

# Sunfire TGP-5 and TGA-7400

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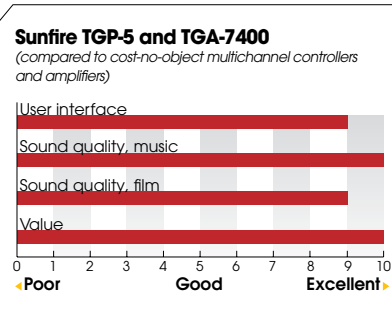
Multichannel Controller and Power Amplifier

## Superabundant Clarity and Power

When *The Perfect Vision* received review samples of Sunfire's flagship TGP-5 Theater Grand Processor and TGA-7400 Theater Grand Amplifier, they came with an unexpected treat: a visit from Sunfire's legendary founder and chief designer, Bob Carver. Our talks with Carver covered all sorts of subjects from loudspeakers to design details of the TGP-5 and TGA-7400, but what stood out most

was the fact that Carver evaluates his designs with both the objectivity of a physicist and the passionate sensibilities of a veteran audiophile. Of course it's one thing to say your products can satisfy purists, but quite another to deliver the goods. Can Sunfire's components truly walk the high-performance walk? The simple answer is that they can—and do.

The TGP-5 is long on features that impact sound quality, but short on gongs and



whistles of dubious merit, which is how we think components ought to set their priorities. Accordingly, the TGP-5 uses high quality parts such as 24-bit/192kHz Analog Devices DACs, and it provides both single-ended and balanced sets of 8-channel analog outputs. The controller provides Carver's signature Sonic Holography circuit, which can add an impressive measure of soundstage width and depth on stereo material. The circuit can also be used with Dolby Pro Logic IIx or DTS Neo:6 processing to help fill in information from the sides of the soundstage. For even more effective side-fill, the TGP-5 can derive signals for an optional pair of Side Axis speakers. Finally, the TGP-5 supports multizone operations and comes with an excellent lighted remote.

Through both its HDMI and component video outputs, the video performance of the TGP-5 was exemplary. I could see no difference between signals routed through the controller versus those run directly to my reference display. The maximum video resolution of the HDMI inputs is 1080i, and, says Sunfire, "no ... audio decoding in the TGP-5 is available from the HDMI inputs," meaning users should "always connect a separate digital audio input cable when using HDMI."

The TGP-5's defining sonic characteristics are clarity, resolution, and razor sharp transient response. I put on "The Dirt" from Steven Strauss's *Just Like Love* [Stockfisch, SACD], a beautifully-made multichannel recording, and came away impressed by the Sunfire's ability to retrieve low-level details I've only heard when listening to the disc through costly high-end audio systems. For example, producer

### The Last Word

#### TGP-5



- Purity and clarity reminiscent of high-end stereo preamps
- Includes phono section, RCA and XLR outs. Good job, Sunfire
- "Sonic Holography" circuit really works



- No auto setup/EQ functions (a blessing in disguise?)
- Tone controls not easily accessed on the fly

#### TGA-7400



- Absolute power doesn't corrupt; it spoils you rotten
- Voltage and Current Source outputs give the amp two distinct voices (both good)



- Um, none.

### Specifications

#### TGP-5 multichannel controller

- Decoding formats: Dolby Digital, Digital EX and Pro Logic IIx; DTS, DTS ES and Neo:6; proprietary Side Axis mode for 9.1-channel playback
- Video inputs/outputs: HDMI (two in, one out), component video (three in, two out), S-video (six in, three out), composite video (six in, three out)
- Audio inputs/outputs: 7.1-channel analog (one in), 7.1-channel analog (two out—one single-ended RCA, one balanced XLR), auxiliary subwoofer analog (two out), "Side-Axis" stereo analog (one out), stereo analog (eight in, seven out), digital audio (eleven in—six coax, four optical; two coax out)
- Dimensions: 17" x 5.75" x 16.5"
- Weight: 22 lbs.
- Price: \$3499

#### TGA-7400 7-channel power amplifier

- Power output: 400Wpc@ 8 ohms; separate "Current Source" and "Voltage Source" outputs on L/R main channels
- Number and type of audio inputs: Seven single-ended RCA, seven balanced XLR
- Dimensions: 17" x 5.9" x 16.7"
- Weight: 34 lbs.
- Price: \$4449
- sunfire.com





Günter Pauler sometimes manipulates spatial effects to emphasize various lines and phrases in songs, and the TGP-5 allowed each of Pauler's touches at the control board to stand out in sharp relief. The inflections and textures of Strauss's voice were so clearly reproduced that it was easy for me to picture the singer standing at a microphone with his guitar, just across the room from my couch. Imaging just doesn't get much more vivid than this. As you might expect, the TGP-5 positively pounces on detail-rich film soundtracks (e.g., *Hero*), making them sound explosively alive. Relative to the NAD M15 controller reviewed in Issue 71, the TGP-5 offers

**INSIDERS TIP:**

Try using the TGA-7400's Current taps to drive tweeters and Voltage taps to drive woofers—at the same time!

less natural warmth, but noticeably better detail, soundstaging, and overall purity of instrumental and vocal timbres.

As good as the TGP-5 is, the TGA-7400 is the real star of the show, for four good reasons. First, the 400Wpc TGA-7400 is enormously powerful. Second, unlike many ultra-powerful amplifiers, the TGA-7400 sounds delicate and refined—never boorish or muscle-bound. Third, for its L/R main channels, the TGA-7400 offers two different voicing options via user-selectable Voltage Source or Current Source speaker taps. The Voltage taps offer the tight, focused sound associated with great solid-

state amps, while the Current taps yield a warmer, more spacious sound reminiscent of fine tube amplifiers. Fourth, the amplifier is light, quiet, and cool running (no forced-air cooling is required).

But the biggest difference the TGA-7400 makes involves dynamics, and specifically the dynamics of well-recorded movie soundtracks. Most of us use dialog as a guide in setting volumes, and then gauge the volume levels of effects relative to human speech.

When I tried this approach when watching the familiar DVD *Saving Private Ryan* through the TGA-7400, I found the dynamic range of the soundtrack suddenly seemed to expand, so that loud scenes (e.g., the "Omaha Beach" assault) became much more powerful, while quiet passages (e.g., the soft conversations from the "Piaf" sequence) became even more delicate and poignant. In short, the TGA-7400 made other A/V amplifiers I've heard sound downright compressed—most impressive.

Sunfire's TGP-5 and TGA-7400 are among the top four controller-amplifier combinations I've ever tested (though I am eager to see how Anthem's latest offerings will compare). Together, these components offer audiophile-grade clarity and superabundant power at a thoroughly fair, though not inexpensive, price. **TPV**

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