

Quad QC-24P (£1200)

Nothing could look more unashamedly retro than the Quad QC-24P, which like the current TwentyFour preamp is a visual echo of the original 1950s Quad 22. On this phono stage, the large front panel knob actually is a volume control, which comes into play if you choose the 'variable' output phonos on the back, offered as an alternative to the fixed output pair also provided.

Also on the rear are separate MM and MC input sockets and an MM/MC selector button, along with the more unusual feature of a three-position sensitivity switch, effective in both modes. As with all but two of the units in this group test, the extra gain for the MC setting is provided by a transformer at the input.

REAL ATTACK

On the Harry James record the Quad gave a quite coherent view of the brass and sax sections, and was not lacking in punch although it somehow lacked the vivacity of the Lector or Icon. Both the brass and percussion had some real attack, but the effect seemed controlled rather than uninhibited.

Moving to Clapton's 'Motherless' bottleneck extravaganza, the Quad gave you a pretty good feel of the pent-up energy that's unleashed at the start of the track, and then conveyed the driving rhythm with a bass that was tight and controlled.

Yet it didn't seem particularly revealing of inner detail in the complex and noisy accompaniment, and I felt that the slide guitar should have had more sheen and sizzle.

'Easy Money' from Rickie Lee Jones had the Quad again sounding clean and coherent, the bass firm and accurate on the intro, and well under control. The vocal was solidly presented, while the accompanying instruments were quite well characterised, even though they seemed to inhabit a relatively constricted space.

With the Barbirolli record, the Quad showed its pedigree with a seemingly neutral balance, though it had more muscle than sparkle. Its presentation of the soundstage never seemed quite open enough to give a real feeling of place or occasion. The strings could actually sound quite strident, with little feeling of air around them.

Changing to the Koetsu Black, the Quad didn't stand in the way of the cartridge's gutsy delivery, but still sounded smooth and controlled, with a powerful but not unruly bass.

With the Roksan MM, the Quad delivered a powerful and driving bass sound, which was both accurate and well extended, with a midrange that was clear and detailed – if somehow not particularly expressive. Its virtues were heard on the Harry James disc, where it resolved the peaky horn section passages without degenerating into a blare.

Sound Quality: 75%

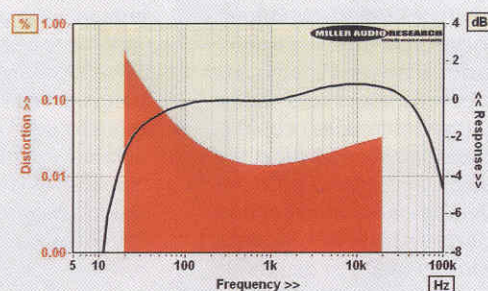


ABOVE: Quad's 'Classic' fascia bears the name TwentyFour P, but this model is usually known more succinctly as QC-24P

HI-FI NEWS LAB REPORT

Offering both fixed and variable output options delivering up to 16V at 1% THD (from a modest 500ohm source impedance, increasing to 7kohm at 20Hz) the QC-24P also provides six input sensitivity settings, largely thanks to its complement of four 6111 double triodes. With both low/medium/high sensitivity options (increasing in 6dB steps) across both MM and MC inputs, the 24P offers a gain range from +45.5dB (MM, low) to +77.3dB (MC, high) with healthy input overload margins of 90mV/9mV (MM/MC, low). This makes the QC-24P the most accommodating of tube phono stages in our group test.

The equalised response [black trace, below] shows a broad treble lift centred at +0.8dB/10kHz, which may add some 'brilliance', together with a -2.6dB/20Hz bass roll-off. By 5Hz the response is 20dB down – a sensible attenuation if LP warps are not to become troublesome. In practice it's probably the high 7kohm/20Hz output impedance and increase in THD from 0.015% (midrange) to 0.45% (bass) that will most obviously impact on its subjective LF performance. PM



ABOVE: RIAA-corrected response from 5Hz-100kHz (black) plus distortion versus frequency (red) from 20Hz-20kHz



ABOVE: Here a small push button selects standard MM or MC gain, while the knob near the centre gives high, low, or medium gain options in either mode

Input loading (MM/MC)	47kohm/100pF / 10ohm
Input sensitivity (MM/MC re. 0dBV)	1.33–5.31mV / 0.136–0.55mV
Input overload (MM/MC)	90mV / 9mV
Maximum output (re. 1% THD)	16.0V
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 5mV/500µV in)	77.5dB / 71.4dB
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	-2.6dB to -0.70dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 0dBV)	0.046–0.013%
Power consumption	14W
Dimensions (WHD)	220x90x300mm