

FIDELITY AUDIO HPA-500 HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER £550

Presented within a neat, compact chassis spanning 104x56x245mm and weighing just 1.73 kg, this hand-built headphone amplifier is a dual-mono design with a large toroidal transformer and a host of audiophile components including high-grade metal can op-amps and in-house produced SPower low noise regulation. These fancy passive components do need running in however, so you'll need to fire up the HPA-500 for a good week or two to get it giving its best. Sporting a full size 6.3mm headphone socket, the Fidelity Audio unit also offers a choice of power LED colour indicators: green, red or orange!

By nature, it's more incisive than its Musical Fidelity X-CANS v8 (£400) rival, offering a more searching and analytical presentation that doesn't flatter CD, and/or clinical sounding headphones. Excellent as they are, my reference Sennhesier HD650 headphones fall into the

latter category, so I used my superior vinyl source to smooth things out. Via LP the HPA-200 gave deep, subterranean lows, and a rich tone to the midrange with a fine vocal performance that offered real emotional impact. Lovely resonant strings, dripping with harmonics, showed the HPA-500's naturally incisive midband at its best. It carried plucked rock guitar strings beautifully, showing the obvious sense of effort and application of the players, plus a lovely timbre to the bass guitar. Treble was crisp and spacious, with loads of atmosphere. An excellent high end headphone amplifier this, the real issue is that it needs a top

notch source and headphones to show it at its best. **PR**

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