

**Creek Audio's latest Evolution 100A amplifier may be small – but it has a big sound, says Jon Myles.**

# Evolution solution

**W**hile perhaps not having the overall brand recognition of some of Britain's biggest hi-fi manufacturers, Creek has been quietly and steadfastly going about its business of making great-sounding equipment at realistic prices for more than 30 years now.

The company launched its first amplifier – the £99 30 Watts per channel CAS4040 – in 1982 and that unit went on to become a massive success with audiophiles.

Founder Mike Creek's long experience in the electronic engineering and hi-fi industries convinced him he could produce an amplifier that matched or bettered most of those on sale at the time, at a price that wouldn't burn a hole in people's pockets.

His confidence proved well-founded and since then Creek has gone on to produce a series of award-winning mid-priced products including CD players, tuners, pre-amps and headphone stages.

All share the same characteristics

of technically sophisticated circuit design, careful component selection and build quality as good as it gets at the price.

So it was no surprise that I jumped at the chance to review the new Creek Evolution 100A – an upgrade to the best-selling entry-level 50A.

Priced at £1,499 the 100A is housed in the same slim-line cabinet as the 50A but inside things are significantly different.

For a start, the 100A has twice the power of its partner – pushing out a 136 Watts per channel into an 8 Ohm load and a massive 225 Watts into 4 Ohms (see Measured Performance).

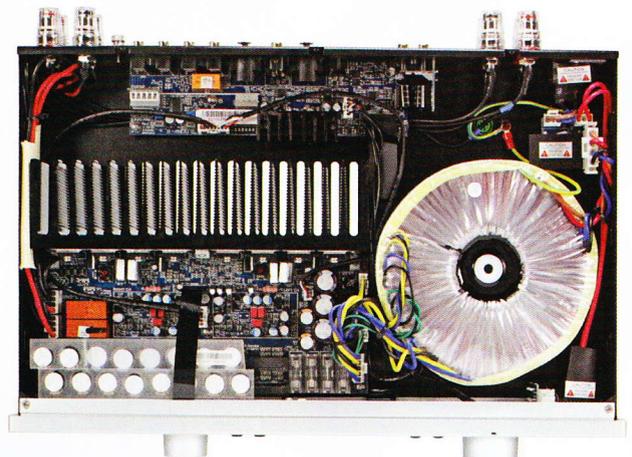
To do so Creek has utilised a specially-designed Class G circuit which sees the amplifier running at a lower voltage for power levels up to 25 Watts and then switching to a secondary higher voltage above that level.

The theory isn't entirely new – Arcam, for one, has used a similar topology – but this is the first time it's been used in a Creek product.

Round the back are five line-level inputs – although one of these can be converted to a phono stage with Creek's optional plug-in board. Another can also take the optional Ambit analogue tuner module or the new 24/192 capable Ruby DAC board with Bluetooth functionality. None of these upgrades were fitted to our review model, but can be specified at the time of order.

Completing the rear panel are a pair of balanced inputs, a ground post and two pairs of switchable

*A large toroidal mains transformer provides plenty of current, and the heatsinks keep this Class G amp cool.*



loudspeaker binding posts which can be selected individually or used in tandem – useful for those looking to bi-wire their 'speakers.

The front is pure Creek – a minimalist yet purposeful-looking brushed aluminium design bereft of unnecessary frippery. A

rectangular OLED information display is flanked by eight backlit soft-touch control buttons with two metal rotary knobs on either side. The left selects inputs and sets levels such as bass and treble boost and balance, while the right handles volume.

To Creek's credit the controls are a joy to use – with the volume control in particular beautifully-weighted, making small adjustments in level tremendously easy.

The display brightness can also be dimmed or turned off completely while a fully featured remote completes the package.

## SOUND QUALITY

Of all the solid-state amplifiers out there Creek's have a reputation for being some of the most un-transistor like. Instead they have a mellifluous, natural flow to their presentation free of the grain or artificial edge which rivals can display.

And that is what you get with the Evolution 100A – except with a hefty dose of power and punch added, thanks to that beefy output stage.

It was more than up to the job of driving a pair of the relatively demanding Magneplanar 3.7is (see our comprehensive review in this issue) with the second set of speaker connections being employed to power an additional bass panel. And the 100A positively excelled with our big Tannoy Kensington Gold Reference loudspeakers.

