

# Hi-fi

PURE AUDIO EXCELLENCE

# news™

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## LOUDSPEAKER GROUPTEST

**£1k bookshelf speakers** – six of the finest reviewed and rated



The **Acoustic Signature Final Tool** turntable spins a musical spell



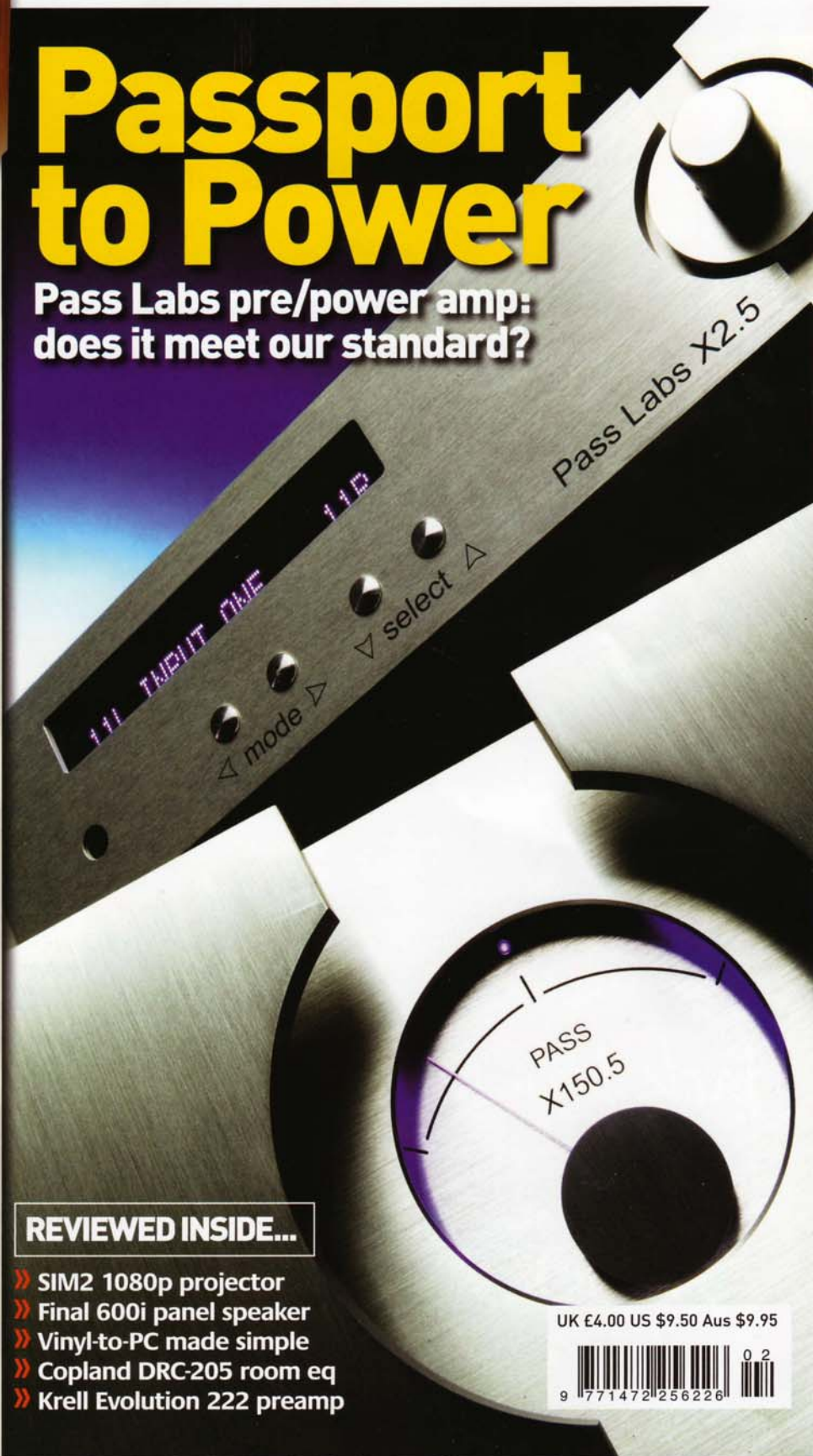
**Rega Apollo** CD player lifts off



**Musical Fidelity X-series** CD player and amp get their first lab test

# Passport to Power

Pass Labs pre/power amp: does it meet our standard?



