



“There is not a lot of power to spare for less sensitive speakers or for high volume, but what you do have is extremely usable.”

components together for simultaneous power switching, with power status indicated by blue LEDs. The two units feel solid and their simplicity, cool running and good build could be the key to a long and reliable working lifetime.

SOUND QUALITY

Some warming up was tried, but both Boxes are not particularly responsive to being left on for extended periods. The sound starts out okay, and changes a little, though it is possible that the limited inherent resolution of the two units helped mask subtle warming up effects.

There are some significant limitations, of course. There is not a lot of power to spare for less sensitive speakers or for high volume, but what you do have is extremely usable. The available power is delivered cleanly, and unless you go into hard clipping, which we wouldn't advise, the Pro-Ject is capable of forays into the reasonably loud part of the volume spectrum with no apparent ill effects or signs of distress. Other limitations include the limited number of inputs, no headphone socket and no tape circuit. Any recorder should be able to provide a unity gain audio pass-through, but there are bound to be some effects on sound quality. On the plus side, the tiny size of the units makes building a small system for use in secondary locations extremely simple, and space-efficient.

On the whole, sound quality is gratifying. The midrange and

treble in particular are clean, agile and moderately detailed, with just an occasional hint of grain or undue upper mid emphasis. There's little that could be described as colouration, and there are few signs of the digital origins of the sound. There's no shortage of bass either, but this is where the Pro-Ject comes off the rails to a degree. While the rest of the audio band is transparent, tonally neutral and even moderately dynamic, the bass has a very obvious personality. It sounds slow, detached and rather leaden, and is palpably lacking in detail and the ability to react quickly to changes in recorded musical structure. The difference in sound quality between the low and the mid/high frequency region is really very marked.

The reasons for this don't take to long to understand. It seems clear, partly from previous experience with digital amplifiers, that the controlling factor here is the limited performance of the power supplies. The low-grade plug-top supplies are just not man enough to perform when the amplifier is asked to deliver substantial amounts of current. Indeed, this is something that other amplifier manufacturers realised at an early stage in the history of digital amplification. Sony, for example, made a landmark multichannel digital amplifier that was as big and as heavy as was then available using tiny credit card-sized digital

power amplifier modules. Almost all of the weight and bulk was taken up with massive edge-mounted toroidal transformers and other PSU-related furniture.



Is the PSU issue a deal breaker? Well perhaps not. Because of the modular nature of the design, it is open to Pro-Ject to design some new power supplies that come closer to making the most of the intrinsic capabilities of the core design, which it could then sell as upgrades.

These two units are inexpensive, well-built and, musically, will make you smile. What lets each down is the power supply. The Pre Box and Amp Box are well worth considering as long as you have a clear understanding of the strengths and limitations. In the meantime, this is our report on what we have heard, and hopefully the maker will take the hint. **HFC**

Alvin Gold



VERDICT

SOUND >> 75%

FEATURES >> 82%

BUILD >> 86%

VALUE >> 80%

PRO
 With decent mid/treble output these are simple, ultra compact and flexible. There's also the ability to add extra inputs and improve the sound with monoblock or valve power using add-on modules.

CON
 Bass region sounds slow and opaque, and is clearly out of character with the rest of the audio band.

CONCLUSION
 Probably the smallest and neatest pre- and power amplifiers you can buy, they are ultra simple to configure and use. They work well in concert with conventional source components and speakers, but suffer from limited functionality in standard form.

HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 79%