

Error feedback in audio power

In response to a plea for help on a feedback problem, William de Bruyn has unearthed three alternative methods of error feedback for power amplifiers that do work.

Following K H Ellis's plea for help in 'Feedback on Feedback' in the December 1996 issue, it seems to me that his amplifier (outlined later) was always bound to be unstable. Little or no attention seems to have been given to issues of loop stability.

Addition of the 22pF capacitor simply inserts a dominant pole at a suitable frequency; it does not 'filter' noise. The operational amplifier chosen for this implementation of Hawksford's error-cancelling idea is not particularly suitable as the inherent slew rate limitations of the device restrict the potential bandwidth.

There has been a number of practical amplifier designs which have used the idea of an error feedback loop around the output stage of an amplifier.

First is a design by E. M. Cherry, which deals with a number of issues rather elegantly. Quiescent current is sensed and controlled without any need for complex schemes of thermal feedback. Such schemes bring with them the difficulties of dealing with all of the ther-

mal/electrical time constants.

Prof. Cherry's approach to this problem – the feedback loop around the back-to-back differential pairs – also permits accurate setting of the gain of the output stage to some desired level.

His concept of nested differentiating feedback loops achieves unconditional stability with high levels of feedback and very low distortion within the audio band.

A further amplifier of note is designed by Robert Cordell. It was published in 1983 and reprinted in the *Journal of the Audio Engineering Society*, Vol. 32, No 1/2, 1984, Jan/Feb.

This amplifier employs a simple method of feed-forward error correction based on Hawksford's scheme. The error-correction loop uses only two fast small signal transistors and the resulting improvement in transfer linearity is quite remarkable. Most of the crossover and transfer artefacts, that so much recent correspondence has concerned itself

with, become relatively minor issues.

This design is capable of extremely low distortion over a very wide frequency band – less than 0.001% from 20Hz-20kHz. It also exhibits extraordinarily good high-frequency and transient performance and achieves a slew rate of more than 300V/μs.

The third amplifier is a commercially produced design, namely the Tandberg 3009A. This also uses a variant of Hawksford's scheme. In this case no overall feedback is applied, each stage relying on local feedback for setting of overall gain. In this instance, the output stage used Hitachi mosfets. These fets are distinguished from Hexfet structures by their substantially lower transconductance and threshold voltages. This Amplifier is capable of good high-frequency performance.

All in all, I feel that much of the rather heated debate regarding the linearity of igt devices as opposed to mosfets, 'batwing' transfer curves, etc. is rather absurd and has more to do with what people grasp with their hands

