

Lehmann Black Cube Decade (£1350)

In this two-box model the usual plastic-cased in-line transformer gives way to Lehmann's PWX II power supply, its frontal aspect uniform with the phono stage itself except for its lack of controls, and notably well-built. You can hide it away if you want, as the power cable that joins the two is 2m long.

As for those controls, one of the three miniature toggles selects an optional low bass cut, -6dB per octave below 60Hz, which you can use to cut speaker-threatening subsonic frequencies arising from warped records, for example. The next selects MM or MC sensitivity while the third gives an extra 10dB of gain if needed. Underneath, an array of DIP switches provides 100ohm or 1kohm loading for MCs or added capacitance for MM.

LITHE AND KICKING

Starting once again with the Harry James big band, I found the bass subjectively less heavy than it had been with either the Acoustic Signature or Aqvox. I put it that way rather than saying the bass was 'lighter' because the Lehmann's balance seemed more correct, and the double bass sound had a relatively lithe, unexaggerated quality that really helped the rhythmic flow.

Perhaps partly related to this, there was a pleasing open quality to the presentation as if the music was being allowed to breathe a bit more. James's solo trumpet had a good feeling of tangible presence in front of his band, and drummer LesDemerle's all-important cymbal sounds had life and realism, insistent but crisply heard, not splashy or over-prominent.

Moving on to 'Motherless Children', the Lehmann seemed in



ABOVE: Here the neat front panel switches select MM or MC sensitivity, add 10dB extra gain, or engage a subsonic filter

general just a little dry, though it was admirably detailed. Its stereo imaging was impressive in terms of width and not without depth at the centre, but somehow did not reveal quite the coherence across the spread that I'd got from from the Aqvox. On the other hand, the bass arguably seemed to benefit from a feeling of more precision, rather than letting it all hang out.

This time, Red Callender kicked off 'Easy Money', his double bass sounded clean and firm, plangent and well described, right down to the dodgy intonation on one note. Rickie Lee's voice was depicted characterfully, but with a presentation that seemed just very slightly recessed compared with some of the others in the group.

Switching over to the MM settings, I found the Lehmann impressive as it clearly had no difficulty in bringing out a well-detailed and convincingly dynamic sound from a moving-magnet cartridge. On the Harry James record there was an appealing sense of speed and snap that made you appreciate the precision, musicianship and swing of the brass players. The bass seemed to be tight and well-timed too, and in the 'Cherokee' drum solo there was a good sense of power and energy.

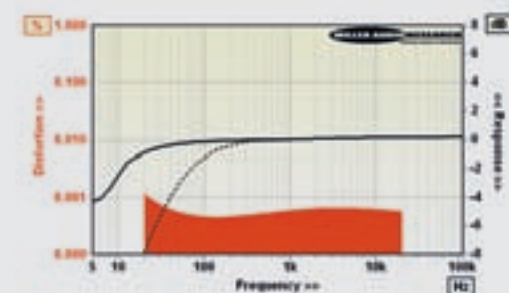
Sound Quality: 85%



HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Previously tested in *HFN* Sep '07, the Black Cube Decade looks to be largely unchanged. Its standard +36dB (+35.3dB) gain is increased to +45.0dB in the 'High' setting which will be more appropriate for most MMs, requiring 5.6mV rather than 17.2mV to raise 1V from its single-ended outputs. The MC setting offers +56.0dB gain which is sufficient for medium-to-high output pickups. Gain may be slightly low but, on the flipside, the Decade offers a generous 160mV/15mV input headroom with MM/MC cartridges together with wide 93dB/77dB A-wtd S/N ratios. Both MM and MC responses show a built-in bass roll-off of -0.9dB/20Hz, a mild tailoring that increases to -7.7dB/20Hz with the LF filter option engaged [dashed trace, below], and an HF that stretches right out to 100kHz within +0.15dB.

Distortion is very low at 0.0005-0.0012% from 20Hz-20kHz on the right channel but, as we discovered three years ago, is rather higher (if not *high*) at 0.033-0.037% through the left. Is this a feature of an asymmetric circuit layout or has importer Henley Designs simply shipped us the same box? **PM**



ABOVE: RIAA-corrected response (black) with low bass filter (dashed) plus distortion versus frequency (red)

Input loading (MM/MC)	47kohm/100pF-1nF / 100-1kohm
Input sensitivity (MM/MC re. 0dBV)	17.2mV / 1.59mV
Input overload (MM/MC)	160mV / 15.0mV
Maximum output (re. 1% THD)	9.1V
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 5mV/500µV in)	92.7dB / 76.8dB
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-0.87dB (-7.7dB) to +0.15dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 0dBV)	0.00045-0.0012%
Power consumption	12W
Dimensions (WHD)	110x44x280mm (each)



ABOVE: The PWX II power unit, on the right, connects to the phono stage itself via a Neutrik locking 4-pin plug. A second power outlet is also provided