

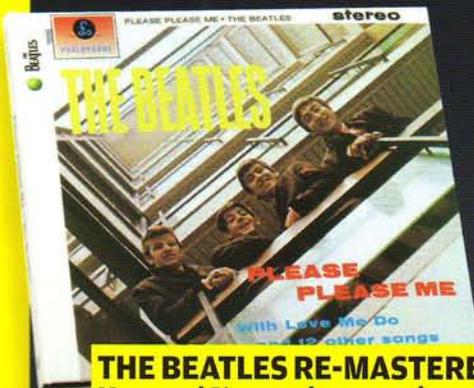
hi-fi news

THE HOME OF REAL HI-FI

& Record Review

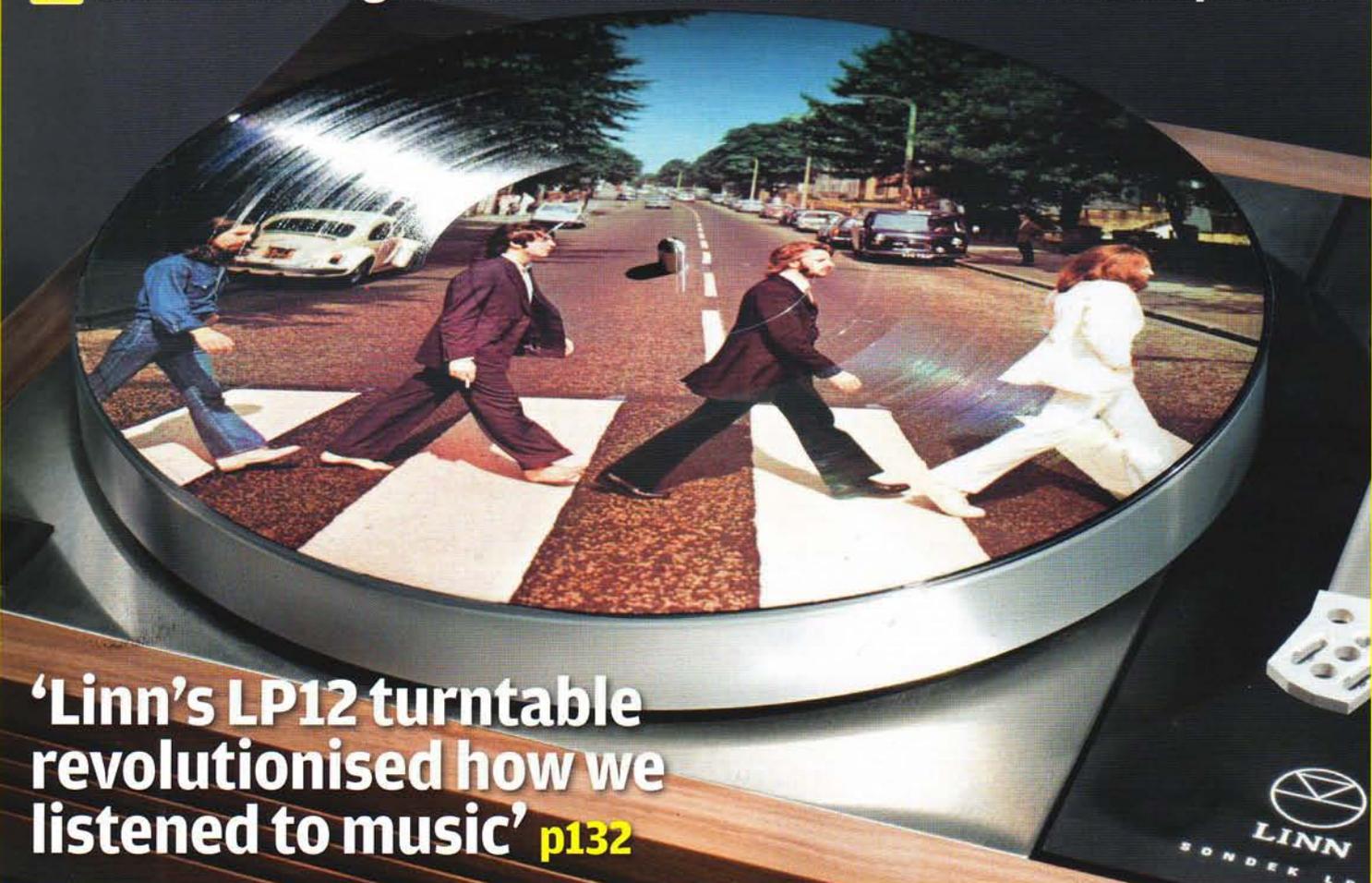
ULTIMATE HI-FI 2009

We choose the year's best products



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Mono and Stereo releases reviewed

The Beatles Box Set – Worth the wait? Read our Verdict
+ Re-mastering the music – behind the scenes at Abbey Road



