

GROUP TEST

MM/MC Phono preamp with selectable gain and loading
 Made by: Avid Hifi Ltd, Huntingdon
 Supplied by: Avid Hifi
 Telephone: 01480 869 900
 Web: www.avidhifi.co.uk

AUDIO
FILE

hi-finews
EDITOR'S
CHOICE

Avid Pulsus (£1300)

Although the least costly in the group, Avid's was one of three equipped with an outboard power supply – favoured by some for its potentially lower noise. Curiously, given the lavish workmanship and handsome styling of Avid's turntables, the Pulsus is rather anonymous in both looks and form. This may rule out Avid's two-box preamp if aesthetics matter greatly to you.

Where it scores, ironically, is thanks to this same unabashed purism. Flip over the preamp, and there are gain settings and DIP switches to fine-tune the Pulsus to any cartridge you might care to use. Between the Ortofon and Shure, it preferred the latter, sounding sweeter than through any stage except for the Simaudio. With the two MCs, the underside switching allowed both to work of their best at their factory settings.

CLEAN COMPORIMENT

In addition to being among the easiest to install, the Avid required the least 'warm-up' time, followed by the Clearaudio; the Roksan took the longest. I was soon enjoying the liquid sound of the keyboards throughout the Doors' debut LP, and the Pulsus excelled in creating the ominous atmosphere of 'The End', which fills a full side of this '45. This unit resolves space almost as well as the Simaudio, tied with the Pathos.

What it does lack is the 'slam' and ability to handle bombast as do the Roksan or the Clearaudio, notable with the massive organ sweeps in the Band's 'Chest Fever'. If this is evidence of headroom limitations, it's not intrusive enough to condemn the unit; it will be discernible only



ABOVE: Two compact 'black boxes' in prosaic cases; clear evidence that the money was spent on the insides

during side-by-side auditioning. It is, however, a concern if you're using this phono stage with ultra-wide bandwidth systems with massive power reserves and dynamics. With the Sarah Vaughan and Crystals LPs, it wasn't noticeable at all.

Leaving aside an inability to sound as 'huge' as the others, the Pulsus certainly has noise-free and clean comportment on its side. The airiness of the Sarah Vaughan LP was maintained on every track, the detail in her voice in 'I Remember You' having an in-the-room presence that was staggering.

If the Avid has any sonic downside it's a tendency toward the brittle if agitated too much. The Band's 'We Can Talk' gets a bit raucous, and while the Pulsus doesn't allow the sound to fall apart, you know it's working hard, in contrast to the Roksan which took everything in its stride. Still, the precision and 'rightness' of the Avid's sound overrides much criticism at its price.

Sound Quality: 79%

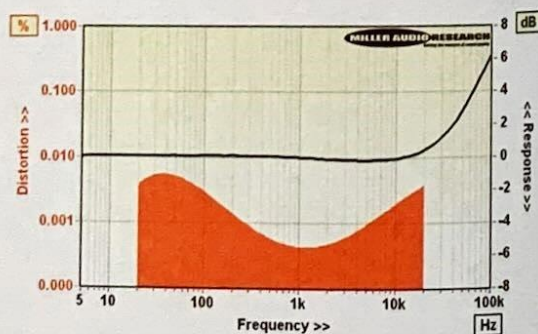


ABOVE: Rear view is self-explanatory – no room for user error, but no balanced output either. The umbilical cable allows separation of 0.5m between the two chassis

HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Avid has gauged the three gain options of its Pulsus phono stage very well, the +48dB/60dB/70dB rated settings emerging at +46.9dB/59.0dB/70.5dB in practice. The former is ideally suited to MMs (4.5mV sensitivity), the middle option for high output MCs (1.12mV sensitivity) and the latter for low output MCs (298µV sensitivity). However, while the Pulsus does not meet its maximum 18V rated output capacity (it clips at 9.8V) neither is the input headroom as generous as claimed, the MM input overloading at 46mV (+19.3dB headroom re. 5mV) and the MC settings at 11.5mV and 3.1mV, respectively.

If the internal gain distribution of the Pulsus was modified after the spec. sheet was written this might also explain the 87dB/74dB A-wtd S/N of its MM/MC input which is rather better than Avid had anticipated. Distortion is very low at ~0.00045% midband and the response, flat to within ±0.5dB from 20Hz-20kHz, also shows the high treble lift (rising to +6.2dB/100kHz) we've seen with other Avid phono preamps. Channel separation is better than 70dB across the board. PM



ABOVE: RIAA-corrected response (black) from 5Hz-100kHz and distortion versus frequency (red) from 20Hz-20kHz

Input loading (MM/MC)	47kohm / 100ohm-10kohm
Input sensitivity (MM/MC re. 0dBV)	4.52mV / 1.12mV, 0.3mV
Input overload (MM/MC)	46mV / 11.5mV, 3.1mV
Max. output/Impedance (re. 1% THD)	9.8V / 1-24ohm
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 5mV/500µV in)	86.7dB / 73.7dB, 75.0dB
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.1dB to +0.54dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 0dBV)	0.00042-0.0055%
Power consumption	4W
Dimensions (WHD)	120x70x220mm (each)