



## NuPrime MCH-K38

**N**uPrime has quickly established a reputation for producing audio components that combine innovation and functionality with cut-above performance and a sleek, minimalist aesthetic. Keen pricing has added value to the list of attributes, too.

The MCH-K38 could be considered the Swiss Army Knife of power amplifiers because it offers so many different options and configurations. Effectively an eight-channel power amp, it features eight individual inputs via a choice of XLR or RCA sockets.

In addition, the eight channels can be bridged in pairs to provide up to four, beefed-up mono channels, or a combination of bridged mono and individual single channels. Switches allow selection between balanced and single-ended mode, and between bridged and individual operation.

Quite miraculously, all the circuitry for this eight-channel whizz kid fits into a normal DIN-sized enclosure. The result is a surprisingly compact device with the kind of sleek, minimalist appearance

NuPrime has become renowned for.

The front panel offers a main power switch, and individual power buttons for each channel. Indicator lights provide at-a-glance info on operation status — confirming XLR or RCA input selection, as well as whether channels are running bridged or direct.

The rear panel layout is straightforward, with the XLR and RCA inputs arranged in a tidy row above the robustly engineered binding posts. Small toggle switches provide selection between direct and bridged mode, and between the XLR and RCA inputs. There's a rear-panel power on/off master switch adjacent to an IEC power socket, as well as a trigger input to power up the amp remotely.

The flexible configuration of the MCH-K38 allows an almost limitless combination of applications. In the home theatre context, for instance, the amp can power all seven channels of a 7.1 system — including the .1 channel if the subwoofer is a passive device.

You could also bridge six of the channels into three, and power the front LCR channels, then use the remaining channels for surrounds

in a 5.1 configuration.

For stereo fans, you could run all eight channels bridged, and then use the four bridged channels to bi-amp a set of power-hungry, low-impedance loudspeakers. Of course, there's also the option to arrange the eight channels in any combination of bridged and stereo settings to offer between four and eight channels.

In short, the NuPrime is almost uncannily flexible and versatile, and the more you think of different applications, the more applications you come up with. Trust me, by the end of this review I really, really wanted to buy one.

As is always the case with the latest NuPrime gear, build quality of the MCH-K38 is exemplary, thanks to sturdy casework, robust feet, nicely turned out inputs, and those nicely machined speaker binding posts I referred to earlier.

By now, many readers will know that NuPrime employs a hybrid design for its power amplifiers, combining a Class A input stage with a Class D output stage. It's an arrangement that's become increasingly common among high-end audio brands as everyone scurries to



benefit from Class D's efficiencies without falling prey to the perceived vagaries of switch-mode amplification.

I say perceived, because even pure Class D designs have come a long way, and don't necessarily suffer from the upper-frequency glare and harshness that gave the tech a bad name in the first place.

Still, there's logic in harnessing some of the organic richness, texture and musicality linked to Class A with the drive, efficiency and sheer pace of Class D – a combination NuPrime does particularly well.

The company's take on this hybrid approach is linking what it calls an Ultra-Linear Class A Module (ULCAM) to a well integrated Class D power stage. The ULCAMs feature discrete, high-quality components and a high-impedance single-ended configuration, while the Class D output stage benefits from a large 1 kW power supply and a CMA capacitor array.

NuPrime considers the MCH-K38 a Reference LE class component, which means it matches the near-reference ST-10 stereo power amp in sonic quality terms. Add the considerable power output potential harnessed by the K38, and you have the makings of something rather special.

Those expectations weren't disappointed in practice. The NuPrime sounded lively, dynamic and exciting. It showed off a very agile, nimble character that easily kept up with the pace and complexity of even the most challenging soundtracks and recordings.

In that context, the K38 never sounded muscle-bound or heavy-handed – it just allowed the music to flow and sparkle with unencumbered enthusiasm, and always remained true to the essence of the original. In short, it never got in the way of the music.

Tonally, the sound was open and accessible, with a lucidity to the upper trebles that was so revealing and honest that some may consider it bordering on the bright. I say bordering, because the sound was by no means bright in the brittle, aggressive sense of the word.

Rather, we're talking a level of clarity that doesn't roll off or attenuate any

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upper frequencies, but allows them free rein. A portion of those frequencies may be well beyond what are considered the limits of normal human hearing, but then, it's also true that what you can't hear in the conventional sense, you may well sense in different ways.

Here, the sound certainly seemed to impart a completeness and a realism that allowed exceptional insight, and afforded access to both audible and subliminal detail.

At the other end of the scale, the NuPrime effortlessly reached down to the kind of deep, urgent bass notes that you feel as much hear. There was nothing muddy, fuzzy or flabby about those bass and sub-bass notes: they had presence, purpose and grip, and were delivered with almost startling punch and precision.

The amp's control over these lower frequencies was absolute and almost iron-fisted, but never so authoritarian that the music's flow or energy was compromised.

## VITAL STATS

Power output .....	8x 210 watts (8 & 4 ohms) 4x 400 watts (8 & 4 ohms)
Frequency response .....	10 Hz – 50 kHz
Signal-to-noise ratio .....	>80 dB @ 1 watt/10 watts/100 watts
Inputs .....	8x single-ended RCA 8x balanced XLR
Outputs .....	8x stereo binding post sets
Dimensions (WxHxD) .....	430 x 99 x 378 mm
Weight .....	14,5 kg

Price ..... R39 048

### Verdict

Extremely versatile multi-channel amp with extended applications in both stereo and home theatre systems. Tactile quality extends to a lively, visceral sound that offers a clear view of the sonic action.

