

# Fully Loaded

**Suitable for any cartridge, Musical Fidelity's affordable phono stage grabs John Pickford's attention.**

**P**hono amplifiers catering for both moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) cartridges usually cost a lot more than the £199 being asked for Musical Fidelity's LX2-LPS. Anyone looking for a cheap phono stage for MM only can purchase one for under £15, just to get up and running. When MC amplification is required, the price usually rockets to the high hun-

dreds and into four – and sometimes five – figure sums.

The price of high-end phono amps is unsurprising considering most decent MC cartridges cost at least double the amount the LX2-LPS retails for. It begs the question then, who is this budget-friendly unit aimed at? I would suggest it's the listener who uses a decent line-level integrated amplifier and has just (re) discovered the joy of vinyl replay.

Or perhaps someone looking for something better than their amp's inbuilt MM stage and dreams of trying an MC design at some point in the future.

Sleek and stylish in appearance, the unit's fascia is unhindered by knobs and dials, instead providing space for two toggle switches, one for power and the other to select MM or MC operation.

On the rear of the unit are separate inputs for MM and MC,



while the unit facilitates cartridge loading for those who wish to customise the phono stage – using DIY loading plugs – to suit their cartridge; impedance wise, MM is the usual 47k Ohms while MC is set at 100 Ohms.

A wall-wart provides power to the unit, which helps keeps the price low, however a separate upgrade power supply unit is available at extra cost.

Using my Goldring Lenco GL75 equipped with a G1042 MM pick-up and playing a selection of familiar test tracks, I found the presentation to be richer and more full-bodied than my Naim Nait XS3's phono stage. While the Naim has a leaner sound and is more fleet-footed rhythmically, the LX2-LPS is a little more relaxed yet not at all sluggish or dull. Spinning *Since I've Been Loving You* from *Led Zeppelin III* (Atlantic 1970), I enjoyed the weight and texture of John Bonham's bass drum, while the amp's excellent

insight didn't mask the drummer's squeaky bass drum pedal. Bonham was a drummer who didn't need extra verve injected into his solid rhythms and here the LX2-LPS provided a firmer foundation than my sprightly Naim. I detected the merest hint of upper midrange glare at times, especially when a vocalist like Robert Plant really lets rip, however this slight emphasis is not unpleasant and

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allows filigree detail to shine through.

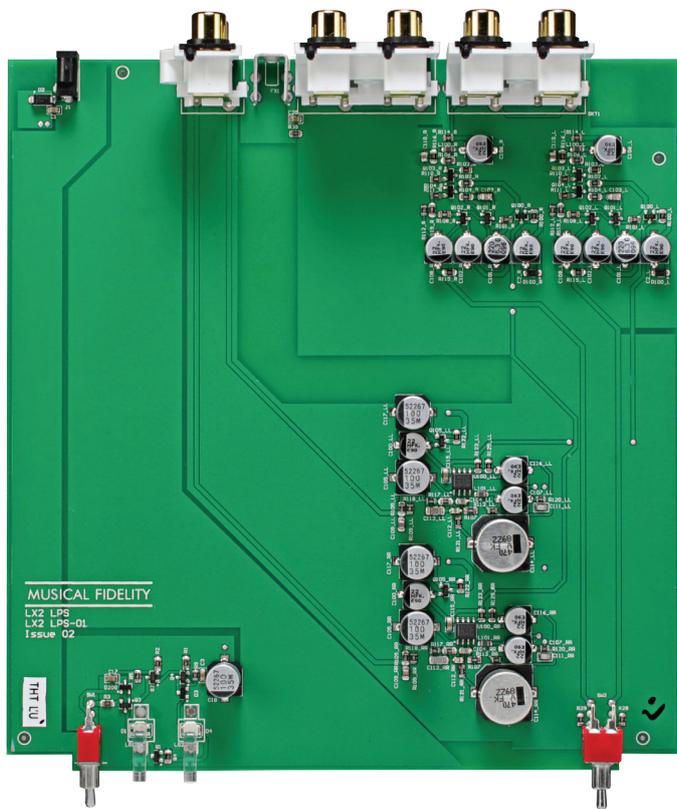
Lee Morgan's *The Sidewinder* (Blue Note 1964) is a swinging soul-jazz tune and I was recently lucky to find an original mono copy, albeit a little on the rough side condition wise. With

Morgan on trumpet playing the lead melody in unison with Joe Henderson's Saxophone, each player's unique timbre could be clearly heard despite not being hard-panned apart as per the stereo edition. Here though, I really could've made use of a mono switch to eliminate intrusive groove noise.

