



# K9 class

**Longdog Audio have produced a classy phono hybrid phono stage that uses FETs and valves. Tony Bolton listens in carefully.**

Over the years I have come across several companies that started with someone's desire to improve on the performance of one component within the audio chain. The unusually named Longdog Audio is one such example. Nick Gorham worked as a computer software designer, building his own audio equipment as a hobby. As his designs became more refined the hobby has grown into a business, now comprising three amplifiers, a two box pre-amp and two phono stages. One of these is the MCJ2 moving coil model under review here.

Any doubts that I had that the MCJ2 may have had that 'built-in-a-garage' feel or look were dispelled as soon as I opened the box. The bodywork is simple, a 450 x 115 x 320mm (w x h x d) case of aluminium, sporting a 10mm thick fascia. This is ornamented by the model name in the bottom left corner and a large power switch in the middle which is surrounded by a glowing blue light when power is present. At the back are the usual input and output sockets, alongside another pair. These are for adjusting the cartridge loading by inserting phono plugs with suitable loadings

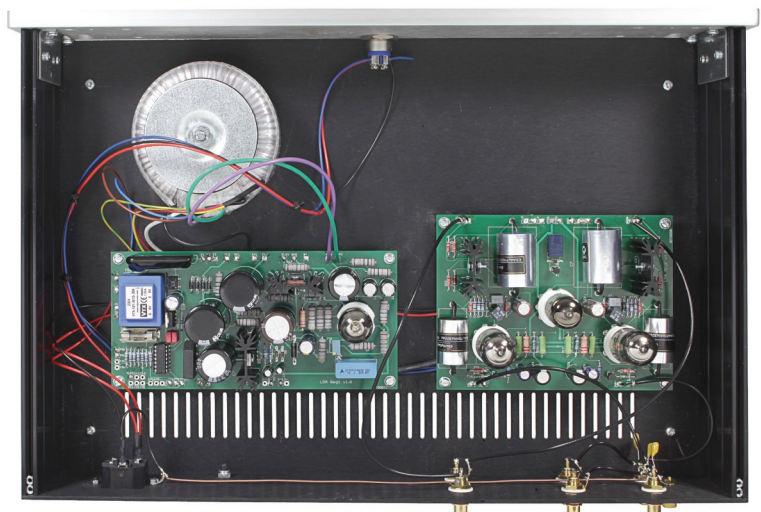
of resistors across the terminals in exactly the same way as those on the Blue Horizon Profono reviewed elsewhere in this issue, and were chosen for the same reasons; namely a dissatisfaction with the sonically detrimental effects of switchgear in the audio signal path.

Here the chosen amplification is by means of using a super low noise Toshiba JFET in combination with an ECC88 triode (also known as a 12AX7): this circuit being known as a cascode. A 5687 twin triode is used as an output buffer, after the signal has passed through ICW Clarity Caps SA coupling and output capacitors, and Takman carbon and metal film resistors. Each channel boasts a choke power supply and shunt regulator. After switching on the unit is muted for a few minutes while everything warms up. Once the blue light stops flashing then

listening can begin.

## SOUND QUALITY

The first record on was Elton John's 1975 concept album 'Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy'. It isn't my usual musical fare but belongs to a friend of mine and had become one of his standard test discs due to its superb sound quality and the range of instrumentation and musical styles it contains.



*At left is a complex regulated power supply based around a big toroidal mains transformer. At right is the amplifier board with valves and Clarity Caps on display.*

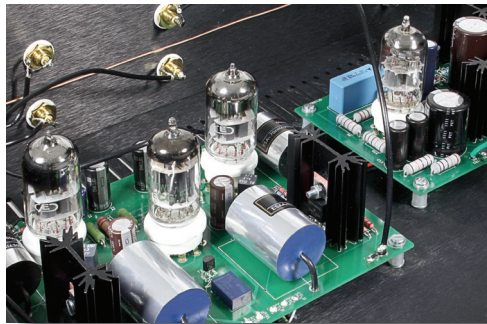
**SYSTEM USED:**  
 Clearaudio Master Solution/ Magnify/ Benz Wood SL.  
 Leema Acoustics Tucana II amp.  
 Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers.

Linn LP12/ Hadcock 242 Cryo/ Clearaudio Concept MC.  
 Bent Audio TAP-X passive pre-amp.  
 2 x Quad 303 power amps,  
 Kelly KT3 loudspeakers.

