



**FIDELITY AUDIO HPA-100
HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER
£350**

Headphones can be a saviour when younger members of the family are tucked up in bed and you have a yearning to play Led Zeppelin at midnight, but they're also wonderful when you want to escape into a cocoon of music, or if you want to hear music in a different way to that heard via your trusty loudspeakers.

As with any hi-fi component, there are good and bad headphones to choose from, but purchasing the right set of cans is just half the battle. If you then plug them into a poor headphone amplifier, which is

point of saying that it can easily drive Sennheiser's HD650, so I thought I'd put that assertion to the test and did so while comparing the HPA-100 with the Musical Fidelity V-Can, one of the best headphone amplifier performers in its £100 bracket and perfectly capable of putting headphone amplifiers two to three times that value to shame.

Running a series of vinyl discs through both units, it was immediately noticeable that the Fidelity offered a more focused performance than the V-Can. The soundstage was well organised, the music was calmer in its approach to the music, while the more balanced presen-

tones that acted as musical punctuation.

While the V-Can can be incisive when it comes to upper frequency tracking, those same areas sounded rather thin and weedy when compared to the Fidelity. The latter enriched the upper midrange and treble regions, offering a broader insight. So, whereas the V-Can provided a laser-like clarity, digging into the midrange detail and lifting it to the surface, the Fidelity widened that laser, allowing each piece of revealed

detail to express itself fully and to expose a personality. In effect, turning the laser-like details in a rainbow effect.

The story continued on CD where I tested a range of excessively peak limited chart CDs that, on a neutral system, would sound harsh and bright. The V-Can was both penetrating and detailed within the digital domain; it never waited for the detail to come to it, it went off and searched for the stuff but it, in turn, did suffer from a well lit presentation which allowed the upper frequencies to dominate the track excessively. The Fidelity however, reigned in that excess by injecting the musical mix with added bass and then supplemented that

Zoom out