### REVIEWED INSIDE...

- » SIM2 1080p projector
- » Final 600i panel speaker
- » Vinyl-to-PC made simple
- » Copland DRC-205 room eq
- » Krell Evolution 222 preamp

UK £4.00 US \$9.50 Aus \$9.95



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# Posh Splice

Has Transparent created a cable that can serve as a universal choice whatever system you care to hook up with it? Well it has certainly come close, though it'll cost you...

**REFERENCE XL**  
**SPEAKER CABLE** (£9602) 8ft pair  
**INTERCONNECT** (£6960) 1m pair

**REFERENCE MM**  
**SPEAKER CABLE** (£15,660) 8ft pair  
**INTERCONNECT** (£5665) 1m pair



Tested by Martin Colloms

**T**ransparent has set enviable standards in recent years for audiophile cables and, after some activity in its flagship Opus MM range, the new technology has now been applied to some of the company's more well known cable series.

One of these is the XL range, which has now been replaced by a new version based on Opus 'MM' technology. Experience has shown that change does not necessarily produce improvement, so would these revamped cables produce a better sound?

### REFERENCE XL INTERCONNECT/SPEAKER CABLE

I needn't have worried since on wiring up the new XL cable much was immediately familiar. That unrivalled top-to-bottom tonal balance, the quality of inner silence working with a perceived calm and control, plus the firm grip on the musical pulse and the still mightily impressive sharpness for stereo focus were all present and correct.

It was undoubtedly core 'XL' sound, but tighter, still better focused and still more transparent and spacious. Compared with the 'classic' Reference XL it sounded as if layers of sepia varnish had been stripped away.

With no change to the essential tonal balance and to the essentially musical structure, new XL provided cleaner, deeper bass with an obviously more neutral upper bass. It was both more delicately resolved yet more open, natural and dynamically expressive through the midrange.

That slightly boxy and wiry tinge had almost vanished, while the treble now sparkled by comparison with the old, sounding pure, grainless, and also imbued with a subtle sense of zest and air. The whole effect was more upbeat, faster and more involving.

Reference XL interconnect proved significantly better than the original, arguably addressing failings which though minor, could nevertheless be exposed by using a raft of competitors valued *en-masse*. Bass speed and attack, bass tune playing and articulation plus midrange transparency, musical



expression, purity of timbre, clarity, sparkle, focus, air, spatiality, image depth – all were heard to benefit. In other words, the lot!

### REFERENCE MM INTERCONNECT/SPEAKER CABLE

There is another set of cables positioned above Reference XL and below Opus. Many listening tests were made, leading to the conclusion that if you want to hear

the Reference MM at its best, the right step to take is

to use the speaker cables with the interconnects.

I found some greater dependency between these cables and variations in the audio system, in context, more so than with the new Reference XL. For example, a Wilson 7/Krell FPB

700 pairing felt more at home with Reference MM while an Eidolon Diamond/Conrad-Johnson Premier 350 combo used for the test actually sounded better balanced to my ears when used with the less expensive new XL.

In the latter arrangement, new XL managed to sound more spacious and transparent, more in keeping with the Eidolon. Reference MM brought the soundstage forward,

adding a trace of extra attack and dynamics. So while not favoured with the Eidolon-cj pairing, it added life, detail and speed to the Krell-Wilson system.

To be fair, the differences were not very great in the context of the high standard already set by new Reference XL cable and while I preferred the latter, Reference MM was clearly an alternative cable of particularly high quality.

### CONCLUSIONS

With understandable system dependency for the final sound, no particular cable is going to be a universal choice given the sheer range of high-end audio systems that abound. Nevertheless, the new Transparent Reference XL series

**'The treble now sparkled by comparison with the old, sounding pure, grainless, and imbued with air'**

has, in my opinion, come close to defining that possibility.

The more costly Reference MM set was found to be better in some areas but not quite so well balanced in others. I recommend these cables but with some caution, bearing in mind the significant price uplift. ☹

**UK DISTRIBUTOR:** Absolute Sounds  
**TEL:** +44 (0)20 8971 3909  
**WEB:** www.absolutesounds.com

**ABOVE:** Interconnects carry either balanced or phono terminations  
**LEFT:** The cables are configured for either valve (V) or solid state (SS) components

**FOR:**  
Open, natural, neutral, free of grain, a true benchmark

**AGAINST:**  
Price, some system dependency