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Dan D'Agostino

Momentum

How can such a substantial amplifier produce so much musical beauty?

Dan D'Agostino is the man who founded Krell, the man who arguably put high-power amplifiers on the high end map. Not so long ago however he ended up being kicked out of his own company as a result of a takeover that did not work out in his favour. Not dispirited he went back to the drawing board to produce a new amplifier using tried and trusted technologies enhanced by the wealth of knowledge he gained through nigh on three decades of amplifier design. The result is the Momentum, a 300 watt monoblock in the most stunning casework that a high power amplifier has ever worn.

By Krell standards, the Momentum is compact. It's just over a foot wide (31.25cm) but it's also extremely dense, weighing a bone-crunching 40.8kg. This is because the case is largely hewn from solid billet aluminium. The absence of visible fixings gives a clue to this, as does the machined nature of the entire surface.

This is combined with copper heatsinking, a material that no one else in the business uses because aluminium is so much cheaper. But, according to D'Agostino, copper has some distinct advantages aside from its appearance. It gives immediate heat transfer for the attached output devices and remains at a stable temperature regardless of the demands being placed on the amplifier. This also has positive effects on the eventual sound, but we'll come to that soon.

The most distinctive feature is the VU meter on the front. This is angled up so that you don't have to bend down to see it and has a defeatable green light and three modes of operation. It looks superb: the styling was inspired by Bugatti dials and Breitgauge watches.

The display options, via back panel micro switches, offer off, 1x and 10x metering, but you'll need to be driving pretty deaf speakers to alarming levels to get any serious swing out of them even at their most sensitised. They do move at lower levels – and rather seductively, too – but one's attention is soon drawn to what's coming out of the speakers.

In terms of topology, they are based around a classic circuit using through-hole components, that uses individually soldered parts rather than surface-mount devices (SMD). D'Agostino has also avoided the use of microprocessors in the signal chain. One of the trickiest aspects of the design was fitting a big enough transformer into the case. In the end, a two-inch-thick custom toroid with a diameter of nine inches was shoe-horned in. This accounts, in part, for the amp's considerable mass.

Another challenge was to ensure that the copper would not oxidise over time, one of the likely reasons, apart from cost, for its absence in this field. D'Agostino developed a technique of rough-cutting 99.99% OFC copper and then heating it to draw out the remaining oxygen prior to the final machining and clear-cut sealing. The result looks – and sounds – stunning.

SOUND QUALITY

These amps are in another league to most of the power amps we've encountered over the years. They not only have truly veil-removing transparency but they time beautifully, showing you things in your favourite records

that have never even been hinted at before. This is most apparent in terms of image depth: they open up the soundstage to the extent that each instrument and voice in the mix has more space to work in; more space to show off its timbre and the nature of the playing.

Stereo is a remarkable thing when its reproduced with this degree of accuracy and musical fluidity. The way that the Momentum brings micro dynamics into the mix is positively valve-like – albeit in the context of a wider bandwidth. There's also considerably more control than can be achieved with any glass-powered device. The fact that this amp is biased to Class A operation must have something to do with

“A low distortion amp that lets you connect with music on another level altogether”

this, but it's also the reason why this amp is so illuminating even at low levels. You get the full dynamic envelope even at sensible levels. This makes records that have plenty of fine detail even more fascinating.

Keith Jarrett's solo playing is always good, but here it takes on another dimension, becoming more intimate and bridging the gap between recording and live event. Sounds unlikely, we know, but this is a very revealing, exceedingly low distortion amplifier that lets you connect with the music at a whole other level.

It's very rare to find an amp with this sort of power on tap that also has delicacy. Its ability to give every instrument and voice in a composition the breadth to do its stuff means that musical perspectives are far more coherent. If the words are the key part of the piece, they are clear and their inner meaning more apparent; the same goes for the mood and scale of a piece. It's 3D without glasses, especially if you close your eyes, and makes music you know and love all the more vivid and meaningful.

This may be a very expensive amplifier but it is also a work of art in build and sound quality. You can't often say that about an audio component.

Jason Kennedy

