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Any product displaying the **Krell** badge deserves to be taken very seriously indeed – especially one packing as much power as the strapping S-300i amplifier...

STEREO AMPLIFIER
KRELL
S-300i
★★★★★
£ 2640

FOR

Massively powerful seemingly beyond the claimed figures; impressive bass control and punch; expansive and focused

AGAINST

Not the most natural sounding of performers; needs to be matched with care

VERDICT

Krell's latest integrated isn't its most impressive. There are far more musically talented rivals at this money

IT'S VERY EASY to be impressed by a product like the S-300i. It starts off with having the Krell name. Krell is arguably the king of high-end solid state amplification and has been there for a number of decades. Few of this integrated's rivals have that kind of pedigree or historical performance.

Next comes weight and solidity of build. The S-300i feels as solid as a brick and weighs as much as a pallet load of the things – OK, it weighs 20kg, which is mighty hefty for an amplifier of this price. It's human nature to equate quality with weight and most people will be impressed. Lastly, it really is a powerhouse. Take a look at the specs and you'll notice it outputs 150 Watts into an 8 ohm speaker load.

That's a decent output for a product of this type, but nothing particularly special. The special bit comes into

“The Krell amp's power output doubles to 300W per channel as the load impedance drops – that is rare at any price”

play when you see that power output doubles to 300 Watts per channel as the load impedance drops. Technically, that is ideal amplifier behaviour and strongly suggests a highly specified power supply and a very robust output stage. In use it means this amp will drive just about any price-compatible speaker properly. This type of control over speakers is rare at any price, let alone at what is considered the starting point of high-end amplification.

So the S-300i has scored a boatload of points before it's even connected to a system. Let it warm up for the best part of a week from new, and two qualities take pride of place.

First of all, that power figure seems too modest. This chunky integrated has enough grunt to rival our 300 Watt per channel reference power amplifier, and it is terrifically composed with it. No rival we've heard can deliver demanding bass-dominated tunes such as Kanye West's *Love Lock Down* with such grip and control at floor-shaking

volumes. Pleasingly, the amplifier doesn't harden up or get aggressive when pushed really hard, so party levels are well and truly on the menu. That's not usually the case at this price level, where many of the Krell's closest rivals sacrifice sound pressure levels for some other sonic quality. It's worth noting that when pushed hard the Krell does get rather warm, so make sure it's well ventilated. You'll need a large shelf, too, as the amplifier is far deeper than the norm.

Controlled performance

We think the stereo imaging will please, too. The S-300i creates a massive sound stage and populates it with well-focused instruments and vocals. It's stable and doesn't collapse when huge dynamic swings come into play. If you're a fan of large-scale, bombastic classical music such as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* or Holst's *Mars* we

think there's much to like here. You can add top-class speed and good clarity to the list of plus points, too.

So far so good, and you should be in no doubt that the S-300i is a capable amplifier well worthy of consideration. However, we're not totally convinced. The presentation from the midrange upwards lacks body, projection and natural warmth. This means Jill Scott's lush vocals on *Golden* don't communicate as they should, with too much of her passion being traded for a mechanical feel. High frequencies are a little thin and brittle too, emphasising the sibilance in recordings. These shortcomings have more impact on intimate vocal-based material than they do large classical or hard-charging rock. More so than most rivals, your musical taste will decide whether this Krell appeals or not.

Features are an odd mix of the impressive (iPod connection and



TYPE Integrated amplifier
LINE LEVEL INPUTS 4 line level, including 1 x balanced XLR
PHONO STAGE No
TAPE LOOPS No
PREAMP OUTPUT Yes
HEADPHONE OUTPUT No
REMOTE CONTROL Yes
POWER OUTPUT 150 Watts per channel
DIMENSIONS (HWD) 10 x 44 x 45cm
WEIGHT 20 kg





They may look old fashioned, but these stunning **Spendors** put most of their modern-day rivals to shame

control via a supplied lead), the expected (a preamp output and remote) and the odd (there's no tape loop). While the solid build pleases, the quality of finish isn't particularly good for the price: the volume control feels cheap and the casing paint lacks class. That said, at least the remote is a chunky all-metal affair that feels like quality and has basic iPod control keys.

Not consistent enough to recommend

We thought long and hard about the S-300i's star rating: the amplifier's odd mix of the brilliant and disappointing makes it hard to classify. We've decided to give it three stars, because we think an amp at this elevated price has to be a better musical all-rounder to gain a recommendation, particularly when its rivals include Plinius' excellent 9200 and Moon's highly capable i3.3. Krell has made some great integrations – this isn't one of them.

UGLY AND UNGAINLY? Call the Spendor SP2/3R2s what you like, but there's no denying their sonic brilliance.

These speakers are very much capable of worrying the cream at this price. The combination of a new tweeter – straight from the SA1 mini monitor – and an extensively reworked version of Spendor's in-house 21cm polymer-coned mid/bass works seamlessly. The result is a wonderfully natural-sounding midrange sandwiched between a sweet and insightful treble and weighty bass.

Like earlier versions of the SP2, these speakers sound glorious with classical music. Whether something small-scale from Arvo Pärt or the sonic thunder that is *The Dark Knight* OST, these Spendors deliver in full. Stereo imaging is expansive yet focused, and the sense of authority is class-leading.

Move on to music by the likes of Lily Allen or Kanye West and the R2s sound right at home. There's punch, dynamics and the kind of precision to timing that earlier Spendors barely hinted at, while voices are incredibly full-bodied.

Flaws? There's a touch of excess richness in the bass, and these Spendors need space to breathe, so place them at least half a metre away from any wall.

The SP2/3R2 is easy to underestimate. Its traditional appearance hides a speaker of uncommon ability. That a product originating decades ago still challenges cutting-edge modern rivals is a truly amazing achievement.

STEREO SPEAKERS
SPENDOR
SP2/3R2



£ 2200

FOR

Natural sound; refinement; seamless presentation; scale and authority

AGAINST

They need lots of room to breathe; fussy about stands

VERDICT

This SP2 is the best yet. It can teach rivals plenty when it comes to sound quality



TYPE Standmount
TREBLE 22mm wide-surround dome tweeter
MID/BASS 21cm polymer cone
SENSITIVITY 88 dB/W/m
IMPEDANCE 8 ohms
POWER 150W
FINISH Cherry
DIMENSIONS (HWD) 55x28x33cm