# REK-O-KUT PHONO PRE-AMP: THE UGLY DUCKLING THAT PERFORMS

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For a very long time, I've been using various phono pre-amps for my main turntable set up. Some of them sound decent, but too many of them carry a "signature sound" of the item's engineer. I

don't like that. As someone who lives and breathes calibration, with a background in music and music production, I want accuracy. I want "garbage in - garbage out". Not only want, but need.

Alas, the phono stages that can achieve what I need are all beyond what I'm willing to pay. Therefore, for the longest time, I have been using an oldie but goodie McIntosh MX119 pre-pro. It is not a dedicated phono pre-amp per-se, but it gives me the sound I want. The problem is that I need more than one unit in my house since I have three listening areas.

By pure dumb-luck, I came across the Rek-O-Kut Professional Moving Magnet Preamp mkIV for merely (approximately) US$79, or about $200 Canadian, including shipping from the U.S. I thought that if it could help provide decent sound for the 250 or so records I own, it would be worth it.

The performance of this unit was a big surprise. Not only is it affordable, but the sound is phenomenal for the money. And that's even considering that the appearance of the metal case and silk-screened fonts used for the unit screams "low-grade." It surely doesn't sound "audiophile grade," but the designer did not take any short cuts, or build a unit with low quality sound. Of course, you won't find input and output jacks that are made of space-age material alloy, or a face-plate that weighs more than the innards of the unit itself. What you will find is honest-to-goodness engineering, with carefully chosen circuits and parts with accurate sound for music professionals and sound engineers alike.



While I completely embrace vintage technologies (read: class A or tube-based design) and believe that some pieces were designed to be as good as they could possibly be, I don't deny that more recent developments can offer solutions that measurably equal or better an antiquated design.

Modern vinyl formulations are very good; regulated power supplies are quiet; exotic tonearms and cartridges can be miraculously revealing, and transistors can sound really good. Hence the need for a highly accurate phono stage. Considering the asking price of the Rek-O-Kut Professional Moving Magnet Preamp mkIV, it was a good idea to use transistors, and I welcome that. If I want tube colouration, I can always add that later by using my Musical Fidelity X3 tube buffer.

According to the spec sheet,the Rek-O-Kut includes:

*Highly accurate RIAA record compensation (+/- 0.25 dB)

*Includes 39 inch 43 pF/ft interconnect cable.

*THD of merely 0.025%

*S/N Ratio of 80 dB or better with 45 dB crosstalk at ANY frequency

*Input matched to most high-quality pickups.

*7 Hz subsonic filter to cut ultra low rumble.

*High-quality, gold-plated RCA jacks.

*Discrete component design.

*Power: 100-240 VAC, 50/60 Hz, (automatic switching)

*Low hum steel case.

There are some measurements I found on Esoteric Sound's page that compare the noise and RIAA accuracy of their little black box against a rebuilt McIntosh tube unit, and a later transistor model. If you look at the charts, it would give you the impression that the Rek-O-Kut is "as good as" the two McIntosh units. I have zero experience with McIntosh tube phono stages, so I can't agree or disagree with that statement. I do, however, own a McIntosh MX119 pre-pro with built in phono pre-amp. All I know is that this phono stage is audibly better than the built-in phono stage in all the receivers I've been using, including the McIntosh MX119. For some reason, I hear less clicks and pops from the same recordings played on my non-audiophile Technics SL-2000 turntable with Ortofon Blue cartridge.

My quest has ended, as I am now using the Rek-O-Kut as my phono stage. As budget permits, I will buy another two for my other listening areas. It's amazing what a US$79 unit can do.