

AT HOME

We receive a wide variety of devices for review. Occasionally, one of them strikes a particular chord with me. Such is the case with the EAR Phonobox(es).

EAR Phonobox

EAR Phonobox



VOLUME



POWER



Made in Huntingdon, England



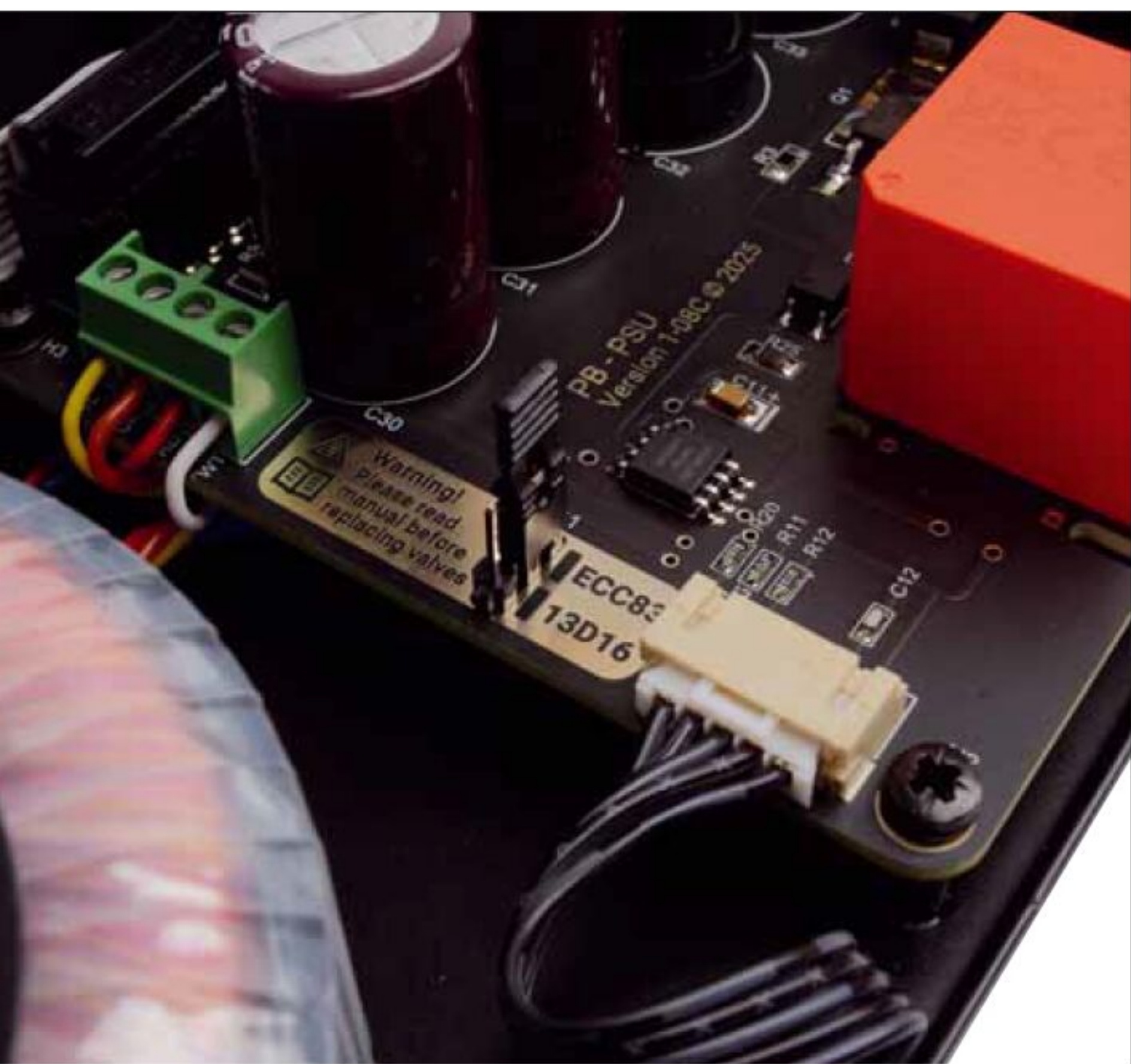
POWER



Made in Huntingdon, England



This is the standard version with the level control. It can be used to build a superb, purist phono chain



