



Audience AdeptResponse High-Resolution Power Conditioner

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Introduction

Audience, LLC of Escondido, California has been manufacturing a range of interconnects, speaker cables, and power cables for several years. The AdeptResponse Power Conditioner is currently their only power conditioning product, but they weren't shy—they aimed right for the very tip-top of the market with this \$3,800 passive power conditioner. Could any passive power conditioner have enough content to get the price up to this lofty level? After all, the recently reviewed \$500 Furman PF15 has power factor correction and surge protection that doesn't degrade or fail from surges, and it performed pretty darned well. Of course, there are obvious build-quality differences, with the AdeptResponse clearly far out front. Is there performance to back up the classy appearance?

The AdeptResponse has the look and feel of a premium, hand-crafted American product. It has the nicest exterior appearance of any power conditioner I've ever encountered. It is a very impressive-looking addition to an equipment rack. The silver aluminum case is so perfect, it wouldn't surprise me if they had to reject three or four out of every ten they get just to have them all come out this perfect. The thick aluminum faceplate, too, is finished in such a way that there's no margin for anything less than perfection. Joints are tight and even, and everything fits within tiny fractions of inches. This level of tolerance con-

trol and finish just can't be attained at the \$500 price point. The contrasting dark blue anodized bar on the front panel power switch/circuit breaker adds a dash of color to the nested arcs that provides a unique appearance to the AdeptResponse face plate.

The list of AdeptResponse features looks like the wish list I'd come up with if someone asked me what the world's best passive power conditioner should have. One of the more controversial features is the cryogenic treatment of the entire unit. Cryogenics is catching on big in the high-end audio industry. It is a long-proven technique for extending the life of cutting tools and high-performance, high-strength engine parts of all kinds. Cryogenic treatment means lowering the temperature of the device to somewhere south of -300-degrees Fahrenheit. But just dumping a device into liquid nitrogen or the even-colder liquid helium could have catastrophic results. So you have to bring the temperature down gradually and come back up to room temperature gradually. You've heard of heat treating metal and the beneficial effects it can have... well, cryogenic treatment also can make significant changes to the mechanical properties of materials at the crystalline and molecular levels. Only the folks at Audience have probably had the educational experience of evaluating AdeptResponse units that have been cryo-treated versus not having the cryo-treatment. You have to trust them that the cryo-treatment is worthwhile.

Other AdeptResponse construction features include beefy point-to-point wiring with no current-limiting circuit board traces. A high-current distribution bus provides an extra margin of current delivery capability especially useful for high-powered amplifiers. Each of the 12 outlets has its own filter, so noise generated by any component is filtered at the outlet, and again at neighboring outlets so components in your system can't contribute much noise to other



SPECIFICATIONS

Features

- Includes high-quality 10AWG Audience Power Chord power cord connected to the AdeptResponse with a twist-and-lock Neutrik 20-amp connector
- Entire unit is cryogenically treated
- Magnetic circuit breaker functions as power switch
- Power Line voltage LED display on front panel
- Filter capacitors are all metalized film Auricaps
- Each outlet has a filter to minimize interactions between components
- Heavy-duty internal AC power distribution to eliminate current limiting and improve amplifier sound quality
- Power an entire audio and video system from a single unit (12 Hubble outlets)
- Partial Power Factor correction
- No current-limiting series inductors
- Surge protection is permanent, will not fail after a single surge like MOV surge protection used in many lower-priced power conditioners
- Isolation transformer for Cable TV or Antenna coax to eliminate ground-loop induced hum
- Rack mount option
- All-aluminum satin anodized chassis and faceplate with unique faceplate finish pattern
- Silver or Black finish

Specifications

- 15A or 20A at 120VAC or 220-240VAC
- Warranty: 10 years against manufacturing defects; 30-day trial period with full refund
- Dimensions (WHD In Inches): 19 x 5 x 9
- Weight (In Pounds): 16.4
- Price: \$3,800

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components. The heavy-duty magnetic circuit breaker is a fairly expensive item that does produce superior audio quality, based on some listening evaluations I performed several years ago, by substituting a magnetic circuit breaker for the power switch in power conditioners and amplifiers.

I have to single out Audience's use of the Neutrik AC power connector for the rarely awarded "dB's Do-The-Right-Thing 5-Star 10-Diamond Tiara." The industry-standard IEC power connector on most components is an absolute abomination, completely backward, and lame. The Neutrik

"...the AdeptResponse is the best performing passive power conditioner I've ever evaluated."



Powercon power connector is a shining example of impeccable engineering. Slip the power cord end into the socket on the chassis, turn it 1/8th of a turn, and it locks into place, never to fall out. To remove the power cord, you press a little tab to release the lock before you can turn the connector 1/8th turn in the opposite direction. The Neutrik power connector should be the industry standard for power cord connectors, and kudos to Audience for using it on the AdeptResponse. Audience's moderately-spendy Power Chord power cord happens to be one of my favorite power cords for audio components, so nobody should have to fret over the need to upgrade the provided power cord with any other cord you might think you want to use.

Auricap metalized film capacitors are used as filters throughout the AdeptResponse. These capacitors are made by Audience primarily for use in high-end audio equipment. In the high-end arena, they have become a touchstone of high performance. Prices for these capacitors make them among the most expensive capacitors money can buy, and there are a lot of Auricaps in the AdeptResponse.

