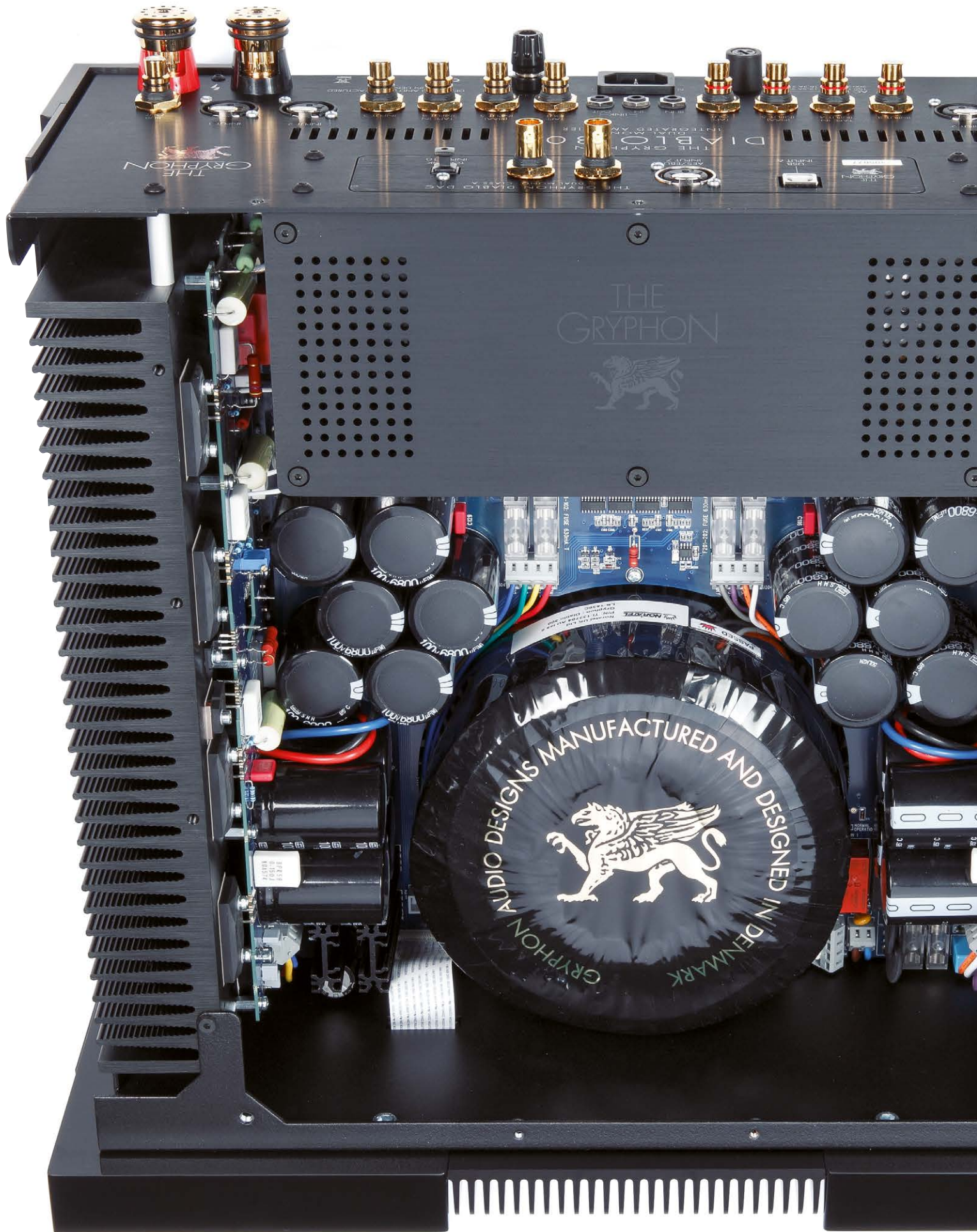


 **HIFI EXCLUSIVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER**



BETTER THE DEVIL...

Some manufacturers rework details of devices and give them a new name, but Gryphon has completely revised the „Diablo“ from the ground up, while still retaining the same name.

Better the devil you know? Perhaps not: while it would have been simple for Gryphon merely to treat its Diablo amplifier to a refresh and a new name, instead it's done much more fundamental reworking to create the Diablo

300 we have here. The price has risen – we tested its predecessor in Issue 4/14 at € 12,000 but the “Diablo 300” comes at a hefty € 15,500, with the optional phono board up from around € 1,800 to € 2,140 – but the price is far from the biggest change here, as a glance inside the amplifier reveals.