Playing Led Zeppelin's dense and congested 'When The Levee Breaks' John Bonham's thundering drums had the power to blow me across the room. The 100A exerts a firm grip on partnering 'speakers meaning bass is firm and tight, although it can be just a trifle dry. Not that that's a bad thing, though – it means you are not overwhelmed by the low-end on bass heavy tracks, but merely hearing what's on the record.

Take Jah Wobble and Evan Parker's testing 'Passage To Hades'. Here the Evolution presents a rock-solid yet melodic foundation from

Wobble's sinuous bass lines, while allowing Parker's saxophone improvisations to float ethereally into the room.

Here the treble is extremely smooth with no sense of harshness or grain – more akin to a valve set-up than a mid-priced transistor amplifier.

But don't take that to mean there's any lack of detail or resolution on offer. Switching to something really layered such as New Order's 'Bizarre Love Triangle' remixes the Evolution brings out the various overlays and studio trickery with ease – including the slight laughter and sound of a chair crashing to the floor as one mix ends.

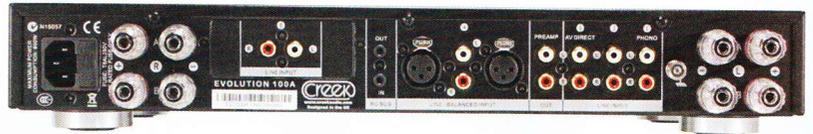
Fans of female vocalists will also love the Creek thanks to its smooth midband. Alison Kraus with Union Station on 'Now That I've Found You' has tremendous intimacy and a lush

feel – and you know all about it on the Evolution; not too syrupy as to be boring but pitched just where it should be in terms of air, atmosphere and swing.

And, actually, that's what the Evolution 100A tends to do so well. It'll grab hold of anything with verve and really power it out, but it can also take a step back and show the detail in more nuanced recordings. What more could you want in an amplifier?

## CONCLUSION

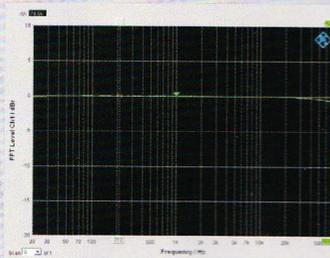
It may have a slim case – but the Creek Evolution 100A has a very big and sophisticated sound. Tight, controlled bass is allied to a smooth midband and treble while it has detail aplenty. The range of upgrade options only add to the value – which, at £1499, is something of a bargain.



## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

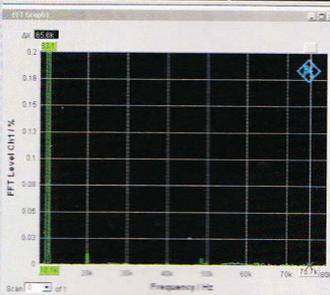
Although compact in size, the Evolution 100A delivers big power, 136 Watts into 8 Ohms and 225 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it can play very loud in all situations, including big rooms with insensitive loudspeakers. Frequency response measured flat to a high 85kHz and was unaffected by volume control position. Damping factor was very high at 73, suggesting tight, or dry sounding bass.

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION

THD @ 1W	1.9900 V	10.000 kHz
0.0150 %	OFF	OFF



The Evolution produced minuscule amounts of distortion, measuring just 0.002% in the midband at 1 Watt, and the same close (-1dBV) to full output. At high frequencies distortion rose little, measuring 0.01% second harmonic only, our analysis shows, and this distortion pattern remained absolutely stable as output increased, suggesting the amplifier will sound smooth in its treble and free of harshness. The low level of distortion and its consistent pattern suggest the output stage works better than most.

The unbalanced (phono socket) line inputs were insensitive, 0.8V being needed for full output from the amplifier, where half this – 400mV – is common. The balanced XLR input needed 1.5V. These inputs will suit silver disc players with an output of 2V, but not external phono stages with low gain.

The Evolution 100A is a powerful amplifier that measured well, except for very low sensitivity. Excellent measured results, better than most amplifiers, point to optimised circuitry and fine sound quality. NK

Power	136 Watts
Frequency response	3Hz-85kHz
Noise	-110dB
Distortion	0.01%
Sensitivity	0.8V
Damping factor	73

## CREEK EVOLUTION 100A £1499



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best**

**VALUE - keenly priced**

### VERDICT

Powerful amplifier in a slim case with a smooth, detailed and accurate delivery.

### FOR

- fluid music delivery
- tight bass
- smooth midband

### AGAINST

- radio/DAC/phonostage options add to the price

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