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The Krell Evolution 202 and 600 combine to create an astonishing amplifier

KRELL EVOLUTION 202 & 600

An uncompromising amplifier from a doyen of the high end

PRICE 202: £12,900; 600: £13,333 each **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds ■ 020 8971 3909 ■ www.krellonline.com

This is a technically sophisticated combination that eschews the more traditional amplifier architectures, and comes from near the top of the Krell range. Internally, the pre and power monoblocks have a fully complementary differential signal path and operate in Class A, with a CAST connection as the preferred interface option. CAST uses miniature four-pin connectors and thin, tractable wire, eliminating the requirement for more than a single I-to-V (current-to-voltage) conversion stage within the CAST loop, no matter how many components there are. All gain is performed in the current rather than the voltage domain. Advantages to CAST extend to eliminating the interconnects on sound quality, greater transparency due to the inherently simple circuit topology and greater immunity from outside interference.

In the case of the preamplifier there is absolutely zero negative feedback, and the audio signal is protected by current mode gain against external interference. The power amplifiers make do with very modest levels of feedback – just 8dB, much less than the FPB range's 26dB requirement.

CONTROLLED POWER

One model down from the flagship Evolution Two, the 202 preamp is

a twin-chassis fully balanced differential design. Its power supply is built around a quad-rectified 170VA toroidal transformer and

39,500uF of filter capacitance, plus a separate 90VA supply for digital control, to which it connects via an umbilical.

The preamplifier has an enormously wide 1.5MHz open loop bandwidth. Gain is controlled by a smooth running multi-turn encoder that uses a 16-bit resistive ladder to define the volume steps. Each EVO 600 power monoblock is built around a prodigious 5,000VA power supply and includes power line conditioning, which is probably more of a benefit in the US than in the UK. Krell's Active Cascode Topology feeds the audio signal through a number of low-voltage parallel gain stages.

The 202 has two pairs of CAST inputs and outputs, while the power monoblocks have one each, and all three have parallel single-ended and balanced inputs – phono and XLR and respectively. The preamp also has five analogue inputs, and a full set of features to support custom install systems, including a Theatre Throughput feature and input naming.

The 600s are designed to deliver 600 watts into eight ohms, doubling in output for each halving of load impedance down to

one ohm, and not falling much short even into 0.5 ohms. This is an amplifier that will probably drive the proverbial piece of wet string. Each of the two power amps, by the way, tips the scales at 61.1kg, and is 560mm deep, excluding cables.

The Krell combination has dynamics, tonal accuracy and an expressive range that knows few if any peers. Tonally it is not bright, and it certainly is not full or over-warm, but by the same token it does not set out to deceive or flatter. Distortion, such as it is, is not audible to my ears. The Krell is astonishingly clean and vivid. The system also has an amazingly wide dynamic range, partly because it goes unfeasibly loud with practically unstoppable output capability.

What came as a real surprise was the fluidity of the system at moderate volume levels, and the way it was able to breathe life into the acoustic of fine recording spaces even when the result was at such a low level it was best hinted at rather than heard. This was apparent, for example, with SACD recordings of the Beethoven and the late Bruckner symphonies (Günter Wand), and with a favourite recording of Strauss' *Four Last Songs* (Elisabeth Soderstrom).

I am sure this amplifier will drive just about any loudspeaker load – certainly those I had access to including the Martin Logan Spire and the Mordaunt-Short Performance 6. I would have loved to use the Krell with a really big, hungry, wide-bandwidth

loudspeaker, perhaps a Monitor Audio Platinum PL300 or one of the big Focal Utopias, but I have heard these with lesser Krells and it is not feasible that the Evolutions have anything to fear.

HOT STUFF

The obvious snag is that this is an infeasibly expensive combination, beyond the reach of all but the most wealthy buyers. Another is that the combination runs hot once stabilised, particularly the power amps, which may be a legacy of their internal Class A architecture. Parts of the case are too hot to touch for long, and standby power consumption is high too.

Finally, I had no opportunity to use the Krell system in full CAST mode, as the Krell Standard SACD Mk III available does not include the interface. Judging by the performance in balanced mode (using Nordost XLR leads) and then CAST, the former adds a subtle touch of granularity, and a fully CAST enabled system should be more transparent still. This is an astonishing amplifier. ■

Alvin Gold



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