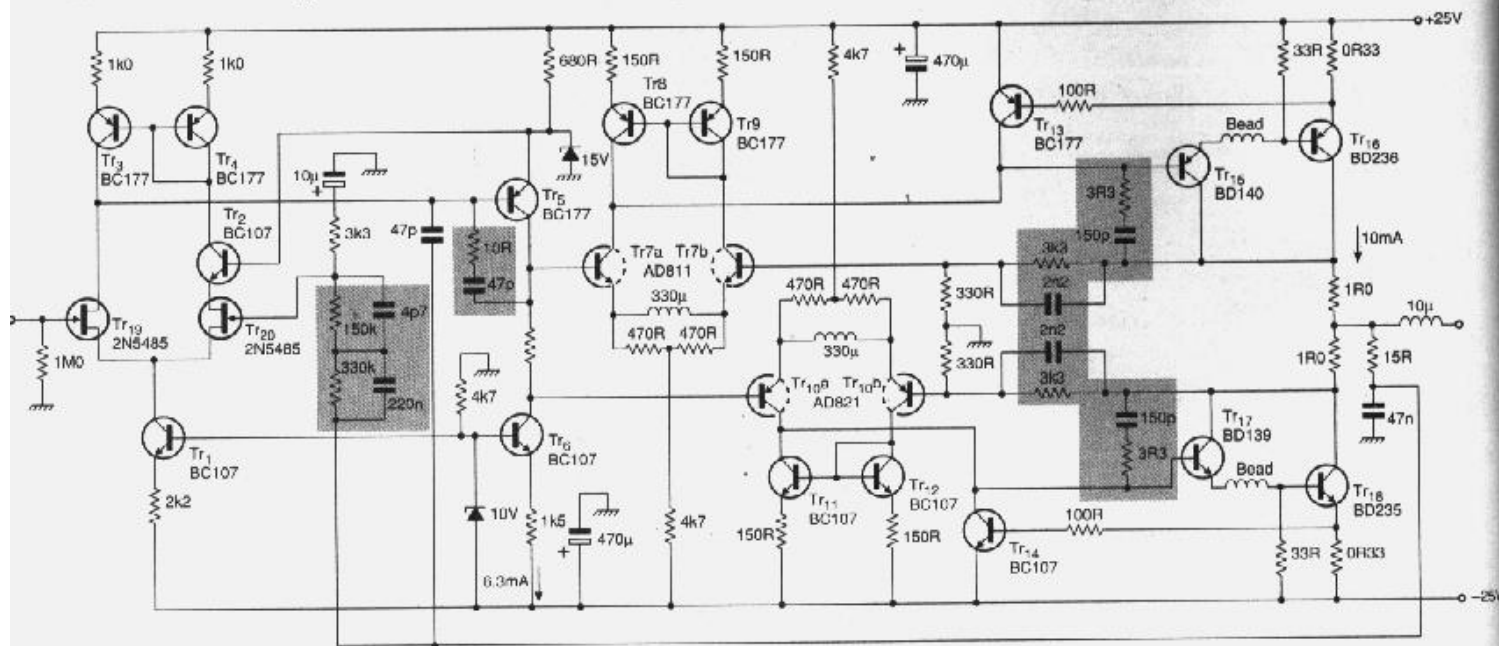
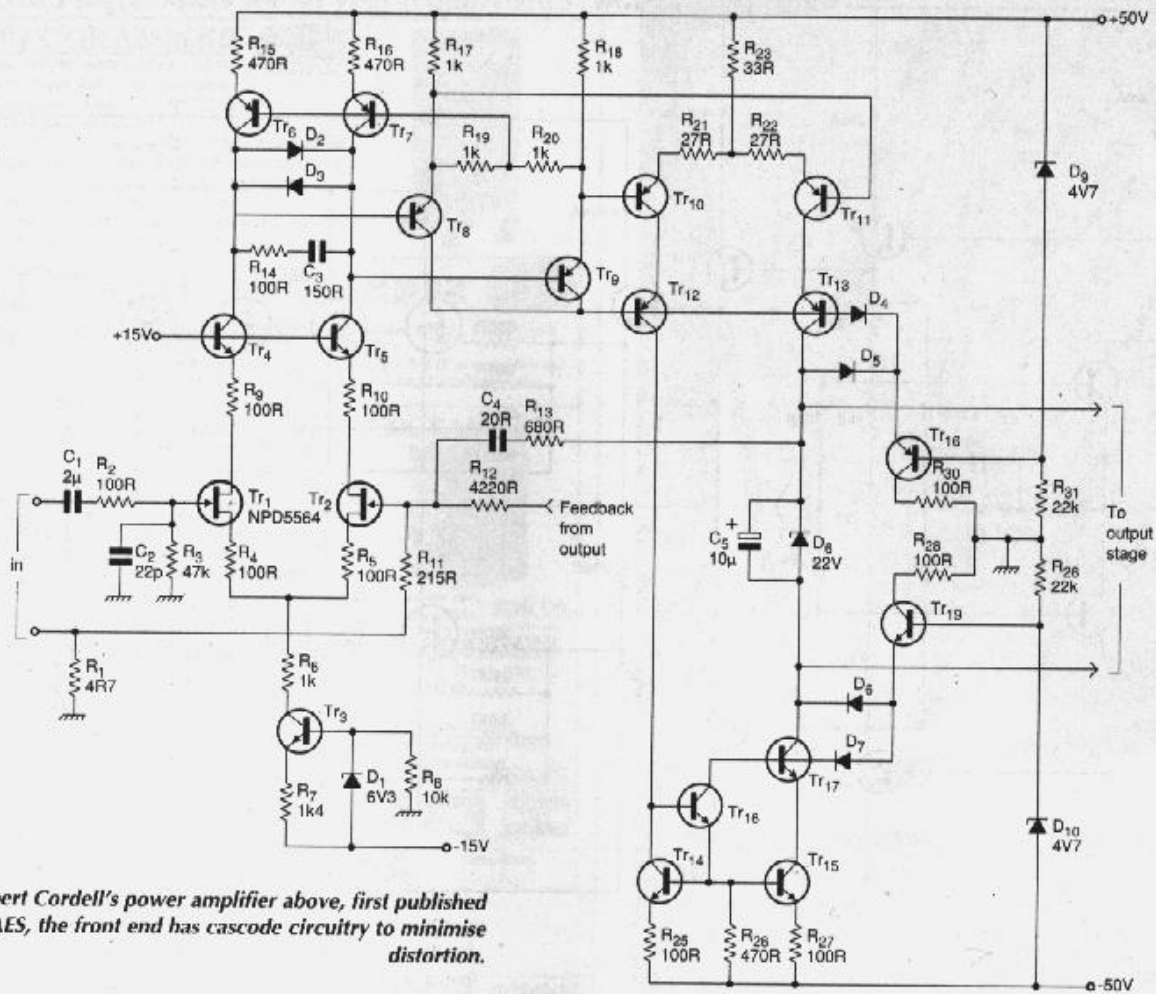
