate as well to the phono section as the MM cart did.



The Voice That Is

That led me to try the VAC preamp and phono section as the front end feeding the X200 in "direct in" mode. The summit level VAC handling off to the X200 configured as a power amp was *fantastic* sounding. Not a likely real-world scenario, but it enabled me to sonically break down yet another piece of the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 puzzle.

To further complicate things, I also experimented with substituting KT-150s for the supplied KT-120s. That was a revelation.

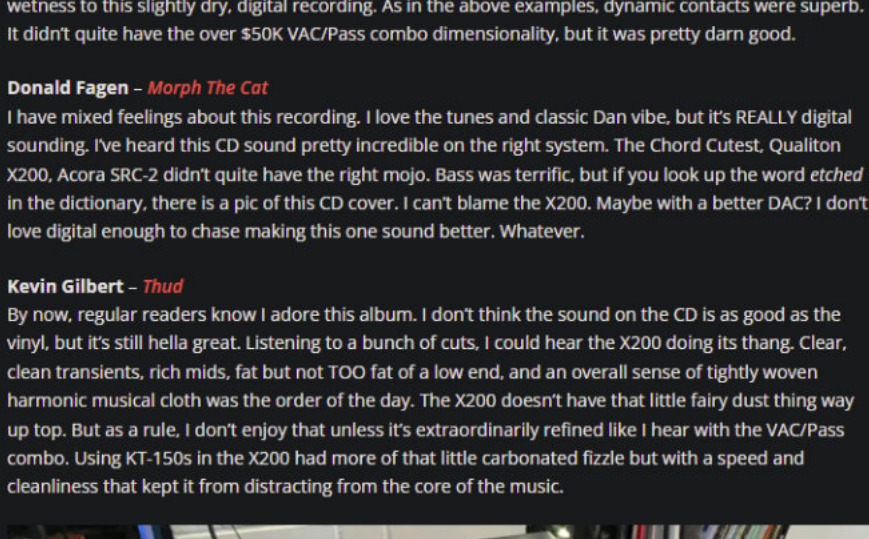
Using KT-150s, everything that was great about the sonics got better. Highs were more extended and faster sounding. The low end got even tighter and more impactful. Imaging (which was already great) stayed about the same, but the added clarity allowed me to hear deeper into the recording layers. With the KT-150s, the sound took on a very refined ARC style of vacuum-tube-with-ultimate-clarity.

Returning to the KT-120s was not a huge letdown, but I did like the KT-150s just that much more. And who doesn't like more? However, the KT-120s had a slightly smoother treble and slightly richer midrange presentation, so it's not like they sucked. The KT-120s were like milk chocolate, and the KT-150s were more like dark chocolate, if chocolate had a sound.

I even decided to run the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 as a preamp only and feed the pair of [Pass Labs XA-200.8s](#) I use for solid state reference amps. Unfortunately, this did not work as intended, and I got a loud burst of music that instantly caused me to lift the cueing on the turntable. It wasn't THAT loud, but DID inspire me to return to a standard configuration for checking the speakers—things seemed fine with the Acora SRC-2s. Those babies are sensitive and ultra revealing but, fortunately for me, not particularly delicate.

The Audio Hungary manual states that RCA connection number 6 is a buffered output for whatever is selected on the front panel. It doesn't say anything about it being pre volume control, although I assumed it was a standard preamp out and would be post volume control. Apparently not.

This brings up that as great as the X200 sounds, I felt like the manual was pretty sparse on usage instructions given various possible configurations.



Music Stuff with the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200

I listened to plenty of records but ended up circling back to listening to digital cause it sounded so dang good (included are links to the albums on [Qobuz](#) for your convenience).

Little Feat - The Last Record Album
16bit 44.1K rip from CD via Innuos Zen Mini. I hold this as a perfect example of how you don't need high rez to hear amazing sounds off digital provided that the engineering is good. On this one, the engineering is GREAT. The Qualiton X200, with the high frequency excited, modern style, yet with a good playback system, dynamic contacts and detail abound. All the cuts were killing off this disc.

Suzanne Vega - Nine Objects Of Desire
This is another 1644.1 CD rip that is exceptional sounding. Again, a chocolate-rich tonality with loads of tightly controlled bass and image fun that also manages to have lots of detail. That Tchad Blake is a master. I'll tell ya. The X200 sounded like it was made for this album. Some of the super low bass drum stuff wasn't as beefy as my reference VAC Master Preamp and Pass Labs XA-200.8 combo, but there was still plenty of butt shakin' low end coming off the Acoras.

Lyle Lovett - Joshua Judges Ruth
One of my old test faves, particularly for Lee Sklar's low bass notes in "She's Already Made Up Her Mind". This is another George Massenburg/Doug Sax sonic extravaganza, even if a bit *early digital* sounding. The Qualiton passed the low bass test on this cut with flying colors. It also contributed a subtle sense of wetness to this slightly dry, digital recording. As in the above examples, dynamic contacts were superb. It didn't quite have the over \$50K VAC/Pass combo dimensionality, but it was pretty darn good.

Donald Fagen - Morph The Cat
I have mixed feelings about this recording. I love the tunes and classic Dan vibe, but it's REALLY digital sounding. I've heard this CD sound pretty incredible on the right system, the Chord Cutest, Qualiton X200, Acora SRC-2 didn't quite have the right mojo. Bass was terrific, but if you look up the word *etched* in the dictionary, there is a pic of this CD cover. I can't blame the X200. Maybe with a better DAC? I don't love digital enough to chase making this one sound better, whatever.

Kevin Gilbert - Thud
By now, regular readers know I adore this album. I don't think the sound on the CD is as good as the vinyl, but it's still hella great. Listening to a bunch of cuts, I could hear the X200 doing its thang. Clear, clean transients, rich mids, fat but not TOO fat of a low end, and an overall sense of tightly woven harmonic musical cloth was the order of the day. The X200 doesn't have that little fairy dust thing way up top. But as a rule, I don't enjoy that unless it's extraordinarily refined like I hear with the VAC/Pass combo. Using KT-150s in the X200 had more of that little carbonated fizze but with a speed and cleanliness that kept it from distracting from the core of the music.



Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 Conclusion

I loved the sound of this integrated amp. Is it summit-level performance? Not really, but it gets close. The MM phono input is above average, and the line-level inputs fed by a DAC sounded seriously good. Going from the VAC preamp directly into the power amp section (especially with KT-150s) was a stone-cold win. Combine build quality, usage options, and you have a lovely package for the price.

I can easily see an X200 to be the perfect thing for a listener whose taste has become a bit more discriminating than the average listener and thinks they want to start building a bonafide audiophile system. Start with an Audio Hungary Qualiton X200, add a good streamer/DAC or CD player and a pair of stand mounted monitors and call it done. The phono stage is plenty good enough to dust off the old SL-1200 with something like a [hiana](#) or an Ortofon MM cart to get the platter party going if that seems like a plan. Later on, if the system grows, the power amp might be the last thing a user considers upgrading, if at all.

Any minute sonic compromises made by Qualiton for this price point are of a very mature and thoughtful nature. If this is the kind of system you want to build, the Audio Hungary Qualiton X200 should be at the top of your list for a serious audition.