Nine years is a lot of time, over which Gryphon has sold a four-digit number of Diablos: many of the insights gained in the development of other devices were also introduced into the new “devil”. For example, if your wallet is still healthy after the price increases, and you want to take one step closer to digital Nirvana, CEO Flemming Rasmussen and his team

can offer you a €6000 digital converter plug-in for the Diablo, which has supposedly inherited all the essential sound characteristics of the company's € 24,000 “Kalliope” über-converter.

So what's changed? Let's start with something seemingly trivial: the volume control. In the old Diablo, the balanced signal was squeezed through a non-balanced series of 7 resistors per volume level; the new version is fully balanced, yet uses only two resistors per damping stage. Strictly speaking, the Diablo is also not a classic integrated amp, as Möller explains: “We don't use a classic preamp stage, but instead have a power amp stage with variable amplification,

TEST COMPONENTS

CCD player: T+A PDP 3000 HV, Rega Apollo R

Power amp: T+A HV 3000, Octave V80SE/SBB, Symphonic Line RG9 MkIV Ref.

Speakers: PMC twenty 5 23, DALI Epicon 6, B&W 802 D3, Avantgarde UNO XD

Cable: Cardas, HMS, Chord Cable





Our basic circuit is simple and implemented with short signal paths, and it's mainly the oversized power supply that takes up a lot of space.

‘However, we keep a close eye on getting the structure as cable-free as possible. One reason is that we know that hardly any two cables run absolutely identically in the devices and thus microphonic effects always worm their way into the sound balance. We don't think that there will ever be cables which are better than no cable at all, and neither do we subscribe to the fairy-tale of synergy effects – to us this is simply a mix of different discolorations which more or less cater to the personal tastes of the developer.’

A big step up

The power supply of the Diablo has also gotten chunkier: the storage capacity of the electrolytic capacitors has increased from about 56,000 microfarads to 68,000 microfarads per channel, while the performance of the transformers has also been upgraded. This also shows in the power output: 250 Watts at 8 Ohm have turned into about 300 Watts, and while the cooling surface has doubled, the Diablo still gets hellishly hot since it runs in Class A operation well up the output range.

▲ Wall of sound: The Gryphon is constructed with mirror symmetry and comes with plenty of equipment – in this case an outstanding optional D/A converter.

However, power isn't as important as quality, and Rasmussen and his chief developer Tom Möller sourced especially low-capacitance transistors for the driver stage in Gryphon's top power amp, the “Mephisto”. Used here, the result is a further increase in bandwidth and greater current delivery capacity, while the circuits have supposedly also become “faster”, with all this was supplemented with non-inductive resistors in the output state.

Digital Nirvana

More big changes come in the optional digital section: € 6,000 is no trifle, but the technology behind the five digital inputs is quite something: the Sabre ES 9018 converter processes PCM and DSD signals separately, circumventing the usual forced conversion of PCM to DSD signals. The Diablo offers up to 32 Bit/384 kHz for PCM at the USB input and DSD is processed from Windows OS with up to 512 times the sampling frequency, and from

MacOS and Linux OS up to 128 times. If you would like to listen in a more conventional manner: the classic digital inputs handle up to 24 bits/192 kHz. Switchable filters round out the package and here as in the rest of Gryphon's designs, the mantra is the same: dual mono construction in Class A topology, no feedback and only the best components.

The phono stage, which is also optional and handles both MM and MC inputs, remains mostly unchanged – but the price has risen, which we thought was a pity: maybe someone can check and calculate whether this is really necessary. However, it does stick to Gryphon's usual feedback-free design..

The amplifier's layout was optimized for short signal paths even more than in the old Diablo, which also involved placing the power supply to the rear, and in the center. The power transistors are select, latest generation bipolar Sanken types, apparently delivering even more current than their predecessors, but Rasmussen feels that more important than the basic measurements are selection and manufacturing consistency – for each individual device and in the series as a whole. All components are produced to military specifications and are tested in-house, first

individually and then again after installation. After this, each finished device is also sound-tested – only possible for comparatively small batch numbers since it is simply too time-consuming. All measurements are entered into a test certificate and archived by Gryphon, meaning the quality of can be maintained in the case of repairs being required.

The open window

A Gryphon is not supposed to leave its mark on the signal: for Rasmussen, circuit design with high bandwidth and phase-stability is the foundation - the open window from which the music can escape, as he describes it. To stay as close to the original in terms of musical truth they have been using master tapes as a reference source, and not just since the renaissance of tape decks: these Danes especially love their dynamic range and resolution.

