

Haute *Fidelity*

A Hi-Fi System that Dazzles

Rare are the brands producing luxury hi-fi equipment that understand the world of luxury beyond audio. For too many years, only loudspeaker manufacturers have understood that aesthetics, fit-and-finish and perceived value matter as much as sheer performance. Dan D'Agostino, after three decades heading Krell, is about to apply the standards of the great automobile, wristwatch, camera and pen manufacturers to consumer electronics.

His name is the giveaway: Dan D'Agostino is Italian. True, he's American through-and-through, but his DNA is shared with the people who have created the most beautiful *objets* the world has seen, from the finest fashions to cars with lines that take your breath away. Thing is, D'Agostino doesn't design suits or shoes or GT cars: he designs high-end audio amplifiers. And such devices are normally fashioned as metal boxes with little scope for pleasing the eye or the hand.

Although constantly surrounded by the whiff of hot solder and usually found refining a circuit diagram, D'Agostino is not unfamiliar with the luxury articles against which his amplifiers must vie. He's played with every supercar, having customised Ferraris, Lamborghinis and Porsches when their details didn't please him. How many owners, shocked by a plastic door pull, will refashion it in machined metal? With fastidiousness more common among watchmakers, D'Agostino has approached his latest amplifier with a determination to suffer neither concessions nor compromises.

His new Momentum amplifier caused pandemonium when it was unveiled to the public for the first time at Milan's 2010 TOP Audio Show. An event filled with not just audiophiles,



but *Italian* audiophiles, it was a litmus test. D'Agostino knew that the amplifier would be a success if it passed the taste test of a nation where even the cleaning ladies at motorway diners practice the ethos of *la bella figura*.

It takes a lot to stop Italians dead in their tracks – they're used to gorgeous designs. When the first-ever public view of Dan D'Agostino's Momentum power amplifier took place, the crowds went nuts.

D'Agostino was vindicated, having parted from the company he'd co-founded in 1980, exactly one year earlier. Working furiously for 12 months, he returned with an outrageous new product that he hoped would have the same effect on the high-end amplifier market as did his KMA and KSA series Krells, some 30 years earlier. His renewed assault on the high-end would commence with a compact yet powerful mono-block power amplifier, the herald of a new contender in the luxury audio sector.

It almost goes without saying that, first and foremost, D'Agostino would concern himself most with the needs of its functionality to be above reproach. Fabulous styling or not, it had to pass muster in the sound arena. It would be scrutinised just like any other power amplifier. Did the music it amplified sound realistic, undistorted, *authentic*? Could it power tough, hungry speakers that would eat lesser amplifiers for breakfast? Was it dependable under all conditions? D'Agostino left nothing to chance, relying on three decades' worth of expertise.

Even before the first units have shipped to their eager recipients, the Dan D'Agostino Momentum has already been extolled for unique selling points that will find immediate resonance with audio enthusiasts. D'Agostino used copper heat sinks instead of the more common, less expensive aluminium extrusions, because the thermal conductivity of copper is 91 percent greater than that of aluminium. For design purposes, it enabled him to employ smaller

conductors instead of the bulky fins that render most amplifiers too industrial-looking to earn pride of place in a well-appointed living room. He enhanced the heat conductivity by the use of 'venturis', a series of holes drilled through the copper blocks. At the top, the holes measure 0.75 inches, narrowing to 0.5 inches.

Those who appreciate 'geekspeak' will crow about the Momentum featuring 28 output transistors as the active devices which amplify the signal, and which "run at a blistering 69MHz" for "incredible bandwidth". Each transistor is mounted with two stainless steel fasteners for maximum thermal transfer to those copper heat sinks. A capacitor/resistor network connected to the base of each transistor ensures stability even at high frequencies and with low-impedance speakers – which translates into an amplifier that should have no problems with any speakers currently available.

Every Momentum will be hand-built in the US. The vault-like casework, with no screws visible in its assembled form, is non-resonant and said to provide superior shielding from the distortions created by RFI/EMI interference. The circuit boards feature through-hole construction, to resist heat and add reliability and longevity of a greater level than surface-mounting provides. All resistors are 1 percent metal-film types, and there are no capacitors in the signal path. The amp is DC-coupled throughout.

While the above clearly addresses audiophilic concerns – power to spare, sound quality to die for – the unit is aimed, too, at people who cherish the finer things in life, regardless of type: wines, shoes, luggage or anything else that makes life a bit more pleasurable. When D'Agostino and Petra, his wife and partner in the venture, explain the concept behind the brand, they refer often to luxury icons, with the familiarity of those who understand quality and prestige beyond mere price-tags.

D'Agostino cites watchmaker

Breguet, whose distinctive hour-and-minute hands inspired the shape for the needle in the Momentum's power meter. D'Agostino cooks with a Viking, stores food in a Sub-Zero. He 'knows' Goyard luggage, Cohiba cigars, Romanée-Conti wine. Petra, who has worked with luxury clients for a number of years, matter-of-factly states that "their mission is to establish a rapport with clients who are comfortable with 'the best'."

What such individuals will



appreciate, whether audiophiles or not, are dimensions smaller than the monoliths that have identified high-end amplifiers of the past: the Momentum measures only 4x12.5x18 inches (hwd). Although the main chassis is machined from a solid aluminium billet, the massive, machined-from-solid-copper heat conductors along the unit's sides add to the weight of around 40-odd kilograms.

The Momentum will sell for US \$42,000 per pair, as required for stereo playback. Because each one is hand-built, one might anticipate a waiting list to match the patience needed while awaiting delivery of a fine wristwatch – if not quite so long as the time needed for wine to mature. For more information, visit www.dagostinoinc.com. ☼