

# HI-FI WORLD

APRIL 2014

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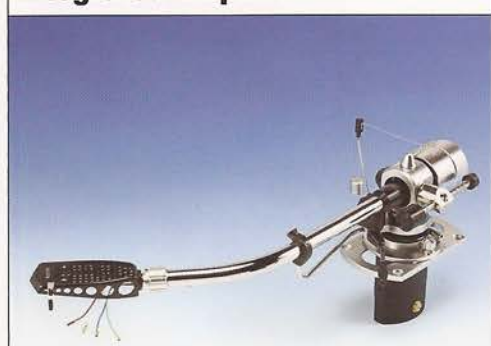
**FREE READER CLASSIFIED ADS IN THIS ISSUE!**



**McINTOSH MCD550** *EXCLUSIVE!*  
SACD/CD player



**ROKSAN K2 BT** *EXCLUSIVE!*  
integrated amplifier



**SME M2-9R** *EXCLUSIVE!*  
tonearm

**ROHDE & SCHWARZ**  
MEASUREMENT



**COMPETITION**



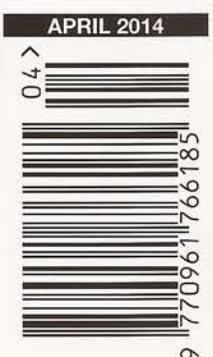
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BLU-RAY PLAYER  
WORTH £399!  
(UK ONLY)**

*EXCLUSIVE!*

# TANNOY DC10A

loudspeakers

**CD TODAY FEATURE**  
ISOTEK'SIGMAS'EV03'PSU *EXCLUSIVE!*  
SONY NWZ-F886 WALKMAN  
MAD 1920S LOUDSPEAKERS  
AMI MUSIK DS5 DAC HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER *EXCLUSIVE!*



**7 PAGES OF LETTERS - THE BEST WINS A PAIR OF KEF Q100 LOUDSPEAKERS! (UK ONLY)**







Roksan's modern classic K2 amplifier gets a Bluetooth boost. Martin Pipe tunes in.

# Rok solid

**W**elcome to an integrated amplifier with built-in Bluetooth, no less. The new Roksan Kandy K2 BT loses its Tape input, but gains the ability to stream music from Bluetooth devices like a smartphone, iPad or similar. And it retains its MM phono stage.

Also rather different from the mainstream is the use of MOSFETs (specifically 2SK1529s and 2SJ200s) in the analogue output stage. Most other solid-state amps either stick with conventional bipolar transistors, or foray into Class D territory.

The K2 BT can be operated via the supplied 'RMX III' handset, programmable with codes from a computer/website via USB.

Roksan's specs claim that with both channels driven the K2 BT delivers 125W into eight ohms, or 200W into four.

It's not possible to upgrade an original K2 into a K2 BT, because they are rather different, insofar that the original K2 made provision for a

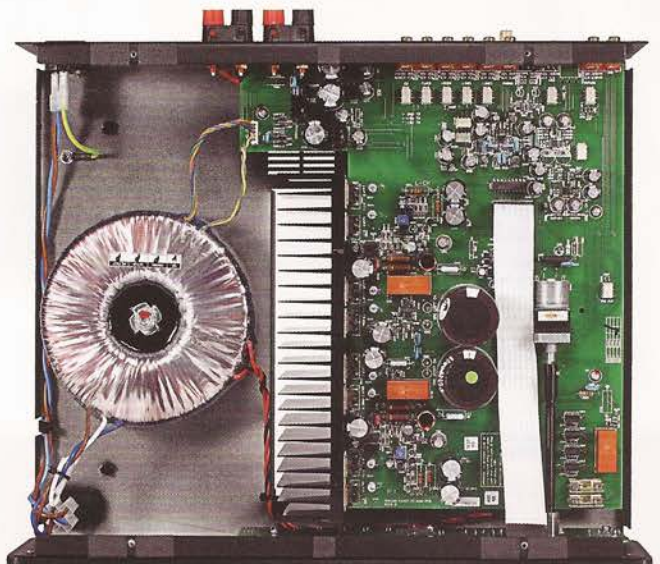
recorder (tape, MD, etc.) but the K2 BT has no such tape loop. Sign of the times? In addition to dedicated CD and phono inputs are three line-level auxiliaries.

A neat trick is the 'bypass' switch. Turn it on, and an adjacent input bypasses the K2 BT's pre-amp, feeding the unit's power amplifier directly. Associated with this is a pre-amp output. In other words, the two sections are electronically-separable.

Two pairs of chunky binding-post speaker terminals carry the K2 BT's output to loudspeakers, while a screw terminal is provided for grounding a turntable. The final connection is for the stubby Bluetooth aerial, supplied in the package. The Bluetooth module has a DAC of course, and it's a pity that it can't be used with other digital sources; there are no coaxial or optical inputs for such gear. The mains switch

is under the left side of the casework (accessibility isn't a problem if there's space around the amplifier).

In terms of front-panel appearance, new follows old. Dominating the front panel is the volume control; to its left are buttons that sequence through the inputs and





a 'mode' button that places the amp in standby or mutes the volume by 20dB.

