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Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage Review – Little magician...



The Gold Note PH-10 is a phono preamplifier with remarkable technical features and possibilities, an almost intuitive operation, an impressive design and a perfect sound. This is shown in our extensive test, whereby we naturally also brought the optional Gold Note PSU-10 power supply into play for even more sovereignty.

Need we mention that vinyl has been celebrating a true renaissance for years? Yes, because for many people vinyl is not only a source that they might rediscover after years, but vinyl has the potential to inspire new music lovers for hi-fi in general and therefore for music reproduction on a high level. Record players and everything that goes with them can convey in the simplest way that hi-fi depends on many factors to achieve a perfect whole, that it is fun to experiment here and there, to exchange and compare individual components. Thus they serve as a prime example of the idea of the hobby hi-fi. With a record, really everything has an immediate effect on the entire system, is not only immediately audible, but can – and this is an immensely important point – be “understood” in the truest sense of the word. It is not just a matter of grey theory, but of direct hands-on experience, for example changing and adjusting the pickup, experimenting with the settings of the phono preamplifier, and much, much more...

In this context, it is often forgotten that especially with records, comparatively small investments are enough to get into the matter in all its depth, because one thing is clear: even high-quality entry-level solutions, at the latest mid-range solutions, nowadays already deliver very good results, especially if you always keep the overall picture in mind, i.e. if you think very carefully about what you combine and how.

One component, for example, is assigned a particularly important task, namely the phono preamplifier. This is often forgotten, especially in the low and mid-range segment. Fortunately, more and more amplifiers have integrated phono preamplifiers. Apart from the fact that most of them are designed for MM pick-up systems only, they often have to be classified as a nice “bonus, but not really an optimal solution. The investment in an additional phono preamplifier therefore always pays off. This is true even if, as mentioned before, you own a drive and pick-up system in the lower and middle price range, because it is always remarkable what these systems are actually capable of, if they have the “right” electronics at their side.

Phono preamplifier, a component underestimated far too often

But why is the phono preamplifier of all things so essential? Well, the answer is very simple, after all, it has the task of providing the equalization that is indispensable for the correct reproduction of records, and of amplifying the minimal voltages that a pickup system delivers in the best possible way, many times over. Roughly speaking, one can speak of a factor of 100. What quality is being given away here can't be made up for by anything else...

For this test we have chosen a model that can serve as a prime example of what a modern, innovative phono preamplifier can look like. The Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage from the Italian high-end hi-fi manufacturer Gold Note is a solution that combines flawless signal processing with flexible features, intuitive operation and elegant design.

Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage from the Gold Note Series 10

The Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage is, for the sake of completeness, only one of several phono preamps of the Italians, but also one of the most exciting. With the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage, this too should only be mentioned in passing, the so-called Gold Note Series 10 was founded, a product range of particularly compact, yet very noble hi-fi components, which can justifiably be described as modern solutions for the current zeitgeist, and which benefit directly from the proven reference solutions of the Italian experts.

To characterize the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage in a few words, it is a phono preamplifier designed not only for MM and MC pickup systems, it even allows the connection of two drives and can be flexibly tuned to the respective pickups. It also has six EQ curves, whereby everything can be set very conveniently via a graphic-capable display. An ingenious circuitry concept guarantees optimal results and the impeccably finished housing with its stylish design is beyond reproach anyway.

Solid and elegantly packaged

Gold Note's engineers have always been keen to bring out the full value of their solutions right from the case design stage. This means that the Gold Note Series 10 and thus the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage, which is comparatively inexpensive for Gold Note, set the same high standards as their "grown-up" siblings.

The Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage therefore features a solidly designed aluminum housing, which is manufactured with impressive precision. This also includes the milled cut-outs on the side panels and the top, which for purely practical reasons are intended to provide optimum cooling, but at the same time also ensure a very striking, elegant appearance. The fact that the manufacturer's logo is not simply printed on the top side, but engraved by laser, also speaks for the high level of manufacturing art.

The Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage measures no more than 200 mm in width, 260 mm in depth, and 80 mm in height, yet it weighs 3 kg.

As usual, the company from Florence naturally offers the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage in three versions: silver, black or gold anodized.

A close look at the front, one at the back...

As we have already mentioned, the front is adorned with a graphic-capable 2.8 inch colour TFT display, a feature that is hardly found in a phono preamplifier, especially not in this price range. Right next to it, there is a rotary encoder as the only control element, but thanks to a well thought-out operating concept, it doesn't need more than that, because, designed as a push button, this rotary encoder not only functions for adjusting all parameters, but also as a standby button. The manufacturer refers to this as SKC Technology for Single Knob Control.

The actual main switch can be found on the back. Here the two inputs are also available, both designed as pairs of cinch sockets. The outputs, however, are not only designed as RCA connectors, but also as balanced XLR sockets. This is another feature that is not often seen in this price range and provides the scope for flexible integration into the hi-fi chain. Of course, the power connector for the integrated power supply is also available on the rear panel, but there is also a connector labeled PSU for the optional external power supply in the form of the Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply. For future expansions a so-called GN port is also available, which is known in a similar form from other Gold Note systems, for example to bring an external tube preamp into play. Let's see what the company from Tuscany has to offer in the future...

