

THE TECHNOLOGY

Crimson have decided not to depart from their traditional non-standard slim casework in the new pre and power. This means the two PCBs in the pre (one for the phono stage, which is user switchable between MM and MC, one for the line stages) are vertically mounted. All circuitry is discrete, the transistors standing alongside predominantly tantalum caps. The transformer is located in a wall-plug to keep hum low and feeds a small bridge rectifier and a pair of DNM's Slit-Foil reservoir caps (hefty 10000uF 50V types).

Within the cramped confines of the power amp the toroidal transformer is also vertically mounted and followed by another bridge rectifier and pair of 10000uF 50V Slit-Foils. Where many amps these days have bipolar transistors in the driver stage and FET output devices the Crimson reverses this order.

For your £800 spent on these two boxes (which aren't available separately), you get a free DNM Reson interconnect and mains lead as well as a five-pin-to-RCA adaptor for the DIN phono socket. There's an £800 trade-in on DNM's own more expensive components when you choose to upgrade too.

SOUND QUALITY

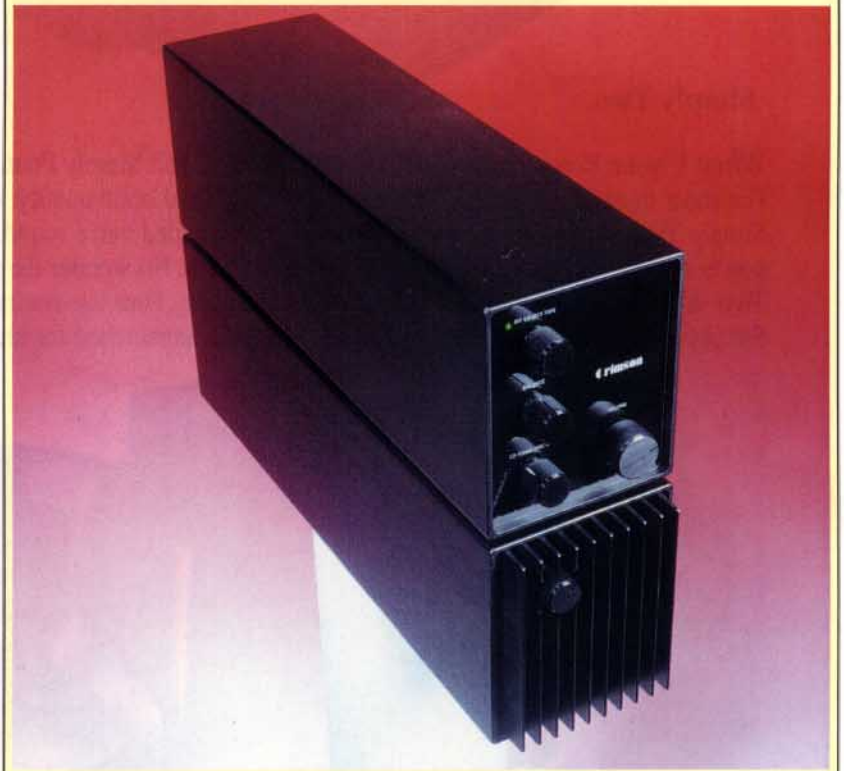
From the Crimsons' sleek looks you might think each black box with its wrap-around sleeve of brushed aluminium is hiding a single glass slipper belonging to one Miss Cinderella, but no. Rather giving the game away as to their true purpose in life are the gold-plated RCA sockets (six pairs on the pre - three line inputs, one tape loop and the outputs to the power amp), the control knobs and the heatsink on the front of the power amp. Slipper boxes also lack 50watts of 'speaker-driving ability and don't come with a free DNM interconnect and mains lead.

Linked to the Concert 8s the Crimsons proved there's little of the shoebox to their sound - music spread broad and deep between the 'speakers without doing so at the expense of focus. And where much footwear pinches in all the wrong places this pre and power never cramped the music flowing through them.

DNM, who distribute the Crimson range, say the combo has been balanced to work best with their interconnects (we tried a variety of alternatives and none worked as well) and mains lead, and they've obviously managed to get the synergy spot-on. Considering its price, this little package has a sweet tonality, stage depth and dynamics that are a real turn-up for the books. Nowhere was this more apparent than with well-produced Classical recordings - several of the HDCD variety had a storming impact and scale that gave them an adrenaline-rush excitement. All of which means the Crimsons offer more enjoyment to the audiophile than a whole cupboard full of mint Judy Garland slippers would to Imelda Marcos.

With a well-mannered input the Crimsons produce a similarly well-mannered output. But what happens when the signal entering the pre-amp is just a tad rougher around the edges, like a bit of Black Grape, for instance? Would the essence of the music still be there? Oh yes! 'Reverend Blake Grape' scorched along hotter and faster

CRIMSON ELECTRIC CS610C PRE AND CS620C POWER



than Thrust 2 nearing the speed of sound. Basslines were as unwashed, dirty and grungey as the day they were laid down in the studio and, even though the production has a sand-paper smoothness to it, the Crimsons for all their clarity didn't make the tunes unlistenable. There's more to music than speed and pace, so it was time to see how this pre/power would deal with the meditative rather than the manic.

With a mix of ethereal, down-tempo Pop (Maria McLachlan's *Fumbling Towards Ecstasy*) and Cesar Franck's *Three Chorals* the Crimsons' smoothness, tonal colour and dynamics scored again. The feeling of substance to the sound, whether it was to be found in cymbals or double-bass, gave the music convincing realism.

Unfortunately, that DIN-to-phono adaptor wasn't supplied in time for the phono stage to make it into this review, so a home demo is the best option for black discers. If it's as unfailingly rhythmic and engaging as the line stages, I can see the Crimson pre and power winning themselves a lot of friends.

CS610C and CS620C
£875

Crimson
Virtual Reality Audio
Systems
PO Box 383,
Brentwood,
Essex CM14 4GB
Tel: 01277 227355