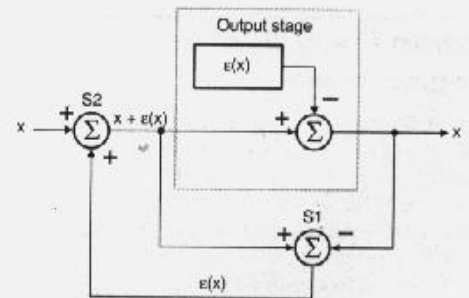
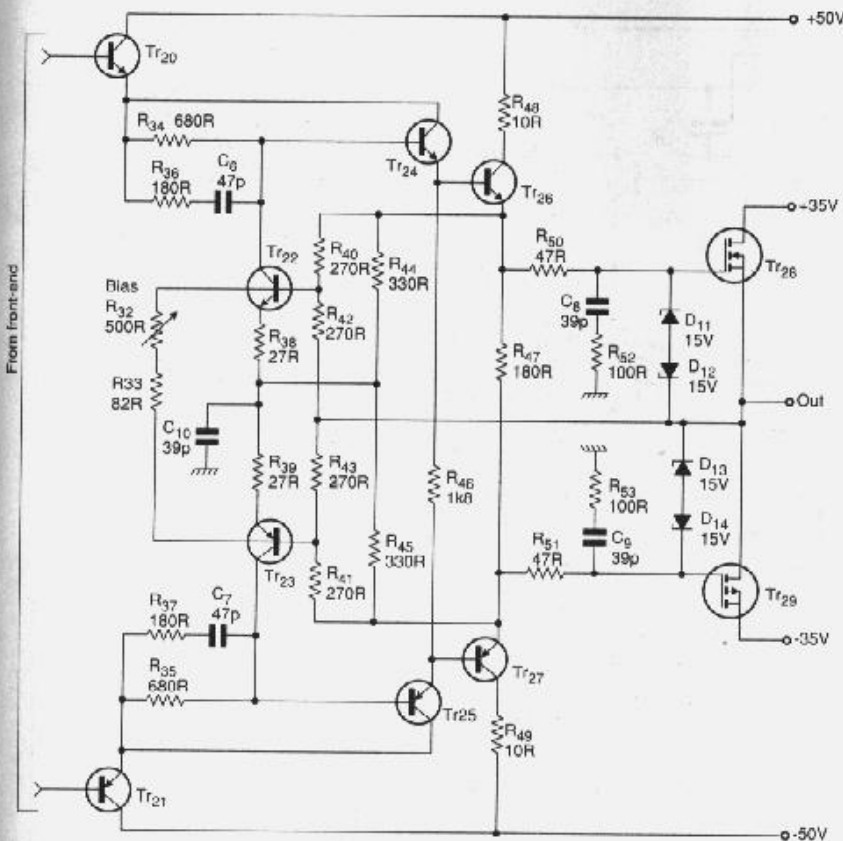


