



Kraken APD7/8 builds on the success of the APD6 integrated, with a bigger, hard-kicking sound. Both sections of the amp have an off-board power supply (below)

Mad Max pre/power that kicks like a mule

Kraken APD7/8

Pre/power amplifier: £395/380

For First class sound; reasonably priced; choice of configurations
Against Power amplifier runs hot but the Mad Max-style fins might not appeal to everyone

Verdict ★★★★★

The sound of this distinctive, minimal combination has genuine audiophile appeal. That, along with its sturdy build, potential for upgrading and reasonable price, wins it a firm recommendation

Hot on the heels of Alchemist's £400 APD6 Kraken integrated amp, reviewed enthusiastically in December 1992's *WHAT HI-FI?*, comes the £775 APD7/APD8 combination – otherwise known as the Kraken pre/power. The styling of the main components is virtually identical to that of the integrated: they're compact and individual but only the power amp has those outrageous fins!

Each unit comes with an additional, smaller case that houses an external power supply. These

should be placed as far away from the amplifiers as their leads will allow. Features and facilities? Not here, mate – these minimalist amplifiers are for audiophiles, not knob-twiddling fans!

The APD7 preamplifier has input selectors for listen and record choices, so that you can listen to one source and tape another at the same time, and a volume control. It's supplied as a line-level only unit, so if you want to use the phono input you'll have to order the optional phono stage (around £50 depending upon the type of cartridge you choose).

The 60Watt APD8 is a regular stereo power amplifier but users who want to exploit its absolute potential can have its power supply upgraded with an additional transformer that enables each channel to be independently powered. The amplifier can also be configured for bridged mono operation if you really can't contemplate life without nigh on 180Watts per channel pumping through your speakers. Naturally,

though, you'll need to buy a second APD8 for this, bringing the cost up to £1150 or so.

The performance of the standard pre/power combo closely resembles that of the Kraken integrated, but its message is writ larger. The presentation has the same precise, taut, dynamic quality wrapped in a full-blooded, natural warmth, but shows gains in terms of the overall control and solidity of the sound. Instruments and voices appear even more corporeal and convincing through this physically small but large sounding pre/power amp.

The Kraken has no obvious preferences or prejudices when it comes to the music you might want to hear. It kicks like the proverbial mule with heavy rock, displaying grip-py, tuneful bass,

hard-hitting impact on drums, and detail and dexterity through the mid and treble ranges. Instrumental and vocal lines come through with engaging vitality and clarity. Switch to gentler music – something acoustic, folky, or a classical string quartet – and the Kraken will demonstrate its delicacy and refinement with equal zeal. If you're looking for an inexpensive pre/power that has a musically persuasive character and styling that's straight out of Mad Max, you won't find an amplifier better suited than this.

