

Staged Entry

Those looking for their first serious phono stage will be interested to discover that Musical Fidelity has a solution in the shape of the new V-LPS II, Rafael Todes reports.

For vinyl junkies without built-in phono-stages, or for those wishing to upgrade mediocre existing ones, Musical Fidelity has its new V-LPS II. Its predecessor, a dour and utilitarian black box, has had its outers crossed with silver paint – on its aluminium casing. There have been other small tweaks from the first version too – the RIAA curve is more accurate and the output impedance has also been slightly altered – but basically the principal difference is cosmetic. The phono stage caters for both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges, with a push button to switch between the two. It comes bundled with a wall-wart power supply that can be upgraded at a later stage with a V-PSU II (£119).

SOUND QUALITY

Listening to my favourite reference, Bach's 'Brandenburg Concerto No. 3', Raymond Leppard conducting the ECO on Philips, using a Timestep Technics with SMEV and Ortofon Cadenza Bronze, the new V-LPS II in no way disgraced itself. The sound of the orchestra was very open, a generous soundstage for this price bracket, with a nice sense of energy flowing from the music. The sound of the strings had a 'glossy' quality to it. The harpsichord continuo let you feel the clankiness of the feather quills plucking the strings.

The main difference between

this and my £1,800 valve Icon Audio PS3 reference phono stage is what happens during the course of the note. The Musical Fidelity is attuned to the leading edges; it also gives things a touch of pleasing resonance, more so than the Icon Audio, but is a little more vague about the timbre contained within the note. Where the Icon is smooth and rich, the Musical Fidelity is a touch glassy and opaque, in a not unpleasant way.

Switching the power supply to the £119 V-PSU removes most of the 'glassiness', turning in a more refined sound, and a dramatic and significant upgrade for the money. Listening to the string sound with the upgraded power supply, and there was more timbral subtlety in the note envelope than before – as such it's highly recommended.

Listening to Canteloube's bucolic 'Songs of the Auvergne', and Kiri Te Kanawa's voice sparkles with the upgraded MF power supply. The phono stage achieves a big sonic image, with the supporting solo instruments contrasting with the voice well in terms of clarity and spacial separation. It lets this relatively early digital recording

show the potential of the medium. Listening to the same passage on the more pricey Trichord Dino 2 with upgraded power supply brings more stability to the sound, tighter bass control and a greater sense of depth – but it costs £570, over twice the price of the combined MF stage and power supply.

CONCLUSION

As with the V-DAC I reviewed a couple of months ago, this new V-LPS II phono stage really punches above its weight, especially with the addition of its upgraded power supply. It is capable of bringing a bounce to vinyl at what is a knockdown price; as such it comes highly recommended.

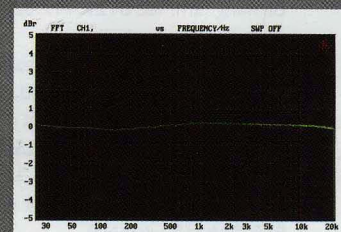
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Equalisation accuracy of the V-LPS is unusual in not possessing the usual treble lift of other phono amps and it will have just a smidgen of extra body in its sound by way of contrast. Deviation from the RIAA characteristic was minimal, around 0.2dB our analysis shows; there is no warp filter.

A peculiar limitation was an output overload limit of 2.5V out – 10V is common – meaning input overload limit of just 21mV with MM cartridges – too low. Very high output types like the Ortofon 2M Red produce 30mV on peaks. Mostly, this limit will pass unnoticed, but occasional distortion on musical peaks may well occur in use, with some cartridges. NK

Frequency response	8Hz-46kHz
Separation	67dB
Noise (MM/MC)	0.3 / 0.07µV
Distortion	0.005%
Gain	x118 (41dB), x940 (60dB)
Overload	21/2.6mV in / 2.5V out

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



VERDICT Neat little phono stage with fine sound, decent build and easy upgradeability – excellent value.

MUSICAL FIDELITY
V-LPS II £130
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FOR

- clean, open sound
- build, finish, value
- small size

AGAINST

- not for high output MMs