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ABSOLUTE SOUNDS ELECTROKID *iPOD* SYSTEM

No KIDding around as Krell and MartinLogan make the iPod sing

PRICE KID: £1,350; Purity: £2,390 **CONTACT** Absolute Sounds ■ 020 8971 3909 ■ www.absolutesounds.com



The ElectroKID is Absolute Sounds' successful melding of two products from two different American high-end manufacturers, Krell and MartinLogan. The name itself is a portmanteau of electrostatic loudspeaker (the MartinLogan Purity) and KID, an acronym for Krell Interface Dock. Ricardo Franassovici, of Absolute Sounds, realised that the combination of iPod interface and active loudspeakers could deliver the sort of sound quality that even Apple might not have expected from the ubiquitous iPod. And so, the ElectroKID was born.

The KID is essentially an iPod dock combined with a line preamplifier. It has both balanced and single-ended inputs, a composite and S-Video connection for video and an RS232 port for those using high-end Crestron/AMX style remote control systems. It also has an auxiliary line-level input mini-jack on the front panel for those using a digital audio player that is not of the iPod family.

The KID has four clear Perspex rods that wheel back and forth to make a snug fit for your iPod. So, an iPod Nano will seat just as robustly as a Classic.

The KID has mild filtering in post-processing and subtle treble and bass tone controls, all of which are useful when trying to improve the lot of compressed audio sources. The KID is also the first product to take advantage of the iPod's differential output, offering XLR alongside the single-ended outputs we used for this review, because the Purity doesn't do XLR.

Krell's baby is joined by the MartinLogan Purity loudspeakers. Last year, MartinLogan launched two entry-level speakers – the passive Source and active Purity. Both share the same CLS Generation 2 electrostatic treble/midrange panel, housed in ML's rigid 'AirFrame' curved aluminium housing and both have a broadly similar footprint, but the Purity sports a pair of 165mm units, driven by a built-in 200-watt amplifier. There is a three-

position bass control at the rear. As ever with MartinLogan speakers, the Purity needs a metre or so from the rear wall and half a metre from the sides.

LOSSLESS WINS

The ElectroKID requires you to limit your iPodding to the better end of the format options. Consider 160kbps AAC and 192kbps MP3 files as a minimum, and if you can go higher, do – both go up to 320 kilobits per second or Lossless or even AIFF. You still get hundreds of hours on an iPod, but at least they are all listenable.

The KID and the Purity sing together beautifully. The Krell KID is more of a preamp than a dock and the improvement that brings to the Apple sound is quite remarkable.

You get a vivid, exciting and clean sound with a surprisingly fine soundstage...

“The KID and the Purity give the iPod sound a cohesiveness it seems to sorely lack in other settings”

something far better than the flat, pinched 2-D sonic disappointment that comes when you hook your iPod to the hi-fi with an interconnect

cable. All this without even tangling with the digital code must mean Krell is doing something right.

The sound is perhaps drier than typical Krell products, but it is still an excellent presentation. That 200 watts brings the speaker to life and helps bring out the best in the KID. It gives the iPod sound a cohesiveness it seems to sorely lack in other settings.

If there is a limitation, it's the video output; composite and S-Video connections are weak in today's HDTV world. Otherwise, the Krell remote is not as intuitive as the iPod interface, the rest is wonderful. Say hello to genuine iPod-fi.

Many will be considering the ElectroKID as a useful adjunct or complement to their existing high-end hi-fi. In that context, the ElectroKID is a remarkable pairing. ■

Alan Sircom

See the April 2008 edition of *Hi-Fi Choice* for the original review of this product