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SURPRISE, SURPRISE

THINK YOU'VE HEARD IT ALL? YOU HAVEN'T: KRELL'S RESOLUTION SERIES DOES THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW A SPEAKER COULD DO.

BY DENNIS BURGER PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN PHILLIP

Day in, day out, I take calls from speaker manufacturers who want me to review their product. Too often, the conversation goes like this:

Editor: "What's special about it? It looks pretty ordinary."

Manufacturer: "Well, it sounds great."

Editor: "Every manufacturer says that."

Manufacturer: "But this one really is exceptional."

Editor: "Every manufacturer says that, too."

In these days of sleek, lifestyle-oriented audiovisual products, such as wall-mounted speakers and plasma TVs, a conventional box speaker commands little attention. The only way it can distinguish itself is through performance, and because there are so many outstanding box speakers available, that's a slim reed to lean on.

Krell's Resolution 1 (left), Resolution C (center) and Resolution 3 (right).

Thus, when a public-relations rep offers me Krell's new Resolution Series speakers for review, I can summon little enthusiasm. I love Krell gear, but what can I say about yet another box speaker? Luckily for him, I have just finished testing a slew of in-wall and in-ceiling speakers and am sick of cutting drywall panels, so I succumb—a decision I will both relish and regret.

My regret begins upon the speakers' arrival, because each of the two Resolution 1 speakers—the flagship of the line—weighs 195 pounds. Unpacking and moving them is no pleasure. In audio, though, weight often indicates quality, and it turns out that the Resolution 1 speaker is much heavier in one key area than its competitors.

The Resolution Series comprises five models; I receive three. I use a pair of Resolution 1s for the front left and right speakers in my home theater system, a pair of the smaller Resolution 3s as my left and right surround

speakers, and a Resolution C as my center speaker. The Resolution 3 and C use drivers borrowed from the Resolution 1, and carry the same excellent construction quality and rich cherry finish. All of the speakers include an unusual grille composed of taut rubber strands. The strands affect sound quality slightly less than a typical fabric grille does, and they add a distinctive look because the spaces between the rubber strands allow the drivers to show through.

I connect the Resolution Series speakers to Krell's Showcase amplifier (which happens to be the amp I normally use for speaker testing) and surround-sound processor, thereby forming what Krell calls a High End Audio Theater (HEAT) system. I let fly with *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, which may be the most demanding soundtrack ever put to DVD. I expect to be impressed but not amazed; I have, after all, heard a lot of speakers. But I start to notice

something different, a quality I have never heard before.

Call it "speed," call it "punch," call it what you will, the sound of the Resolution Series has an immediacy equaled in no other speaker I have tested. This quality dramatically increases the realism of your home theater experience. I hear this character in every part of the audio range. When the good guys in *The Return of the King* bombard the bad guys with chunks of buildings, the impacts frighten me. I feel the bass in my chest as much as I hear it. Yet when I turn off the video projector and play audiophile CDs, the delicate treble of percussion instruments—such as castanets in Chesky Records' fantastic *The Coryells*—also seems verisimilar.

When I visit Krell two weeks later, I ask Chief Engineer and CEO Dan D'Agostino how the Resolution Series can produce such superior realism. "The speakers have very stiff, well-made cabinets, but of

course everyone has that," he confesses. "And we're using excellent drivers, but they're off-the-shelf parts that any manufacturer can buy. What is special is the crossovers [the circuit boards that route bass to the woofer, treble to the tweeter, etc.]. In the course of building amplifiers for the last few decades, we've learned how to build circuit boards of the highest possible quality. This is what we contribute to speaker design. A company that makes only speakers doesn't have that experience."