Fig. 1. Ed Cherry's 15W, 15Ω power amplifier, first published in *IREE* transactions, nested differentiating feedback loops are used. Note the driver circuit with inherent quiescent current regulation and substantial local feedback around the output stage.



In Robert Cordell's power amplifier above, first published in JAES, the front end has cascode circuitry to minimise distortion.



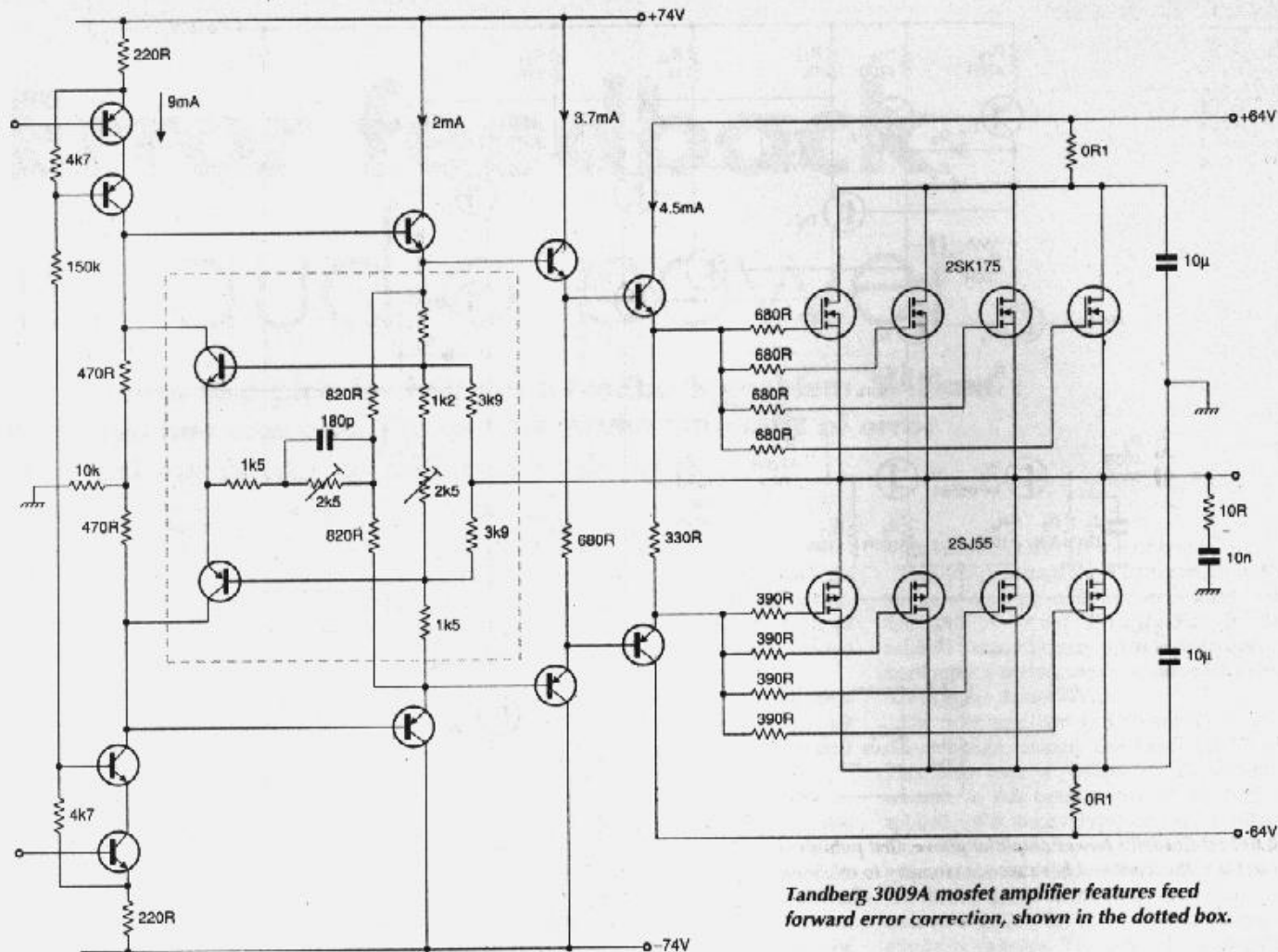
Error correction concept, above, for Cordell's power amplifier output stage, left, in which Tr22 and Tr23 provide the error correction.

