



Life begins at 40...

Cyrus has built some of the best phono stages going in the last few years. **Ed Selley** sees if the 40 PPA can raise the game

As one of the 'core' British brands, Cyrus cemented its reputation with amplifiers before adding digital sources to its quite considerable proficiencies. Phono stages were something that the company offered but that never attracted much attention until the Phono Signature was released in 2016 and reviewed in *HFC* 408. It combined an astonishingly low noise circuit with a level of flexibility both in connectivity and setup that very little else anywhere near the price could match. It proved sufficiently compelling that I bought one on the spot.

Since then, Cyrus has brought the Phono Signature into the Classic range as the Classic PHONO (*HFC* 520) and done some detail tweaks but largely left a winning formula be. The release of the 40 Series in its all-new casework has seen Cyrus update the design in the pursuit of higher

performance and better usability. The 40 PPA is not a clean-sheet design, but it does differ in a number of areas to the Classic Phono that continues on sale as before.

The most significant change is the power supply. This has long been a focus of the Cyrus design process and, superficially at least, it looks like quite a surprising development. Gone is the small toroid mounted in front of the board in the Classic Phono and in its place comes a smaller EI-type device which is part of the main board itself. Cyrus says that the result is 20 percent quieter. Like other members of the 40 Series range, the 40 PPA can be used with an external Cyrus power supply, which takes over supply of key parts of the board leaving the internal supply to handle simpler duties.

The board itself has also been changed. It's now a six-layer design in contrast with the four-layer type used before. Cyrus says that this allows for

reduced interference between key functions. Look at the internal shots of the Classic Phono and the 40 PPA, and you can see that the two products differ both in component choices and layout. As with previous models, output is available to both RCA and XLR connections.

In some ways the most significant changes have been directed at the interface – an area where the 40 Series components are a step forward over the older models. Having lived with the Phono Signature for nine years, I can safely say that there are some unavoidable limitations to the small display and button-driven interface that made it feel a little old hat. The 40 PPA sets out to amend this and largely succeeds.

The 40 PPA ensures there is still a little bit of magic present in what you hear

First up, the new white-on-black emissive display is a huge improvement over what came before. Information is visible at a distance where the Phono Sig is completely illegible. Access to the inputs and the range of adjustments is menu driven and feels slick and logical in use. Adjustments via remote on the older models are not terribly intuitive whereas here they are simple. There are some useful refinements too. The 40 PPA allows for gain to be adjusted in 5dB increments rather than the 10dB of

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Cyrus 40 PPA

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
MM/MC phono preamplifier

WEIGHT
4.8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
220 x 88 x 365mm

FEATURES
• 4x phono inputs
• Each input configurable for MM and MC loading
• RCA and XLR outs
• Optional external power supply

DISTRIBUTOR
Cyrus Audio

WEBSITE
cyrusaudio.com

before and you can also disable inputs you aren't using for faster cycling between those you are. As a brief reminder, given the 40 PPA has four RCA inputs, this might be more useful than you first assume. There is still no mono function and balanced inputs are becoming more common, but this is still a lot of phono stage for the money.

Aesthetically, the older models have an advantage in that the absence of lower lip on the rear panel makes connecting ground connections easier than the 40 PPA, but the four separate grounds are still very useful. Anyone arriving at the 40 PPA from Phono Signature ownership should also note that the input order is reversed to match the 40 AMP, which might initially be confusing.

Sound quality

Listening to the 40 PPA is unlikely to be confusing at all, though. Quite apart from the flexibility it offers for testing, the reason why a Phono Signature has survived nine years in my test system is down to its superb combination of extremely low noise floor and a level of detail, tonality and sheer fun I've yet to find significantly bettered at the price.

The 40 PPA doesn't mess with these fundamental virtues, but it does refine and improve on them. Noise levels have – somehow – managed to drop still further. Connected to my resident Vertere MG-1 MkII and Mystic (HFC 506 and 499 respectively) cart – a combination that is exceptionally quiet – there is a moment as the arm drops into the groove where you wonder if every connection has been made correctly before the gentle 'thunk' of the stylus landing reminds you it very much has.

From there, the manner in which the opening of *Europe Endless* on Kraftwerk's *Trans Europe Express* climbs from silence is a demonstration of how low that noise floor is. Stop listening to the silence and start listening to the music and the Cyrus



Violetric's PPV 790 (HFC 520) is a good match. In some user areas the Cyrus is better. It's easier to make multiple connections, changing settings is simpler and seeing what those changes are is much more straightforward. It cannot match the Violetric for adjustable EQ curves and balanced connections, though, and you can connect a mere four turntables to the Violetric's six. Used with moving coils into RCA, the £1,500 cheaper Cyrus matches the pricier Violetric in sheer performance terms. It's hard to over state quite how good this phono stage is and anyone not needing a balanced input may find they prefer the Cyrus option.



is no less compelling. More than anything else, this is a presentation that feels consistently believable. Jon Allen's lovely *Deep River* is beautifully delivered as his gravelly vocals are intermeshed with instruments that never break the suspension of disbelief. Without ever doing that 'hi-fi thing' of over emphasising elements of the performance for dramatic effect, it ensures that there is still a little bit of magic present in what you hear.

It also shows up the differences between cartridges and turntables with effortless precision. A 'cheaper' (all things with Vertere are relative) Vertere DG-X running an Ortofon MC X20 cartridge reveals that there is less space and heft to records compared with the pricier MG-1 and it reflects the more forward presentation of the Ortofon without itself ever sounding harsh or aggressive. This is still an effortlessly transparent device. It isn't short of gain either; even though the notional maximum gain of the 40 PPA has dropped to 'only' 65dB from 70 on the Classic PHONO, it seems to have more welly available even so.

The limits of criticism with the Cyrus really extend to using it with moving-magnet cartridges; something that's likely to be a relatively fringe pastime for most enthusiasts who have spent two grand on a phono

stage. Having used the 40 PPA and Phono Signature side by side, I feel confident that the newer stage is every bit as good as the original, but – where the moving-coil performance of the 40 PPA is better – moving magnet has realistically plateaued. How much this is going to matter to you will be entirely down to the cartridge (or indeed cartridges) you opt to use alongside it.

Conclusion

Given that this is really the only vague downer in an otherwise pretty relentless tidal wave of positivity should be enough to indicate that this is a rather special piece of kit. The 40 PPA takes the fundamental greatness of the original Phono Signature and updated Classic PHONO, and manages to extract a small but meaningful amount more from the design while bringing the interface and aesthetic bang up to date. The improvements in the user experience mean that you are more likely to actually spend time changing settings on the fly to see what works best (and be able to see the changes you've made when you've done so). Cyrus has taken a fundamentally brilliant product and made it fit for purpose for the next generation of users and I suspect people are going to love it ●



Hi-FiChoice

OUR VERDICT

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|---------------------------------|--|
| SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ | LIKE: Superb sound; a joy to use, build; spec |
| VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ | DISLIKE: MM hasn't made the same jump as MC; no balanced input or mono |
| BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ | WE SAY: A brilliant update to the Cyrus phono stage platform likely to work in a wide spread of systems |
| FEATURES
★★★★★ | |

OVERALL

