

# Satisfying solution for headphone devotees

## Creek OBH-21SE

Headphone amplifier  
£250

★★★★★

### FOR

Rhythmic, fast, subtle  
– a headphone amp  
that does it all

### AGAINST

Price will restrict it to  
headphone lovers only

### VERDICT

A fine niche product  
that sounds gorgeous  
with an appropriately  
talented source

IF YOU LISTEN through headphones only once in a while, the Creek OBH-21SE could be considered overkill. This kind of product deserves quality 'phones (say £80 up) and a decent source, of at least Arcam CD72 standard. Those who find this a little steep should go for the non-SE OBH-21 model and save £100 or so in the process.

Like all headphone amps, the OBH-21SE presents a simple face to the world. There's a volume control, a single pair of line-level inputs and, thoughtfully, a brace of 6.3mm outputs, so you can listen in company.

The new Creek headphone amps differ from their OBH-11 and 11SE predecessors, using integrated circuits in place of discrete transistor circuits. The company says that the new line is more tolerant of headphone design, producing more consistent results.

We wouldn't argue – the OBH-21SE sounds lovely regardless of what's plugged into it. We used Grado's excellent SR125s for most of this test, but the Creek was equally happy driving models from AKG and Sony. Volume levels will keep any headbanger happy and everything remains composed and controlled even when it's pushed hard.

The sound is clean and precise without erring towards sterility. There's plenty of kick, so Radiohead's *The Bends* comes over with impressive vigour, and no lack of speed, while bassfests such as Massive Attack's *Angel* storm along with conviction. This isn't at the expense of finesse, either. Aaliyah's emotion-packed *Miss You* comes through undiluted, with the low-level nuances of her voice intact.

There are few top-quality headphone amps near this price point and the Creek deserves to top any shortlist. It's one of the most musically enjoyable electronic boxes we've come across this year.



No complications here: volume  
and two output jacks are all you see

### LEADING RIVALS

#### Sugden Headmaster

£659 ★★★★★ June 2001

Headphone amp/preamp with fine  
sound; superb build and finish

#### Earmax Pro

£425 ★★★★★ June 1999

Quirky valve-powered headphone  
amplifier; sounds sweet and detailed