rather than with their minds.

As many of the problems associated with amplifier design seem to centre on achieving ever greater bandwidth, it seems – to me at least – that the fastest available devices are the preferred option.

Poor transfer linearity can be readily dealt with by applying some sort of error correction around the output stage, without the problems of dealing with all of the poles that the application of overall feedback has to contend with.

I would be pleased to see someone apply some form of error cancelling feedback loop around, say, a valve amplifier output stage. Such devices are inherently less linear than mosfets and have much lower transconductance than any solid state device.



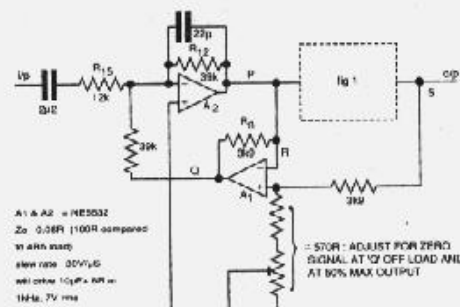
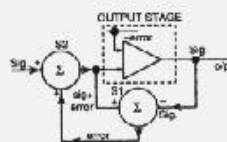
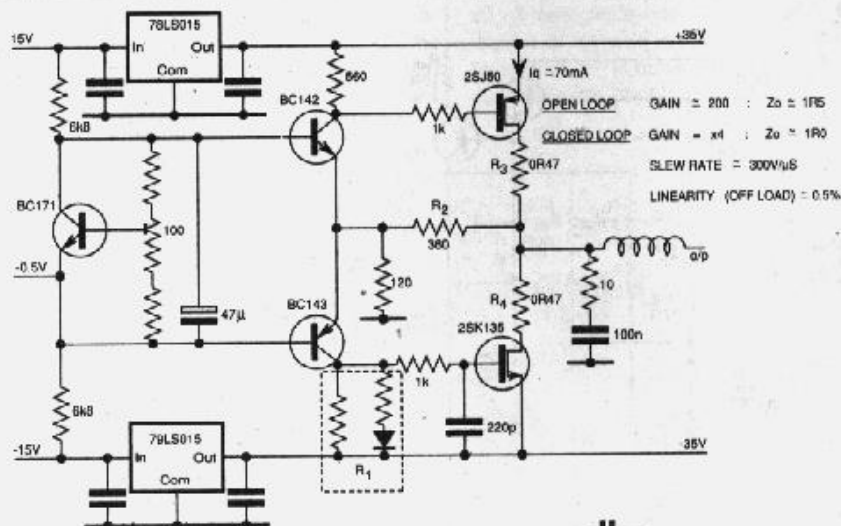
Extract from Ellis's original query

...applying negative feedback to give a gain of four, the stage shown gives reasonable performance, except that output impedance is about 1Ω . Also, when loaded, the stage distorts because there is nothing to increase the drive.

I was about to give in when I came across a reference to an error cancelling technique by Hawksford. The small diagram below gives the theory. Having got the gains right, the results were astounding.