Even the Phonobox couldn't do without modern IC technology. However, the chip is not relevant to the signal

Of course, I once had a Phonobox in my system myself, back then still in the original version as the EAR 834. That was certainly 25 years ago, right after I had repositioned myself after a break from analog. The re-entry with the Lehmann Black Cube was great, but it only really took off with the 834, specifically the simpler version with a volume potentiometer.

834 becomes Phonobox

The EAR 834 came onto the market in the mid-80s. It was developed by Tim de Paravicini, the inventor of many ingenious circuits. The device was cleverly designed, but somewhat cheaply made. For example, the RCA jacks were soldered onto the circuit board and tended to cause humming when used frequently. Components? You

Speaking of purist: you can only connect one pickup to the Phonobox. If you need more, you'll have to reach higher up the EAR shelf





As far as we know, the standard 13D16 is a Russian 6N2P specified for EAR, a variant of the ECC83

could forget about them. But the circuitry was capable, and the sound, the sound was simply seductive. Okay, the bass could be a bit too much at times, and it may not have been a world champion in terms of resolution. But it had such a “warm” basic sound, that feeling of well-being, like sitting in front of a steaming hot meal on an uncomfortable November day, it was just right. Not long before his death in 2020, Paravicini significantly revised the 834 once again

and turned it into the Phonobox. Above all, he tackled the signal-to-noise ratio, and it worked perfectly. We’ll hear in a moment that this final revision didn’t detract at all from its fascinating sound.

Legacy

I always get an uneasy feeling when I visit a website and get the impression that people who have long since passed away are still alive. This is the case with the English

Teammates

Turntable

- Schröder TG
- Garrard 401

Tone arm:

- Schröder CB Ebony
- Schick 12

Pickup cartridge:

- Koetsu Urushi Black
- Dynavector 10x5 MKII NEO

Preamplifier:

- Air Tight ATC-1 HQ
- Stax SR-12 (modifiziert)

Power amplifier:

