

Stage manager

Creek's long-running line of phono preamps has a new addition. **Ed Selley** is impressed as he puts it through its paces

Committed to vinyl replay long before the current popularity of the medium, Creek Audio's OBH range of phono stages has been around for 25 years. The OBH-8mk2 is the latest iteration of the design and is the entry-level model in the range, sitting just below the long-running £300 OBH-15mk2 (HFC 407).

The OBH-8mk2 is a straightforward moving-magnet phono stage with fixed loading and no user adjustments. The new design uses an integrated circuit for the gain stage powered by a 24V supply, which is something that has been present on OBH designs since their inception. The reason why Creek uses this relatively hefty voltage is because it is split inside the phono stage to +/- 12V via a custom circuit. This means that the OBH-8mk2 can be DC coupled with no input or output coupling capacitors. Additionally, by using a capacitor to roll off below 5Hz and capacitance smoothing, Creek ensures that there is no unwanted noise.

The reason the company goes to such lengths is that the voltage swing available means that the circuit is effectively impossible to overload by any conventional means. It is also

possible to use it with longer runs of cable – although they will need to be fairly flexible as, like a number of similarly lightweight designs, stiff interconnects move the unit into the position wherever the cable wants.

The mk2 casework is new and smaller than the preceding OBH-8 and designed to match the company's Evolution range, but is unlikely to look out of place in any system. It would be a stretch to call this black box attractive, but it is well made and feels sturdy despite its small size. The rear connections are quite tightly grouped, but it is easy enough to make the required connections.

Sound quality

Having done so, Creek's power supply arrangements seem to pay dividends from the outset. At idle, the OBH-8mk2 is completely silent unless you wind the volume up on your amplifier to very high levels. Pop the volume back to sane settings and the boisterous *Love Is Dead* album by Chvrches has a hugely potent and entertaining sound as the Creek does an excellent job of delivering the sweeping and powerful *Heaven/Hell*.

The most immediately notable aspect of the performance is the bass

response. There is plenty of low-end output, but no less importantly, there is detail and texture sufficient to ensure that the sound is constantly believable and well integrated into the rest of the frequency response. The OBH-8mk2 avoids any real sense of over emphasising a particular part of the frequency response and you find yourself enjoying the music as a whole rather than focusing on any specific details.

Give it a better-quality pressing like the superbly refined *Sunday Night Blues Club* by Fink, and the Creek positively shines. The shuffling groove of *Keep Myself Alone Now* is handled with an effortless sense of snap and immediacy underpinning a performance that is impressively three dimensional and that gives the listener a real sense of the recording space. Compared with more expensive rivals, the OBH-8mk2 can't quite manage to open this recording out to the extent that the very best can, but it is still a capable-sounding device for the asking price. It is revealing enough to show the different presentation of Gold Note's £382 Vasari Gold (HFC 425) and Nagaoka's £350 MP-200 (HFC 434), and is no less happy working with the equivalently priced Ortofon 2M Blue 100 (HFC 435). The more immediate presentation of the Ortofon can reveal a slight forwardness to the OBH-8mk2, which isn't present with other cartridges – suggesting that some care will need to be taken when partnering it.

Conclusion

For the asking price, the OBH-8mk2 is a very impressive sounding phono stage. It does a fine job of delivering the character of the record and the turntable rather than putting its own spin on proceedings and the low noise and useful level of gain should see it work well in a wide variety of different systems ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Creek OBH-8mk2

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
Moving-magnet phono stage

WEIGHT
400g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
100 x 48 x 80mm

FEATURES
● 24V PSU

DISTRIBUTOR
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Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY

★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY

★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY

★★★★★

FEATURES

★★★★★

LIKE: Refined sonics; low noise levels; build

DISLIKE: Limited functionality; needs careful cartridge partnering

WESAY: A well-implemented phono stage with strong performance at a bargain price

OVERALL

★★★★★

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