I've borrowed it for a while to get to know it better. The MCj2 certainly helped this cause by providing a very open and detailed sound that delved into the layers of instruments and spread them around in front of me on one of the biggest soundstages that I have heard in this house. The music seemed to be almost propelled out of the speakers, and formed into big cohesive images right in front of me.

the higher pitched female vocals that caused me to back off the volume a bit. Callas's voice suffered a little from this effect during the 'Habanera' which detracted from an otherwise very good performance. I also noticed this slight hardness on certain horn and trumpet sounds, but not on all recordings.

Apart from this effect, I found the MCj2 to be a very good performer. It seemed to be better suited to jazz, pop and rock music, where the big production values of this phonostage added a certain zest to the proceedings. I felt it tried to 'big up' classical music a bit too much and



**ECC88 low noise triode work with Toshiba JFETs in cascode arrangement. Output buffer/line driver is a 5687 double triode.**

is very well designed, well built and well finished, and offers performance commensurate with its price. If you like your sound to be big, bold and with a certain vivid excitement to it then this phonostage could well be your idea of sonic heaven.



This was repeated when playing the mid paced psychedelic trance beats of Human Blue's 'Electric Roundabout'. The first track is quite spacious in its presentation and, given the generous scale of the MCj2's presentation, I felt almost tempted to get up and walk in between the sounds as they appeared in front of me.

Unfortunately, the level of detail retrieval also included the surface noise on a moderately worn mono copy of Dave Brubeck's 'Time Further Out', and I found myself wishing that I could ameliorate this to some extent by switching the unit to mono. The music itself was well presented, behind the sizzling sound of frying bacon, with the Longdog again applying its big bold signature to the music.

This sense of rather grand scale to things did not always work though. When playing my way through the Maria Callas recording of Bizet's 'Carmen' I felt that the amp was trying to draw my attention to too many things at once, especially when the choruses started singing. It seemed to try to put a spotlight on every singer. It also produced what I can only describe as a bit of glare or hardness around

this was less satisfying when played through it. I would also avoid it if your records are worn, or in mono. There are other phonostages out there that are a little kinder to such discs.

With that caveat in mind I would still recommend the Longdog MCj2. It

**MUSIC USED:**  
 Bizet 'Carmen' Maria Callas, Nicolai Gedda, Orchestre Du Theatre National De L'opera conducted by Georges Pretre. EMI Records Angel Series SAN 140-1-2 1964

Elton John 'Captain Fantastic And the Brown Dirt Cowboy' MCA Records MCA 2142 1975

Human Blue 'Electric Roundabout' Spiral Trax Records SPIT LP 010

**MEASURED PERFORMANCE**

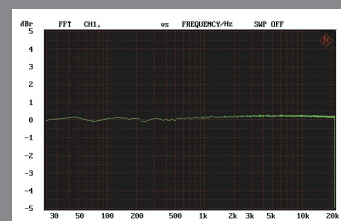
The MCj2 Moving Coil valve phono stage has a gain of x1440, or 63dB, enough to match most MC cartridges, if low against some stages that run up to x3000. With a low output MC giving 0.2mV, the MCj2 will give 288mV out, so volume will have to be turned up on insensitive amps. With a maximum output swing of 47V, typical of a valve output stage, input overload was a very high 34mV. Equivalent input noise measured just 0.09µV (IEC A weighted), a very low value and close to as good as it gets (0.08µV).

Equalisation was absolutely accurate right across the audio band, lacking the small treble lift of many stages, so in comparison the MCj2 will sound just perceptibly less bright. Full gain existed down to 1.5Hz; there is no warp filter.

The MCj2 measured very well in all areas. It has been carefully engineered. NK

Frequency response	1.5Hz-73kHz
Separation	96dB
Noise (e.i.n.)	0.09µV
Distortion	0.1%
Gain	x1440, 63dB
Overload	47V

**FREQUENCY RESPONSE**



**VERDICT**   
 Big, bold sound great for Rock if less subtle with Classical. Unique all the same and well worth hearing.

**MCJ2 MOVING COIL PHONOSTAGE** £1950.00  
 Longdog Audio  
[www.mainscablesrus.co.uk](http://www.mainscablesrus.co.uk)

**FOR**

- strong projection of sound into the room
- very detailed imaging
- excellent with jazz, rock and electronica

**AGAINST**

- not as good with opera
- no mono/stereo switch.