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Edwards Audio By Talk Electronics

MC1 Plus Phono Preamplifier And PSU1 Outboard Power Supply

An enjoyable listening experience at very reasonable price!

Review By Alfred Fredel

Allow me to tell you about my love affair with vinyl. When I was going off to college with all of my record albums in tow, a new format had just emerged that was being touted as the next big thing. It was more convenient, more durable and held more music than my record albums but one question always came to mind; "How does it sound?" Yes, my records were fussy, more involved and extremely labor intensive but they sounded great to me. Isn't that why we listened to music anyway? I got my first taste of this new format called the compact disc and well, to me it was a step backwards. I chose to hold on to my records since I did not like the metallic and unnatural sound that these tiny discs had to offer. The argument had begun. Will it be analog or digital, records or compact discs? It was an easy choice for me.



Over the years, the interest in vinyl has continued to grow. The natural sound of analog recordings has become popular once again with the critical listener encouraging a significant surge in production of both standard and audiophile pressings. Naturally with this regained popularity, new companies have come on to the scene to fill the need for analog equipment. Some older companies have been revived or reborn and are turning out great products. There are great turntables, phono preamplifiers, and cartridges produced here in the United States, but much of what is produced here tends to be fairly expensive. In my mind, the leaders in the production of cost conscious analog equipment dwell across the pond in the land of Arthur and Merlin, castles and clotted cream. Yes, we are talking about the United Kingdom, where names like Rega and Linn have become almost legendary in analog reproduction equipment.

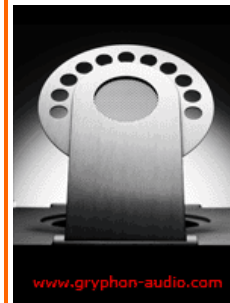
A New Contender From Across the Pond

Talk Electronics is a British company known for their production of high quality audio gear with an eye for visual aesthetics and great sound reproduction. Recently, the company launched Edwards Audio, a line of products targeting a more budget conscious audio consumer offering



high quality products at absolutely reasonable prices. Amazingly, their products are not outsourced and are designed and manufactured in the UK, something that is fairly unusual for products within this mid-level price bracket. I contacted Kevin Edwards at Talk Electronics to inquire about their line of Edwards Audio phono preamplifiers. After discussing what was available, we settled on the MC1 Plus, a unit that is designed to support both moving coil and moving magnet phonograph cartridges. Kevin directed me to USA Hi-Fi (oddly enough based in Canada) a company that serves as the North American distributor and sales outlet for Talk Electronics. I spoke to Carl James of USA Hi-Fi who was very friendly, knowledgeable and helpful who quickly had my test unit out the door and in my home within four days... very quick shipping indeed.

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When I opened the box, I was delighted to see what appeared to be a finely crafted unit with gold plated RCA plugs and a solid post for the turntable ground. The unit was housed in a nicely finished aluminum chassis with a front plate made of a milky colored plastic material that sported a nice blue led to let you know that the unit was powered on. To power the unit, a rather substantial wall wart transformer is included. Also included with my review sample was the optional PSU1, a power supply that dwarfs the supplied wall wart and offers the user the opportunity to use an after market power cable and visually matches the phono preamplifier.

Some Technical Data for You

The MC1 boasts fully RoHs compliant gold plated custom made double sided PCB's, a natural anodized extruded aluminum case and high quality internal parts like it's use of 1% thin film melf resistors from Vishay plus Panasonic low impedance PSU capacitors throughout. The RIAA Equalization accuracy is within 0.25dB across the audio band and signal to noise is low at -68dB (ref 500uV input) with a full 110dB dynamic range. The proprietary pseudo-balanced discrete input technology gives you the option to optimize grounding to reduce the possibility of hum/noise. The circuit topology has a fully discrete input transconductance gain stage followed by a unique op-amp based bass active treble passive RIAA filter which is followed by a totally buffered output section with a very low output impedance. This helps to reduce cable effects and improve output current and drive. The folks at Edwards Audio claim that the unit will easily drive a 600 Ohm load. The MC1 features standard gain for both MM at 40 dB and MC cartridges adding an additional 23 dB, these were chosen so that the MC1 can be used with the majority of normal preamplifiers.

