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Phono stage | £450 | whf.cm/110LPv2

Moon 110LP v2



Image: Moon

Moon's entry-level phono stage delivers a fine sound wrapped in a neat and well-made package

If you play records, no other electronic component in your system has as much impact on the sound as the humble phono stage. There aren't many talented units around the £500 mark, so when we come across something as capable as Moon's 110LP v2, it's worth celebrating.

This is a neatly made aluminium box finished to the high standards we've come to expect from Moon. The curved front panel makes the 110LP v2 look classier than most of the competition. This phono stage is a switchable unit capable of handling both moving coil and moving magnet cartridges.

Unlike most rivals, the Moon offers gain adjustment in four increments, starting from 40dB and continuing through to 66dB. This range should be enough to cope with every moving-magnet design and all but the lowest output moving-coil cartridges.

The phono stage's gain is changed through a series of dipswitches on the underside of the unit, as are the various input capacitance and resistance values. If you know the correct settings, it's easy to manage - but check your cartridge's specifications if you're unsure.

Hum-free operation

Elsewhere, the 110LP v2 is as simple as most affordable phono stages usually are. There's a single input and partnering stereo RCA output (to go to your main amplifier), a power port for the wall socket adaptor and a grounding post. Provided care is taken with placement, by keeping it away from other mains-powered products and power cables, the 110LP v2 proves quiet and hum-free too.

KEY FEATURES



Moving magnet and moving coil



Adjustable cartridge loading



RCA outputs

This is a fine-sounding unit, particularly with moving-magnet cartridges. It works well with Goldring's 2400 mounted to our reference Technics SL-1000R record player, and we can't see any reason it wouldn't work equally well with similarly capable Ortofon, Audio Technicas and Nagaokas.

We use our Burmester 088/911 Mk3 amplifier and ATC SCM50 speaker combination to put a spotlight on the Moon's performance, but also try Cambridge Audio's CXA81 integrated amp to see how this little phono stage delivers into more modest amplification.

For comparisons, we have the cheaper MM-only Graham Slee Communicator (with PSU1 power supply) on hand, as well as the more premium Lindemann Limetree Phono. Overall the 110LP v2 sits well with such talented company.

This phono stage has the classic Moon sonic signature. Its sound is smooth, fluid and refined but it has enough in the way of drive and punch to satisfy. We start with Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and the 110LP v2 delivers a spacious and expansive performance. Nothing sounds cluttered or confused and it's easy to follow individual instrumental strands.

The stereo imaging is accomplished and remains stable even when the music becomes demanding. Insight levels are good, though this isn't a product that goes out of its way to highlight detail.

Each piece of information is presented in a subtle manner, meaning that in a short demo it would be easy to conclude that forward-sounding rivals were more

revealing. Give it a longer listen and it is clear that the Moon is right up there with the best at the price for resolution.

This unit has an undemanding nature, which makes it easy to listen to over long sessions. The Graham Slee pulls ahead when it comes to dynamic punch and rhythm drive, but the Moon counters with greater refinement and sweeter tonality. The choice comes down to taste and partnering system, rather than a difference in absolute ability.

Flowing presentation

We play *Catch A Fire* by Bob Marley and the Wailers and the 110LP v2 responds with a flowing presentation that's rhythmically surefooted. The lowest notes are a touch rounded, but there's enough agility and articulation to make that something simply to note rather than a notable shortcoming.

As with most phono stages at this level, the Moon's performance with moving-coil cartridges is less impressive. There's not much to complain about with noise levels or gain, but when we swap the Goldring MM cartridge for an Ortofon Quintet Blue MC, the large-scale dynamics sound a touch restrained and bass becomes softer. However, you'd have to spend half as much again to get a phono stage that does appreciably better.

The Moon 110LP v2 is one of the best of its kind at this level. It's better built than most and is certainly musically satisfying. If you're in the market for a quality affordable phono stage, this little box is well worth auditioning.



WHAT HI-FI?

SOUND



FEATURES



BUILD



FOR

- Smooth, refined presentation
- Spacious stereo imaging
- Impressive build and finish

AGAINST

- Less convincing with moving-coil cartridges

VERDICT

The Moon 110LP v2 is a well-built and capable performer. Stick with MM cartridges and it's sure to please

RATING ★★★★★