

Isotek EVO3 Nova power conditioner

by Alan Sircom

It's easy to get this a bit mungled up. IsoTek make a product called the Nova One, which is a single £1,500 power outlet filter from the company's Mosaic range. Delete the word 'One' and you have a £5,995 12 outlet passive filter/conditioner in the company's Select range. It's also not entirely right to class the Nova as a dozen Nova Ones in a single box, although there is some element of truth to that statement. You can understand the confusion.

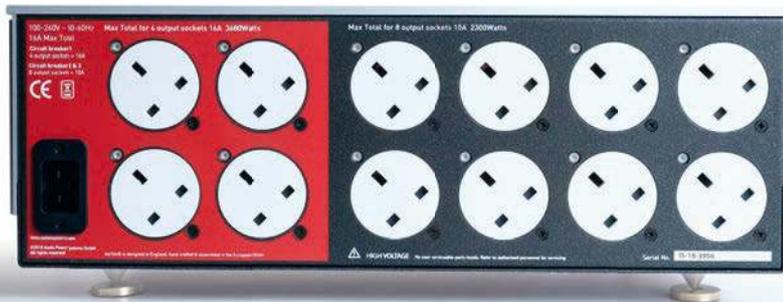
Of course, one look at the product in its own right clears up any such confusion. The Nova One is a neat little box that could be mistaken for a phono stage power supply or a tiny DAC. The Nova is a full sized product that stands about twice as tall as the company's popular EVO3 Sigmas conditioner. You could mistake it for a power amplifier, were it not for the front LED panel. In fact, the Nova is a bit of a brute by IsoTek standards, up there with the bigger Mosaic and Ultimate conditioners in size and weight terms. It's fed by a single C20 plug (IsoTek supplies a mid-blue cable called Premier from its Discovery range) and the unit is neatly sub-divided into four high-power sockets and eight sockets used for sources and preamplifiers. You'd need a pretty large system to run out of plug sockets with a Nova in the mix. The curious part of the Nova is powering it up; there are three thermomagnetic fuses on the underside of the To power the Nova up, first throw the one under the right hand side of the box (this powers the box up, fires up the display, and powers up the high-power side). Then flip the switches on the left side to enable the upper and lower sets of four lower power three-pin sockets. 10A won't work until 16A is powered.



Having these switches on the underside means the Nova has to use the supplied spikes (or alternatives) to allow for clearance. However, the clearance is tight and unless you have long, thin fingers, you might struggle to throw all three switches with the spikes in place. The Nova also features DC cancellation circuit, which rebalances the mains sine wave on the zero volts line, thus reducing transformer hum. This technology is usually found in the company's Syncro power cable, or most recently in its new Syncro Uni box.

When powered up, there is a single constant blue LED and a bright blue numeric display behind a semi-mirrored panel in the middle of the Nova's front plate. This is controlled by the three buttons on the front panel; left displays input voltage, the middle one turns the display off, while the right shows percentage THD on the AC line. My home voltage was usually around 240-242 pretty much throughout the day, although the harmonic distortion did increase in the evening until about 11pm, when it began to fall again. ▶

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- ▶ IsoTek suggests a couple of cable upgrades on its basic – but useful – red instruction manual.

Truth be told, I was fairly blown away by what the EVO3 Nova can do. The best way of thinking it is two EVO3 Sigmas joined at the hip and then given a bit of a spit shine and a power up. The EVO3 enhancements mean those 12 sockets are completely isolated and see equal resistance. I used it with a range of digital and analogue audio devices, in part to try and fill-up all its sockets to test it under stress. Except it didn't get stressed. It took everything in its stride.

It also does that great thing that IsoTek devices are so good at; enhancing without changing. The system seems to be taking less effort in making music, and does so with vastly improved transient attack and speed of delivery, and yet somehow does all this without changing the character of the products connected. A Primare amp sounds like a Primare amp, just better. And that applies whether the device plugged in is a CD player, a Class D integrated amp, or a hulking great beast of a power amp. It is especially good at isolating the nasties put into a system from a plug-top power supply. I have an old Wadia DAC that uses a plug-top that now seems to act as a radio for the rest of the system. Plug it into the wall directly and the system's quality takes a turn for the worst. Put the Nova in place and the influence of this patently dying power supply is reduced to near-enough zero.

The Nova's limits are relatively minor and at the extremes. Someone using the Nova with an amplifier that looks as if you are trying to smuggle jet engines into your listening room should be calling out for IsoTek's Ultimate models, not the Nova. At the other end, the very low power AC feed (often used to trickle-charge battery systems in portable audio devices), seem to extract little benefit from the Nova. The benefit is still there, just not as brightly lit as it is through larger audio equipment.

The big question is would you buy the EVO3 Nova if your system was never going to require more than an EVO3 Sigmas, and I think the honest answer is 'probably not'. There are some improvements to be had, but the

jump in performance brought about by the EVO3 Sigmas is fairly substantial in its own right. The Nova isn't quite gilding the lily, but the jump in price between the two is more justified if you are edging toward running out of sockets. With a relatively humble high-end system now comprising a streamer and a server alongside a turntable, preamp, phono stage, DAC, power amplifier or amps, and potentially a reel-to-reel and CD player, the Sigmas fast runs out of road next to the EVO3 Nova.

And that's the reason why the IsoTek EVO3 Nova will, I believe, prove as popular as the EVO3 Sigmas does. We quickly run out of power conditioner in modern systems. Even excluding more computer-side products like the network switch or a NAS drive elsewhere on the system, the number of products in a system soon adds up, and something as versatile as the EVO3 Sigmas begins to look as if it has some shortcomings. The EVO3 Nova takes on the task for today's bigger systems, with all the capacity and heavy-lifting needed to drive all except the most vast of amplifiers. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: filtering 12 outlet mains conditioner

Number of outlets: 4x 16A high power three pin UK sockets, eight 10A three pin UK sockets for sources and preamps

Outlet: 3,680W

Power cable: IsoTek Premier, C19

Specifications for: UK, EU, US, ZA, Australia, Switzerland

Dimensions (HxWxD):

250 × 182.5 × 350mm

Weight: 15kg

Price: £5,995

Manufacturer: IsoTek Power Systems

URL: isoteksystems.com