



Dynamic Duo

Cambridge Audio unleashes a versatile phono stage at an attractive price.

Andrew Simpson gets his groove on

If you want to hear your vinyl at its best, a separate phono stage is generally the way to go, as its helps to keep your turntable's dedicated amplification circuits away from other electronics, which can introduce unwanted noise.

The Duo is the more feature-rich of two new models from Cambridge Audio. While the €179 Solo caters for moving-magnet pick-ups only, the Duo offers both moving-magnet and moving-coil and with a headphone output to boot. Its solid build quality and high level of finish is quite superb, with a graphite grey 3mm alloy front panel that is kept clutter free, with just an on/off button, MM/MC switching, plus a volume knob and accompanying 6.35mm output jack for headphone listening.

Around the back are separate gold-plated phono inputs for MM and MC pick-ups, highlighting separate circuits under the hood. There's also a handy balance control, which has been added to offer a degree of fine trim across each channel.

In a bid to reduce noise and hum, it sports a switch mode power supply and surface-mounted components. For MM cartridge input you get 47kohm resistance with 39dB of gain, while MC offers 100ohm and 60dB.

Powered up, the Duo's front panel LEDs (for power/standby and MM/

MC) are subtle. The volume pot is redundant in normal listening mode and comes into use once headphones are connected, and also auto-defeats the RCA outputs.

Sound quality

Nestled between my VPI Scout 1.1 turntable with an Ortofon 2M Black cartridge (HFC 434) and Musical Fidelity M6PRE/M6PRX preamp and power amplifier (HFC 340) shows the Duo to be a solid performer.

Spinning The Police's *Bring On The Night* reveals a reassuringly measured and mellow sound. There's no treble harshness, allowing Andy Summers' fast, looping guitar riff to sound clear and insightful without being overly forward, giving its notes a dreamy edge to hook you in.

The soundstage depth is generous for a phono stage in this price bracket. This aspect hits me early on in the Police track with the thud of the opening kick drum's echo, that dissipates deep behind my Sendor A5 loudspeakers.

Serve up something richer such as Pink Floyd's *Us And Them*, and the Duo demonstrates that it can easily handle lush material. The slow building intro is laid forth in a wide soundstage, within which the saxophone is imaged just right of centre with a soothing tonality. As the music builds to a crescendo the Duo

remains unruffled, taking the dynamic swings in its stride and not allowing any congestion to creep in.

It remains just as composed when dealing with more delicate matters, such as Aldous Harding's *Stop Your Tears*, where it brings out layers of subtle nuances in her voice that hints at the emotion of the performance.

Flipping the Ortofon cartridge for a Denon DL103R moving-coil pick-up reveals just how capable this little box really is. Harding's voice takes on a softer and more natural texture, and the way she pushes or holds back her voice for effect is more apparent, showing how well this phono stage responds to different pick-ups.

Headphone listening via Audio-Technica's ATH-SR5BT (HFC 413) using the wired connection strikes a good balance between digging deep into the detail without being forensic in the amount it's able to reveal.

Conclusion

This is fine-looking and mature-sounding phono stage that's at home with both MM and MC pick-ups. It's a worthwhile step up for many built-in phono stages to low-cost integrateds or anyone looking for a versatile upgrade to an entry-level model ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Cambridge Audio Duo

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
MM/MC phono stage

WEIGHT
950g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
215 x 48 x 159mm

FEATURES

- MM and MC inputs
- Balance trim control
- Built-in headphone amplifier
- 6.35mm headphone output

DISTRIBUTOR
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Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



FEATURES



OVERALL



LIKE: Build; well-rounded sound that's equally refined with MM or MC pick-ups

DISLIKE: Lacks some slight bass definition

WESAY: Superb-value phono stage and headphone amp that performs beyond its price point