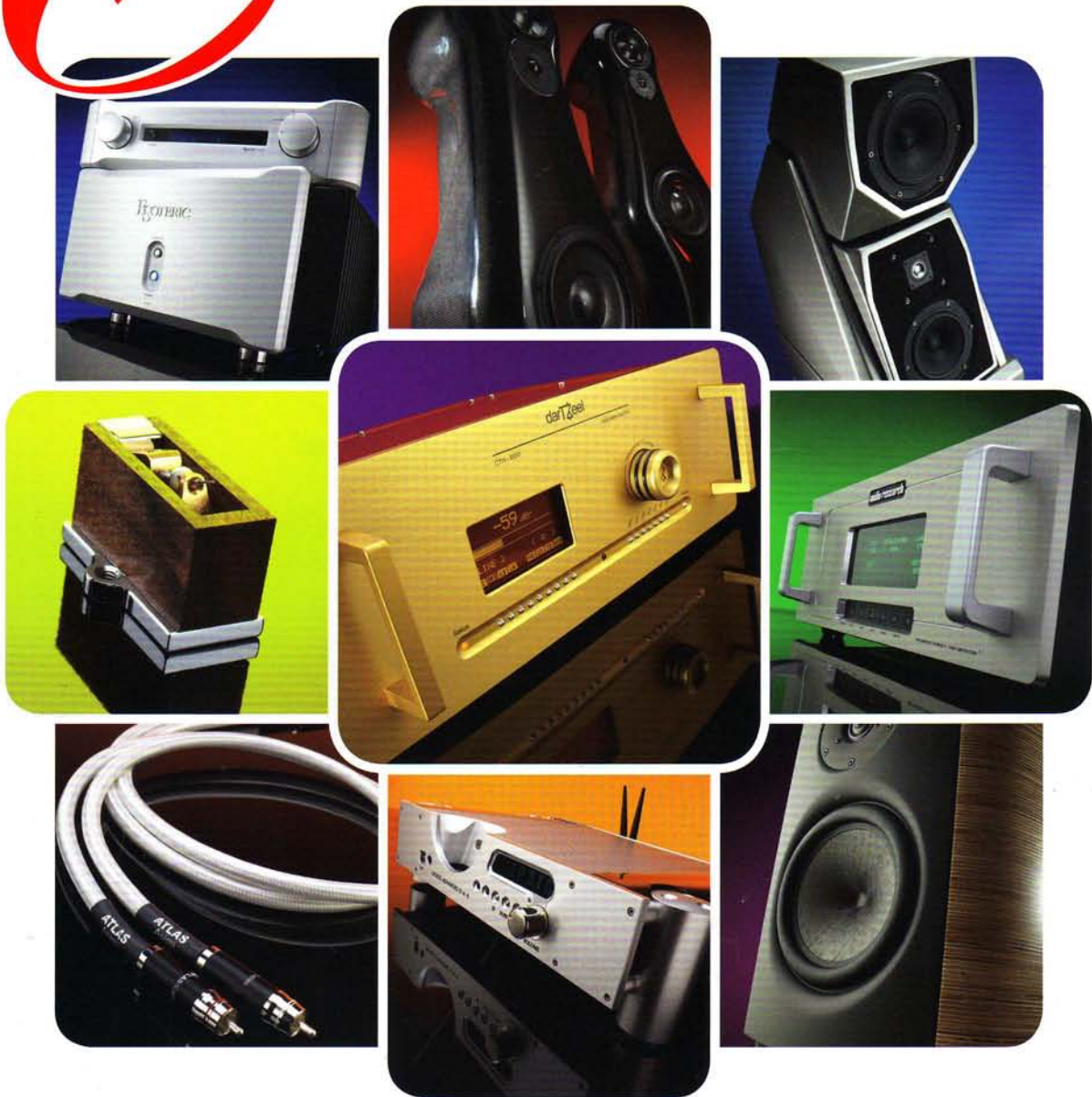


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EVOLUTION 900

Top of the premium range, this amplifier conjures up audio alchemy

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For reasons of logistics and availability, this review and a handful of others were conducted on a different basis from the rest – not at the author's own premises, but in the distributor's demonstration room. If you have ever tried moving an amplifier that weighs 61kg, or more than 170kg a pair when packaged, you'll understand that transporting them is not to be undertaken lightly. We auditioned the Evolution 900 with a single loudspeaker, so this is not a full review but a listening assessment based on the limitations outlined.

