

Lehmann Linear SE

The precious skin of the SE is not the only difference to the standard „Linear“



With his Black Cube Linear Norbert Lehmann, the sound engineer from the Bergische Land, became a pioneer in respect of top headphone sound already a short while after the millenium turn. Since then he has not only known how to assert his market position, but also to expand it continuously due to a clever model strategy and a convincing price/quality ratio. Visually, the Linear SE presented here is a dead ringer for its Linear brother tested in STEREO 4/11, unless you don't order – like we did – the “zebrano“ custom version for a premium (350 euros) or some other available special version.

Looking inside it's instantly obvious that Lehmann has done quite some things to make the headphones with their varying sensitivity and impedance sound even better. Lehmann explains the difficulties in creating an electrical environment in which every headphone feels at ease: certain headphone types demand up to 500 times more power for the same volume level than others, whereby their impedance

values may well differ by the factor of 20. With such a requirement specification many a power amplifier would struggle badly. Lehmann solves the problem with a dip switch block located at the bottom side which serves to shift the gain factor in three steps by a maximum of 20 dB. That being said, the flat beau has also done its

homework: high-grade components made by Mundorf and Alps, a fuse from the specialists at AHP, vibration damping SSC feet and noble Mogami cables are suited to inspire confidence. With an output impedance of merely 50 ohms and the well-fed class

A driving stage with zero negative feedback it also performs as a respectable pre-amp which can drive power amps as well as active loudspeakers. If you have only one programme source, you will need no other preamp; the Linear can cover its range of duty in a sovereign manner, too.

This also puts the price into perspective which at first sight just doesn't seem to be a bargain, the more so as the best dynamic headphones cost still way less than high-quality loudspeakers. Plus there is no need for discussions about the size, the look and the place where to put it.

Putting the pro through its paces

We had fun connecting the Cambridge Azur 840 CD player as our direct signal source. It goes without saying that all the devices were phase-checked and linked with high-grade Wireworld cables on the mains side as well, and they were also allowed an appropriate warm-up time. The SE was then fed with the same diet we had given to its valve-loaded contender, and we were rather surprised that the solid-state Lehmann was reproducing the voices

from Maria Tebaldi to Willy de Ville with a gracefulness that challenged the valve for the top dog role in its supreme discipline. We had expected that, owing to its potent output stage, it would not only consort better with the Sennheiser than its rival in terms of coarse dynamics, but also with the magnetostatic model from HiFi Man. However, the fact that it was playing the music with the same ardour, drawing the confines of the room by no means tighter, did surprise us after all. The lightness and precision with which the speaker cones dished out extremely powerful bass tran-



Via the dip switches the gain factor can be raised by up to 20 dB, e.g. for magnetostats

sients, was cheering the heart of every reviewer who is plagued by resonance problems in his home listening room. Coupled with excellent transparency in the mid and treble range and outstanding suppleness over the entire frequency bandwidth, this makes the difference in price over the “standard“ Linear seem absolutely justified.

Michael Lang



Among the high-grade components on the pc board there are also several capacitors from the Cologne-based specialist Mundorf

LEHMANN LINEAR SE

from €1450
 Warranty: 2 years
 Contact: Lehmannaudio
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 www.lehmannaudio.de

FEATURES

RCA inputs and outputs, two ¼" headphone jack sockets, selectable gain factor, volume control, mains switch, operation manual.



STEREO-TEST

SOUND LEVEL 97%

PRICE/PERFORMANCE

★★★★☆
 EXCELLENT