

Canned Treat

MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANv8 (£349)

Keith Howard listens to a revamped version of the X-CAN headphone amp – a new favourite?

In part, at least, this latest generation of X-CAN headphone amplifier from Musical Fidelity – its predecessor was the v3, by the way, not the v7 – owes its existence to *Hi-Fi News*. Back in September '07 I wrote a feature about headphone measurement, to accompany a group test of headphones. I made the point that the surprisingly common practice of incorporating

state buffer downstream of the double triode input stage. PM's measurements confirm this.

That isn't the only change. In the first place the new v8 – which is slightly deeper than its predecessor but still modestly sized at 87x180x240mm (hwd) – has had a mild cosmetic overhaul, the small volume control knob of the v3 being replaced by a larger, shallower item. Other front panel changes include the addition of a second quarter-inch

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significant output resistance within headphone amps is a bad idea because it results in audible frequency response errors with many headphones.

One person who took the message on board was Musical Fidelity's Antony Michaelson. In planning the v8 he determined to ensure that it would deliver an effectively flat response regardless of the impedance variations of the headphones it is used with. So the output impedance of the v8 has been reduced to just 2ohm (from 30ohm) by adding a solid-

jack socket, allowing the v8 to drive two pairs of headphones, and a small toggle switch that selects between two inputs: line level as before and, new, a USB input that allows the v8 to be used with a computer. I also noted that the v8 is a lot less microphonic than my v3 sample – a gripe I'd also mentioned to AM.

SOUND QUALITY

So far as sound quality goes everything I have to say about the v8 is positive, with one exception. The review sample was prone to making odd noises via the right channel in particular. Usually the whistling and

burbling died away within a few seconds but, of course, it shouldn't be there at all.

This gremlin aside, the v8 delivered superlative sound quality an obvious notch up from the v3. I used it principally with the Audio Technica ATH-AD700 which won the September group test and they made a fine combination, delivering some of the best headphone sound I've experienced.

I began by listening to Elton John's 'Sixty Years On', one of the tracks I used for the group test which really separated the wheat from the chaff. Via the v8 it had an even bigger, more spacious soundstage that left the v3's rendition sounding closed-in and a little rough and amorphous by comparison. The v8 sounded sweeter and more natural, revealing a warmth to the string and vocal sound that the v3 only hinted at.

This vocal and spatial verisimilitude was even more striking on 'The Turtle Dove' [Scarborough Fair, Regis Records; previously *Bushes and Briars* on Hyperion]. Tenor James Griffett's voice was utterly convincing and Tony Faulkner's fine recording set it in an equally persuasive acoustic space.

Natural tonal balance and persuasive imaging (for headphones) also made their mark on Decca's recording of *Peter and the Wolf* with Sir Malcolm Sargent conducting and Sir Ralph Richardson narrating, an even older recording from 1970. Never before have I heard the difference in acoustic between the hall – with low-frequency noise from passing traffic – and the space in which the narration was recorded so clearly delineated.

A significant step forward from its popular predecessor, the X-CAN v8 demands recommendation if you want to extract the very best from dynamic headphones. Ⓜ

AUDIO FILE

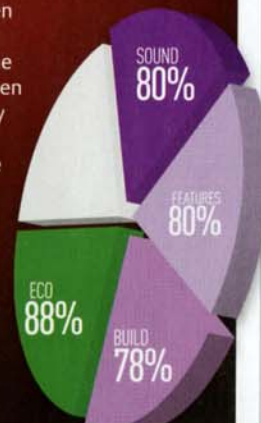
Low output impedance hybrid valve/transistor headphone amplifier with USB digital input

Price: £349

Made and supplied by: Musical Fidelity

Telephone: 020 8900 2866

Web: www.musicalfidelity.com



hi-fineWS
HIGHLY
COMMENDED



HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Maximum Output Level	>7.5Vrms
Output Impedance	1.5ohm
Input Sensitivity (for 0dBV)	208mV
Frequency Response (20Hz–100kHz)	–0.4dB to –2.2dB
A-wtd S/N ratio (for 0dBV)	94.2dB
Distortion (0dBV, 20Hz–20kHz)	0.00018–0.0053%