Digging out my old Denon DL-103 MC equipped headshell,

I swapped out the G1042 for some old-school MC action. I know there are some who view this cartridge as an old stinker, however I'm an avowed fan. This 60 year old design is still available, retailing at little more than the LX2-LPS, so you don't have to





**A look under the hood reveals neatly constructed electronics, including NE5532 Op amps and some large capacitors, in amongst the robotically mounted surface-mount devices (SMDs).**

**Don't try this at home though as there are no user serviceable parts inside and opening the unit invalidates the guarantee.**

spend £500 plus to discover the delights of moving coil.

Arctic Monkeys' *Tranquillity Base & Casino* (Domino Recording Company 2018) is a lush sounding record, quite different from the up-tempo indie-rock of their early recordings and its sweeping soundscapes played to the LX2-LPS strengths brilliantly. While the inherent character of the phono stage remained unchanged, the sound became more lively and open, so much so I had to remind myself I was listening to a moving coil cartridge and phono stage combination costing less than many believe is the starting point for good MC replay.

With such excellent results achieved with the LX2-LPS in my office system, I unplugged my reference Icon Audio PS1, replacing it with this new phono stage. With my Benz Micro/Michell TechnoArm equipped Thorens TD124 plugged directly

into the MC input and outputting through a passive preamp to my Leak TL12 plus monoblocks driving Tannoy Berkeleys, I was impressed with how well the inexpensive MF phono stage held its own in such rarefied company.

I won't pretend the solid-state LX2-LPS is the equal of the valve PS1, however, if we subscribe to the theory that a system is only as good as the weakest link in the chain, the affordable phono stage held strong. The valve stage offers a liquid smoothness and spacious, holographic soundstage the solid-state unit can't compete with, yet it was still an enjoyable listen, with well-controlled bass, clean midrange and glossy treble. This dedicated phono amplifier offers exceptional sound quality for the money – don't let the bargain price put you off.



**Hi-fi hobbyists can make their own loading plugs to customise the phono stage to suit their cartridges.**

## MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Both MM and MC inputs measured flat across the audio band, our analysis shows. There is no warp filter so full gain is available down to 10Hz.

Gain values were conventional at x117 (41dB) with MM and x1167 with MC (61dB).

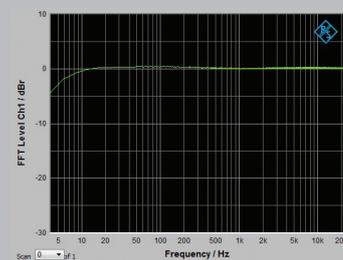
The output swing of this unit was very low at 2.3V, where most are 8-10V, imposing very low input overload values of 20mV for MM and 2mV for MC. Ideally, 30mV and 3mV are more appropriate, values high output cartridges can reach with commercial discs. Our review sample came with a standard wall wart supply rated at 12V, but the d.c. input is rated at 12-24V so it appears the optional uprated EPS supply is needed for better figures here.

Noise levels were low, measuring -83dB with MM and -80dB with MC – the latter being very low for MC.

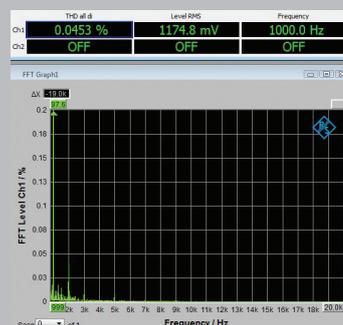
The LX2 LPS was accurately equalised and low in noise but its overload ceiling is also low. The optional EPS power supply would likely improve this by delivering a high voltage. **NK**

**Frequency response** 8Hz-20kHz  
**Distortion (-60dB, 24bit)** 0.1%  
**Gain (MM / MC)** x117 / x1167  
**Overload (MM / MC)** 20 / 2mV in (2.3V out)

### FREQUENCY RESPONSE



### DISTORTION



**MUSICAL FIDELITY LX2-LPS £199**



**OUTSTANDING - amongst the best.**

**VALUE - keenly priced.**

### VERDICT

High quality, flexible phono amplification at low cost.

### FOR

- clean, accurate sound
- compatible with all cartridges
- loading adjustment catered for
- upgradable power supply

### AGAINST

- no mono switch

Henley Audio  
+44 (0)1235 511166  
www.henleyaudio.co.uk