



Pro-Ject Tube Box DS2 £600



The only model in the group to use a valve output stage, this flexible phono preamp has a lot of bottle

CART FLEXIBILITY

Unlike the Exposure XM3, the behaviour of the Tube Box DS2 doesn't significantly alter when you choose to use it with moving-magnet cartridges, but as the performance with moving-coil is rather better balanced, this isn't so important. The MM settings have plenty of gain and retain the usefully low noise floor that is present with moving coil. The DS2 supports two (mostly) individually configurable inputs, which might be useful in some situations. The only slight oddity with using both types of cartridge at once is that while the button-based settings on the front panel will change with the inputs, the large rotary dial that controls impedance settings will need to be adjusted manually for each input. This is a small price to pay for the fine flexibility on offer, however.

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Pro-Ject
Tube Box DS2

ORIGIN
Austria

TYPE
MM/MC
phono stage

WEIGHT
1.9kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
240 x 93 x 227mm

FEATURES
• 2x configurable inputs
• ECC83 valve output stage
• Continuously variable impedance

DISTRIBUTOR
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Pro-Ject's exhaustive Box Design range includes a phono stage seemingly for every occasion. The replacement for the original Tube Box DS, the DS2 represents an ambitious step forward in features. The valves – a pair of ECC83 units – are part of the output stage rather than anything to do with the creation of gain.

The specification is usefully comprehensive with support for moving-magnet and moving-coil inputs and, in contrast to many of the designs here, adjustments for loading, gain and resistance are all accessed via clearly labelled front panel controls as opposed to a row of dip switches.

This functionality is partnered with a chassis design that borrows from Pro-Ject's more expensive RS series of components and feels very solidly assembled with thick metal sections complemented by the wooden side cheeks. The external power supply is a little on the hulking side and the valves poking out the top panel preclude

placing anything on top, but the overall impression is one of impressive value.

Sound quality

The Tube Box DS2 has no trouble hitting the test level and the presence of valves in the circuit has no obvious effect on background noise until you wind the volume up to very aggressive levels indeed. *Ode To The Big Sea* sounds big and powerful, but the DS2 manages to create the definition required in the complex bassline to keep everything sounding coherent. Impressively, this behaviour is consistent across high and low-output cartridges, making this a very flexible option indeed (see box out).

There is a slight emphasis on the midrange that ensures that voices and instruments have the required attention and detail to them. This means that *Mary Morgan* is rich, lifelike and extremely enjoyable to listen to with real presence to both the vocals and guitar. This same emphasis is no less useful with *Hey, No Pressure*

where there is a very pleasurable space and three dimensionality to the way that Ray LaMontagne's vocals are handled and their relationship to the supporting instrumentation. It manages to walk a neat balance between allowing high-quality recordings the space they require while flattering less perfect ones.

Where the Pro-Ject feels marginally less comfortable is with the more potent electronic musings of *Higher Love*. It lacks some of the drive and rhythmic flow of the absolute best in the test and it doesn't necessarily generate the deepest bass here, although it could never be described as bass light. The good news is that this very slight reticence doesn't tip over into sounding sluggish or congested and even with this material, that same detail, space and tonal realism makes for a very compelling listen and one that is very easy to spend extended sessions enjoying ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Rich sound; features and build

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Slightly reserved with more powerful material

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Impressive performance with useful flexibility at a very attractive price

FEATURES



OVERALL

