

PRE-MADONNA

Simon Pope encounters the 'budget' preamplifier from ATC, the CA2.

ATC first plied their respected trade in the world of professional audio monitors and domestic 'speakers'. They've also recently dabbled in electronics with a small range of pre and power amps, plus an integrated. The CA2 featured here is billed as their 'budget' preamplifier. At £750 it's not my idea of 'budget' but when you considered that their other preamp is in the £3,000 region the 'budget' tag doesn't seem too far-fetched.

The CA2 is a very smart and compact bit of kit, robust and well built but also sleek and smaller than your average sized hi-fi component. Its output is only via XLR type connectors, favoured by active loudspeakers. However, decent cable companies will knock you up a set of your favourite interconnects in XLR to phono configuration for a little extra.

The CA2 can, of course, be used as a direct connection to active monitors but it can also be used as a very handy standard hi-fi preamp. There are five line level inputs all with unbalanced RCA phono input

sockets, although for £280 extra the Aux 2 can be transformed into a moving magnet or moving coil phono input. These are selected neatly by a digital, five position rotary control or via the supplied infra red remote. There's also a handy headphone jack which can be used with (should you wish!) or without the main speakers. The volume control on the front plate is a motorised model and can be controlled via the supplied remote.

Soundwise the CA2 is very good and has all the right characteristics of a decent preamp - in other words it doesn't have any! Too many preamps fall into the trap of being too complicated and often this affects the sound in one way or another. The CA2 has the just right amount of facilities not to result in this. It sounds open and full but is also wonderfully transparent, an essential feature in a preamplifier, in my view. I was also pleased to hear that it didn't



have the forwardness and edge that some 'professional' equipment can have. Detail, in true professional tradition, was well conveyed - all the panned tape effects in Paul Weller's version of 'I Walk On Gilded Splinters' were fantastically highlighted.

I was pleasantly surprised by the CA2. Good preamps are few and far between, especially in solid-state form. If you're after a high quality audiophile preamp that won't cost the earth you could do a heck of a lot worse than to check this one out.

ATC CA2 £750

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MEASURED PERFORMANCE

There isn't a great deal to measure in line level preamps, because in electronic terms they don't do much, at least when there are no tone controls. The CA2 provides a modest gain of x2 at full volume, so with a power amp of 1V input sensitivity the CA2 would have an input sensitivity half that, or 500mV. This is around the norm. nowadays, although to be a bit more flexible a gain of x3-x4 is more useful, allowing old, low output sources like cassette decks and tuners of yore to be hooked up, should the need arise. After all, not everyone has, or wants to use bright,

shiny new kit.

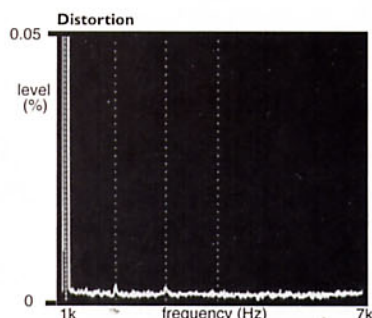
With such low gain the CA2 inevitably produces little noise, has excellent channel separation and minimal distortion, right down at the bottom limit of the measuring equipment used. It is a wide bandwidth design; band limiting has not been applied.

Measurement showed the CA2 offers a nice, clean and simple performance free of problems. **NK**

CD/tuner/aux.

Frequency response 5Hz-150kHz
Separation 90dB

Noise	-102dB
Distortion	0.003%
Gain	x2



World Verdict



A great preamp for the money with an open and transparent sound. Good looking and very user friendly, too.