

Quiescent Peak power modules

by Alan Sircom

Keen-eyed regular readers might be doing a bit of head-scratching here, as we reviewed both Apex and Peak from Quiescent back in Issue 197. And they'd be right... and wrong. Although the names – and the physical appearance – are the same, what's in the boxes is geared toward a very different role in your audio system. Where the last round of Peak modules were geared toward being used with loudspeakers (they had speaker terminals and flying loudspeaker leads), these Peaks are all power-based.

There's a lot to unpack here, figuratively and literally. Starting with the literal; four cartons, containing twelve boxes in total, making six individual devices, made up of eighteen separate components. That's a lot of stuff to get through. What we ended up with was two sets of the single power feed Peak Mains Module, one dual-output Peak Mains Module, a single Peak Mains Shunt filter, four silver-pated copper Peak UK power cords and four silver-pated copper Peak Neutrik powerCON to IEC connector cables... and two sets of three of the latest iteration of Quiescent's Apex40 component couplers.

Figuratively speaking, you need to think of these products as energy control devices, irrespective of whether that energy is electromagnetic, radio-frequency or mechanical. What Quiescent does in every product it makes is to try to tame that wayward energy, using a common set of methodologies for consistency. All feature non-parallel boxes with an acoustically disruptive pattern milled into the heavy black case; an anodised aluminium case for the Peaks, a 3D Printed enclosure for the Apex modules. Inside each of these non-parallel boxes is a complex 3D labyrinth ▶





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into adjacent power sockets, either a spare socket on the audio system’s distribution block or another socket on the same mains spur/ring as your system itself. Meanwhile the Peak Mains Module is a filter that sits between the mains socket and a component’s IEC input, creating an in-line filter and energy control device. The Single Output model delivers the highest degree of control and filtration, while the Dual Output (as the name suggests) allows two devices to share the same filter. Where possible, go with individual Single Output models; the Dual is extremely good, but one device per Module is best. All the Peak products (be it the ones in this issue or the loudspeaker boxes from Issue 197) sit on four tall, thin feet and can be stacked. Where last we used the Peak line-up with loudspeakers, this time it’s all electronics.

Let’s deal with the Apex couplers first. The review from Issue 197 still holds and its conclusions (that it reduces “background hash, stridency and hissy sibilance”) apply. They were provided largely because using the Peak products without having the audio electronics resting on Apex couplers largely defeats the object of the Peaks. In fact, if you are approaching this step-by-step, I’d argue start with the Apex40s first followed by the Peak Mains Shunt filter. These help you focus in on any changes subsequent Quiescent products brings to the system. Those changes are consistent, but contingent on the system you already have; essentially letting that system be as good as it can be without the ‘baggage’ different degrees of interference impose on that system.

Also, although the benefits of the Peak modules seem to work universally, I recommended taking any power conditioners out of the chain during the evaluation process; they don’t conflict, but there’s a potential for misattributing performance improvements. Instead, hear your system au naturel for a while, add in the Peak modules, and hear the system come round to a more unified way of working. This is not an instantaneous change and trying to perform a quick A-B test isn’t going to show much. Over the course of a few days, however, you find your system is operating more in line with how it should and – unless you have a legitimate physical mismatch somewhere in the system – this shows itself by making your system sounds consistent over time, and seemingly happier in its own skin.

The difficulty about Quiescent from a reviewer’s perspective is none of these components have a specific sonic ‘character’ of their own; it’s more that they help the equipment they work with to bring out their own intrinsic characteristics and play to their strengths. Yes, the usual power product highlights of lower noise floors, greater clarity and a less harsh sounding treble apply, and seem to do so universally. But that’s only going halfway to highlighting what they do so well. What you get beyond the audio vocabulary is a sense of music ‘coming together’ better. It’s like your streamer and amplifiers worked out any differences they had in a wholly amicable manner and are now best of friends.

- ▶ designed to prevent the ingress of stray energy, with notionally similar labyrinthine techniques used in both the electrical and mechanical domains.

I wanted to find an Alan-shaped (Sircom-sized?) way of expressing this acoustic and electrical labyrinth concept, but to do that I had to go full Kubrick; that unwanted energy is determined to do damage, but it ultimately bounces around inside a maze until it freezes to death while the music (played by Shelley Duvall and that creepy ‘redrum’ kid) drives off in a Snowcat. While like any analogies it is weaker than the original concept, at least it’s an analogy you’ll remember!