- Air Tight ATM-4 / 6A3 Eintakt DIY

Loudspeaker

- De Vore o/Baby / Greenwall Ivy

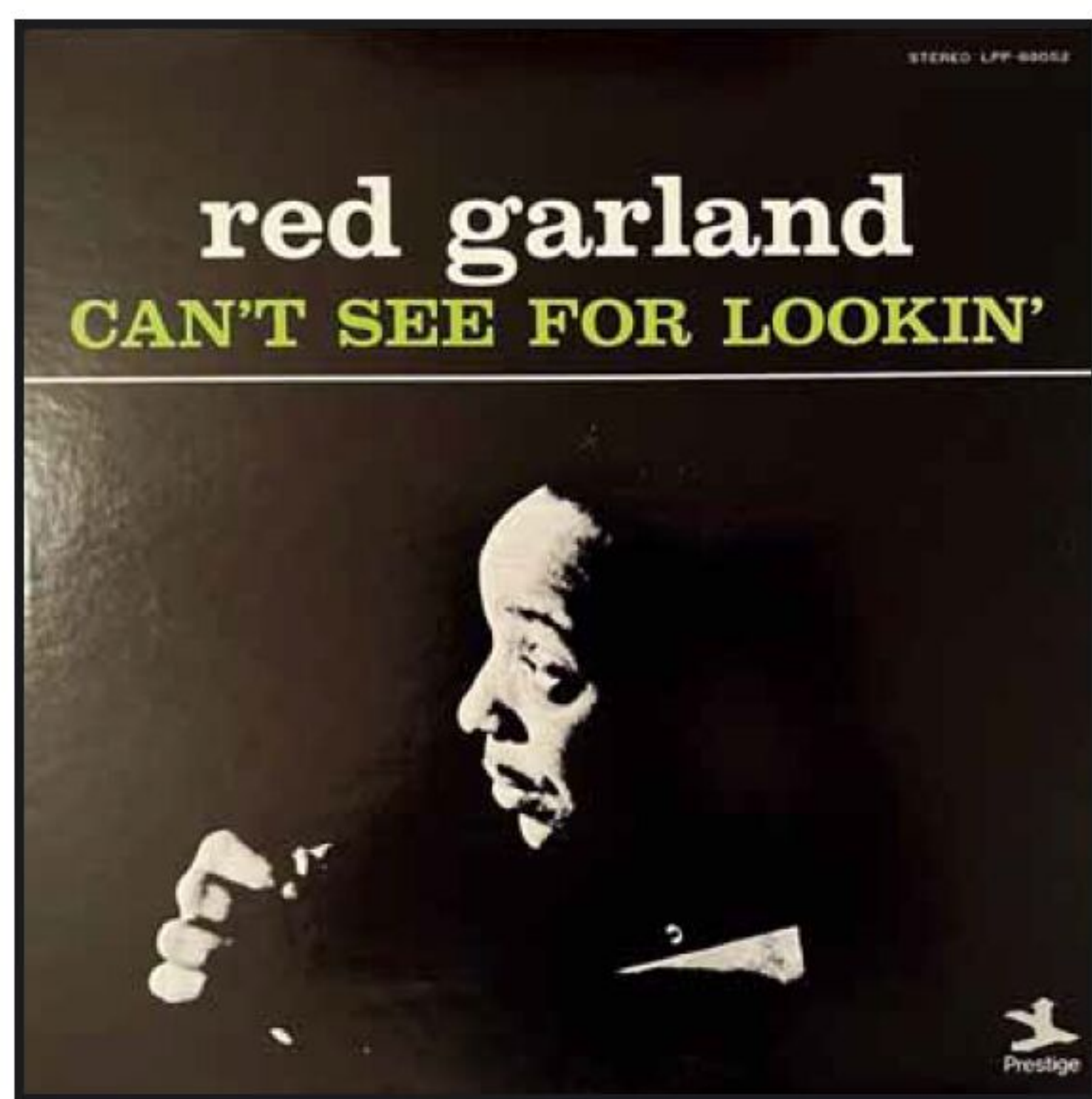
Competitors

Phono preamplifier:

- Air Tight ATE-2005 / DBL The Wand



This is what the De Luxe version looks like with its solid chrome front and without the level control: very elegant



What we played

Red Garland
Can't see for lookin'

Anton Bruckner
7 Sinfonie (Günter Wand 1980)

