

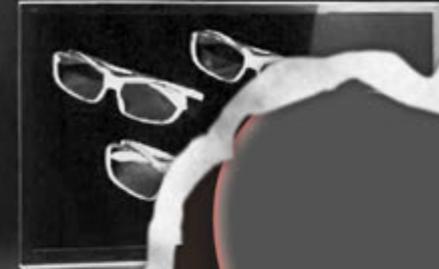


av magazin.de

Das Online-Magazin der
Unterhaltungselektronik

e-paper 01/2015

Erster Test: Panasonic TV
mit 3D Polarisation



3D Blu-ray
Harma



CD-Player
Maran



Ohrhörer
Bowers & W



Fernseher



av magazin.de
1/2015

Oehlbach XXL Phono PreAmp Ultra
Very Good



Oehlbach® XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra
Brand new and auspicious!
Recommended by av-magazin 1/2015

Oehlbach presents a new phono preamplifier. AV-Magazin tested the level of analog euphony generated by the XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra.

Oehlbach is venturing into new territory: Electronic components have been part of the cable specialist's rich assortment of products for some time now. Its initial products include Bluetooth transmitters and receiver modules (such as the BTX 1000 and BTT 5000), compact D/A converters (such as the DA Converter) and headphone amplifiers with integrated converters (such as the XXL® DAC Ultra) - the traditional manufacturer, however, is now concentrating on analog music reproduction. This is a little surprising at first glance at a time of increasing acceptability of NAS-based hifi solutions; however, the appreciation of vinyl and the corresponding systems is as strong as it has ever been - no wonder, as these two worlds are not in competition. The fascination with analog instruments remains unaffected by thoughts of convenience and even by the fact that a certain audio performance can be achieved easier and sometimes less expensively with a digital sound source.

But before I alienate any die-hard vinyl fanatics, I would like to point out that I'm also of the analog school and I made a beeline for the newest addition to Oehlbach's product range. In keeping with the grounded philosophy of the Pulheim manufacturer, the XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra phono preamplifier has been moderately priced at around € 300 - a price range which incorporates D/A converters, phono stages and headphone amplifiers that offer a sophisticated performance... and this is exactly what Oehlbach wants to achieve with its latest offering, because it's putting its particularly good reputation on the line. The XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra is externally pleasing thanks to its extremely well-processed aluminum housing: Precisely dimensioned gaps, a flawless, finely brushed front panel and a high quality anodized chassis, which is optionally available in a black or silver finish, generates an excellent first impression and alludes to the high quality standards Oehlbach has set for its debut model.

While the XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra has compact dimensions, it is not that small when compared to other similarly priced phono preamplifiers - the „XXL“ in its name simply refers to its affiliation with the highest quality series offered by Oehlbach. Let's see exactly what this entails in the case of the Phono PreAmp Ultra and what it sounds like.

Groove and sophistication.

The power supply section of an electronic unit, especially an amplifier, usually takes up a significant portion of the space inside the housing; this is not the case with the XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra, however, as the power supply has been outsourced. So what exactly is in the housing? First and foremost, the external power supply unit is a compact 12 volt model, therefore all of the components used for processing the electric current are located inside the preamplifier. In addition, a pair of generously dimensioned capacitors can be found on the single-layer board in the amplification circuit; overall it looks rather lofty under the robust chassis - ultimately, a phono circuit alone doesn't require that much space. The dimensions of the housing may be attributable to the frequent misconception that exceptionally small components cannot always be taken quite so seriously... This would definitely be a mistake with regard to the XXL® Phono PreAmp, as it has been entirely equipped with components which exhibit a level of quality that is not a given in this price range to create an efficient, well thought-out concept. This positive image continues before the input section and after the output section: Here there are high quality, precise RCA jacks with 24 carat gold-plated contacts.

While such a reasonable price will mean you sometimes have to make do with just a preamp for moving magnet pickups, the XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra goes one better and also provides an equalization branch for moving coil systems. You can easily alternate between these two signal paths via the switch positioned at the rear. The respective values for MM and MC pickups cannot be altered, which is completely reasonable: Each pickup functions extremely clearly with the impedance of the Oehlbach unit.

It's better to leave the selected default values as they are rather than realize an adaptation option that would need to be elaborately configured so as not to damage the sound.

So how does the great phono dwarf sound in the listening test? To begin with, the XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra was used together with a similarly priced unit, namely my modified Rega P25 with a Denon DL-103R in the headshell. One thing quickly became clear: These units go well together and get straight down to business. Oehlbach's unit generates a well-rounded, extensive sound pattern and reproduces the earthy richness of the Denon system beautifully. At the same time, the nimble and agile performance of the Rega is not concealed either; then it was on to the Transrotor Crescendo with the formidable MC Transrotor Figaro. The XXL® Phono PreAmp still manages to show its best side in this asymmetric setup with an excellent dynamic range and it demonstrates its ability to master even complex recordings: The Firebird Suite, which has gained in popularity recently, sounds extremely detailed, energetic and dramatic with the XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra - making analogue music fun.

Plain text.

Oehlbach's XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra is a solid, extremely well-made phono preamplifier with an attractive and appealing design. Oehlbach has dispensed with the customization option for the pickups for good reason: It's better to offer slightly less in terms of functionality and concentrate on the essentials. This is an approach that really delivers: The debut model generates a dynamic, balanced and nuanced performance. The XXL® Phono PreAmp Ultra is a reasonably priced unit that has what it takes to refresh and rekindle one's love of records.

- + Sound: **VERY GOOD**
- + Configuration: **VERY GOOD**
- + Operation: **VERY GOOD**
- + Workmanship: **VERY GOOD**

- + Price/performance: **VERY GOOD**
- + Class: **PREMIUM**