Evolution is Krell's premium range, upstream of the KAV family. The 900 is the manufacturer's biggest, heaviest and most powerful Evolution amplifier. The relevant statistics other than weight are 900 watts into 8ohms, doubling with each halving of load impedance up to 3,600 watts into 2ohms, over a $0.5\text{Hz}-120\text{kHz}+0/-3\text{dB}$ bandwidth for 0.02 per cent THD at 1kHz. The power supply is rated at 6,000VA and output voltage is 240V peak-peak. Current yield is 60amps peak and each monoblock is a reassuringly chunky affair.

On-paper alone, this is a prodigiously powerful amplifier. Even in standby mode, it consumes 440 watts per monoblock and there are also figures in the spec sheet for heat output – from 1600BTU/hr at standby, to 7700BTU/hr at maximum output. In the Absolute Sounds' listening room, ambient temperatures climbed remorselessly in use, which meant taking regular air conditioning breaks.

The amplifier uses all the major Krell proprietary technologies, including Krell Current Mode topology, Active Cascode topology, Architech construction, and the CAST current mode interface, which is how it was used on this occasion from the matching Evolution 202 two box preamplifier (also CAST) and Audio Research CD player. Extensive use of internal screening of critical stages and line conditioning circuitry compensates for everything that can go wrong with the mains supply.

CAST stands for Current Audio Signal Transmission. Any system connected with CAST in cooperation with Krell Current Mode keeps the audio signal in the current domain throughout the amplification chain. We have used this interface on previous occasions and have already learned that it give a slightly more penetrating, but less grainy sound than balanced or single-ended.

What we can say without fear of contradiction is that Krell is the master of engineering big amplifiers. No one else we know of has a model with similar power and technical prowess. In short, this is an area of the market that Krell rules.

Of course, technical sophistication means little if it doesn't deliver the goods. There have been times in the manufacturer's history when the musical results didn't quite stack up against the engineering, but not so here.

That said, we must reiterate that most of the possible conditions of use had to go untried on this occasion and that only one loudspeaker model was involved. That model was the Magico Mini 2 (reviewed separately on p46) which although not especially large, was undeniably suited to the task. It is a sealed-box, infinite-baffle design, rather than being reflex-loaded and its low sensitivity and high power handling predispose it to powerful amplification. Its resolving power demands good-quality amplification.

SOUND QUALITY

The results are close to audio alchemy. First, the Evolution is devastatingly fast and powerful (the two don't always go hand in hand). As we anticipated, there is no detectable change in sound as the volume level climbs – there's no edginess or lack of rock-solid

control. But, what we had not fully anticipated is how refined the beast is with more subtle programme material. One of our highlights was playing recordings of Madeline Peyroux and of Patricia

Barber (the latter backed by Carlos Santana), both of which have a mesmeric, spine-tingling quality that is clearly unrelated to raw power.

One work we could not resist playing was the finale of Mahler 2, the excellent version with Abbado and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. This in many ways covers every musical base – from solo soprano, unison (choral) singing, full orchestra, an orchestral organ and offstage bands. The effect is nothing less than devastating, both in the final overwhelming crescendo and in the hushed first choral entry: this has never been so starkly portrayed against the inky-black acoustic. The unusually complex sound picture is fully resolved, so that individual instrumental lines and voices could be followed. The offstage band with its distinctive acoustic, which is very different from the full orchestra acoustic (this is a live recording), is also fully resolved. This is a recording that is realised superbly by the test system. It is not just loud – it is also soft, even muted where the music demands, making the musical impact all the more telling.

What stands out here is the ability of the system to highlight all the finest detail without any overt emphasis. It was not all down to the Krell, of course, but the Evolution 900 played an important role. It is without question a great amplifier. ■

“What we can say without fear of contradiction is that Krell is the master of engineering big amplifiers”



Alvin Gold