



Rega Fono MC MK4 £275



When it comes to phono preamps, Rega doesn't rest on its laurels as the fourth version of the Fono MC shows

Take Lyle Mays' *Highland Aire*, a sumptuously produced track if ever there was one. With the Fono MC MK4 over seeing proceedings the soundscape sounds closer and more intimate than with any other offering in the group. Yes, it's still nicely expansive and airy, but the imaging seems more palpable and tactile. This is starkly obvious with Mays' beautifully rendered track *Joanna*, the body timbre of which draws the focus more powerfully than the resolution of the ambient acoustic. Added to which, the impressively articulate lower octaves have more body and weight, if not notably greater extension.

When the energy of ELP's *Trilogy* album transitions from tepid to city-threatening tectonic event, the Rega tracks the step change with almost frightening enthusiasm,

It's dynamically bolder and more punctual than anything else here

summoning tremendous attack, heft and dynamic reach to honour the occasion. Transparency isn't quite up to the standard set by the iFi Audio and Pro-Ject, but they in turn don't sound anything like as physical and muscular as the Rega.

We're still in the tell-it-like-it-is zone optioning extra conviction with the immaculate jazz fusion stylings of Clarke and Duke. The good news is *Heroes* has never been delivered with more potency and visceral vim. The slightly thin and overtly technical production sounds more substantial and fleshed out and all the better for it. Finally, if you want Joni's best song (Elvis Costello thinks so) up close and personal with every vocal nuance and inflection laid bare, nothing here does it better ●

HI-FI Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Potent, full-blooded, involving sound; purist design
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Might be too 'front foot' for some
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WESAY: A thrilling, music-first ride
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL



DETAILS

PRODUCT
Rega Fono MC MK4

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
MC phono preamp

WEIGHT
650g

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
180 x 50 x 150mm

FEATURES

- MC input
- RCA input/output
- External PSU

DISTRIBUTOR
Rega Research Ltd.

Let's face it, there's no such thing as a poor, mediocre or merely pretty good Rega turntable or phono preamp. The only realistic poser here is if the Fono MC MK4 can comfortably boss the group. Well, the first message of intent comes in the name. This is a component dedicated purely to the MC cause. If you have a moving-magnet cartridge, Rega will happily sell you a Fono MM MK5. But it's all about focus and singular thinking here, in this case trickled down from the pricier Aria phono preamp (the MK3 version of which was on review back in *HFC* 469). The Fono MC uses a Linear Systems low-noise LSK389 FET in an all-discrete input stage, Rega naturally citing the importance of low noise and linearity in extracting the best from a moving-coil cartridge. Because of the high input impedance of the FET, loading effects of the amplifier circuit are vanishingly small and don't impinge on the performance of the cartridge.

Yes, there's an op amp used in the RIAA amplifier, but it's a high-quality

MUSES device. It joins polypropylene capacitors used in the signal path and in the RIAA equalisation circuits. Via a bank of DIP switches there's selectable input loading for both resistance and capacitance along with two different gain settings – all of which are located out of the way on the back panel.

Rega's design language for the Fono MC MK4 – yes, it's that distinctive – is clearly scaled-down to integrated amp (*HFC* 475) and part of the company's logical initiative to standardise the look of various ranges. Once again, the power supply is separated from the main unit in the form of a wall-wart mains plug.

Sound quality

A Rega does precisely what a Rega does and it's quite a considerable contrast to anything else in the group. Think dynamically bolder and more emphatically punctual with greater saturation of tonal colours and textures, all fed by a big-bore main line to the musical pulse. It's a style that's floated many a boat, but doesn't always lead to plain sailing.