By the way, we almost forgot, there is also a micro USB port at the back, whereby this of course has nothing to do with everyday use. It is rather intended for updates.

Completely discrete construction

The Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage relies on analog circuits for the EQ curves, which were realized with last generation integrated circuits and low-noise components, according to the manufacturer, who is convinced of the absolute superiority of a completely analog design over digital equalizers. The curves are selected not with electromechanical but electronic switches, which work much more efficiently and guarantee a signal processing that is clean by classes, not least due to the shortest signal paths. "Digital technology" is used in the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage for control via the display alone.

Let's get started...

As already mentioned, the manifold adjustment possibilities are among the outstanding features of the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage. Each of the two inputs can be adjusted individually, allowing you to connect two systems at the same time.

For each input you can choose between MM and MC, which is remarkable. For MM cartridges you can choose between nine different load resistors (10 Ohm, 22 Ohm, 47 Ohm, 100 Ohm, 220 Ohm, 470 Ohm, 1 kOhm, 22 kOhm, 47 kOhm), whereas for MC systems the impedance is fixed at 100 pF. Four amplification stages are available for both MM and MC systems. This allows a very accurate and sensitive adjustment to any pickup system, be it MM or MC.

In addition, the EQ curves available on the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage are also available, whereby the well-known RIAA equalization has of course been the state of the art for years. But there are also two "exotics" from the early days of record production, namely the equalization for Decca London and American CBS Columbia.

Oldies but Goldies...

The RIAA curve that is common today was introduced by the Recording Industry Association of America, after a real proliferation of equalization curves for record production. In the absence of an industry standard, it was ultimately up to each producer to decide how to make the technology-related adjustments when mastering vinyl, i.e. increasing the treble for a greater distance from the noise caused by mechanical sampling, as well as the absolutely necessary lowering in the bass range. These are exactly the measures that a phono preamplifier has to compensate for in its equalization for playback.

Above all, two "ways of thinking" were opposed "in the good old times", namely that of the English Decca, and that of the US-American Columbia. In principle, one could play these albums with an RIAA equalization, but one does not achieve optimal results. If you have albums from the 1950s and early 1960s in your collection, you are familiar with this topic, but with the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage you can perfectly counteract it.

For each of the three curves, by the way, a so-called Enhanced Mode is available, in which the uppermost frequency ranges are slightly raised. This gives you the promised six EQ curves of the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage.

By the way, there is also a subsonic filter, which of course must not be missing to counteract low-frequency interference.

From practical experience

For this test we had a fine drive from Gold Note at our disposal, namely a Gold Note Valore 425 Plus equipped with an impeccable pickup system from Italy, the Gold Note Donatello Gold. But not only that, of course we used the flexible connection possibilities of the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage to connect a number of other drives equipped with different pickup systems, especially since the unique operating concept invites us to experiment. This is a very special sight when one drive follows the other on the sideboard...

And that brings us to a clear advantage that speaks for this solution, namely the intuitive operation. Not only does the encoder alone allow you to elegantly dumbbell through the various parameters and adjust them quickly, the display also shows all changes clearly on a curve. This is no comparison to the DIP switches commonly used in this field, which are bent over the manual and tried to be set to the correct on/off combination with a pointed finger. By the way, if the display bothers you in everyday use, you can of course deactivate it.

We don't want to philosophize about how the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the various drives and pickup systems, but the important thing is that it does exactly that. But first of all it was impressive for us to see how finely many drives that are actually assigned to the entry-level segment can play, and that even very inexpensive pick-up systems sometimes have enormous potential, if, indeed, if they have the right electronics at their side. And this is exactly what the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage does justice to.

But of course, the drive from Tuscany served as our benchmark, because this drive also plays in the region appropriate to the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage when looking at the price list. However, the price has to be seen in a more differentiated way, as the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage plays on a quality level that one would not expect in its price range.

One is almost tempted to speak of the proverbial Italian elegance when describing the sound character of the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage. Voices are staged with an impressive naturalness, instruments are presented with all their nuances in a virtually detailed way. Everything has an almost impressive musical flow, sounds harmonious and with a distinct lightness from the speakers. One could almost think that no wishes remain open...

If it weren't for the optional external power supply in the form of the Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply, which we also brought into play.

The external power station – Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply

If there was ever a hint of doubt that a high quality power supply is good for a phono preamplifier, then the combination of Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage and Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply should make it finally and once and for all.

Please don't misunderstand this, the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage on its own already delivers an impeccable performance quality, at a level that is clearly above its price range. So you will be highly satisfied with this solution as long as you do not succumb to the temptation to connect the Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply. Then there is no way back.

With the Gold Grade PSU-10 Power Supply the Gold Grade PH-10 Phono Stage gains even more expression, shows itself even more light-footed in the performance, and especially more confident in the start when it comes to the accurate reproduction of the dynamics. This is achieved by a quadruple power supply with extremely low noise voltage regulators around four transformers. The Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply uses three for the actual power supply and one for inductive filtering, thus not only providing maximum power but also complete shielding against external interference.