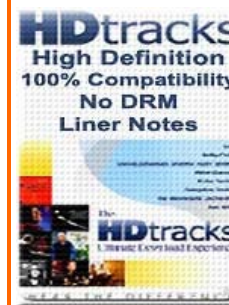
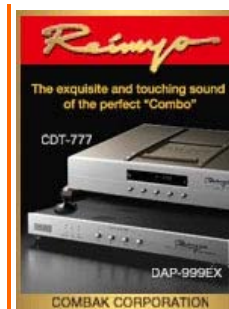


The upgraded MC1 Plus is a variant of the company's award winning MC1. The difference is that it gives the user additional choices to aid the use of high output MC cartridges via different input loading options and a 50 dB gain option that can only be used via the MM input. This is a good feature when using a high output MC or for tuning the MM input for use with passive preamplifiers. Low output MC performance is also enhanced by the use of improved low noise op-amp in the first gain stage. This upgraded unit retains all of the performance of the MC1 but adds a great deal more functionality.

The PSU1, an optional outboard DC power supply, is designed for use as a simple 'plug in' upgrade to the performance of the MC1 and MC1 Plus. The unit features split rail topology with advanced regulated design techniques to reduce all forms of noise while maintaining fast transient capability. It is based around a custom wound 30VA toroidal transformer. This enables it to be used with its partnering components in a wide variety of audio systems. The unit has the additional ability to switch the ground between fully grounded or lifted. This makes it very flexible by optimizing the system to have the lowest possible hum related noise.

Getting Set Up To Listen

In my home, there are two systems that have turntables in use. The system in the living room includes a Moth Alamo X turntable with a Goldring 1042 cartridge. I know this unit to be a solid performing MM cartridge that is a bit on the warm side. It is connected to a Bryston .4B preamplifier and powered by a PS Audio HCA2 power amplifier. Interconnect cables are a mixture of Audio Art, XLO and Kimber cables while power is handled through PS Audio cables and a Duet filter and distribution outlet. The loudspeakers in this system are a pair of Arro towers by Totem connected to XLO bi-wire cables. In the wings to explore the 50dB loading option is a DIY passive preamplifier.



My main system features a Linn LP12 turntable with a Hercules II power board upgrade, Akito tonearm and an Audio Technica OC9 low-output MC cartridge. Amplification is handled with a PS Audio Trio Preamp and an upgraded GCA500 power amp, while power is gently cleaned through a Bybee Quantum filter, PS Audio Duet and various audiophile grade in-wall power receptacles. Power cords are by Audio Art, Kubala-Sosna, XLO and Harmonic Technology. Interconnects used in this system include cables by Audio Art, Harmonic Technology and Kubala-Sosna while speaker cables are bi-wire Audio Art cables that lead to a pair of Magnepan 1.6R loudspeakers.

Now that we had all of the gear ready to go, it was time to discover how this phono preamp would sound when incorporated. Since the unit came with the MC setting as its default, I started with the main system featuring the Linn turntable and the Audio Technica cartridge. Upon first listening to the MC1 Plus with the provided wall wart power supply, it was clear that this was a formidable piece of equipment. There was little noise or hum and the unit presented a very musical



performance: a good first impression. The soundstage was clearly defined and expansive while the unit was able to reject RF interference in addition to other noise adding to a very refined listening experience. No doubt, this unit performs above and beyond its low price tag. The tonal balance with the MC1 Plus was spot on, where the bass provided by this little unit was substantial with strong attack and imaging throughout the dynamic range. This was very apparent while listening to *Fat Albert Rotunda* by Herbie Hancock. In the track "Wiggle Waggle", the horn section was clear and exciting; the guitar had great bounce while Herbie's keyboard had an energy that had me saying "that's real groovy". After this pleasant experience, I moved on to Tom Petty and his popular album *Southern Accents*. I am particularly fond of the track "Don't Come Around Here No More", a tune that features a cornucopia of exotic sounds and standard classic rock and roll riffs. You can accurately hear the sitar, funky drums, wailing electric guitars, driving bass guitar and extreme use of reverb: all focused and in their proper places. This was as good as I have ever heard this song, but then I reached for the optional outboard power supply and that is when it all changed.

