

TEMPTATIONS

Cyrus Mono X300 Signature

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Behind the music

• Peter Bartlett, technical director



By selecting the newly available SMD components and redesigning the XLR input stage, we feel we have achieved very worthwhile improvements over the standard Mono X 300. The new components and revised tuning have helped reduce what I call the black noise behind the music and allowed us to expand the soundstage further. Tuning a product to expose such a high level of data will obviously work best when it's used with the very best partnering components.



Twin cooling fans flank the power socket, with both balanced XLR and phono inputs



Cyrus Mono X 300 Signature

Deceptively compact **monoblocs** that make their mark with a real flourish

Profile

Price £2750 each ★★★★★

Highlight A class-leading combination of agility, resolution and dynamic subtlety that's rare at any price, let alone for this money

Consider if You put a higher priority on sound quality than on external size, massive weight, bomb-proof build or a luxury finish

At the start of this year Cyrus began celebrating its 30th birthday. To mark the occasion the company launched a limited-edition top-end anniversary system.

There were just 30 samples of this £17,000 set-up. It was based on the company's high-end X Series components, but each part was further developed to improve performance. The electrical upgrades have now been incorporated into the standard range, giving us the Signature products.

We're starting with the new version of the Mono X 300 monobloc power amplifier. It looks unchanged from the outside, but take the base off - the internals are mounted upside down, taking advantage of the rigidity and damping qualities of Cyrus's trademark die-cast casework - and you'll find a whole raft of detail changes. These include better-quality surface-mount components and a redesign of the balanced XLR input circuitry.

Brand identity

Since the casing is the same as that which Cyrus uses on all its products it follows that the build and feel of the Mono X 300 Signature is little different from that of the £750 Cyrus 6a integrated amplifier. There's nothing wrong with the build as such, but take a look at rival designs from the likes of Burmester, Chord and Bryston and the Cyrus feels adequate rather than special at this price.

Still, there are advantages to Cyrus's approach. Sharing the casework across a range gives strong identity and spreads the expense too, leaving the company able to spend more on the insides, where Cyrus has done something different.

The circuit is an unusual one that's been refined over a decade or so. It uses no overall feedback, preferring instead to limit feedback to the smaller amplifier gains stages individually. This means that whatever happens at the output doesn't affect the input, which makes the amp less speaker dependent.

To create a system we used our usual Bryston BP26 preamp with Cyrus's own DAC XP Signature (reviewed soon) as the controllers, with Naim's NDS/555ps streamer and Burmester's 069 CD player as sources. We used a range of speakers, majoring on ATC's SCM 50s, but also including Quad's ESL 2812 and KEF's LS50s. Regardless of speaker used, these Cyrus monoblocs sound terrific.

We were big fans of the original X 300, but it's clear that the company has taken some huge strides forward. We praised the original for its resolution and agility, but the Signature version is easily better in both respects. It now sounds faster, clearer and significantly more articulate - some praise, considering the original was already among the best in these respects. There's also greater refinement here, and the kind of fluid delivery that's very rare in non-valve amplifiers.

The Cyrus continues to excel no matter what kind of music is played. We

TECH SPECS

Type Mono
Power 225W
Bridgeable No
Phono in 1
XLR in 1
Dimensions (hwd)
8 x 22 x 37cm
Weight 6.5kg

listened to everything from Holst's *Jupiter* to Kanye West's *Yeezus* set, and the Signature always sounds at home.

Despite its compact dimensions this mono can deliver oodles of power. It's composed when pushed hard and can deliver impressively wide dynamics. Play West's *I Am A God* and the Cyrus delivers this hard-charging track with real force and determination.

The strong, sensitive type

Where the Cyrus excels is in its ability to combine this muscle with an agility, precision and rhythmic drive rarely heard in high-power amps. Time and again we were pleased by the X 300's muscle but stunned by its insight and subtlety.

We know people buy with their eyes as much as their ears, and the Mono X 300 Signature's rivals will invariably be bigger, heavier and more luxuriously finished. If these qualities are paramount there's plenty of choice, but if you want a wonderfully informative amplifier that communicates the drama in music in a really articulate and precise way, we haven't heard better for the money.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Massively detailed; impressive dynamics; combination of finesse and muscle; timing

AGAINST Lacks the luxury finish and hefty build of price rivals

VERDICT The original X 300 was a great power amp. This Signature version is clearly better