



**Kraken APD6** conceals superb performance behind those off-the-wall looks

## Alchemist amp turns in a Kraken performance

### Kraken APD6

**Amplifier: £399**

**For** Dynamic sound with no shortage of bass or subtlety  
**Against** Looks are a matter of taste; runs hot

**Verdict** ★★★★★☆

The Kraken is either the best-looking or the ugliest piece of hi-fi you've ever seen. But without doubt it sounds superb, having a hefty punch combined with admirable delicacy

If ever a model name fitted the looks of a product, it's Kraken. Named after a mythical sea serpent, this outrageous integrated is made by London-based high-end manufacturer Alchemist Products, better known for considerably more expensive equipment. In fact, the 60W per channel APD6 – which is far too prosaic a description, so we'll stick to Kraken! – is just part of a whole Kraken range from Alchemist.

There's method in the madness of the Kraken's looks, however, since those fins on the side are there to dissipate the heat this Class A/B amp develops – heat which grows when the amp isn't playing to around 55°C. Ventilation is a priority – don't stack the Kraken on anything or use it in enclosed cabinets – as is keeping the thing out of the reach of small children.

The Kraken should be left on if possible, since it takes an hour or so to come fully on song. There's no on/off switch on the amp – it's fed by an offboard power supply, in a matching sea-green crackle finish box. The beast itself has just three controls – volume and listen/record selectors. The Kraken accommodates four line-level sources and a tape deck, though phono stages can be fitted.

The rear panel also has 4mm sockets/binding posts for one pair of speakers – the sockets are at either end of the panel, since this is an amp in which the two channels are kept firmly apart – and the multipin socket to accept the feed from the power supply.

The Kraken develops a big sound from so small a box. If you're a metal fanatic attracted by the demonic appearance, you'll find a sound to match, with solid, driving pace and useful clarity for howling guitars. It drives drums with alacrity, too, and high percussion is always well-defined.

What you may not appreciate with metal, but will realise when you try something just a shade gentler, is that the Kraken also creates a wide, deep and spacious soundstage in which instruments are located with impressive consistency. Listen to a concert-hall orchestral recording, and you get

a real sense of the scale and acoustic of the venue; switch to closely-recorded rock or folk, and the smaller, more intimate atmosphere is instantly conjured up.

But what's even more striking is the almost "valve" sound, quite unlike that of much of its price-competition. Compare it to, say, the Audiolab 8000aII, and the Kraken makes its rival sound a shade antiseptic. True, there aren't quite the same analytical oppor-

tunities on offer, but while the Audiolab lets you listen to a mix in detail, the Kraken distracts you with a glorious presentation of the whole sound. You'll enjoy yourself so much you won't want to worry about the clever hi-fi stuff.

Don't let the Addams family looks put you off – if you're in the market for a £400 amp, the Kraken's a real bargain. Only one problem – it'll make the rest of your system look very dull indeed.

### MEET THE KRAKEN FAMILY

£400 buys a line-level Kraken, appealing to those without a turntable who resent

spending money on circuitry they won't use. But vinyl fanatics have the option of plug-in moving magnet or moving coil modules. You can order the amp with one of these fitted, or have a suitable module installed at a later date by your dealer – the cost is around £45 for the moving magnet board, £55 for moving coil.

The power supply is fitted with a single toroidal transformer, but inside the casework the layout looks curiously lopsided, with the transformer at one end and a lot of fresh air at the other.



Why? Because for an extra £45 a second transformer can be put inside the box, giving a separate power supply for each channel.

Get hooked by the Kraken, and you can buy a pre/power version. A line-only preamp costs £395, and accepts the phono modules, while the 60W power amp is £380. And there's the added attraction of being able to bridge the power amp to mono. Add another bridged Kraken power amp, and you're looking at a 140W per channel pre/monoblocks set-up for a rather sensible £1150.