The Remarkable Carmell Jones
Same

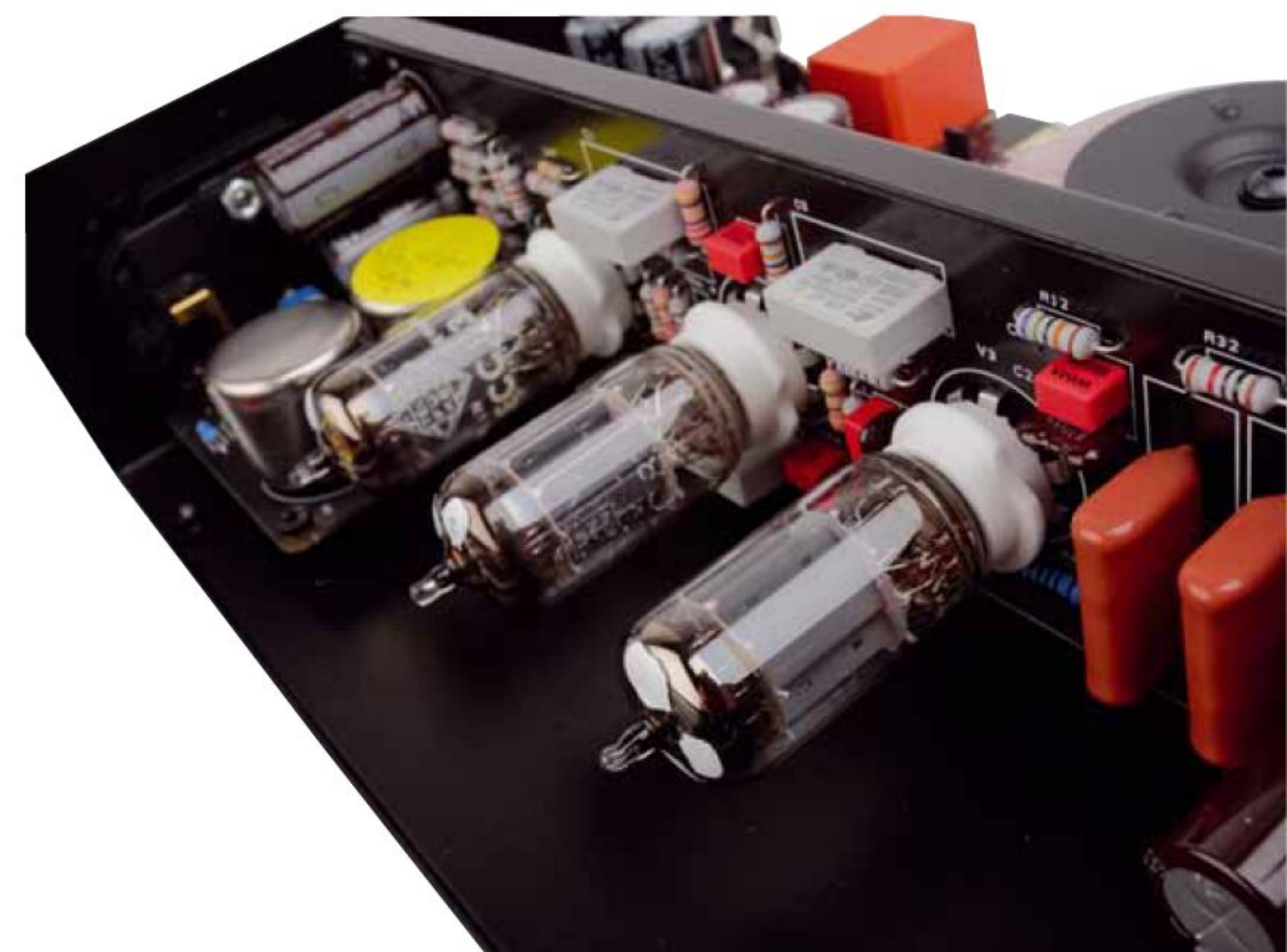
Talking Heads
Exit

Bill Withers
Best of

EAR website, because it gives the impression that Tim de Paravicini is still alive. Yes, the man was EAR, but I think it would be better to be open about the fact that he is no longer alive. The Danish distributor of EAR told me that Tim left behind various circuits. That's wonderful, and if they were to point out that Tim's son Nevin de Paravicini is now implementing them bit by bit in collaboration with experienced EAR employees, everything would be fine and fair in my opinion. But enough of that. One such product is the HP 1 headphone amplifier, which is now coming onto the market.

