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# Krell SACD Standard

*Krell showcases SACD with uncompromised CD replay in this high-end audio disc spinner*

PRICE: £4,244 CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 @ www.krellonline.com

Choosing a high-end disc player these days brings all manner of issues to the fore. Should it be CD-only, still the only viable disc format blessed with a truly universal remit? Or should it include DVD-Audio and/or SACD, which add something, while often taking something away from baseline CD performance? Perhaps it should be a 'universal' machine, to cover all the bases? Or a player with an i.Link (or similar) next-gen digital interface, to address future-proofing as well?

There are no definitive answers at present. It's all down to priorities. But it's becoming clear that although neither of the high-res formats has a hope in hell of catching, still less replacing compact disc, a kind of order is establishing itself, in which DVD-Audio is becoming recognised as the format that does it all – high quality audio, video, added content – while video-free SACD is becoming the purist audiophile choice by default, supported by a broader range of software (though still pitiful by CD standards).

The Krell is in the vanguard of a number of high-end, audio-only SACD players which are either available, or soon will be, from Sony, Classé and others. Its capabilities are straightforward, but in many ways that's the point. It's dressed to kill in the new, delectable KAV-series silver-finished casework (black is available, but why...?), distinguished by rounded corner extrusions and fully machined aluminium panels. Inside, it's what the Krell isn't that helps define what it is. In particular there is of course no video circuitry. This is a dedicated SACD/CD player with analogue stereo and multichannel outputs, the stereo option repeated in single-ended and balanced form. A Philips mechanism in a separate anti-resonance housing drives Burr-Brown PCM 1738 hybrid 24-bit D/A converters in differential mode, with current mode gain stages borrowed from Krell's amplifiers for the main channels, which allows balanced operation, but not unfortunately for the centre and rear channels. The control system is very slick, with some useful behind-the-scenes logic, and a range of digital filters allows some fine tuning. Some may not find the very tiny control buttons, or the camcorder-type credit card remote very appealing, but there are no substantive failings.

Sound-wise, the SACD Standard is very impressive. As a CD player it follows the pattern of other recent Krell kit in the same series (like the

KAV components), veering away from the very heavy-duty, impactful quality of the more traditional top-end Krell components. The emphasis is instead on lightness of touch, exquisite detailing, subtlety and musical expression. Stereo soundstaging, however, remains very firm and explicit.

**“Good SACDs reproduce with a liquid smoothness and superb three-dimensional imaging.”**

In short, the SACD Standard is a very impressive CD player. But it is significantly better still as an SACD player. It has all the qualities that are apparent when playing CDs. But in addition it has a new-found eloquence and subtlety, and even finer detail. Depending on which digital filter is selected, the Krell covers the full frequency range in a way that some competing players don't, perhaps for fear of overexciting amplifiers that don't have the same abilities. The SACD Standard, however, takes no prisoners. As long as it is used with appropriate amplification and speakers (Krell and Focal-JMLab for much of this test), good SACDs reproduce with a liquid quality, a smoothness combined with very obviously three-dimensional imaging that is closer in many ways to good vinyl replay quality than it is to compact disc, but without any of the traditional stumbling blocks of vinyl records – noise, crackle and the like.

It remains open how much improvement, if any, would be available if all channels were equally endowed internally. I suspect there'd be some, but even as it stands, this is one of the finest SACD players available, not over-endowed with toys, but superbly engineered both as a CD and as an SACD player. A fabulous choice for use in a music-oriented hi-fi system, whether two-channel stereo or full-blown multichannel. **HFC**

*Alvin Gold*

See HFC 251 (March 2004) for our original review of this product