To the right of the volume control are a 3.5mm headphone socket and a button that engages Bluetooth. When it's turned on, the K2 BT will be 'visible' to any compatible device. My Samsung Galaxy S4 Mini instantly found it

('ROKSAN K2'). From then on, music is played via the Roksan (provided it's within range – typically 10m or so) rather than the Bluetooth device's 'speakers.

**SOUND QUALITY**

I first listened to vinyl, courtesy of my Linn LP12/Basik/Ortofon 540Mk II. A spin of Run-DMC's Tougher Than Leather LP demonstrated that the K2 BT is punchy, energetic and fast. The old-skool hip-hop of I'm Not Going Out Like That was a compelling listen,

with its insistent electronic rhythms, dexterous raps and furious cutting. The album's title track is packed full of searing heavy-metal guitar riffage (including some noticeably Hendrix-esque touches towards the end) and these were carried with the necessary razor-sharpness. Exciting, yes; subtle, no!

For this reason I then switched to Squeeze's grandiose and varied East Side Story. The prominent bassline of Tempted (high-infidelity?) was deep yet controlled, never obscuring the song's other elements (including a soulful vocal and some delicious organ work). The experimental psychedelia of F-Hole, with its massed strings, was an addictive listen here. My only real criticism here, apart from a slight lack of air and subtlety when compared to high-grade external phono stages, is a lack of output with some cartridges (such as my Ortofon). I had to turn up the volume when playing records. There are no internal gain adjustments to bring levels up to those of other sources.



*A busy rear panel carries phono socket inputs for LP, as well as CD, tuner, etc. Not shown here is the Bluetooth aerial.*

Speaking of which, it was then time to try CD playback (with the McIntosh MCD550 tested elsewhere in this issue). Tracks like Palace Posy, from Board of Canada's Tomorrow's Harvest, confirmed my impression that the K2 BT is something of a rhythmically-sympathetic bass-monster. Indeed, it loves dance music. And, for that matter, rock music. Moving to the maximum RnB of The Who's Live at Leeds (MFSL CD) – cited as one of the best live albums ever recorded – and I was transported to that university refectory circa 1970. Yes, the sound quality is that good. Power, clarity, definition and above all excitement from some damn good songs – whether the blues/rock 'n' roll covers or Who originals.

What, then, of the Bluetooth functionality? It can sound good, although music that has been crunched down to fit into your smartphone's memory can suffer through being recompressed with the lossy apt-X codec that the Bluetooth

link specifies. Buy a bigger memory card, and go lossless! It's also worth noting that care is needed with a smartphone's volume control. Too high, and music can sound congested and gritty. Too low, and definition suffers. I found it's best to adjust this so that the sound is at a similar level to, say, CD or tuner with the position of the K2 BT's volume control unchanged. With care here all of the K2 BT's positive traits are retained - timing and dynamics (e.g., Steve Reich's Music for 18 Musicians) and bass weight (e.g., Will.I.Am's Scream and Shout).

**CONCLUSION**

This is a very enjoyable sounding amp, with plenty of power on tap – great for dynamics and rock-venue realism. It's particularly at home with rock and dance music, but I also found it conveyed classical music well. The Bluetooth feature will appeal to those who harbour large music collections on their mobiles and is an attractive modern convenience.

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

The K2 B2 produced 144 Watts into 8 Ohms under test, and 240 Watts into 4 Ohms, so it is very powerful and will deliver very high volume in any situation. With a damping factor of 40 it will keep a good grip on loudspeakers and bass should be well controlled, even on the dry side.

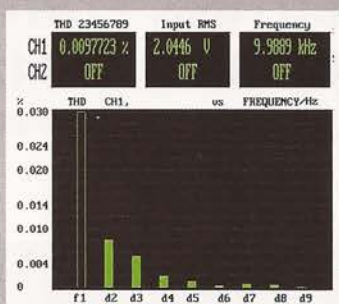
Distortion levels were very low, importantly at high frequencies where the K2 stayed linear from 1 Watt all the way up to full output, producing 0.03% distortion maximum at 10kHz – a very low result. There were no upper

harmonics so the distortion pattern was benign.

Input sensitivity for CD was on the low side at 500mV. This is fine for all silver disc players, if not for low gain external phono stages. The MM phono stage was conventional enough and measured well.

The K2 produce good results in all areas, as usual with Roksan amplifiers and should sound good. NK

**DISTORTION**



Power	144watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	2Hz-kHz
Separation	92dB
Noise	-95dB
Distortion	0.01%
Sensitivity	500mV
Damping factor	40

Disc	
Frequency response	Hz-kHz
Separation	72dB
Noise	-82dB
Distortion	0.02%
Sensitivity	4mV
Overload	50mV

**ROKSAN K2 BT £950**



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best**

**VERDICT**  
Sensible features coupled with a energetic and fulsome yet detailed sound makes this update to the K2 another winner.

**FOR**  
- solid build quality  
- fast and dynamic sound  
- Bluetooth and LP

**AGAINST**  
- care needed to take full advantage of Bluetooth's potential  
- K2's tape loop has been sacrificed  
- Bluetooth DAC not used with other digital sources

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