When I plugged in the PSU1, I was expecting to hear a little tighter performance for the previously played recordings. I was not ready for the dramatic difference that I experienced with this power supply. I have always been a proponent of the saying "garbage in, garbage out" and nowhere was it more evident than at this moment. The MC1 Plus was brought into a new realm with significantly more authority and attack, greater separation and smoothness. It was as if a floodgate was unlocked, where the sound produced was open and inviting. After this realization, I put aside the wall wart power supply and never used it again.

I wanted to see if I could equal this performance through the MM section of the MC1 Plus. This was as simple as unscrewing four small screws and sliding out the PCB board to get at the jumpers. The directions that are included with the unit are clear and it was easy to get this little gem into MM mode. The unit comes with a good schematic, so there is little to no chance of damaging the unit by incorrectly switching the jumpers. An added advantage to the MC1 Plus is the provision of changing the loading options for the use of high output moving coil cartridges, which can sometimes provide difficulties when matching them with a preamp with lower gain. I was ready to test this claim with my trusty homemade passive preamp.

I started this session by listening to Tito Rodriguez and his Orchestra play the classic Latin tune "El Manicero" off the *Uptempo* album. Using my esoteric Tokyo Sound phono preamp, I played the track; which sounded pretty good. I then connected the MC1 Plus to the system in the living room and played the track again. I was surprised when my wife poked her head out from the kitchen and asked me what I had done. The difference made her stop what she was doing to comment, "it sounds so real now...this sounds really great!" She had never done that before. The performance was very similar to what I had become accustomed to when the unit was hooked up to my main system. I then turned to some classical music with a recording of Francis Poulenc's *Concerto in G minor for Organ, Strings and Timpani* with the French National Radio-Television Orchestra under the baton of Georges Prêtre. The organ is noted to be a very difficult instrument to record due to its wide dynamic range. Often times, playback may overwhelm the amplification as a result of the instrument's power and extreme dynamic range. The MC1 Plus took this challenge in stride and did not even flinch during dense passages of music: truly impressive. Finally, I switched out the Bryston preamp to my little passive preamp. I switched the unit to the 50dB load after listening to the unit's default load. For this audio exploration, I used the Budapest Quartet's 1952 recording of Beethoven's *Serioso Quartet (Op. 95 in F minor)*. The unit performed well in the default mode but really shined at 50 dB, something that I expected would be the case with this trial. The MC1 Plus is a well-designed piece of equipment that does all that it claims and then some.

Conclusion

If you are currently playing records or getting back in to the game, you owe it to yourself to give the MC1 Plus a listen. With its very reasonable price tag, it is an absolute steal. Add to that the optional PSU1 power supply and you have a unit that is hard to beat at any price range. Talk Electronics also stands behind its product and offers a 10 year warranty on the MC1 Plus, giving the consumer complete confidence in their purchase of the unit. Without question, this has been one of the most enjoyable listening experiences I have had for quite a while and I could permanently live happily with this unit as I take pleasure in listening to my vinyl and enjoying the music.

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10Hz - 60Hz)	
Mid-bass (80Hz - 200Hz)	
Midrange (200Hz - 3,000Hz)	
High Frequencies (3,000Hz On Up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape Width Front	
Soundscape Width Rear	
Soundscape Depth Behind Speakers	
Soundscape Extension Into Room	
Imaging	
Fit And Finish	
Self Noise	
Value For The Money	

Specifications

Type: MM/MC solid-state stereo phonostage
 Max Input MC: 10mV
 Max Input MM: 100mV
 Gain: 40/50/63 dB MM/MC
 THD Distortion: <0.008% 1kHz
 Signal To Noise Ratio: Ref 500uV (MC) 5mV (MM) -68dB/-84dB
 RIAA Accuracy: Within 0.25dB
 Stereo Separation: Better than 75dB from 20 Hz to 20 kHz
 Input Loading MC 100R with 2n2 capacitance
 Input Loading MM 47K/1K0 with 120pF
 Damping 1K0/10R
 Dynamic Range: 110dB
 Output Impedance: <10 Ohms
 Max Output Level: 10V RMS depending upon input
 Dimensions: 114.5 x 47.5mm x 160 (WxHxD in mm)
 Weight: 2.2 lbs.
 Price: MC1 \$495, MC1 Plus \$595, PSU1 \$495 (\$400 if purchased with MC1/MC1 Plus)

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