

AUDIO
FILE

Preamp with USB input and Class D power amps. Rated at 100W/8ohm
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Musical Fidelity M1 HPA/ M1 PWR

(£499/£799 each)

So what prompted Musical Fidelity, with its long-standing tradition of Class A and A/B designs, to venture into Class D amplification?

Says founder Antony Michaelson. 'We think the minimum power for faithful reproduction is 65W into 8ohm and 130W into 4ohm. It wasn't possible to get that much power from a conventional circuit in an M1-sized package, so we started investigating Class D amplifiers, which are much smaller and produce far less heat.'

All M1 products come in cute half-width cases with thick front panels. With the M1 HPA preamplifier and PWR amp most of the weight can be attributed to the casework, which feels solid and well made. Their switchgear is nicely engineered and clicks firmly when pressed, while the HPA's volume control is silky smooth.

The M1 PWR can either be used as a standard stereo power amp

'The MFs brought an emotional vulnerability to Bassey's performance'

or in pairs as a more powerful monoblock. A front panel LED lets you know which mode the amp is switched to. In use as monoblocks, the left and right outputs become commoned by relays, which will facilitate bi-wiring when driving a single speaker. It's worth noting that each M1 PWR only offers one pair of speaker outputs per channel, and that each left and right channel

is already 'bridged' by design. By switching to mono mode, these bridged channels are combined in parallel to provide extra output.

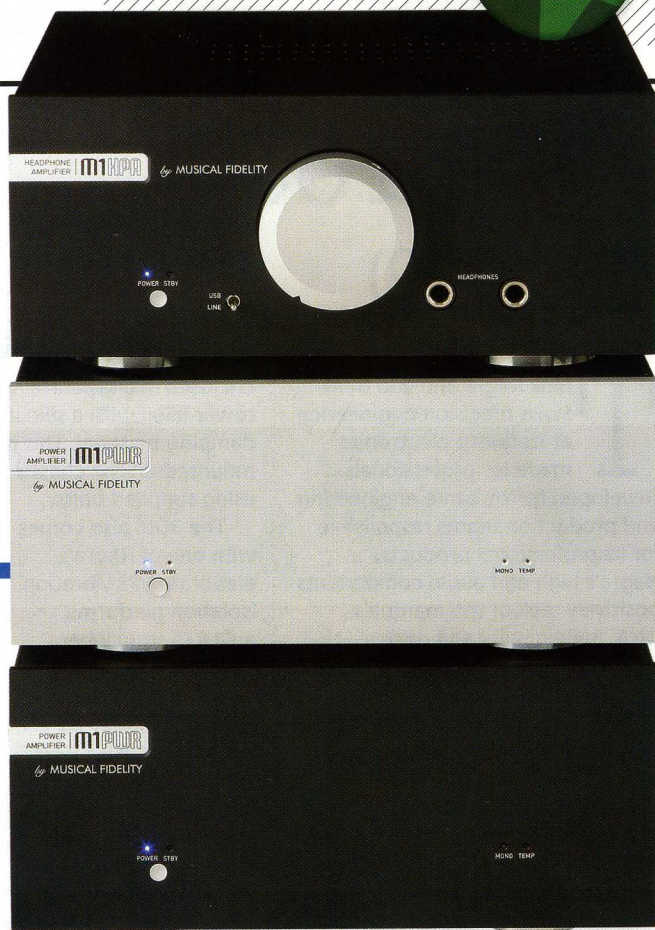
The M1 HPA scored highly in our April '11 group test of headphone amps. With its Class A circuitry, Burr-Brown DAC and £500 price tag, it's easy to see why. It has just one line-level input plus USB. But we'd happily trade one of its headphone output sockets for an extra line-in to allow it to serve more sources.

ENERGY UNLEASHED

Auditioning the M1 PWRs in mono mode we span The Who's album *Who's Next* [Polydor]. In the opening riffs of 'Bargain' this hi-octane rock onslaught provided the perfect means for the M1 PWRs to unleash their energies. Pete Townshend's heavy guitar filled the listening room with real authority, despite the M1 HPA's gain being shy of the 10 o'clock position. More importantly, The Who's axeman's six-string managed to sound unrestrained and

raucous, yet at the same time it was detailed and full of texture.

Hearing Shirley Bassey's 2009 album *The Performance* [Geffen] through the USB input was delightful. On 'After The Rain', Bassey sings in a higher pitch than her usual more ballsy style, when the MFs brought an emotional vulnerability to her performance. As this was streamed from a standard



ABOVE: The M1 HPA sports a large analogue volume control feeding preamp and headphone outputs. It offers analogue line and digital USB inputs, the PWR amplifiers single-ended RCAs only. Casework is available in matt black or silver finishes (as seen)

Dell laptop it suggests that the M1 HPA's USB input is of top quality.

We repeated the Bassey track with just one amp in stereo mode. In this configuration, the soundstage narrowed slightly with Bassey's vocals a shade thinner.

VERDICT

As a stereo power amp the M1 PWR is a no-nonsense little belter, with plenty of power. As a pair of monoblocks, however, they really bring the music to life with superb imagery on a grand scale. Given its sound, the M1 HPA is a bargain of a preamp – provided you can live with its mere two inputs. ☺

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Power output (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	70W / 98W mono / 197W mono
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	99W / 197W / 390W / 377W
Output impedance (20Hz–20kHz)	0.065–0.42ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz–20kHz; pre/power)	–1.5 to –0.4dB / –0.4 to +1.1dB
Input sensitivity (for 0dBV/0dBW)	126mV / 98mV
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV/0dBW)	91.0dB / 76.7dB
Distortion (20Hz–20kHz; pre/power)	0.0005–0.011% / 0.027–0.89%
Power consumption (Idle/Rated o/p)	5W/120W (10W, preamp)
Dimensions (WHD)	220x100x300mm (each)