



Even at this money, the LS17 is a steal – and being an **Audio Research** amp, it's built to last

THE LS17 IS proof positive that bargains can exist at high-end prices. You may think that paying well over three grand for a line-level-only preamp can hardly be called value, but take a listen to this Audio Research in a suitably talented system and we're confident you'll agree.

What makes the LS17 such a great buy? Well, you get a very large slice of the magic produced by the company's flagship preamp, the Reference 3, for a third of the price. For those who don't know, the senior model has a strong claim to 'The Best Preamp in the World' title, so by offering a similar sonic experience the LS17 makes a strong case for itself. Sure, transparency levels and detail resolution are reduced with the LS17, but the essential sonic character is unmistakably the same.

Full marks for usability

This preamp is a simple device to use. The two front panel control knobs govern volume and input selection and there's a quartet of small, cheap-feeling plastic buttons that control functions. There are also balanced and single-ended options for both inputs and outputs.

Overall build is up to the company norm: you'll have no trouble finding more luxurious products, but Audio Research does sturdy very well. There's the company's famous service back-up to consider, too. When you invest this much on some hi-fi equipment, it's good to know this type of aftercare exists.

The LS17's sound is a brilliant sonic balancing act. By class standards it's exquisitely detailed, revealing low-level information such as nuances of Alicia Keys' voice on *Lesson Learned*. Equally, this AR has no trouble resolving a sound of massive scale and authority with the likes of Holst's *Mars*. Yet, at no point is detail thrown at the listener in an attempt to impress. It's presented in a wholly natural and unforced manner whereby the listener's attention is concentrated on the music's message rather than the hi-fi's skill. This is a product that puts the music foremost – and that's just the way it should be.

PREAMPLIFIER
AUDIO RESEARCH
LS17
★★★★★
£ 3399

FOR

A great sonic balance that delivers masses of detail and dynamics without sacrificing listenability; easy to use; sturdy build

AGAINST

Some rivals look and feel more luxurious

VERDICT

This is another top-class preamplifier from Audio Research. It's a product that should serve you for decades, too



- INPUTS:**
LINE LEVEL IN x7
TAPE LOOPS x1
OUTPUTS:
PREAMP OUT yes
BALANCED OUT yes
HEADPHONE OUT No
TONE CONTROLS No
REMOTE CONTROL yes
DIMENSIONS (HWD)
14x48x31cm