



Rather special



Pro-Ject's new flagship phono stage is very sophisticated, but **Ed Selley** thinks that its charms are rather easier to understand

We tested the original RS Phono stage back in *HFC* 368 and it's an indication of how good it was that it still remains part of the Pro-Ject range. The RS2 arrives not to replace it, but to supplement it. This is a single-input design, but has been constructed as fully dual mono from front to back. Input and output are via RCA and XLR and the RS2 builds on the original by moving to a discrete output stage

The external power supply improves fine detail and makes the top end more refined

with no op amps in the circuit. This is combined with passive equalisation – something more commonly seen in valve-based designs – which Pro-Ject says increases the accuracy of the EQ curve. As the RS2 also has a Decca EQ setting built in, there are two separate circuits to allow this.

Befitting a flagship, user adjustability is broad. Options include continuously variable impedance adjustment as well as multiple capacitance and gain

settings – allowing for use with some more unusual cartridge outputs. It's an impressive degree of functionality, but does leave the RS2 looking somewhat fussy. The front panel has multiple controls, all marked by blue LEDs. It's logical enough to use, but not terribly elegant. Build quality is exceptionally good, though.

The RS2 can be upgraded by adding the Power Box RS Phono power supply. As well as the 20V output required for the Phono Box, it also offers a 15V option that can be used on a number of Pro-Ject's turntables, offering the scope to upgrade two devices while reducing the mains plugs in use.

Sound quality

Initially running without the Power Box and connected to a Michell GyroDec, Vertere SG-1 arm (*HFC* 465) and Vertere Mystic cartridge, the RS2 very quickly reveals where the extra money has gone. Listening to Poppy Ackroyd's *Resolve*, it does a fabulous job of not being the story. Pretty much any definable element of 'personality' can be attributed to the equipment around it rather than the phono stage itself. Even at the standards of the price point, this is an admirably transparent device.

Such fragments of definable character that it does possess are positive ones too. The extremely deep note at the start of Dead Can Dance's *Song Of The Stars* has immense weight and scale here and there is a convincing three dimensionality to the presentation that is not tied to simple scale. It makes as much sense of Hayden Thorpe's intimate *Diviner* as it does the bigger and more expansive *Fink Meets The Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra*. There are points where you can subjectively say it doesn't feel as lively as, say, Cyrus' Phono Signature (*HFC* 405), but this can as easily be ascribed to the latter showing a personality that the Pro-Ject is quite deliberately working to avoid.

Adding the external power supply the difference isn't night and day, but there are improvements. Fine detail retrieval is better and where something like Sleater Kinney's *The Centre Won't Hold* feels slightly 'hot' running on the stock PSU, it becomes a little sweeter and more refined across the top end. Even if you don't have a Pro-Ject turntable to benefit from the second output, this is still likely to be a worthwhile upgrade and it has the advantage of being something you can select as and when you need it.

Conclusion

The Phono Box RS2 faces a stiffer challenge than the original RS because it occupies a significantly higher price point and goes up against rivals with similarly impressive specs. Even with these provisos, however, it can more than hold its own. Its transparency is genuinely impressive, even judged at the price and it's lack of colouration is potentially very useful indeed. This is the product you buy when you're already satisfied with the tonal balance of your system and simply need a well-specified phono stage to complete it. The RS2 makes good on its promise and delivers a quite superlative performance ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Pro-Ject Phono Box RS2/Power Box RS Phono

ORIGIN
Austria/Slovakia

TYPE
MM/MC phono stage/power supply upgrade

WEIGHT
1.6kg/2.3kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
206 x 72 x 200mm
201 x 72 x 195mm

FEATURES

- Moving-magnet and coil input
- Balanced and unbalanced connections
- Discrete output

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Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Superbly refined and accurate sonics; features; solid build

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Fussy controls; can sound a little sterile

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** A reference-level phono stage that offers an exceptional level of performance and very flexible spec

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL

