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# Rhinelanders awarded as the best Headphone Amp

One of the world's leading Hi-Fi magazines "What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision" awards the Rhinelander as the best Headphone Amplifier between £300-£500.

We are proud to announce that the Lehmannaudio Rhinelander has been awarded as the best headphone amplifier between £300-£500 by "What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision" in their current issue.

Our Rhinelander headphone amplifier is based on the legendary [Linear](#) which is used by well known professionals like A.J. van den Hul, Andreas Spreer (TACET) and Maarten de Boer (The Masters). The Rhinelander is the right choice for ambitious budget conscious audiophile listeners.

"What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision" is the world's leading independent guide to buying and owning home entertainment products, according to their website.



## Lehmann audio Rhineland

PRICE: £425 CONTACT: 01235 511166  
WEBSITE: LEHMANNAUDIO.COM

**LEHMANN'S PRODUCTS** always seem to be highly individual, and this amp is no exception. OK, it's basically the same as all the other units here in essential operation, but it can be reconfigured (by means of internal jumpers) to serve as a single-input preamp. If the jumpers are set to 'in' you have, instead, the option of selecting between two inputs, which for many users could remove the need for a separate preamp. Gain is also adjustable via internal jumpers. Maximum output is impressive into low impedances, with the ability to drive nearly half a watt into 15 ohms. The distortion rises, but that hardly matters because your ears will have overloaded long ago! Under more sensible conditions, distortion is as low as any. Output impedance is quite low at 6 ohms, which should ensure consistent operation into any normal headphone load.

Although the basic component count doesn't immediately look like twice the value of the others in this test, sound quality does seem to justify the outlay as this is clearly an exceptionally capable device. The basics are all there, with detail, imaging, rhythm and so on clearly in very good order, but above and beyond that there is a magnificent sweep and assurance to the sound that's as effective with a Schubert song as it is with glam rock or a big band. Perhaps, more than with any affordable headphone amp we can recall, the sound just keeps you there listening after bedtime and you'll find yourself enjoying familiar recordings as never before.

**VERDICT** AN UNUSUALLY CLASSY little box which drives any headphones with the greatest panache, but also has the subtlety to bring out fine details

★★★★★



## Musical Fidelity V-Can/V-PSU

PRICE: £100/£152 CONTACT: 01279 501111  
WEBSITE: MUSICALFIDELITY.COM

**ATON ISN'T A LOT TO ASK** for a headphone amp and one might expect a few corners to have been cut internally. The circuit board material is not the fanciest, but in fact the circuit mounted on it is not a million miles short of that used for the other amps here, featuring as it does a pair of medium-power transistors per channel in classic power amp configuration, driven by decent-grade op-amps. The rest of the components are nothing fancy, but are perfectly respectable.

There are no additional features or options, but you do still get a line output connected directly to the input. V Series distributor Armour was keen for us to try the V-Can with the optional V-PSU, which is basically a large mains transformer and some rectifiers in a box, intended to replace the simple wall-wart supplied as standard with the V-Can: the V-PSU can power three V Series units at once.

With either power supply there's plenty of output drive and head-rattling levels can be achieved with low-impedance headphones: high-impedance ones are driven to about the same maximum as the other amps in the group. And one can easily be tempted to play this amp pretty loud, because it has a lively get-up-and-go to it that just encourages unrestrained rock'n'roll listening. It's good at other musical styles too, but less convincing with really subtle stuff than with big musical landscapes. Detail is good, maybe not quite up to the standards of the Lehmann, say, but certainly enjoyable. The V-PSU adds some finesse, though unless you own at least a couple of V Series units it is, perhaps, hard to justify in value terms. ●

**VERDICT** EXCELLENT VALUE, with detail and tonal discrimination only just short of the best. Sound really comes to life with lively, big-scale tracks

★★★★★



A dedicated headphone amp is an easily justifiable purchase along with any fine headphone. Built-in headphone outputs on CD players, amps etc. can often end up sounding quite muted and lifeless.

As you can see, all the amps tested here are badge-winners and will give an obvious lift in performance. In fact, if you listen more than very occasionally to headphones you'll enjoy the results.

Do go easy on listening levels, though: with good headphones and amps it's easy to get carried away and end up listening at potentially dangerous loudness. Remember, quality over quantity!



**H**eadphones carve out a relatively unnoted existence at the edge of the hifi scene. In this area loudspeakers are still being regarded as the standard on which high end fans spend considerable sums of money. Yet the fact is often overlooked that by using headphones, one can get much farther on the audiophile road for much less money. Because of their niche place many headphones need to settle for the corresponding output of an integrated amplifier or a CD player and thus can't nearly tap their full potential, for with headphones even the slightest imperfection will go straight to the ear.

Five years ago Norbert Lehmann presented the Black Cube Linear, a headphone amplifier that instantly made it into the league of the best in its class. True, 700 Euro are no chicken feed and so Norbert Lehmann, who already made quite a splash with the reasonably-priced Black Cube phono preamp, remembered his roots and designed an entry-level headphone amplifier. The »Rhinelander« (350 Euro, Lehmann Audio, 02202/2806240) comes in a much smaller case as it is fed by an external power supply

and does not draw its current from a massive toroidal mains transformer like the Linear. However, this is no economy pack, since it also features a discrete Class A output stage; plus it routes the entrusted signal through MKP capacitors where necessary, its PCBs are double-sided (and hence more expensive to produce) for short signal paths and its headphone socket is another solid product made by Neutrik.

Next to the mentioned front socket is a small toggle switch that lets you select between two unbalanced inputs located on the rear side of the unit. Things get really exciting when you take off the cover and exploit the possibilities of the little DIP switches and the jumper on the PCB. The first serve to select the gain factor in two steps, whereas the jumper turns the second input into a true output, making the Rhinelander a puristic single-source preamplifier.

Soundwise it's nothing short of fascinating what this little box does with various headphones. In terms of punch, resolution and spaciousness it clearly distances itself from onboard solutions, underscoring hands down its *raison d'être*. However, what it can't do – and in this respect it mirrors exactly its big brother Linear – is a constructive post-creation or enhancement of a music sig-

nal. Neither does it conjure up a groove nor unfold shimmering colours or infinite spaces, but it always dogs the trail of the canned music it is fed with. No wonder that the Linear, which is now available in an updated version, can handle all this still a tad better and this is perfectly alright in view of its price (718 Euro). Yet the genes of a sound editor can't be overheard.

The Rhinelander is extremely good at the accurate structuring of rooms where the positions of the musicians are easily

## Top-down Complement

»Rhinelander« – the affordable  
headphone amplifier from  
Lehmann Audio

recognised. And it's powerful, too: it could even drive a 600 ohms headphone without sounding stressed. Used as a preamp – this shall be added here – it also does a pretty good job and sounds really nice, provided that the cable runs to the power amplifier won't get too long. I have never run across such a package for such a bargain, and so I can only send my best congratulations to Bergisch Gladbach. *Stefan Gawlick* ■

