

Musical Fidelity MX-VYNL

A UNIVERSAL PHONO CARTRIDGE EQUALISER

MARTIN COLLOMS

This quite heavy, half-width piece of electronics may be black or silver. Our samples were black, though the function wheel remains silver. It's compatible with a massive range of moving coil and moving magnet cartridges. It weighs a significant 1.9kg (4.2lbs) thanks to hum-screening steel in the casework, and measures 220x53x215mm (WxHxD).

Powered by an external plug-top power supply rated at 12V(DC)/0.5A, it consumes a modest 4.5W. (Some aftermarket linear supplies are available for those prepared to explore.) The 14 click control wheel has numerous MM and MC cartridge loading options, and will also give some control of tonal balance. In the end what is the right cartridge loading for vinyl replay is the one that sounds right in your system.

The MM resistance is standard at 47kohm, while the additional input capacitance may be selected from 50,100, 200, 300 and 400pF. MC (for both low and high output types) has 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 400, 800 and 1200ohms loading; there's also a 47kohm option for high output MCs. One switch chooses either standard RIAA equalisation, or that mild IEC rolloff 'rumble filter' in the low bass (-3dB at 20Hz). Another 'gain boost' switch will help with particularly low output cartridges, with a +6dB increase.

Two sets of input sockets (one balanced, one unbalanced) allow two turntables to be connected. One set comprises phono sockets with a turntable ground binding post. The second input employs the miniature five-wire XLR format, carrying two balanced signal input channels and a ground 'common', for suitably wired turntables and arms. Two sets of output sockets include RCA/phono (single-ended) and XLR (balanced).

In fact, most cartridges are intrinsically balanced. Do note that there are many lower cost moving magnet types where one channel's negative connection is the local grounding to the screening can.

In our modern RFI environment, dealer advice may be required to execute the balanced connection correctly. Balanced connections are not intrinsically better sounding than single ended, but may be so when hum and earth loops are taken into account. Note that you cannot use RCA plug-to-balanced adapters to access the balanced inputs.

Maximum output is 4V phono, 8V balanced, and the de-emphasis equalisation is quoted at ± 0.1 dB (far more accurate than any cartridge response from a test disc. Channel separation betters 83dB at

1kHz, while distortion for both input modes is rated better than 0.01%. Overload headroom is typically +23dB for both inputs. These are all good figures, supporting the description as a 'universal equaliser'.

Sound Quality

I ran in the unit in for a week or so using a random noise signal generator. Using my Linn LP12/Naim ARO/Lyra Delos, audible hum and hiss were vanishingly low, even at high volumes. Also welcome was the absence of other noises, clicks, fizzes or other RFI related effects. First impressions had a silky-smooth sound. Paul Simon's *Graceland* came up fresh and clear, with little sign of wear despite many plays..

After enjoying Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind*, Jackson's *Thriller* was rendered powerful and exciting, but not over the top as it can be with some phono equalisers. While not the tightest on rock material, it timed well by industry standards and drove a purposeful beat. Still more impressive were the velvet dark backgrounds and the sweet yet detailed presentation, with wide, deep and well focused images.

It sounded clear without being too forward, and residual noise and distortion from the mechanical aspects of the replay process was not emphasised in any way. Indeed, it caressed our listeners ears, sounding evenhanded on rock, jazz and classical programme: I ended up listening long into the night.

Conclusions

Beautifully made and finished, with a beneficially low-noise plug top supply, this versatile and convenient MM/MC phono stage will grace many systems over a wide price range, with a sweet, musical, analogue sound imbued with detail and strong stereo imaging. A Best Buy rating is clearly deserved.

Test Results

A check on the figures gave results as follows: RIAA equalisation better than ± 0.1 dB 50Hz to 30kHz, with the IEC rumble rolloff curve holding to ± 2 dB down to 20Hz; an excellent result. The high frequency equalisation continues within -0.3dB right up to 75kHz, then on to 110kHz -3dB. This is accurate RIAA. Via the MM input the gain was 42dB, with midband channel separation exceeding 80dB and signal-to-noise ratio better than 81dBA. The MC input gain was 56.7dB, midband separation was better than 62dB, and distortion and noise were better than -66dB. These are all fine results, promising versatility and wide compatibility.

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BEST BUY



The Review System

Constellation *Inspiration 1.0* pre-amp, Townshend *Allegri* control units; Naim NAP500DR power amplifier; Naim *SuperLine* phono pre-amp, Linn LP12 player (with *Keel* chassis and *Radikal* motor control), Naim *Aro* arm, *Lyra Delos* cartridge; Naim *UnitiServe* network server and S/PDIF source; Linn *Klimax Katabyst*, Naim NDS [+555PS(DR)] streamer/DACs; Wilson Audio *Sabrina*, *Magico S-5II*, *Quad ESL63*, *BBC LS3/5a* speakers; Naim *FRAIM* racks; Transparent *XL MM2*, Naim *NAC A5* speaker cables, Naim *Super Lumina*, Transparent *MM2* and Van Den Hul *Carbon TFU* interconnects.