Theta Digital Upgrading Casablanca, Monoblock Amp

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By Joseph Palenchar -- TWICE, 2/1/2012

Montebello, Calif. - Theta Digital is planning its first Class D amplifier and preparing multiple upgrade options for its existing flagship Casablanca III HD preamp/surround processor.

Theta's first Class D amp is the monoblock Prometheus at a suggested $6,000.The card-upgradable Casablanca, whose base price is a suggested $13,745, will get an optional $1,995-suggested digital output card that features six pairs of wideband 192kHz AES/EBU outputs for connection to outboard digital-to-analog converters (DACs) such as Theta's Generation VIII Series 3. The card ships in February to upgrade previously purchased Casablancas but can also be included in new models ordered from the factory.

A second upgrade is a post-processing card that extends digital audio bandwidth to 192kHz on all channels, adds DTS Neo:X 11.1-channel post-processing, and accepts a bundled daughter card that delivers Dirac Live digital room correction. The upgrade will make Casablanca the first, or one of the first, audio components to support DTS Neo:X's 11.1-channel capability, said senior sales and marketing VP Jeff Hipps. Select AV receivers currently on the market have a 9.1-channel implementation of Neo:X.

The solution will be available in June at $3,995 for installation by dealers and advanced consumers.

Also beginning in June, the post-processing card without Dirac daughter card will be included as a running change in new Casablanca models at no extra charge. Consumers who buy a new Casablanca beginning in June and decide later to add Dirac will pay $3,995 for the daughter card, firmware upgrade, and calibration gear.

Dirac Live digital room correction uses mixed phase processing to improve in-room frequency response and phase errors, reduce first-order reflections, and improve time-alignment, the company said. Set-up requires a laptop computer and a supplied microphone.

Dirac's price includes computer software, a microphone, USB preamplifier, microphone stand, and all necessary cabling to measure room response and make corrections.

The computer software would recommend a target response curve based on test tones generated by the Casablanca. Users can edit the recommended curve to suit their personal preferences and store up to four curves in the Casablanca. Each curve could be tied to a particular Casablanca input, creating music and movie curves and the like.

For its part, DTS Neo:X adds a pair of front-height speakers and a pair of front-wide speakers to a traditional 5.1-channel or 7.1-channel surround-sound speaker system. It up-mixes existing two-, 5.1- and 7.1-channel soundtracks to up to 11.1 channels. The two front-height channels elevate discrete and ambient sounds, and two front-wide speakers widen the front image and provide smooth tracking of front-to-side action.

Although the Casablanca previously supported up to 12 channels via Theta's proprietary post-processing technology, that technology offered up to seven full-band channels and five independent subwoofer channels, Hipps said. The least expensive 12-channel version of Casablanca is $19,370.

Casablanca also decodes Blu-ray's HD Audio codecs and features 3D-capable HDMI inputs and outputs.

In April, the brand will ship the $6,000 Prometheus monoblock amp, which will be the brand's first Class D amplifier.

Until now, all of Theta's amplifiers were balanced designs with zero global feedback, said Hipps. The new technology drives down distortion. Power is rated at 250 watts RMS into 8 ohms, 500 watts RMS into 4 ohms and 1,000 watts RMS into 2 ohms with less than 0.01 percent THD. The signal-to-noise ratio is 128dB A-weighted, and damping factor exceeds 2,500 at any frequency from 0Hz-20 kHz, Hipps said. Unlike typical Class D designs, he added, the frequency response is +0, -0.5 dB from 20Hz to 20kHz at any impedance load.

Theta is owned by audio-component supplier Amplifier Technology Inc., which also owns the B&K Components, ATI, AudioAccess, and BGW brands.