



Krell FPB 700cx

Krell's ultimate power amp rules in that special place where brawn, brains and overdrafts converge

PRICE: £14,998 CONTACT: Absolute Sounds, 58 Durham Road, London SW20 0DE ☎ 020 8971 3909 @ www.krellonline.com

The FPB prefix that is used for two ranges of Krell power amps stands for Full Power Balanced. In reality this translates into 'simply awesome'. The two ranges concerned consist of mono and stereo amplifiers with a common internal architecture, the FPB 700cx being the biggest and most powerful of the stereo models, sitting above the FPB 300cx and the FPB 400cx. The monoblocks consist of the FPB 750Mcx, FPB 450Mcx and the FPB 250Mcx – in each case the numerical designation represents output in watts when driving an eight-ohm load. The FPB 700cx then is the most powerful of the stereo models, and not far off the top monoblock for power yield, with all the packaging advantages that accrue from being built into one box rather than two. You may be surprised to know that FPB is not Krell's top of the line amplifier range. That distinction belongs to the Master series, of which it can truly be said that if you need to ask, you can't afford it.

But that epithet would be a pretty useful way of getting to grips with the FPB 700cx. Just consider – power output is 700 watts into eight ohms, doubling to 1.4kW into four ohms and again to 2.8kW with a two-ohm load from a massively endowed power supply which includes an 8kVA transformer. Weight is a back-breaking 81.8kg (which is more than 1.6 hundredweight if that helps), and it measures 48x26x65cm (WxHxD). But the most frightening statistic of all is the cost, which is just one pint of beer less than £15,000. In the delays before Halcro, this used to count as a lot of money. Of course, it's beautifully made and as solid as structurally reinforced houses, though I'm not so keen, practically speaking, on the unprotected heat exchanger fins that run front to back down both long sides.

But the FPB 700cx story is not just about awesome power and the ability to drive punishing loads (way below two ohms if it is called for). This is an amplifier of real sophistication. Turn the 700cx on, and the amplifier first tests the circuit connected to its speaker terminals, and adjusts itself accordingly, the process being tracked by the three front-panel LEDs. Balanced operation speaks for itself, but the Krell

also has a CAST II interface option, which uses current rather than voltage-mode transmission, complemented by internal current-mode gain topology and Sustained Plateau Bias III circuitry. The latter maintains Class A operation according to the Hall Effect sensing circuit's analysis of the audio signal, causing output bias voltage levels to be ramped up and (after a delay) down again as required by the musical envelope. The result is an amplifier which runs no hotter than a typical Class AB design. It is also unconditionally stable and fully protected against pretty much anything short of a direct nuclear strike.

“The real beauty of this amplifier is that it wields its power with such finesse.”

But this is an amplifier that is unflappable under all circumstances. It does big scale, heavy duty music brilliantly. It is virtually impossible to catch out, even with big current sinks like B&W's Nautilus 800 speakers. But the real beauty of this amplifier is that it wields its power with such finesse – it's not just a bass delivery engine. The whole frequency band is reproduced with real subtlety, and with an exquisite sense of fine detail, which is properly constrained and locked in place. Moreover it will work consistently at any volume level you choose. It has the inevitability and the clout of a steam engine, but even with the volume turned way down, it still somehow manages to sustain the musical tension, and nothing about the sound tonality, dynamics or anything else appears to change. In short, this is one of the very tiny number of truly great high-power, high-end power amplifiers – fit to form the beating heart of the most exhilarating of audio systems. HFC

Alvin Gold

See HFC 234 (November 2002) for our original review of this product