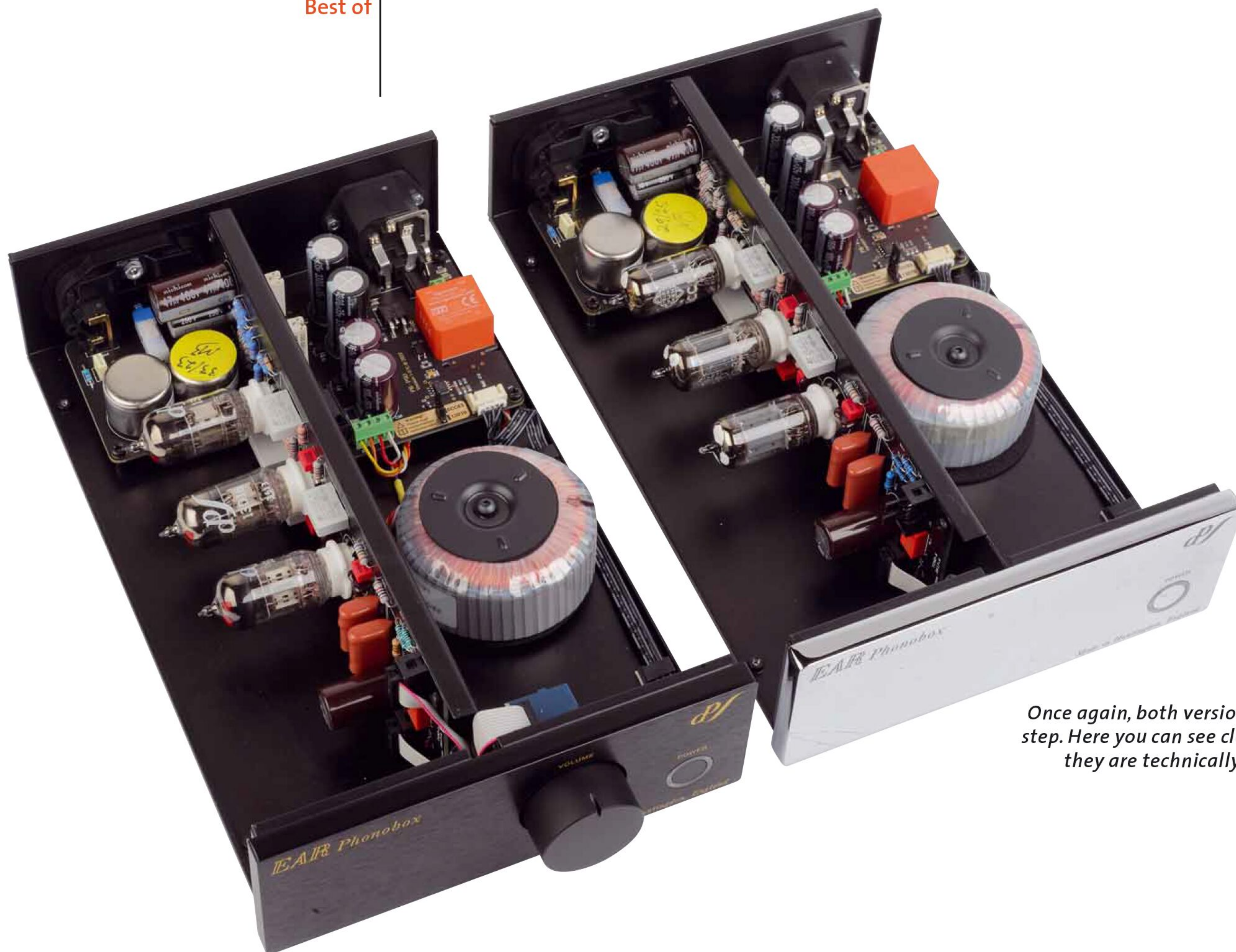
Technology

There is no concrete information about the circuit, so you have to search through the various versions on the internet. The only thing that is certain is that Tim developed this latest, current version of the Phono-



This is the De Luxe version with De Luxe tubes, which the distributor provided us with: Telefunken ECC83 Smooth Plates

box himself. The RIAA is active-passive and also has a very wide bandwidth. The Phonobox comes with three 13D16 double triodes as standard. If you try to find this tube, you will discover that it does not of-



Once again, both versions in lock-step. Here you can see clearly that they are technically identical

ficially exist. It is likely to be a version of the Russian 6N2P produced for EAR. This is also a double triode and a very good tube if it is carefully selected. Because they don't grow on trees, as he would like them to. So much for now, the Phonobox sounds excellent. Of course, you can also plug in ECC83s, but you have to flip a switch to do so. Why? The ECC83 can be operated with 6.3 or 12.6 volts, depending on whether its heating voltage is connected in parallel or in series. The 6N2P, on the other hand, only runs on 6.3 volts and has a different pin assignment. The output voltage for MM is 2.2 mV, for MC 0.22 mV for 40 ohms and 0.15 mV for the 5-ohm version, which I'll come to in a moment. The gain in MM mode is a whopping 55 dB (47 kOhm) and a very healthy 72 dB (at 470 ohms).