Of course, the optional power supply means a considerable additional investment and the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage is convincing on its own, but those who have heard it in the tuned version will not want to be without Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply.

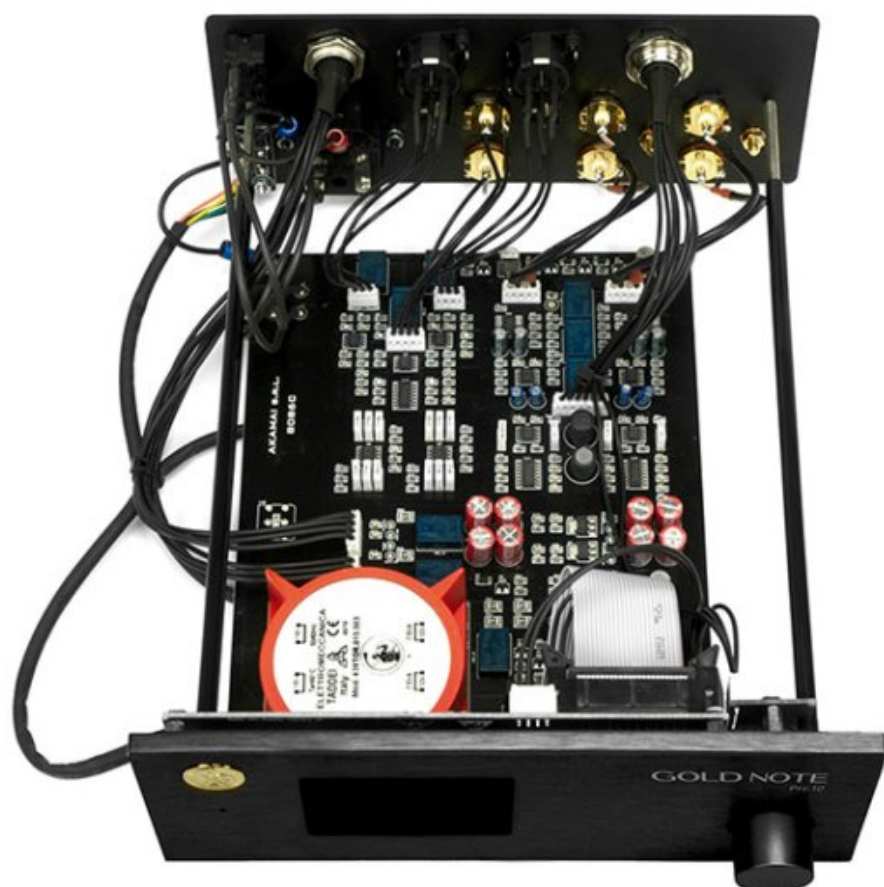
















Getting to the Point

Fact is, the Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage is a remarkable phono preamplifier. It convinces with a really stirring performance that really puts vinyl in the spotlight, with all the dynamics and fine detail across the entire frequency range. The fact that the Stage uses the full potential of any turntable or pickup

system for this purpose is due to its flexibility in tuning, which is also extremely easy to handle, and even more, the operation invites experimentation. Even on its own, it plays clearly above its price range. If you also use the optional Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply, it clearly plays in the high-end class. If you also take into account its compact but extremely elegant appearance, it is almost an irresistible combination.

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★★★★★

9 from 10 Points

Outstanding

Gold Note transforms a profane tool like a phono preamplifier into a small work of art like the Gold Note PH-10, which also sounds outstanding and offers maximum ease of use.

Manufacturer: [Gold Note](#)

Distribution: [TAD Audiovertrieb GmbH](#)

Price: Gold Note PH-10 Phono Stage € 1.390,-
Gold Note PSU-10 Power Supply € 950,-

The Good

- Detailed lively sound
- enthralling dynamics
- immensely versatile configurable
- two pickups can be connected simultaneously
- intuitive controls
- besides RIAA also Decca and Columbia equalization
- impressive design
- outstanding workmanship
- optional power supply

The Bad

- No disadvantage apparent

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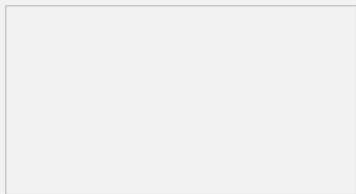


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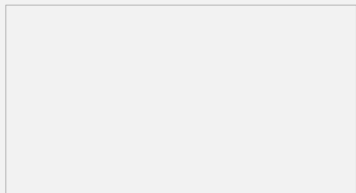


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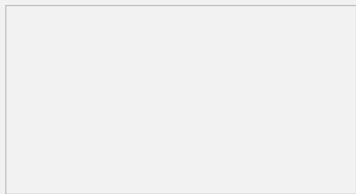
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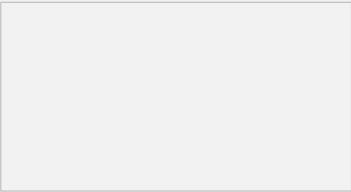
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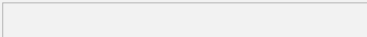
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