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# KID Rock!



## David Price plugs his Apple iPod into the Krell Interface Dock, with surprising results...

Just in case you've been away for the past five years, Apple has sold over one hundred and twenty million iPod portables around the world, and counting. The polycarbonate peril (okay, the latest ones are made of aluminium) has radically transformed the way people listen to music, the closest parallel being that of Compact Cassette a couple of generations ago.

However, iPods and audiophiles are not exactly synonymous with one another – and until recently the former hasn't even appeared on the latter's radar. Something big happened late last year though – Apple introduced the iPod Classic, with either 80GB or 160GB of storage starting from £159. This meant it was possible to store Apple Lossless or even PCM, making the iPod a 'full fat' 16bit, 44.1kHz digital source for the first time.

The arrival of Arcam's rDock (£130) took the humble Pod into the hi-fi world for the first time – you could buy Apple's own version for twenty quid, but the Arcam sounded so much better. Suddenly we began to think of it as a serious music source. And now, please be upstanding for Krell's KID (Krell Interface Dock), which takes the rDock principle to an altogether higher level – along with its price!

To be brutally frank, you probably don't need this bit of kit. In the same way that cassette aficionados didn't need a Nakamichi Dragon, the KID is the sort of thing you buy yourself for your birthday – or better still, get

someone else to! Whilst the Arcam makes a fine fist of getting the signal out of Apple's universal connector, bypassing the iPod's nasty headphone amp, the Krell goes further...

It's said to be the first product to utilize the fully differential output of the iPod's internal Wolfson DAC, opto-isolating it (so no electrical noise passes from the iPod to the KID) and porting it out in its native balanced mode before running it through the Krell's own 255-step custom-taper volume control. The KID then squeezes every last pip out of the iPod's DAC, bypassing the latter's analogue output stage (which is its real weak point), and adds a preamplifier with digitally controlled analogue bass and treble controls. Balanced differential Class A circuitry is maintained throughout the signal path and fed to the balanced (XLR) and single-ended (RCA phono) outputs.

The unit is nicely compact (330x70x277mm), but don't get the idea that you're buying a box half filled with air – looking inside the KID, it's pretty much full-to-brimming with passive componentry, and it weighs more than many CD players at 4.5kg. It's beautifully built (and so it should be at this price!), with a fine brushed aluminium fascia finish featuring three blue LED displays for bass, treble and output level. There are corresponding up/down buttons beneath, and a 3.5mm minijack input. Round the back are chunky RCA phono outputs, XLR balanced outputs and composite and S-Video outs.

## SOUND QUALITY

Slotting in my 80GB iPod Classic running Apple Lossless (uncompressed, bit-for-bit 16/44), I pressed the two output level buttons together to lock the KID into 'direct' mode, so it becomes a fixed output source component. Obviously the iPod's own DAC isn't exactly in the dCS Elgar class, but without ruination from its poor analogue output stage, it's amazing how good the Apple can sound...

Even through a pair of £17,000 German Physiks HRS 120 loudspeakers, I got a surprisingly spacious and smooth performance, with impressive rhythmic snap and strong, full bodied dynamics. Kraftwerk's 'Tour De France Étape 1' was beautifully mellifluous, the KID capturing those warm analogue synthesiser samples and chunky kick drum with aplomb. I was amazed at the space inside the mix, each strand of percussion being readily discernable. Bass stopped at started with precision, hi-hats flickered hypnotically and that famous vocoded lead vocal sounded almost tangible – a brilliant result.

## CONCLUSION

In terms of absolute value, the Krell KID is debatable, but if the best iPod dock/preamp is what you want, then you've just found it. A truly lovely bit of kit, the wonders it works on the signal coming out of your humble Apple digital music portable are such that you might even start convincing yourself that it was, after all, an essential purchase – just like your Nakamichi!

## ELECTROKID

Krell's UK distributor Absolute Sounds is offering the Krell KID with a pair of Martin Logan's superb 200W active Purity floorstanding electrostatic loudspeakers to create the ElectroKID system for £3,740; watch out for a review soon!

## VERDICT

Superbly engineered, state of the art iPod dock with jaw-dropping sonics – but it will cost you!

**KRELL KID** £1,350

Absolute Sounds  
 ☎ +44(0)20 8971 3909  
[www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)

## FOR

- amazing sound from iPods
- superb engineering
- design, build, finish

## AGAINST

- not cheap!