



Graham Slee

Solo Ultra Linear DE **£670**

It might look fairly simple, but this Diamond Edition headphone amplifier sounds like a real gem



POWER BROKER

The chassis of the Graham Slee is the smallest in the group, but the dimensions of the unit as a whole need to take into account the presence of the hefty Linear PSU1 that is supplied as part of the package. This comes supplied as standard with the Solo Ultra Linear Diamond Edition, and is available as an upgrade at an additional £185 for more affordable Graham Slee headphone amps. The power supply itself is a hefty black block that contains a specially built mains transformer that is designed to reduce magnetisation and with it interference that such devices can generate. As a welcome side effect, it is intended to be completely silent and this seems to be the case in practise. It makes use of a figure of eight mains lead between it and a mains socket outlet.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Graham Slee
Solo Ultra Linear
Diamond Edition

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Headphone
amplifier

WEIGHT
510g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
107 x 50 x 185mm

FEATURES
● 6.35mm
headphone output
● Impedance range:
16-600ohm
● 2x line-level RCA
input

DISTRIBUTOR
Graham Slee
HiFi System
Components

TELEPHONE
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WEBSITE
hifisystemcom
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As the flagship model in Graham Slee's headphone amp range, this Diamond Edition is an updated version of the earlier Solo Ultra Linear design. It retains the same basic layout and specification of the earlier model, but has been refined to lower noise levels and improve its suitability for use with high-sensitivity devices such as earphones.

The Solo Ultra Linear Diamond Edition is a solid-state design, but the ethos of its construction is with a view to mimicking the positive attributes of valves while avoiding the drawbacks. Chief among the benefits of this is that the circuit is intended to run without negative feedback for longer and once feedback is applied, it is done so in a fashion that's more in keeping with a valve-design amp. Another innovative aspect of the design is the impedance-sensing volume control, which changes as the volume is raised based on the assumption that the greater the volume level being demanded, the higher the impedance of the headphones being used. As the

system is active all the time, there is no real way of judging it against more conventional arrangements, but none of the headphones used during the test period phased it.

Aesthetically, the Solo Ultra Linear Diamond Edition is not a device to get too excited about. It is in fact almost completely identical to the Solo SRGII headphone amp that appeared in a test of more affordable designs a year ago (*HFC 403*). The key visual difference is the Linear PSU that is supplied (see box out), but the main chassis is very similar. This means it lacks some of the presence that rivals possess, despite the fact that it is well assembled and easy to use.

Sound quality

The Graham Slee doesn't need a huge amount of its available gain to hit the test level, and some brief checks suggest that there is plenty left spare in the tank. The good news is that there is far more than blunt horsepower on offer here. The opening minutes of *Silver Rider* demonstrate that this is an exceptionally able headphone amplifier. Plant's vocals are dripping with detail and realism, while the supporting instruments are worked effortlessly into the soundstage making them easy to discern but unquestionably part of the mix.

Where the Ultra Linear DE also excels is in terms of the space and three dimensionality it can create from recordings. Its rendition of *In Your Eyes* is realistically the strongest in the group. The placement of

performers, their relationship to the crowd and the space that they are in is more effectively captured by this amp than it is by any other design here. This is further aided by the sheer low-end heft and scale that it possesses. Bass is deep, well defined and integrated into the rest of the frequency response.

All of these qualities stand the Graham Slee in good stead with its performance of *Dance Of The Infidels*. The excellent detail retrieval and spacious presentation combine to make a very believable rendition. It manages to capture each note and it decays in a manner that few other designs here can match. Only a fractional lack of warmth in the final Kraftwerk track count against it. Across all the headphones used and with a wide variety of music, it consistently delivers excellent results. Beauty in this instance is so much more than merely skin deep ●



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Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Extremely well balanced and pleasing sound; plenty of gain; solid build

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Fractional lack of warmth; slightly bland appearance

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: A talented headphone amplifier with superb qualities

FEATURES



OVERALL