Variants

It's simpler than it might seem at first glance: there is a pure MM or an MM/MC version. And then you can choose between the standard and the deluxe chrome look; technically, they are the same. I find it interesting that the MM version always comes without a volume control, but the MM/MC variants offer it as an option at no extra charge. I wouldn't have a problem using the standard version with the potentiometer, as I did in my second system, because the extra cost for the technically identical version with a chrome front is steep – \$1,990 versus \$1,470 for the standard version. Without the MC transformers, the Phonobox costs only \$1,325 as a pure MM version. The big advantage of the MM/MC version with volume potentiometer is that it allows you to build a purist analog chain: connect the power amplifier – done. I mentioned my second system, and it worked exceptionally well there. There is another difference that also comes at no extra cost: you can choose whether to install MC transformers with low (5 ohms) or high impedance (40 ohms) – the latter being ideal for a Denon DL-103. The small cartridges are manufactured in England and are also a Paravicini design: toroidal cores wound with copper wire and a Mu-metal core.



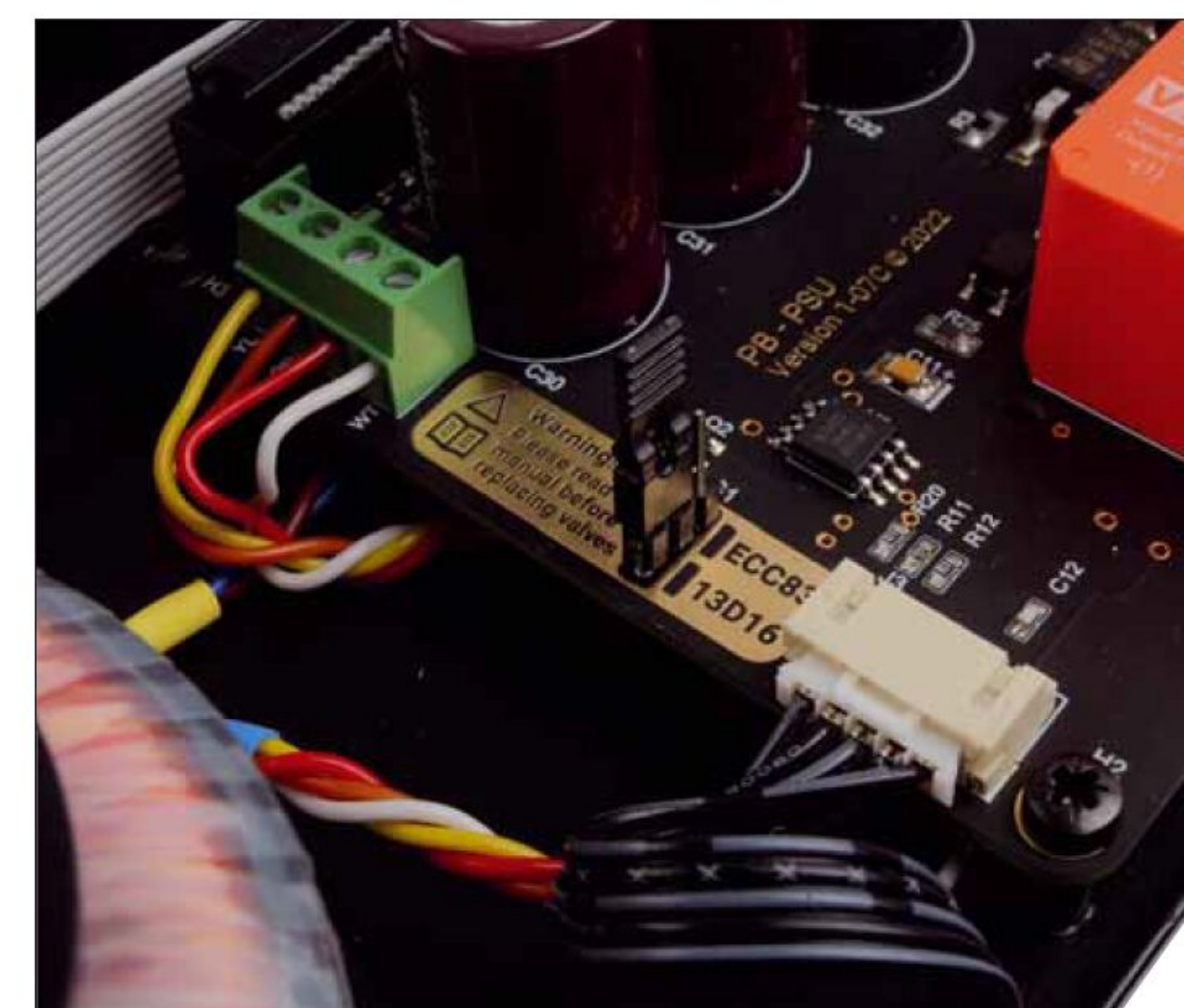
Like the entire amplifier, the input board is now of much higher quality than the earlier 834 models