King Of The Passives

In use, I have to say that the AdeptResponse is the best performing passive power conditioner I've ever evaluated. In the video realm, images are as good as, or better than, any other passive power conditioner evaluated to date. I think Monster Power® and Furman's video filters are about equal, image quality wise, though each one produces a very slightly different image that takes a lot of concentration and familiarity with the program material and video display to detect. Monster Power's video filter used in their HTS-5100 model did a good job of reducing noise artifacts (grain) and excelled in the green hues, making tropical images vibrant and lush. Furman's filter was good across the board, cleaning up noise grain nicely, but without altering perception of colors or spatial characteristics. The AdeptResponse improved the vibrancy, saturation, and clarity of colors a little and made a small improvement in depth of images with DVD-quality images or better. I could be happy with any of these video filters and sometimes found myself switching just to see a slightly different version of images for the variety. If pressed, I'd have to give the AdeptResponse a slightly bolder thumbs up, but the margin of difference is really quite small.

Moving on to audio, the gap widens considerably. The AdeptResponse simply leaves every other passive power condition-

er product I've ever evaluated in the dust. I'd have to say the AdeptResponse is something like "twice as good"—whatever that means in this context—as the next best passive power conditioner products I've evaluated. Everything about the audio quality improves. Backgrounds are more velvety silent, and individual tones are produced without any roughness or fuzz. The improved silence makes it easier to hear subtle detail like room echo decaying, acoustic ambience, reverb, room echo, and windblown leaves, etc. The effect is at least as much of an improvement as upgrading a couple of electronic components in your system to better-performing products. That's the beauty of better power conditioning products... they always sound good and never go obsolete, like so many other home theatre components.

The audible result of the improvements are obvious in details, like the superior shimmering of cymbals. Subtle ambient sounds are more detailed and convincing, the tones of musical instruments are richer and more complete, and everything from top to bottom has extra detail that, on the best soundtracks, helps electrify you with the reality of the soundtrack.

The Acid Test

So far, I've limited comparisons to other passive power conditioners. These use capacitors, and sometimes inductors, in various combinations to filter high-frequency noise from the power line. But that's all they can do—aside from surge and spike protection offered by most of them. Passive power conditioners cannot: correct frequency deviations (rare); fix low, high, or varying power line voltage; or "repair" lower frequency distortions of the sine wave.

Balanced power conditioners and Active power conditioning devices can do more. A Balanced power conditioner will provide a very large reduction in noise common to both power lines—hot and neutral. Active power conditioners will actually "repair" power line problems of any kind and by doing so, the level of audio and video improvement may outstrip what is possible with any passive-only power conditioning device. The power I get at home is probably close to as bad as it gets. Normal AC power should have a peak-to-peak voltage of about 170 volts, but I get only 155 volts peak-to-peak. This compresses and distorts the sine wave, since the RMS voltage measures 117 in spite of the low peaks. Power amplifiers are badly affected by this poor quality power, but source components seem to suffer also. An Equi=Tech Son of Q balanced power conditioner (\$1,379) provides about the same amount of current as the AdeptResponse unit. The Equi=Tech's degree of improvement in background silence and more profound elimination of residual noise grain in images outperforms the AdeptResponse in some ways. The AdeptResponse still has an edge in reproduction of high-quality music due to the excellent tonality and musical quality, but the Son of Q puts up a darn good showing. But the Son of Q alone does not undo the incorrect peak-to-peak voltage.

ExactPower's™ EP15A (\$2,499) and SP15A (\$1,099) active & balanced combination provide a fully corrected 120VAC sine wave with up to 46 amps for peak amplifier current demands plus balanced power for source components. These two products together reduce common mode noise, and every possible distortion of the AC sine wave, to such insignificance that system background noise you didn't even



know was there disappears. Audio is vivid and highly detailed. Video images become unflappably stable with a sensational feeling of depth and absence of noise grain. With the poor quality power I have to deal with, the combined performance of the ExactPower duo overwhelms the passive AdeptResponse's performance in every way. But it is quite possible that under more favorable circumstances, the AdeptResponse could put in a much better showing.

In the Adept Response's favor, it is totally silent in operation, while some active power conditioning products produce small or large amounts of transformer hum that can be heard in the room. The noise is not

from the speakers but from the active device itself. If your AC Power is quite good, the active power conditioning devices can lose their advantage, and the AdeptResponse could be on a relatively level playing field. But the worse your AC power, the more advantage goes to active power conditioning devices, provided the extra hum they might generate isn't an issue.

Conclusion

Audience's AdeptResponse is clearly the best performing passive power conditioner I've evaluated for audio and it is equal to or better than the video perform-

ance of other good passive power conditioners. The worse your incoming AC power, the more advantage active power conditioning products might have, but the trade-off is often audible hum from the active product. At this price point, customer's expect impeccable fit and finish with a feeling of substance and attention to detail—the AdeptResponse delivers on those expectations. If you are seeking the ultimate in passive power conditioning performance, especially for the reproduction of high-end caliber audio, the AdeptResponse is as good as it gets. ■

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