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130+
REVIEWS
SEPARATES,
VINTAGE
& MUSIC

H-FI 2012

We reveal the year's finest products and essential music

164 pages

Equipment

Over 50 standout separates tested

Vintage

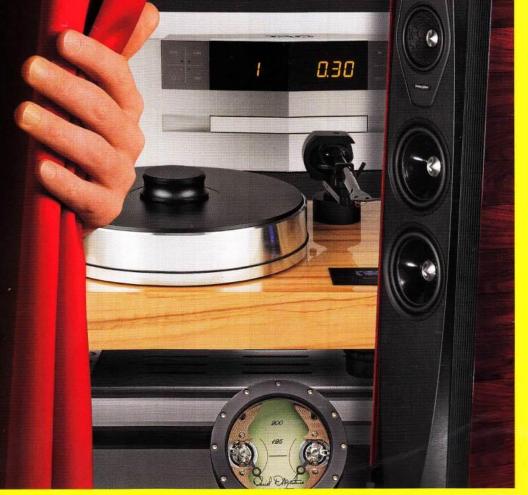
The audio heroes of yesteryear

Music

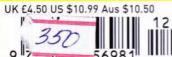
Your guide to the best LPs, CDs and hi-res downloads

Opinion

Our columnists' hi-fi high points



- TURNTABLES, TONEARMS & CARTRIDGES Air Tight to Thorens OUTBOARD DACS Arcam to T+A
- DIGITAL DISC & MEDIA PLAYERS Burmester to TAD TRANSISTOR & TUBE AMPS Anthem to VTL
- LOUDSPEAKERS Cabasse to Wilson Audio VINTAGE B&O, Electrocompaniet, KEF, Sony and more





Stereo integrated valve amplifier. Rated at 20W/8ohm Made by: Kudelski Group, Switzerland Supplied by: R.T. Services Telephone: 01235 810 455

Web: www.nagraaudio.com: www.rtsaudio.co.uk



Nagra 300i (£15,950)

hink Nagra and you think Swiss precision engineering at its finest: electronics made for professionals... Developed by the same engineering and production teams responsible for its professional products, Nagra's high-end audio components positively reek of the marque's DNA. Build quality and design - that legendary Swiss attention to detail is fabulous.

Now Nagra celebrates its 60th anniversary by producing an amplifier employing 300B direct heated triodes, a 'symbol of timelessness in audio'. They were introduced in 1938 and to this day there remain valve aficionados who will listen to nothing else, citing its midrange 'to die for'.

Nagra's 300i employs a pair of Slovakian JJ Electronic 300Bs per channel in push-pull configuration to produce a 'useful' 20W per side. Quite unlike all-valve singleended (lower-power) designs with, say, point-to-point wiring and zero feedback, the 300i employs sophisticated solid-state electronics for its driver stages, circuit surveillance and diagnostics, and microprocessor-controlled input selection and volume/balance circuitry. The company says its

'Soundstage breadth and depth was immense, the sound vibrant in colour'

powering circuits have been most carefully implemented to provide clean, stabilised voltages, giving reliable performance irrespective of the type of 300B used. Experimentation with alternative brands is positively encouraged.

Unusually, the 300i's twin output transformers are toroidal rather than C-core types, bespoke designs handcrafted in-house. They're

enclosed in a separate tower filled with a silicon damping material. This is mounted on the chassis using supplied bolts.

The 300i also comes with one of Nagra's elaborate VFS vibration isolation platforms, a £1425 item when purchased separately.

MODERN SPIN

Homage to hi-fi's 'golden age' it may be, but there is nothing oldfashioned about the sound of Nagra's 300i. Defying stereotypical

tubey cosiness, it sounds quick on its feet and is light of touch, the music emanating from beautifully silent backgrounds. You might be disappointed if hoping for a rich, warm and syrupy midrange with thick, cuddly bass and 'gentle' treble. This amplifier is wholly modern in its resolving capability.

Its crystalline, delicate delivery provides detail in spades, but with none of the hectoring you find with those brightly-lit amplifiers that seem determined to grab the attention. No, what the 300i does is far more subtle. It delivers fabulous

> three-dimensionality, and with good quality source recordings the 'blackness' of the silences helps create holographic soundstages extending far beyond the edges of

your monitors.

Tracks from Nick Drake's charming Bryter Layter album [Island] perfectly showcased the amplifier's seductive charms. 'Northern Sky' had Drake's delicate acoustic guitar appearing eerily lifelike and his melancholy voice sounding golden-honeyed. The individual elements within the soporific 'At The Chime Of A City



16ohm loads

easy to listen into, yet depicted all solidity of the image.

With Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra and Sinfonia da requiem [Reference Recordings] the breadth and depth of the image was immense, the sound grainfree, liquid, detailed, full of vibrant colours and richly textured.

VERDICT

Beautiful to behold, Nagra's 300i integrated amplifier, albeit costly, has a fabulously clear and open sound that fully vindicates the careful design work and superior manufacturing techniques employed to craft it. ()



HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<2% THD, 8/4ohm)	25W (8ohm tap) / 25W (4ohm tap)
Dynamic power (<2%THD, 8/4/2/10hm)	23W / 23W / 30W / 27W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	2.9-3.6ohm
Frequency response (20Hz-100kHz)	-2.0d8 to -13.4dB
Input sensitivity (for OdBW/20W)	120mV / 555mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. OdBW/20W)	95.4d8 / 108.4d8
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz/10W)	0.57-2.2% (left) / 0.72-2.1% (right)
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	113W/143W
Dimensions (WHD)	277x275x232mm