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KRELL EVOLUTION 222 & 302

Krell's top-end Evolution series continues to evolve with a new power amp, exclusively reviewed here with its matching preamp

PRICE £17,448 (Evo 222: £8,498; Evo 302: £8,950) CONTACT Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0TW ☎ 020 8597 3909 www.krellonline.com

The two components here are relatively junior models from a range that extends at its top end to include a mono preamp and separate (outboard) power supply, and a matching two-box monaural high power monoblock power amplifier.

Like other recent Krell designs, the Evolution 222 preamplifier is a Current Mode design, which when interconnected with a matching Current Mode power amplifier using the proprietary CAST (Current Audio Signal Transmission) interface, reduces the number of inherently lossy current-to-voltage conversion stages to the lowest number possible: one, including both preamp and power amp, and including also any CAST enabled source component. Zero overall negative feedback is claimed, though single digit levels of local feedback are used around individual stages, yet distortion is typically less than 50 parts per million. All gain is achieved using surface-mount topology through proprietary multiple-output current mirrors. The volume/balance control is a precision 16-bit resistive ladder. The design allows for single-ended and balanced operation, and a range of custom install features are included.

The new Evolution 302 power amp adds Active Cascode Technology, a massively parallel configuration which is said to minimize distortion by using two to three times as many active gain devices per gain stage. The power amp has an output rating of 300 watts into eight ohms from a 3kVA transformer, and the output doubles into four ohms and doubles again into two ohms, a sure sign of its near ideal behaviour as a current source. Extensive monitoring is employed to ensure safe operation across the entire performance envelope. The amplifier is well packaged, in typical Krell fashion, with semi-enclosed convection cooling. Inputs are single-ended, balanced and CAST 4-pin bayonet, and the unit tips the scales at 54.3kg.

We had some help installing the system and getting it up to speed, but when we declared a break after several hours work, and simply sat down to listen, there was almost a snap change that occurred about half an hour into a symphonic recording we were playing. At the beginning, the strings sounded raw and grainy, but quite suddenly and unmistakably they acquired their accustomed bloom and sweetness. The amplifier is also extremely cable sensitive, but this is no shock: any truly transparent system will naturally be open to

very subtle changes; not that cable differences are always particularly subtle. For most of the time, the pre and power amps were connected using CAST, but even Krell clearly doesn't consider the interface completely takes cable differences out of the equation as we understand the company has placed orders for CAST cables based on Nordost's Odin design (see p120). You wouldn't do that if cables didn't make a difference.

before. It is still wonderfully disciplined, but it wears a subtly more organic, human face. A hint of warmth and harmonic richness have crept into the proceedings. Sometimes you almost sense that the system is smiling while it is working, though there is rarely any obvious sense that it is working hard for its living. But it does breathe in a more obvious and relaxed way, which is a relatively novel finding with Krell. Certainly there is no obvious strain, and

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Much about the sound of these two mighty amps is quintessentially Krell: big and exceptionally disciplined, with bass that plumbs the depths yet keeps a vice-like grip on the music. By choosing a Krell amplifier, you know that you will rarely notice any change of temperament no matter what frequency range is involved or how high you set the volume. It is this change in character when tracking the envelope of a recording that defines the personality of an amplifier, more so than any other factor, but Krell products rarely suffer this kind of almost human frailty and, sure enough, that is the case here.

But the current Krell sound exemplified by this combination is slightly different from

equally certainly the combination is capable of awe-inspiring real-world power yields, especially in this test driving the big Focal Nova that is also reviewed in this issue.

Krell's ultra-heavyweight designs were always devastatingly powerful and authoritative. But where the predecessors of this pair were sometimes almost po-faced, here there is a lightness of touch, a grace and a sense of fluidity that was not always a prominent part of the Krell package in the past. For well-heeled music fans, few hi-fi components come close to the calm, controlled sonic potency on offer here – power, grace and not a hair out of place. ■

Alvin Gold

