



The

Broadcasters' Desktop Resource

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... edited by Barry Mishkind – the Eclectic Engineer

The Cheap Channel

Excellent Tripath Class T Amplifiers That Will Not Break the Bank



By Dana Puopolo

[May 2012] Dana Puopolo is always looking for cheap ways to do great things. This time he brings us a couple of inexpensive audio amplifiers that might just solve a problem for you.

This time I would like to show you two products I have found that will dazzle you with their audio quality and inexpensive price. Interested? Read on.

THE TRIPATH AMPLIFIER

The Tripath audio IC has been known in audiophile circles for years as a high quality audio amplifier that also happens to run as high as 88% efficiency.

I have been using Tripath amplifiers for years and have found them superior to most mid-fi audio equipment (IE: NAD, Adcom, Pioneer, Harmon Kardon, etc.) – and equals many audio amplifiers at 100 times their price.

The only limitations I have found thus far are that the low-priced gear is power limited to

around 12 to 15 Watts per channel, but with high efficiency speakers (those that will put out 90 dB from 1 Watt input) they play quite loud.

Lepai is a Chinese manufacturer that makes audio amplifiers using Tripath Class T audio amplifiers in them. I will show you two of these amazing Lepai products, both are available at Amazon.com and Parts Express.

HIGH QUALITY AUDIO – CHEAP!

The first item I would like to recommend is an Audio Mini Amplifier with Power Supply – for under \$25.



This amplifier offers such features as tone controls (with bypass button), a large illuminated

volume control, RCA and 1/8 inch TRS inputs, and an external 12 Volt / 2 Amp switching power supply. Its sound (with the tone controls bypassed) is above reproach. I use one on my 40-inch TV to drive a pair of rebuilt Advent Legacy II speakers.

It sounds fantastic and it plays *loud!*

The amplifier has such a nice midrange that I have found a center channel dialog speaker unnecessary. The Lepai runs rings around my old amplifier, an Adcom GFA 535 (though the Adcom has more power) quality wise.

The price [at Amazon.com was just \\$24.49](#) If you buy then something else that gets the total for your order over \$25, you qualify for free shipping – and the entire order ships for free. [I bought a 9 Volt battery.](#)

AUDIO AMP, FM TUNER, AND MORE

The second Lepai product is really unique. It also sounds incredible.



This Tripath audio amplifier includes a stereo FM tuner with whip antenna, external audio inputs, tone controls, the ability to play audio files from both SD cards and USB drives, and a wireless remote control. [All this for only \\$31.50 shipped](#) – again complete with a switching power supply.

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The FM tuner is a “scan type” (no frequency readout), but sounds very good and is fairly sensitive (I pick up all the local Philly stations fine with the whip antenna).

I have not tried the SD card playback, but the USB playback sounds and works well (you can select by both file and folders).

I use this as part of the audio/video system in my bedroom, connected to the audio output of my DirecTV receiver. It even works with the DirecTV universal remote to control volume. This way my wife can listen to DirecTV’s ambient audio channel to help her get to sleep without the need for the TV to be on.

You cannot defeat the tone controls in this unit but I have found them to be useful with the smallish Optimus LX-5 Lineaum speakers I hook up to my amplifier (another great audio deal if you can find them at a reasonable price).

BREAKING THEM IN

Both of these sound best after about 50 hours of use. I leave mine on; the high efficiency means low power cost. They are also physically small (the larger one is 120 x 147 x 42 mm), so they can go most anywhere.

I highly recommend both these amplifiers and believe that you also will like them a lot.

Want some help in finding a bargain? Ask Dana Puopolo.

Puopolo is the Chief Engineer at WURD and a long-time bargain hunter. His email is: dpuopolo@usa.net
