

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Edwards Audio MC3/PSU3 Phono Stage

By Malcolm Steward

Edwards Audio represents the “more affordable” range of Talk Electronics products. That should not suggest that the latter are in any way over-priced. Indeed, Talk’s designer, Kevin Edwards, harbours serious concerns about, and eschews, typical high-end pricing practices. He genuinely wants to give his buyers exceptional performance at a respectable cost. He is definitely not a member of the gold-plated grab handles and capacitors of the month for added perceived value fraternity. This two-box phono stage even comes with a 10-year guarantee all in its £1499.95 retail price.

Edwards’ designs are bereft of unnecessary clutter and, in my opinion, look all the better for it. Minimalism never did the likes of Naim Audio or Musical Fidelity any harm in their early years, did it? The top-of-the-range MC3 will accommodate moving coil and moving magnet cartridges, and has one set of RCA outputs alongside a push button that will switch between stereo and a true mono output, providing the latter by summing the output of both channels. The only other connections are a turntable ground and a mini-DIN for the obligatory 21V DC power supply. The black Perspex fascia panel

illuminates whenever the device is powered with subtle indicators showing what type of cartridge is connected and whether you are listening in mono (the display illumination turns from blue to red) or stereo. That is none too busy, even for a box that measures only 6 (h) by 18 (w) by 20 (d) centimetres.

Internally there are also sets of jumpers with which you can alter the cartridge loading. The default setting is 100R with 2nF of capacitance, and this should suit most cartridges today. The jumpers will provide the most popular options but should you find you need some peculiar combination you can talk to your retailer and he will ask the factory to provide a bespoke PCB to suit.

There are also jumpers for equalising the gain of the MC3 – in six steps

– to match that of other devices, your CD player, say, plugged into your pre-amplifier alongside it. Edwards wisely suggests choosing a setting that is slightly quieter if you are in any doubt to reduce the chance of overloading either the MC3 or the input on your pre-amplifier, especially valve models. The final user-adjustable audio setting on the board is the warp filter, which operates at around 7Hz. I promise here and now that there





will be no jokes about “warp factor five, Mr Sulu!” By default this filter is set to be ON when the unit is shipped from the factory. It targets the more common arm and cartridge resonant frequencies and is there to make life a little easier for your amplifier, which can squander a great deal of valuable output power trying to reproduce those inaudible ultra-low frequencies.

I auditioned the MC3 using my Well Tempered Amadeus GTa and Dynavector XX1 record player, and my regular tri-amped Naim NAP 250 active DBL system, with the record player and electronics on Quadraspire Sunoko Vent supports. Once plugged in and warmed up the MC3 was superbly quiet, even in my system, which is highly sensitive to less than perfect earthing arrangements with turntables. The PSU3, naturally, has an earth-lift switch and it is worth trying both its settings even if you suffer no hum or buzz problems as grounding can influence performance in revealing, sensitive systems.

From the outset, the MC3 displayed a beguiling character, a pleasing, natural musical flow. It was not an immediately impressive sound but one that I grew to appreciate the more it played. It was not, as young folks are wont to say, in your face, although it was demonstrative and informative, but in an even-handed and musically persuasive fashion. That is not a euphemistic way of saying it sounded laid back or lethargic because it did not. It could convey dynamics, vigour and energy with the best of them but without any sense of artifice or stridency.

One acid test of a record player is to crank up the system SPL until it reaches the point where the sound begins to appear artificial: the point at which it starts to sound unmistakably like a record playing rather than a musical performance. The WT Amadeus GTA is one of the least artificial sounding turntables I have used, and will happily play at what I consider to be realistic SPLs: the Edwards Audio MC3 elevates this ability to another level.

That old war-horse, Rickie Lee Jones' 1979 eponymous LP sounded absolutely magnificent in both musical respects and in terms of its hi-fi presentation. Tunefulness and timing aspects were spot on, with Jones' voice swooping and soaring but always landing precisely on the desired note. Instrumental timbre was outstanding with drums and bass guitar enjoying a particularly rich and powerful sonority, along with a stable, solid sound-stage that lent the proceedings a true sense of authority and a grand sense of scale.

The MC3 also proved to be a fine conveyor of emotion with Van Morrison's wonderfully lyrical and evocative album, *Poetic Champions Compose*.

Morrison's voice betrays the contentment he, then 42, admitted to feeling when he penned and performed the album. His satisfaction and that of his band appeared almost tangible. Again, the instrumentation was blessed with vivid – but wholly realistic – timbre: Morrison's saxophone, for example, had a delightful breathy rasp that enhanced its soulful tonality.

Finally I auditioned the 180gm audiophile pressing of Gwynneth Herbert's *All The Ghosts*, in particular tracks such as *Perfect Fit*, *Put Your Mouth Where Your Money Is* and *My Mini and Me*; tracks that the editor and I had seen her perform live only the week before. The MC3 conveyed her idiosyncratic vocal character and stylings with a rare lucidity. It also portrayed her energetic interplay with her band and the effect her intelligent phrasing had on the compositions and their arrangements.

All round the Edwards MC3 is as fine and musically coherent a phono stage as you will find anywhere at this price level. That it also performs well in terms of imagery and timbral accuracy is really a bonus. What is more, its slightly retro appearance makes it a complete winner as far as I am concerned. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Max Input MC: 26mV

Max Input MM: 116mV

Gain: 40dB(MM) 58dB/61dB/64dB/67dB/70dB and 73dB (MC)

MC Input Loading Resistance:

22R/47R/100R/470R/1K/47K

MC Input loading Capacitance

120pF/1n0/2n2/4n7/10nF and 22nF

MM Input Loading(Fixed): 47K/120pF

Output impedance: <10 Ohms

Max output level: 11.5v depending upon input

Dimensions (WxHxD): 17.5x53x16cm

Weight: 4.7kg

Price: £1,500

Manufacturer: Talk Electronics

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