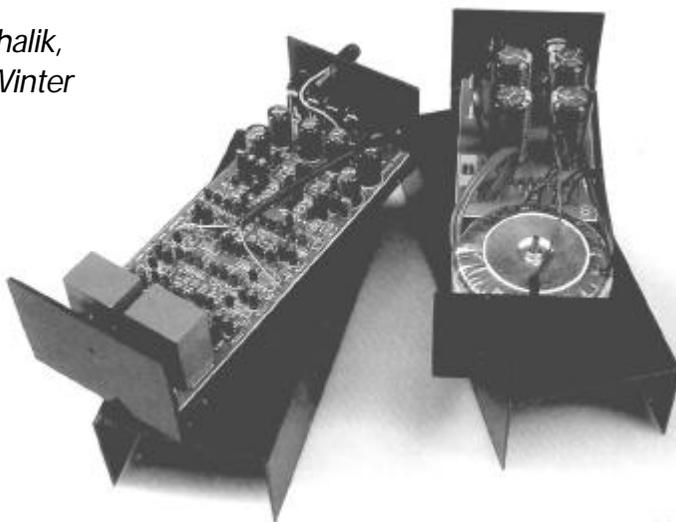


Heed Quasar

reviewed by Ulrich Michalik,
photographed by Rolf Winter

It costs less than two metres of mains cable anywhere else, sounds like a world beater, it's called Heed Quasar, and is possibly one of the biggest bargains on today's high-end market.



The fact that the guys at Heed Audio know their business should now be obvious to the readers of *image hi-fi*, at least since our review of the Orbit psu (6/2000): a Rega Planar 3 equipped with this device took pricier record decks virtually by storm, and what is more, without putting insurmountable financial hurdles in the way of vinyl lovers. More prosaically: this analogue performance-enhancing drug is bloody cheap in comparison with rival products, not least those selling in huge quantities.

The Hungarian manufacturer saw an even bigger challenge in designing a reasonably priced phono stage.

“The signal processing of cartridges is one of the most delicate jobs in amplification”, says Alpár Huszti, spokesman of Heed Audio, all the more so because it isn't done merely by boosting a few hundred microvolts to a few hundred millivolts. The 60 dB necessary for that – a thousandfold amplification in fact – also gives rise to huge noise problems. What is more, it is not a relatively simple linear but a frequency-related amplification job. It is well known that an equalisation curve is applied in the cutting of LPs, whereas a boost of around 20 dB in bass response is necessary when the disk is actually played. No wonder the range of first-class

phono stages is fairly easy to survey. Before proceeding to the question of whether the arrival of this Heed component has changed the face of the phono stage market, let's make one thing clear: at the moment, you can't get more phono stage for less.

The Quasar is a two-box design with separate cases for the power supply unit and the actual amplification circuits, which are not based around the ICs used by everybody else at this price-level, but built as a discrete design in the best audiophile traditions. It also means that it is built in dual-mono configuration from the power supply upwards, including separate earthing throughout!

The Quasar works both with MM (the fairly high capacity of 470 pF did not bother my Linn K9 at all) and MC cartridges of all kinds due to its three different settings for sensitivity (100, 220 and 600 microvolts) and load (100, 220 and 470 ohms). The various settings can be applied by jumpers on the PCB, and can be freely combined.

The Quasar is equally armed for all eventualities at its output end: pre-amps can be fed via its “Low Out”, whilst its much louder “High Out” can drive power amps directly.

If you have a look inside the psu, you will immediately realize what the Hungarians mean by “battery-like” power supply. The unit is constructed around a massive 60 VA toroidal transformer with low-density magnetic field and minimal dispersion, as well as 2 capacitors per channel with a 40,000 μ F filtering capacity in total. These capacitors, in order to reduce internal resistance and ESR (Equivalent Series Resistance) to a minimum, are connected in parallel.

A word about optics and build quality. Of course, more ‘lifestyle’-oriented components can be found elsewhere, but this unpretentious Hungaro-duo has a solid heavy-metal charm throughout. Finish is, both electronically and mechanically, first class. No screech, no rattles, and

the only thing you might wish for is a removable power cable – not for hooking up some idiot-wire, of course, but to provide a bit more flexibility in its placement.

Such trivialities are gone with the wind when the Quasar starts to play music. The thing is incredibly fast, its fine dynamics are more nimble, and its rhythm is crisper than anything on this side of £800. Bass has real grip, wonderful body and precision, and is coal-black down under, mid-band is bold and punchy, upperbass is just fabulous. Going into the suboctaves, contours soften up to a minimal degree, but there is no lack of pure power. Impulse-shocks can never upset it – its generous power supply would never allow that to happen.

And the Quasar is quiet. Not as dead quiet as the Linn Linto but a quantum-leap less crackly, pasted, and blotted than many a high-end braggart box with a chic logo stuck on the front. This astonishing lack of noise is presumably godfather to the Heed's fantastic sense of space. The soundstage is not only vastly wide, unbelievably deep and quite high, but it shines with an inner composure, imperturbability and plasticity only available otherwise from the very best phono stages. I rank the Quasar among them without hesitation, even at the risk of being throttled by the high-price lobby.

And I would enthuse even further. The midrange has colour and fire, aura and attack, and the top, even if not the most extended, delivers detail en masse, is meticulously clean, and possesses, what one rarely finds, air and (!) luminosity.

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The Heed Quasar is the answer to the fervent prayer of all cost-conscious analogue fans: it does MM, it does MC, it is flexible, it is robustly built, and sonically – a phenomenon!

image info

Heed Quasar Phono Stage

Input.....2 x chinch (MM/MC)
Output.....2 x chinch (High/Low)
Spec.facilities...ext. psu, adjustable
MC Sensitivity/Impedance
Dimensions.....9/7/23 cm (each)
Weight.....1 kg (amp), 1,5 kg (psu)
UK Price.....£550
Warranty.....3 years

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