During testing, I found that a capacitive load of more than 22nF caused a high output at high frequency. This was a surprise as the output stage itself would happily drive a $10\mu\text{F}$ at 1kHz . More experimenting gave the feeling that this was not parasitic oscillation, but rather amplified and filtered noise. While loading the output with increasing values of capacitor, the output of A_1 became increasingly noisy until it burst into oscillation at about 2MHz . Putting a small capacitor across R_8 (A_1) stopped the oscillation but was not the best place as only the error signal was being filtered. The best solution was a 22pF across R_{12} (A_2) to filter signal and error. The amplifier now drives $10\mu\text{F}$ with no problem.

I would welcome your comments.

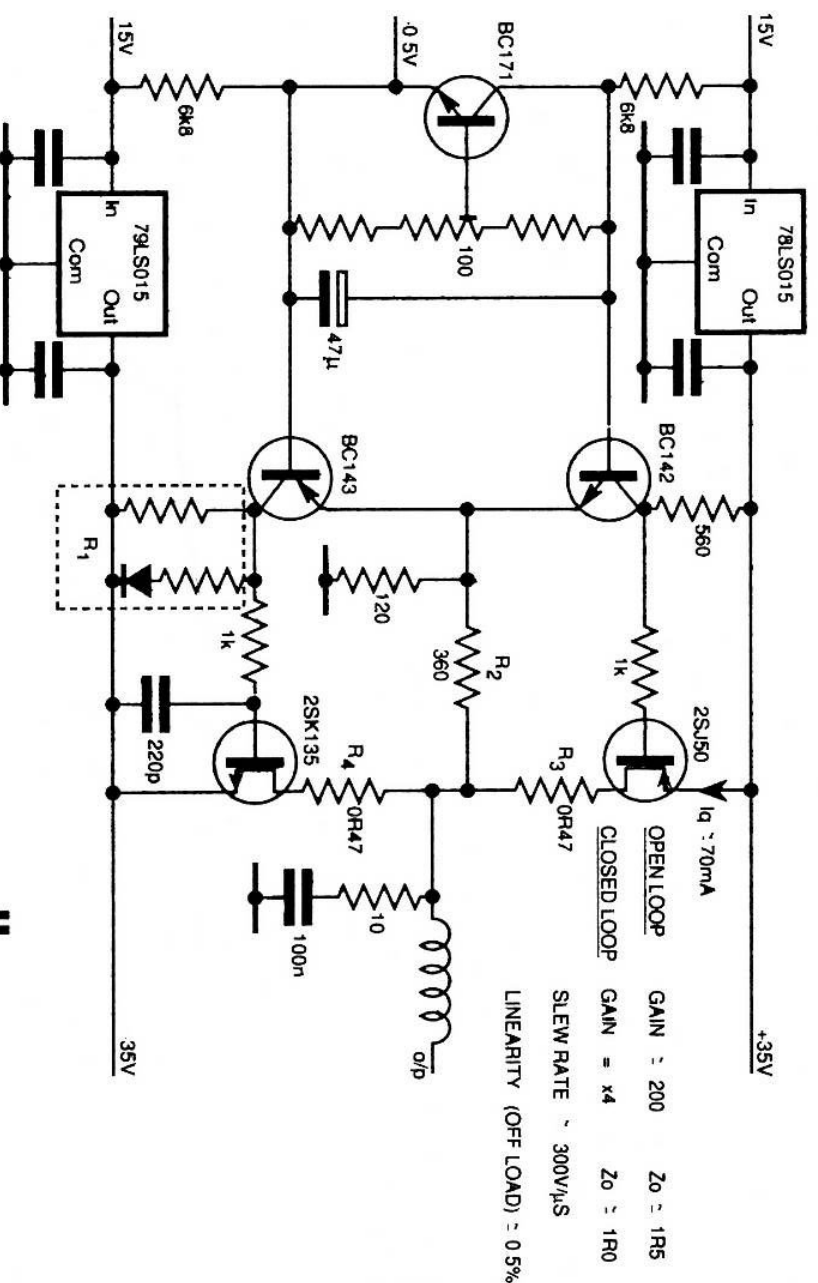


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TI Texan output stage, top, before a practical implementation (below right) of Hawksford's error-cancelling idea, below left, was added.