In addition to the trust-engendering detail quality and the connection jacks soldered directly to the circuitboard, we also appreciate the versatility and operational stability of the Diablo 300: there are two balanced inputs on Neutrik XLRs, plus single ended inputs, all of course gold-plated, a volume control, and the ability to integrate the 300-series with a surround system, connect it to two subwoofers or add a power amp.

Updates are available via a network connection, while protection that reliably prevents the death of the amp or connected speakers is as welcome as the easy-to-read and brightness-adjustable display and the sensor buttons, which reacted sensitively

and reliably to the lightest touches. By the way, the central on-off switch is on the bottom of the Diablo, close to the front plate.

With a small speaker

Right from the beginning we were impressed with how unbelievably well the Diablo 300 was able to project large and small spaces, and to represent the difference between sound recorded directly where it was generated and more ethereal recordings made with mics placed at some distance. Almost shocking was its ability to reproduce gnarly bass lines, such as “Carta de Amor” by Garbarek, Gismonti, and Haden with ease and to make them sing while at the same time preventing them from going off on their own. Meanwhile ZZ Top, not exactly known as sound tinkerers with a penchant for perfection, became unusually fun in “La Grange”, the amp delivering sheer sound pressure with grip, swing, and fun – all in one. Not an audiophile highlight, agreed, but this was gripping music.

The WOW factor

The next big moment came when we used the optional digital section: with Max Bruch’s violin concerto with Jascha Heifetz playing solo violin, an old analog fan had to catch his breath at hearing what sounds came out of the speakers, full of musicality, precision, and feeling for what was essential in the music. Depending on the speakers the sound was sometimes more or less elegant, but the playback was always gripping – and all that was achieved with a relatively modest digital source: the Rega Apollo R used as a transport.

The generous and yet precisely located presentation, in particular when listening to Verdi choirs and orchestras, lets the Diablo 300 stand up to any competition in the pre/power amp combo world, and it was especially cool that all the tendencies and differences in the sound were already readily apparent using comparatively cheap PMC speakers. No matter what power we pulled out of it, the Gryphon simply passed on it absolutely neutral but never distant sound character to the speakers.

Isn’t that exactly what we mean when we speak of high-end audio? This devil, it seems, does have all the best tunes.

Michael Lang



▲ The metal remote handset feels good, and is easy to operate.

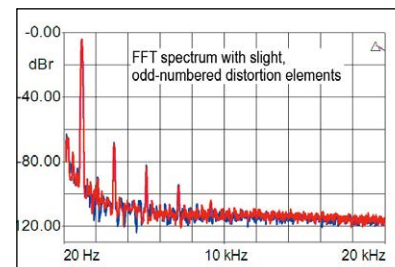
GRYPHON DIABLO 300



starting at € 15,500
 Dimensions: 48 x 24 x 51 cm (W x H x D)
 Warranty: 3 years
 Contact: TAD HiFi
 Tel.: +49 8052/9573273
 www.tad-audiovertrieb.de

A monster of an amp. The expensive Dane won us over completely with seemingly old-fashioned amp technology and an optional state-of-the-art digital converter section!

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Continuous power at 8 4 Ω	284 473 W/channel
Impulse power protection switch W/channel	
Distortion at 50 mW 5 W Pmax -1 dB	0.02 0.1 0.3 %
Intermodulation at 50 mW 5 W Pmax -1 dB	0.004 0.03 0.3 %
Signal-to-noise ratio CD at 50 mW 5 W	72.5 91 dB
Channel separation at 10 kHz	83 dB
Attenuation at 4 Ω	350
Upper cutoff frequency (-3 dB, 4 Ω)	>80 kHz
Load ratings	practice-oriented
Crosstalk tuner/CD (10 kHz/5 kOhm)	92 dB
Timing error volume control up -60 dB	0.1 dB
Power consumption Off Standby Idle	0 0.5 152 Watt

LAB COMMENTS: Very good to excellent measurements, only distortion and intermodulation just below full load are merely decent. More power than you can handle. High attenuation factor.

FEATURES

Two XLR inputs, 3 cinch inputs; 2x subwoofer/pre out; tape input, switchable to home theater; display, dimmable, remote control; optional: phono MM/MC and digital board with 5 inputs for PCM and DSD signals

STEREO-TEST

SOUND QUALITY 100%

PRICE/PERFORMANCE

★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆

VERY GOOD