



WITH AFTERBURNER

Lehmann Audio has upgraded the Black Cube phono preamp to the Black Cube II model. The external PWX power supply turns it into the SE – a very hot affair. ■ By Lothar Brandt

How time flies: already a quarter of a century ago, back in 1995, Norbert Lehmann put his first Black Cube phono preamp on the market. Owing to its excellent price-performance ratio, the little black box in its rustic guise celebrated a tremendous success. Sporting a 5 millimetre thick front panel, the Black Cube II oozes a much more classy appeal. The now gold-plated RCA sockets have moved to the rear side. The Black Cube II with the outsourced PSU standard power supply costs 679 euros and is available in black, silver or stylish chrome (99 euros extra charge). With the considerably beefier energy bar named PWX, which also purifies the mains current, it turns into the Black Cube SE II and

changes hands for 949 euros. On both variants you'll look in vain for an on/off switch. Once connected to the mains outlet, the Black Cube II/SE continuously sucks 3 watts and thus keeps itself permanently at operating temperature.

On the bottom side we have six unlabelled DIP switch banks ("dual inline packages"), each with four, three or two switches respectively per channel. One might assume that one switch bank is used for setting the impedance of the MC inputs, the second for the MM capacitance and number three for the gain factor. Wrong. Only the user manual reveals how and where to engage the switches for the various pickup types.

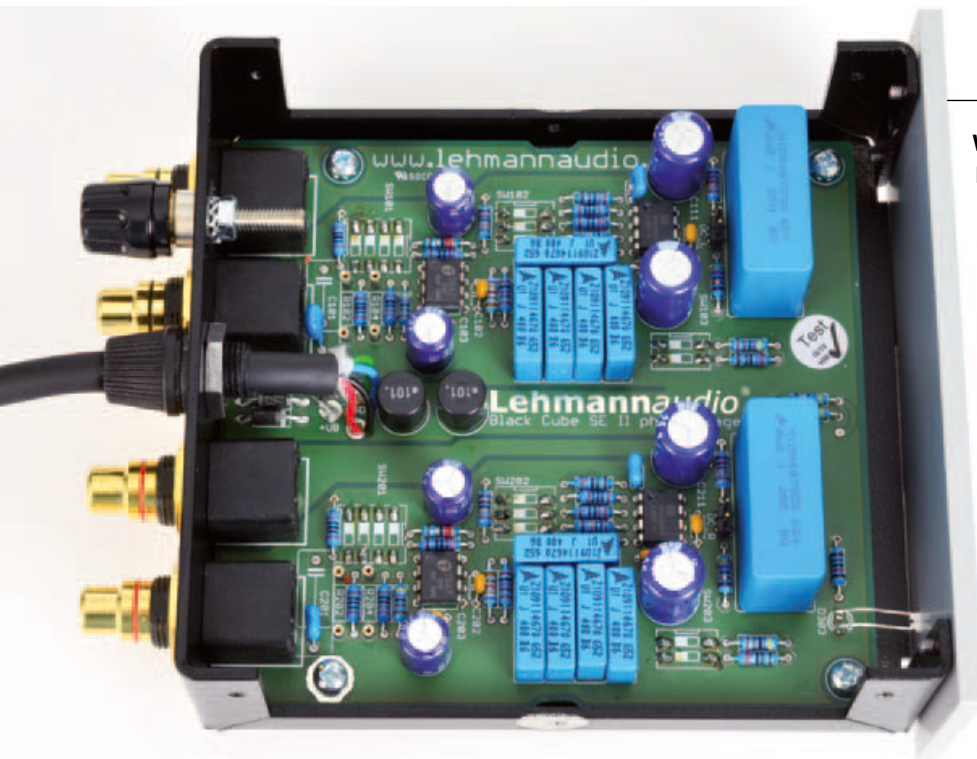
Default values for MM are an exem-

plarily low 100 picofarads, 47 kilohms and 36 or 46 decibels of gain, for MC these are 100 ohms or 1 kilohm and 56 or 66 decibels. For instance, if you wish to terminate your MC with 500 ohms, Lehmann Audio will deliver the appropriate resistors for free. Laudable. However, those who don't dare the solderless insertion of the delicate parts, should have their dealers do it for them. This regards even more the option of bridging the output capacitors which can bring more kick soundwise. But if the downstream amplifier has no DC offset protection filter, this may cause an irreversible damage.

