

**B**ritish electronics manufacturer Crimson was probably the first to use a 'CE' mark on their products — but not for the purpose seen today. Building solid-state amplifiers since 1977, Crimson Electrik has now forsaken the CE tag, to become plain Crimson. But some things have survived the years — the amplifier combination reviewed here may be familiar to some as a variation on the 510/530, reviewed in this magazine in 1982.

On test here is the 610C pre-amplifier and two 630C monoblocks, all sharing the same simple case style, an elongated black housebrick measuring 95 x 110 x 350 mm (whd). So even sat side by side, the three blocks take up less shelf width than many conventional integrations. The outward styling may stress function over form, but having already seen the stereo power amp version, I suspected that, in the best tradition of British amplifiers, the hard work had been left to the inside.

The pre-amp is a straightforward design comprising five inputs, one of which is preset for either m-m or m-c cartridges. Selection between them is made by a row of DIP switches on the built-in phono card. While the CD, Tuner, Aux and Tape inputs are of the familiar RCA phono type, the turntable input is a locking 5-pin DIN socket, necessitating use of a supplied DIN-to-phono adaptor for

## MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATIONS

### Crimson CS610C pre-amplifier

Nominal output level	775mV
Output resistance	700 ohms
Maximum output level	>3.5V rms
Sensitivity (line inputs)	250mV
Sensitivity (m-m)	5.5mV at 1kHz into 50k ohms
Sensitivity (m-c)	0.25mV at 1kHz into 330 ohms
Slew rate	>10V/μS
Signal-to-noise	70dB (m-m), 65dB (m-m)
Distortion	>0.01%
Weight	2.3 kg

### Crimson CS630C power amplifier

Power output	100W into 8 ohms/175W into 4 ohms
Peak output current	17A
Input sensitivity	775mV
Distortion	Typically 0.01%
Frequency response	10Hz to 40kHz, -1dB
Signal-to-noise	>100dB
Weight	3.95 kg

most record players. At the front, the gloss black panel carries four black anodised knobs; two pots for volume and balance (a panning control that allows gentle left-right swing), and two rotary switches. The lower selects between four inputs while topmost knob selects either these sources or the tape input, and will also readily turn the unit off — arguably an artefact of the earlier, outwardly similar, PP9-powered 510 which needed turning off after use to preserve battery life.

Inside is evidence of much hand-finishing, like point-to-point wiring of phono sockets and front panel

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controls. Two PCBs — one phono stage, the other for the line stages — are mounted on their side, both carrying only discrete components, that is, not an op-amp in sight! The pre-amp takes its power from a plug-in wall transformer, which supplies about 20V ac to the unit through a 3-pin DIN socket on the rear. On-board, a small rectifier supplies a pair of 10 000μF 50V Aerovox capacitors. These caps are the rather specialised slit-foil types, and seeing them here should not be too much of a surprise as Crimson amps are now distributed by DNM, originator of the improved designs. Further evidence of the DNM touch can be seen in the power amplifiers, wired internally with Reson solid-core speaker cable and DNM solid mains cable.

The 630 power amps feature a finned heatsink for a front panel, with a small rotary knob turning them on and igniting a soft green LED. Connection to speakers is made through tiny flush-mounted 2mm sockets. Although matching the 2mm plugs on the Reson speaker cable supplied for review, the more popular 4mm plugs will require adaptors that are available for the Crimson. Between the twin sets of 2mm outputs lie a pair of RCA sockets, a line input and an output, the latter allowing easy daisy-

*The Crimson name, on the scene over twenty years,  
may still be ready for new fans*

by **ANDREW HARRISON**



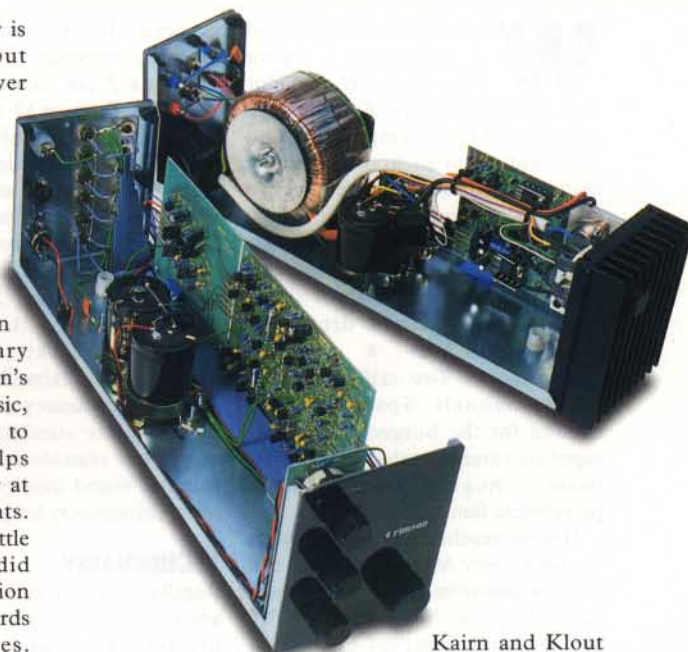
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chaining to an auxiliary power amplifier, for example in bi-amping applications. Incidentally, mention must be made of the substantial solid core mains cable included in the amp package, alongside a DNM Reson interconnect and DIN adaptor. And that solid-core philosophy even continues with the flying lead of the pre-amp power plug.

Where the 620C stereo power amp has a single power supply to feed two amplifier channels, a 630C monoblock possesses the same toroid and slit-foil capacitors, per

channel. This generous reservoir is combined with uprated output bipolars, to take nominal power output from 55 watts/channel on the stereo version to 100W/ch into 8 ohms on these monoblocks. Power into 4 ohms is given as 175W/ch. And listening to these amps showed how useful the extra headroom could be, not just for headbanging and Wagnerian excesses. Listening at ordinary volume levels showed the Crimson's refreshing, relaxed nature to music, although it was indeed tempting to hike volume levels as the Alps volume pot has great sensitivity at even small rotational increments. This made low-level listening a little harder to adjust easily and did seem to convey an impression of more enthusiasm towards

'rocking' volumes. Compared to, say, the drier, tauter sounding Linn



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Kairn and Klout pre/power, the Crimson amps showed more character and life, albeit with hints of mild coloration. The thickening of sound textures, faintly discernible at lower volumes, was replaced by the satisfying crisp smack of clean power as the power amps were allowed to get into their stride. Then the dynamics of music came alive, along with subtle detailing that showed insight into a generous stereo soundstage.

A thermal cut-out is installed as protection; while the heatsinks could get warm to touch with continuous high levels, they never reached the 70° C threshold for shutdown.

The power amps were also tried separately with first the Kairn — and then an Audio Synthesis passive Passion, a particularly satisfying match with the 630C's usable input gain.

Where the Crimson's miss out against more recent or sophisticated designs is in their overall grip and control, which while very good, is not up to some contemporary standards. They make up for this, though, in their warm tuneful delivery, and proved able to easily drive any of the speakers they were paired with.

The price, at £1075, seems quite competitive, with all units, cabling and accessories boxed together in an inclusive package. Despite the absence of recent conveniences like remote control, these amplifiers are still a relevant and worthy option. †

