

# Hegel V10 phono preamplifier

by Jason Kennedy

It's a testament to the success of the vinyl revival that a company that has been making audio electronics for nearly 30 years has decided to make a product specifically to use with this remarkably resilient medium. Hegel has carved out a strong position in the audio market with several series of streaming amplifiers distinguished by curved front panels and minimalist aesthetics. It now competes with the biggest brands in the sector but founder Bent Holter has apparently long been wanting to build his own phono preamplifier, presumably he knows that vinyl still does things that digital audio struggles to deliver. I suspect that this is because of its simplicity, there is no buffering, oversampling or processing with the medium, it's an analogue signal from needle to loudspeaker, you don't get signal paths like that in digital.

The V10 is quite a radical move for Hegel and a fairly radical phono stage in its own

right. As much becomes apparent when you try to set it up and discover that there are no power inlets on the back panel and that the plug-top power supply's cable is split into two outputs. Flip the V10 over and you can see a large bay with a pair of small power sockets on one of the vertical faces. I thought initially that this space might be to house a battery supply but when I asked Hegel they said that this was an interesting idea but not the purpose of the strange construction. If you take the lid off the V10, it becomes apparent that this bay is part of a barrier that separates the power circuit from the signal circuitry that's entirely at the back of the box. It makes for an elaborate box and a strange system for power connection but shields the tiny signal from an MM or MC cartridge from any stray emissions created by the power supply.

The plug-top supply is a linear type that provides 18 volts to run a circuit powered by JFET transistors that offer up to 60dB of gain for moving coils (40dB MM) with the option to add up to 12dB more via dip switches on the back panel. If that's not enough there is the option to add a further 6dB by swapping a jumper inside the box, you are encouraged to have the dealer do this, I guess for warranty purposes, but it requires little more than a good light and a steady hand. Likewise there are two standard settings for impedance on the back panel, 100 and 300 Ohms, but inside the box a tiny rotary allows you to choose any level between 50 and 550 Ohms.

The dip switches that you can adjust with relative ease, a small screwdriver or similar helps, are arrayed on either side of the back panel and offer alternative ►





► levels of impedance, capacitance and gain as well as the option to switch between MM and MC or use a subsonic filter, it's not short on features. Using them, that's slightly less obvious, the two sets of switches are mirrored so to increase gain by 5dB on the right channel you need switch 3, to do the same thing on the left it's switch 8. It's hardly challenging but is a little idiosyncratic. There's a more extensive graphic in the (lovely) manual and on the bottom of the case however and this makes it relatively straightforward. A subsonic filter is a rare option on modern phono stages but if you've ever noticed your bass drivers moving in and out while playing vinyl you'll know it can be useful.

Inputs are separate for MM and MC but you are advised against connecting both simultaneously, output is available on RCAs or XLRs, the latter are not described as providing a balanced signal but do provide more gain, 6dB more than the RCAs with a moving coil so worth having. One feature that wasn't obvious to me because it had been disabled is auto sleep, you can choose to have the V10 put itself into standby after 15 minutes without a signal which is quite handy.

My listening commenced with the Hegel connected to a Rega P10 with the Rega Aphelion 2 MC cartridge reading the groove on Jeff Beck (with the Jan Hammer Group) *Live* [Epic] which starts with the car horns of 'Freeway Jam' and builds up an impressive head of funk rock powered steam, the V10 revealed the energy and intensity of the piece alongside its rather compressed soundstage. The bass was particularly appealing on 'She's a Woman', powerful and tuneful with it, the timing that this stage delivered was very engaging indeed and made it hard to sit still in all honesty. The contemporary strains of Nassif Thiago's 'Soar Estranho' [Mente, Gearbox] were delivered with the dynamics in full effect and a really electric feel, the image likewise was presented in

precisely etched form. Again timing was very strong, the taut muscularity of the rhythms of this piece being clearly defined.

After a few more tracks it did start to sound a little forward for my tastes, a little unforgiving of any brightness in recordings and I was beginning to think that the Aphelion 2 might be a bad match, but not before I looked into the capacitance setting. This shouldn't affect moving coils but past experience with this cartridge suggested the opposite and I selected the 100 pF option, it doesn't say what the default capacitance is with no preference selected but I discovered that it's 120pF so not much different. This did however mellow the sound to a degree and it was easy to enjoy Sarathy Korwar's *My East is your West* [Gearbox] which was good and open with a very live feel and decent low level resolution. I could feel the acoustic of the venue being projected into my own and this was amplified when the audience were aroused.

After all that acoustic beauty it was time for something a bit more meaty and I found the Prodigy's second album *Music for the* ►

*“The relatively smooth nature of this MC (Dynavector DV-20XL) proved a good match with the eager V10.”*



► *Jilted Generation* and picked out ‘Poison’, here the Hegel revealed just what a monster tune this is, the balance is positively savage and this gives the bass a slam that’s very weighty indeed. Once I had recovered from the battering I put something more relaxed on it *Wish You Were Here* [Pink Floyd, Harvest] and remembered just why this remains such a well loved album, in retrospect it was also highly influential with its spacey vibe and lurvely synths. All this and more was revealed by the V10’s super quiet circuitry but I still suspected that it wasn’t best suited to the Rega MC so a Dynavector DV-20X2L took its place and that proved to be a good move. The relatively smooth nature of this MC proved a good match with the eager V10, bringing out the lyrics, rhythm and scale of Joni Mitchell on *Miles of Aisles* [Asylum], articulating the band’s excellent playing and bringing the atmosphere of the event into the room.

Timing is the key here, it’s what vinyl does so well but not all phono stages manage to exploit. If the timing is right then the most complex passages make sense, I played a variety of records from jazz and rock genres and failed to trip it up, there is a slight forwardness in the balance but this doesn’t get in the way of the music. For completeness a Goldring 1042 moving magnet was installed in the P10 and the V10’s dipswitches changed to suit. This reduced the detail level but retained a lot of the musicality experienced with the MCs, the result being warmer and slightly coarser but not as dull as some stages can make MMs sound. Whether anyone will spend this sort of money for an MM is another question, but there are a few who feel that this technology has a lot to offer so it’s good to have a phono stage that can do it justice.

The Hegel V10 is a very capable and strongly featured phono stage, build quality is excellent too, I particularly like the chunky earthing point between the inputs. It’s great to see that Hegel haven’t produced a ‘me too’ product to fill a hole in the range, there has clearly been a lot of thought put into the V10 and it pays off with a dynamic and revealing sound that will suit the more relaxed turntables and cartridges on the market down to a tee. +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Solid-state, MM/MC phono stage

**Phono inputs:** Two pairs single-ended (via RCA jacks)

**Analogue outputs:** One pair single-ended (via RCA jacks), one pair balanced (via XLR connectors)

**Input Sensitivity:** Not specified

**Input impedance:** 33 Ohm–47kOhm

**Input capacitance:** 100pF / 147pF / 200pF / 220pF / 247pF / 320pF / 420pF / 467pF @ 47 kohm

**Output impedance:** 200 Ohms

**Output level:** Not specified

**RIAA linearity:** +/- 0.2dB, 20Hz–20kHz

**Distortion:** MM < 0.005%, MC < 0.009%

**Signal to Noise Ratio:** MM 84dB, MC 81dB

**Dimensions (HxWxD):** 60 x 210 x 280mm

**Weight:** 2.2kg

**Price:** £1,250

**Manufacturer:** Hegel Music System AS

**URL:** [hegel.com](http://hegel.com)

**Distributor:** Auden Distribution

**Tel:** +44(0)7917 685 759

**URL:** [audendistribution.co.uk](http://audendistribution.co.uk)