

# Musical Fidelity

## V90-LPS phono stage

**IT'S MORE THAN** a little paradoxical that Musical Fidelity started out, ostensibly, as a purveyor of big pre-power amplifiers and integrations, pushing out large amounts of mostly Class A watts in a manner that would make your average tube amplifier glow with envy! As it happened though, hi-fi history has decided that the company would become most famous for its tiny mini boxes, with preamps, buffers and DACs inside.

### V for victory

The X-series started it all in the nineties, but then the company launched the recession-busting V-series. These were super-cheap, stripped-down devices with pretty crude casing and graphics, but inside they had state-of-the-art electronics. They measured well, and performed way above their price point, which was sometimes as little as £99. Now, the V series has been rotated through 90°, got nicer casework (170 x 47 x 102mm, 600g) and a slicker finish, and ends up selling for around £149 in the LPS form you see here.

The V90-LPS is basically an op-amp-based solid-state phono stage, set inside a high-quality (especially at the price) silver-painted case, with a simple aluminium fascia and a small front-mounted power switch. The switched mode power supply is – for sonic as well as practical reasons – outside the casing, and comes as a small ‘wall wart’. This, of course, means it’s theoretically possible to upgrade it at a later date. Round the back, there are three pairs of phono sockets; two going in and one going out, the former being a choice between moving magnet (input sensitivity 3mV) and moving coil (200mV). The latter pair is the line output, and there’s also a little switch to toggle between MM and MC – handily, this means you can keep two turntables rigged up to the one phono stage, providing one’s got an MM and the other an MC cartridge in. Finally, there’s an earth terminal and the DC power input.



The matching V90-DAC recently impressed me, so I’m interested to see how the phono stage fares. It has a fairly similar ‘house sound’, which is very pleasant and enjoyable for the price, one that displays surprising refinement – indeed I have to pinch myself to remind me it’s a whisker under £150. In absolute terms, of course, it isn’t the world’s smoothest, sweetest or most three-dimensional performer (you wouldn’t expect it to be), but it does have a clean, open, matter-of-fact sound that’s completely devoid of harshness. Given that several other phono stages around this price are a tad too rough and ready, this is a salient point. It’s great for crisp, spacious pop such as Eurythmics’ *This City Never Sleeps*. The V90-LPS gives Annie Lennox’s distinctively icy voice decent body and depth, behind which the sequenced bass synth powers along with real bite. There is a nice rhythmic flow to the proceedings, this phono stage being able to capture the track’s sense of occasion adeptly.

Fun Lovin’ Criminals’ fulsome, fat sounding *Love Unlimited* doesn’t sound quite as rich as it can on pricier phono stages; the LPS certainly doesn’t add any extra tonal colour or warmth to the proceedings. But that’s not to say it’s a hard or forward design; it isn’t! Whether it’s from a warm-sounding Goldring G1042

moving magnet or Audio-Technica’s slightly more clinical AT-OC9MLIII moving coil, the Musical Fidelity is a stable, middle-of-the-road performer with absolutely no unwanted nasties. Noise is very low – again this proves a nice surprise as it isn’t always the case under £200. I feel the dynamics are good, too, and the music pushes along with a clean, crisp and positive gait. Bass is tuneful, even if isn’t quite the punchiest around, midband is decently three dimensional and the treble is delicate.

### Dress to impress

The new Musical Fidelity V-90 LPS is a very impressive little product at the price, then. It’s way less than most ‘serious’ vinylistas would spend on a phono stage, yet its performance doesn’t fall far short of several £500 designs. That means if you’ve got a Rega or a Pro-Ject turntable, for example – with a good, but not great cartridge – you can get a really solid performance without the need to spend so much. At a push, the LPS is even good enough to work with turntables the calibre of, say, Michell’s GyroDec, without spoiling things. This makes it cracking value, and its choice of MM and MC inputs allied to neat styling and fine build make it all the more desirable at its low price. **DP**

#### DETAILS

**PRICE**  
£149

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#### OUR VERDICT

