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BACK TO THE FUTURE

TO APPRECIATE THE ALLURES OF THE MOSCODE 401 HR HYBRID TUBE/
TRANSISTOR AMPLIFIER, ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS LISTEN. BY STEVE GUTTENBERG

The Moscode 401 HR stereo amplifier is a brand-new design with a story that dates back to the early 1980s. The HR suffix in the model name pays homage to the late Harvey “Gizmo” Rosenberg, a passionate audio evangelist who explored far-flung boundaries of product design. It was at Rosenberg’s company, New York Audio Laboratories, where Moscode head honcho George Kaye created the very first amplifier that commingled the romance of vacuum-tube sound with the efficiencies of solid-state design. The original Moscode caused quite a stir and inspired competitors’ hybrid tube/transistor designs through the following decades. The fusion of old and new technology was pure Harvey bravura—for him, audio gear was always more than mere hardware, and the best high-end designs served as totems on his search for “musical ecstasy.” Harvey went so far as to pack a diaper in the box with the original Moscode, “just in case you lose control of private functions” during your first audition. He was quite the showman.

Kaye nixed that “accessory” for the 401 HR, but he is emphatic about the new amplifier’s *raison d’être*. “Ultimately, the goal is to design something that makes you want to listen more. If someone walks by and hears the amp, I want them to be startled by its sound. It’s supposed to turn heads.” Talk like that from a manufacturer is music to my ears. Beyond resurrecting the Moscode brand, Kaye plays stand-up bass, owns a recording studio, and builds custom electronics for professional installations.

Clearly, the 401 HR is not the product of market research or an iPod-obsessed sales department. It was designed with a single goal: to sound great. Truth be told, the original Moscode’s basic-black styling wooed no one other than die-hard audiophiles; the new design—available in silver or black—has an integrity of purpose sorely lacking in more mainstream components. I find the 401 HR’s look thoroughly modern in a broad-shouldered, all-American way. The new modular design incorporates a host of technological refinements to enhance sound quality and rela-

bility. Internal construction standards are high, and the various capacitors, resistors, and other parts are of audiophile quality. Like the original Moscode, the 401 HR is built in America.

While the four stock tubes produce great sound, I am sure any adventurous 401 HR owner will want to partake in the ancient art of “tube rolling”—that is, experimenting with different brands and vintages of tubes to fine-tune the Moscode’s sound. Some tubes sound brighter or more up-front, others sound laid-back and sweet. Anticipating the audiophile imperative to fuss with the tubes, Kaye mounts the half-inch thick milled aluminum faceplate on a hinge to flip down out of the way for easy access. The flip-down faceplate makes it easy for

The 401 HR combines tube input and gain stages with an output stage composed of MOSFET transistors. The result is an amplifier with the power and precision of a solid-state amp, and a taste of the romantic, warm sound of tubes.



you or your installer to plug in a new set of tubes; the operation is a good deal more straightforward than, say, changing a soundcard on your computer. I swap a full set in less than a minute. In any case, the tubes will likely last many years; replacement tubes range from \$5 to \$50 a pop depending on the brand and quality you choose.

The 401 HR is primarily intended for use in high-end music systems, but three or four Moscode amplifiers could be just the ticket for a hot-sounding home theater. The amp's back panel is fitted with solid copper speaker connectors, stereo RCA inputs, and a switch that can convert the amplifier to dual-mono operation. The dual-mono option lets you feed the same signal to both channels, so if your speaker has separate binding posts for the woofer and tweeter, you can apply all of the 401 HR's available power to that one speaker. A control knob allows you to adjust the brightness of the edge-lit Moscode logo on the etched glass front panel. When you power up the amplifier, the Moscode logo throbs for 45 seconds until the circuits stabilize and become fully operational. The amplifier delivers 200 watts per channel for 8-ohm speakers and 400 watts each to 4-ohm speakers.

Sound is by nature ethereal, but there is something about the way the very best components imbue sound with characteristics that approach a physical presence. At the risk of sounding New Agey, it seems like the 401 HR lets my brain process less, so there is more truth in the sound. You find yourself more involved—your feet are moving, your head is bobbing to the music. If you have never heard a tube amplifier in all its glory, the



The front panel of the 401 HR hinges down for easy tube swapping. You can use a variety of tube types in the amp; there's a list printed on the chassis. Eight types (including the common 12AU7) are listed for the centermost tubes, and one extra for the two other tubes.

Moscode's sonics might feel like a decadent pleasure.

On a more objective basis, the 401 HR's sound is less immediately present than my favorite transistor amplifiers. That is not to say the sound is overtly mellow or soft—I hear a wealth of detail in my reference CDs and LPs, albeit devoid of electronic edge or zing. The tubes' prime contribution to the Moscode's sound is an enhanced spatial dimensionality on some of my better discs; instruments and voices emerge full-bodied and almost real from my speakers.

The amp's "round" sound mimics the timbre of live acoustic instruments, so I of course expect chamber and orchestral music to reap the benefits of tubes' golden warmth. It does, but it is rock'n'roll that truly wows me. Fire up

a little Jimi Hendrix or early Bruce Springsteen, and the 401 HR really struts its stuff. The raunchiest blues reach out to pull on my heartstrings. Even if I did not know that George Kaye plays bass, I might guess that after I hear the way that jazz icon Ron Carter's stand-up bass looms large over the Moscode. The instrument's life force comes through, loud and clear.

Future Moscode products will include a multichannel amplifier and possibly a stereo integrated amplifier. The 401 HR is currently being offered at a special introductory price with a 30-day trial period, direct from the Moscode website, so you can experience the amplifier's sound in the only system that matters: yours. [HE](#)

■ PRICE: \$4,995

■ CONTACT: 877.797.8823, moscode.com