'Linn's LP12 turntable revolutionised how we listened to music' p132



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UK £4.00 US \$9.50 Aus \$9.95



AUDIO
FILEStereo integrated amplifier. Rated at 150W/8ohm
Made by: Krell Industries
Supplied by: Absolute Sounds
Telephone: 020 8971 3909
Web: www.krellonline.comhi-finews
OUTSTANDING
PRODUCT

Krell S-300i (£2400)

Krell's S-300i combines a fully-balanced, Class A preamplifier section and a 2x150W stereo amplifier, employing the Current Mode technology found throughout the range. Although compact at 438x101x444mm (whd), it tips the scales at nearly 20 kilos. A good portion of that is a gigantic, typically Krellish, 750VA toroidal transformer, supported by 38,000 microfarads of storage capacitance. This is not your normal integrated amp's power supply.

This integrated is bereft of nothing, features-wise. The S-300i

'The S-300i is like a small dog unafraid of some big, loping hound'

has an iPod/iPhone interface (cable included) that derives audio from their fully differential outputs – according to Krell, no other manufacturer does this.

A hefty solid aluminium remote operates all functions, including those of a connected iPod or iPhone, as well as Krell CD, SACD, and DVD players.

The S-300i features a number of control menus, viewed via the front-panel display, for accessing customisable parameters and functions including balance, input trim, input naming and muting level. Also included is a home cinema pass-through for unadulterated two-channel integration into a surround-sound set-up. At the back panel are three single-ended RCA inputs, a balanced

XLR input, the socket for the iPod/iPhone cable and genuine WBT speaker terminals. Even though this handsome, silver-finished baby stands less tall than a CD jewel box, Krell even supplies a pair of 'ears' for rack-mounting.

Also on an installation-friendly note, the S-300i talks to after-market, upscale touchscreen controllers such as those from AMX and Crestron.

NAPOLEON COMPLEX?

The S-300i made itself known from the get-go with a sound that's full and rich. Such wallop! Such extension! Such sheer mass! The S-300i is like a small dog unafraid of some big, loping hound. But that's not to say that it's scrappy or yappy, merely that it can punch well above its weight.

With big bands, from Jools Holland back to some classic in-house Capitol sessions from the 1950s, this amplifier conveyed the requisite majesty with both realistic levels and convincing dimensions.

It's as if the amp has a Napoleon complex and needs to keep proving that it can hang with the big boys. Small, delicate works like the Buffalo Springfield's gorgeous 'Sad Memory' offered the realistic scale required to reproduce a single vocalist and an acoustic guitar, with all of the woody harmonics present and accounted for with chilling veracity.

And when the Neil Young solo – 'recorded across town' – came in, the tremolo effect was as liquid as we've ever heard it.

ABOVE: The central dial is no simple volume control but a rotary encoder that navigates through the input, balance and volume menu options. This amp includes one balanced (XLR) and three single-ended (RCA) inputs plus a multi-pin iPod connection. An unbalanced preamp out is joined by single sets of 4mm speaker binding posts. Full trigger and RS232 control is also offered

Then came the layering of the guitars in 'Bluebird' – 'all 11,386 of them' – and the S-300i flexed its muscles in another area: retrieval of detail. Because the sound space is so huge, wall-to-wall and stretching into the sonic vanishing point behind the speakers, you can listen in to this layering, imagining the studio wizards who applied guitar after guitar. Fuzz-tone, banjo, acoustic, and thunderous drums and bass. The smallest Krell shifts gears from gossamer romance to rock-hard hard-rock with the grace of a Bentley leaving a motorway for a windy road.

Throughout this drama, there's an overwhelming sense of composure, the amp never putting a foot wrong. No buzzes, no noises, no clipping-related nasties. True, we didn't try this with the sort of speaker aimed at its beefier siblings, yet we think it wouldn't balk at big Wilsons or Magicos, corner-filling Tannoys or the mightiest Thiels.

But this is, after all, a sanely-priced integrated and as such will be paired with similarly-priced speakers. Tack it on to some Quad electrostatics, or like-priced MartinLogans, and you will know the meaning of a 'bargain'.

VERDICT

This is a product that challenges accepted wisdom: it isn't merely a solution for people short of shelf space, or lacking a spare AC outlet. The S-300i is so good that it will even cause problems for Krell, not just its rivals, because it behaves like a £5000 pre/power combo. The distributor won't thank us for saying so, but this is an inexplicable, insane give-away. We love it. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	195W / 315W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	235W / 435W / 280W / 135W
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	0.082–0.125ohm
Frequency response (20Hz–100kHz, 8ohm)	–0.04dB to –2.53dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/150W)	65mV / 800mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (for 0dBW/150W)	74.5dB / 96.3dB
Distortion (10W/8ohm, 20Hz–20kHz)	0.0075–0.026%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	65W / 595W
Dimensions (WHD)	438x101x444mm