

hi-fi news

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ULTIMATE HI-FI 2012

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and essential music

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The audio heroes
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• **DIGITAL DISC & MEDIA PLAYERS** Burmester to TAD • **TRANSISTOR & TUBE AMPS** Anthem to VTL
• **LOUDSPEAKERS** Cabasse to Wilson Audio • **VINTAGE** B&O, Electrocompaniet, KEF, Sony and more

UK £4.50 US \$10.99 Aus \$10.50





Stereo integrated valve amplifier. Rated at 20W/8ohm
 Made by: Kudelski Group, Switzerland
 Supplied by: R.T. Services
 Telephone: 01235 810 455
 Web: www.nagraaudio.com; www.rtsaudio.co.uk



Nagra 300i

(£15,950)

Think Nagra and you think Swiss precision engineering at its finest: electronics made for professionals... Developed by the same engineering and production teams responsible for its professional products, Nagra's high-end audio components positively reek of the marque's DNA. Build quality and design – that legendary Swiss attention to detail – is fabulous.

Now Nagra celebrates its 60th anniversary by producing an amplifier employing 300B direct heated triodes, a 'symbol of timelessness in audio'. They were introduced in 1938 and to this day there remain valve aficionados who will listen to nothing else, citing its midrange 'to die for'.

Nagra's 300i employs a pair of Slovakian JJ Electronic 300Bs per channel in push-pull configuration to produce a 'useful' 20W per side. Quite unlike all-valve single-ended (lower-power) designs with, say, point-to-point wiring and zero feedback, the 300i employs sophisticated solid-state electronics for its driver stages, circuit surveillance and diagnostics, and microprocessor-controlled input selection and volume/balance circuitry. The company says its

enclosed in a separate tower filled with a silicon damping material. This is mounted on the chassis using supplied bolts.

The 300i also comes with one of Nagra's elaborate VFS vibration isolation platforms, a £1425 item when purchased separately.

MODERN SPIN

Homage to hi-fi's 'golden age' it may be, but there is nothing old-fashioned about the sound of Nagra's 300i. Defying stereotypical tubey cosiness, it sounds quick on its feet and is light of touch, the music emanating from beautifully silent backgrounds. You might be disappointed if hoping for a rich, warm and syrupy midrange with thick, cuddly bass and 'gentle' treble. This amplifier is wholly modern in its resolving capability.

Its crystalline, delicate delivery provides detail in spades, but with none of the hectoring you find with those brightly-lit amplifiers that seem determined to grab the attention. No, what the 300i does is far more subtle. It delivers fabulous three-dimensionality, and with good quality source recordings the 'blackness' of the silences helps create holographic soundstages extending far beyond the edges of your monitors.

Tracks from Nick Drake's charming *Bryter Layter* album [Island] perfectly showcased the amplifier's seductive charms. 'Northern Sky' had Drake's delicate acoustic guitar appearing eerily lifelike and his melancholy voice sounding golden-honeyed. The individual elements within the soporific 'At The Chime Of A City



ABOVE: The 300B tubes are protected by Pyrex cylinders. Multi-function modulometer displays tube bias, speaker load matching and output level. There are four line rear inputs, one balanced (XLR) and three single-ended (RCA). Output transformer has speaker binding posts for 4, 8 and 16ohm loads

Clock' were clearly separated and easy to listen into, yet depicted all of a piece thanks to the believable solidity of the image.

With Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* and *Sinfonia da requiem* [Reference Recordings] the breadth and depth of the image was immense, the sound grain-free, liquid, detailed, full of vibrant colours and richly textured.

VERDICT

Beautiful to behold, Nagra's 300i integrated amplifier, albeit costly, has a fabulously clear and open sound that fully vindicates the careful design work and superior manufacturing techniques employed to craft it. ⚡

'Soundstage breadth and depth was immense, the sound vibrant in colour'

powering circuits have been most carefully implemented to provide clean, stabilised voltages, giving reliable performance irrespective of the type of 300B used. Experimentation with alternative brands is positively encouraged.

Unusually, the 300i's twin output transformers are toroidal rather than C-core types, bespoke designs handcrafted in-house. They're

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<2% THD, 8/4ohm)	25W (8ohm tap) / 25W (4ohm tap)
Dynamic power (<2% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	23W / 23W / 30W / 27W
Output impedance (20Hz-20kHz)	2.9-3.6ohm
Frequency response (20Hz-100kHz)	-2.0dB to -13.4dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBW/20W)	120mV / 555mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBW/20W)	95.4dB / 108.4dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz/10W)	0.57-2.2% (left) / 0.72-2.1% (right)
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	113W/143W
Dimensions (WHD)	277x275x232mm