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OUR RATING: 88 / 100





The midrange was smooth and clearly rendered, if not quite creamy or lavishly textured. Instead it continued the ordered, structured, lucid theme of the amp's treble delivery, never allowing any emphasis or veiling to interfere with the music.

Thus, there was an overriding sense of realism, of clarity and of insight. The amp always sounded muscular, athletic and incisive, accurately capturing the essence of the incoming signal, and portraying it with ample urge and precision.

Staging was spectacular in both its dimensional generosity and the fine, sharp focus of the imaging. The amp created a powerfully painted, precisely executed sonic picture, with every facet – from bold to subtle – clearly, succinctly and believably portrayed.

It created a big, wide, deep, bold sound picture that invited the listener to step into and become a part of the music, rather than remaining a mere bystander.

It's important to note at this point that most of the comments in this review relate to the MCH-K38 being used in a stereo role, specifically with all eight channels bridged into mono, and the resulting four channels used to bi-amp our KEF R500 loudspeakers.

I also used this configuration for a comparative listen to the rather notoriously difficult Bowers & Wilkins PM1 monitors. And in both cases, I also ran four of the eight channels into the speakers directly, without bridging.

However, let's not forget that one of the MCH-K38's primary roles would be to partner an AV surround processor in a home theatre system.

Our February 2017 review of the top-notch Anthem AVM-60 AV processor featured the K38 in the power amplifier role, and I can tell you that its inherent authority, momentum, pace and sonic integrity made it a perfect match for the Anthem's considerable signal processing and steering talents.

It fully embraced its responsibility to project the full harvest of the surround sound processor's sonic messages, never running out of steam or enthusiasm, and always portraying the excitement and the intensity of the sound.

That timeless southern rock band, the Doobie Brothers, revisit some of their most memorable hits on *Southbound* (44/16 FLAC), augmented by the contributions of a string of guest artists. It also allows these classic songs to

benefit from modern, latest generation production techniques.

The NuPrime's urge and momentum were apparent throughout. It translated the energy and intent of the music with unbridled, sparkling enthusiasm.

The amp never lagged behind the music, nor lost any steam: instead it emphasised the pace, the rhythm and the urge of the music – and not just on the outright rockers. On 'You Belong To Me' with Amanda Sudano Ramirez on vocals and Vince Gill on guitar, the smouldering swagger of the music was mesmerizingly portrayed.

Ramirez's vocals are smooth, creamy and sexy, while Gill's guitar loses all its cowboy twang and becomes a searing, keen-edged weapon instead. Just marvellous!

On 'Nobody', with country music ace Charlie Worsham, the amp revealed the delicacy and intricacy of the banjo, despite the band's driving, hard-rocking, country-edged rhythm. The bass, in particular, had so much presence and sheer energy that it presented a very real challenge to the system's composure.

The NuPrime wasn't in the least intimidated, and even seemed to add an extra octave of bass to the already

generous delivery of the KEF R500s. The same was true of the classic 'China Grove', with the big, bold bottom end providing a solid, powerful foundation, but never to the detriment of the finer details. The kick drum was so reverberant that it made the couch shake, rattle and roll!

On Michael Stern and the Kansas Symphony Orchestra's *Britten's Orchestra* (Reference Recordings 176/24 WAV), delicacy and dynamics vie for attention on 'Sinfonia da requiem', an atmospheric recording that paints sweeping sonic vistas, and seems unperturbed by any physical limitations of the listening room.

Here the music embraces the listener with a sound that is both intriguing and absorbing. Fine, delicate passages – such as the dialogue between the shimmering strings and the studious woodwinds – provide a counterpoint to the threatening brass and brooding, menacing cellos and double bass sections.

The work culminates in an almost pyrotechnically intense crescendo that unleashes the full might and tonal registers of the orchestra – including explosive kettle drums! The NuPrime embraced the dynamic challenges of this recording with a certain glee and exuberance that suited the extended dynamics of the

music well, but also showcased just how truthfully and delicately it handled the subtler, finer nuances.

I'll admit that I wasn't remotely prepared for what the NuPrime MCH-K38 is capable of. I expected more muscle than music from what appeared to be a straight-down-the-line power amp with little more than muscle on the agenda.

Instead, the K38 is a riveting, musical performer that manages to harness its considerable power with flair and precision. It's also hugely versatile, and approaches its sonic wares with an effortless honesty that is both accurate and accessible.

And besides, where else can you get so much amplifier for this kind of money?

Deon Schoeman

## Software

*Michael Stern/Kansas Symphony Orchestra – Britten's Orchestra (Reference Recordings 176/24 WAV)*

*The Doobie Brothers – Southbound (Sony 44/24 FLAC)*

*Joe Stilgoe – Songs On Film Live (Linn 96/24 FLAC)*

*The Rolling Stones – Blue And Lonesome (Universal 88/24 FLAC)*

## Associated Equipment

*Paradigm AVM-60 AV processor*

*Atlantic Technology 7.1 surround speaker system*

*Oppo BDP-95EU universal deck*

*Primare PRE32/MM30 pre-amp and media board/DAC*

*Parasound Halo A21 stereo power amp*

*Marantz SA-KI Pearl Lite CD/SACD player*

*Bryston BDA-3 D/A converter*

*KEF R500 loudspeakers*

*B&W PM1 monitors*