And this is the version with the standard tubes and the 40-ohm MC transformers for high-impedance cartridges



The input board with mains filter, screening, and jumper. This is much better made today than it used to be



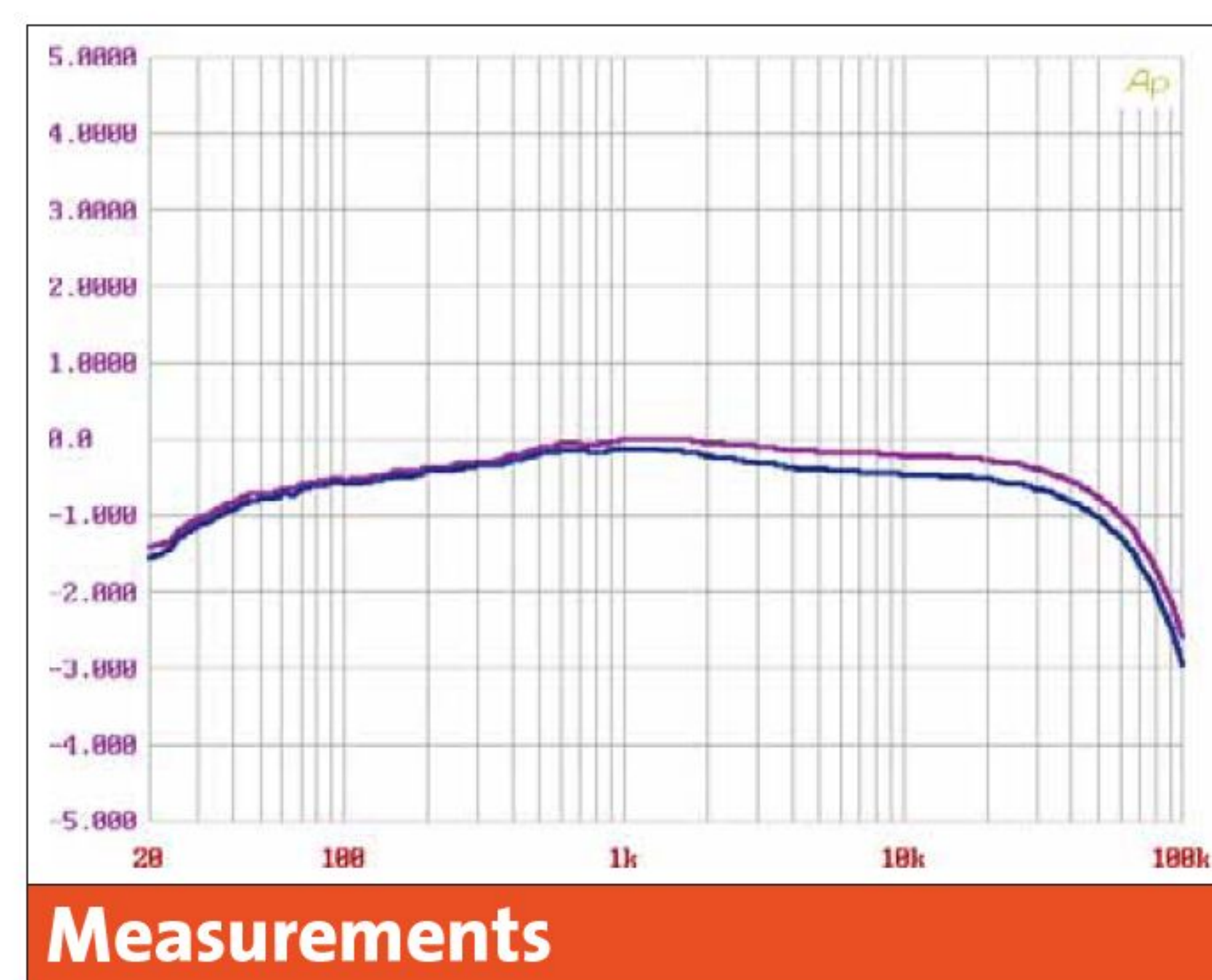
Here you can see the jumper for the different tube types. It is essential to position it correctly

