

CRIMSON CS610/CS630

Crimson first appeared in the '70s when it sold its amplifiers principally in kit form. It enjoyed a pretty good reputation but disappeared for some years before being revived by Virtual Reality Audio Systems, the distributor of DNM. They've been revived pretty much wholesale, including original circuits, circuit board layouts and the distinctive packaging, 'enc-on' in a black anodised aluminium box section. Some might find it hideously ugly, but I never saw the attraction of large facias and find it quite elegant.

Features are basic. The preamp has five inputs (including phono, unique in this test and switchable internally between MM and MC), one tape output and a balance control which operates over a much smaller range than usual, giving a maximum 4dB channel difference. Internally, separate boards for line and phono amplification are linked by short wires, while wiring from front to back is run in a piece of ribbon cable with alternate cores grounded to maintain good channel and input separation. The audio path uses discrete transistors with a couple of integrated-circuit regulators and is quite complex; as with so many things, audio tends to be a bit fashion-led and in the '70s, when these amps were designed, circuits with lots of transistors were 'in'. As with modern 'slimline' circuits, some people did it well, some less well.

The power amplifiers are monoblocks — about as small as units of their capacity can practically be made. In fact, thermal overload used to be a bit of a problem but this has been solved in current production by making the case act as an auxiliary



heatsink. In cases of severe distress, a thermal cut-out keeps things under control. As with the preamp, the circuit is a fairly dense discrete-transistor affair with just two output devices. A large toroidal transformer makes up most of the unit's weight. Input and output sockets are duplicated to facilitate bi-amping or bi-wiring,

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In keeping with DNM-type thinking, the output sockets accept 2mm plugs instead of the usual 4mm (though sockets for these can be requested as an option), and some of the internal signal wiring uses DNM cable. In addition, the £1,075 price for a pre/power ensemble (already less than the two bought separately) includes DNM Solid Core mains and interconnect cables. (Bought

separately, prices are £450 and £800 for preamp and power monoblocks respectively.)

SOUND QUALITY

There's a notion that hi-fi in the '70s was at an all-time low. I'm delighted to report that these throwbacks to that era cheerfully refute the idea. In fact, among the amps in this test they arguably only lost out to the Creek combination. They certainly make for a very workmanlike duo, approaching the task of reproducing music with gusto and energy. Only in the slightest aspects of subtlety and detail preservation do they occasionally prove less than completely assured.

Listening began with some orchestral music and the amps' solid, controlled bass was put to immediate use in conveying the richness and body of cellos and double basses. When various other instruments joined in they were similarly well treated, building up to a sumptuous whole that never submerged any one of its constituent parts. The ability to keep track of individual lines in a large body of sound is, of course, one of the hallmarks of good hi-fi, and these Crimsons managed that feat with some distinction.

◉ **Elegant or ugly? Whatever, prepare to be blown away by the performance.**

Imaging was good from side to side, with just a little compression front to back compared with the best I've heard. No one kind of music seemed particularly favoured, though perhaps the get-up-and-dance brigade would wish for a touch more drive and fire on occasion. There was also an odd reluctance on the part of the amps to play very quietly — one kept wanting to turn it up. But as I loathe background music I'd take that as a plus. The phono stage acquitted itself well with both MM and MC cartridges.

Measurements on the 610 pre-amp were absolutely textbook, its frequency response in particular being quite beyond reproach and extending well into the MW broadcast band. The power amp is similarly well behaved with plenty of power on hand (150 Watts continuous) and low distortion.

CONCLUSION

Whether you like the Crimson styling is another matter, but judged strictly on sound this combination certainly cuts it. It's admittedly basic and the upgrade factor is low, but taken as it is, it's definitely worth Recommending.



VERDICT

SOUND	★★★★☆
BUILD	★★★★☆
VALUE	★★★★☆
PRICE	£1,075

Despite the odd looks and the aged circuit design, this is a very capable set-up with plenty of power and detail. Price includes DNM Solid Core cables.

■ **THREE YEAR GUARANTEE**

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