He then shows me the crossover for the Resolution

DESCRIPTION

Music/home theater speaker system; system tested comprises two Resolution 1 tower speakers, one Resolution C center speaker and two Resolution 3 monitor speakers. Subwoofer optional

COMPONENTS

Resolution 1: Two 10-inch aluminum-cone woofers, 8-inch magnesium-cone midrange/woofer, 4-inch polypropylene-cone midrange, 1-inch dual-concentric-ring tweeter

Resolution C: Two 8-inch aluminum-cone woofers, 4-inch polypropylene-cone midrange, 1-inch dual-concentric-ring tweeter

Resolution 3: 8-inch magnesium-cone midrange/woofer, 1-inch dual-concentric-ring tweeter

CONNECTIONS

Resolution 1: Two pairs 5-way metal binding posts (accept bare wire, pins, spade lugs, banana plugs and dual banana plugs). Biwireable

Resolution C: Same as above

Resolution 3: Same as above

DIMENSIONS

Resolution 1: 58 x 13.2 x 19.7 inches (hwd)

Resolution C: 12.3 x 32 x 16.7 inches (hwd)

Resolution 3: 16.7 x 11.3 x 16 inches (hwd)

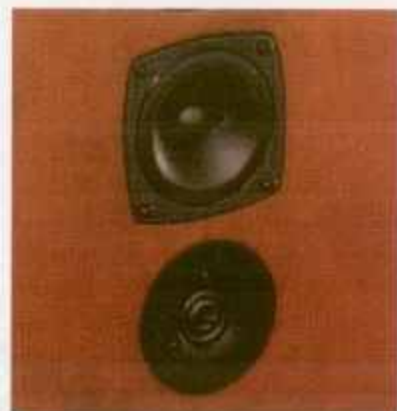
PRICE/CONTACT

PRICE: Resolution 1 \$11,000 per pair, Resolution C \$3,500 each, Resolution 3 \$4,000 per pair

CONTACT: 203.799.9954
krellonline.com



Compliant mounting material isolates the midrange/woofer driver on the Resolution 1 and Resolution 3 (left) from speaker-cabinet vibration. Excellent tweeters and midrange drivers (right) complete the package.



1: four separate circuit boards weighing 45 pounds in total. Each one carries gigantic coils of wire—the inductors used to block certain frequencies of sound. "We use extra-heavy-gauge wire in our inductors," D'Agostino continues, "because it lets more signal pass through. That's why the inductors are so large. We also use heavy-gauge copper for the connections on the circuit boards."

Just as it is difficult to resist speeding when you drive a Ferrari, it is all too easy to push the Resolution Series speakers to extreme volume. These speakers play loud but never *sound* loud, because they produce so little distortion. Even as the speakers massage your body with sound, they treat your ears gently.

But in the same way that pushing a car to its limits takes a toll on the tires, exploring the performance

capabilities of the Resolution 1, in particular, can stress amplifiers to the breaking point. With the volume cranked up high, dynamic peaks of the most demanding DVDs (such as *The Return of the King* or *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones*) cause the Showcase amplifier to shut down temporarily—and permanently damage a competing high-end amplifier. Had I added the Resolution Subwoofer, as Krell suggests, to assume some of the bass-reproduction duties, I'm sure the Showcase amp would have endured the punishment without complaint. Still, the Resolution 1 deserves an elite, high-wattage, high-current stereo amplifier (or a pair of mono amps) instead of a multichannel amplifier like the Showcase.

Besides their perhaps-unprecedented immediacy and incredible dynamic capability, the Resolution Series speakers do all the things one would expect of a carefully designed high-end speaker.

When you play well-recorded stereo CDs, instruments seem to float in space between the speakers, and sometimes even behind you. Voices sound exceptionally natural: never raspy, never dull, never bloated, never thin. The bass, treble and midrange are perfectly balanced, with no particular part of the sonic spectrum calling attention to itself. That being said, the Resolution 1 outperforms its smaller sibling, the Resolution 3, with a clearer midrange and more realistic ambience. So make space in your room—and room in your budget—for the big one.

Having reviewed somewhere between 500 and 1,000 speakers in my career, I thought it would be impossible for one to really astonish me. But the Resolution Series—and the Resolution 1 especially—are truly better than anything I have ever reviewed. Krell's efforts show that even in a field overflowing with competent competitors, imagination and quality craftsmanship can produce a better-sounding product. Imagine if the music industry itself could learn this lesson. **[RE]**