The De Luxe version is technically no different from the standard version. It is unusual for a distributor to supply high-quality "old" tubes



Here is another look at the small transformer capsules, which are manufactured in the United Kingdom according to EAR specifications

And here from the back. The sticker is there to remind us that the 5-ohm MC transformers are built in



Lab commentary

Both versions of the Phonobox are impressive. The version with a fixed output has a slightly wider bandwidth than its sister model: here, the frequency response extends to 100 kilohertz!

The total harmonic distortion is 0.03% in MM mode and 0.06% in MC mode. The signal-to-noise ratio is above average at -84 and -65 dB(A) respectively. Channel separation is a good -50 dB(A).

Practical use and music

We received both MM/MC versions: the most elegant one with a thick chrome front without a volume control and MC transformers with 5 ohm impedance. This one went straight to my main system and was connected to the Koetsu Urushi Black. I plugged in the Telefunken ECC83 supplied by the distributor, which works excellently. And then we got the standard version with volume potentiometer and 40-ohm transformers. Here, I opted for MM mode (selectable via a push button on the rear panel) and connected my Dynavector 10x5 MKII NEO high-output system, con-

necting the Phonobox directly to my 6A3 single-ended power amplifier. The same applies to both setups: you don't need any special knowledge or in-depth experience to have fun with these devices right away. That's because both Phonoboxes play in a refreshing (and indeed refreshed) way that's just right: rich, colorful, awesome bass – it's simply fun and ultimately exactly what we want. On my office system, the simple version with the Dynavector was an instant dream match, playing Bill Withers' "Just the Two of Us," for example, so intimately, so true to the original and colorful, with the voice standing in the middle of the room and Grover Washington's saxophone right behind it. When a component manages to make such a hackneyed number sound new, fresh, and exciting, it's nothing short of magnificent. And in the large setup on the Koetsu Urushi Black, Bruckner's 7th Symphony under the strict but humane Günter Wand gripped me so much that for the first time I was ready to fully appreciate all the inner details, all the different tempos and the sheer triumph of this composition.

Christian Bayer

EAR Phonobox



- Price from 1,325 euros
- Distribution Exotic Audio / Copenhagen
- Phone 045-35-11 27 70
- Internet www.exoticaudio.dk
- Warranty 2 years
- Dimensions (W x H x D) 180 x 65 x 320 mm
- Weight approx. 3.5 kg
(Chrome version approx. 4 kg)



EAR
Phonobox

International 1/26

» Perfectly redesigned classics that make listening to music a pure joy. I think they're outstanding.