

hardware review

## Accuphase C-57 vinyl finesse Japanese style

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### Accuphase C-57 phono stage

Accuphase is a little different from many of the Japanese brands most people are familiar with. They say they are not interested in mass production and what they see as "its inevitable compromises". Their philosophy is to produce smaller runs of components that "focus on sound quality and that are a representation of their own ideals for music reproduction". To this end, design, manufacture, sales, and service are all carried out in-house.

The company was set up in Japan in 1972 as KenSonic by brothers Nakaichi and Jiro Kasuga (who worked previously for Trio Kenwood) and 10 years later changed its name to Accuphase – derived from Acc(urate) and Phase. Many people are familiar with their Class A amplifiers, which were first made in 2002. Indeed, I recently reviewed the E-700 Class A integrated, which really impressed me. It was the first Accuphase product I had reviewed in many years and it rekindled my enthusiasm for the brand.

So when I saw the shiny new C-57 phono amplifier at last year's North West Audio show in Cranage, I put my order in for a review sample there and then as I knew it might be a while before stocks would arrive in the UK. Accuphase introduced their first phono stage, the C-27, in 2008. The C-57, which retails at £9,500, replaces the C-47 that was launched in 2020.

When you unpack the C-57 you cannot help but be impressed by its build quality and gorgeous finish. It simply oozes quality, from the champagne-coloured aluminium front panel to its luxurious natural wood grain side panels. The review sample had the rosewood side panels and they looked really classy.

The C-57 is a fully balanced design from input to output – useful if you have a turntable/arm combo that has a balanced cable. They point out that MM cartridges cannot be used with a balanced connection as they have a static shield that is connected to the negative side of one

channel, meaning the positive and negative are asymmetrical and open to noise that a balanced connection cannot cancel out.

The C-57 is said to incorporate the latest preamplifier technology from the C-3900 and E-800S amplifiers. The moving coil amplifier stage uses eight parallel low-noise bipolar transistors with current feedback, as well as their own ANCC noise reduction circuit. The moving magnet input uses three parallel low-noise J-FETs with current feedback, but no ANCC.

In moving coil mode, the C-57 offers low (64dB) and high (70dB) gain settings and load impedance options of 10, 30, 60, 100, 200, 300 and 1kOhms. The MM stage has a gain of 34dB or 40dB and impedance options of 1k, 47k and 100kOhms, but no options for capacitance change. It also boasts an ultra-high precision RIAA circuit with a claimed deviation of only  $\pm 0.3\text{dB}$  between 10Hz and 20kHz.



The C-57 features a dual mono circuit configuration and has a completely separate stabilised power supply and amplification circuits to minimise the effects of internal and external noise. It has low flux leakage, high-capacity toroidal transformers with eight 15,000uF filtering capacitors.

Accuphase say they have ensured that all signal paths within the C-57 are as short as possible with all amplifiers located on the same PC board, this has a glass fluorocarbon substrate, chosen for its high-frequency performance and heat-resistant properties.

## Versatile

As the C-57 offers so much adjustability, I tried it in two different systems. The first was my own vinyl-playing setup of Audio Note TT3/PSU3/Arm Two and Io1 MC cartridge, through an Audio Note Meishu Tonmeister amp and the excellent Fyne Audio Vintage 10 speakers. Mains was taken care of by a Reflex Ultra G5 distribution block and Revive Ultra II mains leads from Musicworks, who are also the UK Accuphase distributor.

The Audio Note Io1 is a challenge as it has a very low output of 0.04mV and needs a recommended load impedance of around 3-4 Ohms, compared with the Gold Note Giotto, which I used in the other system, which has an output almost 10 times higher at 0.35mV and a recommended load of 220 Ohms. I set the impedance at 10 Ohms for the Audio Note with gain set to high, which worked fine.



Low gain was OK for the Giotto with the load set to 200 Ohms. This was mounted in the second system on a Vertere MG-1 turntable with SG-1 tonearm, playing through an Accuphase E-5000 integrated amp and Avalon Monitor PM1.2 speakers. I was lucky to have on hand another very well-respected phono stage that cost around £500 more than the C-57 to help me assess its value for money. My listening comments are an amalgam of the results from both systems, as the C-57 performed equally well in both.

### Insights

The first track I tried was Sun Pillars from jazz pianist/songwriter Fergus McCreadie. This is a great recording of his trio, comprising himself on piano with double bass and drum accompaniment. The first thing I noticed was how the C-57 provided great insights into how the cymbals and snare were played and let me hear into the twists and turns of the superb double bass line. McCreadie's piano play is nimble, but he has power and finesse in equal measure, rather like the drummer, and the C-57 captured both well. Its more expensive rival could not match the subtlety of the C-57 on drumkit, its fluidity on the bass line, nor how well it conveyed the lower registers of the piano.

To try the C-57 on vocals, I switched to I Don't Know Why from Norah Jones, the C-57 conveyed the delicacy of her piano playing and sheer power of her vocals, with a bass line that moved really well. The rival phono stage had a harshness to it when she really pushed a note, while the C-57 was smoother, more relaxed, without losing the inflections and nuances that constitute her signature style. While being harsher on her loudest notes, the rival was also warmer in its balance and not as open as the C-57.

On a favourite test track of mine, Ben Sidran's Didn't All Come True, his piano sounded more natural and open with more top-end leading edge to notes, while his vocals were more expressive and the bass line faster, tighter and more fluid. The more expensive rival did not convey the pace and dynamics of the track so well.

To finish, I played Red Lights in the Rain by Stephen Fearing. On the C-57, I could hear the inflections and nuances in his vocals better and when he pushed a note, it sounded cleaner and smoother, but still with the power and inner detail. His guitar was also crisper, more natural and more open and less boomy than its rival in the lower registers, which are very well captured on this Rega recording.





## Accuphase C-57

### Phono finish

The new C-57 from lives up to the reputation that Accuphase's products deservedly enjoy. It was beautifully finished, well made, a joy to use and took even very low output moving coils in its stride.

The C-57 sounds detailed, dynamic, with plenty of insights into how the musicians are playing and how they shape the notes and contribute to the pace and impetus of a composition.



It simply makes the music make sense and lays it all out in front of you in a way that allows you to appreciate and enjoy it better.

Capable of showing some more expensive phono stages a clean pair of heels, the C-57 not only offers superb sound, but also good value for money. Make sure it's on your shortlist of you're buying something at the price.

### Specifications

Type: Solid-state, MM/MC phono stage

Phono input: 3x unbalanced RCA, balanced XLR

Analogue outputs: unbalanced RCA, balanced XLR

Input impedance: 1k to 100k Ohms for MM in 3 steps, 10 to 100k Ohms for MC in 7 steps

Input capacitance: not specified

Output impedance: 50 Ohms

Gain: MM 34dB, 40dB; MC 64dB, 70dB

Output level: 2V

Signal to noise ratio: 98dB – 102dB

Dimensions (HxWxD): 114 x 465 x 407mm

Weight: 14.8kg

Warranty: 3 years