Likewise the 16 subsonic filters are more for professionals – here they can

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE A GOOD SUPPLY:
The additional PWX power supply (left) provides the Black Cube II with increased aplomb.



**WORK IT OUT FIRST:**

Before inserting resistors into the professionally designed dual-channel structure or using the DIP switches, one should definitely read the manual.

**PROFILE**

	LEHMANN AUDIO BLACK CUBE II/SE II
Distribution	Lehmannaudio Tel. +49 (0)221 29493320
www.	lehmannaudio.com
List price	679/949 euros
Warranty period	2 years
Dimensions W x H x D (amplifier)	11.4 x 5.0 x 12.4 cm (4.49 x 1.97 x 4.88 in.)
Weight (amplifier)	0.6 kg (1.32 lbs)

CONNECTIONS

Phono MM/MC	•/•
Line level RCA/XLR	-/-
Digital In	-
Tape Out	-
Out RCA/XLR/adjustable	•/-/-
Headphones	-

FUNCTIONS

Adjustable MC impedance	•
Adjustable MM capacitance	•
Remote control	-
Special features	16 subsonic filter settings

AUDIOGRAM

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> very dynamic and vigorous MM and MC preamp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adaptation to special pickups tricky at times
Sound MM/MC	120/120 (Black Cube SE II)
Features	good
Operation	satisfactory
Workmanship	very good
AUDIO SOUND SCORE	120 POINTS
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	SUPERB

BOTTOM LINE

Lothar Brandt
AUDIO editor

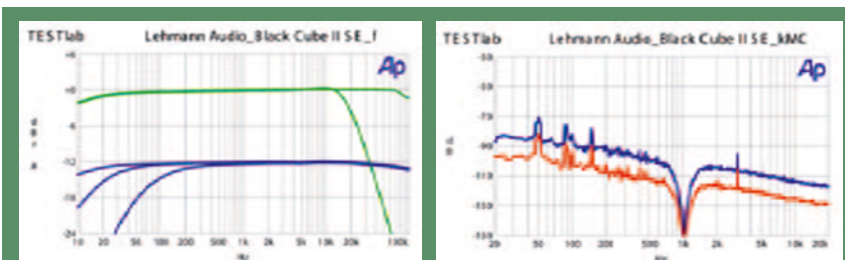
Already in the factory setting, the new Lehmann Audio Black Cube II has given me lots of joy. Together with the PWX power supply, the afterburner for the SE-II version, it's even more fun. The multiple configurations of the subsonic filter and the custom options with plug-in parts are more for professionals. But Norbert Lehmann has also vamped up his evergreen for the average consumer.

switch and prevail to their heart's content. Normally low-frequency rumble, e.g. from warped records, should be sufficiently tamed in the default setting. Other disturbing factors are left out. The 2 metre supply cable with Neutrik connectors allows to set up power supply and preamp away from each other and also far from other power supply units. And the Black Cube II itself will hardly spoil the useful signal by distortion, noise or hum anyway – see measuring lab box.

And so it really let the music burgeon freely. The "Moldau" of Smetana's "Ma Vlast" (all samples in the vinyl section) was jauntily gurgling from its sources,

bouncing over rapids to finally flow so wide and majestic towards the end. In a highly dynamic way the Black Cube II let the "Running Man" rush ahead, and the exquisite wealth of colours of the delicate jazz on Eva Kruse's "New Legend" was also shimmering and shining.

Upgraded to the SE version by the PWX, it was definitely poking the fire again like almost no other phono pre in its price range. Merciless heavy rock by Vanilla Fudge or massive bigband attacks by Count Basie were just about to blaze through the listening room. Pimped in such a hot manner, the Lehmann Black Cube SE II is state-of-the-art.

MEASURING LAB

The Black Cube II has a very broadband frequency response up to beyond 100 kHz. The blue curves on the left show the effects of the different subsonic filter settings. The 83 dBs of S/N ratio with MM and 77 dBs with MC are very good, the MC distortion diagram on right shows little noise. The default values for the MM input capacitance (100 pF) and the MC terminating impedance (100 ohms) are practice-oriented.