The difference between the devices is more to do with use than design, making for a very consistent set of results. The Peak Mains Shunt filter (the one with an IEC input on one end and nothing on the other) is a passive device designed to be plugged

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► This sense of a system working in harmony is hard to describe but works on any kind of music. We often point to small jazz combos at this point, describing how the musicians are so adept at working together. The problem is, that’s kind of what jazz combos are good at, so we highlight something that is already playing to the musicians’ strengths. On the other hand, play something more ‘angular’ [‘Leave My Head Alone Brain’ by Wesseltoft and Schwarz, *Duo*, Jazzland] and the interplay between piano, treated instruments and electronics melds as elegantly as any smoky club from the 1950s. In less competent hands, this could be an over-smooth view of music; as if Fleetwood Mac’s *Rumours* [Warner Bros] was written by five people who really got along with one another. Music needs its hard edges at times, and the Quiescent products do nothing to planish those edges smooth. They just make things the equipment work more smoothly and get in the way less.

I guess the point of Quiescent devices is this: we all have an idealistic view of how our systems should sound, based on the first demonstration, those early days with the equipment, reviews and more. That idealism is often not met in day-to-day reality; while that system can still shine, those good days are often interrupted by times when the same system sounds flat or uneven or just plain ‘off’. While some of that is down to the mood of the listener, we’ve all had times when what should be a musical salve to shake off the stresses of the day becomes a frustration. Quiescent’s Apex and Peak products don’t magically make your system sound better, but they make it sound more like you expect it to sound, more consistently. They take away much of the frustration of an audio system’s ‘bad hair day’ when nothing works right, making such days increasingly rare.

There are few downsides here. Yes, there are listeners who are so keen on a specific aspect of performance they focus on making everything create a bigger soundstage or tauter rhythmic properties above all other considerations. For those, the more holistic approach of Quiescent could prove too even-handed. Also, the products that benefit the most from Quiescent’s gentle and deft touch are those at the more affordable/attainable end of the audio price spectrum, which are paradoxically the ones least likely to be partnered with products from Quiescent’s portfolio. Otherwise, the only real downside is trying to explain what they do and why without resorting to pointing to the end of *The Shining*...

In a past life, what came before Quiescent proved addictive and cumulative; those who got it quickly went from ‘toe in the water’ to ‘total-body immersion’ at speed... and that was at a time when the equivalent power filter was built in a nondescript aluminium case. Given the outside of Quiescent products is every bit as clever as what lives inside, and what’s inside works extremely well, I have little doubt that if you give Quiescent a try, you’ll be back for more. And more! +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Peak Mains Modules

Casework construction: Ultra-

low resonant black anodised
high-grade solid aluminium block

Absorption Technology: Multi-phase,
wide-bandwidth electrical labyrinth
(EMI/RFI); Proprietary casework with
3D passive acoustic absorption
materials (Mechanical)

Wiring: Extremely high-grade pure silver
internal wiring with Teflon™ air-tube
dielectric

Filtration: Built-in ultra-fast RF shunt filter.
Proprietary passive EMI and RFI
absorption technology

Dimensions (LxWxH): 24 × 15 × 7.5cm

Weight: 4.5kg

Price: £2,040 Single Output, £2,162
Double Output, £1,953 Shunt Filter

Peak Mains Cables

Conductors: Silver-plated copper with
over 30A current capability for
ultra-low cable resistance

Insulation: Teflon™ air-tube insulation with
proprietary EMI/RFI absorption tubing
over entire length

Braiding: Acoustic dampening

Price: £801/1m (UK plug to IEC),
£661/1m (Neutrik powerCON to 10A
IEC), £947/1m (Neutrik powerCON
to 16A IEC)

Apex40 Component Couplers

Casework Construction: 3D printed
acoustic labyrinth

EMI/RFI Absorption Factor: 1.00

Maximum load: 45kg

Dimensions (WxDxH): 12.1 × 11 × 4cm
per coupler

Weight: 400g per coupler

Price: £740 (pack of three)

Manufacturer: Quiescent

URL: quiescent.co.uk